

Emergent Strategy-Making in Private Higher Education Institutions by Managers: A Micro-
Foundational Perspective

by

Grace Magama

Submitted in accordance with the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Business Leadership

at the

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA

SUPERVISOR: Prof. P. Venter

SEPTEMBER 2025

DECLARATION

Name: Grace Magama

Student Number: 42073790

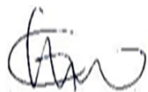
Degree: Doctor of Business Leadership

EMERGENT STRATEGY-MAKING IN PRIVATE HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS
BY MANAGERS: A MICRO-FOUNDATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

I declare that the above thesis is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

I further declare that I submitted the thesis to originality checking software and that it falls within the accepted requirements for originality.

I further declare that I have not previously submitted this work, or part of it, for examination at Unisa for another qualification or at any other higher education institution.



1 SEPTEMBER 2025

SIGNATURE

DATE

ABSTRACT

EMERGENT STRATEGY-MAKING IN PRIVATE HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS BY MANAGERS: A MICRO-FOUNDATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

The current study aimed to explore how strategy emerges in South African Private Higher Education Institution (PHEI) through the everyday micro-foundational practices of managers operating at various organisational levels. Existing strategy literature has largely prioritised deliberate, top-down processes, often overlooking how strategy is enacted informally, iteratively and contextually within complex institutional environments. This research departed from a linear, plan-based ontology and instead adopted a practice-process perspective grounded in Strategy-as-Practice (S-as-P), micro-foundational theory, and Bourdieu's theory of practice. From this viewpoint, strategy is regarded not as a fixed outcome but as a dynamic phenomenon shaped by situated cognition, social interaction, power and individual routines.

The study employed a qualitative, intrinsic single-case design, purposively sampling managers at operational, middle and executive levels within a South African PHEI. A constructivist-interpretivist paradigm guided the research, enabling a rich interpretation of how managers enacted strategy through daily micro-foundational-practices. Data were collected via semi-structured interviews, written narratives and document analysis. The data were thematically analysed to produce a grounded model of emergent strategising informed by real-world managerial practices.

Key findings revealed that strategy emerged through socially embedded micro-doings, such as strategic adaptation and flexibility, institutional purpose and vision, communication and collaboration in decision-making, and the influence of leadership and power dynamics. Central to these findings was the role of "*phronesis*" (practical wisdom) and "*metis*" (practical intelligence), which enabled managers to navigate flux, uncertainty, the institution and operating environment. Significantly, the study advanced a multi-level understanding of strategic agency, highlighting that managers at various hierarchical levels contributed meaningfully to emergent strategising, despite differing levels of formal

authority. This contribution adds a contextual and empirical extension to S-as-P by recognising that strategising is not merely concentrated at the top but is distributed through layers of practice across the organisation.

The main theoretical contribution of the study lies in its integration of micro-foundations with a practice-based view of strategy within a context from the Global South. The findings challenge essentialist views of strategy as formal design and instead position strategy-making as a pluralistic, emergent process shaped by practice, power and place. The final conceptual framework connects micro-practices to organisational outcomes, offering an alternative perspective on how strategy is enacted under real-world institutional conditions.

The study concludes that strategising is not merely the result of deliberate planning but also arises from responsive, embodied and socially constructed actions. These insights enhance our understanding of the lived dynamics of strategy work and provide a valuable foundation for future research and leadership development in higher education contexts experiencing change. The findings may inform the design of more adaptive, inclusive and practice-oriented strategic processes within PHEIs and similar organisations.

Key terms: Strategy as Practice; phronesis; metis; dwelling worldview; private higher education institution; emergent strategising; micro-foundations; pluralistic context; Bourdieu's theory of practice; building worldview

OKUCASHUNIWE

UKWENZIWA KWAMASU EZIKHUNGWENI EZIZIMELE ZEMFUNDO EPHAKEME OKWENZIWA NGABAPHATHI: NGOKWEZIMO ZANGALESO SIKHATHI EZENZAKALAYO

Inhloso yocwaningo lwamanje ukuphenya mayelana nokuthi amasu avela kanjani ezikhungweni zemfundo ephakeme ezimele eNingizimu Afrika (HPEIs) kusetshenziswa imisebenzi yansuku eyenziwa abaphathi abasemazingeni ehlukeni esikhungweni.

Incwadi yamasu esetshenziswayo ibeka eqhulwini izinqubo ezihleliwe ukusuka phezulu, ezivame ukuthi zikushaye indiva okwamasu angahleliwe, okuphindaphindiwe, futhi ngokuhambisana nokwenzeka endaweni yesikhungo eziyinkimbinkimbi. Lolu cwanningo luyasuka ohlelweni olulandelwayo/oluqondile okuwucwaningo ngokukhona, kunalokho lusebenzisa umbono wenqubo yalokho kwangaleso sikhathi okusekelwe yi-Strategy-as-Practice (S-as-P), ithiyori yezenzo zabantu/yokwenzakalayo, kanye nethiyori yenqubo ka-Bourdieu. Ngokwalo mbono, isu aliwona umphumela ongaguquki kodwa liyaguquka ngokwezimo ezikhona, ukuxhumana kwabantu, nangezinqubo zansuku zonke zomuntu ngamunye, izimo zenhlangano nezingaphandle kanye nobudlelwano bamandla.

Ucwaningo lusebenzise ikhwalithethivu, olusezingeni eliphezulu olugxile ohlangothini olulodwa esikhungweni zemfundo ephakeme eNingizimu Afrika, ukuhlola ukuthi abaphathi balisebenzisa kanjani isu ngokwezinto/izinqubo zansuku zonke. Ngemposamibuzo eyenziwe kubaphathi abehlukene kuwo wonke amazinga kanye nokuhlaziywa kwemiqu, kusungulwe indlela ekhombisa ukuthi isu lakhiwa ukuziphatha kwabaphathi kwansuku zonke.

Iziphumo ezisemqoka ukuthi isu livela ngokwenzeka nsuku zonke, izenzo zomphakathi, ngokuhambisana nezimo. Okubalulekile kulokhu okutholakele yindima ye-“phronesis” (ukusebenzisa ubuhlakani) kanye ne-“metis” (ukusebenzisa amaqhinga), okwenze abaphathi bakwazi ukubhekana nokungabikho kozinzo, ukungaqiniseki, kanye nokungezwani esikhungweni. Ucwaningo luhlolile izizinda ezine ezixhumene ezibe nomthelela ekuveleni kwamasu: indlela abantu abahlobana ngayo, indlela ababecabanga/abenza ngayo, izinqubo abazisebenzisayo, kanye nesikhundla sabo

enhlanganweni. Abaphathi badale isu ngezenzo ezincane, eziguquguqukayo, nezingekho emthethweni/ezingahleliwe.

Ngokuphawulekayo, ucwaningo luveza ukuthi amasu awagcini ngokuvela kubaphathi abaphezulu, kodwa kuwo wonke amazinga okuphatha. Lokhu kuvumelana nethiyori yeS-as-P ngokubonisa abaphathi kunoma yiliphi izinga banesandla ekwakhiweni kwamasu, kungakhathaliseki igunya labo elisemthethweni.

Lolu cwaningo luhlenganisa izenzo zomuntu ngamunye nezinqubo zansuku zonke ukuze kuqondwe isu ngokweGlobal South. Kubonisa ukuthi isu akulona nje uhlelo oluqala phezulu lwehlele ezansi, kodwa wuhlelo oluguquguqukayo olubunjwa ukwenza, amandla, nendawo. Uhlaka lokugcina luxhumanisa lezi zenzo zansuku zonke nemiphumela yesikhungo, lunikeza umbono omusha wokuthi isu lenzeka kanjani ngempela ngokwezimo zezikhungo

Ucwaningo luphetha ngelokuthi isu akuyona nje into ehlelwayo ngaphakathi kodwa liphinde livele ngezenzo zesikhathi sangempela nezenhlalo, njall. Le miphumela isiza ukuthuthukisa indlela abaholi bemfundo ephakeme abaphatha ngayo izinguquko, ikhuthaze ukuhlela okuhambisana nezimo nokubandakanya wonke umuntu.

Amagama amqoka: S-as-P, ubuhlakani, amaqhinga, indawo yokuhlala-umbono womhlaba, isikhungo semfundo ephakeme esizimele, ukuvezwa kwamasu.

KAKARETŠO

TOGAMAANO YE E GOLAGO KA GO DIHLONGWA TŠA PRAEBETE TŠA THUTO YA GODIMO KA BALAOADI: PONO YA MAEKROFANTIŠENE (MICRO-FOUNDATION)

Maikemišetšo a nyakišišo ye ya bjale ke go nyakišiša ka moo leano le golago ka gare ga Dihlongwa tša Praebete tša Thuto ya Godimo (diHPEI) tša Afrika Borwa ka mekgwa ya ka mehla ya balaodi bao ba šomago maamong a go fapafapana a mokgatlo. Dingwalo tša maano tše di lego gona di beile pele kudu ditshepedišo tša ka boomo, tša go tloga godimo go ya fase, gantši di hlokomologa ka moo leano le phethagatšwago ka mokgwa wo o sego wa semmušo, ka poeletšo, le ka boemo ka gare ga ditikologo tše di raraganego tša setheo. Nyakišišo ye e tlogile go tšwa go ontolotši ya mothalo, ye e theilwego godimo ga peakanyo gomme go sa le bjale e amogela pono ya tirišo-tshepetšo yeo e theilwego godimo ga Leano-bjalo ka-Tirišo (S-as-P), teori ya maekrofantišene le teori ya Bourdieu ya tirišo. Go ya ka pono ye, leano ga le tšewe bjalo ka sephetho se se sa fetogego eupša bjalo ka tiragalo ye e fetogago yeo e bopilwego ke temogo ye e lego maamong, tirišano ya leago, le mekgwa ya ka mehla ya motho, mabaka a mokgatlo le a ka ntle le dikamano tša maatla.

Nyakišišo e šomišitše tlhamo ya khwalithethifi, ya ka gare ya tiragalo e tee, yeo e akaretšago balaodi maamong a tshepedišo, gare, le maemophethišing ka gare ga HPEI ya Afrika Borwa. Mmotlolo wa kago-tlhathollo o hlahla nyakišišo, go kgontšha tlhathollo ye e humilego ya ka moo balaodi ba phethagatšago leano ka mekgwa ye mennyane ya ka mehla. Datha e kgobokeditšwe ka dipoledišano tša peakanyo-seripa, dikanegelo tše di ngwadilwego, le tshekatsheko ya ditokomane. Datha e sekasekilwe go ya ka morero go tšweletša mmotlolo wo o theilwego godimo ga datha ya maano ao a tšwelelago wo o tsebišwago ke maitshwaro a taolo a lefase la mannete.

Dikutullo tše bohlokwa di utollotše gore leano le tšweletše ka ditiro tše nnyane tše di tsentšwego ka leago go swana le tiro ya kwešišo ye e fetogago, peakanyo ya togaganyo, le boitlhamelo. Sa bohlokwa go dikutullo tše e bile tema yeo e kgathwago ke “*phronesis*” (kgopolo ye e šomago) le “*metis*” (bohlale bjo bo šomago), tše di kgontšhitšego balaodi go šogana le diphetogo, go se kgonthiše le dikgatelelo tša sehlongwa. Nyakišišo e

lemogile dikarolo tše nne tše di logagantšwego tše di hueditšego kgolo ya maano: tirišano ya kamano, temogo ye e akaretšwago, mekgwa ya boemo, le peakanyo ya maemo. Peakanyo ya poeletšo, boemedi bjo bo sego bja semmušo, le kgotlelelo ya maemo a manyane di bonwe bjalo ka mekgwa ye e ipoeletšago yeo ka yona balaodi ba tšweleditšego leano le le šomago gabjale.

Se bohlokwa, nyakišišo e tšweleditše kwešišo ya maemo a mantši ya etšentshi ya maano, e laetša ka moo balaodi maamong a go fapafapana a tatelano ya maemo ba bilego le seabe ka mo go nago le mohola go bopeng leano, ntle le go šetša maemo a go fapana a taolo ya semmušo. Seabe se se tlaleletša karolo ye mpsha ya *S-as-P* ka go lemoga gore bokgoni bja maano ga bo hwetšagale fela ka godimo eupša bo phatlalatšwa ka dillaga tša tirišo go ralala le mokgatlo.

Seabe se segolo sa teori ya nyakišišo ye se ka gare ga kopanyo ya yona ya di maekrofantišene di nago le pono ye e theilwego godimo ga tirišo ya leano ka gare ga seemo sa go tšwa Borwa bja Lefase ka Bophara. Dikutullo di hlohla dipono tša bohlokwa tša leano bjalo ka tlhamo ya semmušo gomme go e na le moo go bea go dira leano bjalo ka tshepedišo ya bontši, ye e golago yeo e bopilwego ke tirišo, maatla, le lefelo. Tlhako ya mafelelo ya kgopolo e kgokaganya ditirišo tše nnyane (micro-practices) le dipelo tša mokgatlo, e fa pono ye nngwe ya ka moo leano le dirwago molao ka fase ga maemo a setheo a lefase la nnete.

Nyakišišo e phetha ka gore go hlama maano ga se fela setšweletšwa sa peakanyo ya maikemišetšo eupša gape go gola ka magato a go araba, a emetšwego le go agwa gare ga setšhaba. Dikgopolo tše di oketša kwešišo ya rena ya diphetogo tse di bonwego tša mošomo wa maano le go fa motheo wa bohlokwa wa nyakišišo ya ka moso le tlhabollo ya boetapele maamong a thuto ya godimo ao a itemogelago phetogo. Dikutullo di ka hlahlala tlhamo ya ditshepetšo tša maano tše di fetogago kudu, tše di akaretšago, le tše di lebanego le tirišo ka gare ga di-HPEI le mekgatlo ye bjalo.

Mareo a bohlokwa: *S-as-P*, phronesis, metis, kgopolo ya tulo, Sehlongwa sa thuto ya godimo sa praebete, togamaano ye e golago

PREFACE

I am a 49-year-old Zimbabwean female. I had been in the private sector industry in Zimbabwe for 15 years before joining higher education in South Africa for the past ten years or so. I lectured on marketing and business management modules in the private sector for most of these years. I have been involved in public higher education for the past two years. I have two master's degrees: an Executive Master's in Business Administration (EMBA) and a Master's in Science in Strategic Marketing (MSc). Both of which were quantitative in nature.

Before the research, I had some experience with qualitative methods, especially since I have taught and supervised Honours and Master's students. However, this study was challenging and intriguing, requiring an intimate relationship with the data and extra care when dealing with managers. It was fascinating to work with managers to hear their lived experiences, thoughts and feelings.

This journey has taught me to listen more and to judge less. I have also gained invaluable experience in organising a large amount of qualitative data and making sense of it, gaining a critical understanding of the data, coherently presenting the data, linking them to the existing theory, and conceptualising the conclusions of the current research. Ultimately, this research journey has made me a better researcher and person.

As a researcher, I have two articles to my name that are qualitative in nature. It took me about five months to appreciate how qualitative data is collected and analysed by attending workshops and reading widely. I made mistakes during the coding process and had to redo them several times before I could get a grip of things.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my supervisor, Professor Peet Venter, for his continuous support, patience, and immense knowledge. Their guidance helped me through every stage of this research, and I am grateful for the intellectual freedom they gave me while keeping me on the right track.

I would also like to thank the faculty and staff of the School of Business Leadership at the University of South Africa for their technical assistance and for providing the resources required to conduct this study. My thanks also go to everyone who supported me, in whatever form or way.

On a personal note, I want to thank my friends for the countless coffee breaks and for keeping me sane through the long nights of writing.

Finally, I owe a debt of gratitude to my family. Thank you for your love, support and sacrifices, and for standing by me through every setback and success. This achievement is as much yours as it is mine. To my parents and siblings, thank you for your unwavering belief in my potential.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to myself, my children: Tinashe, Tonderai, Tatenda, and Tiara, and my grandchildren: Anesu, Sihle, Anashe, Ruvarashe, Tinashe Junior, and Atipaishe.

Thank you for your never-ending support and for believing in me.

Table of Contents

DECLARATION.....	i
ABSTRACT	ii
PREFACE	viii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	ix
DEDICATION	x
LIST OF FIGURES.....	xvi
LIST OF TABLES	xvii
LIST OF ACRONYMS	xviii
DEFINITIONS	xix
Chapter 1: Research orientation	1
1.1 Research context and provocation	1
1.2 Problem statement.....	4
1.3 Theoretical positioning	5
1.4 Research purpose and aim	6
1.5 Research questions	6
1.6 Methodological orientation	7
1.6.1 Research philosophy	7
1.6.2 Research approach to theory development	8
1.6.3 Research strategy and techniques	8
1.6.4 Time horizons	8
1.6.5 Ethical considerations	8
1.7 Delimitations	9
1.8 Significance of the study	9
1.9 Layout of chapters	12
1.10 Conclusion	15
Chapter 2: Contextualisation of Private Higher Education Institutions in South Africa ..	16
2.1 Introduction	16
2.2 The global higher education insight	19
2.2.1 Public and Private Education in Higher Education	19
2.2.2 Higher education global changes.	24
2.2.3 Ensuring quality assurance in Higher Education	25
2.2.4 Globalisation and the future of HE	26
2.2.5 The Threat of Artificial Intelligence (AI) to HE	27

2.3 The global insight of PHE	28
2.3.1 Private HE defined	28
2.3.2 The proliferation of private provision	29
2.3.3 Quality assurance issues in the PHE	30
2.4 South African Higher Education	32
2.4.1 South African HE landscape	32
2.4.2 Challenges facing HE in South Africa	33
2.5 Private Higher Education in South Africa	34
2.5.1 The South African private higher education landscape	34
2.5.2 Potential and rapid growth in PHE	35
2.5.3 The competitive landscape of the PHEI	37
2.5.4 Ensuring quality in HE in South Africa: Current trends	40
2.6 Management aspects in PHEI in South Africa	42
2.7 Strategic Management studies in HE	45
2.7.1 Emergent strategy development	45
2.7.2 A S-as-P perspective	47
2.8 Conclusion	49
Chapter 3: Strategising.....	50
3.1 Introduction	50
3.2 Operationalising of strategising.....	55
3.3 Strategy process	59
3.3.1 Categories of strategising	60
3.3.2 Emergent approach to strategising	70
3.4 Emergent strategising and S-as-P research	78
3.4.1 S-as-P research approach	79
3.5 Epistemological perspectives of emergent strategising	87
3.5.1 Building worldview in strategising	88
3.5.2 Dwelling worldview for S-as-P	91
3.5.3 Criticism against both worldviews in strategising	99
3.5.4 Concluding remarks on the building and dwelling worldviews	100
3.6 Theoretical foundations.....	101
3.6.1 Micro-foundational perspective	101
3.6.2 Bourdieu's Approach	108

3.7 Conclusion	121
Chapter 4: The role of the individual action and interaction in strategising	123
4.1 Introduction	123
4.2 A social viewpoint on strategising	126
4.3 Contextualising psychology in organisations	128
4.4 Social psychology in an organisation.....	131
4.4.1 Four broad core assumptions of social psychology	133
4.4.2 Concluding remarks on social psychology	137
4.5 Knowledge construction in the workplace and approaches.....	138
4.5.1 Constructivism paradigms and knowledge creation	140
4.5.2 Approaches to the construction of knowledge	142
4.5.3 Concluding remarks on knowledge construction in the workplace and approaches	147
4.6 Social construction as part of micro-practices in the workplace.....	148
4.6.1 Concluding remarks on the social construction	149
4.7 Conclusion	150
Chapter 5: Research Methodology	152
5.1 Introduction	152
5.2 The Research Environment	154
5.3 Research Aim	154
5.3.1 Emergent strategising as a function of micro-practices	154
5.3.2 The theoretical perspective	155
5.4 Research questions	155
5.4.1 General research question	155
5.5 Organisational context	156
5.5.1 Historical development.....	156
5.5.2 Organisational structure.....	157
5.5.3 Business model.....	158
5.5.4 Financial overview	158
5.5.5 Governance and management	159
5.5.6 Comparative position in the South African PHE landscape	159
5.6 Research design	159
5.6.1 Research philosophy	161
5.6.2 Research approach	164

5.6.3 Qualitative case study research approach	167
5.5.4 Delimitations of the study.....	191
5.5.5 Limitations	191
5.5.6 Visual summary of the research process	192
5.7 Chapter conclusion	194
Chapter 6: Data analysis, presentation, and discussion of findings	195
6.1 Introduction	195
6.2 The research questions.....	198
6.3 Case context during data collection	199
6.3.1 The case	199
6.3.2 Management structure:.....	199
6.3.3 Participants and management structure	201
6.4 Data gathering.....	203
6.4.1 Summaries of data gathering methods	203
6.5 Data analysis, interpretation and reporting	211
6.5.1 Familiarisation with the data	212
6.5.2 Generating initial codes.....	213
6.5.3 Searching for themes.....	214
6.5.4 Reviewing themes	214
6.5.5 Defining and naming themes	215
6.6 Data interpretation and findings reporting	216
6.7 Integrated data results	220
6.7.1 Theme one T1: Strategic adaptation and flexibility (Core to emergent strategy).....	224
6.7.2 Theme two T2: Institutional purpose and vision (Vision-driven practices influencing strategising)	235
6.7.3 Theme three T3: Communication and collaboration in decision-making (key to emergent strategy)	246
6.7.4 Theme four T4: Influence of leadership and power dynamics (Leadership practices shaping emergent strategising).	260
6.9 Reflective final thoughts	299
6.10 Chapter Conclusion.....	300
Chapter 7: Significant findings of the study, recommendations and conclusions	301
7.1 Introduction.....	301

7.2 Study overview	301
7.3 Responding to the research questions	304
7.4 Research contribution	307
7.4.1 Multi-level managerial perspective multi-methods evidence	307
7.4.2 Micro-foundational practices in emergent strategising	308
7.4.3 Contribution to theory	311
7.4.4 Contribution to practice	313
7.4.5 Methodological contribution	314
7.4.6 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and Agenda 2063	316
7.5 Reflection	317
7.5.1 My research lens	317
7.5.2 Why I chose this topic	317
7.5.3 Reflections on academic rigour	318
7.6 Conclusions and recommendations	319
7.6.1 Conclusions, recommendations for practitioners and researchers	320
7.6.2 Recommendation to improve theory	324
7.6.3 Recommendations to improve practice	326
7.7 Recommendation for future research	327
7.8 Limitations	327
7.9 Researcher's reflection: A Journey of learning and transformation	327
7.10 Chapter conclusion	329
Bibliography	330
Appendix A: Participant information sheet	357
Appendix B: Interview guide	361
Appendix C: Written Narrative	363
Appendix D: Informed consent to participate in this study	365
Appendix E: Signed consent form	367
Appendix F: Coding Report	368
Appendix G: Transcribed semi-structured interview TM4	380
Appendix H: Filled in Written narrative MM4	385
Appendix I: Ethical clearance	391
Appendix J: Language editing certificate	393

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1.1 offers an overview of the layout of the chapter 1	
Figure 1.2: Illustration of the significance of the study	
Figure 1.3 Conceptual presentation of the thesis and overview of the thesis chapters	
Figure 2.1 is a diagrammatic presentation of Chapter 2	
Figure 2.2 An illustration of the Higher Education	
Figure 3.1 provides an overview of the chapter	
Figure 3.2: Six manifestations of strategy.....	
Figure 4.1 The chapter outline.....	
Figure 4.2 Psychology contextualised	
Figure 4.3: Subcategories of constructivist theory	
Figure 5.1: The structure of Chapter 5	
Figure 5.2: Case study design.....	
Figure 5.3: Overview of the research process	
Figure 6.1: Chapter 6 structure.....	
Figure 6.2: Theorising emergent strategising	
Figure 7.1 is a diagrammatic presentation of Chapter 7 and the overview of the study	

LIST OF TABLES

Table 2.1: Comparison of HE's public and private attributes	
Table 2.2: Key studies on emergent strategy development in HE	
Table 2.3: Key Contributions to S-as-P in HE	
Table 3.1 summarises studies with a focus on the core insight on emergence strategising	
Table 3.2 S-as-P relevant studies	
Table 3.3 Relationship between the building and dwelling worldview	
Table 3.4: Comparison of knowledge forms relevant to strategising	
Table 4.1 Core assumptions of social psychology	
Table 5.1: The Research design of the study	
Table 5.2 interpretivist perspective	
Table 5.3: Respondent selection strategy	
Table 5.4: Participants inclusion and exclusion	
Table 5.5: Audit trail for qualitative data analysis	
Table 6.1: Analysed documents	
Table 6.2: Participants' description	
Table 6.3 offers the total number of participants, level of management and gender	
Table 6.4: The reporting reference system applied to the semi-structured interviews and written narratives	
Table 6.5: The reporting reference system applied to the written narratives	
Table 6.6: Consolidated overarching themes and categories from document analysis, semi-structured interviews and written narratives	
Table 7.1 Summary of the linkages between the research questions, literature review and empirical study	
Table 7.2 Summary of conclusion	

LIST OF ACRONYMS

PHEI	Private Higher Education Institution
S-as-P	Strategy-as-Practice
MANCO	Management Committee
CHE	Council of Higher Education
SAQA	South Africa Qualifications Authority
IP	Interview participant
PHE	Private higher education
WN	Written narratives
HE	Higher Education
PHEI	Private Higher Education Institution
4IR	Fourth Industrial Revolution
DHEQC	Department's Higher Education Quality Committee
SWOT	Strengths Weaknesses Opportunities and Threats
SPACE	Strategic Position Evaluation Matrix
OECD/UNESCO	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) and UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation)
AI	Artificial intelligence
DHET	Department of Higher Education and Tertiary
OT	Organisational theory
OB	Organisational behaviour

DEFINITIONS

TERM	DEFINITION
<i>Phronesis</i>	In the context of this study, <i>phronesis</i> refers to practical wisdom (Chia and Holt, 2006a).
<i>Metis</i>	In the context of this study, it refers to practical intelligence to deal with puzzling situations ((Vaara and Whittington, 2012a)
Episteme	In the context of this study, episteme refers to abstract, generalisable knowledge; it is scientific, explicit, universal In the context of this study; episteme knowledge can be 'written, recorded, validated and protected (Spender, Baumard and Wauchope, 2000)
Techne	In the context of this study, techne alludes to technical expertise; precise, codified technical instruction often expressed through quantitative measures and rigid procedures (Spender, Baumard and Wauchope, 2000).
Field	In the context of this study, field refers to the social world, microcosms in the macrocosm of society at large (Gomez, 2015)
Capital	In the context of this study, capital refers to resources endowed within an actor (Gomez, 2015) .
Habitus	In the context of this study, habitus refers to a property of social agents (whether individuals, groups, or institutions) that comprises a “structured and structuring structure” (Grenfell, 2016)
Practices	In the context of this study, practices are relations between one’s habitus and one’s current circumstances (Grenfell, 2016).
Tacit knowledge	In the context of this study, tacit knowledge refers to knowledge that is difficult to transfer to another person (Spender, Baumard and Wauchope, 2000).
Doxa	In the context of this study, doxa refers to the taken-for-granted knowledge. (Grenfell, 2016).
Strategy-making	In the context of this study, it refers to strategies that display a consistent pattern of action that tends to evolve in the absence of intention (Mintzberg and Waters, 1985).
Micro-foundational perspective	In the study context, micro-foundations are the theoretical foundations elucidating how individual-level factors and their interactions influence broader macro-level phenomena or outcomes (Foss, 2010a).
Strategy-as-practice perspective	It is a perspective that “is concerned with strategy as a situated, socially accomplished activity constructed through the actions and interactions of multiple actors” (Jarzabkowski, 2005a)
Building worldview	This approach suggests that there is “an initial pre-cognitive separation between the actor and the world and involves

	constructing mental representations and models of the world before any practical engagement with it” (Ingold, 2000).
Emergent strategising	In the context of this study, it refers to the unplanned, iterative, and practice-based process through which strategy takes shape over time from the everyday actions, decisions, and social interactions of organisational actors, rather than being the result of formal planning or deliberate top-down design. It is driven by situated coping, relational dynamics, and contextual responsiveness within an evolving organisational environment. (Mintzberg and Waters, 1985; Chia and Holt, 2006b; Jarzabkowski et al., 2025)).
Dwelling worldview	This approach theorises people as “intimately immersed and inextricably intertwined with what surrounds them, in all its complex interrelatedness” (Chia and Rasche, 2018).
Higher education institution	It refers to any institution that provides higher education on a full-time, part-time or distance basis and which is (a) established or deemed to be established as a public higher education institution under the Higher Education Act; or (b) registered or conditionally registered as a private higher education institution under the Higher Education Act” (Baumgardt and Lekhetho, 2013).
Social interaction	These are the acts, actions, or practices of two or more people mutually oriented towards each other's selves, that is, any behaviour that tries to affect or take account of each other's subjective experiences or intentions” (Bardis, 1979).
Private higher education in South Africa	Eligibility requirements for a private provider in South Africa include the need to be registered as a company in accordance with the Companies’ Act, and to offer higher education, thus offering full programmes on NQF levels 5-10 (Department of Higher Education and Training, 2013).

Chapter 1: Research orientation

Macro-level phenomena (e.g. practices, routines and logics) start from micro-level individuals. (Whittington, 2025)

1.1 Research context and provocation

Over the last 20 years, Strategy-as-Practice (S-as-P) has significantly transformed strategic management research by moving the emphasis from plans and structures to individuals, processes and practices. This approach highlights that strategy is not merely developed in boardrooms; instead, it is formed through daily activities, contextual actions and changing discussions carried out by various actors within organisations (Whittington, 2012, 2018; Jarzabkowski, Lê, Seidl and Vaara, 2025).

The paradigmatic evolution enables researchers to explore the micro-foundational practices that underpin strategy work, including sensemaking, improvisation and embodied cognition, in highly dynamic environments. As Jarzabkowski, Seidl and Balogun (2022) argue, the S-as-P field is entering a “propagating phase,” opening new frontiers in studying large-scale issues, diverse strategic actors and technologies such as artificial intelligence.

Further, in response to the limitations of conventional, top-down strategic models, this study examined how managers in South African Private Higher Education Institutions (PHEIs) engaged in emergent strategy-making under conditions of volatility, decentralisation and heightened marketisation. Unlike public universities, PHEIs operate within hybrid logics, balancing commercial imperatives with academic missions, while grappling with fluctuating enrolments, regulatory ambiguity and diminished public legitimacy (Nukunah, Bezuidenhout and Furtak, 2019; Barca and Ceyhan, 2025).

Instead, strategy emerges informally through daily, unscripted actions involving sensemaking, adaptation and reactive problem-solving. These “dwelling” practices, as opposed to “building” paradigms, reflect “*phronesis*” (practical wisdom) and “*metis*” (practical intelligence), which are central to navigating contextual ambiguity (Vaara and Whittington, 2012; Chia and Rasche, 2018).

Recent research also highlights the role of sociomateriality, cognition and interpersonal dynamics in shaping strategic outcomes. For instance, Zaghmouri (2024) explored how dynamic capabilities and practice-based views intersect in hospitals, offering analogies to similarly complex service environments like PHEIs. Meanwhile, Kohtamäki, Foss, Rahman and Huikkola (2025) showed that the interplay between individuals, organisational design and practices explains how business models evolve in fast-changing industries (Rabetino et al., 2025).

The convergence of evidence reveals that strategy is not the exclusive domain of senior leaders (Jarzabkowski *et al.*, 2025). The authors posit that it is rather a distributed, contested and enacted phenomenon shaped by multiple levels of management. Hence, S-as-P, therefore, invites research to recognise the strategic agency of middle and operational managers, a perspective rarely applied to African private higher education (PHE).

Therefore, by researching how strategy emerged through the micro-foundational practices of PHEI managers, this study aligned with current research trajectories calling for a deeper understanding of pluralistic, non-corporate and institutionally complex settings (Barca and Ceyhan, 2025; Gordon, 2025).

Additionally, this study addressed the need for more thorough theorisation and empirical research on emergent strategising within high-stakes contexts that are often overlooked and often in the face of challenges to their legitimacy and an increase in market-oriented practices as indicated by Barca and Ceyhan, 2025, such as South African Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). It highlighted that the micro-foundational practices of managers, viewing them not merely as mechanistic routines but as dynamic processes involving sensemaking, negotiation and resilience.

Figure 1.1 offers an overview of the layout of Chapter 1.

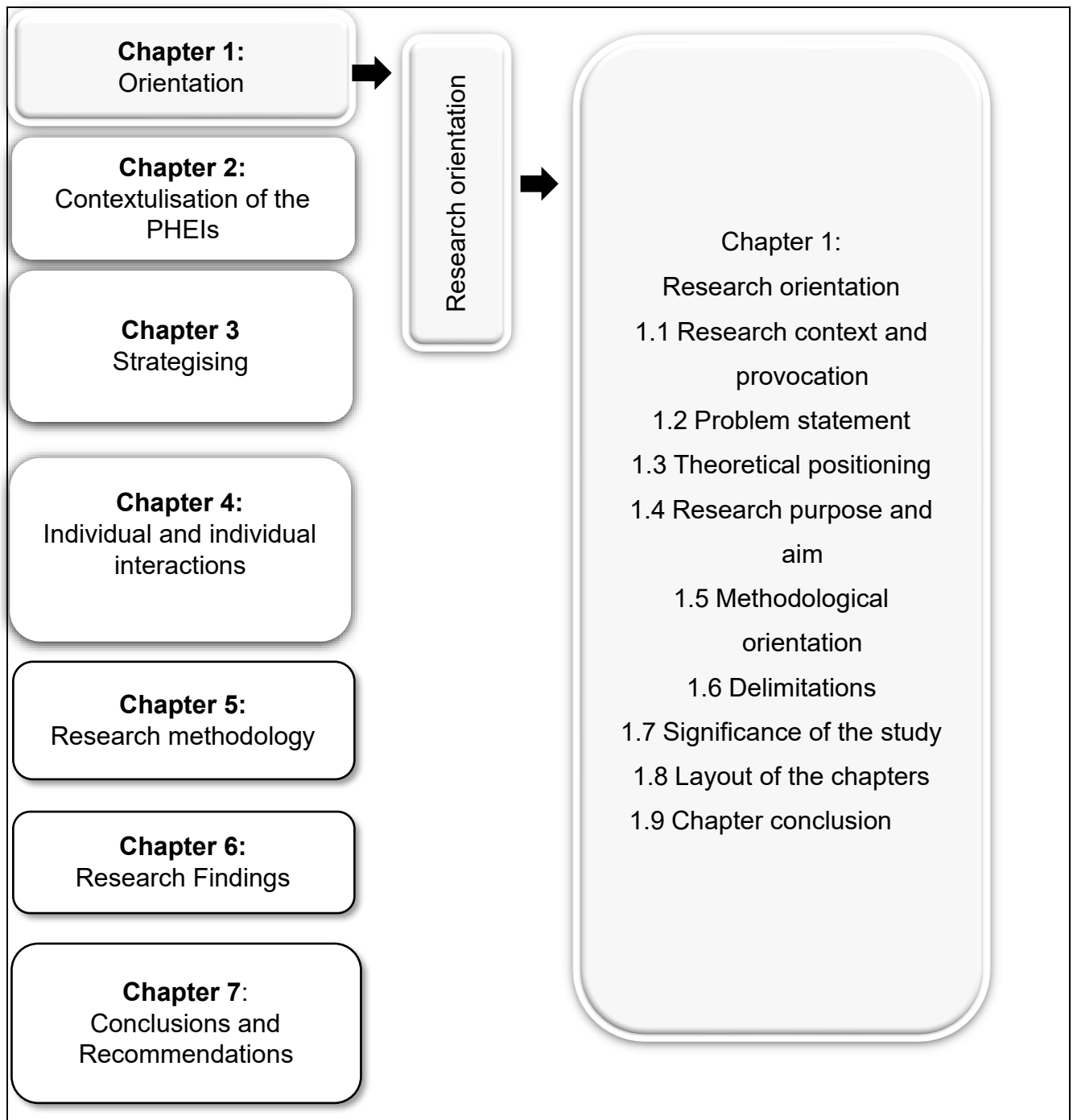


Figure 1.1: Chapter 1 Layout

Source: Author's own

This chapter introduced the conceptual foundation, contextual grounding and intellectual provocation behind this study. It began by examining the turbulent environment in which

South African PHEIs operate and why emergent strategy-making demands closer empirical and theoretical scrutiny.

1.2 Problem statement

Despite two decades of advancement in the S-as-P domain, a significant portion of the research still prioritises deliberate, formalised planning, frequently overlooking the informal, adaptive and emergent processes through which strategy is genuinely executed in intricate organisational contexts (Jarzabkowski, Kavas and Krull, 2021; Kohtamäki et al., 2022; Rouleau and Cloutier, 2022; Seidl, Ma and Splitter, 2024). This is especially restrictive in dynamic industries like Higher Education (HE), where organisations must consistently adjust to legislative changes, resource limitations and hybrid frameworks.

The difficulty is especially pronounced in South African PHEIs. These institutions operate at the intersection of commercial interests and educational obligations, often in the face of challenges to their legitimacy and an increase in market-oriented practices (Nukunah, Bezuidenhout and Furtak, 2019; Barca and Ceyhan, 2025). In these situations, strategy is not a rigid plan but rather a dynamic process that unfolds through the daily actions and context-driven decisions made by organisational members at every level. Nevertheless, empirical research examining the emergence of strategy from these micro-level, context-specific activities within Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) remains limited.

Recent research has initiated a critical examination of the significance of dwelling worldviews, wayfinding and the concept of practical wisdom (*phronesis*) as employed by managers navigating change within educational contexts (Chia et al. (2018); de Metz, Jansen van Rensburg and Davis, 2023; Sinfield, Goldspink and Wilson, 2023). However, understanding remains limited regarding the influence of micro-practices, socially entrenched actions shaped by habitus, field and capital, on emergent strategising. The micro-foundational dynamics of cognition, sensemaking and social interaction furnish a comprehensive framework for elucidating how individual actions converge to produce strategic outcomes (Felin, Foss and Ployhart, 2015; Johnson, Langley, Melin and Whittington (2016a); Li and Jarzabkowski, 2025).

While there is increasing attention to strategising in higher education more broadly, studies specifically focusing on South African PHEIs are few. The work of Samson,

Williamson and Davis (2022), for instance, provided critical insight into middle manager sensemaking during organisational change, but further research is necessary to explore how managers across various levels enact strategy through everyday practice. This multi-level perspective, which encompasses operational, middle and executive managerial roles, remains under-theorised. Yet it is precisely this distributed agency that forms the essence of emergent strategising in PHEIs.

This study, therefore, addressed a critical empirical and theoretical gap by exploring how micro-foundational practices, including daily routines, cognition, social interactions, the exercise of localised power and organisational and external factors, influence emergent strategy-making in a South African PHEI. In doing so, therefore, it contributed to advancing the S-as-P agenda toward a more grounded, inclusive and practice-sensitive understanding of strategy in pluralistic institutional contexts (Lavarda and Bellucci, 2022; Jarzabkowski et al., 2025; Li and Jarzabkowski, 2025).

1.3 Theoretical positioning

Grounded in the intersection between S-as-P and micro-foundations. S-as-P brings attention to the situated actions of practitioners, while the micro-foundational lens emphasises how these individual-level actions aggregate into organisational phenomena (Jarzabkowski, 2005; Barney and Felin, 2013, Foss and Lindenberg, 2013).

Managers do not operate in a vacuum; internalised dispositions, social interactions and access to different forms of capital shape their decisions (Bourdieu, 1977, 1990). Bourdieu's theory of practice became particularly relevant here. Through concepts such as habitus, field and capital, Bourdieu offered a framework for understanding how social context's structure individual actions, yet remain dynamic and agentic (Gomez, 2015; Grenfell, 2016).

This study conceptualised emergent strategising as a product of managers' embodied routines, cognition, social interactions, and contextually situated judgments. It investigated how these micro-foundational practices influenced emergent strategising in a South African PHEI. In addition to social interaction, cognition and the role of daily routines, it was necessary to consider the organisational and external contextual factors

at different levels of management that influenced emergent strategising. Traditionally, PHEI are known to pursue profit maximisation, and questionable quality of programmes is tolerated (Nukunah, Bezuidenhout and Furtak, 2019; Bird and Mugobo, 2021a).

Characterising PHEIs as fundamentally profit-oriented enterprises that accept diminished program quality is an oversimplification that disregards stringent national regulatory systems. Although commercial pressures may jeopardise academic integrity, recent studies demonstrated that South African PHEIs fulfil a crucial, rigorously controlled function in enhancing student accessibility and delivering specialised professional competencies (Meyer, 2025; Van der Westhuizen, 2026). In South Africa, PHEIs function under the same rigorous accreditation and governance standards as public institutions, as posited by Stoltz-Urban (2026), thereby guaranteeing quality assurance throughout the industry.

Therefore, this study responded to calls for research and literature on PHEIs in South Africa (Bezuidenhout, 2020).

1.4 Research purpose and aim

This study explored how micro-foundational practices influenced managers' emergent strategising in a South African PHEI. It aimed to develop a deep, contextually situated understanding of how daily routines, social interactions, cognition, and external factors shape the emergence of strategy across organisational levels.

1.5 Research questions

The main research question was:

How do micro-foundational practices of managers influence emergent strategising at a PHEI in South Africa?

Specific research questions were:

1. How do the social interactions of PHEI managers drive emergent strategising?
2. What is the influence of cognition by PHEI managers in emergent strategising?
3. What role do daily individual routines play in facilitating emergent strategising of PHEI managers?
4. How do organisational and external contextual factors influence the emergent strategising of PHEI managers?
5. How do power dynamics by PHEI managers influence emergent strategising?

1.6 Methodological orientation

To explore how emergent strategising unfolds across different levels of management in a South African PHEI, the study adopted a qualitative, interpretive approach. Rooted in a constructivist-interpretivist paradigm, the methodology prioritised depth, context and meaning-making over generalisability. This orientation was particularly suited to investigating the nuanced, often tacit micro-practices that constitute S-as-P in real-world settings. A single, intrinsic case study design allowed for an in-depth exploration of a bounded organisational setting, while enabling the researcher to capture rich, situated accounts of managerial action, interaction and reflection across multiple levels of the institution.

1.6.1 Research philosophy

This study followed a constructivist-interpretivist paradigm, which recognised that reality was socially constructed and that knowledge was co-created between the researcher and participants (Creswell and Creswell, 2018). This perspective supported the study of lived experiences, particularly the social aspects of strategising. The former considered the social aspect of strategising, and the empirical programme of constructivism drove it. In contrast, the latter sought to create new, richer understandings and interpretations of

social worlds and contexts. The researcher worked closely with the phenomenon to collect rich, in-depth data, creating new, richer knowledge by asking broad and general questions that allowed respondents to construct meaning from the situation formed through interaction. From this, the researcher derived meaning from the data gathered on the ground (Rüegg-Stürm et al., 2015; Creswell et al., 2018).

1.6.2 Research approach to theory development

An intrinsic single-case qualitative study design enabled the researcher to make sense of the subjective and socially constructed meanings. It allowed the researcher to delve deeply into a phenomenon and spend a significant amount of time with participants, personally involved in the case's activities and operations, reflecting on and revising descriptions and meanings. Inductively, the researcher develops a pattern of meaning using multi-methods such as document analysis and semi-structured interviews (Creswell, 2007; Creswell et al., 2018; Denzin and Lincoln, 2018).

1.6.3 Research strategy and techniques

The study employed a case study strategy, drawing on documents, interviews, and narratives to inform its analysis. Atlas Ti software version 24 supported thematic coding and analysis. Managers were purposively sampled to ensure their experiences were rich in context-specific insights.

1.6.4 Time horizons

A cross-sectional approach was used, capturing insights from multiple management levels within a defined period (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2016).

1.6.5 Ethical considerations

Consent in writing was sought from the participants before conducting the study, as the study entailed human subjects. Anonymity and confidentiality were considered for both respondents and the organisation. Furthermore, participants were assured that the research would be used for the intended purpose (Saunders et al., 2016; Creswell et al.,

2018). Moreover, approval was sought from the institution to conduct the research, and ethical clearance (Appendix I) was obtained from University of South Africa (UNISA), as it is a policy matter. The researcher strived to be objective and maintain integrity.

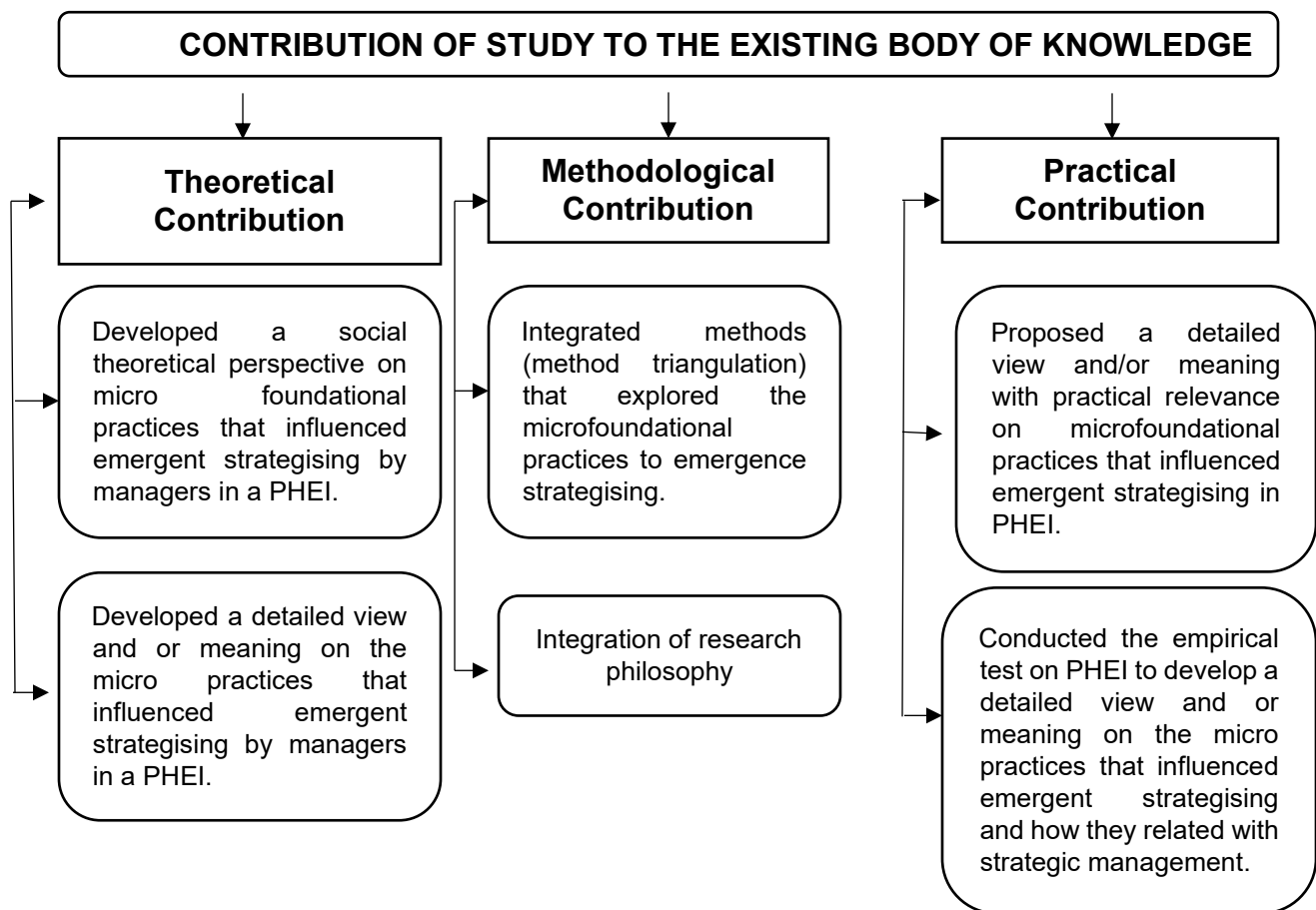
1.7 Delimitations

- 1) **Focused on micro-foundational practices** – The study deliberately excluded macro-level strategic decision-making to concentrate on micro-level strategising.
- 2) **Private institutions only** – The research was restricted to PHEIs, rather than public universities, to align with the study's objectives.
- 3) **Strategic adaptation and emergent strategies** – The study did not evaluate formal strategic planning, but instead it focused on emergent, informal strategising.
- 4) **Geographical scope** – The research was limited to South Africa, meaning findings may not be directly applicable to other national contexts.
- 5) **Managerial perspective** – The study only investigated strategising from the managerial level, rather than from students, faculty or external stakeholders.

1.8 Significance of the study

Figure 1.2 illustrates the study's contribution to the theorisation of emergent strategising. It contributed in several ways. Firstly, theoretically, it integrated S-as-P and micro-foundations within the South African PHEI context. Secondly, empirically, it offered grounded insights into how managers enacted strategy beyond formal planning. Lastly, practically, it supported leaders in designing environments that cultivate strategic emergence.

Figure 1.2: Illustration of the significance of the study



Source: Author's own

Figure 1.2 illustrated a schematic representation of the significance of the study. This study made an original contribution to the theorisation and practical understanding of emergent strategising in South African PHEIs, with a particular emphasis on the multi-level nature of strategic agency. It addressed a critical gap in the S-as-P literature by shifting focus from formalised, top-down planning to the nuanced, lived practices through which managers at different organisational levels co-constructed strategy.

Theoretically, the study integrated S-as-P and micro-foundational perspectives by applying Bourdieu's theory of practice, particularly the constructs of habitus, field and

capital, to explain how strategy was enacted through embedded social action. By anchoring this framework within the under-researched South African PHEI context, the study extended the conceptual boundaries of S-as-P to pluralistic, resource-constrained and legitimacy-sensitive environments.

Empirically, the research provided rare, grounded insight into how managers at all levels of the organisation, from operational to executive, engaged in emergent strategising. This multi-level perspective represented a distinctive contribution. It revealed how strategic agency was distributed and enacted through everyday sensemaking, improvisation and social interaction. In contrast to conventional assumptions, the findings showed that strategising did not reside solely at the executive level but was fostered through dynamic, interdependent micro-foundational practices across organisational layers.

Practically, the study provided actionable insights for institutional leaders and policymakers. By exposing the micro-foundational practices that supported or hindered emergent strategising, it offered guidance on how to cultivate institutional environments that empower managers to act strategically, even in the absence of formal authority or centralised planning. This had clear implications for leadership development, organisational design and institutional responsiveness in PHEIs.

Ultimately, the study affirmed that strategy was not solely devised at the upper echelons but was also experienced and influenced from within, through the reflective, relational and contextual actions of individuals as they navigated complex environments. These collective contributions provided a profound understanding of emergent strategy formulation, situating this thesis within the highest academic standards of originality, depth and relevance.

This study aligned with the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the African Union's Agenda 2063, making a significant contribution to achieving institutional excellence and educational transformation in the Global South. By examining how managers at various levels within PHEIs engaged in emergent strategising, the study

supported SDG 4 (Quality Education) by improving institutional agility and responsiveness to the needs of students, society and the market. It also contributed to SDG 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions) by promoting participatory governance and distributed leadership practices that enhance institutional resilience. Moreover, it aligned with Aspiration 1 and Aspiration 6 of Agenda 2063, which prioritise inclusive growth, people-driven development and the empowerment of African professionals. The findings further provided valuable insights that helped reposition African PHEIs as adaptive and strategic actors in regional and global development agendas.

1.9 Layout of chapters

Chapter 1: The first chapter gave a synopsis of what the thesis aimed to achieve; it introduced the study, thesis statement, problem statement, research questions, theoretical background and structure of the thesis.

Chapter 2: The second chapter contextualised the research. It described the environment of higher education in South Africa and how it related to private institutions. It also reviewed empirical research conducted within a university context. It further described the chosen PHEI.

Chapter 3: The third chapter discussed the thesis orientation, the origins of strategising, the concept of strategy making, the building and dwelling worldviews, the criticisms of the building worldview.

Chapter 4: The fourth chapter theorised the study. Firstly, it discussed the micro-foundations, their history, concepts, criticisms against them, defences for them and previous studies on micro-foundations. Secondly, Bourdieu's approach was discussed, along with its concepts, their relation to micro-practices, its origins and criticisms, as well as its application in other studies. It further elucidated the building and dwelling worldview and its relationship with the "*phronesis*" and "*metis*".

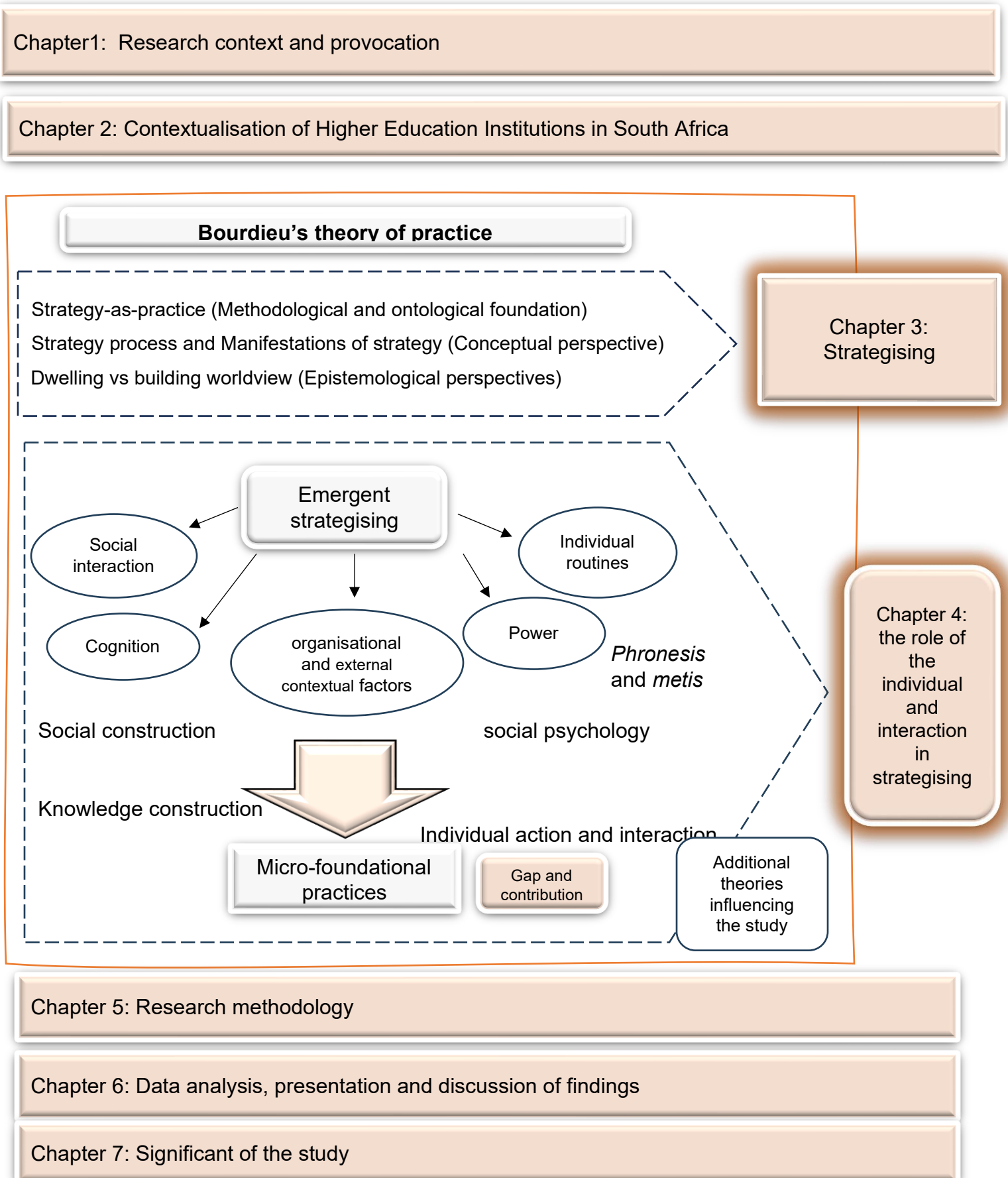
Chapter 5: The fifth chapter discussed the research design of the study. It began by describing the research philosophy, followed by the research approach and then the strategy. Furthermore, it discussed the methodological choices, time horizons, data

collection methods, techniques and procedures. It concluded by discussing the researchers' role during the study.

Chapter 6: The chapter presented findings on all the levels of management in the chosen institution. It outlined detailed and in-depth descriptions of micro practices that influence emergent strategising. The findings were linked back to Bourdieu's perspective. The results of the critical findings and contributions were evaluated.

Chapter 7: The chapter summarised the study's major findings, gives an overview of the study, the response to the research questions, discusses the research contribution, the researcher's reflection, conclusions and recommendations drawn from the study, limitations, and lastly concludes the chapter. Figure 1.3 provides a conceptual framework and overview of the thesis chapters.

Figure 1.3 Conceptual framework and overview of the thesis chapters.



Source: author's own

1.10 Conclusion

Chapter 1 laid the conceptual and contextual groundwork for the study. It introduced the turbulent and hybrid nature of South African PHEs and problematised the limitations of traditional, top-down models of strategising in such settings. In contrast to dominant strategic paradigms, this study positioned emergent strategising as a lived, distributed and context-sensitive process, one shaped by micro-foundational practices and enacted across multiple organisational levels. Additionally, the chapter established the theoretical rationale for employing a S-as-P perspective, enriched by micro-foundational theory and Bourdieu's framework of habitus, field and capital. It also highlighted the researcher's commitment to surfacing the often-overlooked voices of middle and operational managers, whose daily actions and interpretations contribute meaningfully to institutional direction. Furthermore, the chapter clearly articulated the research aim, questions and methodological stance, while situating the study's originality in its multi-level lens and its empirical focus on an under-explored context PHE in South Africa. In doing so, it signalled the study's intent to contribute not only to theoretical debates but also to institutional practice and leadership thinking within PHEs.

The next chapter provided a more in-depth examination of the institutional and sectoral context. It mapped the terrain of South African private higher education (PHE). It explored how these institutions are situated within national policy frameworks, economic pressures and broader global shifts, all of which shaped the conditions under which strategy must emerge.

Chapter 2: Contextualisation of Private Higher Education Institutions in South Africa

Higher education institutions in the 21st century face a competitive landscape that has changed entirely in the last 40 years or so. Indeed, the adjective 'competitive' has shifted from the ancient rivalry based on academic reputation to peaks to a correlated (Hashim et al., 2022)

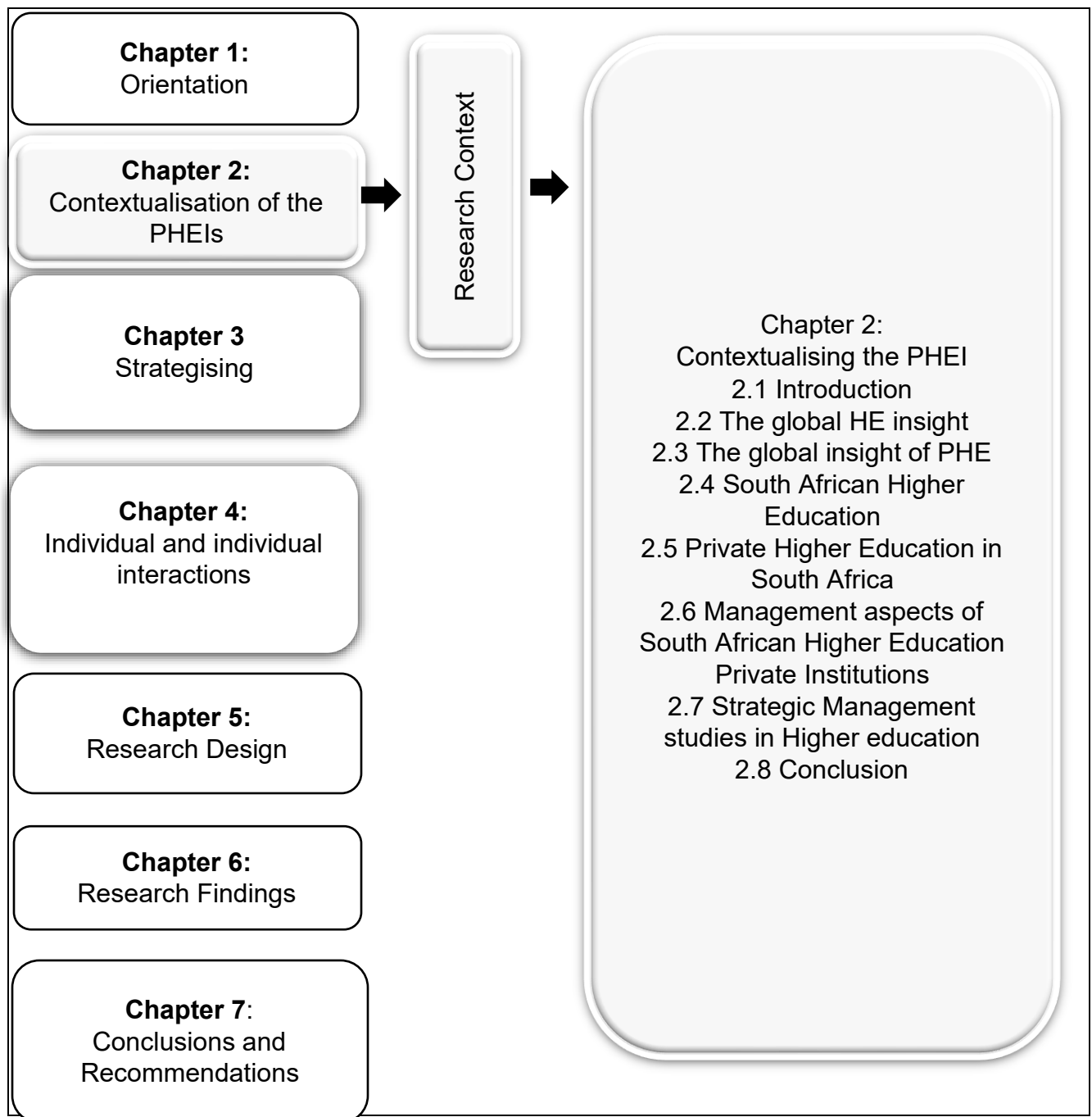
2.1 Introduction

The purpose of Chapter 2 was to expand on the orientation presented in Chapter 1. The study was contextualised in this chapter. Therefore, this chapter provided an expansive investigation of the specific context in which strategising occurs, which was the contextualisation of the current study. As described in Chapter 1, the study explored the micro-foundational practices influencing emergent strategising in a PHEI in South Africa. The choice of PHEI as the research environment for the current study was influenced by little practice-based research on the emergent strategising practices of strategy practitioners within the PHEI sector in South Africa, as detailed in Chapter 1. The difficulties that PHEIs in South Africa face, as described in Chapter 1 and further explored in this chapter, make further strategy investigation within this particular environment necessary. Chapter 2 focused on the South African PHEI landscape, which was the operating environment of PHEIs.

The organisation's internal environment under study was examined empirically and elaborated in Chapter 6, representing the emergent strategising in that context. Strategising practices are unique to each organisation, and no two are alike. This peculiarity represented the context of the study in the current internal or microenvironment, where strategising was unique to the PHEI as it sought to expand its operations. The chapter began with a look at HE around the globe, then the global insight of HE, followed by the global insights of PHE. The SA HE landscape followed it, and then the PHEs in South Africa were discussed to frame the inquiry into PHEIS. Then, the management aspects of South African PHEIs are discussed. Lastly, the chapter

concluded with a look at the strategic management studies already conducted in an PHEI-related research setting. This section focused heavily on S-as-P research in an PHEI context. Furthermore, this chapter was framed by the debate that PHEIs exist for profit maximisation and the questionable quality of their programmes. Furthermore, owing to the increased demand for HE qualifications, the competitive landscape has resulted in increased marketing efforts by PHEIs.

Figure 2.1 is a diagrammatic presentation of Chapter 2



2.2 The global higher education insight

The South African PHEI landscape must be contextualised within the global private provision and defined within the global Higher Education (HE) scene. This section discusses the global aspect of HE, focusing on strategising and the notion of the normative, deriving from a standard of behaviour that is globally acceptable. Figure 2.2 illustrated the division of HE globally into private and public (Marginson 2022).

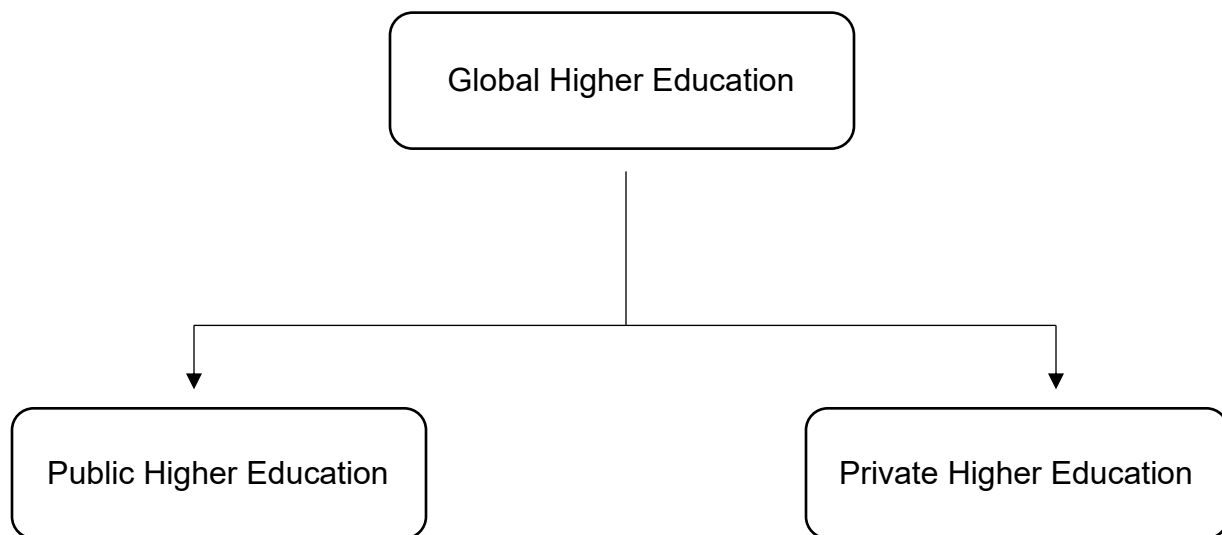


Figure 2.2: An illustration of Higher Education

Source: Adapted from Marginson (2018)

2.2.1 Public and Private Education in Higher Education

Beginning in the latter half of the 20th century, with the advent of massification and the global knowledge economy, HE has become a critical societal resource, vital in providing access to employment and intellectual capital for individuals and society (Altbach, Reisberg and Rumbley 2009). However, according to Altbach, Wit and Woldegiyorgis (2021), in the contemporary context, as HE became an essential societal function and in the era of HE massification, almost all countries fund HE through public and private/non-public funds. The authors add that two related trends emerge: increased and diversified non-state funding for PHE and the expansion of PHEIs.

State-owned institutions of higher education provide public education, whereas private organisations provide private education, also known as non-state education. (Altbach et al., 2021). The concepts, public and private, have long been used in liberal political theory and political economy to make a renowned and forceful difference (Marginson 2022). In the 21st century, there has been a massification of HE and this trend comes with different challenges among enrolment trends, competition trends, government funding shifts, public support, curriculum revisions, increased personal and institutional debt, and inequalities among many higher education stakeholder groups (Altbach et al., 2018). Kuh and Ikenberry (2009) earlier had indicated that the significant challenge for HEIs is to reduce spending, maintain access gains, improve graduation rates and remain affordable while also ensuring that students acquire the skills, competencies and dispositions that will prepare them for a lifetime of learning in an increasingly competitive global market. The enormous challenges in HE on a worldwide basis should be seen against this context, especially the concept of quality education as an outcome Nukunah, et al., (2019) has been highlighted as the issue that is a challenge with most PHEIs.

2.2.1.1 Public good versus private good

The foregoing section brings the argument or debate of the public versus private good, in which there is less consensus on whether it is a public or private good. The conceptual conflict between higher education as a public benefit and as a private good persists as one of the most contentious issues in modern education policy. Although previous frameworks highlighted the public advantages of higher education, there is increasing apprehension that neoliberal reforms have gradually redefined higher education as an individual, market-oriented commodity (Woldegiorgis, 2024).

Altbach et al., (2021) postulate that the public-good argument contends that university graduates contribute broadly to society not only through their skills and added value to the labour market and the broader economy, but also, crucially, through civic participation, improved health outcomes, and other broader contributions to society that, while difficult to quantify in purely economic terms, have measurable value to both society

and the economy. Further Marginson (2018) indicated that HE benefits individuals primarily through increased income and social mobility. In the same vein, Mense, Lemoine, Garretson and Richardson (2018) echo that HE, as a public good, should benefit all citizens. Furthermore, higher education institutions have more than just economic goals. The authors maintain that they generate many tangible and intangible outputs. Owing to these unique characteristics, countries cannot always provide public goods, such as higher education, in a manner that meets social demand or adheres to desired timelines (Mense et al., 2018).

Mense et al., (2018) postulate that HE's good public nature is well understood in terms of its traditional functions and the social benefits it provides. They further argue that HE faces two significant challenges: growth and sustainability. First, governments worldwide have steadily reduced their support for public higher education (HE), while costs have increased steadily over the last decade. Secondly, governments are putting more pressure on universities to demonstrate the value of their degrees in terms of short-term, quantitative and market-related metrics (Mense et al., 2018). The authors posit that the modification of educational services related to standardisation of production creates a quandary that forces universities to pursue excellence and equity in an environment of accountability and competition a nearly impossible task.

Some researchers argue that policy reforms over the last several decades have increased "privatisation" and market competition in higher education systems, have reduced the "public goods" provided by higher education institutions, and are jeopardising academic integrity within universities (Williams, 2016). Although globally, HE has the potential to increase access to higher education, serious concerns have been raised about equity of access (Bandyopadhyay *et al.*, 2021). Owing to technology, learning is becoming increasingly borderless. Accordingly, Shameem and Shaffi, (2023) assert that developing countries see increased participation in HE as critical to their transition to developed-country status and providing opportunities for their citizens in the knowledge economy.

These reforms have been criticised for compromising the fundamental academic principles of universities. Tilak (2008) observes that the Indian example illustrates how privatisation and market competition in higher education have led to underinvestment in the public good aspect of education and increased stratification in access.

Scholars have advocated for a redefinition of higher education, emphasising its significance not just in terms of economic utility but also as a civic and moral obligation essential for the sustenance of democratic societies and knowledge economies (Pusser, 2006). Therefore, the dichotomy of public vs private is becoming inadequate. A more nuanced continuum is required to elucidate how higher education operates across various contexts and how institutions can address market demands while upholding public principles. In South Africa, this dual obligation must be meticulously balanced to guarantee that higher education remains accessible and transformational.

Table 2.1 compares HE's public and private good attributes not as a rigid classification but as a continuum. Most higher education institutions exhibit hybrid characteristics, especially in complex contexts such as South Africa. The difficulty is reconciling the demands of market response with higher education's ethical and social responsibilities.

Table 2.1: Comparison of HE's public and private attributes

Dimension	Public good orientation	Private good orientation
Primary goal	Social development, civic engagement, public knowledge creation (Williams, 2016; Simon Marginson, 2022b).	Individual advancement, personal return on investment (Labaree, 1997; McMahon, 2009)
Funding source	Primarily public (state subsidies, grants) (Tilak, 2008; Mlambo and Mpanza, 2024).	Primarily private (tuition fees, commercial services) (McMahon, 2009; Singh, 2025).
Access and equity	Universal access, inclusivity, affirmative action (Altbach and De Wit, 2020; Department of Higher Education SA, 2022a)	Selective access, affordability tied to individual capacity to pay (Caerus Capital, 2017a; Berisha, Mustafa and Ismail, 2018)
Curriculum focus	Broad-based education (critical thinking, humanities, civic knowledge (Jarzabkowski and Whittington, 2008; Williams, 2016)	Market-driven programs (business, tech, employability-oriented) (Teixeira et al., 2017)
Outcome metrics	Social impact, graduate citizenship, contribution to public discourse (Pusser, 2006; Marginson, 2022)	Employment rates, salary outcomes, return on education investment (Labaree, 1997; Okulich-Kazarin et al., 2024)
Accountability	Public accountability through regulatory bodies (CHE, DHET, SAQA) (Department of Higher Education and Training, 2023; Ogunbanjo and Olajide, 2025a)	Shareholder/investor accountability; performance-based funding (Tilak, 2014; Govender and Law, 2025)
Governance model	Participatory (public boards, academic senates) (Jarzabkowski and Fenton, 2006; Berisha, Mustafa and Ismail, 2018)	Centralised or corporate-style management (Caerus Capital, 2017; Bird and Mugobo, 2021b)
Pedagogical model	Emphasis on academic freedom and deliberative dialogue (Jarzabkowski, 2005; Davis, 2013a)	Emphasis on efficiency, modular content, learning outcomes (Bezuidenhout, 2020)
Research orientation	Basic research, socially relevant research, open access publishing (Marginson, 2022b; Singh and Tustin, 2022)	Applied research, IP generation, commercial partnerships (Mlambo and Mpanza, 2024; Govender and Law, 2025)
Impact focus	National development, democratic strengthening, cultural reproduction (Williams, 2016; Simon Marginson, 2022b)	Individual mobility, career success, institutional branding (Caerus Capital, 2017; Teixeira et al., 2017a)

Source: Author's own

The following section explored the evolving nature of HE globally by briefly discussing the changes that necessitated studying the private sector and evaluating the implications for expanding private sector involvement in HE provision.

2.2.2 Higher education global changes.

Like the rest of society, HE is undergoing significant upheaval and development, hence the need to adapt to societal or environmental changes. HE is more accessible than ever before in human history, to more people, in more places and more ways (Gleason 2018). Further, Arbidane et al. (2020) buttress that most respectable higher education institutions aim to increase graduates' ability for academic accomplishment and information retention to prepare them for a productive life. Additionally, Alexander (2020) echoes the same and further acknowledges that the changes being instituted by HE are inadequate and slow. Following is a brief discussion of the literature on the changes affecting HEI offerings' quality.

a) Technology and the fourth industrial revolution (4IR)

Mense et al. (2018) aver that technological changes are occurring rapidly and that knowledge production is necessary but frequently inconsistent, which will significantly impact the future education system. As indicated by Gleason (2018), there is knowledge automation in HE; these changes are occurring today because humans have finally acquired the processing ability to store vast quantities of data, enabling machine learning. However, these changes, opportunities or expansions should address quality issues through assessments and evaluation systems (Balzer, 2020; Okulich-Kazarin *et al.*, 2024).

b) Economic

HE institutions face decreased funding during scarce resources, but increased accountability for productivity in knowledge development and service articulation (Mense et al., 2018). However, the authors further state that HE's traditional, formal processes have been disrupted by technology. HE institutions are separating from traditional brick-and-mortar physical spaces and venturing into a virtual mélange of educational models used in the knowledge economy, aided by emerging technologies. Technology is an essential stimulus for economic development (Mense et al., 2018).

c) Demographic

Demographic changes also present universities with direct, long-term challenges (Seeber, Cattaneo, Huisman and Paleari, 2016). An ageing population shapes many global market participants' spending priorities. Many countries are forced to compete for talent, not only to keep their students at home, but also to recruit and retain talented students and workers from other countries (Jason 2011). Furthermore, an increasingly diverse society, including growing minority populations and high rates of immigration (Mense et al., 2018; Borrás, Chaminade and Edquist 2009), ensure that colleges and universities will require additional resources to meet the needs of these diverse students (Horizon 2020 2015; Zaman and Mohsin 2014).

d) Funding

Jensen (2017) argues that financing this massive industry has frequently proven complex and contentious as the HE industry grows globally. Financial demands on governments and HEIs to provide for HE are rising. With declining government subsidies, HEIs are tasked with accommodating ever-increasing enrolments (Jensen 2017).

Like any other industry, HE globally experiences changes as the environment also changes and hence the need to respond effectively and efficiently.

2.2.3 Ensuring quality assurance in Higher Education

Quality concepts in HE differs across countries and regions, and regional quality programmes reflect these differences (Mense et al., 2018). However, they argue that quality perceptions are shifting, and the growing emphasis on outcomes and standards heralds the possibility of more dramatic techniques for assessing and evaluating technology and education globally.

Altbach et al., (2009) posit that by 1998 UNESCO World Conference on Higher Education, virtually all nations had prioritised quality assurance, with the majority having developed methods to assess the quality of institutions and programmes in HE. The

authors emphasise that these systems' reach, aims, and impact differ greatly. Hence, increasing the comparability and complementarity of various national quality assurance programmes and frameworks (Altbach et al., 2009). Additionally, the authors posit that quality assurance has emerged as a significant problem in the context of global transformation in HE.

2.2.4 Globalisation and the future of HE

Globalisation is defined as a reality shaped by an increasingly integrated global economy, new information and communication technology, the emergence of an international knowledge network, and other forces beyond higher education institutions' control (Van Der Wende, 2003). Mense et al., (2018) postulate that HE has been thrust into a new world of change, instability and ambiguity, shaped by an increasingly integrated global economy, technology, an international knowledge network, and other forces beyond the control of higher education institutions. Chankseliani, Qoraboyev and Gimranova (2021) echo that, HE can potentially contribute to global (global, national, and local) development. Mense et al., (2018) project that future education systems, according to futurists, will vastly differ from those of today. Furthermore, they predict that as technology and telecommunications improve, innovative approaches to teaching and learning will proliferate and be used more effectively. Traditional universities have historically been producers of knowledge in the form of human capital, research and scholarship. Still, they are now being challenged to meet the growing demand for lifelong learning. HE is in high order, but it faces significant challenges due to globalisation and technological advancements (Mense et al., 2018).

In addition to the global changes such as technology and quality that were alluded to earlier, the preceding authors indicate that management is necessary for producing knowledge, but it is frequently inconsistent. Hence, HE institutions must become business-like entrepreneurs by managing themselves to remain viable in the knowledge economy (Judson and Taylor, 2014).

2.2.5 The Threat of Artificial Intelligence (AI) to HE

Marginson (2022) contends that globalisation and neoliberal reforms have redefined higher education as a private commodity, transforming knowledge and students into marketable entities. The author further maintains that AI propels transformation by integrating algorithmic reasoning into educational and administrative frameworks, intensifying the demand to present education as a scalable commodity rather than a social responsibility.

However, a primary concern is academic honesty (Rodrigues *et al.*, 2024). The authors contend that Instruments such as ChatGPT have facilitated the generation of AI-produced content by students, jeopardising the integrity of conventional assessments. They further assert that the emergence of AI necessitates an immediate reassessment of pedagogical and evaluative methodologies.

In addition to ethics, there are educational ramifications (Humble and Mozelius, 2022). The authors indicate that the implementation of AI-driven learning platforms may lead to the depersonalisation of education, substituting human mentorship with automated interactions. They indicate that it results in the diminishing of critical thinking and relegates educators to mere content facilitators.

There are also labour issues that are increasing (Okulich-Kazarin *et al.*, 2023). The authors further discovered that students progressively perceive AI as a feasible substitute for educators, raising apprehensions about the viability of academic positions. Notwithstanding certain institutional policy responses (McDonald *et al.*, 2025), HE primarily remains ill-equipped to address the ethical and structural upheaval presented by AI.

As Marginson (2022) indicates, that AI possesses transformational potential. However, unregulated deployment threatens to exacerbate inequities, diminish trust and compromise the public goal of higher education. Therefore, AI can be recognised as a technological advancement and a disruptive force; its irresponsible integration into the academic system risks eroding the essential ideals of education.

The global higher education landscape is influenced by rapid technological, economic, and demographic changes that necessitate strategic agility and contextual responsiveness. Hence, viewing it from emergent strategising and the microfoundational approach offers a more refined comprehension of how strategy develops in dynamic conditions not as a predetermined plan, but as a pattern of contextual actions executed by managers within their institutional contexts. Further, utilising Bourdieu's theory of practice, these actions can be interpreted as outcomes of the interaction among habitus (the ingrained dispositions that influence behaviour), field (the organised social and institutional framework of higher education), and capital (the economic, cultural, and symbolic resources that managers employ to affect results). As such, this dynamic interaction elucidated the variability of strategising across institutional contexts and the functioning of individual agency within structural constraints. This study was guided by the S-as-P framework, which elucidated how routine managerial practices in private higher education institutions, shaped by their dispositions, power dynamics, and contextual limitations, collectively generated emergent strategic outcomes in the face of global turbulence.

The following section looks at the global insight of PHE

2.3 The global insight of PHE

This section aimed to clarify what private HE provision entails and uncover global patterns and recurring PHEI topics. Like the discussion of HE in the preceding section, the issue of private HE provision was set within the context of the worldwide growth of demand in the HE industry, particularly PHE, and the debate over PHEI as prioritising profit maximisation over programme quality.

2.3.1 Private HE defined

Bezuidenhout (2020) summarised three standard criteria in distinguishing between private and public provision, including legal ownership government as opposed to private; funding by government or exclusively by private investment and student tuition fees; and

contribution to society: public or for private gain. The author defines PHE-providers as legally owned by private entities, privately funded through student tuition fees, and seeking specific/individual gain, for example, profit or addressing a specific social cause. The current study subscribed to the preceding three criteria in differentiating between private and public provision.

Ge Rochelle (2022) postulates that, driven by economic and national development needs, the latter half of the 20th century saw a massive HE expansion in many nation-states. As indicated earlier, it has resulted in competition in knowledge creation, transmission and production as demand increases. This challenges HE institutions to offer higher-quality education (Santini-Hernández, 2022). Earlier, (Buckner, 2017) had indicated that the proliferation of private provision reflects countries' shift in perception of HE from an 'essential public good' to an individual/private good. As discussed in the preceding sections, this perception shift coincides with the emergence of neoliberalism in HE and its subsequent marketisation.

2.3.2 The proliferation of private provision

As stated previously, private provision is rapidly expanding on a global scale. Research indicates that the private provision sector is so significant in some countries that it may completely replace public provision. According to Myburgh (2021), the growth in private HE provisions over the last two decades has been "spectacular," with one in every three students globally enrolled in a PHEI. Further, the author posits that experts agree that the proliferation of PHEIs appears to be driven by demand absorption, and that the global 'massification' of HE has resulted in needs that governments cannot meet. Moreover, many consider a higher education degree a wise investment in personal development and marketability. Buckner (2017) for example, identifies private provision as the fastest-growing segment in higher education. The author maintains that private providers outnumber public providers globally, agreeing that PHE has been the channel through which the access constraints confronting public higher education provision have been alleviated, mainly where there is evidence of greater demand than public institutions can meet.

Based on a study of 15,129 PHEs worldwide, Singh and Tustin (2022) conclude that the remarkable growth of PHE cannot be attributed solely to increased HE demand and governments' inability to meet it. Globally, the PHE sector has experienced rapid structural growth as highlighted by (UNESCO, 2026). The global data demonstrate that systemic expansions have pushed worldwide Higher education enrollments to unprecedented levels (Marginson, 2026). Further, within this shifting landscape, this expansion is driven by governments increasingly embracing private provision as a 'preferred model' for delivering HE (Rumbley *et al.*, 2023). As such, the underlying premise of this policy shift is rooted in contemporary public sector resource constraints; states actively leverage the private sector to manage surging massification demands without overburdening public fiscal budgets (Altbach and de Wit, 2025; Marginson, 2026).

However, interpreting private provision as an active government 'preference' requires careful academic interrogation, as it masks severe underlying systemic tensions. Hence, alternative perspectives in recent scholarship demonstrate that state reliance on PHE is frequently an act of operational default rather than strategic choice, which is a phenomenon driven by severe public university capacity crises and systemic infrastructure deficits (Tamrat and Demas, 2022; Tamrat and Teferra, 2022). In several emerging economies, state regulatory frameworks remain structurally adversarial, creating an environment where governments reluctantly tolerate private institutional growth to solve enrollment bottlenecks while simultaneously enforcing restrictive compliance barriers due to academic suspicion (Tamrat, 2024). Rather than reflecting a seamless policy preference, the expansion of private provision represents a highly contested, negotiated space where institutions must maintain financial stability through tuition fees while navigating intense state regulatory surveillance.

2.3.3 Quality assurance issues in the PHE

Tamrat (2020) posits that despite the tremendous growth in PHE, they have yet to achieve the status that gives HEIs bargaining power in most parts of the world. PHEIs are frequently regarded less favourably than their public counterparts within their own national

territories, and the quality of their programmes, students and faculty, and support systems is called into question.

According to Bezuidenhout (2020), most PHEIs are 'entrepreneurial' in nature, seeking profit for their stakeholders through flexible and targeted programmes. Giroux (2010) and Atakan and Eker (2007) indicate that the evolution of HE (both private and public) from an altruistic to a business-like nature began in the early 20th century. Nukunah et al., (2019) agree and maintain that economic pressures from reduced government funding and competition from other national and international providers have forced even public HE providers to foster an entrepreneurial approach. Tamrat (2020), similarly, although certain PHEIs are established to cater to a specific religion or social cause, most are founded to exploit profitable opportunities in absorbing a growing demand for HE. Furthermore, the author asserts that it is assumed that their academic standards fall short of accepted standards.

In summary, the worldwide proliferation of PHE signifies increasing demand, competition, and institutional diversification, resulting in contexts where strategy develops through the adaptive behaviours of institutional agents rather than through formal planning. Hence, comprehending these dynamics necessitated transcending structural analysis to focus on the micro-level practices that influence strategy within context. That as it may, from the perspective of S-as-P, strategy in PHEIs was perceived as a sequence of context-specific, socially embedded actions undertaken by managers, through which meaning and direction are perpetually negotiated. The microfoundational perspective enhances this understanding by illustrating how individual cognition, social interaction, and daily routines collectively produce strategic outcomes, whereas Bourdieu's theory of practice elucidated how these actions are influenced by the interaction of habitus, field, and capital, determining the permissible and legitimate forms of strategising within the private higher education sector. As such, when viewed through the lens of the dwelling worldview, strategising within these institutions transforms into a dynamic process, executed through managers' ongoing interaction with intricate institutional, economic, and social realities. Therefore, collectively, these viewpoints elucidated emergent strategising as a socially rooted, practice-oriented process whereby managers in private higher

education institutions overcome restrictions, mobilise resources, and co-create strategy within an increasingly volatile global HE environment.

The following section examined the South African HE framework, specifically its influence on private provision in South Africa. The main themes included the strict regulation of HE and the major challenges facing HE authorities.

2.4 South African Higher Education

The previous sections focused on global HE before moving on to global PHE issues. The following section delves into the South African HE landscape.

2.4.1 South African HE landscape

HE in South Africa entails providing it on a full-time, part-time or online basis (Republic of South Africa 1997). The Ministry of Education governs private education institutions, and their policies are drawn from the national plan for Post-School Education and Training 2021-2030 (Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) South Africa, 2023). Accordingly, the same document indicates that the National Plan's policy framework advocates for programmes that support a democratic culture in a local discourse that adds to the value of knowledge, is in tandem and adaptive with local, national, Southern African, and African contexts, and preserves excellent academic vigour. However, that has not been achieved.

In South Africa, the HE sector is governed by a set of rules and policies that govern how decisions are made and implemented by the DHET. Caerus Capital (2017) reports that HE in South Africa is supply-constrained, with an applicant to seat ratio of more than three to one at public institutions. Hence, the PE plays a complementary role in the basic delivery of education. Even though four of the country's public universities rank among the top 500¹⁶⁷ in the world, many struggle to provide high-quality education, especially with decreasing government funding per student. Dropout rates at public universities exceed 50% during the first year of study,¹⁶⁹ compared to 10% at private institutions,

owing to the availability of better student support systems at private institutions. Even though private higher education accounts for only 13% of all enrolments, private enrolments are growing much faster (at 8%) than public enrolments (at 1 percent)(Caerus Capital 2017). The report further report that distance education is becoming more popular in South Africa as it provides greater affordability and flexibility for working professionals. The private distance education market is expanding at an annual rate of 8%.

2.4.2 Challenges facing HE in South Africa

Caerus Capital (2017) notes that HE in South Africa continues to grapple with deep structural and systemic challenges, many of which have persisted despite reform efforts. Further, recent studies affirm that South African public universities are severely underfunded relative to demand. Mutongoza, (2025) highlights how limited infrastructure, overcrowded classrooms and staff shortages—particularly in historically disadvantaged institutions—undermine quality. Hence, rising enrolments not matched by proportional investment exacerbate these issues. As Essop (2005) notes, the massification of higher education has introduced greater diversity into student cohorts and strained teaching quality, support systems and institutional capacity.

Further, the 4IR has brought about new challenges (Lubinga, Maramura and Masiya, 2023). The authors state that numerous higher education institutions (HEIs) encounter considerable obstacles in embracing digital technologies, largely owing to digital illiteracy, insufficient infrastructure and resistance within the institutions. This was especially pronounced during the transition to online learning caused by COVID-19 and continues to hinder the sector's ability to adapt.

Additionally, there are concerns about persistent dropout rates (Saidi, 2024). Further, the author attributes high attrition to inadequate academic preparation, insufficient financial aid and limited psychosocial support. Additionally, the authors add that interestingly, PHEIs, which frequently offer more robust support systems and flexible delivery methods, generally report much lower first-year dropout rates.

Lastly, there are additional challenges, including social justice issues, particularly around gender and disability (Wheeler and Wiese, 2024). The authors elaborate that there is a persistent gender disparity in staff promotions and leadership, while Zongozzi and Ngubane, (2025) stress the barriers disabled students face in accessing equitable digital learning environments.

Overall, the South African HE system remains a paradox of transformation and constraint, marked by efforts to democratise access but constrained by under-resourcing, inequality and limited systemic agility. Nonetheless, the sector has expanded considerably; however, it remains constrained by resource limitations, inequity and uneven institutional performance.

2.5 Private Higher Education in South Africa

This section described the private provider sector of South Africa's higher education business. Additionally, the PHE landscape was briefly examined, and focus areas in terms of academic delivery, the challenges facing private providers, and their strengths need to be scrutinised. There is little information about the PHE industry, the potential and rapid growth, and stakeholder perception of PHEIs.

2.5.1 The South African private higher education landscape

The global and national importance of PHEIs is increasing, especially when public universities encounter capacity limitations. In South Africa, the private sector assumes an increasingly crucial role in accommodating the growing demand for higher education, as seen by recent enrolment and institutional expansion trends.

Singh (2025) indicates that enrolment in South African PHEIs has consistently increased owing to rising student demand and the public schools' failure to satisfy this demand adequately. The author maintains that as of 2023, private higher education schools registered over 240,000 students across more than 140 providers, indicating a sustained

increase from the 219,031 students enrolled in 2020. This shows an estimated 37% rise over 2016, when enrolment was 167,408 students across 130 institutions (Govender and Law, 2025).

PHEs share of total national enrolments has consistently risen, representing approximately 18% of the overall student population, as reported by (Mlambo and Mpanza, 2024). The government's augmentation of public institutions specifically the anticipated University of Science and Innovation in Ekurhuleni and a new university in Hammanskraal has not yet substantially mitigated demand-side pressures DHET, 2023).

Hence, this void offers a distinct opportunity for private suppliers to expand their presence and innovate (Mlambo et al., 2024). Moreover, recent data indicate that private universities generally exhibit lower first-year dropout rates than public institutions, attributable to smaller class numbers, flexible modalities, and student-centred pedagogical methods. Further, the authors indicate that distance learning is a significant expansion area, which has gained popularity among working adults pursuing flexible, cost-effective certifications. Additionally, the private distance education sector is expanding annually by over 8%, driven by digital adoption and cost-effectiveness (Mlambo and Mpanza, 2024).

Notwithstanding persistent views of public sector supremacy, the private sector demonstrated adaptability and resilience, providing feasible alternatives to address South Africa's changing educational requirements.

2.5.2 Potential and rapid growth in PHE

Caerus Capital (2017) reports that there is a severe scarcity of higher education seats. The report further alluded that the private sector, which currently provides approximately 30% of African higher education spaces, can do more to address the continent's educational issues. African governments (including the South African Government) should capitalise on it rather than ignore or oppose it. The DHET (2022) and Stan (2017)

also acknowledge steady growth in the PHEIs. According to the report, public sector capacity limitations and a desire for employability-oriented education exacerbate this growth. Furthermore, distance higher education has arisen as a key and expanding market in Africa owing to the expansion of technology. It presents a significant opportunity and will continue to do so in the next five years.

Caerus Capital (2017) reports that the private sector plays an important role in ancillary services. Therefore, aside from its role in core education delivery, the private sector is an important player in providing services that support and complement core education delivery, such as teacher training and education technology. However, even if private institutions are an alternative, there seems to be discontentment in their offerings. Though it is encouraging that to tempt national institutions, world-class, quality-focused and national development-oriented private universities should be permitted to expand and join new scientific and technology disciplines (Caerus Capital 2017). This clearly indicates a healthy competitive landscape within the HE framework, emphasising the region's investment needs and prospects. It goes without saying that it also brings strengths into the HE landscape. As stated in the report, the strengths are a) it improves access to education, b) accelerates innovation through flexible teaching and learning methods, c) improved education quality and d) provides relevant education as they adapt to what the industry wants from graduates (Caerus Capital 2017).

There is growth in the medium term as the PE sector is large and growing as the provision of education is likely to increase in the next 15 years in the region of which, as indicated earlier, South Africa is a part (Caerus Capital 2017). However, the global expansion of PHE has been lauded by many as an opportunity to increase competition in the sector, thereby improving the quality of programmes offered (Teixeira, Kim, Pablo and Gilani Zulfiqar 2017). The authors further maintain that the persistently high demand for HE qualifications, combined with a dynamic labour market, has resulted in a complex system in which institutions constantly develop new programmes to meet market demands.

In line with this, South African public universities have carved out a niche by establishing business schools that offer specialised programmes to meet the needs of both students

and businesses. The goal of these business schools is to form close relationships with industry to provide specific programmes that address business needs. The increased demand for professional development and training in the workplace has created a large market in which private business schools compete favourably, resulting in an increase in PHEIs enrolment (Nukunah et al., 2019).

2.5.3 The competitive landscape of the PHEI

As previously stated, very little information on the South African PHE industry is available. This section sheds more light on the industry by briefly elaborating on the competitive landscape of the PHEIs in South Africa.

The private higher education sector in South Africa has witnessed significant expansion, comprising 137 registered private higher education institutions alongside 26 public universities. This development responds to the growing demand for higher education, which public institutions alone are unable to satisfy (BusinessLive, 2025).

Stadio Holdings has become a significant player in this arena. Since its establishment, Stadio has increased its student population from 12,976 in 2017 to over 50,000 by 2024 (Bizcommunity, 2024) and the expansion is attributed to its diverse offerings across several institutions, including AFDA, Milpark Education and Stadio Higher Education (EWN, 2025). Approximately 84% of its students participate in distance learning, indicating a purposeful focus on flexible educational paradigms (Stadio Holdings, 2024; BusinessLive, 2025). Stadio's infrastructure expansion encompasses a new campus in Durbanville, Cape Town, designed to host 4,000–5,000 contact learning students by 2026 (Bizcommunity, 2024; Stadio Holdings, 2024; BusinessLive, 2025; BusinessTech, 2025a, 2025b; EWN, 2025)

Conversely, Educor, previously a formidable entity with institutions such as Damelin and City Varsity, has encountered substantial difficulties. Despite that it was once a formidable institution, in 2023, the DHET deregistered multiple Educor schools for non-

compliance with regulatory mandates, including the failure to produce financial accounts and tax clearance certificates. This action impacted almost 13,096 students, underscoring the vital significance of poor governance and compliance within the sector (Department Science Technology and Innovation, 2024; Mail and Guardian, 2024).

Another institution, Akademia, a private Afrikaans-medium education, has consistently expanded its footprint. Although precise enrolment statistics are scarce, Akademia's emphasis on cultural and language preservation distinguishes it within the PHEI sector (Akademia, 2025a, 2025b).

Hence, as stated earlier, PHEIs in South Africa face stiff competition from public universities (Bird and Mugobo 2021a). Furthermore, Bird and Mugobo (2021a) posit that demand for tertiary education in South Africa has resulted in the establishment of new markets and an increase in the number of local private education institutions. However, they have a competitive advantage owing to several factors.

Firstly, their methodology for teaching and learning in the lecture hall in private institutions, as part of classroom didactics allows for engagement and success (Bird and Mugobo (2021b). Secondly, Singh and Tustin (2022) highlight that PHEIs have course flexibility, which allows them to offer courses that are not available at public universities, and they can also respond to changes in the job market and industry needs more quickly. Thirdly, Bird et al., (2021b) asserts that PHEIs have smaller class sizes; hence, students can receive more individualised attention, engagement and success. Additionally, PHEIs focus on employability; with career services and industry partnerships, private institutions frequently place a strong emphasis on preparing students for the workforce (Bird et al., (2021b). Furthermore, PHEIs may have more freedom to experiment with innovative teaching methods and technology, which can be appealing to students (Caerus Capital 2017). Lastly, brand recognition plays a significant factor as some private institutions have developed strong brand recognition and reputations for providing high-quality education, which can be a significant selling point for prospective students (Bird et.al., 2021a).

Despite these advantages, private institutions still face challenges in competing with public universities, which typically have more resources and funding. However, by focusing on their strengths and adapting to changing market needs, private institutions

can remain competitive in the South African higher education landscape. PHEIs do not receive government subsidies; their target markets are mostly middle-to-upper-income customers. Despite the proliferation of PHEIs in South Africa, they face significant challenges in the South African HE sector, impacting the quality of service they offer to remain profitable.

The preceding discussion highlighted the competitive landscape of the PHE industry. The following section briefly discussed the stakeholder perception of PHEIs and the challenges that they faced in their operations.

2.5.4 Stakeholder perception of PHE and challenges in South Africa

As indicated earlier, Caerus Capital (2017) report also concedes that the private sector is already making significant contributions to education and service delivery. However, the report concedes that the quality of education is a great challenge that needs improvement, as it is compromised at the expense of profits. Even internationally, quality concerns have been raised (Teixeira et al., 2017). Bird et al. (2021b) concur that stakeholders have a negative perception towards qualifications acquired from them. Furthermore, Nukunah et al. (2019b) further posit that there is apparent mistrust in the PHEIs owing to their entrepreneurial nature of seeking profits at the expense of stakeholders. A concern earlier indicated by Teixeira et al., (2017) indicates that it had necessitated that the government and regulatory bodies instil and install quality measures through policies.

Bird et al., (2021b) and Bezuidenhout (2020) lament a lack of well-equipped laboratories and facilities, lecturers who are underpaid and lack skills and qualifications, lack of infrastructure investment, a lack of research conducted and a deemed inferior qualification quality are generic factors that attract strong criticism in most PHEIs. Singh and Tustin (2022) studied stakeholders' perceptions of private HE in South Africa to determine why it has not grown to complement public HE in closing the access gap. The findings indicated a lack of knowledge about PHE, particularly among parents. Furthermore, there is a perception that it is costly with low returns on investment and a

lack of trust in the value of the qualifications and the quality of the tuition provided. However, respondents recognised the benefits of PHE and graduate success. Based on these findings, addressing cost perceptions and improving communication should be top priorities for both this sub-sector and national authorities.

Despite these reservations, students continue to choose to study at private institutions in South Africa. The solution may entail more than simply absorbing students who failed to qualify at public universities and their strengths (Nukunah et al., 2019). These strengths are further discussed in the next section. A higher completion rate for qualifications and other strengths are indicated.

The competitive dynamics of PHEIs in South Africa are influenced by regulatory compliance, market adaptation and strategic expansion. As such, Stadio Holdings illustrated effective expansion and innovation, while Educor's recent challenges highlight the repercussions of regulatory non-compliance. In contrast, Akademia's specialised focus enhances the sector's variety by serving particular linguistic and cultural populations.

2.5.4 Ensuring quality in HE in South Africa: Current trends

The Council on Higher Education (CHE), through its permanent sub-committee, the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC), persists in its collaboration with the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) to deliver regulatory supervision and maintain the system's integrity (CHE and SAQA, 2025) (Council on Higher Education, 2025). The stringent, multi-tiered regulatory framework necessitated that PHEI managers consistently reconciled inflexible compliance requirements with the imperative for operational flexibility. Further, effective quality monitoring across the system was critical to ensuring an effective and credible PHE sector (DHET, 2022). Yet, despite a concerted and collaborative effort by regulatory bodies over the last few years, the threat of illegal (or bogus) colleges remains (Department of Higher Education SA, 2026). Another issue confronting the PHE sector is the ongoing misrepresentation of qualifications. The main areas of misrepresentation are the incorrect application of specialisations to

qualifications, the wrong allocation of credits and irregular claims about a qualification and its employment relationship. To address these issues, DHET will continue to provide close oversight while collaborating with SAQA and the CHE to intervene when these practices are identified (Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET), 2025).

Myburgh and Calitz (2020) underscore initial apprehensions regarding inconsistent quality assurance systems in South African higher education, stressing the necessity for institutional transformation and regulatory oversight. This concern persists today, even out of Africa as Blacklock, Baird and Stensaker, (2025) assert that Australia's transition to risk-based quality assurance signifies a wider worldwide trend towards differentiated, performance-oriented monitoring frameworks designed to address institutional complexity and market-driven behaviours.

The swift expansion of PHEIs has exacerbated this demand. As Kayyali (2025) observes that numerous nations, especially in the Global South, have reacted by establishing or enhancing national quality assurance bodies to combat "diploma mills" and uphold programme credibility. Hence, these advancements highlight the growing expectation that higher education systems provide not only access but also value, transparency and accountability.

The issues are significantly amplified in cross-border scenarios. As Ogunbanjo et al., (2025) contend that global mobility and digital proliferation have engendered ambiguous legal areas necessitating enhanced compliance with frameworks like the OECD/UNESCO Guidelines. El-Hassan (2025) asserts that internal quality assurance (IQA) systems in higher education institutions (HEIs) are more vital, comparable to external evaluations, particularly in decentralised and competitive academic settings.

Given that the quality assurance has emerged as one of the most urgent and intricate policy domains. The swift expansion, widespread accessibility and worldwide interconnectivity have converted higher education systems into extensive, hybrid landscapes characterised by the coexistence of opportunity and risk. In the Global South,

particularly with the proliferation of PHEIs, ensuring quality was not merely a technological task, it is a strategic necessity. Although national quality certification bodies are essential, the primary challenge is cultivating a culture of quality across both public and private sectors. Regulation must transition from punitive compliance to developmental involvement and engagement, especially as new providers integrate into the system and hybrid and international learning formats become prevalent.

In conclusion, the PHE sector in South Africa functions within a multifaceted and dynamic context influenced by regulatory frameworks, economic pressures, and an increasing demand for accessible and flexible learning possibilities. Notwithstanding its swift expansion, the sector is still inadequately studied and sometimes misconstrued, resulting in a considerable deficiency in comprehending the implementation of strategy within these organisations. Hence, utilising the S-as-P framework offers a significant perspective for examining how managers and educators in South African PHEIs partake in quotidian strategising via their interactions, decisions, and adaptive strategies, rather than through formal strategic plans. Further, the microfoundational perspective elucidates how human cognition, societal dynamics, and localised behaviours collectively shape institutional strategy creation and adaptability. Lastly, Bourdieu's theory of practice enhances this perspective by illustrating how actors' habitus, field, and capital influence their strategic options within a historically stratified and policy-oriented higher education system. From a theoretical perspective, strategising in South African PHEIs may be perceived as a dynamic, experiential process that embodies managers' attempts to reconcile compliance, innovation, and sustainability in the face of variable market and regulatory environments. In a nutshell, collectively, these viewpoints provide a comprehensive picture of how strategy formulation in South African PHEIs is socially integrated, contextually limited, and perpetually negotiated through practice.

2.6 Management aspects in PHEI in South Africa

This section focused on the strengths and management attributes of PHEIs in South Africa.

Bird and Mugobo (2021a) posit that PHEIs strengths, amongst others, are

- a) self-funding;
- b) small classes for intimate relationship building that allow for student engagement;
- c) innovative and supportive teaching methods;
- d) a comprehensive and holistic developmental student support system;
- e) as well as the provision of learning opportunities that meet the students' diverse needs;
- f) a scholarship programme; and
- g) Digital learning designs—incorporating technology in teaching and learning—

Nukunah et al., (2019) echo the same principles and further highlight a higher completion rate of qualifications compared to the public sector. They also diversify into a wide range of targeted (niche) programme offerings, adopt business-like operational structures that promote effectiveness and efficiency, and demonstrate agility in making and implementing strategic decisions, as some of the strengths of PHEIs. The business-like nature and client focus appear to be their business strategy. The Quality Assurance Framework for HEI in South Africa guarantees accountability and improvements and improvements (Myburgh and Calitz 2020).

Nonetheless, as elaborated in Section 2.5.4, the quality assurance issue persists, both domestically and internationally. Although external causes are present, internal systems exhibit considerable variability. Myburgh et al., (2020) observed that although quality management systems exist in the majority of PHEIs, they vary in scope, applicability and maturity. Their study, conducted through semi-structured interviews with prominent institutional leaders, indicated that quality frameworks are frequently adaptive, perpetually evolving to satisfy external accrediting standards and internal developmental objectives.

Notwithstanding these advantages, a notable deficiency remains. South Africa still lacks a centralised management information system for PHE. Nukunah et al. (2019) assert that this deficiency obstructs the objective assessment of quality, student outcomes and

sectoral contributions. As a result, public views of PHE quality are frequently influenced by anecdotal information rather than empirical facts, fostering bias and scepticism.

As such, South African PHEIs have unique structural and pedagogical benefits that make them essential contributors within a limited HE system. Their agility, operational efficiency, and student-centred approaches facilitate the expansion of access and retention, especially among marginalised populations. Nonetheless, they persistently encounter obstacles associated with public perception, regulatory oversight, and sectoral fragmentation. From the perspective of S-as-P, these interactions illustrated that strategy in South African PHEIs not solely formulated at the upper echelons but is actualised via the quotidian practices, sensemaking, and adaptive behaviours of managers and educators. Further, the microfoundational perspective elucidates how individual cognition, social connections, and contextual engagement influence emergent strategies, mirroring the lived experiences of institutional actors confronting uncertainty and constraints. Additionally, utilising Bourdieu's theory of practice, these strategic behaviours are located within a specific social field where the actors' habitus, capital, and the institutional framework of higher education interact to both facilitate and constrain their agency. Essentially, situated within a domestic perspective, strategising in PHEIs manifests as a process of pragmatic involvement – anchored in experience, attuned to context, and perpetually contested through routine practice. Thus, collectively, these theoretical frameworks characterise South African PHEIs as dynamic, adaptable institutions whose strategies arise from experiential reality rather than structured design.

The following section explored strategic management studies in South Africa.

2.7 Strategic Management studies in HE

A comprehensive evaluation of current research in the disciplines of strategic management, S-as-P, micro-practices, and HE was conducted in Chapters 2, 3 and 4. Research has been conducted in the HE context in relation to strategy. This section discusses current research in the aforementioned disciplines within higher education and emergent strategic planning. As mentioned earlier, various studies from around the world investigate HE strategy, and little has been studied in the emergent strategising context from an S-as-P perspective.

2.7.1 Emergent strategy development

Many strategic management studies have researched the university setting; this section considers studies conducted in the emergent strategising context. Table 2.2 indicates key studies on emergent strategy development in HE.

Table 2.2: Key studies on emergent strategy development in HE

Author(s)	Study Focus / Title	Context / Area	Key Contribution to Emergent Strategy
Sgobbi, 2025)	Emergent or planned?	Employability strategy in HEIs	Investigates how institutions develop employability strategies through adaptive rather than planned approaches.
Sgobbi, 2025)	In search for employability strategy	Institutional responsiveness	Shows improvisational strategy-making in response to labour market volatility and competition.
(Fumasoli and Hladchenko, 2024)	Strategic management in higher education	Strategy hybridity	Explores hybrid strategy frameworks and the interplay of planned/emergent models in HE leadership.
Hashim and Tlemsani (2022)	Higher education strategy in digital transformation	Digital transformation	Demonstrates that HE strategy under tech disruption must be emergent, flexible, and iterative.
Hashim and Tlemsani (2022)	Emergent strategy, postmodernism and digital sustainability in HE	Global HE strategic theory	Develops a theoretical model linking emergent strategy to sustainability via digital transformation and postmodernism. Highlights strategy as iterative and knowledge-based.
Foss, McCaffrey and Dorobat, 2022)	Critique of design school via Mintzberg and Hayek	Strategic theory in HE and complex systems	Theorises how experiential, tacit knowledge and adaptable rules support emergent strategy in dynamic educational contexts.
(Bekele and Ofoyuru, 2021)	University–society engagements in Africa	African university engagement	Emphasises strategic adaptability in African HEIs responding to local social development needs.
Sammut-Bonnici, Vella and Baldacchino, (2020)	Strategic Plan 2020–2025	Institutional planning	Blends long-term objectives with emergent responsiveness to shifting external demands.
(Boström, Collén and Damber, 2021)	COVID-19 and the shift to emergent distance learning	Pedagogical crisis response	Documents real-time emergent teaching strategies developed during pandemic disruption, highlighting institutional learning in action.

Source: Authors own

2.7.2 A S-as-P perspective

The preceding sections described the PHE landscape in South Africa, shaped by global and local HE trends. This industry is characterised by strict regulation, perceptions of inferior quality, no government subsidy, aggressive competition, but promising potential. The South African PHE provides a rich context for studying the strategising phenomenon, with its unique challenges and potential. The S-as-P framework provides a valuable perspective for analysing the micro-level dynamics of strategy formulation. It offers a compelling lens for unpacking the micro-level dynamics of strategising. The framework enables researchers to move beyond formal strategy documents to understand how strategy is shaped in meetings, discussions and practices, often by middle managers and frontline educators, rather than solely by executive leaders. Table 2.3 summarises key studies with a key contribution to S-as-P in HE

Table 2.3: Key Contributions to S-as-P in HE

Author(s)	Context / Focus Area	Key Contributions to S-as-P in HE
Samson, Williamson and Davis, 2022	South African universities; academic middle managers	Highlights micro-practices (e.g., storytelling, emotional intelligence) used in strategising; shows role of informal sensemaking in institutional strategy.
Ngwenya, Davis and Ncube, 2022	South African business school; theory–practice link	Demonstrates how graduates adapt strategic theory through praxis; emphasises the workplace as a site for testing academic knowledge.
Bezuidenhout, (2020)	PHE institutions in South Africa	Shows strategising as a product of emotional, social, and interactional dynamics among actors; owners play a dominant role.
Whittington (2019)	Global S-as-P evolution	Introduces “open strategy” and performative turn in strategy; underscoring inclusion, transparency, and power dynamics.
Golsorkhi, Rouleau, Seidl and Vaara (2015)	Theoretical consolidation of S-as-P	Advances materiality and relationality in strategy-making; suggests strategy emerges through tools, discourse, and power relationships.

Source: Author’s own

This section revealed numerous studies that addressed strategy from the traditional rational or economic perspective for HEIs. As described in Chapter 1, the current study

aimed to provide an understanding of how people interact (micro-practices) when strategising and how these micro-practices influence emergent strategising. Few studies in higher education focus on the social and micro-dimensions of strategy. As described in Chapter 1, the S-as-P perspective provides a framework for investigating how individuals act and interact and how this interaction, as a social mechanism, influences strategic organisational outcomes. However, S-as-P research in higher education was scarce, and published works on micro-practices were also limited within this limited perspective. Therefore, it was clear that S-as-P empirical study was required to properly investigate micro-practices and their influence on emergent strategising within the context of PHE.

2.8 Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter was to contextualise the study. The empirical phase's examination of the external and internal environment of the organisations was positioned within the broader HE perspective. The worldwide HE environment was investigated, with particular emphasis on ensuring quality in the transformation of HE. Globalisation and the nature of future HE were explored. Following that, the South African HE landscape and its considerable impact on the growth of South African private provision were investigated. An examination of the PHE landscape showed the difficulties and potential and rapid growth confronting the PHE. A discussion of the role of private providers in tackling South Africa's HE concerns was preceded by a noticeable presence of PHE providers. The quality management of programmes in PHEIs followed this. The context-investigation concluded with a discussion of the available literature on strategic management in the context of HE. Although numerous studies investigated emergent strategising in HE in general, there are relatively few studies on the actual practice of strategising in HE from a micro-practices standpoint: It was limited to a few accounts in a few S-as-P studies in higher education. As a result, there was a justification for the demand for socially informed research in higher education.

Chapter 3: Strategising

“To better understand and appreciate the world of practitioners, Strategy-as-Practice researchers must attune themselves to the more subtle nuances of strategizing: of the possibility of phronesis as a distributed practical wisdom and tacit understanding which underpins strategic actions; and of the importance of metis in strategic manoeuvrings that appear to be more recognized and accepted by astute business practitioners themselves” (Chia and Rasche 2018a).

3.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter was to expand on the orientation presented in Chapter 1 and the contextualisation in Chapter 2. It elaborated on the concept of strategising by operationalising it and then looked at the emergent approach to strategising. It explicitly examined deliberate and emergent strategies to elucidate the understanding of strategy practice development. It further outlined the epistemological alternatives for researching S-as-P research, and the theoretical foundation backing the study were discussed further, and the study contribution was elucidated.

The content of this chapter was based on the interpretation that emergent strategising responds to what is happening within and without and, are unplanned and purposive (Mintzberg and Waters 1985). Emergent strategising is based on the continuous actions and decisions of organisational actors, shaped by organisational and other practices that influence both the process and outcomes of strategy (Vaara et al., 2012). Throughout this thesis, the term strategising was used to encompass the internal practices that shaped a firm's strategy (McGee 2015).

Figure 3.1 provides an overview of the chapter.

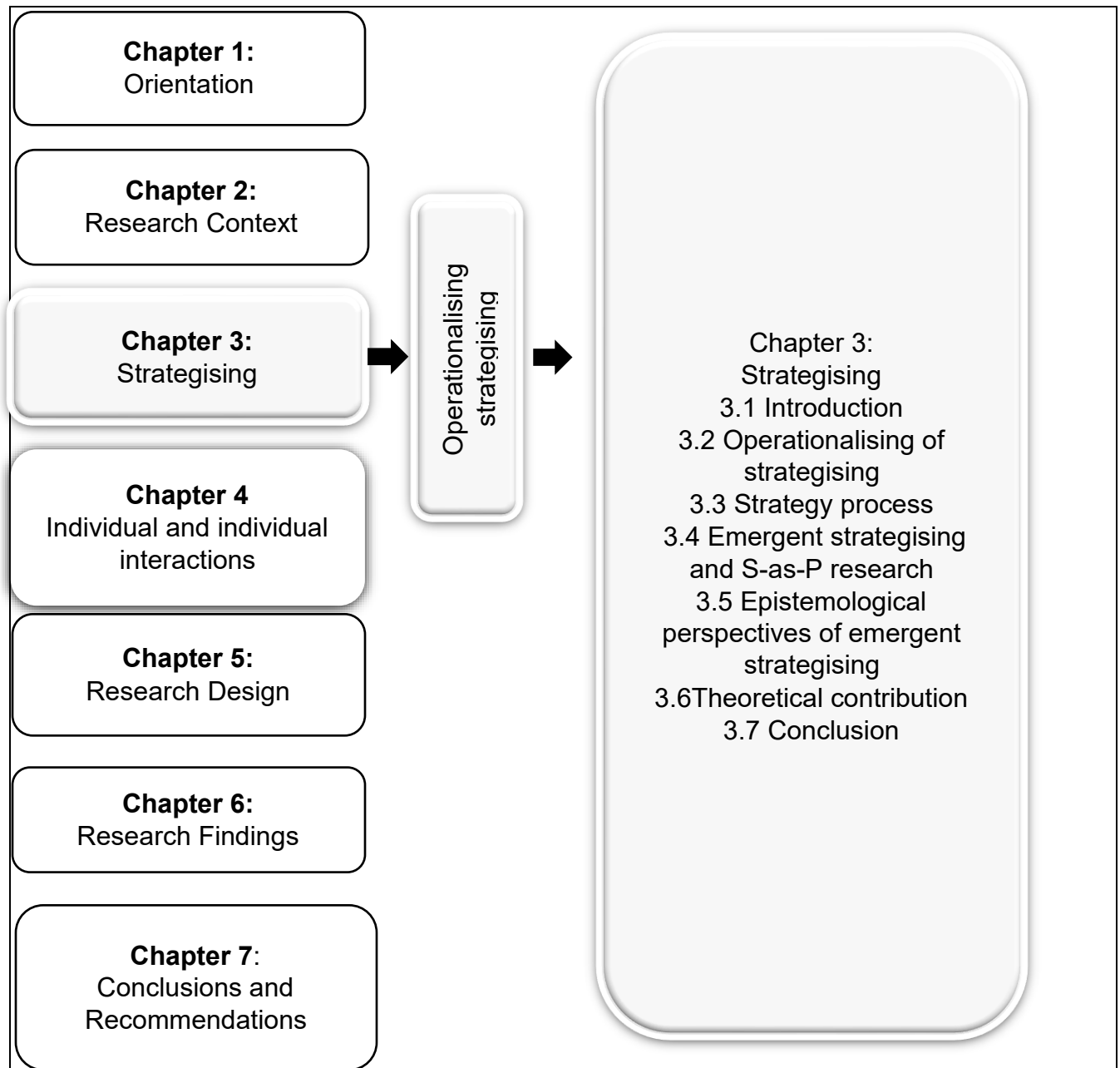


Figure 3.1: The structure of Chapter 3 (own compilation)

As shown in Figure 3.1, the chapter started with an introduction, then proceeds to operationalise strategy and discusses the strategy process by examining the categories of strategising. It further contextualises emergent strategising within S-as-P research and

discusses the epistemological perspectives of emergent strategising and the theoretical contribution of the study.

Strategising is a clear-cut phenomenon that has influenced various organisations and industries owing to its long-term effects on the organisation's operations. Traditionally, the critical insight in strategising has been to set direction, thus “how strategies should be formulated rather than with how they necessarily do form” (Mintzberg et al., 1999a). However, research has since evolved to include informal, emergent and distributed dimensions of strategy. Whittington et al., (2003) emphasise that strategising is integrated into many disciplines across different private and public sectors, leading to various organisational outcomes consistent with the organisation's missions and goals. Pretorius and Stander (2012) add that the changing business environments impact how companies run their operations, pointing to how strategies should accommodate other organisational and external contextual factors that may impede their rationality.

Mintzberg et al., (1999) demonstrate that strategising happens on a continuum, with deliberate and emergent strategising at the two ends of the continuum. They further emphasised that having an entirely deliberate or emergent strategy is impossible. This assertion is now bolstered by Jarzabkowski, Seidl and Balogun, (2022), who contend that S-as-P research has progressed to acknowledge the dynamic, pluralistic and performative characteristics of strategising, advocating for deeper engagement with its everyday manifestations.

The argument presented in this chapter pertained to emergent strategising, which calls for more relevant research on “the informal, unscripted activities through which strategies often emerge” (Vaara et al., 2012). Adaptation is key to survival in a fast-paced environment. Pretorius and Maritz (2011) maintain that strategy should be embedded in practice to stay relevant and meaningful. This consequently indicated a study of daily practices that delves into micro-level activities through which strategies often emerge instead of the organisational macro-outcomes.

This shift is paramount to the “practice turn” in strategy research, often termed S-as-P. It focuses on the social and situated nature of strategy-making, turning attention to what people do when they do strategy (Golsorkhi et al., 2012). As Kohtamäki, Whittington, Vaara and Robetino., (2022) note, that S-as-P research currently embodies a variety of methodological and theoretical perspectives, and this diversity should be utilised to comprehend the emergence of strategy from practice. This study aligned with a pluralistic perspective by adopting a dwelling worldview, which emphasises the lived, embodied experiences of strategists within their organisational context (Chia and Rasche, 2018a; de Metz, Jansen van Rensburg and Davis, 2023).

S-as-P has captured much attention as a social contextualisation of social doings (Golsorkhi et al., 2012). in other terms, situatedness or 'contextuality' of strategic action. It dwells on the aspect of the action by practitioners and their interactions in a particular context; therefore, bringing the theory into action by attempting to bridge the gap between the relationship between macro and micro-level activities (Golsorkhi, Rouleau, Seidl and Vaara. Eero 2015; Chia et al., 2007). Golsorkhi et al., (2012) have also challenged S-as-P researchers to attune to the more “subtle nuances” of strategising and it is these “subtle nuances” that this research attempts to explore.

Another argument this study supported was that senior managers cannot single-handedly create value. This view is supported by Nonaka et al. (2007), who state that distributed wisdom is required for effective strategic management. They further elucidate that the ability to evaluate one's environment and resources subjectively, as well as to interact with subjectivity and objectivity, are all factors that go into developing a strategy (strategising). This view is further supported by Chia et al. (2018a), who state that individuals are supposed to be deeply involved in and inexorably linked to the world around them and its complicated interconnectedness. The top echelons of the organisation are not well situated for an objective analysis of all the organisational and external contextual activities that enable or inhibit the emergence of strategy. As such, this then implies that even the implementors contribute to the macro aggregate outcomes.

Seidl, Ma and Splitter (2024) contend that the strategic nature of an action is determined not by its formality or hierarchy, but by its consequentiality. This study utilised this perspective to analyse how ostensibly trivial managerial practices influence emergent strategising.

The foregoing indicates a study of everyday practice, which becomes a pattern of action that is understood as a daily practice, which involves subtle nuances of strategising. Therefore, studying individuals and their interactions can impact emergent strategising. A view mentioned by Foss (2010) that explanatory mechanisms lying at the "micro-level" should receive much attention to increase the progress of strategising. In support, the S-as-P analysis contends that the micro-practices of strategising, rather than the macro analyses, are the essence of strategy (Whittington, 2004; Nonaka and Toyama, 2007)

Although the current S-as-P literature provided valuable theoretical insights into strategising, numerous frameworks remain detached from the actual experiences of practitioners in contexts such as PHEIs. The notable aspect of this study was the disparity between official strategic plans and the micro-level measures that effectively developed strategies within the institution. The research recognised that the under-explored aspect is how these local, relational and unplanned actions frequently undocumented gain significance over time especially in the South African context. This study aimed to address that gap by focusing on the daily activities of managers: their decisions, adaptations, resistance and real-time sensemaking. The researcher's perspective was influenced by the conviction that these nuanced activities are not ancillary but fundamental to comprehending strategy in practice. Further, by interacting with participants and immersing in their daily practices, the researcher recognised strategy not as a fixed artefact, but as a dynamic construct continuously created and recreated through the intricate, emergent interaction of agency, structure and context.

In conclusion, the study focused on the informal and often unscripted practices of individual managers at all levels of the organisation. It explored how these practices facilitated the emergence of a strategy. Therefore, indicating the micro-practices such as

daily routines, interactions, knowledge and use of power, influenced emergent strategising. These practices represented the “subtle nuances” of strategising that Golsorkhi et al., (2012) urged academic scholars to investigate, and this research sought to understand in-depth.

3.2 Operationalising of strategising

Building on the conceptual foundation laid in the previous section, the notion of traditional strategy has almost always been conceived in terms of what an organisation's leaders plan to do in future. Accordingly, strategising has tended to be treated as an analytic process for establishing long-term goals and action plans for an organisation; that is, as one of formulation followed by implementation (Mintzberg et, al., 1985a). The authors argue that the notion offered a shallow perspective on strategising. Hence, to have a wider view, they defined strategy as a “pattern in a stream of decisions,” thereby operationalising it not merely as a product but as a practice emergent in organisational activity.

The preceding definition operationalised the strategy concept to provide a broadened view of how strategies are formed in organisations. Behaviour streams could be identified as patterns or consistencies, and strategies could be identified as patterns or consistencies in such streams. The origins of these strategies could then be investigated, emphasising the relationship between leadership plans and intentions and what the organisations did. Exploration was encouraged by using the label strategy for both phenomena one called intended, the other realised. Based on this logic and practical necessity, researchers have been drawn to studying strategies as patterns in streams of actions rather than decisions because the latter also represent intentions (Golsorkhi, Rouleau, Seidl and Vaara 2015; Mintzberg and Waters 1985a). This makes strategising an iterative process between deliberate and emergent strategies.

In elaborating their broad perspective, the authors elaborated by giving labels; one labelled *intended*, the other *realised*. Hence, the development of pure deliberate and pure emergent strategies in an organisational context and the conditions under which each

occurs. Similarly, Mirabeau, Maguire and Hardy (2018a) indicate that the focal phenomenon shared by Strategy Process (SP) and S-as-P research is strategy that manifests itself in a variety of ways: intended, realised, deliberate, emergent, unrealised, and ephemeral strategy. The authors, just like Mintzberg, echo that strategy-making practices are likely to give rise to the two transient manifestations, namely, unrealised and ephemeral strategy, as well as the consequences for subsequent strategy-making. They further conclude by demonstrating the utility of their methodology for bridging SP and S-as-P research by theorising practices that are more likely to give rise to unrealised and ephemeral strategy, identifying their likely consequences, and presenting a research agenda for studying these transient manifestations. This makes strategising an iterative process between deliberate and emergent strategies.

This iterative nature resonates with the dwelling worldview articulated by de Metz, Jansen van Rensburg and Davis, (2023), where strategy is enacted through everyday coping, relational engagement and situated practices rather than through formalised planning. Therefore, in organisational contexts like PHEIs, managers often respond to unfolding events using informal, adaptive strategies rather than executing predetermined plans. Furthermore, by definition, an 'organisation' is a term used to describe a group of people who have *deliberately* come together to accomplish a shared goal (Mintzberg and Waters 1985a). These authors identified various typologies of strategies on a continuum; each strategy has varying degrees of deliberateness or emergentness. Hence, for a strategy to be entirely deliberate, that is, for the realised strategy (pattern in behaviours) to form exactly as intended, it must be completely purposeful and for a strategy to be entirely emergent, there must be an absence of intention, meaning there must be order-consistency in activity over time (Mintzberg et al., 1985a). In short, the organisation must have control over both internal and external environments in which it operates.

The idea that emergent strategy is not the absence of structure but a response to contextual dynamics resonates with Jarzabkowski, Kavas and Krull's (2021) study, who argue that what makes a practice strategic is not its formal position but its

consequentiality its capacity to shape organisational direction. This is particularly salient in HEIs, where decentralised action can result in institution-wide strategic shifts.

As Mintzberg et al., (1985) noted, a lack of consistency indicates a lack of strategy or, at the very least, unfulfilled strategy intentions. Therefore, it is unimaginable that there can be action without intent, which then renders pure emergent strategies impossible. It is rather difficult to find a perfectly deliberate strategy in organisations, which then leads to non-deliberate strategies that respond to what is happening within and without and are unplanned and purposive Mintzberg et al., (1985). Emergent and non-deliberate strategies have a similar meaning in this study.

Perfectly deliberate strategies are those that are executed precisely as intended. For this to occur, three prerequisites must be met. Before acting, there must have been a clear understanding of the organisation's aims, which were communicated with a level of specificity that leaves no room for dispute. Second, because organisation implies collective action, for there to be no doubt as to whether or not the intents were organisational, they must have been shared by the vast majority of the players, either as their own or as a result of their acceptance by the leaders. Thirdly, these collective intentions must have been carried out precisely as intended, meaning that no external influence should have impeded their execution (Mintzberg et al., 1985).

Mintzberg et al., (1985) further posit that, on the other hand, for pure emergent strategies to emerge, “there must be order-consistency in action over time- in the absence of intention about it”. A lack of consistency indicates a lack of strategy or, at the very least, unfulfilled strategy intentions. Therefore, it is unimaginable that there can be action in the absence of intention, which then renders pure emergent strategies impossible.

On the other end of the continuum is an entirely emergent strategy. Hence, for a strategy to be entirely emergent, there must be order consistency in activity through time, order-consistency- in the absence of deliberate design. Consequently, strategy may be unexpectedly rationalised to imply something entirely different from what was intended

(Maritz, 2008). Moreover, Mintzberg et al., (1985) argue that emergent strategy enables management that cannot be close enough to a situation or who does not know enough about the diverse activities of its organisation to relinquish control to those who have the most up-to-date and comprehensive information to formulate realistic strategies. The author concludes that emergent strategies emphasise communal activity and convergent behaviour, whereas deliberate strategies emphasise central direction and hierarchy. Real-world strategising occurs along a continuum between perfectly deliberate and perfectly emergent.

Mirabeau et al., (2018) support this continuum and add further nuance by introducing unrealised and ephemeral strategies as transient phenomena that are integral to emergent strategising. Their work demonstrates how strategy-making practices often unobserved in formal plans can yield significant consequences. Furthermore, Chia et al., (2018), in support of non-deliberate strategies, concede that a strategy can emanate from the daily activities to cope with different situations that an organisation faces and can emerge from any given situation as the need arises to cope with a prevailing circumstance. The authors termed it a dwelling worldview, where actors are a relationally constructed, non-deliberate nexus of social activity. Actions are aimed at removing an urgent stumbling block: deliberate practical coping and a *modus operandi* — an ingrained inclination is considered to ensure consistency of action.

In this perspective, actions are not premeditated but arise in response to immediate circumstances. Sinfield, Goldspink and Wilson (2023), reinforce this notion by illustrating how strategising can manifest phenomenologically, through lived experiences and sensemaking during periods of uncertainty, termed “waiting in the wings.”

This perspective also endorsed the notion that tactics often emerge from informal, decentralised activity. This research acknowledged that even ordinary daily actions can possess strategic importance, particularly when they impact broader institutional outcomes. Rouleau and Cloutier (2022) emphasise that the examination of S-as-P must

be firmly rooted in tangible social behaviours, rather than in abstract reasoning or overarching narratives.

In this study, emergent and non-deliberate strategies were treated as conceptually similar. What qualified them as "strategic" was not their origin in a formal plan but their impact their ability to influence emergent strategising. As such, this study focused on how micro-foundational practices, such as individual routines, social interaction, power and cognition, enabled strategy to emerge from within. Additionally, this research utilised literature on emergent and non-deliberate strategising to theoretically contextualise possibilities; however, it inadequately elucidated the actual emergence of strategy from managerial actions within a resource-constrained, dynamically evolving institutional setting such as a PHEI. The literature, especially in conventional strategy models, lacks clarity on how informal, unscripted behaviours, such as relationship management, adaptive decision-making and micro-political navigation, may aggregate into a significant strategy over time. This study elucidated the divide by examining the lived experiences and micro-foundational practices of managers, encompassing not only their narratives but also their quotidian acts, hesitations and workarounds. Therefore, it enabled the researcher to investigate how strategy could emerge from practical adaptation instead of formal planning, in a manner that was both contextually relevant and theoretically significant. Through the observation and interpretation of these nuanced interactions, it became clear that strategising is an intrinsically social, corporeal and improvisational process, one that resisted being fitted into established typologies and instead manifests in their presence.

3.3 Strategy process

As alluded to earlier, strategies fall on a continuum from pure deliberate to pure emergent and it is difficult to achieve either of the two. Therefore, the interplay between the two is of utmost importance. To further appreciate this interplay, it is paramount to consider the different social movements of strategising, their role and their impact on strategising.

The notion of the interplay can be interpreted in various views. One view state that strategy is the “long-term direction of an organisation” (Johnson, Whittington, Scholes, Angwin and Regner, 2014) and the Mintzbergian way of defining strategy “as a pattern in streams of action.” However, the argument followed by this study draws from the work on Mintzberg et al., (1985), which postulates that strategising draws on unintended actions through practice that result from the achievement of the organisation's long-term goals.

These concepts and ideas have evolved alongside the emergence of various social movements. Therefore, to clearly understand strategising, it is of paramount importance to consider the various schools of thought (social movements) on strategy that have dramatically impacted how strategising is viewed in the contemporary worldview. The schools of thought reflected to a more significant extent the distinction of ‘deliberate strategies—realised as intended—from emergent strategies-patterns or consistencies realised despite, or in the absence of intentions. The interplay between deliberate and emergent strategies was the focus.

Hence, the following subsection explores the various categories of strategising.

3.3.1 Categories of strategising

To fully appreciate emergent strategising, it was vital to understand the development of the different schools of thought. Strategy process research acknowledges how strategies are formulated and developed as a sequence of individual and collective events, actions and activities unfolding over time. Model et al., (1998) categorised strategy formation into ten schools of thought. They are further sub-classified into three groups by Monib, Qanet, Nabeel and Abdi (2021), therefore, in terms of how strategies are formulated rather than how they are formed. The role of managers in each group and the ‘patterns or consistencies realised despite the absence of actions’ as indicated by Mintzberg et al. (1999) and Mintzberg et al., (1985) is elaborated on.

3.3.1.1 The prescriptive approach

The prescriptive approaches are rational and intentional. The prescriptive school is “more concerned with how strategies should be formulated than with how they necessarily do form” (Mintzberg et al., 1999a). The strategy is formulated in advance, and it is a result of an analytical and sequential process (Monib et al. 2021a; Lynch 2015; Shah, Jamil, Shah and Kazmi 2015). Strength Weakness Opportunities and Threats (SWOT), strategic position evaluation matrix (SPACE), and internal and external matrix (IEM) are methods that are widely used in the development of specific guidelines that need to be followed and adhered to. Monib et al. 2021a) add portfolio analysis and industry analysis by Tanveer et al. (2015).

The design school is the first in the school of prescription. In the 1960s, it offered the fundamental foundation on which the planning and positioning school was built. It focuses on strategy development as an informal design process, essentially a notion (Mintzberg 1990). The design school captures the essence of strategy formation as a process of “conception”. The responsibility of strategy making solely lies with the Chief Executive Officer, who sought a model to match the internal capabilities and the external opportunities (Mintzberg et al. 1999).

The design school may be traced back to two prominent publications produced at the University of California (Berkeley) and M.I.T. in 1957 and 1962, respectively: Philip Selznick's *Leadership in Administration* and Alfred D. Chandler's *Strategy and Structure* (Cockburn, Henderson and Stern 2000; Mintzberg et al. 1999a). For two decades (1960-1970), they emphasised that the study of the strategy was the study of what general managers or leaders should do. The assumption was that doing so would make a difference in choices and perform better than the competition (Cockburn et al. 2000). Before the 1960s, strategy formulation was intuition-based by the owners of businesses and could mean that it was a complex phenomenon. Accordingly, Mintzberg (2017b) emphasises that the CEO is the primary strategist who devises and implements the strategy and when the strategy formulation process is kept simple and formal, strategies

succeed. Lately, researchers have viewed this school of strategising as a visionary and innovative process (Monib et al. 2021).

The planning school is the second prescriptive school formed simultaneously in the 1960s. It culminated in a flourishing of publications and works in the 1970s of both academic journals and business press of formal strategic planning, officialised the design school and made it a systematic planning process and the CEO remained the architecture of strategy formation (Model et al., 1998; Mintzberg, 2017a). A cadre of highly educated planners, working as part of a specialised strategic planning department with direct access to the CEO, was to steer strategy. As such, this activity culminated with introducing "strategic management" as an approved field for courses and conferences (Mintzberg, Ahlstrand and Lampel, 1999b).

However, there was very little research to see how planning functioned in practice (Mintzberg, et.al., 1999b). Furthermore, Mintzberg (2017) indicates that strategy formulation is a formal procedure that is documented and treated as a distinctive process and relates the internal environment to the external environment's opportunities and risks in such a way that the importance of each of these aspects in attaining the goals is appropriately defined (Monib et al., 2021b)

The third prescriptive school, namely, the positioning school, in the 1980s, had a somewhat different role than the actual content of techniques in that school. It is also called the placement school because it concentrates on selecting strategic locations in the economic market (Mintzberg et al. 1999). Furthermore, the authors assert that it opened up the field's prescriptive side to further inquiry, and this is when the field of strategic management was born. Michael Porter published the book titled, *Competitive Strategy*, which was a catalyst for bringing together a lot of the dissatisfaction with design and planning schools. Furthermore, this period saw the introduction of strategic tools to analyse the market and improve the position of the organisation's products at the top of the mind (Monib et al. 2021a; Mintzberg 2017).

3.3.1.1.1 The criticism of the prescriptive approach

The essence of the prescriptive strategy approach is that changes in the environment are predictable and can be foreseen, and the strategy can be altered accordingly (Mintzberg 2017; Tanveer et al. 2015) and control the strategy formation process (Monib et al. 2021). On the contrary, many academics have claimed that the environment is unstable and unpredictable. It might not be applicable and unsustainable that strategy formation follows a processual process and uses rational methods or techniques that are hard to form a strategy (Shah et al. 2015).

The prescriptive approach offers valuable tools for developing a structured strategy. However, its emphasis on analytical rigour and sequential planning made it less suitable for understanding how strategy emerged in the context of this study. In a PHEI, strategy did not unfold through formalised models but through a series of reactive, adaptive decisions shaped by localised constraints, informal relationships, and managerial discretion.

What remained unknown in the prescriptive literature was how strategy took shape between planning cycles in corridors, meetings and conversations where real decisions were made. The researcher's engagement with participants revealed that strategising was far less about compliance with analytical models and much more about navigating ambiguity in real time. While the prescriptive tools may have informed initial planning frameworks, they failed to capture the nuanced, situated practices through which strategy evolved in practice. This gap validated the turn to S-as-P and a dwelling worldview as more appropriate conceptual anchors for the research.

3.3.1.2 Descriptive approach: the footing for emergent strategies

The prescriptive approaches involve trial and error; the approach considers specific characteristics of the strategy-building process and have less to do with ideal strategic behaviour than articulating how strategies develop. Lynch (2015) argues that it is not necessary to distinguish between the strategy development and execution phases

because they are inextricably intertwined, with one responding to the results obtained. They are more concerned with how strategy necessarily forms (Mintzberg et al. 1999). However, Monib et al., (2021b) reject this method of analysis, citing the presence of nonlinearity and that emphasis is placed on the unpredictability of the environment (Mintzberg 2017; Lynch 2015; Tanveer et al. 2015). For these reasons, Monib et al. (2021) have termed it the determinative schools.

The prescriptive schools have endeavoured to open the strategic formulation process to other forces and players beyond the individual (Mintzberg et al. 1999). The environment is too complex for the prescriptive schools to build tactics as specific plans or visions all at once. Therefore, when an organisation adjusts or "learns," tactics should emerge in modest steps (Monib et al. 2021; Mintzberg 2017; Tanveer et al. 2015). Further, Mintzberg (2017) believes that strategy is a spontaneous phenomenon that stresses the impossibility of gradual procedures in strategy formation. Monib et al. (2021) stress that there is no strategic planning but formulation.

These schools bear the strategist. A strategist is defined as someone who can make decisions at any time based on the organisation's current circumstances for successful movement (Monib *et al.*, 2021b). In the context of this study, the evolving definition of the strategist, primarily as acknowledged in more recent literature aligned with my decision to treat all managerial actors in the PHEI as strategists (Jarzabkowski et al., 2022; Jarzabkowski et al., 2025). The prescriptive school, although historically hierarchical, has started to recognise that strategising is not limited to the executive level. According to Monib et al. (2021), strategists are individuals who make decisions based on real-time organisational conditions—an observation that closely aligns with the duties of the research participants. Participants operated at the low, middle and top levels of management. Nevertheless, they were perpetually obligated to make significant decisions without awaiting the formal strategising. This study reflected the broader S-as-P perspective, which posits that strategy is an activity performed by individuals, rather than merely a declaration made by senior executives.

Accordingly, some assumptions were adopted in strategy formulation:

- The emphasis of strategic management was on thinking and acting quickly (rather than having a lengthy strategy document).
- Strategic management was a trial-and-error decision-making process.
- Strategic thinking and action (as opposed to tactical and operational action or thinking) were concerned with the interaction and success of the entire set, rather than a subset of the set.
- Strategic management was a macro contingency and adaptive activity or act.
- In unexpected conditions, this way of thinking made long-term planning impossible.
- These schools of thought opposed the cautious approach to strategy formation, believing that step-by-step and preset processes cannot lead to sound strategic conclusions.
- The impossibility of creating and outlining a specific and obvious future strategy.

The entrepreneurial school lies between the prescriptive and descriptive schools, which considers strategy formation as a visionary process (Mintzberg et al., 1999b; Mintzberg, 2017b). The organisation's strategic direction is based on the leadership and cognitive capabilities of the organisation's chief executive (Mintzberg, Ahlstrand and Lampel, 1999b; Monib et al., 2021). However, strategising cannot solely depend on an individual's cognition and capabilities, as it needs to be replicated and performed systematically (Mintzberg, 2017).

The second prescriptive school is the cognitive school, which considers that strategy formation is a mental process that encompasses all the environmental factors (Monib, et al. 2021; Mintzberg, 2017; Mintzberg et al., 1999) and attempts to create meaning of different environmental cues. It encompasses the interaction of people to create their mental worlds (Mintzberg et al. 1999). However, it is impossible to keep track of every market change. It can be noted that the strategist is still of paramount importance in this school.

The cognitive school appropriately acknowledges the interpretive aspect of strategising, although it presumes that strategists can manage and react to complexity in a somewhat cohesive and centralised manner. This perspective seems constraining within the scope of this study.

The third prescriptive school is the learning school, which emphasises that strategy formation is an emergent process (Mintzberg et al. 1999) and strategies form by learning over time by relying heavily on their experiences and market events (Mintzberg, 2017). Furthermore, the complexity and unpredictability of the business environment, along with the dispersed distribution of information inside the firm, preclude deliberate control (Mintzberg 2017). Hence, the organisation takes cues from strategies in the market that were successful or failed and implements what succeeded with an assumption that it will work once more and discards those that do not work (Mintzberg 2017). However, given the instability of the environment, strategies that have worked in the past might not work in the future. Through learning at different levels of the organisation, organisations can adapt easily to the changing environment (Lynch 2015; Tanveer et al. 2015).

The fourth prescriptive school is the power school, which posits that strategy formation is a negotiation process. Power and politics are inherent in strategy formation (Mintzberg et al. 1999), those in power make decisions through negotiations, the formation of alliances and advancing one's interests (Mintzberg 2017). Additionally, power and politics shape strategy formation, and those that are powerful steer the company forward, ensuring less resistance to strategy implementation (Mintzberg 2017; Mintzberg et al. 1999). Moreover, power is inherent in any social setting. However, those in power might not listen continuously take feedback from others which might result in an impediment to continuous adaptation to the changing environment (Mintzberg, 2017).

The cultural school follows the descriptive school, emphasising that strategy formation is a collective and unique process (Tanveer et al., 2015). Furthermore, Mintzberg (2017) emphasises that human capital is crucial in organisations. Additionally, the author advocates for a positive culture, which is the glue that harnesses innovation and

entrepreneurial capabilities within the organisation. The author emphasises that strategy takes the shape of a perspective anchored in collective goals and expressed in the patterns by which the organisation's embedded resources or skills are preserved and utilised for competitive advantage. However, people resist culture, especially during change management.

Lastly, the environmental school views strategy formation as a reactive process and places emphasis on situations in the environment and changes that happen in it (Mintzberg 2017; Mintzberg et al. 1999). Situational analysis is the method that plays an essential role in this school. However, keeping abreast with the ever-changing environment and constantly changing strategies can be challenging (Mintzberg, 2017).

3.3.1.2.1 Criticism against the descriptive schools

After a thorough search of literature, no criticism encompasses all schools under the prescriptive approach but on each school. Therefore, a major weakness of the entrepreneurial school is that strategy is not individually dependent. The cognitive school is not practical as it becomes costly and impossible to keep track of everything that happens in the market.

Contextually, the descriptive approach offered a crucial footing for emergent strategising. Strategy emerged from the interaction between deliberate intent and unintended adaptation—a blend of planned and reactive behaviour. Therefore, it is acknowledged that environments are too dynamic and unpredictable for organisations to rely solely on pre-set strategies and validating the need for spontaneous adaptation. Descriptive literature was insufficient in addressing the interrelated nature of practices, specifically, how cognition, routines, social interaction, and power influenced the grassroots development of strategy.

This study addressed the gap by examining the micro-foundational practices of managers: how their daily routines, cognitive frameworks, social interactions, and influence negotiations determined what was ultimately recognised as strategy. The

descriptive school provided a framework for the phenomenon, although it was the S-as-P perspective, especially its emphasis on the execution of strategy, that enabled the comprehension of it. Consequently, this research expanded the descriptive framework by revealing the underlying connections of daily practices that transformed spontaneous behaviours into emergent strategising. This approach addressed the demand for a more profound understanding of the informal, unscripted behaviours that facilitate strategy development Vaara et al. (2012), while also raising new enquiries regarding whose acts are significant, how they are coordinated and how they accrue strategic importance over time.

3.3.1.3 The configuration school

This school considers strategy formation from two angles, configurative and transformative transformation as an unavoidable result of configuration by attempting to take advantage of all the nine schools (Mintzberg, 2017). This view is supported by Monib et al. (2021b), who assert that strategies must be rule-based, pre-planned, experimentally and adaptively articulated, borne out of necessity and combination. Furthermore, the strategy-making process can include the conceptual design or formal planning, methodical analysis or leadership visioning, cooperative learning or competitive politicking, an emphasis on individual cognition, communal socialisation, or a simple response to environmental influences (Mintzberg 2017; Mintzberg et al. 1999).

The foregoing section divulges how strategy formulation has shifted from prescriptive to descriptive to the configuration of schools of thought. Managers play distinctively different roles in each of the schools. Therefore, this study utilised all the schools of thought by taking advantage of what each emphasises in strategising. Essentially, paying more attention to strategic thinking and actions, emphasising individual cognition, communal socialisation, or a simple response to environmental influences configuration school.

The foregoing indicates activities and actions of different individuals at different levels of the organisation, which are the foundation of the everyday practices that result in

emergent strategising, especially in the descriptive and configuration schools of thought. Essentially, what actors do is an essential aspect of S-as-P (Golsorkhi, Rouleau, Seidl and Vaara, 2012). These actions and social interactions enable strategy-making (Foss and Pedersen 2014; Westgren 2014; Felin and Foss 2005), which entails the different micro-foundational practices actors engage in during daily activities.

Further constructing the activities and actions, Vaara et al. (2012) state that a gap exists in emergent strategising. They further state that S-as-P researchers have focused on formal planning and strategising activities and have overlooked emergent strategising, which entails the iteration between deliberate and emergent strategy formulation. Mintzberg et al. (1985) echo that streams of behaviour may be isolated, and tactics could be detected as patterns or consistency in those streams. This view is illuminated by Regnér (2003), who contends that micro-level processes and activities have received less attention, especially when it comes to strategy generation and development. Vaara et al. (2012) state that “this neglect is surprising: the practice perspective’s ability to pay close attention to what is happening in organisations gives SAP researchers a special sensitivity to the informal, unscripted activities through which strategies often emerge”.

Tsoukas (2010) asserts that “S-as-P calls for nothing less than a re-orientation of the field of strategy research,” therefore, by rethinking strategy as something that organisations *do* rather than something they have. Recently, Chia et al. (2018a) called for S-as-P researchers to “attune themselves to the more *subtle nuances* of strategising”.

This approach offered an intriguing contrast to the more fluid, practice-based views of strategising. At a surface level, organisations can be viewed as being configured or at a configuration stage, therefore, structurally stable, bureaucratic and somewhat resistant to change. However, beneath the surface, strategic activities could be taking place in more subtle, emergent ways through daily social interactions, cognitive engagements and micro decisions that did not align with formal transformational cycles.

The configuration literature has overlooked the subtle nuances, agent-level specifics on how these transformations are facilitated, opposed or enabled. Although the model elucidated the circumstances under which change may transpire and its classification, it failed to demonstrate the role of practitioners in the configuration or reconfiguration of the institution. This research addressed this constraint by investigating how quotidian managerial behaviours, rather than solely structural realignments, influenced emergent strategising.

Ultimately, although the configuration school effectively contextualised the institutional framework of this study, a sector susceptible to abrupt changes from policy or financing disruptions, it fell short in elucidating how strategy was developed from grassroots levels. The micro-foundational perspective enabled the demonstration that strategy was perpetually negotiated, even during seemingly static configurational periods.

The purpose of the following sub-section was to emphasise the emergent strategy approach to strategy, describe the emergence of S-as-P and research on emergent strategy.

3.3.2 Emergent approach to strategising

In the previous sections, reference was made to prescriptive, descriptive and configuration schools with a focus on differing perspectives to strategising. The different perspectives or social movements led to an emergent approach. In relation to these schools, it was fundamental to emphasise the emergent approach as it is the central concept or approach guiding this study.

It is widely acknowledged that strategies can emerge from planned and unplanned action (Monib et al. 2021; James 2018; Mintzberg 2017a; Shah et al. 2015; Andersen and Nielsen 2009; Model et al. 1998; Mintzberg and Waters 1985). Planned strategies are rational, whereas unplanned actions-prescriptive are irrational- emergent (Mintzberg and Waters, 1985a; Lynch, 2006a). Lynch (2015) further differentiated several different schools, among them the prescriptive and the emergent approaches. To examine

emergent strategising closely, the distinctions between rational planning and emergent schools must be highlighted, particularly regarding social practices.

The rational planning school (also termed deliberate, prescriptive and intended) (Shah et al. 2015) specifies an aim beforehand, describes "where we are now," and employs a prescriptive approach in which "the three fundamental areas strategic analysis, strategic formulation, and strategy implementation are linked sequentially" (Lynch 2006, 2015). Deliberateness is the quality of acting deliberately or intentionally. When people act deliberately or intentionally, they 'think' before they 'do.' (Shah et al. 2015), thereby employ rationality in every action and activity in which they are engaged. Scholes (2011) critiqued this line of strategising by stating that this viewpoint assumes that organisations' complexity can be understood analytically, that a rational group of top managers will reach logical conclusions, and that people in the organisation will accept the logical conclusions. This implies that environmental change is predictable, and organisations can forecast that change and adjust their strategy accordingly (Shah et al. 2015). Many researchers have argued that the environment is unstable and unpredictable, contrary to the assumption made by the prescriptive approach (Monib et al. 2021; Lynch 2006, 2015; Quaye, Osei, Sarbah and Abrokwah 2015; Shah et al. 2015; Pretorius and Maritz 2011), hence making it difficult for organisational survival.

On the contrary, the emergent strategy formulation approach, has been described by trial, experimentation and discussion; that is, by a sequence of experimental approaches as opposed to a final target (Lynch, 2015). Emergent strategy is pursued by an organisation that continuously evaluates its surroundings and simultaneously implements its strategy (Lynch 2006; 2015). The emergent approach appreciates and acknowledges that some external contextual and organisational factors can influence strategising.

The emergent approach (also termed non-rational and realised) emphasises the scope of strategy that discards the linearity of strategy formulation and emphasises the spontaneity of strategy making (Monib et al. 2021a; Mintzberg 2017). Strategy planning,

implementation and control are interrelated (Shah et al. 2015). Mintzberg (1994), an early proponent of the idea, indicated that emergent strategy is a "realised pattern" that was not "expressly intended". The author defines emergent strategy as "one-by-one actions converged in time in some sort of consistency or pattern," indicating that it is a plan and pattern that is 'organisations develop plans for the future and they also evolve patterns out of their past' (Mintzberg, 1994). This indicates an iteration between rationality and non-rationality in planning and that without intention, a pattern can emerge that results in practices which influence emergent strategising.

This spontaneity of strategy making is characterised by trial, experimentation, and debate; that is, by a series of experimental approaches rather than a single goal (Downs, Durant and Carr, 2004). The authors further give attention to the effect that an emergent strategy is implemented by a company that constantly analyses its environment and implements its strategy at the same time. Several authors echoed the same sentiment (Downs, Durant and Carr, 2003; Bouty, Gomez and Chia, 2019)

which eventually leads to unintended strategies. Accordingly, managers need to be spontaneous in strategising through practices and adjusting to external contextual and organisational factors, calling for adaptation to environmental changes. Essentially, the themes of emergence and strategy are inextricably linked (Downs et al. 2004).

Shah et al. (2015) allude that in emergent strategising, the final objective is unclear or unknown, and the elements or components emerge over the course of the strategy's life and as the environment changes, thereby introducing the concept of strategic learning (Mintzberg et 1985). An idea further echoed by Noe et al., (2024) is that emergent strategies also rely on an organisation's ability to learn from the real-world experiences of employees at all levels. This then brings in the notion of complexity theory, which inquires about the predictability of the future and planning ahead of time (Shah et al. 2015) given the changes.

Questioning the notion of the unpredictability of the future and the dynamism and volatility of the environment, emergent strategies respond to what is happening within and without and are unplanned and purposive (Mintzberg et al, 1985). Accordingly, Chia et al. (2018), assert that most traditional approaches to strategy research consist of a complicated set of operations that include dependent and independent variable analyses, theoretical conjecture and testing of theories and models constructed to capture the essence of strategic realities. An organisation needs to respond to what is happening within and without, and it can only do so through the micro activities performed by its members. To enable such, Chia et al. (2018) suggest S-as-P as an approach to research that has a fixated insistence on focusing solely on what strategy practitioners do, dwelling on the daily unscripted, unstructured practices (micro activities) by managers that result in emergent strategising.

In responding to what is happening within and without Chia et al. (2018) investigated epistemological alternatives for researching S-as-P by stating that strategy can emanate from the daily activities to cope with different situations that an organisation faces and can emerge from any given situation as the need arises to cope with a prevailing circumstance. The authors investigated how the explanatory gap between research accounts of strategy practice and the practice itself is inextricably linked to the acceptance of a widely held set of epistemological premises. They referred to it as the building worldview. They contrasted it with a dwelling worldview, where actors are relationally constructed, a non-deliberate nexus of social activity, actions are aimed at removing an urgent stumbling block, deliberate practical coping and lastly a *modus operandi*, an ingrained inclination is considered to order consistency of action (Chia et al. 2018).

There is no pure deliberate or emergent strategy. A deliberate strategy may contain elements of an emergent approach, and an emergent approach may contain elements of a deliberate strategy (Mintzberg, 1978). Strategising is a dynamic and ever-changing process, and the chosen strategy is determined by the situation and the nature of the decision. A single organisation may have a mix of deliberate and emergent strategies.

In the context of this study, the emergent approach allowed the researcher to appreciate strategising not as a formal event, but as a continuous process embedded in the daily actions of managers. Strategic direction did not result solely from planned exercises or formal meetings. These actions were rarely documented or framed as 'strategic' by those who perform them, yet they have tangible, long-term consequences. This observation aligned strongly with the S-as-P literature, particularly in its emphasis on executing strategy through practice rather than planning it in isolation. However, while the emergent approach provided a more realistic lens than the prescriptive schools, it often lacks granularity in explaining how emergent strategies take shape. Much of the literature refers abstractly to "emergence" without identifying the underlying practices that give it form. In essence, the emergent approach served as a departure point to uncover the subtle nuances that are the ways people sense, adapt and act strategically without necessarily intending to. What remained largely unexplored in the literature was how managers in complex, hybrid institutions, such as HEIs in the South African context, actually practice strategy in motion. This study provided that insight.

3.3.2.1 Previous findings on how strategies emerge

Some studies show how strategy, as a continuous pattern of activities, emerge serendipitously from the synergistic interweaving of such local coping acts and the unexpectedly good unintended outcomes. For instance, Bouty et al. (2019), through narrative research, analysed day-to-day practical coping activities and ongoing improvisations with the persons involved, their professionally socialised identities, the unique organisational situations they faced and the institutional and environmental pressures placed on them. The authors then developed a model of strategy emergence as a process of wayfinding that incorporates actors' social embeddedness and reveals the dynamics of how this occurs in practice. Accordingly, strategies emerge through inconsistencies in action and it is characterised by the spontaneity of individual actions (Bouty et al., 2019).

Expanding on this view, MacKay, Chia and Nair (2021) offer a Strategy-in-Practices (SIP) perspective by utilising process metaphysics and the practice-turn in social philosophy and theory. SIP stresses how, over time, the myriads of coping activities made at an organisation's "front lines" spontaneously coalesce into *modus operandi* that serve as the basis for strategising. Therefore, strategy is inherent in socio-culturally transmitted inclinations that provide the pattern consistency that enables the accidental formation of a coherent strategy. The SIP paradigm addresses the problematic micro/macro dichotomy highlighted by strategy processes and S-as-P research by demonstrating how strategy is inherent in socio-culturally disseminated activities. Additionally, it increases our understanding of how the establishment of a strategy influences organisational outcomes.

Through an ethnographic study, Burke and Wolf (2020) explored the socio-material practice of communal toolmaking of a firm with a complex problem. They describe how strategy toolmaking oscillates between different problem domains and demonstrate how this exhibits 'unintended' process affordances. By constructing a strategic instrument on purpose, players unintentionally build a socio-material springboard for spin-off strategising and the identification of latent ambiguity, providing strategic value beyond the tool itself. These insights demonstrate how community toolmaking can inspire wayfinding, thereby indirectly aiding managers in addressing wicked challenges, which are characterised by high levels of complexity, ambiguity and uncertainty.

Horst et al. (2019) investigated managing change in the media industry. Through a qualitative study, the researchers identified an approach they referred to as "shared inquiry." This approach entails recursive and adaptive planning toward (1) finding and learning (activities of employees), (2) facilitating and questioning (actions of managers), and (3) guiding and reflecting (actions of consultants). The approach establishes the circumstances to deal with continual change and how they manage to achieve strategy emergence at both the local and enterprise levels. In conclusion, they demonstrated how strategic behaviours can be mapped along a continuum that facilitates "responsive coping."

Similarly, Andresen et al. (2020) conceptualises foresight as emergent by drawing on and combining concepts from the practice lens and complexity theory. The integrative framework of foresight-as-emergence deconstructs the concept of foresight space by connecting the dynamics of how new future insights emerge from the everyday situated practices of organisation members (i.e., local emergence) with the processes of how they are dispersed and adapted throughout the organisation (i.e., global emergence). Therefore, the framework provides a theoretical basis for strategic foresight in situations characterised by both micro levels and macro levels of velocity.

Satterwhite et al. (2020) advocated for a transition to adaptive learning paradigms to address intricate leadership and strategy issues, complementing these empirical and theoretical insights. They underscored that strategy frequently arises from knowledge-in-action, which refers to the contextual learning that transpires while individuals address immediate challenges.

The studies mentioned above and further summarised in Table 3.1 demonstrate that strategy can emerge from unintended actions and practices. Managers must be vigilant and explore organisational and external contextual factors where strategies can emerge. The idea that strategies can originate from both deliberate and emergent acts is gradually permeating the strategy literature. However, the two phenomena are rarely investigated as complementary processes (Andersen and Nielsen, 2009), to account for a plethora of uncontrollable situational and environmental factors (Melanie 2018). Therefore, it was interesting to find out how strategy emerged from the daily informal, unscripted practices such as routines, capabilities, cognition and other external contextual and organisational factors.

Table 3.1: A summary of studies with a focus on the core insight on emergence strategising

Study	Methodology	Core insight on emergence strategising
Bouty, Gomez and Chia (2019)	Narrative research	Strategy emerges through coping acts, identity, and institutional pressures. Described as a process of wayfinding.
MacKay, Chia and Nair (2021b)	Conceptual (SIP - Strategy-in-Practices)	Strategy coalesces over time via socially embedded practices. Coping becomes a modality of strategic action.
Burke et al. (2020)	Ethnographic study	Strategy emerges unintentionally through socio-material toolmaking. Reveals "spin-off strategising".
Horst et al. (2019)	Qualitative field study	Describes "shared inquiry" as a recursive way to adapt and plan. Strategic behaviours are distributed across levels.
Andresen et al. (2020)	Conceptual (Practice lens + Complexity theory)	Strategy foresight emerges from micro-level practices and scales up via organisational sensemaking.
Satterwhite et al. (2020)	Literature synthesis	Identifies emergent learning patterns in leadership for complex problem solving. Strategy is adaptive knowledge-in-action.

Source: Author's own

3.3.2.2 Concluding remarks on emergent strategising

The preceding section illustrated the strategy process and the different categories of strategising that gave rise to emergent strategising. The concept of strategising has not only arisen but has been widely adopted by organisations and practitioners who acknowledge the dynamism and complexity of the operating environment. This gave rise to the fact that the organisation needs to learn that through individual micro practices, the organisation can respond, cope and allow for strategies to emerge spontaneously. Much of the literature refers abstractly to “emergence” without identifying the underlying practices that give it form. In essence, the emergent approach served as a departure point to uncover the subtle nuances by which people sense, adapt and act strategically without necessarily intending to. What remained largely unexplored in the literature was

how managers in complex, hybrid institutions, such as HEIs, actually practice strategy in motion. This study provided that insight.

There are many perspectives and approaches to strategy. The next section described an in-depth strategy approach relevant to the study.

3.4 Emergent strategising and S-as-P research

The previous section dealt with the strategy process and the three categories or approaches to strategising. It was indicated that the configuration approach is an approach that accommodates emergent strategising as organisations continuously learn and adapt to the ever-changing environment. The following section emphasises emergent strategising from a S-as-P perspective on which the study is based.

Mirabeau et al. (2014) posit that the significance of emergent strategy has long been acknowledged. The authors introduced the concept of ephemeral autonomous strategic behaviour and demonstrated how it is related to emergent strategy in the same way that it is related to deliberate strategy. Furthermore, Mirabeau et al. (2018a) address methodological challenges that researchers face when studying the full spectrum of strategy manifestations, by creating a novel, systematic and integrated methodology that is unique in its ability to track specific empirical strategy content and map it to all six manifestations in a single study as illustrated in Figure 3.2 They emphasise that investigating practices give rise to ephemeral strategy. Ephemeral strategy occurs when autonomous strategic behaviour, contradicting dominant strategic categories, fails to take hold and persist, which emphasises, as alluded to earlier, the importance of studying practices that give rise to ephemeral and emergent strategy.

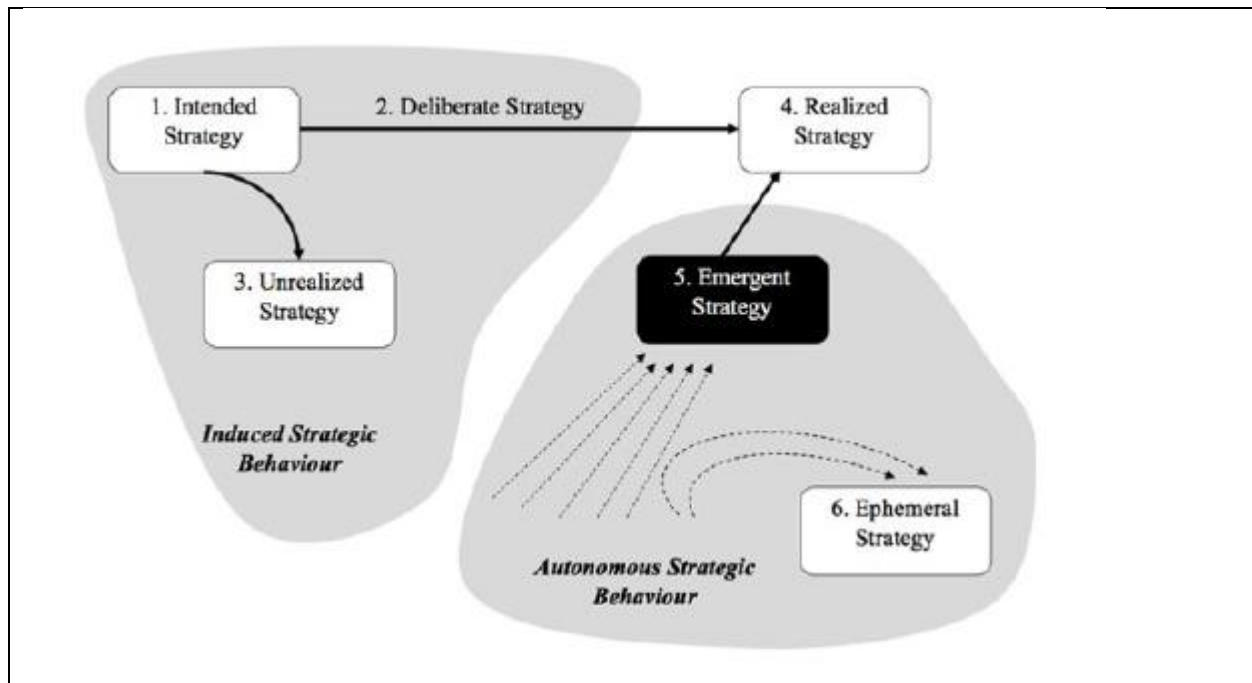


Figure 3.2: Six manifestations of strategy (Adapted from (Mirabeau and Maguire 2014a))

3.4.1 S-as-P research approach

S-as-P approach has become a prominent alternative to conventional notions of strategy in recent decades, with ongoing studies further enhancing its significance. Transitioning from the traditional prescriptive approach that regards strategy as an asset of an organisation, S-as-P conceptualises strategy as a practice enacted by individuals through their daily activities, relationships, tools and decisions (Golsorkhi et al., 2015b). The practice focuses on the micro-level social behaviours, processes and practices that characterise organisational strategy and strategising. This provides an organisational perspective into not only strategy, but also a strategic angle for looking into the process of organising, and therefore, serves as a helpful research programme and social movement for linking modern strategic management research with practice-oriented organisational studies (Golsorkhi et al., 2012).

Recent contributions have further substantiated the profundity of this approach. Jarzabkowski et al. (2025) illustrate how two decades of S-as-P research have elucidated

the intricate, dynamic and significant methodologies of strategy, particularly in contexts where conventional planning is inadequate for real-time decision-making.

S-as-P's distinctive value resides in its capacity to analyse strategising as a socially created, context-dependent endeavour executed by several players, not just senior leaders. It perceives strategy not as a completed entity but as a perpetual achievement, consistently influenced by dialogue, interpretation, authority and tangible resources (Whittington, 2006). Against this background, this theoretical paradigm facilitated my examination of how strategy developed beyond formal channels, including informal meetings, unanticipated negotiations and ingrained routines that influenced institutional trajectory over time.

3.4.1.1 Basic premises of S-as-P approach

The practice approach to strategy attempts to overcome the dualism between the rational and processual schools of strategy by focusing on the phenomenon of strategy itself (Jarzabkowski, Balogun and Seidl, 2007). This is done by taking a sociological perspective and treating strategy as any other institutionalised activity in our lives (Whittington, 2007). Therefore, the S-as-P research approach to strategy could be considered part of a larger effort to humanise organisational and management research. It seeks to comprehend human agency in the creation and implementation of strategy by focusing on the actions and activities of a strategy practitioner by shifting attention away from a narrow focus on the effects of strategies on performance and toward a more comprehensive, in-depth examination of what actually occurs in strategic planning, strategy implementation and other strategy-related activities (Golsorkhi, et al., 2015b). The authors emphasised that it concerns the micro-level social activities, processes and practices that define organisational strategy and strategising, emphasising what Whittington initiated in 1996. This provides not only a managerial perspective on strategy, but also a strategic angle for examining the organising process and therefore, serves as a useful research programme and social movement for connecting contemporary strategy research with practice-oriented organisational studies (Golsorkhi et al., 2015b).

Additionally, S-as-P delves deeper into the actual practices of strategy by referring to the various tools and techniques utilised in strategy work. It investigates how strategy work is performed, who performs it and what tools are utilised (Whittington and Cailluet, 2008). It also examines and situates these activities within a broader framework, as they are not isolated but instead rely on socially defined institutionalised ways of behaviour. Many tools, processes and discourses used in strategy work are part of the structured social infrastructure or industry of strategy. The practice-based strategy approach uncovers this relationship between the micro- and macro-levels of strategy (Golsorkhi et al., 2015; Balogun, Jacobs, Jarzabkowski, Mantere and Vaara 2014).

As a socially constructed approach, it draws on the work of Giddens, Bourdieu and de Certeau, whose efforts to resolve the historic duality between structuralism and individualism inspired the practice approach (Golsorkhi et al., 2015b; Balogun et al. 2014). They further posit that social theorists give the background in understanding this duality and practice emerged as a major concept for appreciating major questions about how agency and structure, as well as individual action and institutions, are linked in social systems and cultures.

Earlier, Whittington (2006) identified three elements to be considered when examining the relationship between the structure and the individual. First, the sector or system known as "society" guides a shared understanding, cultural rules, language, or practice, establishing the scene and facilitating human activity. Second is the concept of "individuality," which refers to people's innovative and sometimes unexpected behaviour in everyday life. The third concept is "actor," which refers to strategy practitioners, people who perform and employ strategy. According to the practice theory, these issues are associated with components of the whole. The behaviours of individuals cannot exist in isolation from society; on the contrary, these behaviours generate civilisation itself (Whittington, 2006).

"Practice is the actual activity, events, or work of strategy, whereas practices are the traditions, conventions, rules, and routines by which the work of strategy is formed" (Jarzabkowski, 2004). 'Practice' is a very special concept in that it allows researchers to engage in a direct dialogue with practitioners (Golsorkhi et al., (2015b)). The authors further posit that the study of practices enables one to investigate topics that are directly important to persons. Those persons who deal with strategy as strategists involved in strategic planning or other activities related to strategy, or as those who must deal with the strategies and their consequences.

According to Whittington (2007), the acceptance of S-as-P has become widespread. The study efforts pointed in two different directions. The initial path has led to micro-level investigations of people's strategy action, praxis. In such instances, strategy is seen as strenuous labour that managers master. The author maintains that the second direction of the research has resulted in a broader perspective, in which strategy is viewed as an industry whose members, in business, consulting, and beyond, collectively generate strategies and practices.

Hence, most S-as-P research focuses on formal planning and strategising activities and negates informal strategising that leads to emergent strategies (Vaara and Whittington 2012). It has been demonstrated that formal strategising activities are insufficient for shaping strategy, particularly in turbulent environments (Soliman et al. 2019; Kopmann et al. 2016). Additionally, Vaara and Whittington (2012) state that the practice perspective's capacity to pay close attention to what occurs in organisations endow S-as-P researchers with a unique sensitivity to the informal, unscripted activities that frequently result in strategy formation. What happens in the organisation and is done by individuals are the micro-level activities, emphasising the individual and their interaction (Johnson et al. 2016; Felin et al. 2015).

Golsorkhi et al., (2015a) emphasise three fundamental motives for understanding the central role of practices in social reality. First, a focus on practice allows for an examination of the micro-level of social activity and its construction in a real social context

or field. Therefore, a practice approach enables one to progress from a broad and abstract reflection on social activity to a more specific analysis of social reality. Second, the practice approach departs from methodological individualism by emphasising that activities must be understood as enabled or constrained by the prevalent practices in the field in question. As a result, a practice approach to strategy should look beyond managers' behaviours or actions to see how they are linked to prevailing practices. Lastly, the concept of practice enables one to address one of the most fundamental issues in contemporary social analysis: the relationship between structure and agency in social action.

S-as-P researchers are endowed with the ability to keep a careful eye on what is truly going on within an organisation (Vaara and Whittington 2012). Furthermore, it elucidates that the focus should be on contextual practices that have a strategic role in organisational success or failure. This further contributes to organisational capabilities on how strategies eventually emerge. The authors maintain that practices lead to 'routines or capabilities', which result from patterns of activities that individuals engage in, resulting in a strategy emerging when repeated. This includes daily social interaction, power dynamics, organisational factors and all other practices that enable a strategy to emerge that lead to a realised strategy. These activities were referred to as strategising activities.

Additionally, it also encourages a closer look at the tools, terminology and artefacts utilised in strategy work. This approach examines how strategy tools are socially interpreted, adapted or resisted, rather than viewing them as neutral or technical (Whittington et al., 2008). Moreover, Kohtamäki et al. (2022) underscore the necessity to "harness the diversity" in S-as-P research by amalgamating insights from micro-foundational theory and dynamic capabilities. This intersection provided a significant conceptual framework to examine how recurring behavioural patterns—such as routines, improvisation and informal leadership—could develop into a discernible strategy over time. Rabetino et al. (2025) assert that strategy arises from the interaction of individuals, practices and organisational design—a viewpoint reflected in my findings regarding how

middle managers' coping behaviours influenced institutional outcomes in unanticipated yet strategic manners.

Finally, Zaghmouri (2024) emphasises the application of S-as-P in intricate service organisations, such as public hospitals and higher education institutions, by concentrating on the social practices that underpin dynamic capabilities. The author demonstrates that adaptation arises not from elaborate planning but from emergent skills rooted in contextual practice. This idea was crucial for understanding how strategic responsiveness occurred in the higher education institution the researcher examined, often without formal authorisation or visibility, although with considerable ramifications over time. Table 3.2 summarises studies that are relevant to emergent strategising.

Table 3.2: S-as-P relevant studies

Category	Definition	Key characteristics	Sources	Relevance to this study
Deliberate Strategising	Intentional and planned actions aimed at achieving predefined strategic objectives.	Formal planning, centralised control, linear execution.	(Mintzberg and Waters, 1985; Lynch, 2015)	Provides contrast to emergent strategising; rarely dominant in complex HEIs.
Emergent Strategising	Strategy that unfolds in response to real-time issues, often without prior intent.	Adaptive, reactive, unstructured; shaped by local actions.	(Mintzberg, 2017a; Bouty, Gomez and Chia, 2019; MacKay, Chia and Nair, 2021)	Central to this study; reflects how HEI managers coped with dynamic challenges.
Ephemeral Strategising	Short-lived strategic actions that may not lead to sustained patterns.	Transient, situational, context-driven.	(Mirabeau, Maguire and Hardy, 2018)	Helps identify unstructured acts that failed to sustain traction.
Unrealised Strategy	Intended strategies that were not successfully implemented or achieved.	Strategic intent exists, but outcomes are not delivered.	(Mintzberg and Waters, 1985; Damon. Golsorkhi et al., 2015)	Highlights strategic drift and institutional constraint.
Embedded Strategising	Strategy formed through socially embedded practices, routines, and norms.	Relational, informal, path-dependent.	(Jarzabkowski, 2005; Whittington, 2006; Rabetino et al., 2025)	Core to micro-foundational focus; managers enact strategy through daily embedded practices.
Strategic Praxis	The flow of activities, routines, and practical coping in strategising.	Performative, improvisational, ongoing.	Whittington (2006); Chia and Holt (2006)	Reflects how managers enact strategy in the moment
Tool-mediated Strategising	Use of tools (e.g., plans, KPIs, dashboards) in strategic sensemaking and decision-making.	Material-discursive, co-constructed, interpretive.	Whittington and Cailluet (2008); Burke and Wolf (2020)	Supports analysis of how tools are reinterpreted or by passed by HEI managers.

Source: Author's own

3.4.1.2 Concluding remarks on S-as-P research approach

The preceding section demonstrated how S-as-P shifts research attention from macro-outcomes to the micro-activities individuals perform to attain those outcomes. An attempt to humanise strategy by focusing on social behaviours, processes and practices at the micro level that characterise strategising. Its focus is on researching and conducting a full in-depth analysis of what actually occurs in strategising. Therefore, the S-as-P approach provided a conceptually robust and empirically grounded, substantiated framework for this research. It enabled the researcher to perceive strategising not merely as a series of decisions, but as an evolving, negotiated and socially contextualised process. It elucidated what is still inadequately examined in conventional strategy literature: how routine acts by managers, contextually anchored, facilitated by technologies, and influenced by social interactions, generate consequential strategies, even when unintended. Crucially, it provided the analytical tools to explore micro practices of managers, when contextually anchored, can dynamically generate consequential strategists, even when entirely unintended.

Hence, this study precisely targeted a nuanced boundary within existing practice-based literature by focusing on managers at all levels of the organisation who influence emergent strategising within PHEI. The study explored micro-practices that managers engaged in that resulted in emergent strategising which are localised adaptations to aggregate into wider strategic patterns. Therefore, stretching the boundaries of S-as-P insofar as the emergence of strategies in a dynamic and volatile environment is concerned, and consequently, contributes to the ongoing development of S-as-P by demonstrating how micro-level praxis operates when bounded by volatile external environments and strict institutional compliance frameworks. Ultimately, this approach responds directly to established scholarly calls to advance theoretical understanding in a manner that remains practically actionable for managers and organisational members alike.

The following section described the alternative epistemological foundations in an attempt to conceptualise S-as-P.

3.5 Epistemological perspectives of emergent strategising

In the previous section, reference was made to the emergence of S-as-P as a research approach and studies conducted on emergent strategising. The preceding section provides background to establishing different epistemological perspectives in conceptualising emergent strategising.

Merriam (2009) provides the rationale behind an epistemological perspective:

‘...provides a framework for predicting, describing, empowering, and deconstructing population-specific worldviews, increasing the base of knowledge that leads to enhanced understanding of the purpose behind qualitative research.’

To a more significant extent, the foregoing rationale provides the study with a framework to conceptualise daily practices and actions by managers that influence emergent strategising. As alluded to earlier, real-world strategising occurs between perfectly deliberate and perfectly emergent. Rationally, strategies are developed; however, the environment is changing and requires that managers spontaneously respond and develop strategies in unprecedented conditions.

Golsorkhi, Rouleau, Seidl and Vaara. Eero (2015) posit that the S-as-P research approach serves as an alternative to traditional research approaches of strategising, oriented towards social actions, processes, and behaviours at the micro-level that characterise strategising with a focused and targeted examination of social realities. They further emphasise that the prevailing practices in the field must be regarded as enabling or constraining actions and how structure and agency are intertwined in social action.

Researchers must consider how accounts and explanations offered on strategy practice are reflexively moderated by a keen awareness of the inherent problems relating to the

"situatedness" of strategic action, meaning the epistemological issues associated with such attempted representations (Chia et al., 2018). The authors further explain that the problems pertaining to creating a chasm between academically stated descriptions of strategy practice and the practices they purport to describe are one of the most persistent difficulties in the research process. To curb this split requires a thorough evaluation of the prevalent research orientations and the nature and limitations of the resulting explanatory conclusions (Chia et al., 2018). To curb the split, the authors investigate how the unexplained gap between research descriptions of strategy practice and the activity itself is intimately connected to the adoption of a commonly believed set of epistemological premises, which they termed the building worldview. The authors contrasted it with the dwelling worldview.

The following sections sought to elaborate more on the two worldviews or orientations, their nature and limitations.

3.5.1 Building worldview in strategising

As indicated in the previous section, a key aspect of the building worldview-dominant view is that it examines how the explanatory gap between research descriptions of strategy practice and the activity itself is inextricably tied to the adoption of a commonly believed set of epistemological premises (Chia et al., 2018). It relies on two assumptions: first, everyone is a distinct bounded entity that interacts with its social environment and other individuals in a way that preserves its basic internally specified identity and agentic features. It is assumed that a 'social atomism' or methodological individualism exists, obscuring and distorting our appreciation of social life. The second fundamental assumption posits a Cartesian division of the mental and physical spheres, with proper knowledge defined as the ability to mentally describe the world around us in the form of mental representations. This implies that cognition and mental representation must always come before any meaningful action.

Previously, in 2000, Ingold had stated that the building perspective entails "worlds that are made before they are lived in; in other words, that acts of worldmaking precede acts

of dwelling.” This means that the strategy actor is supposed to be separate and unconcerned by the scenario in which they find themselves (Chia et al., 2018). As a result, the strategy actor is assumed to be distinct and detached from the situation in which they find themselves. This places the actor in a position of just acting according to stipulated policies and procedures. It emphasises the individual actor’s meaning, intention and purposefulness, and portrays the strategy actor as a self-contained entity interacting with reality externally. Hence, the meaning and intention of actors are used to explain the strategic activity, and a means-ends logic of action is assumed (Chia et al., 2018).

Furthermore, Chia and Rasche (2018a) elaborate that actors in a dwelling worldview are believed to be driven by prior thought-out intentions and behave ‘purposefully’ to achieve pre-specified goals, which distinguishes ‘action’ from ‘mere’ behaviour. Purposeful means a method of intervention that has been carefully conceived and implemented. Therefore, the meaning and intention of actors are, therefore, invoked to explain strategic behaviour, and a means–end logic of action is assumed. An organisation rationally defines strategies and prescribes means and ways to achieve them. However, this then obscures and distorts our appreciation of social life as the actor is supposedly separated from the world (Chia et al., 2018).

Drawing on Chia et al. (2018), the building worldview results in a detached spectator’s fear of social circumstances. The authors state that according to the building worldview, research is focused on visible, tangible and often spectacular interventions carried out by relatively independent strategic players, which echoes what Wundt mentioned about research in modern psychology. The authors further posit that according to the building worldview, research is focused on visible, tangible and often spectacular interventions carried out by relatively independent strategic players. On the contrary, the authors elaborate that a dwelling worldview leads to a deep, engaged and involved understanding of the local mindsets and proficiencies necessary to conduct the everyday practices of planning skilfully. Additionally, it focuses on the intricacies of implicit and almost unnoticeable acts that, when combined, result in the progressive transformation of strategic conditions.

Additionally, in a dwelling worldview, individuals may be construed as visualising shapes before they are implemented. However, this envisioning is carried out by real individuals in a real-world setting rather than by a disembodied intellect moving in a personal space in which the issues it attempts to answer are represented (Ingold 2000).

Chia et al. (2018) conclude that although the building worldview remains prominent in existing theoretical and empirical studies on strategy practice, the dwelling worldview has excellent potential to augment and expand this more traditional perspective. Therefore, while focusing, for example, on micro-practices that require *phronesis* and *metis*, it is imperative not to disregard episteme and techne that guide strategising as being goal-oriented and depict the practitioners as passive participants in the strategising process.

Carefully conceiving a method of intervention calls for two types of knowledge, *episteme* and *techne*. The following section further outlined the types of knowledge associated with the building worldview and its association with strategising.

3.5.1.1 *Episteme and techne* in strategising

Aristotle, Plato's successor, conceptualised the knowledge creation theory. (Manosevitch and Flyvbjerg 2013a) and (Faure, 2013) indicate that the main approaches to knowledge creation in psychology seem to be *episteme*, *techne* and *phronesis*. Episteme is a Greek word that means knowledge and *logos* means explanation or account (Faure, 2013). Episteme is context-independent, rationally based, and objective universal propositional truth that focuses on universal applicability independent of time and space (Chia and Rasche 2018a; Nonaka and Toyama 2007). Nonaka and Toyama (2007) posit that *techne* is a word that translates to technique, technology, art, knowledge or practical ability required to produce. Chia and Rasche (2018a) add that it is concerned with craftsmanship and involves precise codifiable procedures or practical instructions that may be explained in language. *Episteme* and *techne* are inspired by a 'rationally inspired mode of thought' indicating actions that intend to act purposefully to attain a prescribed goal within the

organisation (Chia and Rasche, 2018a). The authors contrast it with *phronesis*; *phronesis* is inspired by what one is and does. It gives rise to *praxis*, *cannot be instrumentalised and* is difficult to apprehend. It would seem this is so because of the relationship between being and doing, intention and action and identity and strategy (Chia et al., 2018).

Historically, episteme and *techne* were used interchangeably among the ancient Greeks, and both indicate a desire for explicitness, universality, precision, clarity, and teachability. These are traits linked with what was regarded as desirable in ancient Greece and remain held in high regard today, particularly in academic circles (Chia and Rasche, 2018a). Therefore, it is deemed knowledge only when knowledge can be articulated verbally in terms of principles, causes or actor meanings and intentions.

Table 3.3: Relationship between the building and dwelling worldview

Building Worldview	Dwelling Worldview
Actors are self-aware, deliberate and self-motivated.	Actors as an unintentional, rationally formed nexus of social activities.
Predefined goals direct efforts toward outcomes, resulting in purposeful action.	Actions are aimed at overcoming immediate impediments through purposeful practical coping.
The consistency of action is assumed to be ordered by deliberate	Action consistency is assumed to be ordered by a modus operandi- an internalised disposition.

Source: Adapted from Chia and Holt (2008)

3.5.2 Dwelling worldview for S-as-P

As alluded to earlier, the dwelling perspective explained the gap between research descriptions of strategy practice and the activity itself and makes connections between them (Chia et al., 2018). Further, people's identities and attributes are not thought to

come before social interactions and activities. Instead, the individual is seen as the result of "condensations of histories of growth and maturation within fields of social relations" (Chia et al., 2018). From this, it is implied that everyday social practices shape individual agents in such a way that they act and interact, for the most part, spontaneously and purposefully. Instead of being purposeful and self-referential to overcome immediate problems and obstacles, there is no need for theoretical distancing, conscious deliberation or an overall pre-planned plan of action.

Earlier, Ingold (2000) asserts that everyone emerges as a development locus within a field. Hence, individuals and societies should not be thought of as self-contained entities interacting with one another from the outside; they should be viewed as "mutually constitutive and co-defining impulses relying on complex responsive processes" (Chia and Rasche, 2018a).

Ingold (2000) added that forms people create, whether in their imaginations or on the ground, emerge from the flow of their engaged activity, from the specific relational contexts of their practical connection with their surroundings. This idea is further echoed by Chia et al. (2018), who indicate that, from a dwelling perspective, individuals are thought to be wholly absorbed in and closely linked to their environment in all its complexities. Individuals, therefore, may be construed to visualise shapes before they are implemented, but this envisioning is carried out by real individuals in a real-world setting, rather than by a disembodied intellect moving in a subjective space in which the issues it attempts to answer are represented (Ingold, 2000b). Vision and strategy, in this view, are not abstract constructs, but materialised through action and situated experience, not detached cognition.

This conceptualisation was recently reinvigorated by de Metz, Jansen van Rensburg and Davis (2023), who illustrated how strategy is implemented during organisational change through the dwelling worldview. The authors indicated that strategic action is not consistently premeditated but instead emerges through practical coping, relational responsiveness and purpose improvisation. This directly substantiates the thesis that

strategy in higher education institutions does not arise from formal planning cycles, but rather from the informal, pragmatic practices of those most intimately involved in the work. Their work illustrates how managers manifest strategy by manoeuvring through complexity in real time through adaptive actions informed by prior experience and situational requirements. This study emphasises that strategising throughout transformation is an experiential activity, rather than simply a manifestation of strategic purpose.

Further supporting this view, Bouty et al. (2019) concur that strategy development could emanate through ‘observed consistencies in actions and *modus operandi*. Horst et al. (2016) and Chia et al. (2018) echo that strategy is not constructed from a detached blueprint but enacted through socially conditioned dispositions, lived experiences and improvisational action. These actions are consistent with past experiences, beliefs, dispositions and position in the social world, and actions and social interaction (Rasche et al., 2009; Gomez, 2015). Dispositions enable agents to act in tandem with past experiences and actions, creating an enabler for the emergence of strategy based on the “prevailing practices” (Gomez, 2015). In this view, strategy is not built but dwelt in, emerging from everyday practices.

This was further echoed by the fact that non-deliberate strategies respond to what is happening within and without, and are unplanned and purposive (Mintzberg and Waters, 1985). Therefore, strategy can emanate from the daily activities to cope with the different situations an organisation faces (Gomez, 2015; Chia and Holt, 2018). Like a hand in glove, there is no separation between people and their society, which is a human dwelling (Gomez, 2015).

This thesis argued that strategising in actual everyday practice did not occur in a building perspective based on planning and abstraction, but rather from a dwelling perspective, wherein individuals adaptively implemented strategy within their embedded setting. This assertion was progressively corroborated in the S-as-P literature (Bouty et al., 2019; Horst et al., 2019; Horst and Järventie-Thesleff, 2016).

3.5.2.1 *Phronesis and metis* in strategising

In the context of the developing S-as-P literature, the notions of *phronesis* (practical wisdom) and *metis* (cunning intelligence) have acquired renewed importance for comprehending the enactment of strategy in unpredictable and socially rooted contexts. These concepts contest the supremacy of rationalist and cognitive frameworks in strategic decision-making by emphasising the embodied, contextual and intuitive dimensions of strategising.

Nonaka et al. (2007) contend that individuals do not merely follow formal strategy; they build it through practice, which is a dynamic process. They posit that the rationalist approach to strategy has nothing to do with practitioners' reality and has resulted in a disconnect. The challenges that they outlined are firstly finding a universal theoretical solution that tends to ignore the portion of strategy that is based on practice in a specific situation; secondly, the subjective part of strategy, which is developed and performed by humans, is overlooked in objective analyses of the firm's environment and resources; and lastly the idea that strategy is a process of creating the future gets lost in historical study. Similarly, earlier Aristotle, regarded as the father of knowledge, believed that *phronesis* is a qualitative type of knowledge, as it indicates the kind of person one is (Aristotle and Sachs, 1999) and is always already a part of a person's makeup (Chia et al., (2018)

Recently, de Metze et al., (2023) offered empirical support for these philosophical assertions. Their research, centred on strategy implementation amid change, utilised the dwelling perspective and demonstrated that strategy develops through pragmatic adaptation and intentional improvisation rather than through rational planning. Managers demonstrated strategic behaviour by interpreting context, adapting to environmental needs and modifying their approach through situational judgment characteristics of phronetic thinking. These insights corroborate the study's claim that strategising in real-world environments, such as higher education institutions, transpires through embedded, relational practices rather than codified processes.

Drawing on the works of Aristotle, Nonaka et al., (2007) postulate that distributed wisdom is required for effective strategic management (philosopher Aristotle coined the term "*phronesis*" to describe it. Chia et al. (2018a) assert that *phronesis* is practical wisdom. It is stated openly in causal terms and may be empirically validated methodically. Nonaka et al. (2007) indicate that *phronesis* is a quality of mind. Today, *phronesis* is typically viewed as the ability to assess and perform the optimal action in each situation to serve the common good and is roughly translated as prudence, ethics, practical knowledge or practical rationality (Nutt 2010). Nonaka et al. (2007), in their emphasis on *phronesis*, indicated that strategy emerges from one's existential belief or commitment to a future vision. An indication that the capacity to subjectively evaluate one's surroundings, the resources and the interaction of subjectivity and objectivity amongst individuals can be a catalyst for emerging strategies, bringing in the idea of tacit and explicit knowledge in knowledge creation. Tacit knowledge is deeply rooted in action, commitment and involvement in a particular organisational context and involves cognition and technical elements (Chia et al., 2018a; Nonaka and von Krogh 2009; Nonaka 1994).

The concept of *phronesis* was emphasised by Flyvbjerg (2001a) by stating that *phronetic* social research is a method of studying organisations that is based on a modern interpretation of the ancient Greek idea of *phronesis*. The author alluded that the method examines society and social organisation, focusing on power and values by emphasising that *phronesis* is concerned with values and extends beyond analytical, scientific (episteme), and technical (know-how) knowledge (techne). The author, however, argues that an attempt to reduce social research to episteme or techne or to comprehend it in those terms is incorrect. The same author in 2013 further emphasised that *phronetic* research focuses on knowledge that can be put into use in the real world, which aids in decision-making about what can and should be done, as well as how to do it (Manosevitch and Flyvbjerg, 2013).

Nonaka et al. (2007) acknowledge that these abilities must be dispersed among members of the organisation. As an organisation is an entity that pursues a universal ideal and a specific reality, strategy as distributed *phronesis* evolves from practice to seek "common

goodness" within each scenario. Such utopian pragmatism implies that knowledge may be generated and polished to become wisdom in a specific and dynamic setting. An idea further echoed by Farnese, Barbieri, Chirumbolo and Patriotta (2019), indicating that knowledge represents a critical drive for organisations' competitive edge. The authors state that enhancing an organisation's capacity to produce innovation creates value. They further cement what Nonaka et al. (2007) echoed by noting that knowledge creation is a dynamic process in which the continuous dialogue between tacit and explicit knowledge generates new knowledge and amplifies it across different ontological levels (individual, organisational, and inter-organisational).

Earlier in Detienne, Vernant and Lloyd (1978) suggest another form of practical knowledge called 'cunning intelligence' *metis*. They posit that it is "a type of intelligence and thought, a way of knowing; it combines flair, wisdom, forethought, the subtlety of mind, deception, resourcefulness, vigilance, opportunism, various skills and experience acquired over the years." Tacit knowledge is often associated with the concept of *metis*. Kogut and Zander (1992), citing Polanyi (1966), the author argues that tacit knowledge is "personal knowing" that is difficult to articulate explicitly, while *metis* is "practical knowledge" that is acquired through participation in social communities of practice (CoP). Both concepts highlight the importance of personal experience and practical knowledge in decision-making and problem-solving. Kogut and Zander (1992) suggest that tacit knowledge is essential for successful knowledge transfer and replication within organisations, as it often involves context-specific knowledge that is difficult to codify or transfer explicitly. Similarly, Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995) emphasise the importance of tacit knowledge in knowledge creation and innovation, as it allows individuals to draw upon their personal experiences and insights to develop new ideas and approaches.

Additionally, Cope (2003) suggests that tacit knowledge and *metis* are closely linked, as both concepts involve experiential learning and the development of practical skills and expertise. In relation to this study, strategising should consider both tacit knowledge and *metis* as they are essential for successful strategising in complex and uncertain environments. The emphasis is on the importance of practical knowledge and personal

experience in decision making and problem solving which is synonymous with the operating environment.

Building on both the perspectives, a gap exist in that to explain the actual practice of strategising; both managers can use the building and dwelling modes of explanation. Nonetheless, the explanatory outcomes are markedly different (Chia et al., 2018). The authors further posit that while acknowledging episteme and *metis*, which presuppose an initial pre-cognitive separation between the actor and the world, researchers should explore *phronesis* and *metis*, which denote the ability to strategise in the face of the dynamism of the environment. Furthermore, these views have transformed and evolved with an emphasise to develop a theory of practice in-process research which entails solving problems that are important to people in our local, national, and global communities (Chia et al., 2018).

In conclusion, *phronesis* and *metis* offer valuable conceptual frameworks for understanding the emergence of strategy from context-specific, value-oriented, and experiential practices. This viewpoint corresponded to the findings of de Metz, Jansen van Rensburg and Davis (2023), whose study emphasised that strategic action during change involves not merely following a predetermined plan, but rather responding judiciously and innovatively to emerging obstacles. Therefore, within the context of HEI, this indicated that strategy frequently emerged not from formalised plans, but from managerial responses to uncertainty, utilising deeply ingrained, context-specific knowledge, a process this study characterises as internal strategising.

Table 3.4 offered a comparison of knowledge forms relevant to strategising their definitions, focus, nature of application and their key characteristics.

Table 3.4: Comparison of knowledge forms relevant to strategising

Knowledge type	Definition	Focus	Nature of application	Key characteristics	Representative sources
<i>Phronesis</i> (<i>Practical wisdom</i>)	The ethical, situational ability to act appropriately in context, oriented toward the common good.	Judgment and moral reasoning	Situational; based on values, experience, and social context	Context-sensitive, action-oriented, ethically aware, embedded in lived practice	(<i>Aristotle's Ethics: Critical Essays</i> , 1999; Flyvbjerg, 2001b; Nonaka and Toyama, 2007b; Chia and Rasche, 2018a)
<i>Metis</i> (<i>Cunning intelligence</i>)	Adaptive, intuitive knowledge gained through experience, used to navigate complexity and unpredictability.	Opportunism, responsiveness	Emergent; rooted in practical coping and tacit skill	Tacit, strategic, improvisational, experiential	(Detienne, Vernant and Lloyd, 1978b; Cope, 2003b; Chia and Holt, 2006b)
Episteme (<i>Scientific knowledge</i>)	Abstract, universal knowledge that can be theorised, tested, and generalised.	Objective truth	Formal; derived through analysis and logic	Codified, rational, generalisable, theoretical	(<i>Aristotle's Ethics: Critical Essays</i> , 1999; Flyvbjerg, 2001b; Chia and Rasche, 2018a)
Techné (<i>Technical skill</i>)	Craft-based know-how or technical expertise for producing predictable outcomes.	Production and replication	Prescriptive; follows set procedures or rules	Instrumental, transferable, skill-based	(Polanyi, 1966; Nonaka and Takeuchi, 2004; Nonaka, Takeuchi and Umemoto, 2014)

Source: Author's own

Phronesis and *metis* offer a more suitable perspective than episteme and techne for analysing contextual, emergent strategy creation in real-world situations, particularly inside complex and ambiguous environments such as PHE institutions.

3.5.3 Criticism against both worldviews in strategising

The building worldview epistemology to strategising does not come without criticism. This section offers an overview of the criticism against the building worldview, counterarguments and the promotion of the dwelling worldview as an epistemological consideration in informing strategising. The main critics of the dwelling worldview in the S-as-P perspective are Chia et al., (2018). This criticism was published in the book titled, *Strategy-as-Practice*.

In a dwelling worldview, the meaning and intention of actors are invoked to explain strategic behaviour, and a means-end logic of action is assumed. In the dwelling worldview, there is no presupposed prior distinction between individual and society, no dualism between mind and matter and no prior distance between thought and action. According to this viewpoint, these are regarded as secondary distinctions generated by social practices themselves (Chia and Rasche 2018a).

Chia et al. (2018) contend that strategy practices are flexible and founded on the improvisations of practitioners in practice and have encouraged methodological plurality. However, they argue that their underlying epistemological assumptions are primarily confined to traditional research areas and that their focus is limited to considering practitioners' actions in terms of episteme and techné. They further argue that neither *phronesis* nor *metis*, are equally valid tacit types of knowledge held by practitioners.

Therefore, the authors posit that the core assumption of the autonomous strategic actor depending on explicit knowledge to consciously analyse, plan and then actively act to achieve preset aims remains a central feature of the study agenda. To be sure, the focus is on more micro-level everyday strategic sense-making tasks, but it remains on what

formally assigned organisational strategists actually do and the rational decisions they make (Chia and Rasche 2018). Implying that to explain the actual practice of strategising, both the building and dwelling modes of explanation can be used.

This study looked at the iteration between deliberate – purposeful actions and non-deliberate-purposeful actions. It implies that the criticism against both worldviews was avoided by going deeply into the daily micro activities carried out by self-absorbed individuals who did not assume deliberate forethought or conscious planning on their part. The study further sought empirical evidence from the different managers at different levels where strategies emerged.

3.5.4 Concluding remarks on the building and dwelling worldviews

In the practical application of strategy inside organisational environments, both the building and dwelling worldviews may coexist. Each presented unique ontological and epistemological assumptions that resulted in markedly different explanatory consequences. The building worldview conceptualised strategy as a project to be designed intentional, detached from context and governed by logic, planning and regulation. Conversely, the dwelling worldview perceives strategy as emergent, contextual and inextricably linked to the quotidian behaviours of practitioners manoeuvring through dynamic settings (Ingold, 2000; Chia and Rasche, 2018).

Although the building worldview can effectively delineate formal procedures, measurements and idealised performance models, it frequently neglects the complexities of real-time adaptation, relational subtleties and embodied sensemaking that define strategy-in-use. It assumes a level of environmental predictability and managerial foresight that seldom exists, particularly in complex, resource-limited institutions like PHE institutions.

In contrast, the dwelling worldview provided a more profound framework for comprehending the real development of strategy through relational interaction, practical adaptation, implicit knowledge and contextual judgement. According to de Metz et al.

(2023), strategising during organisational transformation involves not merely abstract calculation, but rather engaging in the flow managing tensions, responding ethically and improvising within contextual limitations. This supported the idea that strategy is not formulated in isolation, but rather developed through interactions with tools, individuals, institutions and experiential knowledge.

Consequently, although both worldviews were theoretically recognised, the dwelling viewpoint was empirically more suitable for encapsulating the micro-foundational, emergent and socially embedded characteristics of strategising observed in the field. Ultimately, acknowledging this distinction was beneficial not only for theoretical precision but also for methodological coherence. The dwelling mode validated the examination of informal behaviours, experiential knowledge (*phronesis* and *metis*) and the quotidian improvisations that influenced strategic results. This viewpoint enhanced the interpretive framework of this thesis and facilitated a more genuine representation of how strategy develops from experience.

3.6 Theoretical foundations

The previous sections presented the origin of strategy and the epistemological perspectives in strategising. The next section presented the theoretical foundations underpinning the study, the concepts, history, and how they linked to the study. To answer the research question, the researcher utilised multiple perspectives that complemented each other to make sense of the phenomena and generate robust and credible data. The micro-foundations perspective drove the study as it accounted for the individual level practices that informed emergent strategising – organisational outcome. Secondly, Bourdieu's approach complemented by accounting for the individual daily activities that conditioned them in the dwelling worldview focusing on the individual subtle nuances of *phronesis* and *metis*.

3.6.1 Micro-foundational perspective

Before the presentation of the micro-foundational perspective, the origins of the concepts of micro-foundational need to be defined and clarified and how it has contributed to strategy formulation or strategising.

As early as 1990, Coleman highlighted that micro-level mechanisms are the primary causes of macro phenomena, and intervening at the micro level may frequently make the most sense. The author further elaborated that micro-level explanations are more stable, fundamental and broad than macro-level explanations. An idea further supported by Foss and Pedersen (2014), the authors posit that micro-foundations are 'about locating (theoretically and empirically) the proximate causes of a phenomenon (i.e., the explanations of an outcome) at levels of analysis lower than that of the phenomenon itself. Simply put, Foss (2003) suggests that an analysis should be done at a particular level by engaging in 'reduction' by explaining a particular phenomenon (Foss 2003).

Micro-foundation is a movement that arose in economics, and it has been mainly used in macro-management to connect to more micro-disciplines like psychology and organisational behaviour (Felin et al. 2015). Lately, it has been adopted in studying the theory of practice and focusing on micro areas such as organisational behaviour and human resources management Foss and Lindenberg (2013) and used as an explanatory mechanism that is situated at the micro-level (Barney and Felin 2013; Foss 2010). Furthermore, it has been used in studying individuals, outcomes and interactions (Felin, Foss and Ployhart 2015; Ariew and Westgren 2014; Abell, Felin and Foss 2008; Felin and Foss 2005).

There are many debates about micro-foundations what they are and what they are not (J. Barney and Felin, 2013a). Micro-foundations are rooted in understanding individual outcomes, such as routines, capabilities, performance links, motivations, learning and interactions (Felin et al., 2015; Westgren 2014; Abell, Felin et al., 2008; Felin et al., 2005). Foss (2010) defines micro-foundations as foundations of something, namely, aggregate concepts and/or aggregate variable relationships. The author posits that the micro-foundations project is an example of "reductionism". Firstly, the term "reduction" refers to

the process of explaining a specific phenomenon in terms of more fundamental phenomena. Secondly, the explanatory position that the best understanding of a complex, and in social science: collective level, the phenomenon "... should be sought at the level of structure, behaviour, and laws of its parts plus their relations" is referred to as "reductionism." Furthermore, it entails a search for the deep structure underneath aggregate phenomena.

As alluded to earlier, the pioneer of the concept or movement was Coleman. In recent literature it has been coined Coleman 'boat' or 'bathtub' (Storbacka, Brodie, Böhmann, Maglio and Nenonen 2016); Coleman distinguishes between the macro–macro-level explanation, in which social facts result in social results, and the micro–micro-level explanation, in which conditions for action result in observable behaviours. The 'bathtub' is formed by the connections between the macro-micro explanation, in which social facts inform conditions for action, and the micro-macro explanation, in which observable actions inform social consequences.

There is not much agreement on what micro-foundations are (Barney and Felin 2013). Many authors argue that there are many connotations of what they are and what they are not and what constitutes micro-foundation research. Foss and Pedersen (2014) emphasise what micro-foundations are and what they are not.

However, linking it with strategising, Abell, Teppo and Nicolai (2016) posit that the micro-foundations research programme's main goal has been to unpack collective concepts to better understand how individual-level factors affect organisations (aggregate phenomena). Furthermore, how individual interactions lead to emergent, collective and organisation-level outcomes and performance, and how micro-level actions and interactions mediate macro-level relationships.

3.6.1.1 Micro-foundations research agenda

Calls for micro-foundations in strategic management research started over two decades ago from Foss (2003) and recently Gavetti (2012); Barney and Felin, (2013) and Helfat

and Peteraf (2015). To date, there are calls for an improved understanding of micro-antecedents of strategic management by calling on research to be conducted on ‘micro-analytic issues’, especially at lower levels of analysis. This helps to eliminate the divide between micro-level process Foss and Pedersen (2014) outcomes. Moreover, Foss and Pedersen (2014) place emphasis on conducting research empirically. The emphasis by the authors is on understanding behaviours and their complicated interactions, which leads to higher-level results.

The body of knowledge on the theories and research topics that guide the micro-foundations of strategic management has increased substantially over the past 25 years. Since the 1980s, the area of strategic management, which aims to understand the causes for variances in business performance and success, has addressed strategic phenomena with many perspectives and points of view (Bağış 2020).

Recent contributions continue to enrich the theoretical dialogue surrounding the intersection of micro-foundational strategy research and the practice turn. Whittington (2025) presents a metaphorical, yet analytically incisive distinction between “tall” and “flat” ontologies within strategic research. The author critiques excessively hierarchical (tall) micro-foundational models that detach individuals from practice, advocating instead for “flat” ontologies where strategy arises from individuals interwoven in shared practices. This perspective closely aligns with the epistemological framework of this study, which refrains from viewing micro-foundations as isolated behaviours, but rather as relational and contextually embedded. By conceptualising strategy as “the water of practices” rather than discrete agent-level causes, the author reinforces the research’s argument that micro-foundational practices must be understood within a contextual, performative and interactive framework, particularly in the quotidian contexts of managers within HEIs.

The foregoing indicated a study of empirically locating the more stable micro-activities, such as social interactions performed by individual managers, that influence emergent strategising. Studying these stable micro-activities as embedded in cognition, individual interaction and the use of power impacts the aggregate outcome of emergent strategising.

This was done by empirically responding to calls for an improved understanding of the micro-antecedents at a lower level of analysis that influenced emergent strategising.

3.6.1.2 Micro foundations in emergent strategising

Bağış (2020) posits that the behavioural theory of the firm has dominated micro-foundations of strategic management, evolutionary theories of economic change and Coleman's social theory. This is over and above the effects of actor-social network theories, theory of practice, behavioural decision theory, goal framing theory, organisational learning theory, upper echelon theory and transactive memory system. The author mentions that the micro variables that were investigated were cognition, motivation, human capital, human resources management, managers and individual variables.

The methodologies and perspectives produced in the discipline have mostly described the strategic phenomena at the macro-analysis level. According to Felin and Foss (2005), the micro-foundations literature focuses on the influence of strategic phenomena on capabilities, firm and firm performance because of persons and their interactions, therefore, combining topics at the micro and macro analysis levels. In the first instance, the micro-practices result from the macro phenomena in organisations. The cognition and motivation variables have been discussed to unearth the firms' macro variables.

As a movement, the micro-foundations research programme's central impetus has been to unpack collective concepts to understand how individual-level factors impact organisations. Secondly, how individual interaction leads to emergent, collective and organisational-level outcomes and performance, and how relationships between macro variables are mediated by micro-actions and interactions (Abell et al. 2008).

The study of micro-foundation lies within the organisational behaviour and human resources of sociology; a research field concerned with how people influence one another in their relationships. The field of organisational behavioural studies is then expanded to

include organisational sociology. The organisational theory aims to comprehend how social organisations and business' function. This section explored the concept of micro foundation within organisational studies. The current research acknowledged that individuals within an organisation influence one another in their relationships within the organisation.

In recent years, a new line of study in strategic management has evolved that focuses on investigating micro-foundations. Strategic topics are examined through the foundation rooted in individual actions and interaction. Different ways of utilising micro-foundations exist. This section explores some prominent theories that guide micro-foundations and how they have been used in strategic management, while relating them to this study in an organisational context. The micro-level of analysis was the appropriate level of analysis guiding this study.

Scott (2004) posits that, since gaining prominence in the 1950s, sociology has been widely used in the study of organisations. The author mentions that the 1930s and the 1940s saw sociologists enter the workplace, questioning the mechanistic view of organisations, identifying 'informal patterns' of intricate motives, shared values, conflict and cooperative human behaviour within organisations. In addition to investigating the 'actors' and the 'processes' in organisational sociology studies, the authors maintain that organisations are viewed as 'open systems, with the environment in which organisations operate, significantly influencing behaviour.

One significant motive for the strategic management micro-foundation movement is to make the theory more relevant to managers by anchoring more abstract macro ideas. In such instances as in emergent strategising, non-deliberate strategies respond to what is happening within and without and are unplanned and purposive (Mintzberg et al 1985). As alluded to earlier, strategy can emanate from the daily activities to cope with different situations that an organisation faces (Chia et al 2018). Therefore, an important contribution of the micro-foundation movement is to "unpack collective concepts to understand how individual-level factors impact organisations. Essentially, how the

interaction of individuals leads to emergent, collective and organisation-level outcomes and performance, and how relations between macro variables are mediated by micro-actions and interactions” (Felin et al., 2015). The micro-foundation movement understands that to comprehend collective phenomena, we must first comprehend the basic parts that comprise them: individuals and their social interactions.

3.6.1.3 Evaluation of the Micro-Foundations

Micro-foundations are appropriate to understand how individual-level (micro-level) elements lead to emergent, social and organisational-level outcomes and performance, and how micro-actions and interactions influence relationships between macro variables (Felin et al., 2015). On the contrary, the authors purport that they are not a “distinct theoretical or empirical approach”; hence, the researcher used other supporting theories or perspectives for this study to counter this criticism. Therefore, micro-foundations support strategy and organisational theory as the study falls under this research area.

3.6.1.4 Relevance of Micro-Foundations

The micro-foundation approach was relevant in this study as it accounted for individual and individual interaction. It develops linkages between the individual and their social interactions and informs the micro-foundational-practices (Foss 2010). It further linked the micro-macro aspects of practice between the individual and the institutional matters of strategising, therefore, creating sociological interactions between agents and their organisation. They consist of various abilities, procedures and organisational activities (Johnson et al. 2016; Foss and Pedersen 2014). This implied that the study accounted for individual managers and their social interaction by forming linkages between the individuals and their social interactions.

3.6.1.5 Concluding comments on the micro-foundational movement

Micro-foundations, as defined by Felin et al. (2015), are explanations at a lower analytical level that do not necessarily connect to individuals. While individuals may be included as

participants in organisational theory in micro-foundation research, the research aims to provide theoretical and empirical explanations at a level of analysis lower than that of the phenomenon itself. While macro constructs define the conceptual domain, Foss et al. (2014) caution that "macro scholars too frequently work with firm-level constructs with often unclear micro-foundations and proceed as if there are direct causal relations between macro variables (e.g., arguments that capabilities cause performance), when, in fact, the real causal relations involve lower-level actions and interactions" by individual actors.

The micro-foundations accounted for the understanding of the individual outcomes, such as routines, capabilities, performance links, power and interactions, which are organisational outcomes and fail to account for the micro activities that individuals engage in to achieve the organisational outcomes. Therefore, Bourdieu's approach underpinned the study by accounting for the individual actual practices that resulted in an emergent strategy.

3.6.2 Bourdieu's Approach

The second underpinning theory of this study was a social theory named Bourdieu's Approach. It was coined by Pierre Bourdieu, who was a French sociologist, a public intellectual in the tradition of Émile Zola and Jean-Paul Sartre (born 1 August 1930, Denguin, France; died January 23, 2002, Paris). In southern France, Bourdieu was born into a working-class family. While there, notably among the Berber-speaking Kabyle, he participated in ethnographic research. Bourdieu's experience in Algeria, which built his reputation, led to *Sociologie de l'Algérie* (1958; *The Algerians*).

The approach has French origins; it was introduced over four decades ago by a French sociologist and public intellectual. Bourdieu's work was concerned mainly with power dynamics in society, particularly the various and nuanced ways in which power is transmitted and social order is maintained within and between generations. Furthermore, (Bourdieu 1959) *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste* (1979), Bourdieu's

best-known work, contends that judgements of taste are tied to social status or, more accurately, are actions of social positioning.

The sociologist is regarded as one of the most influential figures of the 20th century in the social science domain (Yang 2014; Whittle and Mueller 2010). In recent post-modernist humanities and social sciences, Bourdieu's notion of habitus (socially acquired provisions) has been influential. As the driver of practice, the workings of habitus connect practice (agency) with capital and field (structure) (Reay 2004). Through social acquisition, individuals are expected to behave in a certain way that is governed by social practices, becoming a 'shared sociological treasure' precisely part of their nature (Lahire, 2001). This behaviour becomes the 'concrete human activity' that then conditions by the world in which individuals live. Practice is a human activity with a significant social context (Gomez, 2015). It relates to the socially 'deeply ingrained habits, skills and dispositions that managers possess owing to their life experiences', habits, skills and dispositions essential for daily coping under uncertain environmental conditions to necessitate emergent strategy development. Habitus should be deeply ingrained to 'naturally' respond and cope with environmental changes.

3.6.2.1 The roots of Bourdieusian approach to theory of practice

Pierre Bourdieu (1977) developed a theory of practice which was the foundation of anthropology and sociology. The sociologist critiqued the methodologies and postures of social science, and provided a basic explanation of how human activity should be interpreted. The author draws on his research in Kabylia (Algeria) to demonstrate his theoretical arguments. Furthermore, the sociologist analyses the dialectical process of 'incorporation of structures' and the objectification of habitus, through which social forms seek to replicate themselves, via a careful analysis of marriage tactics and the function of rite and myth. A rigorous, consistent materialist approach establishes the groundwork for a theory of symbolic capital and, by examining the many modalities of dominance, a theory of symbolic power.

An integrated theoretical and methodological approach underpins Bourdieu's study of French society, attempting to transcend sociological dichotomies such as micro/macro, subjective/objective, material/symbolic, structure/agency, empirical/theoretical, public/private, and freedom/necessity (Power 1999). As an integrated and methodological approach, Bourdieu emphasises that practice is derived not just from habitus or field but from the interplay of capital, habitus and field (Bourdieu 1959).

Bearing that Bourdieu refuses to reduce practice to these three effects (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992), it is their collaborative effort that results in practice (Yang 2014). Moreover, Yang (2014) further emphasises the relationship as interlocking and calls them 'thinking tools'. Maton, in 2008, succinctly summarised the relationship as "practice comes from relations between one's disposition (habitus) and one's position in a field (capital), inside the present state of play of that social arena (field)".

3.6.2.2 The chosen concepts of Bourdieu's approach

Bourdieu claimed in his best-known book, *La Distinction* (1979), that those with high social and cultural capital (or status) are the taste arbiters and that the unique taste of one's own comes from the atmosphere and social class in which one resides, that is, one's field. The sociologist called habitus the almost inherent knowledge of a person on how to live and navigate that area. Bourdieu's approach accounts for the relationship of micro-level activities. These activities are independent of an individual's will but preconditioned by the field and further propose a formula that indicates the necessities of achieving a balanced relationship between the habitus, practice, field and capital; (Practice = [(habitus) X (Capital)] + Field (Gomez 2015; Yang 2014). It is possible to interpret the practice equation succinctly as stating that practice benefits from relationships between one's disposition (habitus) and the place of one in a field (capital), this social arena (field)' (in the current state of play) (Yang 2014).

The foregoing implies that the position of individual managers in organisations (field) is largely influenced by the capital they possess. This capital is assessed in terms of

bureaucratic, financial, technological, organisational, social and informational capital (Pierre 2005). This then equates to corporate capital that contributes or rather influences the emergent strategies. On the contrary, habitus, as a socially constructed system of dispositions or tendencies for action, inhibits or allows managers to reach their potential through the factors at play that govern how they behave and make decisions. To elaborate further, Bourdieu (2005) gives an illustration of how the organisation functions:

The firm is not a homogeneous entity that can be treated as a rational subject – the ‘entrepreneur’ or the ‘management’ – oriented towards a single, unified objective. It is determined (or guided) in its ‘choice’ not only by its position in the structure of the field of production, but also by its internal structure which, as a product of all its earlier history, still orients its present [...] Its strategies are determined through innumerable decisions, small and large, ordinary and extraordinary, which are, in every case, the product of the relationship between, on the one hand, interests and dispositions associated with positions in relations of force within the firm and, on the other, capacities to make those interests or dispositions count, capacities which also depend on the weight of the different agents concerned in the structure, and hence on the volume and structure of their capital.

To Bourdieu, the organisation does not consist of similar people and can be treated as rational people who exist to pursue a single unified goal. The organisation's position in the industry guides its strategic choices and many other factors. This implies that an interaction of different micro-practices inherent with different individuals may result in the organisation attaining its goals.

Gomez (2015) states that numerous studies on practice focus on each element separately in organisational studies and strategic management by exploring a broad range of issues (faithful to the dichotomies that shape but limit strategy research), specific fundamental themes are evident. The following section looked at Bourdieu's fundamental concepts in greater detail.

3.6.2.2.1 Practice: a human activity

‘Concrete human activity’, as Bourdieu terms it, is at the prime of social life, and S-as-P scholars call it practice. Gomez (2015) emphasises that practice is at the core of Bourdieu’s work as he utilises it to account for social life. The author emphasised it as Bourdieu had emphasised earlier that even for fundamental tasks like what people do for a living, concrete human action always takes place in the social sphere (Bourdieu 1998).

Gomez (2015) submits that individuals are constantly a part of their social milieu, influencing their actions. The author further posits that the social environment provides practice meaning and value. People adopt various habits based on their social standing, prior experiences, beliefs and inclinations. Linking with Bourdieu (1998), the idea of agents’ positioning taking, Gomez (2015) maintains that they reflect the conflict between the internalisation of external determinism and the singularity of the self, which is founded on personal inclinations, prior experiences and beliefs. These personal features, however, are also formed and consequently ingrained in a social framework. Bourdieu insists that individuals are agents who act and are acted upon; they are neither intelligent actors nor entirely confined by social systems. Hence, to account for practice and logic, the focus should be on the relationship, independent of people’s will or deliberate decisions and separate from interactions and dispositions, which are influenced by the field’s setting and structure. According to Gomez (2015), the combination of field, capital and habitus is required to achieve balance and provides a comprehensive knowledge of social life. The author maintains that they are intended to be used scientifically and methodically.

Gomez (2015) concludes by stating that as a result, practice cannot be understood apart from the social environment in which it occurs (the field), the capital possessed by agents, which defines their positions and stakes in the field, and the habitus, or inclinations for action.

3.6.2.2.2 Habitus: a generative system of dispositions for practice

To further elaborate on the concept of habitus, it was defined as a type of 'mindless,' or unconscious orchestration of acts that do not require agency and intentionality. The construction of the habitus is a long-term process, and Gomez (2015) posits that it is the driver of practice. Bourdieu (1977) defined it as

'systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is principles of the generation and structuring of practices and representations which can be objectively "regulated" and "regular" without in any way being the product of obedience to rules, objectively adapted to their goals without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary to attain them and, being all this, collectively orchestrated without being the produce of the orchestrating action of a conductor'.

To Bourdieu, the workings of habitus connect practice (agency) with capital and field (structure). It takes a long time to be constructed and constituted to be part of a "social trajectory" (Gomez 2015; Chia 2004; Jenkins et al. 1993). It entails innate dispositions that enable one to act and cope with non-deliberate actions (Gomez 2015; Jenkins et al. 1993). It is permanently ingrained, guiding principles, prejudices, and preferences and guides everyday practices and presentations in dispositions expressed in everyday practice by agents (Grenfell 2016; Gomez 2015). It signifies the values inherent in a human being that can inhibit or allow managers to reach their full potential (Smets et al. 2015; Gomez 2015; Smets et al. 2015; Jenkins et al. 1993).

The term "structured and structuring dispositions" describes how habitus works (Bourdieu 1990). Its structured disposition, which permits repetition of action, is the result of the interpretation of prior experience and learning. The author adds that it is an innovative art that allows improvisation in the specific setting of a new practice as a structuring disposition. While asserting that an agent's surroundings, experiences and past have a

significant impact, Bourdieu maintains that they are capable of being creative, active and imaginative (Bourdieu, 1990). Earlier, it "enables the accomplishment of infinitely varied jobs" (Bourdieu, 1977). In a continuous interaction, practice shapes habitus, which in turn is reorganised and modified by habitus, indicating an interrelationship between practice and habitus.

(Navarro, 2006) echoes the notion that habitus is established through a social rather than an individual process, resulting in patterns that are stable and transportable from one setting to another. However, habitus can be altered in response to specific conditions and over time. Habitus is neither stable nor permanent; it may change in reaction to unforeseen situations or over time. It is neither the result of free will nor of structures. Instead, it is the result of an interplay between the two over time: dispositions shaped by past events and structures, that shape present practices and structures, and, most importantly, that condition our very perceptions of these things (Bourdieu, 1984). Therefore, habitus is developed and replicated spontaneously, "without any active pursuit of coherence... without conscious attention" (Bourdieu 1984).

Therefore, in line with Bourdieu's habitus, individual dispositions formed guiding principles of practices. Through learning and replication, habitus in the context of strategising was characterised and established through social interactions, which resulted in individual routines and capabilities. In a highly volatile environment, habitus was seen as potentially generating a large repertoire or range of possible courses actions to end up with a realised strategy, allowing managers to draw on both transformative and constraining courses of action. The ability to formulate the different courses of action resulted from rules, environment, experience, subjectivity, and value system; essentially, it was both personal and social (Gomez, 2015).

The everyday dispositions were a product of individual managers' experience and learning showed how emergent strategy was imagined as it drove managers to behave and interact in a particular fashion. Analysis of dispositions allowed for a better

understanding and appreciation of how micro-activities of managers influenced the emergence of a strategy.

3.6.2.2.3 Field: a structured space for struggle

Bourdieu defines the concept of the field as the “social world,” a small part of the more significant part of society (Gomez 2015). The sociologist describes fields as part of an organisation’s history, changing over time, and serving a particular interest and what is at stake (Costa and Murphy Mark 2015; Jenkins et al. 1993). Hence, it is crucial to understand the actions or what is said in the social space (Grenfell, 2016).

Field is a social space employed by the habitus and defined as

a network or a configuration of objective relations between positions. These positions are defined objectively in their existence and in the determinations that they impose on their occupants, agents or institutions... (and) by their objective relations with other positions (domination, subordination, homology, etc.) (Bourdieu, 1992).

The importance of the concept of the field in Bourdieu’s theory is the idea of ‘fields,’ which are the many social and institutional arenas where individuals express and replicate their dispositions and compete for the distribution of various forms of capital (Gaventa, 2003). A field is a network, structure or set of relationships that may be intellectual, religious, educational, or cultural, among others (Navarro, 2006). Context and environment are major impacts on habitus, as people's perceptions of power vary depending on the field in which they operate (Gaventa, 2003).

Bourdieu (1980) explains the tensions and contradictions that develop when individuals encounter and are challenged by many settings. His idea helps to explain how individuals can reject authority and dominance in one [area] while expressing complicity in another (Moncrieffe, 2006).

Fields aided in elucidating differential power, such as differing behaviour in different settings. These actions signified the relationships developed and cultivated within the

organisation. These relationships inhibited, motivated or nurtured emergent strategising (Grenfell 2016; Gomez 2015; Jenkins et al. 1993). Additionally, individuals, as social agents, were determined by an indefinite number of interactions involving talks, meetings, agreements and or disagreements and are governed by positions and unspoken rules which are either determined or autonomous (Grenfell 2016; Grenfell 2016; Gomez 2015; Smets et al. 2015; Chia and Holt 2006; Jenkins et al. 1993).

Humans' everyday living, who are social agents, is determined by an indefinite number of interactions involving talks, meetings and disagreements. These interactions happen in the field, which is the social space subdivided into different social fields and governed by rules, positions (dispositions) and how they interact (Grenfell, 2016). These rules are tacit and form part of tacit knowledge that humans within a particular field understand, and these rules can either be determined or autonomous (Chia and Holt, 2006b; Gomez, 2015a; Smets, Greenwood and Lounsbury, 2015; Lemoine, Jenkins and Richardson, 2017).

According to Bourdieu (1982), the link between field and habitus is one of "ontological complicity," as it acts in two ways. On one hand, it is a relation of conditioning: the field constructs the habitus, which manifests the field's immanent necessity (or of a hierarchically intersecting set of fields). On the other hand, it is a relation of knowledge or cognitive construction: habitus contributes to establishing the field as a meaningful world, a world with significance and value, in which it is worthwhile to spend one's activity (Bourdieu, 1989).

The foregoing implies that the organisation under study is the field. The organisation's history changes over time as it responds to the changing environment. This change necessitates managers to develop strategies in response to the changes. Individual managers express their behaviour through social interaction and create a network, structure and relationships through cognition. As the organisation changes, we can better understand the perception of power and the dynamics and their role in emergent strategising.

3.6.2.2.4 Capital: A resource and stake

According to Grenfell (2016), capital is an internal resource of an actor and a possible reason for differentiation. It comes in different forms – economic, cultural, social and capital, and analysed within an organisation as bureaucratic, financial, technological, organisational, social, informational and social recognition of capital leads to symbolic capital (Grenfell 2016; Gomez 2015; Smets et al. 2015; Jenkins et al. 1993).

Capital extends beyond the concept of monetary goods to include social, cultural and symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1986). Equally significant, these forms of capital can be acquired and transferred from one arena to another (Navarro, 2006). Cultural capital – and how it is formed or transferred from other types of capital – plays a crucial part in societal power relations, as it "provides a non-economic form of dominance and hierarchy, as classes differentiate themselves via taste" (Gaventa, 2003). The transition from material to cultural and symbolic forms of capital is mainly responsible for concealing the origins of inequality. According to Bourdieu (1986), "social order is gradually imprinted in people's minds" via "culture products" such as systems of education, language, judgments, values, classification methods and daily activities. These factors result in an unconscious acceptance of social inequalities and hierarchies, "a sense of one's place" and self-excluding behaviours.

Concerning the current study, an appreciation of how capital in the form of resources; in the form of educational qualifications (cultural), networking, social relations and interactions with others in the organisation, past experiences, a position held, the ability to teach online, specialised knowledge within a specific subject area, and the social status of the manager influences emergent strategising.

3.6.2.2.5 Bourdieu's understanding of and doxa

Bourdieu views power within the context of a full "society theory" like Foucault (Navarro 2006). Even though his primary focus was Algerian and French society, Bourdieu's

approach is valuable for analysing power in development and social transformation processes. This idea was also echoed by Gomez (2015), that Bourdieu's approach is endowed with a depth that can benefit our comprehension of various aspects of social activities and practices in situations such as S-as-P (Golsorkhi et al., 2015), in which understanding of power influences how strategies eventually emerge.

To Bourdieu, *doxa* is an important concept in understanding power, which is the combination of both orthodox and heterodox norms and beliefs – the unstated, taken-for-granted assumptions or 'common sense' behind the distinctions we make. Doxa happens when we 'forget the limits' that have given rise to unequal divisions in society: it is 'an adherence to relations of order which, because they structure both the real world and the thought world inseparably, are accepted as self-evident' (Bourdieu, 1984).

While Foucault views power as "ubiquitous" and independent of agency or structure, Bourdieu views power as culturally and symbolically formed and continually re-legitimised through an interaction between agency and structure. This occurs mostly through what is referred to as "habitus," or socialised norms or habits that govern behaviour and thought. Habitus is "the manner in which society becomes deposited in individuals in the shape of enduring dispositions, or trained capacities and organised tendencies to think, feel and behave in determinative ways, which then govern them" (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992).

In any social context, especially an organisation where there are structured structures, power influences emergent strategising. Therefore, the study explored the role of power – the unstated, taken-for-granted assumptions or common sense behind emergent strategising.

3.6.2.2.6 Reflexive sociology

Long before reflexivity became fashionable, Bourdieu proposed a 'reflexive sociology' in which one recognises their prejudices, beliefs and assumptions in the act of creating sense. Self-critical knowledge that shows the "sources of power" and "the causes that explain social inequalities and hierarchies" can become "a potent instrument for advancing social liberation" (Navarro 2006).

3.6.2.3 Evaluation of Bourdieu's approach

Bourdieu's approach is appropriate as it is a method of looking at communities, adaptable and easy to apply (Yang, 2014). However, it is too structuralist, materialist, or deterministic, does not expect change and cannot be rational (Yang, 2014). To curb determinism, the researcher used reflexivity.

3.6.2.4 Relevance of Bourdieu's approach

Despite its criticism, Bourdieu's approach was relevant in this study as it can be empirically utilised to contribute to the advancement of the S-as-P research agenda by overcoming the dichotomies that shape but constrain strategy research. Practice is the central theme in everyday social life, and social theories are used to account for social life (Harrington, 2005). The author further maintains that sociology and social theory are concerned with "sociation" relationships between members or patterns that include not just business partners but a wide range of other types and processes of sociation and socialisation amongst individuals. An idea echoed by Coleman (1990), asserts that it is a theory of action based on purposive action. To account for individual interaction or sociation, Gomez (2015) proposes a 'relational and disposition system' that is essentially a human activity. Bourdieu's social theory is founded on the ongoing dialectic between social structures and human aspects.

Additionally, the micro/macro antagonism, the opposition between structure and agency, and the quandary between strategy planning and emergence (Gomez 2015). Furthermore, Gomez asserts that Bourdieu's approach relates to how two or more people are connected. The author posits that habitus, field, capital and practice are systems narrating for practice as individuals interact to shape non-deliberate strategies. It seems Bourdieu's praxeology or approach evolved from the general use in theory in organisational studies, especially in defining the community of practice, positioning S-as-P to build dynamic linkages between knowledge and practice.

As a concept, Gomez (2015) adds that it is used to account for social life and practice. The author further notes that it has been quoted rather than applied in strategic management and organisational studies. Lastly, this inability to exploit the approach to its full potential necessitates its application as a system and not as individual elements. It deserves greater attention in the practice-based research.

Practice relates to 'concrete human activity' and this human activity happens in the social world, which is the theoretical framing for social practices. It also stresses the interdependence of theoretical and empirical work as a means of constantly challenging and informing one another. Additionally, it seeks to demonstrate how relations of privilege and domination are produced through the interaction of habitus – a matrix of dispositions that shape how the individual operates in the social world – capital (economic, cultural, social, and symbolic capital), and field (social contexts) (Stahl, 2015).

Because of the collaboration between habitus and field that drives practice, "the most effective strategies are those that, being the product of dispositions shaped by the immediate necessity of the field, tend to adjust spontaneously to that necessity, without express intention or calculation." This research explored the concrete human activity at a PHEI by addressing private institution managers' influence on daily routines and cognition in emergent strategising.

3.6.2.5 The contribution of Bourdieu's approach

Gomez (2015) appreciates that the approach not only provides a toolset for analysing strategising activities. It also aids in overcoming some of the dichotomies that S-as-P research has critiqued and sought to address. The dichotomies are a) linking the micro- and macro-levels of strategy b) overcoming the dichotomy between agency and structure and c) escaping the planning versus emergence dilemma. The author adds that it offers a different appreciation of strategy, as strategy is not rational reasoning.

3.6.2.6 Concluding remarks on Bourdieu's approach

Bourdieu's theory of practice provides a social perspective on how strategising emerges in a dynamic environment. It gives researchers an understanding and appreciation of how socially ingrained dispositions in organisations and the different resources that individual employees collectively use influence emergent strategising.

3.7 Conclusion

This chapter operationalised the concept of strategising by critically examining the principal schools of thought: prescriptive, descriptive and configuration. In doing so, it chronicled the historical and epistemological development of strategic thinking, ultimately leading to the rise of S-as-P, which addressed the shortcomings of top-down, rationalist paradigms. By highlighting this, it emphasised the emergent approach to strategising, indicating that strategy typically emerged from informal, iterative and socially situated practices rather than solely from formal planning.

A key contribution of this chapter was it portrayed S-as-P as not just as a theoretical viewpoint, but as a research angle that connected macro-level institutional strategy with micro-level everyday practice. It offered a comprehensive exploration of the foundations of S-as-P, including its ontological stance, essential constructs and its relationship with the dwelling worldview. The discussion also touched on the crucial roles of *phronesis* and *metis*, which are types of practical and adaptive knowledge that have frequently been under-explored in mainstream strategy literature. By doing this, the chapter provided a more humanised and context-aware understanding of the actual performance of the strategy.

What remains insufficiently explored in current research, and what this study aimed to address, was how strategy emerged from the informal, often spontaneous micro-foundational practices of individuals facing uncertainty, ambiguity and resource limitations. This gap was particularly pronounced in lesser-studied institutional environments such as PHEs, where formal strategy tools may be poorly institutionalised

or applied inconsistently. While the S-as-P literature has thoroughly theorised practitioners, practices and praxis, there is an urgent need to investigate how cognition, social interaction, routines, organisational and external factors, and power dynamics interact to inform strategy in real-time, lived organisational contexts.

This study took on this challenge by focusing on the lived experiences of strategising managers and their daily activities at a PHEI within the South African context. It was rooted in a practice-theoretical epistemology and integrates insights from both the micro-foundational turn and Bourdieu's theory of practice to explore how individual agency and institutional factors co-create strategy. By emphasising the dwelling worldview over the conventional building perspective, this research aligned with those who advocate for reframing strategy as something people do rather than something organisations possess.

In this manner, the chapter established a crucial foundation for the empirical investigation in Chapter 5. It elucidated not only what was examined but also the significance of this study and how it addresses a vital gap in strategy literature. The next chapter was continued to operationalise the study by elaborating on the role of individual action and interaction in strategising.

Chapter 4: The role of the individual action and interaction in strategising

"Organisations are made up of individuals, and there is no organisation without individuals. There is nothing quite as elementary; yet this elementary truth seems to have been lost in the increasing focus on structure, routines, capabilities, culture, institutions and various other collective conceptualisations in much of recent strategic organisation research" (Felin and Foss, 2005).

4.1 Introduction

Following the orientation phase of the study, Chapter 2 contextualised PHE. Chapter 3 provided the foundation, offering a comprehensive concept of strategising by operationalising it and exploring the epistemological alternatives available for studying strategy and strategising. Chapters 4 continued with the literature review and theorising of the study. Furthermore, the chapter provided a theoretical foundation for the study, thus key concepts that guided the research.

This chapter utilised an integrative, context-driven and socially aware perspective that highlighted the strategic actor's influence on the development of emerging strategies. It emphasised that individual actions and interactions are central to strategy formation, rather than peripheral, acknowledging that strategising happens frequently outside of formal processes through micro-practices embedded in daily organisational activities. In this way, the chapter referenced the micro-foundations literature to illustrate how unplanned and unintended actions, shaped by cognitive processes, routines, and power relations, played a role in S-as-P. This viewpoint was supported by Frödin (2024), who suggests that institutional emergence is fundamentally based on intersubjective social interaction and cognition.

Aligned with Bourdieu's theory of practice, the chapter recognised that strategising exists within a field of power and is shaped by habitus the embodied dispositions of individuals operating in a structured environment. Therefore, this chapter focused on actual practices (both action and interaction) within PHEIs, and how they facilitate or constrain emergent strategic outcomes.

The traditional strategy process view were interrogated here, with increasing recognition of illogical and non-linear decision-making within organisations. This study aligned with the "empirically informed social science viewpoint" (Clegg, Schweitzer, Whittle and Pitelis, 2017) and the notion of social context doings (Golsorkhi et al. 2012), emphasising that strategising occurs along a continuum from the deliberate to the emergent. As such, this chapter investigated how daily micro-level activities whether habitual, cognitive or socially constructed became the foundation for emergent strategies in PHEIs.

As indicated in Chapters 1 and 2, this study subscribed to the notion that real-world strategising occurred along a continuum between perfectly deliberate and perfectly emergent strategies and how individuals' actions and interactions contribute to emergent strategising. Therefore, the interplay between perfectly deliberate and perfectly emergent is crucial, and strategy can emanate from daily activities to cope with the different situations an organisation faces (both micro and macro).

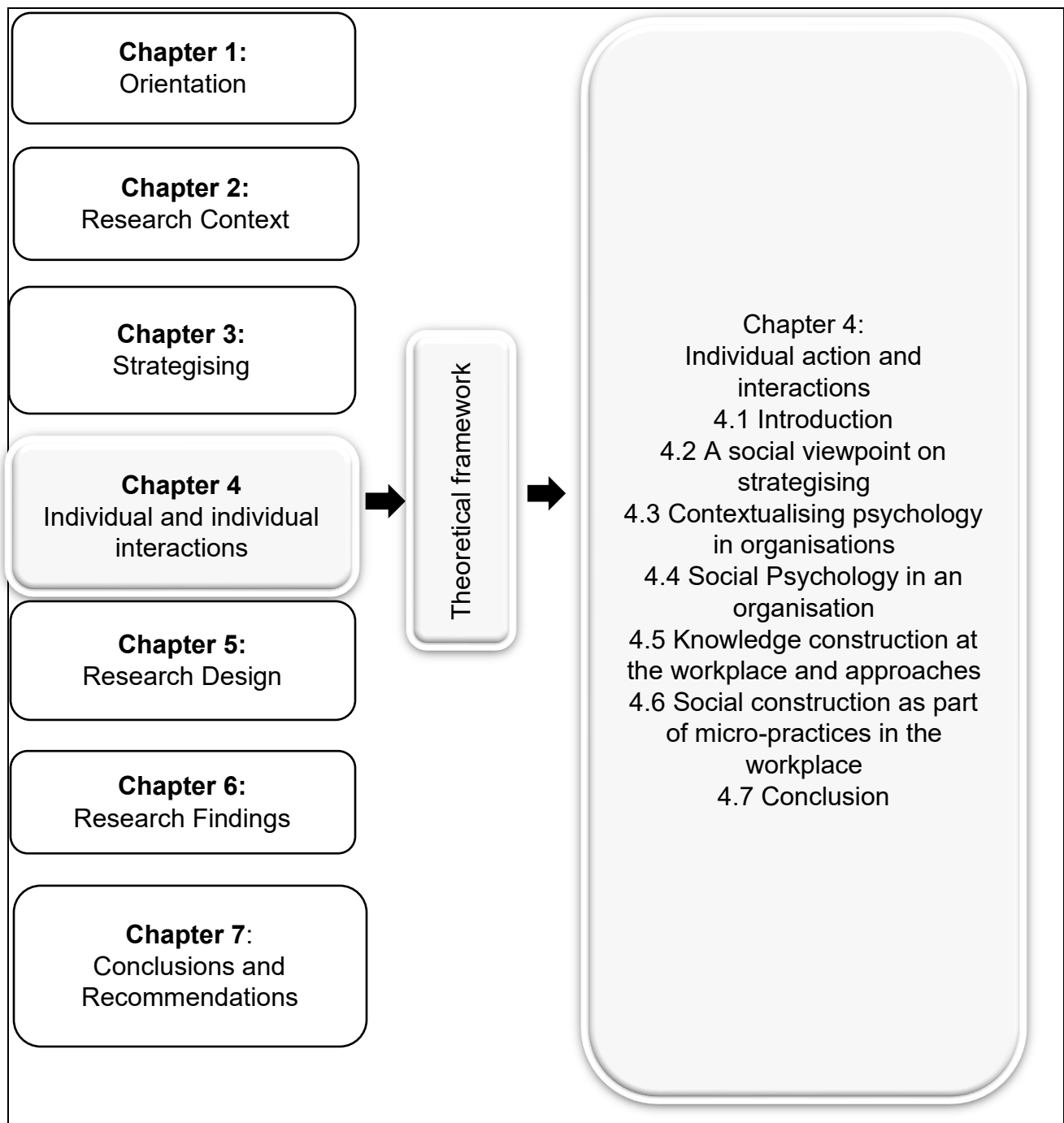


Figure 4.1: The chapter outline

As shown in Figure 4.1, Chapter 4 continued with the theme of the study and investigated literature related to individual actions and interactions as an empirically informed social science practised through their actions and interactions (micro-practices) that result in emergent strategising.

Guided by Bourdieu's theory of practice, this chapter highlighted how habitus and power dynamics shaped the field in which strategising occurred. The micro-foundation lens, therefore, allowed for a nuanced understanding of how cognition, interaction and structure intersected to shape strategising, particularly within the complex, actor-driven environments of PHEIs. Additionally, the study built on the notion that social actions, processes and behaviours at the micro level characterised strategising with a targeted examination of social realities, emphasising the enabling or constraining actions. Therefore, the chapter included contextualising psychology in an organisation. It further delved into social psychology in the organisation and knowledge construction at the workplace and the different approaches of knowledge construction. Furthermore, the chapter looked at social construction and the role of power in the social arena.

4.2 A social viewpoint on strategising

This section deepened the study's core assumption that strategising is a socially embedded, empirically informed process, enacted through the everyday actions and interactions of individual managers. In the context of this study, which explored emergent strategy-making in PHEIs, the social viewpoint became critical. It challenged the traditional structural and top-down perspectives by shifting analytical focus to the micro-level, where strategy actually happens often unplanned and interactional.

In aligning with strategising as an empirically informed social science practised by strategy actors, this part firstly explored individuals' actions and interactions and contextualised them within organisational studies. The study of individual actions and interactions was positioned within the broader organisational theory under organisational behaviour; the former concerns understanding social organisations and how organisations operate (Cakir, 2012) while the latter concerns the interaction between employees and management (Mullins and Christy, 2010). Traditionally, process research has focused on structure, routines, capabilities, culture, institutions and various other collective conceptualisations, which are aggregate concepts at the expense of the

individual; yet, no organisation exists without the individual (Felin and Foss, 2005; J. Barney and Felin, 2013; Foss and Foss, 2022).

Secondly, the different approaches and viewpoints on how individuals construct knowledge in everyday interactions and practices are examined, which have a powerful effect on cognition and behaviour. Individuals actively construct their understanding of the world through their experiences, interactions and interpretations of the information they encounter. The sub-processes of micro-practices (micro-foundations) as proposed by Barney et al., (2013), are micro-level mechanisms are more stable, fundamental and broad, and provide an applicable framework for investigating micro practices within the parameters of the current study. These micro-practices served as the bridge between individual cognition and emergent organisational outcomes (Rabetino et al., 2025).

Drawing on Harvey (2022), the study adopted the view that strategic sensing and response capabilities begin with micro-level cognition and evolve through team-based behavioural dynamics. Hence, managers co-constructed meaning through shared frames, interpretive routines and communicative acts, which, in turn, shaped how strategies emerged and evolved.

This chapter described known mechanisms and identified under-theorised aspects. Strategy emerged through interaction, yet how micro-level practices differed across managerial levels and were influenced by institutional norms, power asymmetries, and educational mandates in PHE in the South African context remained underexplored. This gap was evident when focusing on the organisational context of social construction, where power, position and institutional norms shaped legitimised knowledge, pursued strategies and definitions of what was strategic.

In summary, this section asserted that a social lens was essential for understanding emergent strategising, while also acknowledging the empirical studies, particularly within PHE contexts, had often overlooked the micro-level practices that drive strategy from the ground up, including all the levels of the organisational structure. By foregrounding individual cognition, interaction and context, this study contributed to closing that gap

while maintaining an open space for discovering what remains unknown through empirical exploration.

The following section examined the significance of social construction in context and its power relationship. The study acknowledged the significant influence of organisational context on micro-practices in the workplace.

4.3 Contextualising psychology in organisations

To meaningfully explore micro-practices and their influence on emergent strategising, micro-practices were contextualised within the broader subject of organisational studies, organisational behaviour, management, and, ultimately, the field of psychology in organisations. This section established the conceptual bridge between the disciplines of organisational behaviour and psychology, as well as the micro-foundational focus of this study. By doing so, it underscored how cognition and interaction become not only tools of individual adaptation but core mechanisms of emergent strategising.

As depicted in Figure 4.2, organisational studies are divided into organisational theory (OT) and behavioural or field areas (Cakir, 2012).

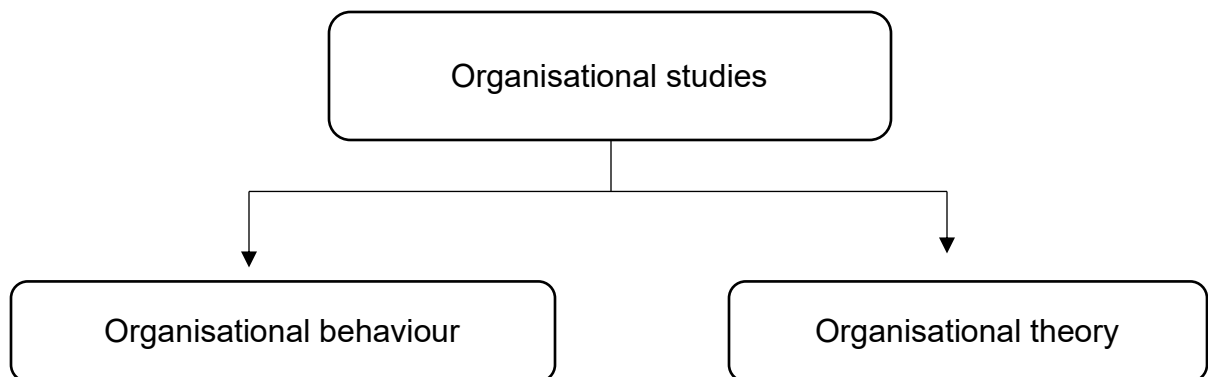


Figure 4.2: Psychology contextualised (own compilation)

OT deals with the organisation in its entity, how it adapts, strategies and structures at the macro-level analysis (Cakir, 2012). In contrast, organisational behaviour (OB) pertains to examining individual and group actions within an organisation (Cakir, 2012) at the micro level. Brooks (2008) further elaborates that human behaviour is investigated in organisational situations, emphasising individual and group processes and activities. As

a result, it entails investigating organisational and management processes in a dynamic environment, primarily focusing on the human aspects of such action (Brooks, 2008). In the same vein, Mullins and Christy (2010) concur that common definitions of organisational behaviour (OB) include studying and understanding individual and group behaviour and structural patterns to enhance organisational performance and effectiveness. Furthermore, Cronin, Midgley and Jackson (2014) agree that the subject is anchored in the behavioural sciences, particularly sociology and psychology. It underlies management studies in many ways, indicating a close relationship between OB and management theory.

The field of study draws on theory, methods and principles from various disciplines to learn about individuals' perceptions, values, learning capacities and actions while working in groups and within organisations, as well as to analyse the impact of the external environment on the organisation and its human resources, missions, objectives, and strategies (Sahni 2021; Mullins and Christy 2010).

Gidson, Ivancevich, Donnelly and Konopaske (2012) assert that organisational behaviour is multi-disciplinary in nature, drawing from behavioural sciences such as psychology (individual level of analysis) and sociology, social psychology, anthropology and political science. This agrees with Robbins, Judge and Millett, (2015), who claim that organisational behaviour is a multi-disciplinary field (individual, group and organisational level of analysis). Sociology studies how individuals interact in particular situations, including social environments and culture (Gidson et al., 2012; Robbins, Judge and Millett, 2015). According to Mullins and Christy (2010), psychology is how individuals interpret the world, learn, absorb information, acquire distinct attitudes and ideas, and so on, which influences their attitudes toward work and the organisation, among other things (Bratton, 2020). Social psychology studies how people perceive, influence and interact with one another (Myers and Twenge 2018). Components of psychology are employed to help comprehend the person's nature as a foundation for better understanding people's behaviour at the individual level in organisations -micro-level (Clegg, et al., 2016).

Recent research conducted by Frödin (2024) highlights the importance of examining cognition as it emerges from social and institutional contexts, rather than being confined

to mere internal processing. In a complementary vein, Harvey (2022) examines how managerial cognition, intertwined with different levels of dynamics, forms the micro-foundational basis for sensing and strategic response. Collectively, these findings substantiated the principal contention of this chapter: that a comprehensive understanding of emergent strategising necessitates a thorough analysis of how individuals contextualised and enacted their interpretations within organisational frameworks.

The psychological grounding provided a foundational framework for subsequent analysis, particularly in the domain of social psychology. At this juncture, the process of individual meaning-making begins to exert influence on others, collaboratively constructing shared understandings and directing the trajectory of organisational actions. The theory of micro-foundations asserts that these mechanisms transcend mere antecedents, positioning themselves as integral components of strategic development (Felin et al., 2015). Consequently, psychology is not dissociated from strategy; rather, it is inherently situated within it.

The theoretical exploration remained insufficient, particularly in the context of HE, regarding how individual cognition, constrained by institutional pressures and power dynamics, evolved into emergent strategic behaviours over time. This conceptual void was pivotal to the present study, as it encapsulated the intricate nature of the PHEI environment and the nuanced strategising processes that frequently elude formal documentation.

In summary, this section illustrated that psychology, especially in relation to cognition, learning, perception and behaviour, provided an essential perspective for analysing the micro-level processes that underlay emergent strategising. These insights paved the path for the subsequent section, which enhanced the analysis by concentrating on social psychology as the immediate context within which cognition and behaviour harmonise through interaction.

4.4 Social psychology in an organisation

Building on the focus of the previous section on individual cognition, this section shifts to social psychology as the perspective through which cognition is socially embedded, where individual attitudes, perceptions and behaviours are shaped through interactions with others in organisational contexts. In the context of this study, which examined how managers in PHEIs engaged in emergent strategising, social psychology served as a critical framework for understanding the processes of knowledge acquisition, influenced and meaning-making at the micro-level.

Social psychology investigated how individuals perceive, influence and interact within social environments. This field was particularly relevant to the current study's focus on micro-foundations, as it situated cognition not merely as an internal process but as one deeply influenced by social contexts, cultural norms and interpersonal dynamics (Frödin, 2024). This perspective aligned with the study's conceptualisation of strategy as a socially constructed and emergent phenomenon propelled by continuous human interaction.

To construct a theoretical foundation, this section drew upon four fundamental assumptions of social psychology:

1. Human behaviour was contextually situated, shaped by both innate dispositions (nature) and experiential learning (nurture).
2. Social influence constituted a significant determinant of individual behaviour.
3. Cognition possessed a social dimension, entailing shared interpretations and meaning-making processes.
4. Individuals actively engaged in meaning-making, possessing the capacity to alter or reinforce social structures through their practices.

These assumptions reinforced the study's position that emergent strategising was not orchestrated from a hierarchical level; rather, it organically materialises from grassroots interactions, through micro-level social processes. For instance, Harvey (2022) illustrated how team-level cognition, driven by dynamic interactions, enhances an organisation's

capacity to adapt to emerging strategic challenges. This evidence supported the notion that strategy was realised in instances of interaction, decision-making and sensemaking by managers, not solely within the confines of formal strategy meetings.

Historically, social psychology has evolved in response to significant societal questions, ranging from early debates on instinct versus learning (Dewey, 1922) to the post-WWII examination of authority, power, and group dynamics. While this intellectual lineage holds significance, the primary concern of this study lay not in general explanations of human behaviour but in exploring how individuals' experiences and internalised social frameworks shaped their strategic actions and interactions within their institutions.

An area that remained under-theorised, particularly within PHEIs in the South African context, was how managers' personal experiences, moulded by institutional norms, social roles and power dynamics, inform their strategic behaviours in practice. This study positioned social psychology as a conduit between personal insights and organisational dynamics, facilitated an investigation into how interactional meaning-making, rooted in both conscious and unconscious processes, contributes to emergent strategic outcomes. It further opened avenues for empirical inquiry into the specific instincts, beliefs and relational experiences affecting how managers interpreted complexities, navigated decisions and contributed to strategy in the absence of formal directives.

In this regard, social psychology provided not only a theoretical foundation but also a methodological framework for this research. The study presupposed that managers are not passive recipients of institutional expectations; rather, they are active interpreters and agents within their social environments, capable of exercising agency and creating meaning. This concept laid the groundwork for the subsequent section, which explored knowledge construction at work, an additional layer through which micro-practices and strategic sensemaking were developed.

4.4.1 Four broad core assumptions of social psychology

Understanding the micro-foundational elements of emergent strategising necessitated a comprehensive analysis of how individuals conceptualise and navigate their social environments. As delineated by Greenberg et al. (2013), there are four fundamental assumptions that underpin the domain of social psychology. These principles are not only pivotal for comprehending human behaviour but also facilitate an explanation of how strategic actions manifest from individual-level behaviours and interactions within organisational contexts. A summary of these assumptions was presented in Table 4.1, with a more detailed discussion provided subsequently in relation to this study.

Table 4.1: Core assumptions of social psychology

The following section briefly described the core assumptions of social psychology as described by Greenberg et al. (2013).

Social psychology is based on four core assumptions.			
The combined influence of specific aspects of the person and the situation determines behaviour.	Almost all human thoughts, feelings and actions are social in nature and involve other people.	To comprehend behaviour, we must first understand how people perceive themselves and their social environment.	The scientific method is the most effective method for accurately understanding social behaviour.

Adapted from Greenberg et al. (2013)

4.4.1.1 Behaviour is a Joint Product of the Person and the Situation

Kurt Lewin (1936), the father of modern social psychology, advocated that any conduct is influenced by a person's unique traits and certain situational factors. A person's immediate environment significantly impacts their thinking, feeling and social behaviour. The concept of the situation's power is also known as the "great lesson of social psychology". It can be interpreted to mean that certain events produce nearly the same response from humans, regardless of how they differ.

Greenberg et al. (2013) echo the same by stating that each of us is a distinct individual with a collection of personality traits, values, attitudes and worldviews that distinguish us from everyone else. The authors postulate that individuals develop dispositions, which are steadfast preferences, ways of thinking and behavioural tendencies that appear over time and in various situations. The dispositions are because of the distinct genetic makeup that individuals inherit from their biological parents and even more so because

of the lessons we have learned from the vast array of experiences we have had over our lives. Therefore, the individual's situation, personality, attitudes and values influence the ways in which they interact.

As a central tenet of understanding individual action and interaction, it seems human behaviour was not solely determined by the individual's distinctiveness but by the social situation in which it occurs or find themselves. It can be implied that, for example, it was fundamentally important to note the significant influence that the organisation and external contextual factors had on individual actions and how they interact. As discussed in Chapter 3, consistency of action was assumed as an internalised disposition in the dwelling worldview and hence specific behaviour patterns can be predicted that influence emergent strategising.

Further, utilising the micro-foundational approach, it was posited that managerial actions are not merely isolated decisions; rather, they are responses to the perceived organisational context. This notion is bolstered by Frödin (2024), who contends that intricate intersubjective dynamics influence both cognition and action. Therefore, within the context of PHEI, this framework elucidated why managers confronted with identical organisational constraints exhibited divergent responses, where some initiated transformative changes while others reinforced existing practices. Consequently, this study underscored the importance of contextually embedded experiences as a vital avenue for comprehending the formation of emergent strategies.

4.4.1.2 Behaviour Depends on a Socially Constructed View of Reality

According to Greenberg et al. (2013), the second tenet of social psychology is that almost all human ideas, feelings and behaviours are social in character since they involve and are influenced by other people. Individuals frequently encounter and engage with others throughout their lives. The authors posit that even when they are entirely alone, individuals often keep each other busy and thereby influence each other's thinking. As a result, relationships with people affect how individuals perceive the world. Therefore,

knowledge and consequent conduct are outcomes of the social world in which individuals are habitats.

As indicated in Chapter 3, in a dwelling worldview, individuals in their everyday social practices shape individual agents in such a way that they act and interact, for the most part, spontaneously, self-referentially to overcome immediate problems and obstacles. Additionally, individuals are thought to be wholly absorbed in and closely linked to their environment in all its complexities. This study supported the notion that individuals within the organisation understand and interpret their surroundings differently and experience, influencing their behaviour and interactions with others. The implication was that individuals within an organisation may have different perspectives and interpretations of the same situation or event based on their views, backgrounds and previous experiences. Hence, these perspectives and interpretations influenced how people behaved and interacted in the workplace. As part of the research, the researcher asked in-depth questions that unravelled the complexities of how individuals influenced each other to develop emergent strategies.

4.4.1.3 Our Social Cognition Strongly Influences Behaviour

In 1958, Fritz Heider highlighted the crucial role causal explanations of others' actions play in influencing people's behaviour. The fact that social cognition influences behaviour should not be surprising since our perception of reality is influenced by the individual's connections on a social level. Individuals regularly interact with people such as managers, colleagues, superiors, or anyone else. These individuals tend to invest considerable time and energy in comprehending and making sense of their actions and words, hence, highlighting the significant role people play in our daily lives. Whether or not an individual's understanding of others is proper, it significantly impacts their behaviour in social situations (Greenberg et al., 2013).

As indicated in Chapter 3, individuals' actions were mutually exclusive from their environment. Their actions were directed at overcoming immediate impediments (purposive practical coping). Be that as it may, individuals' beliefs, perceptions and

attitudes about the organisation shape how one behaves in social situations, such as strategising. This implied that individuals' roles in organisations either impeded or supported emergent strategising, as well as their ability to maintain relationships within the organisation and communicate effectively. This, therefore, impacted the choices that individuals made when faced with a challenge or opportunity in operating a business.

This was especially important in settings like PHEIs, where strategy was frequently informal and enacted through negotiation, alignment and power dynamics. Further, Harvey (2022) shows that team cognition and shared beliefs significantly affect adaptive responses, reinforcing the idea that cognition is not just individual, it is relational. Therefore, this study explored how shared cognitive frames influenced both the intent and emergence of strategy through everyday organisational practices.

4.4.1.4 The best way to understand social behaviour is to use the scientific method

Kurt Lewin also inspired the fourth assumption. The author asserts that science is the greatest means to explain the origins and effects of social life's ideas, feelings and behaviours. According to Greenberg et al. (2013), anthropology, economics, sociology, history, the humanities and philosophy are just a few disciplines that try to comprehend human behaviour. This is done through scientific methods. The most obvious way that social psychology differs from these other fields of study is by focusing on the scientific method, particularly the use of experiments, to create, test and improve hypotheses to understand the factors that influence social behaviour. The discipline was created as a means of honing intuitive thinking and assisting in discovering the truth by offering more precise perceptions of how the world functions. The scientific method is the foundation for social psychologists learning about the factors influencing people's beliefs, feelings and behaviours. This was dealt with more in Chapter 5 when outlining the research methodology.

4.4.2 Concluding remarks on social psychology

This section has demonstrated that social psychology provides a comprehensive framework for understanding the intricate interplay between individual meaning-making, interpersonal influence and contextual perception in driving strategic action. From a

micro-foundational perspective, emergent strategising is inherently social, rooted in the dynamics of individual behaviour, reactions and interactions with others in their environments. The beliefs, instincts and accumulated experiences of individuals significantly shaped their strategic behaviour, often manifesting in informal and unstructured manners.

Within the context of this study, these premises aligned with a constructivist-interpretivist epistemology, which postulated that knowledge and strategic intent are not pre-existing constructs but rather emerge through social interactions. Micro-practices such as interpreting ambiguity, negotiating meaning, or participating in workplace dialogues constitute strategic actions that actively shape the future rather than merely responding to it. This rationale underpinned the adoption of methodologies such as semi-structured interviews and written narratives, which aimed to unveil the concealed, socially constructed aspects of strategising within PHEIs.

The subsequent section was built on this groundwork by exploring how routine workplace practices contributed to knowledge construction, thereby establishing a connection between thought, action and strategic emergence.

4.5 Knowledge construction in the workplace and approaches

The previous section delved into how individuals learn, interpret the world, absorb information, acquire distinct attitudes and ideas, and so on, based on the environment or situation in which they find themselves, in this instance, in the workplace. The workplace is a central concern for understanding the micro-foundational practices that underpin emergent strategising in PHEIs.

In accordance with the constructivist–interpretivist paradigm underpinning this research, knowledge is conceptualised not as a static or transferable entity but as a subjective construct arising from social interaction and experiential contexts. As such, individuals are actively engaged in the process of knowledge creation, co-constructing understanding in relation to their peers and the organisational milieu. This perspective

was congruent with the study's emphasis on micro-practices, specific contextual behaviours and dialogues through which strategic sensemaking occurred.

As indicated earlier in this chapter, various epistemological orientations offered different approaches and viewpoints on how individuals constructed knowledge in everyday interactions and practices that have a powerful effect on cognition and behaviour. They create knowledge and increase the base of knowledge that leads to an enhanced understanding of the world around them by using *phronesis*, *metis*, *episteme* and or *techne*. This section provides a brief explanation and elaboration of the most prominent viewpoints in creating knowledge, the rationale and the main paradigms guiding this study, particularly in emergent strategising.

This pluralistic approach to knowledge supported the central claim of this study: that strategy emerged through the interaction of knowledge forms, situated judgments and real-time negotiation of meaning. In dynamic institutional environments like PHEIs, where change is constant and often unpredictable, managers frequently operate between deliberate and emergent modes of strategising. As highlighted in the S-as-P perspective, these manifestations of strategy intentional, realised, unrealised or ephemeral reflect how practitioners engage in and adapt to unfolding realities.

The implications are unequivocal: strategy transcends mere planning; it was actively experienced, enacted and interpreted in practice. It was intricately woven into the processes through which managers comprehend institutional expectations, navigate conflicting demands and co-create meaning in collaboration with their peers. Frödin (2024) posits that such cognitive processes are not solely internal and isolated phenomena; rather, they arise from social interactions and contextual engagements.

The study drew on Wilhelm Wundt's foundational work in psychology, which underscored the analytical study of the human mind, and on contemporary organisational theorists such as Arnold (2010). This study assumed that mental processes and social interaction are inseparable in the creation of meaning. Consequently, how managers thought, acted

and made sense of the world was influenced both by internal interpretation and by the discursive practices, norms and power structures in which they were embedded.

Ultimately, Chapter 3 delineated the dichotomy of dwelling and building worldviews, presenting a dual lens through which to comprehend the engagement of individuals with their organisational environments. These worldviews epitomise contrasting epistemological approaches: intuitive and responsive as opposed to planned and structured both of which are crucial for theorising the emergence of strategy as it materialises through quotidian interactions within the workplace.

In conclusion, this section substantiated that knowledge construction within organisations was interpretive, context-dependent and relational. Thus, it was through these epistemic practices rooted in practical engagement and a shared understanding that micro-practices cultivated strategic trajectories. The subsequent section augmented this analysis by investigating social construction as an intrinsic characteristic of organisational micro-practices and its ramifications for power dynamics, discourse and strategic formulation.

4.5.1 Constructivism paradigms and knowledge creation

Constructivism offers the ontological and epistemological grounding for this study. Rooted in that learning is a process of meaning construction; it is how people make sense of their experiences and subjective interpretations through interaction with the world (Merriam and Caffarella, 2008). Gogus (2012) asserts that the adjective constructivist is derived from the noun constructivism, which specifies the theory of reality and knowledge (epistemology). It is based on the premise that humans generate knowledge and meaning from their experiences, mental structures and beliefs used to interpret objects and events.

Constructivism emphasises the significance of acquiring information, beliefs and abilities via learning. It claims that understanding is built by combining existing knowledge and new information, and individuals can embrace new concepts or incorporate them into their

pre-existing worldviews. Constructivist learning is a learning theory that describes how individuals learn. According to the idea, learning occurs when students generate meaning by interpreting knowledge in the context of their own experiences (Gogus, 2012).

This idea is further echoed by Sahni (2021), who asserts that constructivist theories concern knowledge and how individuals learn it. In organisations, it emphasises the individual's active engagement in generating, comprehending and making meaning of knowledge. Individuals are active participants in creating and determining decisions. Therefore, organisational environments are not the result of objective reality; instead, they are enacted via their members' social interaction and try to make meaning of what is happening around them (Critchley and Nagai (2012) concur, referring to organisations as the outcomes of their members' ongoing interaction. This is in contrast with a building mode that predefined goals direct behaviour. Focusing efforts on results leads to purposeful action (Chia and Rasche, 2018a).

In essence, constructivism is mainly used in teaching and learning (Reath 2022; Lombardo and Kantola 2021; Gogus 2012). It stresses the validity of knowledge claims and epistemological issues, namely, knowledge acquisition and retention. Gogus (2012) further maintains that constructivism is a learning philosophy that asserts that students actively develop or "build" their own knowledge. Furthermore, constructivists believe that knowledge is obtained less by transmission from one person to another and more by teachers and students working together to develop or expand their knowledge in social interactions. The author further posits that, although active knowledge creation and social interaction are fundamental principles in most constructivist learning models, scholars disagree on the importance of these two concepts in the learning process. The author expands by indicating two types of constructivism: psychological and social.

As indicated earlier, the current study favours a constructivist approach. Raskin (2002) posits that there are wide varieties of constructivism. Despite their differences, there are several areas of similarity and diversity (Rüegg-Stürm et al., 2015). Raskin (2002) avers that given the significant theoretical differences, constructivist psychologists are divided on whether achieving a singularly recognised orientation is desirable, hence, the exclusion in most psychology books. Rüegg-Stürm et al. (2015) explore the peculiarities

and areas of contrast and/or agreement of the three archetypal constructivist methodologies the programme of social construction, systemic constructivism and the empirical programme of constructivism.

Subcategories of constructivism

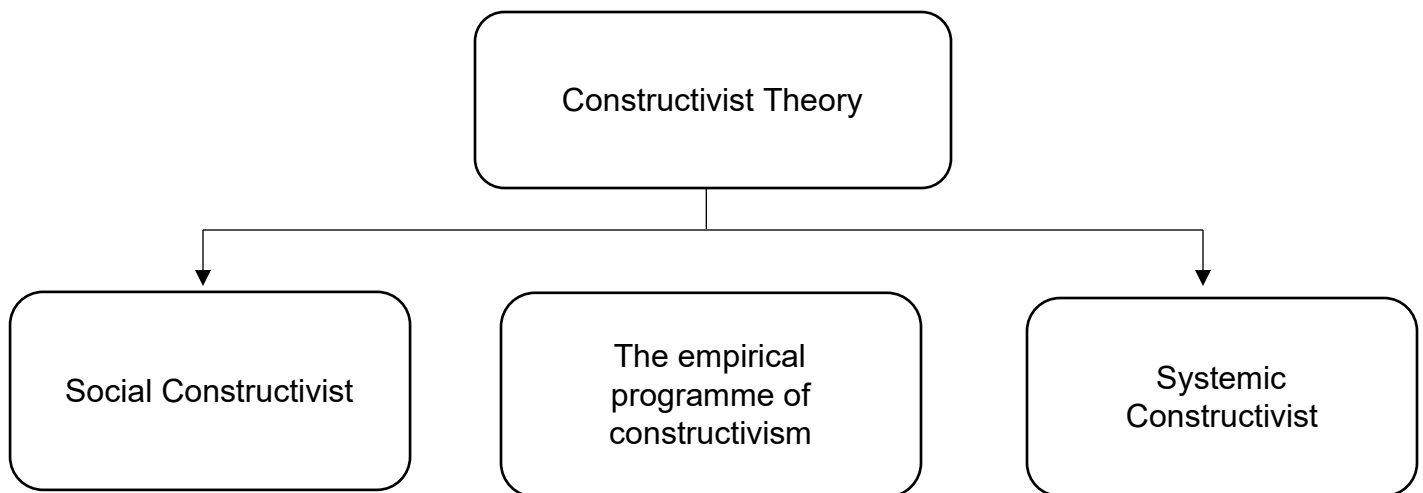


Figure 4.3: Subcategories of constructivist theory (Adapted from (Rüegg-Stürm et al. 2015))

The following subsection succinctly describes the three archetypes, as depicted in Figure 4.3.

4.5.2 Approaches to the construction of knowledge

4.5.2.1 Systemic constructivism

This approach, according to (Rüegg-Stürm et al. 2015), to determine more explicit conceptual underpinnings, systems theory can be used to understand constructivism. The authors posit that by drawing an analytical distinction between everyday activities and scientific activities, human cognition does not represent an objective, given world but

resembles an active process of making a reality. In other words, the sole significant criterion is viability, defined as the ability to deal with the outside world successfully. As a result, in reaction to earlier cognition and experience, the cognition process goes through historical evolution and differentiation processes. The authors buttress that whatever is accepted as real, relevant and true affects cognition and vice versa. Cognitive structures and content are mutually reliant, referred to as 'self-referentiality'. Based on this idea, information and knowledge are considered processes of informing and knowing rather than fixed substances. Foester (1981) termed it 'operative epistemology' as an ongoing enactment.

In 1977, Piaget believed that learning does not happen passively but through active meaning formation. Jean Piaget, a cognitive psychologist who explored how humans build information that cannot be attained simply by generating mental representations of objective reality, is well-known in constructivist psychological theory. Piaget instead concentrated on universal knowledge, such as the principles of conservation and reversibility, which may be acquired through more complicated cognitive processes such as reflection and logic.

The author says that when we, as learners, face an event or a scenario that challenges our thinking, we generate a condition of disequilibrium or imbalance. To restore harmony or balance, we must change our thinking. To do this, we make meaning of new information by linking it with what we already know or by seeking to incorporate it into our previous knowledge. When we cannot do so, we resort to accommodation, which involves rearranging our current understanding to a higher level of thinking.

This relates to reality construction through communication (Rüegg-Stürm et al. 2015). In this view, instances of communication are the fundamental components of social systems. In communication, what is deemed genuine, significant and true is constantly co-created. The authors further critique it by contending that systemic constructivism is an operational epistemology. In the sense that there is never a complete description of phenomena, as knowledge creation is fundamentally processual and susceptible to future progress. Furthermore, it disregards individual consciousness as unimportant for the study of communication or social reality. Additionally, the process of making distinctions

assumes the possibility of relatively clear-cut distinctions, although most empirical phenomena and social references are characterised by inherent ambiguity and fuzziness.

For this study, systemic constructivism helped to conceptualise how cognition and knowledge evolved through iterative interaction. Still, it was complemented by perspectives that centre the social and relational aspects of knowledge construction.

4.5.2.2 Social constructivism

Beaumie (2019) argues that the relevance of culture and context in comprehending what happens in society and building knowledge based on this understanding is emphasised by social constructivism (Derry 1999) and Foerster, 2003) as reality is always a reality for and by humans (Rüegg-Stürm et al. 2015). Furthermore, Amineh and Asl (2015) posit that this viewpoint is strongly related to several modern ideas, notably Vygotsky and Bruner's developmental theories and Bandura's social cognitive theory (Schunk and Usher, 2019). According to Beaumie (2019), social constructivism is based on reality, knowledge and learning. Beaumie explains that social constructivists argue that human behaviour creates reality. Rüegg-Stürm et al. (2015) further accentuate that reality is rooted in everyday actions and diverse practices, which social actors constantly enact.

The idea was supported by Kim (2001), who asserts that knowledge, according to social constructivists, is likewise a human product that is socially and culturally formed. Learning is a social process; it neither occurs solely within an individual nor is the passive development of actions influenced by external circumstances (Beaumie, 2019). Essentially, individuals need to be engaged in social activities for learning to occur. It can be summed up that social constructivism relates to the "primacy of relational, conversational, social practices as the source of individual psychic life" (Stam, 1998). This reality is socially constructed and negotiated (Raskin and Sampson 2002). Rüegg-Stürm et al. (2015) emphasise that social action is primarily driven by implicit daily knowledge that is valid and objective in a specific situation or context, but achieves legitimacy and objectivity through social construction processes that transcend these circumstances and settings.

However, Rüegg-Stürm et al. (2015) posit that the social construction approach presumes a broadly agreed common concept of 'reality' and 'knowledge,' notwithstanding its fragility and variety. Overall, the study programme's intuition is a significant reference for constructivist epistemologies; without rigorous examination of the underlying premises, the mere proclamation of 'reality' and 'knowledge' as built becomes trivial.

This perspective also aligned closely with S-as-P, where strategy is understood as something people do, rather than something organisations have.

4.5.2.3 The empirical programme of constructivism

When contrasted to systemic and social constructivism, this approach argues that presuming any construction theory is problematic (Rüegg-Stürm et al. 2015). This means that the construction process study should not be pre-conceptualised but practically examined (Latour, 2005). The research method is not primarily led by theoretical premises, which tend to "black box" what would otherwise demand clear exposition and explanation. The empirical programme creates a distinct repertoire of research tools and methodological procedures to guide the empirical research process in its openness, messiness and fragility, thereby, opening social realities that may be overlooked. This is in line with the ideas of the dwelling worldview. Therefore, the programme is after the obvious that is taken for granted, "subtle nuances" (Chia et al., 2018b).

Rüegg-Stürm et al. (2015) posit that this programme is intimately related to the practice turn and can be related to Bourdieu's approach, which is one of the lenses guiding this study. Their commonalities relate to comprehending how ordinary routines, placed behaviours and local practices generate the 'stability' and 'objectivity' of 'reality'. As Latour (2005) echoes, the research process must be experimentally rebuilt and explained in its formation, unlike in systemic constructivism, where neither pre-specified theories nor everyday theories of the players involved are acceptable.

The authors elaborate by stating that the primary concern of research is to establish methods as research practices that allow us to examine 'world production' as the continuous 'manufacturing' of knowledge under unpredictable situations. They essentially emphasise that the empirical programme of constructivism a) questions not just unchallenged dichotomies in the social sciences but also any assumed basis. b) This is important for the study of reality, knowledge and fact, which cannot be assumed but must be described in their production. c) It is also crucial for the study of agency, which cannot be understood as inherent in any person or organisation but must be seen as the product of inscriptions and enacted networks. d) As a result, this study programme is constantly concerned with epistemological questions, such as the status of (scientific) knowledge and the unique methods of (scientific) knowledge generation.

The foregoing argument implies that while various constructivist epistemologies argue for certain theoretical viewpoints, constructivism's empirical approach focuses on the heterogeneity and diversity of contextual processes and idiosyncratic actions crucial to the formation and stability of 'reality' in specific circumstances (Rüegg-Stürm et al., 2015).

As indicated in Chapter 3, micro-practices, which are more stable and fundamental, describe the individual action and their practices and are about locating (theoretically and empirically) the proximate causes of a phenomenon. Therefore, while the constructivist approach guides the current study, it still acknowledges the importance of all the archetypes and their influences in exploring the micro-practices. In this study, the constructivist theory was used to explain the explanatory gap by explaining the influences of cognition and the routine behaviours they engage in that influence emergent strategising. Additionally, it was important to understand the underlying actions and interactions that influenced emergent strategising, and hence, develop a social theoretical perspective on micro practices that influence emergent strategising by managers.

For this research, the empirical programme supported the idea that micro-practices were observed in their unfolding context, not assumed through abstract models. This was also connected with the dwelling worldview introduced in Chapter 3, which suggested that

individuals respond adaptively to the affordances and constraints of their lived environment.

4.5.3 Concluding remarks on knowledge construction in the workplace and approaches

This section has outlined that constructivist epistemologies provide a critical framework for understanding how managers generate meaning, act and strategise within complex institutional environments. The three approaches systemic, social and empirical each provide distinct insights into the processes by which knowledge is constructed through interaction, experience and embedded practices.

By applying constructivist theory to organisational micro-practices, this study elucidates how strategy arises not from predetermined plans but from the continuous, situated actions and interpretations of organisational members. These interpretations are influenced by antecedent experiences, institutional cultures and relational dynamics; consequently, they must be examined in context rather than in abstraction. It should be noted that the constructivist paradigm underlying this study is inherently interpretivist in its methodological orientation. It recognises that knowledge is situated, subjective and co-constructed between the researcher and participants. Therefore, understanding how micro-practices influence emergent strategising requires an interpretivist approach—one that privileges meaning, context and lived experience over objectivity or generalisability. The interpretivist stance informs the study's commitment to capturing the rich, nuanced and diverse interpretations of strategy held by managers within PHEIs. This paradigm guides the choice of qualitative, participant-centred methods that explore *how* managers interpret, respond to and act within their organisational realities.

In alignment with this perspective, the study utilised qualitative methodologies, including semi-structured interviews and written narratives, to unveil the intricate processes through which knowledge is created, disseminated and transformed into strategic action. Each individual's contributions were recognised as significant, reflecting their lived experiences and personal viewpoints, thereby uniquely enriching emergent strategising.

The subsequent section further advances this inquiry by focusing explicitly on social construction as a micro-practice, examining how discourse, symbolic interaction and contextual meaning-making influence the daily routines and decisions that managers employ to shape strategic outcomes.

4.6 Social construction as part of micro-practices in the workplace

Social construction theory serves as a foundational lens for understanding how individuals interpret, reproduce and challenge meanings within organisational life. This study adopted a constructivist–interpretivist paradigm, wherein reality is not regarded as pre-given; rather, it is perpetually negotiated through individual and collective actions. Therefore, strategy, particularly in its emergent form, is not solely conceived within boardrooms but is enacted and shaped through ongoing, contextual practices in routine work settings.

Schutz (1932) was the first to articulate that individuals create meaning via routines and interactions with their environment. This notion is further developed in the social construction programme, which examines how processes such as institutionalisation, objectification and legitimation contribute to the formation and sustenance of knowledge and social reality (Rüegg-Stürm et al., (2015). Within organisations, these processes manifest as individuals engage with one another, interpret institutional scripts and infuse meanings into practices that may evolve into routines—often unconsciously, without deliberate strategic intent.

From this perspective, the organisational environment is not merely a static vessel for strategy; it is a dynamic social space in which knowledge and strategic direction are co-generated through micro-practices. These practices may encompass decision-making, conflict resolution, informal discussions or even silence and avoidance all of which influence how individuals perceive their roles, prioritise tasks and respond to perceived opportunities or constraints.

This viewpoint contrasts with structural or collective explanations of strategising, which often favour aggregated behaviours, roles or functions at the expense of individual lived experiences (Foss et al., 2014). Rather, the current study highlights the significance of individual actions and interactions as the focal point of strategic meaning-making, thereby promoting a more detailed and contextualised understanding of organisational life.

As initially posited by Berger and Luckmann (1967), social reality stabilises through habitualisation and shared interpretation what they term the “legitimation” of order. This concept holds particular relevance within the context of strategy, wherein the essence of strategic action is not inherent to the action itself, but rather in how it is perceived and validated by others within the institution.

However, social construction is not devoid of bias. It is influenced by power dynamics and institutional logics that determine which interpretations are acknowledged, which practices are legitimised and which contributions face marginalisation. Accordingly, this study investigated how social construction processes conjoin with power to either facilitate or restrict emergent strategising within PHEIs. As Molina-Azorín (2014) highlights, recognising the role of individuals in integrating micro and macro dimensions of strategy yields a more nuanced and realistic comprehension of strategic behaviour.

4.6.1 Concluding remarks on the social construction

Social construction is fundamental to the concept that strategic reality is perpetually enacted and reconstructed through interpersonal interaction. Micro-practices such as task interpretation, role negotiation and responses to uncertainty are not merely technical activities; they constitute meaning-making actions that shape and reflect the strategic trajectory of the organisation.

Within the framework of this study, social construction serves as the nexus between individual agency and institutional structure, elucidating how strategy materialises from the grassroots level. This perspective underscores the significance of perception, identity,

discourse and power in the quotidian practices that constitute strategising. Notably, these processes do not exist in isolation; they are invariably embedded in historical contexts, hierarchical structures and social dynamics that bestow meaning and exert influence upon them.

Therefore, comprehending how strategy is socially constructed through micro-practices provides a robust framework for examining emergent strategising not as a deviation from formal plans, but as an integral, socially embedded process. This understanding lays the groundwork for the methodological choices articulated in Chapter 5, where the study's interpretivist orientation and qualitative approach are operationalised through interviews and narrative analysis.

4.7 Conclusion

This chapter contextualises the examination of micro-practices within the expansive field of organisational studies and organisational behaviour, placing particular emphasis on the psychological dimensions of organisational existence. It further investigates the underlying assumptions of social psychology that shape the ways individuals perceive, engage with and derive meaning from their contextually situated environments. Additionally, the chapter analyses the processes through which knowledge is constructed within the workplace, presenting a theoretical synthesis of constructivist paradigms and their significance in comprehending strategy as an emergent and socially enacted phenomenon.

Through this lens, it became evident that micro-foundational mechanisms cognition, interaction, routines and power are under-theorised in the context of PHEIs. Much of the existing literature either focuses on macro-strategic outcomes or aggregates individual behaviour into broad organisational capabilities, thereby missing the nuanced, everyday practices that actually constitute strategising in practice.

This study addressed that gap by arguing that strategising is an emergent and interpretive process, enacted by individuals through their daily interactions and meaning-making practices. These practices are not just operational they are sites of strategic agency, adaptation and learning. Yet, we still lack a fine-grained understanding of how managers in PHEIs construct meaning, navigate ambiguity and translate micro-level insights into strategic action. This chapter responds to that gap by conceptualising micro-practices as socially constructed and contextually situated.

In sum, this chapter has completed the theoretical groundwork for the study. It has clarified the epistemological and ontological positions of the research, which are anchored in a constructivist–interpretivist paradigm, and illuminated the conceptual terrain within which the study is situated. The chapter affirms that knowledge, power and strategy are co-produced in practice, and it positions the micro-level as a critical, yet overlooked domain of strategic analysis.

The following chapter presents the research design and strategy that operationalises these theoretical commitments, outlining how the study explores the lived, constructed realities of strategy practitioners in PHEIs.

Chapter 5: Research Methodology

“Triangulation avoids the potential bias of a single data source and assists in constructing more complete and accurate analyses through converging sources of evidence.”
(Jarzabkowski, 2003)

5.1 Introduction

Chapters 3 and 4 discussed the main constructs concerning strategising and micro-practices (individual actions and interactions), ultimately providing the theoretical framework that informed the study. Chapter 2 provided the context for the empirical phase thereof. Chapter 5 aimed to describe how the research questions were addressed. In addition to addressing the mechanics of the chosen case study research design, the philosophical disposition and consequential research approach of the researcher are described. The research design, with its underlying philosophical worldview and research approach grounded in a descriptive phenomenological approach, as well as the research context (Chapter 2), represent essential building blocks in creating the conceptual framework that guides the empirical inquiry in the study. The chapter also lays the groundwork for the following chapter, which recounts a preliminary exploration project.

Figure 5.1 depicts the relative position of Chapter 5 within the overall research project and also presents the structure of this chapter.

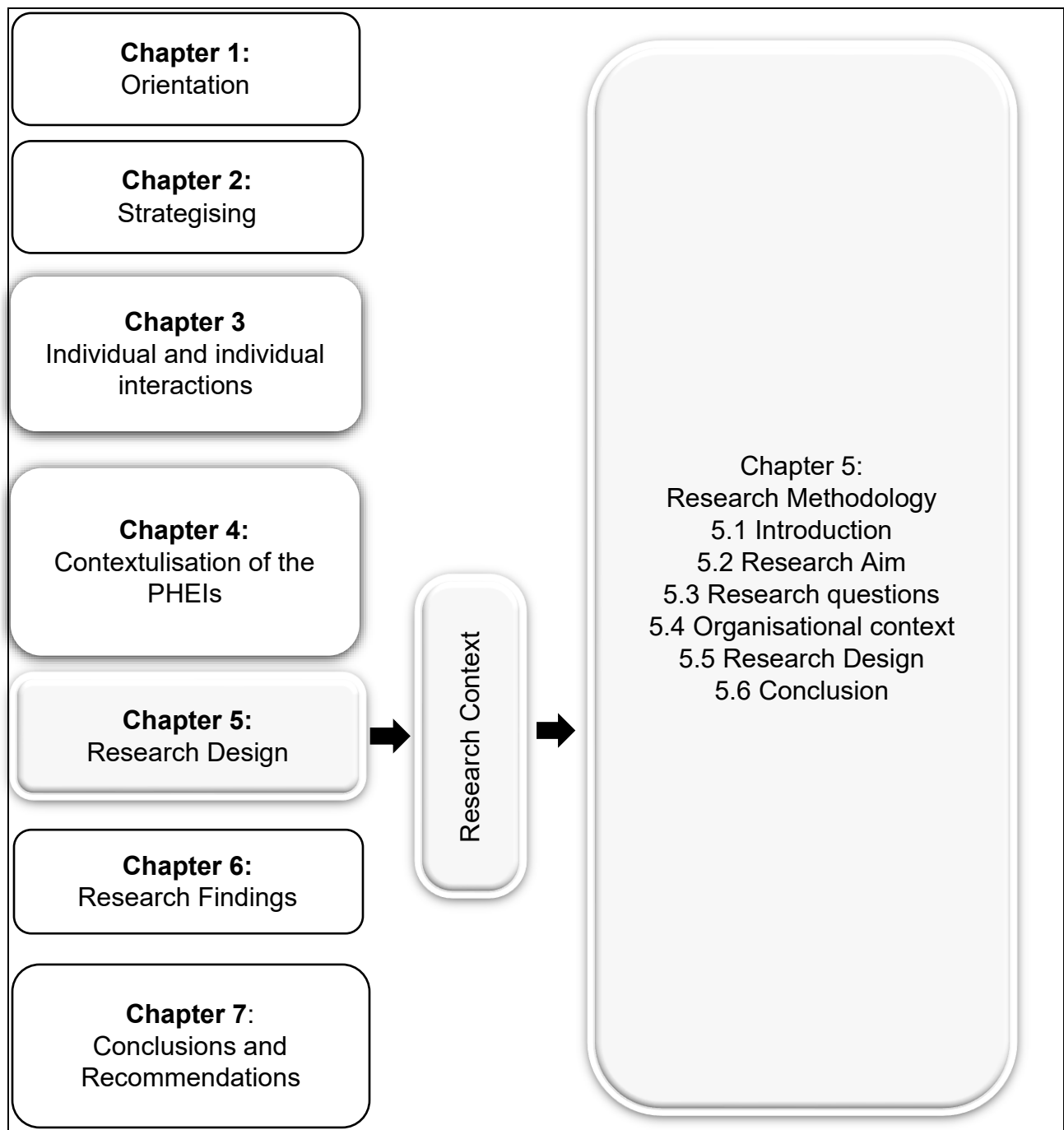


Figure 5.1: The structure of Chapter 5 (own compilation)

5.2 The Research Environment

This section summarises the scope of the study, including a description of the research goal, the theoretical framework underpinning its inquiry and the research context. The researcher's interest in the top, middle and low managers' micro-practices sparked the idea for this study. The research interest began with the S-as-P and management perspectives described in Chapters 2 and 3. As stated in those chapters, academics and practitioners have called for more research on emergent strategising and practically relevant research.

5.3 Research Aim

As discussed in the preceding sections, the research aimed to gain a deeper understanding of micro-practices as a micro-foundation in influencing emergent strategising and present a theoretical perspective to guide further inquiry in this area of interest.

5.3.1 Emergent strategising as a function of micro-practices

The study explored emergent strategising of top, middle and lower-level managers as a function of their micro-practices, adhering to the view that strategising, like all other organisational activities, is a function of individual action and interaction. As discussed in Chapter 3, various individual dispositions, cognition, routines, power dynamics, and organisational and external contextual factors influence how managers interact and influence emergent strategising. Ongoing micro-practices result in daily unscripted, unstructured practices. These micro-practices result in habituated tendencies, internalised dispositions and contextualised meaning, providing a unique framework for emergent organisational strategising.

The study sought to comprehend these micro-practices as a mechanism for shaping unique organisational practices and shared meaning, specifically micro-practices and how they led to emergent strategy (the intended outcome of strategising in response to

the dynamic environment). In contrast to many studies that regard strategy as a rational, planned and linear activity, this study responds to the call for strategy inquiry to be socially informed and focused on the actual strategising micro-practices of strategy actors. The micro-foundations and the Bourdieusian perspectives provided an appropriate lens to view strategy actors' actual micro-practices practices. Therefore, the overall goal is to better understand how micro-practices between top and middle and lower managers influence and shape emergent strategising in the ever-changing environment influenced by external contextual factors. To facilitate the development of distinctive and diverse strategising processes and mechanisms within unique organisations contexts, an in-depth understanding of this iterative process may inform how micro-practices in emergent strategising should be approached. The goal also includes developing a conceptual framework to guide future research in this field, as discussed in the following section.

5.3.2 The theoretical perspective

The study created a social theoretical perspective on micro-practices to guide future research on understanding micro-practices and a detailed view and meaning of the micro-practices that influence emergent strategising.

5.4 Research questions

A research question is a question that expresses explicitly what the researcher wishes to discover (Bryman 2016). The main research and the exploratory questions, which were described in Chapter 1, are presented next.

5.4.1 General research question

How do micro practices of managers influence emergent strategising at a PHEI?

Inquiry-based research questions were

1. How do the social interactions of PHEI managers drive emergent strategising?

2. What is the influence of cognition by PHEI managers in emergent strategising?
3. What role do daily individual routines play in facilitating emergent strategising of PHEI managers?
4. How do organisational and external contextual factors influence the emergent strategising of PHEI managers?
5. How do power dynamics by PHEI managers influence emergent strategising?

5.5 Organisational context

In the study's empirical phase, the peculiarities of the respective private higher education institution (PHEI) and how their micro-practices influenced emergent strategising were addressed. As discussed in Chapters 1 and 4, the selection of the study's organisation was considered applicable from a macro-perspective: the substantial growth of the PHE sector and its role in addressing the growing demand for HE and quality perception necessitate further investigation. From a micro-level perspective, the selected PHEIs fit the profile of typical South African profit-seeking private HE-providers and thus could make a significant contribution. To ensure their survival in a challenging business environment, this study selected a single PHEI, like all other South African private HE-providers, that relied on sound micro-practices. The chosen PHEI has its headquarters in Cape Town.

5.5.1 Historical development

The case is a prominent private education group in South Africa. It was established in 2017 after its unbundling from a holding company. The organisation has swiftly grown through smart acquisitions and consolidations, seeking to deliver affordable, high-quality education in accordance with industry requirements. The organisation was established because of a strategic decision by a publicly traded education company to enter the higher

education market. Following initial purchases around 2010, the higher education division was officially divested and independently listed on the Johannesburg Stock Exchange in 2017. Since its establishment, it has sought rapid expansion by the purchase of many specialised institutions, providing programmes in teacher education, fashion, business, and film, among others.

In 2020, it amalgamated various academic brands under a singular HE institution to harmonise its operational framework and academic identity.

5.5.2 Organisational structure

The organisation is registered as a PHEI with the DHET under the Higher Education Act, 1997. The Head Office is in Cape Town, and it is a subsidiary of a holding company which owns two more PHEIs and is publicly listed on the JSE. The organisation has several campuses spread throughout South Africa with an enrolment of over 50,000 students. It has three directors. The executive and senior management consist of the Chief Executive Officer, Chief Information Officer, Chief Operations Officer, Chief Academic Officer, Chief Financial Officer, Executive Head (Contact learning) Executive Head (Distance learning), two Deans: Teaching, Learning and student support and Dean: Quality Assurance, Registrar, and ten schools. The ten schools are the School of Commerce, Education, Information Technology, Media and Design, Architecture and Spatial Design, Management, Fashion and Design, Arts and Humanities, Policing and Law Enforcement, and lastly Law. The different schools are manned by different heads of schools.

The organisation manages three primary educational brands, each targeting a specific market segment:

- **Extensive and comprehensive academic brand:** Provides more than 50 approved qualifications in fields such as trade, education, law, information technology, arts, and design. It underscores both remote and in-person education and has opened campuses nationwide.

- **Business and finance school:** Focuses on online and remote education, namely in commerce and accounting. It is renowned for its online Chartered Accountancy (CA) preparatory curriculum and postgraduate financial credentials.
- **Creative arts academy:** Established in the 1990s, this institution specialises in film, performance and digital innovation, positioning itself as a regional authority in media and entertainment education.

5.5.3 Business model

The model of the group is engineered for scalability, accessibility and quality.

Multi-brand strategy: It preserves the distinct identities of acquired businesses, facilitating targeted marketing and specialisation, while attaining operational efficiency through centralised support.

Blended and distance learning: It incorporates flexible delivery formats to serve full-time, part-time and remote learners throughout South Africa and beyond.

Accredited, market-responsive programmes: Curricula are designed to prioritise employability, adapt to market demands and ensure regulatory adherence.

Digital Infrastructure: The organisation has invested in an extensive digital infrastructure for academic delivery, student assistance and support, and administrative automation.

5.5.4 Financial overview

Over the course of seven years, the group increased its revenue from less than R150 million to over R1.6 billion. Additionally, student enrolment increased from approximately 13,000 in 2017 to more than 50,000 by 2024, with a target of 56,000 expected shortly. Despite significant investments in infrastructure and acquisitions, it maintains a conservative financial strategy, steering clear of external debt while ensuring a robust cash flow.

5.5.5 Governance and management

The organisation is overseen by a central management team, which is accountable for corporate strategy, finance and compliance. Every educational brand possesses distinct academic and operational leadership, safeguarding sector-specific expertise within each vertical school. Strategic choices are directed by a board of directors comprising both independent and executive members.

5.5.6 Comparative position in the South African PHE landscape

This group differentiates itself from other PHEs in South Africa by:

1. **Scale and reach:** With a statewide network of campuses and a robust online presence, it possesses one of the most extensive footprints among PHEs.
2. **Programme diversity:** The programme provides an extensive array of certifications, ranging from certificates to master's degrees, across several academic areas.
3. **Regulatory status:** All programmes possess complete accreditation, with several receiving endorsements from professional bodies, thereby augmenting graduate employability.
4. **Technological advancement:** Its focus on digital learning and advanced educational technologies positions it as superior to numerous conventional competitors in terms of student engagement and operational effectiveness.

Finally, compared to other PHEs in the region, they often function on a lesser scale, with restricted academic programmes and a more limited geographic or online presence.

This described the research background that framed the empirical phase of the study. Next was the research design that was deployed.

5.6 Research design

The research used Husserl's descriptive phenomenological approach to understand lived experiences (Hopkins, 2015) Hence, Colaizzi's (1978) structured data analysis method

operationalises Husserlian bracketing and participant validation (Praveena and Sasikumar, 2021). Furthermore, Creswell and Creswell (2018) define a research design as "a plan, structure, and investigation strategy to obtain answers to research questions or problems." In agreement, Bryman (2016) posits that the research design is the blueprint that guides the entire research process, from question formulation to finding interpretation. This blueprint adheres to the philosophical underpinnings to build an effective research design that aligns with the researcher's nature of reality (Rashid, Rashid, Warraich, Sabir and Waseem, 2019). This was followed by a detailed description of the case study research design used in this study. Table 5.1 depicts the study's paradigmatic disposition, research approach and specific research design.

Table 5.1: The Research design of the study

Research design element	Description
Research Paradigm or philosophy:	A constructivist-interpretivist paradigm or philosophy
Research approach:	Qualitative
Case study design:	A single case study involving a South African private higher education institution (PHEI)

Source: Author's own

A single qualitative case study approach was identified as the most suitable method, within a constructivist-interpretivist paradigm, to address the study's research questions. It enabled the researcher to make sense of subjective and socially constructed meanings.

The study design enabled the researcher to engage deeply with the phenomenon by interacting with participants across multiple organisational sites, including the head office, main campus and regional satellite offices. A combination of face-to-face semi-structured interviews conducted during on-site visits and online interviews via Microsoft Teams was employed, allowing for both physical immersion and broader geographic access. Moreover, on-site interviews allowed the researcher to delve deeply into a phenomenon and spend a significant amount of time with participants who were personally involved in

the case's activities and operations, reflecting on and revising descriptions and meanings. Inductively, the researcher developed a pattern of meaning through multi-methods by using document analysis, semi-structured interviews and written narratives (Creswell and Creswell 2018; Denzin and Lincoln 2018; Yin 2018). The following section discusses this paradigm, research approach and case study design.

5.6.1 Research philosophy

Rashid et al. (2019) suggest that a paradigm serves as a frame of reference that is introduced into the research. This philosophical framework is used to reach conclusions and make discoveries about phenomena. The authors posit that a paradigm is utilised to identify and communicate specific perspectives and assumptions easily.

Rüegg-Stürm et al. (2015) posit that the constructivist paradigm is embedded firstly, in practice (ontological consideration); secondly, in knowledge is studied in relation to the world – 'research as a construction process' (epistemological consideration) as depicted in Table 5.2. The authors further postulate that the agency in the creation process cannot be automatically associated with specific entities, individuals, organisations, or institutions, but must be studied as distributed among heterogeneous actants (methodological consideration). Lastly, they challenge the dominance of unquestioned dichotomies in the social sciences, such as those between micro and macro, subjective and objective, or situated activities and collective practices.

According to the constructivist viewpoint, Guba et al. (2005) posit that individuals actively engage with their environment and experiences to build their understanding and knowledge. As indicated in Chapter 4, this viewpoint values individual concrete action and its interaction with the environment. According to researchers, individuals construct knowledge through their own experiences, and knowledge is neither objective nor universal (Flick 2022). The author further indicates that constructivist researchers seek to understand how people actively construct their own understanding of the world around them. Similarly, Guba et al. (2005) maintain that "constructivist researchers investigate

how individuals make meaning from their experiences and how cultural and social contexts influence this meaning-making process." A distinguishing factor about constructivists is that the researcher recognises their role in shaping research findings and acknowledges that their interpretations and biases can influence the research process. As a result, they strive for reflexivity and self-awareness in their research practices. Rashid et al. (2019) emphasise the process by which they and their participants construct knowledge together (Charmaz 2014).

As stated in Section 4.5.1, the constructivist paradigm endows itself by exploring the following:

- situated construction of strategy concepts and strategising practices;
- the importance of explicitly considering the uncertainty implied in strategising;
- the importance of routinisation processes for the establishment of strategy concepts; and
- strategising practices in specific organisational contexts, and the deconstruction of such concepts and practices as they occur in any translation and transformation process.

This study aimed to explore how micro-practices influenced emergent strategising, as well as the meanings and interpretations people assigned to their experiences. It also investigated how these meanings are shaped by cultural and social contexts, acknowledging the researcher's role in shaping the research process. It is important to note that constructivist and interpretivist are the same in this research. The next section deals with the philosophical foundations of the pragmatic paradigm.

5.6.1.1 The relationship between constructivist (interpretivist) and other research paradigms

The constructivist (or interpretivist) paradigm can be seen as a complement to the "received view" or positivist paradigm (Ponterotto 2005). Darby, Fugate and Murray (2019) indicate that a generalising strategy is used in positivist qualitative research so

that the knowledge produced can ideally be applied to a wide range of events and contexts. Similarly, Bonache and Festing (2020) assert that positivists assume an objective world that concepts and propositions can represent. Conversely, interpretive research suggests that we live in multiple socially constructed views of social reality rather than a single social reality. It employs a more particularistic approach in that specific occurrences are investigated at a particular time and place.

Ponterotto (2005) accentuates that in contrast to positivism's naive realism (a single objective external reality); constructivism takes a relativist stance, assuming multiple, understandable, and equally valid realities. The author postulates that reality is created within the individual rather than existing as a single, external thing. The hermeneutical method, which the constructivist stance promotes, posits that meaning is concealed and must be brought to the surface through careful thinking. Similarly, Kelly, Dowling and Millar (2018) assert that the essential factors in the formation of the interpretivist paradigm are regarded as "*Hermeneutics*" (interpretation) and "*Verstehen*" (understanding). The author further chronicles the development of the constructivist and the emphasis it places on lived experiences from the perspective of individuals who experience it daily. Therefore, co-constructed findings are those that the researcher and their subjects arrive at after engaging in interactive conversation and interpretation. Constructivism-interpretivism has idiographic and emic objectives. Interpretivism, therefore, represents practical (situation-dependent), contextualised (socially constrained) approaches to inquiry, summarised in Table 5.2.

Table 5.2: Interpretivist perspective

	Interpretivist
Ontology	Reality can be constructed and can be multiple
Epistemology	Knower and known are inseparable
Axiology	Inquiry is value-driven
Inductive/Deductive	Inductive
Generalisation	Generalisation is not possible but transferability is possible

Adapted from (Guba et al., 1994)

In Table 5.3, Guba et al. (1994) logically summarise the responses given to the interpretivist paradigm by its proponents. As indicated earlier, a constructivist- interpretive worldview that guided inquiry recognised that reality and the pursuit of truth are inextricably linked to the situation or context, and the researcher and generalisations are not possible. Guba et al. (1994) contend that transferability is possible. This study followed an inductive value-driven inquiry, with an emphasis on gaining a deeper understanding of the topic rather than simply generalising the results.

5.6.1.2 Inductive theory building

A specific strategy that was followed in this study was building a theoretical perspective (Yin, 2018). Instead of a tendency to develop a rigid methodology that excluded alternative explanations for what was going on, the objective was to operationalise the concepts and seek a better understanding of the nature of the phenomena (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2023). The following section outlines the research approach followed in this study.

5.6.2 Research approach

The approach to addressing the research problem necessitates clarification within the constructivist-interpretivist worldview that frames this study. This section unpacks the qualitative methods approach used in this study.

5.6.2.1 A qualitative research approach

A constructivist-interpretivism worldview was applicable to study the research topic of how micro-foundational practices of managers influence emergent strategising at a PHEI. This method acknowledged that everyone perceives the world differently and that reality was dynamic and greater than the sum of its parts.

For this study, qualitative methods proved effective since they captured temporally developing events in great depth and detail, and were helpful in understanding the processes. Although qualitative studies have been criticised for being illustrative and

unverifiable (Saliya, 2017), they can offer more context-relevant approaches that call into question the objectivity and fragmentability of reality, as well as significant insights into the views of individuals being examined (Langley and Abdallah, 2011). Additionally, Darby et al. (2019) acknowledge numerous calls for context-relevant approaches that question the objectivity and fragility of reality. The authors support the notion that individuals perceive reality as they make sense of the world. So, reality is a holistic structure that is constantly changing and greater than the sum of its parts. Hence, they propose the constructivist-interpretive approach, which contends that there are multiple realities; understandings are created by the knower and the subject, and a naturalistic (found in nature) set of methodological procedures.

Merriam (2009) asserts that research that emphasises discovery, insight and understanding from the viewpoints of those being examined has the greatest potential to improve people's lives. The most effective method for this is qualitative inquiry, which includes interpretative or naturalistic research. Similar to how, Denzin and Yvonna (2018) and Creswell and Poth (2018) describe qualitative research as a situated activity that places the observer in space and enhances understanding of the issue at hand.

In conclusion, the study topic of how managers' micro-practices influence emergent strategising at a PHEI was best investigated using a constructivist-interpretivism worldview and qualitative research techniques. These methodological decisions, informed by theoretical perspectives, offered priceless insights into the intricate mechanisms at work in this situation.

The preceding section examined the philosophical assumptions of a constructivist-interpretivist paradigm, highlighting the use of qualitative research methods. The chosen approach was elucidated in the next section.

5.6.2.2 A qualitative research strategy

According to Smith and Gaya (2016), qualitative research is gradually gaining significance as a research strategy in the social sciences and related professional fields like strategic management. This view is shared by several authors (Hyett, Kenny and

Dickson-Swift, 2014; Denzin, 2009; Merriam, 2009). The rationale for this could be attributed to the characteristics of qualitative research highlighted by Creswell and Creswell (2018) and Merriam (2009). These characteristics include research taking place in a natural setting, with the researcher playing a pivotal role, the ability to use multiple methods, complex reasoning through inductive and deductive logic, various perspectives from participants, context-dependency, emergent design, reflexivity, and a holistic approach to creating a comprehensive picture of the problem or issue being investigated.

This then justified the constructivist-interpretive approach, and the qualitative methods employed within the paradigm allow for an inductive investigation of meaning-making and interpretation of the environment that influences emergent strategising. In addressing the exploratory research questions of the study from a constructivist-interpretive perspective, it became apparent that the research questions required an in-depth investigation of narratives, scrutinising the intricacies and hidden understanding and interpretation of a phenomenon.

The different qualitative methods subscribed to a constructivist-interpretivism paradigm, with an interpretative meta-theoretical stance, guided the data collection phase. The overall interpretation of this study's findings was guided by an interpretivist worldview, beliefs and values, as shown in Table 5.3. This study, therefore, employed a qualitatively driven methods approach (Creswell and Creswell 2018).

5.6.2.3 Research Scope: Exploratory

As stated in Sections 1.2 and 2.7, little research had been conducted on managers' micro-practices that influenced emergent strategising practices, indicating the need for an exploratory study. An exploratory study is one in which the knowledge base is insufficient to make good theoretical propositions prior to the start of data collection (Yin 2018). Similarly, Saunders et al. (2023) concur that an exploratory study is an excellent way to discover what is going on, gain insights and understand a particular topic. Essentially, this study was exploratory as it sought new insights into phenomena, posed further

questions and evaluated them in a new light. In this instance, the micro-practices of managers influenced emergent strategising.

5.6.3 Qualitative case study research approach

A case study design was employed to address the research problems stated in this study. This design adheres to the study's philosophical assumptions and consequential approach, as discussed in the preceding sections. This section describes the qualitative case study design of this study.

The chosen case study design represented the most appropriate approach to addressing this study's research problem. One of the proponents of the S-as-P approach, Jarzabkowski (2005), conducted a study in the UK involving three universities. Furthermore, Davis (2013) at one of the largest public universities in South Africa and Bezuidenhout (2020) On two small PHEIs in South Africa in the field of S-as-P, the findings seemed to validate the appropriateness of a case study. Recently, several other authors within the field concluded that the case study is the most appropriate and relevant research method within the S-as-P field (Lavarda and Bellucci, 2022; Bellucci and Lavarda, 2018; Hughes and McDonagh, 2017). Yin (2018a) supports the notion of using a case study if the study focuses on contemporary events. More importantly, case studies are bound to real-world contexts; an in-depth study of phenomena in bounded, natural settings compared to a derived setting.

Yin (2014), a well-known author in case study research, mentions the significant increase in case study research publications and the publication of reference works that document the case study method. The author posits that it demonstrates the growing acceptance of case study research as a respected research method. On the contrary, in his 2012 book, he claims that while case study research can be found in a variety of publications, it has not yet achieved the widespread acceptance that other research designs have. In his 2018 edition, he then acknowledges the case study as a method that is growing and receiving much traction in social science research. Additionally, Merriam (2009) asserts

that a case study as a research approach is sensitive to underlying meaning when gathering and interpreting data, as it is considered a naturalistic method.

In subscribing to the S-as-P mentioned earlier, researchers and Yin's case study research, this study, within an overarching qualitative paradigm and qualitative method, employed an exploratory case study design involving a PHEI (Lavarda and Bellucci 2022; Bellucci and Lavarda 2018; Yin 2018; Hughes and McDonagh 2017; Merriam 2009). Section 5.8.1 describes the case study design used in the study.

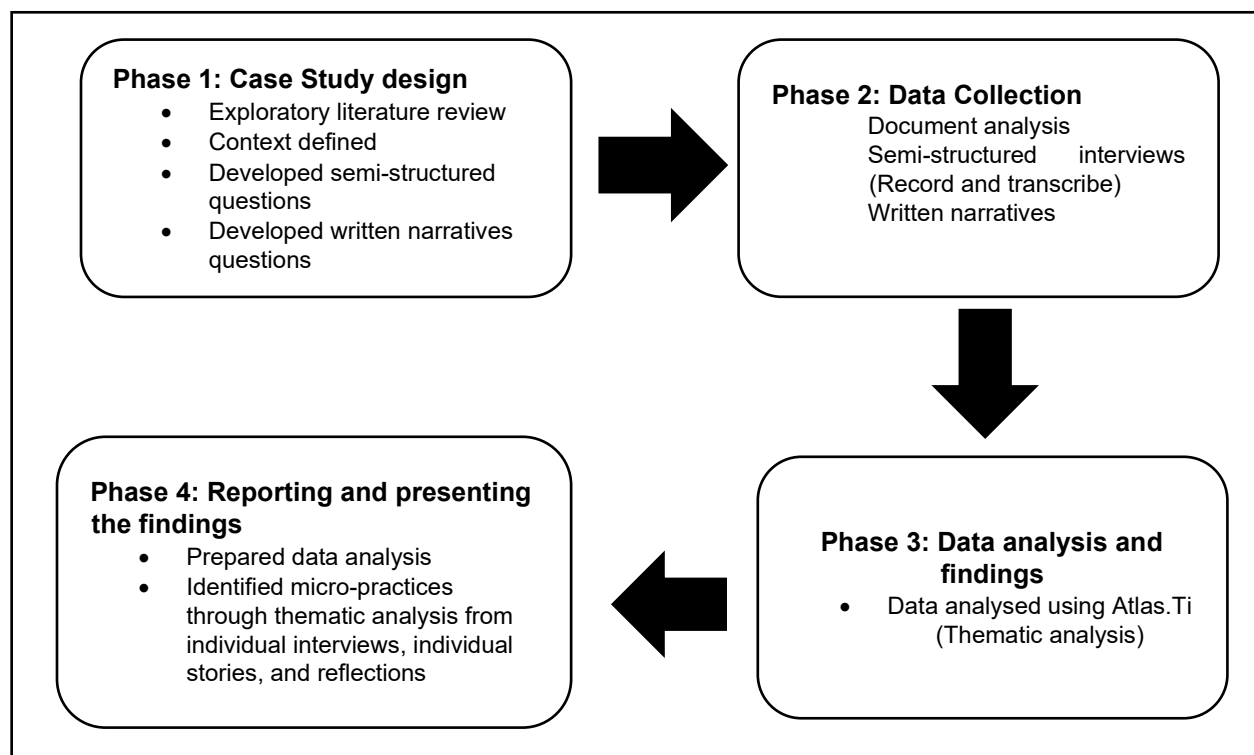
The case study design employed in this study enabled an in-depth investigation within a real-world context (Yin, 2018). This multi-setting-bound research enabled a close, in-depth examination of social interaction among strategy practitioners and its impact on strategising. Merriam (2009) further asserts that the qualitative case study can be defined in terms of the actual investigation process, the unit of analysis (the bounded system, the case), or the end product. It is, therefore, an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a single entity, phenomenon, or social unit resulting from an investigation. This rendered them specific, descriptive and heuristic (Merriam, 2009). In support, Yin (2018a) further emphasises the importance of case study research in providing analytical generalisations instead of statistical generalisations. This study aimed to develop a conceptual framework for investigating the micro-practices that practitioners use to influence emergent strategising, which can be applied in other contexts.

5.6.3.1 A framework for designing a systematic case study

It was recommended to adhere to a systematic way to answer the what and how questions of a contemporary phenomenon in a real-life context (Yin 2018). It also addresses the scientific rigour concerns (Yin 2011). Merriam (2009) alludes to a proper method definition based on the researcher's intentions. She further indicates that qualitative research is investigative and systematic inquiry. Merriam (2009) supports the idea of a systematic case study that supports inductive reasoning. The author also recognises, just like Yin (2011), the idea of having a research framework that supports

rigour in case study research and addresses such concerns about the proper use of case studies. This study, as depicted in Figure 5.2 and discussed in the following sections, responded to the Yin's call with a research design based on a systematically mapped process.

Figure 5.2: Case study design



Source: Author's own

As shown in Figure 5.2, this study's case study research design comprises four phases: case study design, data collection, data analysis and findings, reporting, conclusions, and recommendations. The sections that follow are devoted to a more in-depth discussion of each step used for the chosen PHEI to where findings are prepared. As this study evolved, specific steps within the design were adapted.

5.6.3.1 Phase 1: Case study design

Following Merriam (2009) and Yin's (2018) propositions, this study, within an overarching constructivist-interpretivism paradigm and qualitative methods research approach, employed an exploratory, intrinsic case study research design involving a PHEI.

5.6.3.1.1 Theoretical framework

The literature review section of this study (Chapters 2–4) provided a deeper understanding of the case and its context. Chapter 2 discussed the external environment (the global and South African HE and PHE environment) where this study's PHEIs operate. Chapters 3 discussed the strategy process, and Chapter 4 discussed the role of the individual action and interaction in strategising. The two chapters related the theories to organisational social interaction. This enabled the development of a theoretical perspective on micro-practices that influenced emergent strategising to address this study's research problem. The literature review in this study was intended to give background and contextualise the study and inductively develop theories to be tested or applied.

The researcher aimed to explore and gain a deep understanding of the micro-practices that inductively influence emergent strategising, and was willing to adapt the research questions as the empirical study progressed iteratively (Yin, 2011, 2018).

5.6.3.1.2 Definition of the case and context

As alluded to earlier, this study employed an inductive case study to better understand the phenomenon (Merriam, 2009). It was not because the researcher would learn about other cases in the study or about any generalised problem or challenges, but because the researcher was intrinsically interested in that particular case (Merriam 2009; Stake 1995).

Within the contexts of the PHEI, the main units of analysis or cases were the micro-practices of emergent strategising in response to what was happening within and outside of top, middle and low-level managers. The case involved the exploration of micro-practices of these managers on how they described, understood and interpreted the environment to develop emergent strategies. It also included organisational factors and the external contextual environment, as well as the role of power by practitioners in influencing emergent strategising. The case contextualised the practitioners' micro-practices (praxis). They were instrumental in elucidating the individual actions and interactions that influence emergent strategising.

The chosen PHEI is registered in South Africa as a private institution, with its head office located in Cape Town. As mentioned in Chapter 2, selecting the South African private higher education industry as the context for investigating emergent strategising in this study was timely, as this industry plays a crucial role in meeting Africa's pressing demand for higher education, despite quality concerns. On a macro level, this study aimed to elucidate the dynamism of the environment and its influence on emergent strategising. At a micro level, this study aimed to provide insight into how micro-practices influence emergent strategising.

Therefore, against this background, the case organisation chosen for this study is a PHEI with which the researcher has had previous professional involvement. The researcher was employed at the institution two years prior to the commencement of data collection. This insider access facilitated a more seamless entry and the procurement of an official gatekeeper letter with relative simplicity. Moreover, this previous relationship fostered rapport and trust, essential in interpretivist research focused on revealing profound, contextual insights.

The selection adheres to the principles of purposeful sampling prevalent in qualitative research Patton (2002) where the aim was analytical depth rather than statistical generalisation. However, transferability was possible to other institutions. The organisation exhibited traits pertinent to the study, specifically decentralised decision-

making and discernible occurrences of emergent, informal strategising. These qualities make it an information-rich context for examining how micro-practices influenced strategic emergence.

Although previous employment provided contextual insight, efforts were made to maintain researcher reflexivity and minimised bias. This was accomplished through a reflexive journal, which maintained critical distance and analytical rigour throughout the research process.

5.6.3.2 Phase 2: Primary data collection

Various primary data collection methods were employed to gather the data. A case study design allowed for the use of multiple data sources to gain a comprehensive understanding of such phenomena (Yin, 2003; 2011; 2018). This study used three qualitative data collection methods: semi-structured interviews, document analysis and written narratives. The significance of the researcher's observations was not underestimated (Merriam, 2009a).

In addition to the data collection methods mentioned earlier, this study relied on the researcher's observations as a research instrument. Before delving into the three data collection phases, this section describes the researcher as a research instrument during the qualitative research, followed by a discussion of the participant and respondent selection plan, and finally, the data collection phases.

5.6.3.2.1 The researcher's involvement as a research instrument

In qualitative research, the researcher is acknowledged as the primary research instrument, tasked not only with collecting data but also with interpreting its significance (Stake, 1995; Denzin and Lincoln, 2018). This role assumes added significance within the framework of descriptive phenomenology, which seeks to comprehend and

articulate the lived experiences of participants through meticulous interpretation informed by the data.

In the present study, data collection took place over a period of approximately three months, during which the researcher actively engaged with participants across various organisational sites, including the head office and satellite campuses. Some interviews were conducted in person, while others were facilitated via Microsoft Teams, thereby providing both contextual immersion and flexibility.

The researcher possessed a prior insider role, having been employed part-time at the institution two years preceding the study. Although not employed during the data collection phase, this previous affiliation introduced both advantages and challenges, a phenomenon articulated by Mercer (2007) as a "double-edged sword." Familiarity with the institutional culture, language and structure cultivated rapport and interpretive sensitivity. However, it also necessitated a deliberate bracketing of preceding experiences and assumptions to mitigate potential bias.

In alignment with the recommendations of Fleming (2018) and Sinfield et al. (2023), the researcher sustained a reflexive journal to chronicle preconceptions, emotional responses and analytical determinations throughout the research process. This journal functioned as a mechanism for bracketing the practice of temporarily setting aside prior knowledge to engage with participant narratives with openness and epistemic humility.

The researcher's interpretative role was paramount during the data analysis phase, particularly in the stages of deriving meanings, developing themes and constructing a comprehensive description (Colaizzi, 1978). Interpretations were not superimposed on the data; instead, they emerged through immersion in transcripts, narratives and documents. The researcher's insider familiarity facilitated a more nuanced understanding of context-specific language and micro-practices, yet every endeavour was made to ensure that interpretations were rooted in the participants' own articulations. This equilibrium between familiarity and critical distance was persistently negotiated and documented as part of the audit trail.

5.6.3.2.2 Participant selection and inclusion

As indicated in Table 5.3, the research participants were those classified as managers who influence emergent strategising.

Table 5.3: Respondent selection strategy (own compilation)

Population/Job title (From top, middle and low level)	Chief Executive Officer, Chief Academic Officer, Chief Operations Officer, Chief Financial Officer, Chief Information Officer, Head of schools, Dean: Teaching and Learning, Dean: Quality assurance, Dean: Research and Internationalisation, Head of Instructional Design, Head of Collaboration, Head of Research, Academic managers, Head of Campus, Manager for Student Support, Programme Coordinator, Head of Department, Discipline Leader, senior lecturers
Sampling technique	Purposive sampling
Role/Portfolio responsibility (inclusion and exclusion)	The manager should have the ability to intentionally influence strategic planning in their position.
Sample size	• Top Managers: 10 participants • Middle Managers: 5 participants • Low-level Managers: 5 participants

Therefore, the inclusion criteria were that a participant had to be under top, middle or low-level management and influence emergent strategising. The researcher easily interviewed them. Therefore, purposive sampling was utilised. This study required obtaining detailed, rich, robust information from a few participants. The concept of determining the sample size was generally “saturation,” criticised by Malterud, Siersma and Guassora (2016) by proposing the concept of ‘information power’. The authors

state that the concept posits that the more information the sample contains relevant to the actual study, the fewer participants are required. Therefore, the greater the sample's information power, the lower the *N* required, and vice versa. Furthermore, the authors emphasise that in qualitative interpretive research, the logic of exploration is more emphasised than the logic of justification. Other sampling assumptions are usually more adequate than what can be predicted or calculated. An idea further echoed by Yin (2011, 2018a) unlike in quantitative analysis, there is no accepted rule for the number of participants required in qualitative research. Furthermore, Table 5.4 summarises the inclusion and exclusion criteria used to identify participants for this study, ensuring relevance to the research focus and consistency in participants' roles.

Table 5.4: Participants' inclusion and exclusion

Criteria type	Inclusion criteria	Exclusion criteria
Employment type	Permanent staff appointed in a management position	Contract or temporary staff in acting or interim management roles
Experience	Managers with at least 6 months of experience in the case organisation	Managers with less than 6 months' experience in the case organisation
Role scope	Individuals formally recognised as part of the institution's management structure.	Staff not officially designated as managers (e.g., coordinators without formal authority)
Availability	Willing and available to participate during the data collection window	Unavailable or declined to participate during data collection

Source: Author's own

This implies that data were gathered to a point where it was necessary and that the study was not prolonged unnecessarily.

5.6.3.2.3 Data gathering

One distinguishing feature of well-collected qualitative data was that it focused on naturally occurring, ordinary events in natural settings, giving us a good sense of "real life" (Miles, Huberman and Saldana, 2014). The authors further emphasise "local groundedness" and "richness and holism" as features of qualitative research that have the potential to unearth complexity in the phenomena.

To fully exploit the foregoing characteristics, triangulation in qualitative research allowed for the examination of a given reality from multiple perspectives. This was done by allowing for information confrontation and minimising bias caused by a single analytical view and allows for depth and methodological rigour in qualitative research (Santos, Tureta and Felix 2021) and credibility to qualitative research (Wood, Sebar and Vecchio 2020). Additionally, Abdalla et al (2018) posit that triangulation improves credibility, allowing the reader to gain a better appreciation and understanding of the phenomenon, and thereby enhancing research quality. Further, according to Merriam (2009), triangulation entails comparing and cross-checking data collected through observations at different times or locations or interview data collected from different perspectives or follow-up interviews with the same people, improving the study's integrity and deepening the researcher's understanding of the phenomena under investigation.

To gain a foundational understanding of the institutional context and guide the development of subsequent data collection methods, the researcher began with a document analysis phase (Yin 2018; Creswell 2012; Stake 1995). This analysis helped surface key themes and organisational patterns related to emergent strategising and informed a more nuanced interpretation of the empirical context. Although the semi-structured interview guide was developed prior to the document analysis, the content of the documents played a critical role in shaping how interviews were conducted. Specifically, the researcher used probing and clarifying questions during interviews to follow up on themes, inconsistencies, or ambiguities identified in the documents. This iterative interaction between data sources ensured that the interviews remained

grounded in the participants' lived realities while also responding dynamically to contextual insights.

Owing to limited access to internal records, document analysis was restricted to publicly available institutional documents that could be accessed online. To ensure methodological transparency, inclusion and exclusion criteria were applied. Included documents were (i) produced or endorsed by the institution or regulatory authorities; (ii) dated within the study's time frame; and (iii) directly relevant to strategic direction, institutional values, or managerial operations. Excluded documents consisted of non-institutional commentary (e.g., news articles or blogs), materials lacking verifiable authorship, outdated sources, and marketing collateral not tied to strategic practice. This curated selection enhanced the credibility of the document analysis and supported the triangulation of insights from multiple data sources. Subsequently, semi-structured interviews were conducted to explore, elaborate on, or challenge the understandings developed through the document review.

Written narratives were utilised as a closely related qualitative research method. Narratives focused on the stories themselves, how they are told, the context in which they are told and the meanings and insights that were drawn from them. They sought to explore the temporal (past, present, future) and contextual dimensions of experiences and ways in which individuals construct and communicate their experiences through stories (Bowen 2009). It also entails collecting and interpreting stories from participants to understand their experiences and the meanings they ascribe to them (Morgan 2022; Bowen 2009). They provided deep, rich and contextualised data. Participants' stories often included emotional and experiential details that reveal their perspectives, motivations and the complexities of their experiences.

The following section details and justifies the choice of qualitative research methods.

a) Document analysis

As defined by Bowen (2009), document analysis is a methodical process for reviewing or evaluating printed and electronic documents (computer-based and Internet-based). Many authors suggest that it can widely be used in conjunction with the interviews and observations in case study research (Morgan 2022; Wood et al. 2020; Bowen 2009). Like other qualitative research methods, it necessitated examining and interpreting data to elicit meaning, gain understanding and develop empirical knowledge (Bowen 2009). Wood et al. (2020) postulate that as the researcher moves between concept development, sampling, data collection, data analysis, and interpretation, the interpretative process is both recursive and reflexive. The author argues that rather than "a rigid set of procedures with tight parameters," it is an emergent process focused on the search for underlying meanings, themes and patterns.

In this study, document analysis involved analysing various documents related to the case or strategising. The analysis assisted the researcher in understanding the history, context and key issues related to emergent strategising. It also helped to identify key stakeholders, in this instance, managers and their roles in the case or emergent strategising, as well as any challenges or opportunities that have arisen (organisational and external contextual factors). Specifically, this was done to achieve research questions four and five.

Documents that were analysed that highlight issues related to micro-practices in emergent strategising included:

- Annual financial statement for the year ended 31 December 2022 provided insights into emergent strategising micro-practices, particularly in the areas of performance, goals and objectives. They highlighted factors and goals of the organisation that were met and provided information on the strategies used to address challenges and opportunities. The report included information on how decisions were made and resources allocated, providing insights into the micro-practices involved in emergent strategising. It further provided information on changes in leadership or organisational structure, which can impact emergent strategising at the micro level.

- The Holdings Integrated Report 2023 summarised the institution's financial performance and strategic direction over the past year. It also communicated with shareholders, investors and stakeholders about the company's achievements, including emergent decisions, challenges and plans.
- Holdings Annual General Meeting summarised the company's financial performance and strategic direction over the past year. It also communicates with shareholders, investors and stakeholders about the company's achievements, including emergent decisions, challenges and plans.
- The 2023 Integrated Annual Report summarised the company's financial performance and strategic direction over the past year. It also communicates with shareholders, investors and stakeholders about the company's achievements, emergent events, decisions, challenges, and future plans.

b) Semi-structured Interviews

Pathak and Intratat (2012) posit that semi-structured interviews are used when the research would benefit from a more open framework. The authors also note that these methods are used when focused, yet informal two-way communication with the participants yields more useful information. In a structured interview, it is customary to prepare detailed questions in advance. Similarly, Brinkmann and Kvale (2018) suggest that with this type of interview, the researcher aims to obtain qualitative descriptions of interviewees' 'life-world' (everyday life, lived experiences) interpretations/meaning-making of the research phenomenon. This interviewing method focuses on contextualised 'social meaning-making' actions (their stories of practice). In this interview, the interviewer and interviewee co-constructed knowledge about the phenomenon's in the interviewee's life world experiences through dialogue ('shared discourse').

In the context of this study, interviews were considered an effective way to collect data, especially refining the understanding of emergent strategising and identifying areas for further research (Creswell, 2012) to confirm or challenge the insights obtained during

document analysis (Yin 2018; Miles et al. 2014). Interviews were conducted with managers at different levels who had first-hand experience with the case or phenomenon being studied. The interviews provided rich and detailed data, and assisted the researcher in understanding different managers' power relations, cognition, perspectives, experiences and routines. Intrinsic case study research often necessitates a profound understanding of participants' subjective experiences, and interviews can offer valuable insights into these experiences. They were guided by the interview guide (Appendix C).

The interview questions were constructed based on the theoretical perspectives of the study, the articulated research questions and pertinent literature on emergent strategising and managerial micro-practices within higher education (HE), along with preliminary insights obtained from document analysis. The objective was to elicit comprehensive, context-rich narratives regarding how participants' micro-foundational practices influenced emergent strategising. Although the interview guide was not subjected to formal pilot testing, its open ended and semi-structured design provided flexibility, allowing for real-time modifications during the interviews. This involved the use of probing questions during the interviews to delve deeper into themes or uncertainties that emerged from both the documents and the participants' discussions. This adaptive methodology aligns with qualitative research principles that prioritise contextual responsiveness, depth and reflexivity rather than strict standardisation (Creswell, 2012; Patton, 2015). Consequently, the guide functioned as a flexible framework rather than a rigid tool, allowing the researcher to remain receptive to emerging insights throughout the data-gathering phase.

This assisted in achieving all specific questions one to five.

c) Written narratives

Bowen (2009) posits that narrative inquiry entails collecting interesting stories of individuals to understand their experiences and the meanings they assign to them. It is an effective method for exploring complex phenomena in depth as they capture the richness of personal and contextual factors that shape individuals' perspectives and

actions. The author asserts that they focus on the ways in which individuals construct and communicate their experiences through stories.

In the context of the study, narratives were used to collect reflections and stories from managers about their day-to-day practices, decision-making processes and interactions. The researcher requested managers to share stories (lived experiences) about significant social interactions with colleagues, subordinates and other stakeholders that influenced strategic decisions and initiatives. Thereby, identifying specific incidents that illustrated how these interactions influence strategic decisions.

Additionally, the researchers collected narratives about managers' thought processes, reflections and cognitive strategies when faced with strategic decisions. These stories revealed mental models, perceptions, and problem-solving approaches that influence emergent strategising, thereby identifying cognitive themes and how they shape strategic outcomes.

Stories about daily routines, habits and practices were gathered. The specific routines that managers believe contribute to strategic outcomes were examined. The researcher requested managers to recount stories and reflect on how organisational structures, social interactions, daily routines, cognition, culture, policies, and external factors such as market conditions or regulatory changes have impacted their strategic decisions. The managers identified key organisational and external factors and their influence on strategy formation.

Lastly, stories of managers exercising power or influence in strategic contexts were gathered. The researcher focused on incidents that demonstrated the use of authority, negotiation and influence, and analysed how power dynamics within the organisation contributed to emergent strategising.

5.5.3.3 Ethical considerations, the relationship between the researcher and the participants

A careful reading of Unisa's research ethics policy (Unisa, 2012) revealed significant ethical issues that were addressed in this study, as discussed below:

This study was guided by four moral principles of research ethics (UNISA 2016):

- Each participant's autonomy, rights and dignity were respected.
- Beneficence: This study sought to make a positive contribution to people's well-being.
- Non-maleficence: No research participants were harmed because of this study.
- Justice: The benefits of this study will be distributed fairly among the people.

In addition to the foregoing moral principles, this study was guided by general ethical principles published in the Unisa research-ethical policy (UNISA 2016). These included ensuring essential and relevant research, maximising public interest and social justice, research competence, ability, and commitment, respecting and protecting all participants' and institutions' rights and interests, informed and non-coerced consent, respecting cultural differences, justice, fairness, and objectivity, integrity, transparency, and accountability, risk minimisation, and non-exploitation.

a) Informed consent

The participants were regarded as critical partners in the study. Care was taken to avoid causing them physical, social, or psychological harm. In addition to considering each participant's social, cultural and historical background, they were not exploited or coerced in any way. They were informed of Unisa's research ethics policy and provided it to them upon request.

b) Privacy, anonymity and confidentiality

None of the participants' names were recorded or disclosed at any stage of the study. Participation was entirely voluntary, and individuals were not coerced into providing information they felt uncomfortable sharing. All personal and research data, including interview recordings, transcripts and written narratives, have been treated with the utmost confidentiality.

The semi-structured interviews were transcribed using Otter AI, a speech-to-text software, to facilitate efficient documentation. Acknowledging that automated transcription tools can introduce errors, particularly owing to regional accents or technical limitations, each transcript was manually reviewed and corrected by the researcher against the original audio recordings. This ensured the transcripts were accurate, coherent and preserved the intended meaning of participant responses.

To further ensure accuracy and credibility, member checking was conducted. Each participant received their respective transcript via email and was invited to verify the accuracy of their content. All participants who responded confirmed that the transcript accurately reflected their views.

The submitted narratives were provided directly by participants through email correspondence. These texts were independently authored by the participants and, therefore, necessitated no transcription or modification. They were regarded as genuine representations of everyone's experiences and perspectives.

In the realm of data storage, all transcribed interviews and documents are meticulously stored on the researcher's password-protected laptop, supplemented by a backup to a private, access-controlled Google Drive folder. Access to these files is strictly restricted to authorised personnel only. This dual-storage strategy not only ensures robust data security and ease of retrieval in the event of local hardware failure but also maintains the ethical principles of confidentiality and participant anonymity.

c) Data storage and disposal

The data will be stored at the researcher's house in a lockable steel cabinet accessible only to the researcher for a period of five years. Following this time, all documents will be shredded, and all computer files will be permanently deleted.

d) Possible risk factors for the participants

There was no physical or financial risk. On a psychological level, it could have been possible that participants may experience a degree of emotional discomfort during the study; hence, the researcher assured participants about issues of privacy, consent, withdrawal and confidentiality. Every effort was made to provide support.

e) Conflict of interest

A potential risk factor in this research relates to the researcher's prior affiliation with the PHEI under study. The researcher previously undertook part-time academic work at the institution, which concluded two years prior to data collection. While the institution did not employ the researcher at the time of the study, this historical connection positioned her as a former insider, with prior exposure to the institutional context, culture and strategic language.

This insider positioning was acknowledged and carefully managed throughout the research process. In alignment with descriptive phenomenological principles, the researcher engaged in bracketing to set aside prior assumptions and professional experiences consciously. Drawing on the guidance of (Sinfield, Goldspink and Wilson, 2023), this included the use of a reflexive journal to document pre-understandings, monitor the influence of past affiliations and remain critically attuned to how prior knowledge might shape interpretations of participants' lived experiences.

Transparency and ethical integrity were central to the research design. Participants were informed of the researcher's former relationship with the institution, and measures were taken to ensure that the analysis foregrounded participants' voices rather than the researcher's prior experience. This reflexive approach ensured that the findings reflected authentic, situated insights while maintaining methodological rigour and ethical accountability.

5.5.3.4 Data preparation for analysis

Before the formal analysis commenced, all data underwent systematic preparation to guarantee analytical consistency and rigour. Semi-structured interviews were initially transcribed using Otter AI, followed by manual verification against the original audio recordings to correct any transcription errors and ensure fidelity to the participants' voices. Each transcript was anonymised, uniformly formatted and saved in both Microsoft Word and PDF formats to facilitate traceability and ease of coding.

Written narratives submitted by participants via email were accepted as they were, as they were composed directly by the participants. These narratives were assigned anonymised identifiers and formatted consistently with the interview transcripts to enable comparative thematic analysis.

Data sourced from publicly accessible institutional websites and regulatory bodies were imported into Atlas. Ti version 24 as individual documents. Metadata (e.g., document title, source, year) was logged for each file. This software environment enabled efficient organisation, code application, and memoing during the document analysis process. Each document was reviewed in full before coding to promote immersion in the data and familiarity with language and structure.

All data were securely stored on a password-protected laptop and backed up in a private, access-controlled Google Drive folder to ensure confidentiality and data security. Following the preparation and organisation of all data types, the researcher conducted multiple readings to facilitate initial sense-making and inductive coding following Colaizzi's phenomenological analysis method.

5.5.3.5 Phase 3: Data analysis

To build a narrative, the researcher relied on in-depth and repetitive textual analyses and personal observations and experiences (Akinyode and Khan 2018). Merriam (2009) and Creswell and Poth (2018) advocate for simultaneous data collection and analysis in an iterative and emergent manner. Both authors discuss different levels and procedures involved in qualitative analysis. Merriam proposes three levels of analysis: description, constructing categories and themes, and theory building/interpretation. Creswell et al. (2018) suggest that all qualitative analyses follow general procedures such as data management, coding and presenting data. However, they also note that additional analytical strategies may be employed during the analysis process. Overall, both authors emphasise the importance of reducing, consolidating and interpreting data to make sense of participants' words, the researcher's observations and existing literature.

Nowell, Norris, White and Moules (2017) buttress that thematic analysis is a versatile and intricate technique that enables the identification, analysis, organisation, description, and reporting of themes within a data-set. The authors assert that this method produces thorough, detailed and reliable findings. Additionally, despite its intricacy in handling data, the authors state that thematic analysis is a flexible and valuable approach for examining the diverse perspectives of research participants, uncovering similarities and differences and generating unexpected insights. They also highlight that this method is helpful for summarising key features of datasets by promoting structured handling of data, which results in a clear and well-organised final report. Saunders et al. (2023) further state that it can be used to analyse smaller data sets and disparate amounts of qualitative data.

As alluded to earlier, since data collection and analysis happened simultaneously, it is critical to recognise that the data analysis process was not wholly distinct from the actual data. This study employed thematic data analysis, and it is presented in the next section.

5.5.3.5.1 The data analysis strategy

This section outlines the data analysis strategy applied across the three qualitative phases of the study: document analysis, semi-structured interviews and written narratives. It also details the case-specific analytical strategy relevant to the single-case study design.

To ensure the trustworthiness and credibility of the analytical process, the study incorporated principles aligned with Carcary's (2009) framework for maintaining a research audit trail. This included systematic documentation of data preparation, coding decisions, theme development, and memoing activities. Detailed records were maintained to illustrate how raw data were transformed into meaningful findings, facilitating transparency, dependability and confirmability throughout the analytic process.

In addition to adopting Colaizzi's phenomenological analysis method, the study also emphasised reflexive documentation and consistent file management across all data sources. This layered strategy provided a clear trail of analytic logic and interpretive rigour, allowing one to trace how conclusions were derived from the data.

a) Data analysis procedures

Many authors agree that data analysis should not consist of linear, cast-in-stone steps (Saunders et al. 2023; Creswell and Poth 2018; Merriam 2009). It entails constantly switching between description and interpretation (Merriam 2009). It involves continuously moving back and forth between narrative and interpretation (Merriam, 1998). Accordingly, Saunders et al. (2023) state that themes were derived from data in an inductive approach. Themes related to micro-practices were sought. Braun and Clarke's (2006) six phase foundational method for qualitative analysis was utilised.

- Data administration

The researcher followed Braun and Clarke's foundational method for qualitative analysis by identifying, organising, describing and reporting themes found in the data set (Braun et al., 2012). Atlas.ti was used to store transcriptions as hermeneutic units. This computer software package aids in the analysis of qualitative data.

- **'Memoing' and reading**

The researcher immersed themselves in the data, reading it several times to make sense of it. The researcher wrote memoirs on the margins of the field notes that aided in the exploratory stage.

- **Describing, categorising, and interpreting**

In the following step, the data were classified and interpreted into codes and themes. As alluded to earlier, a thematic analysis of the transcribed data allowed the researcher to investigate latent content inductively in addition to concrete issues.

In interpreting, the researcher abstracted from the codes and themes to the overall meaning of the data. These interpretations are related to the study's research questions and the existing literature. The following section covers the case study-specific data analysis strategies.

b) Case study-specific data analysis strategies

As discussed in Section 5.3, the research questions and, by extension, the data analysis phase of this study were anchored on the research questions and, more loosely, in developing a social theoretical perspective on micro-practices that influence emergent strategising (Yin 2018). The relevance of the research evidence to the research questions was considered when analysing the research evidence. Therefore, this created a detailed understanding with practical relevance of micro-practices and provided a comprehensive view of their meaning and relationship to strategic management. This study addressed the *'how' and 'what'* questions of micro-practices that influence emergent strategising. According to Creswell and Poth (2018), the data analysis phase included a detailed case description and its settings. This was done because the case facilitated a thorough understanding of the phenomenon of micro-practices that influence emergent strategising.

5.5.3.5.2 Assuring accurate data analysis

As suggested by Yin (2018), this study followed critical principles to ensure rigour and scientific soundness in data analysis, such as addressing all the evidence and dealing with the most significant issues during the research.

5.5.3.6 Phase 4: Presenting the research findings

As described in Section 5.8.1, an intrinsic case-study approach was followed for this study and its embedded units of analysis. The findings from the case studies were presented in a narrative form, which aimed to gain a deeper understanding of the investigated phenomenon. The case study is instrumental in elucidating this phenomenon. A theory-building compositional structure proposed by Yin (2018) was chosen for the findings-narrative. This study aimed to gain exploratory insights into micro-practices; how they influence emergent strategising and further develop a social theoretical perspective on micro-practices and a detailed view of micro-practices that influence them. The researcher discussed the recurring themes in the narrative report when answering each research question. The researcher also provided evidence for the themes by using verbatim quotes from the transcriptions and a coding report.

5.5.3.7 Scientific rigour

Despite its widespread use, the case study method is still contested within the research community, and credibility concerns still linger (Merriam, 2009b; Yin, 2018). Seminal authors like Miles and Huberman (1994), Stake (1995), Merriam (1998, 2009) and Yin (1994; 2009; 2012; 2014) have endeavoured to elucidate the workings (theory and implementation) of the case study, followed by various other researchers, like (Creswell, 2009, 2017; Creswell and Creswell, 2018). This study employed planned systematic steps and protocols for collecting and analysing the data, as suggested by (Yin, 2018b) and (Merriam, 2009b).

5.5.3.7.1 Trustworthiness in the qualitative phases

This study was guided by the widely accepted criteria for ensuring research trustworthiness in qualitative research, as proposed by Lincoln and Guba 1985). Further, to ensure the trustworthiness and credibility of the analytical process, the study incorporated principles aligned with Carcary (2009) framework for maintaining a research audit trail, as presented in Table 5.5.

Table 5.5: Audit trail for qualitative data analysis

Audit trail element	Description	Linked trustworthiness criteria
Raw Data	Audio recordings (semi-structured interviews); participant-submitted narratives; publicly accessible documents	Credibility and dependability
Transcripts	Interview transcripts reviewed for accuracy and edited manually; narratives formatted and anonymised	Confirmability and credibility
Data Storage	Password-protected laptop and private Google Drive; version-controlled files	Dependability and confirmability
Coding process	Initial and secondary coding done in ATLAS.ti v24; codes grouped into families and categories.	Dependability and confirmability
Codebook development	Iteratively updated with code definitions and examples; grounded in Colaizzi's method.	Credibility and dependability
Memos and analytic notes	Written reflections on emerging themes, contradictions, and analytic decisions (maintained in a reflexive journal)	Confirmability and credibility
Theme development log	Step-by-step documentation of how codes evolved into themes and categories	Dependability and confirmability
Member checking records	Emails sent to participants with transcripts; confirmations received for accuracy	Credibility
Reflexive journal	Continuous documentation of personal assumptions, positionality, and methodological reflections	Confirmability and reflexivity
Document log	Metadata for institutional documents analysed (title, date, source, relevance)	Dependability

Source: Author's own

- In terms of transferability or external validity, the researcher described the phenomena in great detail using thick descriptions.

In terms of dependability, consistency, and repeatability, the researcher:

- An objective researcher was assigned to investigate this study in terms of the research process and conclusions.
- Concerning the research's confirmability, or neutrality, the researcher recorded all evidence of fieldwork to provide an audit trail;
- The researcher kept a reflective journal throughout the research process, reflecting on issues such as research logistics, methodological decisions and reasons for them, and their own insights.

5.5.4 Delimitations of the study

- **Focus on micro-foundational practices** – The study deliberately excluded macro-level strategic decision-making to concentrate on micro-level strategising.
- **Private institutions only** – The research is restricted to PHEIs, rather than public universities, to align with the study's objectives.
- **Strategic adaptation and emergent strategies** – The study does not evaluate formal strategic planning but instead focuses on emergent, informal strategising.
- **Geographical Scope** – The research was limited to South Africa, meaning that the findings may not be directly applicable to other national contexts.
- **Managerial Perspective** – The study only investigates strategising from the managerial level, rather than from students, faculty or external stakeholders.

5.5.5 Limitations

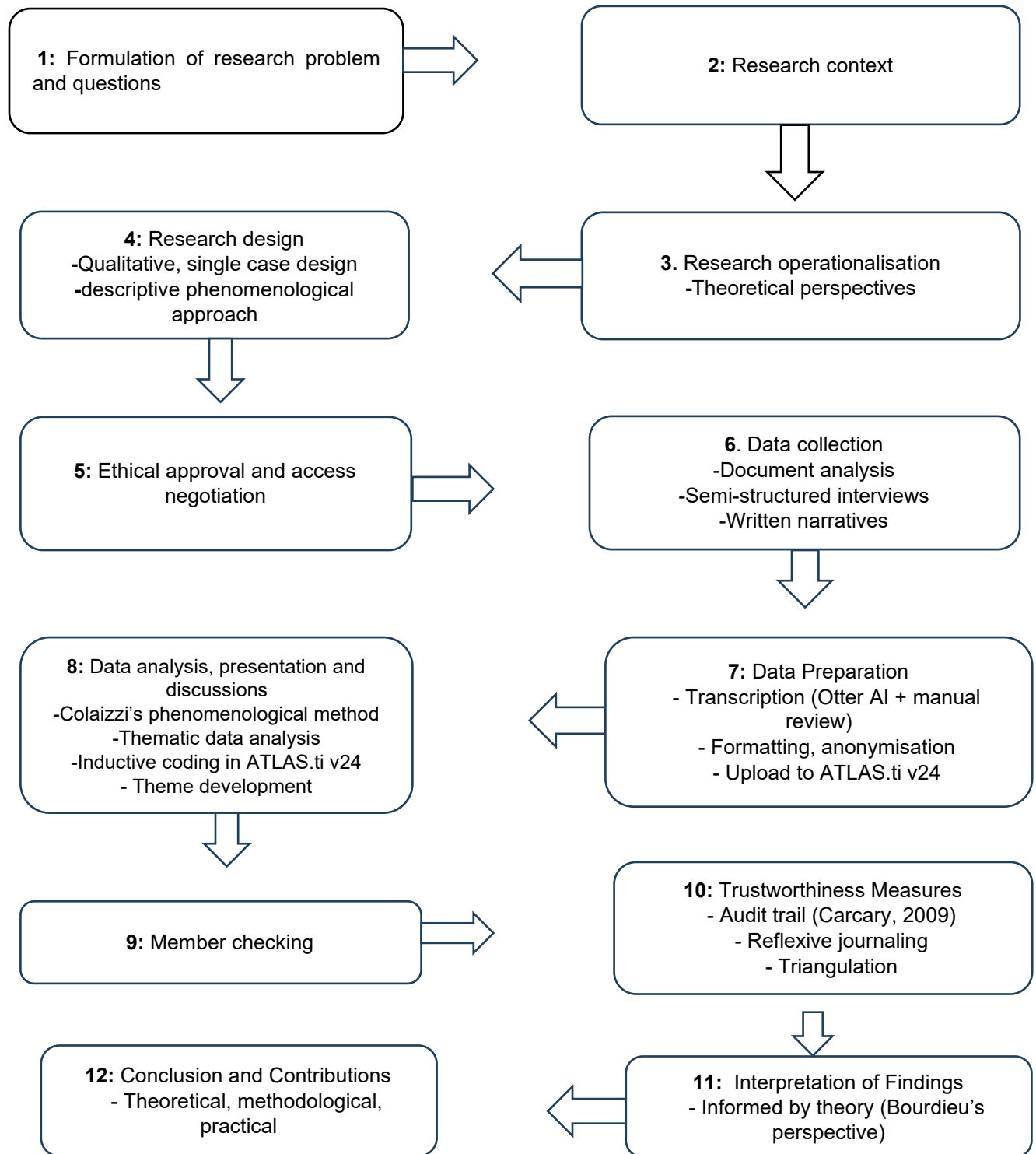
- **Context-specific findings** —The study focused on a single PHEI in South Africa, limiting generalisability to other institutions or regions.
- **Qualitative approach** – While providing rich insights, the case study method does not allow for broad statistical validation of findings.
- **Subjectivity in interpretation**—Given the constructivist-interpretivist paradigm, the researcher's interpretation could influence the findings, introducing bias.
- **Time constraints**—The data were collected within a specific period, potentially missing long-term strategic evolution within the institution.

- **Limited participant pool** – The study focused on managers, which may exclude perspectives from other key stakeholders like faculty, students, or administrative staff.

5.5.6 Visual summary of the research process

Figure 5.4 provides a visual overview of the research process, illustrating the sequential and iterative steps undertaken from initial design to data interpretation. This diagram complements the narrative descriptions presented in this chapter and reinforces the methodological coherence of the study.

Figure 5.3: Overview of the research process



Source: Author's own

Figure 5.3 indicates the overview of the research process.

5.7 Chapter conclusion

This chapter presented a discussion of the research design; the blueprint for the study's empirical phase, which aimed to answer its research questions. It was framed within the study aim and research questions, theoretical perspective and context. The study aimed to gain a deeper understanding of micro-practices as a micro-foundation for influencing emergent strategising and to present a theoretical perspective that guides further inquiry in this area of interest, thereby developing a theoretical framework for similar future studies. The philosophical underpinnings of the study were the constructivist-interpretivist worldview and its connection to a qualitative case study approach, which was described next. The chapter also provided a comprehensive explanation of the exploratory, intrinsic case study research design. This included a discussion of the three qualitative data collection methods, how they were analysed, and how the findings were presented. The next chapter presents the findings and the interpretation of the study.

Chapter 6: Data analysis, presentation, and discussion of findings

“Qualitative research gathers participants' experiences, perceptions, and behavior. It answers the hows and whys instead of how many or how much” (Tenny, Brannan and Brannan 2022) .

6.1 Introduction

Chapter 1 elucidated that the study explores the micro-foundational practices of managers influencing strategising at a PHEI. Chapter 2 contextualised the study; Chapter 3 expanded on the orientation of the study by operationalising it. Chapter 4 theorised the study. The preceding chapter elucidated this study's research design, approach and methodology. This chapter discusses insights from empirical data acquired through qualitative document analysis, semi-structured interviews and written narratives on how micro-foundational practices of managers at a PHEI influenced emergent strategising. Detailed and rich contextualised descriptions and verbatim quotes provide an account of top, middle and low managers' lived experiences with strategising activities and interactions at their organisations. In investigating emergent strategising of top, middle and low-level managers, the research contributes to the body of knowledge in strategising.

The micro-foundational practices of managers that influenced the emergent strategising of organisations are explored in-depth. Additionally, this study viewed strategising through the lens of S-as-P. This study supported an integrative, context-based, socially informed perspective recognising the strategic actor's role (individual action and interactions) in emergent strategising. Additionally, it recognised that the micro-foundation approach provided a lens through which to investigate the micro-practices that bring theory into action and are unplanned and unpurposive, impacting the process and outcome of resulting strategies. Bourdieu's approach recognises the actual individual practices (action and interaction) within a given context.

Lastly, the study contributes to the S-as-P agenda of socially contexted doings and subscribes to the notion that real-world strategising occurs along a continuum between perfectly deliberate and perfectly emergent strategies and that individuals' actions and interactions contribute to emergent strategising. Therefore, the interplay between perfectly deliberate and perfectly emergent is crucial, and strategy can emanate from daily activities to cope with different situations an organisation faces (micro and macro).

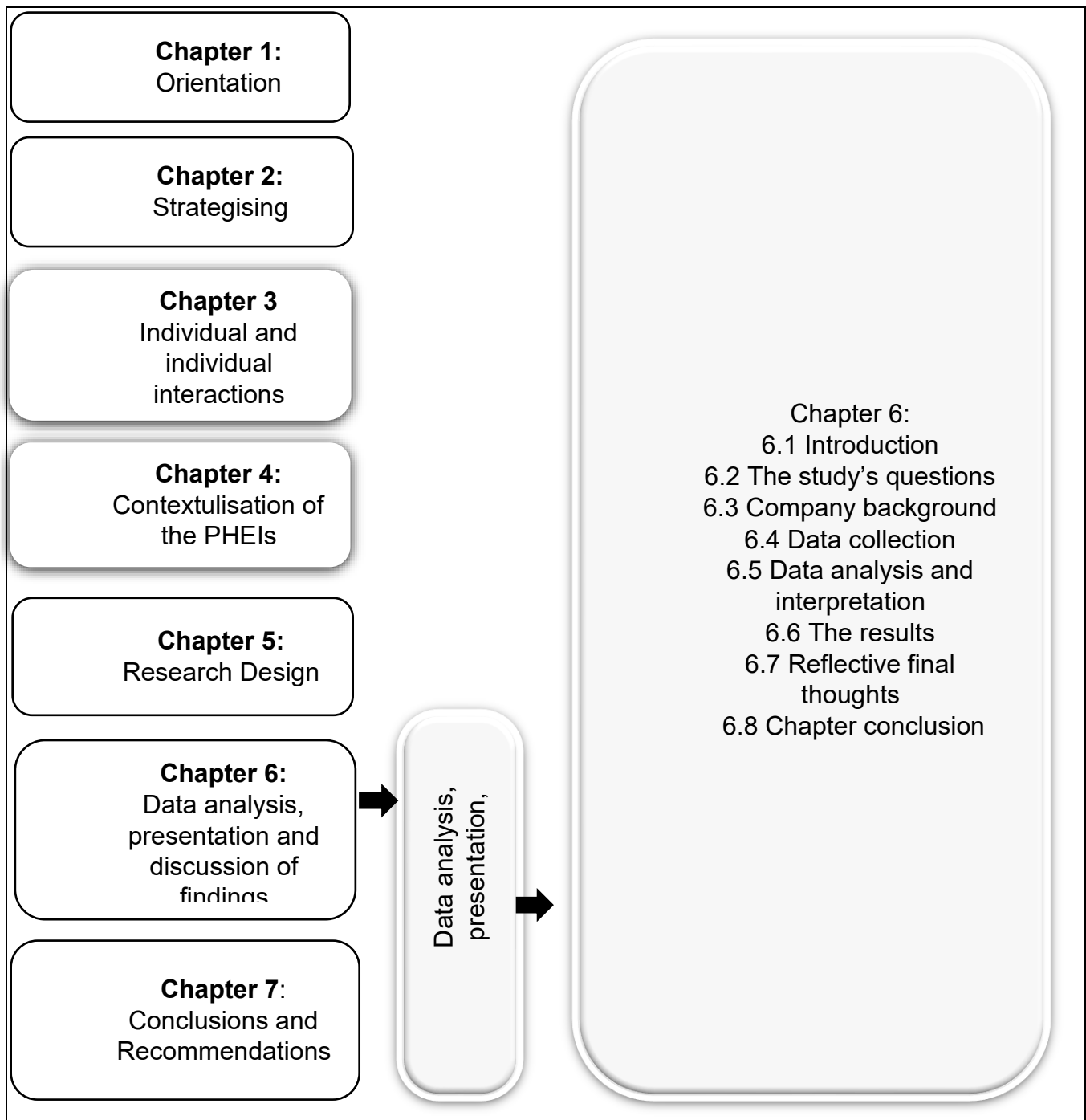


Figure 6.1: Chapter 6 structure (own compilation)

As depicted in Figure 6.1, this chapter presented findings empirically collected through document analysis, semi-structured interviews and written narratives with top, middle and low-level managers of a PHEI to gain a deeper understanding of the micro-practices of managers that influenced emergent strategising. It commenced with a review of the

study's main research questions and the inquiry-based questions, company background, data collection, data analysis, interpretation and reporting, the discussion of the results, then a reflective thought from the researcher and a conclusion of the chapter.

6.2 The research questions

The general research question was:

How do micro-practices of managers influence emergent strategising at a PHEI?

This question formed the core of the research, guiding the researcher to explore the intricate dynamics of strategising at a PHE institution.

The inquiry-based research questions were:

1. How do the social interactions of PHEI managers drive emergent strategising?
2. What is the influence of cognition by PHEI managers in emergent strategising?
3. What role do daily individual routines play in facilitating emergent strategising of PHEI managers?
4. How do organisational and external contextual factors influence the emergent strategising of PHEI managers?
5. How do power dynamics by PHEI managers influence emergent strategising?

6.3 Case context during data collection

This section described the context of the case study organisation during data gathering. Data were gathered from mid to the end of the second semester in 2024, capturing a snapshot of micro-foundational practices that influenced emergent strategising rather than long-term trends. This period was characterised by academic conferences, strategy sessions and end-of-the-year assessments, as well as the significant expansion of one of their campuses. Hence, under this pressure, they responded to the questions while operating under operational pressure.

As indicated in section 5.4, the organisation has a central executive team responsible for corporate strategy, finance and compliance. However, each educational brand has academic and operational leadership that ensures the preservation of sector-specific expertise within each vertical school. Furthermore, strategic decisions were guided by a Board of Directors (BOD) that includes independent and executive members.

6.3.1 The case

The institution under study is registered as a PHEI with the DHET in accordance with the Higher Education Act of 1997. It was established by merging four educational brands and launched as a cohesive brand in October 2020.

6.3.2 Management structure:

a) Head Office

The central administration is tasked with providing overarching strategic direction, formulating policies and allocating resources. It guarantees alignment with the institution's mission and vision while overseeing financial management, academic standards, and institutional development.

b) Subsidiaries and campuses

The institution's subsidiaries encompass various schools and faculties, each concentrating on specific academic disciplines. These include the School of Administration and Management, the School of Arts and Humanities, the School of Commerce, the School of Education, the School of Engineering and Architecture, the School of Fashion, the School of Information Technology, the School of Law, the School of Media and Design, and the School of Policing and Law Enforcement. Each campus operates under the guidance of the head office, implementing strategic initiatives while addressing local educational needs.

c) Interaction between the Head Office and subsidiaries

The head office is in Cape Town and is a subsidiary of a holding company that possesses two additional PHEIs. The PHEI is publicly listed on the JSE via its parent company, showcasing its commitment to transparency and governance. With a centralised management structure, the head office offers strategic guidance to subsidiaries to ensure alignment with the institution's mission. The subsidiaries, which comprise various faculties and schools, deliver educational programmes locally while adhering to centralised protocols. Collaboration between the head office and these subsidiaries is crucial for upholding academic standards and executing strategic plan initiatives.

d) Strategic growth

The institution has grown significantly, now operating ten campuses across South Africa and serving more than 46,000 students. The milestone represents a significant strategic achievement, transforming the institution into a comprehensive provider of higher education. By the end of 2023, the institution offered over 50 accredited programmes across various disciplines. These programmes were tailored to meet the diverse needs of students and market demands, with delivery options including contact learning (CL) and distance learning (DL).

e) Development of deliberate strategy

Strategic planning at the institution adheres to a purposeful process that encompasses environmental analysis to evaluate market conditions, stakeholder engagement (including faculty, students, and industry partners), and the development of clear, actionable goals. The leadership consistently monitors progress and adjusts to changes in the educational landscape to retain relevance and competitiveness. The structured approach ensures that the institution remains agile while upholding a unified direction. Furthermore, the institution's programmes were offered at ten contact learning campuses and six distance learning support centres, both locally and regionally, ensuring flexibility and accessibility for students. The strategic positioning enables the institution to provide high-quality education across South Africa while offering robust support for distance learners, enhancing both reach and inclusivity.

6.3.3 Participants and management structure

The organisation's management structure is decentralised, featuring numerous levels of managers functioning across various geographic regions or provinces. A centralised head office directs overall strategy, while academic and operational leadership is integrated at the campus level. This decentralised management model indicates that numerous managerial actors interviewed for this study function from separate campuses, rather than a singular central location.

Participants included low, mid and senior managers from both the head office and regional campuses, encompassing those overseeing academic, operational and support roles. The geographic dispersion is significant within the study's micro-foundational framework, as these managers' micro-actions, interpretations and decision-making patterns were contextually situated. Therefore, their location inside distinct campus environments, each characterised by particular student demographics, infrastructural capabilities, and community dynamics, profoundly influences the daily exercise of managerial agency.

Recognising this contextual complexity is essential, as participants' perspectives and insights were not solely indicative of institutional policy or overarching managerial rationale but of a profoundly localised reality. The study acknowledges that all aggregated

interpretations concerning these spatial and functional characteristics should be considered.

a) Participant location and contextual embeddedness

Participants in this study were drawn from diverse geographic and operational locales within the case organisation, encompassing the head office, the main campus and a range of regional and satellite campuses across the organisation's national presence. This selection was intentionally designed to capture variations in managerial experiences across various institutional contexts.

This geographical diversity was analytically significant, as each site possesses unique operational realities, resource dynamics, student demographics, and strategic focuses. The micro-practices of participants, such as their interpretations of the institutional vision, approaches to strategy implementation or management of constraints, were influenced by their specific positions within these distinct organisational settings. For instance, managers at satellite campuses frequently articulated adaptive strategies in response to constrained infrastructure and limited staff autonomy, whereas those situated at the head office emphasised policy implementation and oversight.

Recognising this spatial and organisational dispersion was crucial for data interpretation. It highlighted that emergent strategising is not homogeneous but is profoundly rooted in the localised, lived experiences of managers operating within a structurally dispersed higher education system.

b) Integration of case study design and phenomenology

This study adopted a qualitative research design that integrated a case study methodology with a phenomenological approach. While these two approaches stem from different methodological traditions, their combination was highly deliberate and epistemologically coherent for this study.

As such, the case study design provided the structural and contextual boundaries for the research by defining the bounded system specifically as posited by Coombs (2022), the

selected South African PHEI and allowed for an investigation of phenomena within their real-world, highly regulated settings.

However, because S-as-P focuses heavily on human action and micro-practices, a structural case study alone is insufficient; it must be paired with an approach that captures human subjectivity (Coombs, 2022). Therefore, to achieve this, phenomenology was integrated as the primary interpretive lens within the case boundaries (Morrison, 2025).

Hence, in this study, rather than treating the institutional case merely as an objective set of structures, the phenomenological layer focused on the lived experiences of the PHEI managers operating within those structures. It explored how these actors personally perceive, interpret, and make sense of their daily micro-practices in emergent strategising. Therefore, these two traditions were integrated as complementary layers: the case study established where and under what structural conditions strategising happens, while phenomenology uncovered how individual managers experience and enact that strategising from the inside out, rendering the dual approach necessary to ensure that the study remained contextually grounded in the reality of the PHE sector and deeply humanised at the micro-practice level.

6.4 Data gathering

Three methods were used for data collection. The researcher started with document analysis to gain insights into the institution's strategy. All prospective participants were contacted via email after a thorough engagement with the documents. In the email, the researcher introduced herself and attached the participant information sheet (Appendix A), which informed the participants of the study's aims and the ethical issues surrounding participation. The participants who agreed to participate were sent consent forms, which they signed and returned via email (Appendix E). Interviews were followed by written narratives.

6.4.1 Summaries of data gathering methods

The researcher utilised three data collection methods: document analysis (a secondary data collection method) and two primary data collection methods: semi-structured interviews and written narratives. The data collection methods were described next.

6.4.1.1 Document analysis

Firstly, document analysis sets the stage by providing a contextual and historical foundation, which informed the interview questions' design and helped to identify key themes and patterns for further exploration (Bowen 2009). It involved reviewing publicly accessible organisational documents and other relevant materials, such as multimedia sources and digital content, to gain insights into the institution's strategic practices. It should be noted that the institution did not permit the researcher to access internal strategic plans or presentations, except for those that were publicly accessible, such as annual general meetings and management insights within the institution. The absence of live documents potentially limited the ability to capture real-time strategising, which might have provided deeper insights into the emergent strategies occurring within the institution. However, document analysis helped to provide a contextual background and triangulate the findings, allowing for a view from multiple perspectives.

The document analysis process was underpinned by a systematic data management framework designed to enhance transparency, traceability and analytical rigour. Each document was meticulously recorded in a document analysis log, which captured essential metadata including the document title, source, publication date, authorship, type (e.g., strategic plan, policy, public report), and its relevance to the study's objectives. This log facilitated the researcher's tracking of the selection, interpretation and subsequent cross-referencing of documents with the themes that emerged from both interview and narrative data.

Documents were individually imported into ATLAS.ti v24, where they were systematically coded using the same inductive framework that was applied to the interviews and written narratives. Memos were generated directly within ATLAS.ti to document early interpretations, contextual notes and insights regarding how each document interconnected with the study's conceptual framework and research inquiries. This methodological process facilitated triangulation, enabling the researcher to compare findings across various data types while maintaining the distinct contributions of each source.

Table 6.1: Analysed documents

Documents name	Author	Date	Type of document	Audience	Function of document
2023 Integrated annual report	The management team and the executives	December 2023	Official	Shareholders, investors, financial analysts, Regulatory bodies and Stakeholders (including employees, customers, suppliers)	Summarises the financial performance and strategic direction of a company over the past year. It also communicates with shareholders, investors and stakeholders about the company's achievements, emergent events and or decisions, challenges and future plans
Annual financial statement for the year ended 31 December 2022	Finance department	31 December 2022	Official	The audiences are the different shareholders, investors, financial analysts, creditors, regulatory bodies (DHET) and tax authorities	It present the financial position, performance, and cash flows of a company over a specific period (e.g., a fiscal year)
Holdings Integrated Report 2023	The management team and the executives	31 December 2023	Official	Shareholders, investors, financial analysts, Regulatory bodies and Stakeholders (including employees, customers, suppliers)	Summarises the financial performance and strategic direction of a company over the past year. It also communicates with shareholders, investors and stakeholders about the company's achievements, including emergent decision, challenges and future plans
Holdings Annual General Meeting	The management team and the executives	31 March 2024	Official	Shareholders, investors, financial analysts, Regulatory bodies and Stakeholders (including employees, customers, suppliers)	Summarises the financial performance and strategic direction of a company over the past year. It also communicates with shareholders, investors and stakeholders about the company's achievements, including emergent decision, challenges and future plans

Source: Author's own compilation

6.4.1.2 Semi-structured interviews

Secondly, semi-structured interviews were conducted with managers during the second semester of the year, towards the mid to end of the semester, depending on availability at various levels (low, middle and top), to allow for an in-depth exploration of their daily routines, cognition and social interactions, and how they influenced emergent strategising.

Semi-structured interviews enabled an in-depth exploration of the research questions, allowing researchers to probe deeply into the thoughts, experiences and practices of managers (Adams, 2015). They allowed the researcher the flexibility to explore micro-practices while maintaining a focus on the research question.

It should be noted that, for the purposes of this study, senior lecturers were considered as managers. According to institutional hierarchies and management theory, senior lecturers were classified as low-level management owing to their restricted administrative power, absence of strategic decision-making responsibilities and emphasis on operational-level academic coordination. Their inclusion corresponds with the study's micro-foundational focus, as they influence organisational results via locally placed, subordinate managerial practices.

Table 6.2 depicts the participants' descriptions, including gender and position within the institution. Furthermore, Table 6.2 represents the total number of participants for the semi-structured interviews, gender and management level.

The total duration of the semi-structured interviews exceeded 650 minutes, resulting in 184 pages of transcribed interviews, which provided substantial qualitative data for analysis.

Table 6.2: Participants' description

Reference of participants in the study	Gender	Position	Concise description of the participant
IP1 and WN1	Female	Programme Coordinator	The participant was a low-level manager. We met at her office so they could feel comfortable. The participant was quite nervous during the early stages of the interview but later became comfortable, was very open in answering the questions, and commented more after the interview. The participant further participated in the written narratives.
IP2 and WN2	Male	Senior Lecturer	The participant was a low-level manager. We met at their office. The participant appeared relaxed yet looked anxious and eager to participate. The participant further participated in the written narratives.
IP3 and WN3	Male	Senior Lecturer	The participant was a low-level manager. We met online via Microsoft Teams. The participant eagerly answered questions and participated in the written narratives.
IP4 and WN4	Male	Academic Manager	The participant was a middle-level manager. Firstly, the participant indicated that they did not have as much time as they had, as he had back-to-back meetings. However, when it was time for the interviews, he took longer than I had anticipated, and I elaborated and clarified my points by providing in-depth examples. The participant further participated in the written narratives.
IP5 and WN5	Male	Academic Manager	The participant was a middle-level manager. The participant was open to all the questions and positive towards the institution's trajectory and strategies. However, the participant provided neutral responses to some of the questions I posed. The participant further participated in the written narratives.

Reference of participants in the study	Gender	Position	Concise description of the participant
IP6 and WN6	Female	C4AS Manager	The participant was a middle-level manager. As we met at her office, the participant was relaxed and eager to provide more answers and elaborations. The participant further participated in the written narratives.
IP7 and WN7	Male	Discipline Leader/Senior lecturer	The participant was a middle-level manager. He gave more information than expected because he had expressed that they were constrained for time. The participant further participated in the written narratives.
IP8 and WN8	Female	Deputy Registrar-Distance Learning	The participant was a middle-level manager. We met in a neutral venue in their boardroom because she did not want any disturbance from colleagues. She was eager and optimistic about the organisation's trajectory. The participant further participated in the written narratives.
IP9 and WN9	Female	C4AS Manager	The participant was a middle-level manager. She needed probing as she gave short and brief answers without elaboration. The participant further participated in the written narratives.
IP10 and WN10	Female	Head Collaborations	The participant was a middle-level manager. She had a lot to say, and the interview was one of the longest. She provided numerous examples and elaborated without further prompting. The participant further participated in the written narratives.

Reference of participants in the study	Gender	Position	Concise description of the participant
IP11 and WN11	Male	Head of School	The participant was a top-level manager. He comprehensively covered both the interview and written narratives. He provided a lengthy narrative and passionately answered all the questions without hesitation. They were willing and eager to participate. They went out of their way with their responses, providing comprehensive examples and elaborating more. The participant further participated in the written narratives.
IP12 and WN12	Female	Head of School	The participant was a top-level manager and fairly new in the institution. She took her time and gave quite comprehensive responses. Despite being new in the organisation, she was willing to elaborate and give information as far as possible. The participant further participated in the written narratives
IP13 and WN13	Female	Head of Quality Assurance	The participant was a top-level manager. We met online, with our video cameras on, and she was eager to participate. We covered all aspects. The participant further participated in the written narratives.
IP14 and WN14	Male	Head of Research	The participant was a top-level manager. He was eager to participate and answered all the questions without hesitation. He further participated in the written narratives.
IP15 and WN15	Female	Head of School	The participant was a top-level manager. Though it took more than a month to secure an interview date with her, the interview was worth the wait. She gave responses without hesitation and provided comprehensive examples to elaborate on her points. The participant further participated in the written narratives.
IP16 and WN16	Female	Head of School	The participant was a top-level manager. She seemed uncomfortable sharing some information, and I had to reassure them that their identity would be withheld. She was relaxed towards the end and commented further when I asked if they had anything to add. The participant further participated in the written narratives.

Reference of participants in the study	Gender	Position	Concise description of the participant
IP17 and WN17	Female	Head of School	The participant was a top-level manager. She provided very long narratives for both the interviews and narratives and further participated in the written narratives.
IP18 and WN18	Male	Manager	The participant was a top-level manager. He was friendly and indicated they had little time owing to work pressure. However, he got comfortable and answered all the questions without further probing. He also participated in the written narratives.

Source: Author's compilation

Table 6.3 indicates that the study had 18 participants, of whom three were from lower management, seven from middle management, and eight from top management. Further, there were nine female and nine male participants.

Table 6.3: Total number of participants, level of management and gender

Participants gender	9 males and 9 females
Level of management	3 low, 7 middle and 8 top management
Total participants	18

Source: Author's compilation

Table 6.3 offers the total number of participants, level of management and gender

6.4.1.3 Written narratives

Lastly, written narratives were collected to capture managers' reflections and stories as indicated in Appendix H. All participants were instructed to reflect on and document their experiences related to micro-foundational practices that influenced emergent strategising at the institution as much as possible. Participants were given two weeks to respond, although some took longer than usual, as it was during the year-end period, characterised by strategic planning for the following academic year and conferences in the education sector. All the participants responded. The data from the narratives totalled 120 pages, providing substantial qualitative data for analysis. Allowing participants to describe their experiences in their own words adds richness and depth to the data (Elliott 2005).

The combined data collection methods provided the researcher with a comprehensive understanding and appreciation of how micro-practices influence emergent strategising at the PHEI.

6.5 Data analysis, interpretation and reporting

This section summarises the key elements of reporting the gathered and analysed data, as detailed in Chapter 5. Within an overarching constructivist-interpretive paradigm and

qualitative research approach, the study utilised multiple data sources in an intrinsic case study involving a PHEI to gain a deep understanding of how micro-practices influence emergent strategising.

The main units of analysis were the micro-practices of emergent strategising in response to what is happening within and without, involving top, middle and low-level management. The case involved exploring managers' micro-practices in describing, understanding and interpreting the environment to develop an emergent strategy. The researcher was the primary instrument in data collection and interpretation.

The data analysis was the next step in the research process after the data gathering procedure described earlier. The objective of data analysis is to arrange, establish a framework and extract significance from the gathered information (Polit et al., 2013). Data analysis, according to Shazia (2014), is crucial because it gives meaning to unprocessed data and allows researchers to derive conclusions from it. The procedures for analysing and interpreting the qualitative data was be further elaborated in the next section. As alluded to earlier in Chapter 5, in analysing data, the researcher followed the following steps as prescribed by Braun et al. (2012).

6.5.1 Familiarisation with the data

The first step in the thematic analysis process involved familiarisation with the data. As mentioned earlier, the researcher utilised publicly accessed documents, transcribed semi-structured interviews and written narratives submitted by participants. The researcher repeatedly read through raw data collected from documents, transcribed semi-structured interviews and written narratives to familiarise themselves with the texts (Nowell et al., 2017). It should be noted that the researcher utilised static documents, as live documents were not available from the institution owing to policy restrictions.

In alignment with the trustworthiness principles delineated by Nowell et al. (2017), this phase emphasised the importance of credibility and dependability through a meticulous and transparent methodology. Throughout each reading cycle, the researcher

systematically maintained comprehensive memos and observational notes to capture initial impressions, emerging meanings and contextual insights. These notes were systematically archived alongside the transcripts and documents in a traceable format, thereby enhancing the study's audit trail. This reflexive documentation not only facilitated subsequent coding and theme development phases but also bolstered the confirmability of the analysis by rendering the researcher's interpretative lens visible during the preliminary engagement with the data.

6.5.2 Generating initial codes

Following familiarisation, the next step involved generating initial codes. Open coding was utilised, which entailed the researcher coding in every conceivable way (Khandkar 2009; Strauss and Corbin 2004). Coding is the process of organising data into meaningful groups (Tuckett 2005). Coding was carried out using Atlas.ti software version 24, which facilitated the systematic identification and categorisation of data segments relevant to the research questions.

Given the study's inductive, theory-driven nature, the coding process was predominantly data-driven. During open coding, codes emerged organically from the data as it was analysed. The researcher had over 1500 codes in the initial coding process. Following the primary coding of the data, a secondary coding process was conducted, wherein codes were categorised into families or sub-themes. These sub-themes exhibited consistent patterns in the data concerning participants' behaviours and strategies. The sub-themes were further categorised into overarching themes, encompassing the study's principal findings. The theme analysis facilitated a comprehensive understanding of how micro-practices contributed to the development of emergent strategies within educational institutions. The themes that surfaced were then interpreted within the context of the theoretical perspectives (micro-foundations and Bourdieu's perspectives), research questions and the chosen research paradigm guiding the research, ensuring that the analysis remained grounded in empirical evidence and relevant theory.

6.5.3 Searching for themes

Once the initial codes were generated, the next step was to search for themes. In an inductive, theory-driven approach, themes were not predefined but emerge from the patterns observed in the coded data. The researcher initially developed ten themes and later consolidated them into four by looking at the overarching themes. The process involved carefully examining the relationships between codes and grouping them into broader themes that encapsulate key aspects of the research questions. These themes were shaped by the data itself, reflecting the underlying dynamics of the micro-practices of managers in the context of emergent strategising at the PHEI (Braun and Clarke, 2021; Nowell et al., 2017).

6.5.4 Reviewing themes

After identifying potential themes, the review process began. It involved revisiting the coded data and ensuring that each theme was coherent, consistent and truly reflective of the data. The emergent themes were scrutinised to confirm that they captured the essence of the participants' experiences and perspectives. The emerging themes were developed through a thorough and reflective approach that followed Colaizzi's descriptive phenomenology method. The process involved identifying key statements, formulating meanings, clustering themes and creating comprehensive descriptions. The researcher independently completed the data analysis, driven by a commitment to bracketing and reflexivity described by (Sinfield, Goldspink and Wilson, 2023). Moreover, the researcher maintained a reflexive diary and employed memoing practices to capture their evolving interpretations and mitigate the impact of biases on the data.

The researcher used triangulation to strengthen analytical rigour and credibility by incorporating three distinct data sources: semi-structured interviews, written narratives from participants and relevant institutional documents. This multi-source method facilitated cross-verification of key themes and revealed subtle nuances in participants' experiences. The iterative analysis involved multiple rounds of reading, comparing

different data types and refining themes to ensure that the final interpretations genuinely reflected the participants' lived experiences. In doing so, the researcher aligned with the primary goal of descriptive phenomenology, which is to portray the 'essence' of the phenomenon without interpretive bias distortion.

The iterative process also involved refining themes by splitting, merging or discarding them to ensure accurate representation of the data. The themes were then reviewed in terms of the theoretical framework, ensuring that they contributed meaningfully to the study's inductive, theory-driven analysis (Braun et al., 2006, 2012).

6.5.5 Defining and naming themes

With the themes refined and reviewed, the next step was to define and assign names to them. It entailed clearly understanding each theme's scope and focus, as well as how it related to the research questions, paradigm and theoretical perspective. The themes were defined in a way that highlighted their connection to the inductive insights drawn from the data while also being informed by relevant theoretical constructs. The naming of themes was done thoughtfully to reflect the essence of the data, ensuring that they resonated with both the empirical findings and the theoretical framework guiding the study (Braun et al., 2012; Maguire, 2017).

6.5.6 Producing the report

The final step in the thematic analysis process was producing the coding report. Appendix F provides a detailed account of the identified themes, illustrating them with direct quotes and examples from participants' interviews, written narratives and institutional documents. It is organised around the four core themes and associated categories, with coding examples drawn from participant responses and institutional documents. The inductive, theory-driven approach allowed for a rich, grounded analysis that connects empirically with broader theoretical insights (Braun et al., 2006; 2012; 2021). The themes

are interpreted considering the theoretical framework, offering a nuanced understanding of how managers' micro-practices influence emergent strategising at the PHEI.

The study's theoretical framework interpreted the themes, yielding a deeper understanding of how managers' micro-practices influence emergent strategising in the PHEI context. The researcher connected individual codes to broader meanings throughout this process, systematically linking these findings to the research questions and relevant literature.

During this process, the researcher aimed to satisfy the trustworthiness criteria of credibility, dependability, confirmability and transferability as detailed by Nowell et al. (2017). A comprehensive audit trail was maintained, featuring analytic memos, reflexive journaling and methodological documentation. This approach fostered transparency in decision-making and strengthened the interpretive validity of the final themes. The triangulation of various data sources further enhanced the credibility of the findings, while continuous reflexivity ensured that interpretations closely reflected participants' expressed realities rather than the researcher's biases.

In interpreting data, the researcher abstracted from the codes and themes to the overall meaning of the data. These interpretations are related to the study's research questions and the existing literature. The following section covers the case study-specific data analysis strategies.

6.6 Data interpretation and findings reporting

The empirical phase of the study, within the overarching constructivist-interpretivist worldview, employed qualitative research methods and gathered empirical findings and evidence on the micro-practices of managers influencing emergent strategising at a PHEI. Data collection and analysis occurred simultaneously in an iterative and emergent manner to describe, construct categories and themes, and develop theory.

This study's presentation and analysis of data were underpinned by the constructivist-interpretivist paradigm, which emphasises the subjective co-construction of meaning

through interactions between the researcher and participants (Guba et al., 1994; Creswell et al., 2018). The paradigm aligns with using multiple data sources document analysis, semi-structured interviews and written narratives to capture managers' complex and nuanced experiences in a PHEI. These diverse data sources were analysed using thematic analysis, a method well-suited to identifying and interpreting patterns and themes within qualitative data (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

The analysis was further enriched by applying micro-foundations and Bourdieu's Social Theory as theoretical lenses. Micro-foundations provided a framework for understanding the individual-level practices that contribute to emergent strategising, while Bourdieu's concepts of habitus, capital and field offered insights into the power dynamics, social structures and cultural influences shaping these practices (Bourdieu 1990; Felin et al. 2015; Foss and Linder 2019; Foss, Mazzelli and Weber 2024). By integrating these theoretical perspectives, the micro-foundation approach provides a framework for exploring the micro-practices that convert theory into action. These activities are frequently unplanned and unintentional, yet they profoundly influence the process and results of emergent strategies. Bourdieu's approach recognises the actual behaviours and interactions of individuals within a particular setting, highlighting how these everyday practices influence strategic dynamics.

Additionally, the study's qualitative analysis strategy adhered to (Creswell and Poth, 2018) statement that qualitative data analysis is an iterative process. In discussions, the authors suggested general qualitative analysis procedures, including data management, coding, theme building, and data presentation.

The main unit of analysis was the micro-practices that top, middle and low-level managers perform in the research setting (PHEI). It entailed their social interaction, cognition, routines, organisational and external contextual factors, and the role of power that influences emergent strategising.

The qualitative analysis strategy utilised Atlas Ti version 24 to facilitate coding and theme building and abstracted the data's overall meaning. The choice of a case study methodology was deliberate, as it allowed the researcher to generate an observational narrative encompassing visual, auditory and sensory perceptions (Yin 2018). In

qualitative research, the researcher was the primary tool for gathering data (Ravitch and Carl, 2019). The researcher prepared a field journal to chronicle their observations and personal experiences. The researcher also maintained a reflective notebook throughout the study, documenting her learning, reflections and views on the unfolding events.

The study aimed to gain a deeper understanding of micro-practices as a micro-foundation for influencing emergent strategising and to present a theoretical perspective that guides further inquiry in this area of interest. The researcher's analysis entailed an iterative process, which took six months to analyse the collected data and draft the preliminary list of codes, categories and themes with detailed descriptions. It began with document analysis, followed by semi-structured interviews and written narratives were conducted on participants who had already had their interviews. It further culminated in an exhaustive record of practices that may influence emergent strategising. The researcher then searched for themes by identifying broader patterns and categories from the coded data. The interpretation followed, then refined and revised as new data were collected through observations and interviews.

The iterative process coding, refining and reassessing as new data emerged facilitated the discovery of broader trends and themes. These trends demonstrated how individual-level micro-practices contribute to significant strategic changes within the institution.

The study draws upon the micro-foundational perspectives, which emphasise the bottom-up processes that influence organisational strategy. Through the data, it became clear that the micro-practices of individuals small, often unplanned actions embedded within daily routines are critical drivers of emergent strategy. Though seemingly insignificant in isolation, these micro-practices collectively shape strategic adaptation as they accumulate and influence more significant institutional outcomes. For example, participants' actions in adapting to new technologies, shifting assessment methods, or engaging in reflective thinking were not always formally planned. However, over time, they contributed to significant shifts in the institution's strategic direction, which aligns with the micro-foundational perspective, which focuses on the effect of individual actions and decisions in driving macro-level strategic shifts.

In linking the micro-practices to Bourdieu's theory of practice, the research highlighted that habitus, capital and field shape participants' actions within the organisational context. Bourdieu's concept of habitus the ingrained habits, skills, and dispositions that individuals acquire based on their experiences elucidates how individuals navigate their roles and make decisions that influence their strategy. Participants' positions within the institution influenced the practices observed in the study, their accumulated symbolic and social capital, and the structures of the institutional field in which they operated. For example, individuals in leadership positions demonstrated practices that reinforced the institution's vision and long-term goals. At the same time, those in more operational roles aligned their actions with immediate needs, ensuring their contributions to broader organisational objectives.

The study highlighted that symbolic capital the reputation, authority and recognition acquired by individuals within the institution contributed to shaping emergent strategies. As participants engaged in reflective practices and collaborative decision-making, they accumulated symbolic capital that enabled them to influence strategy and align their micro-practices with the institution's long-term objectives. Bourdieu's concept of field further elucidates that participants navigated the institutional landscape, adapting their practices to maintain alignment with both institutional values and emergent strategic requirements. The institutional field with its rules, hierarchies and power dynamics determined the manner in which individuals acted and interacted, influencing the micro-foundations of emergent strategising.

As the researcher continued to refine and revisit the data, it became clear that micro-practices were not isolated occurrences, but rather adaptive responses to internal and external pressures. These practices aligned individual actions with the institution's long-term vision and strategic objectives, confirming the relevance of Bourdieu's theory in elucidating how individuals operate within the field of the institution. Over time, these practices became ingrained, mirroring Bourdieu's concept of habitus, as they shaped the institution's broader strategic outcomes.

The study's findings illustrated a balanced relationship between habitus, practice, field, and capital, represented by the formula $\text{Practice} = [(\text{Habitus}) \times (\text{Capital})] + \text{Field}$. It

demonstrated that micro-practices are shaped by the interaction among an individual's habitus, capital and institutional field. Furthermore, it demonstrated that practices are neither entirely autonomous nor exclusively driven by individual will. Instead, they result from the individual's habitus, the capital they possess and the field in which they function. The relationship established a framework whereby micro-practices influenced emergent strategising while reflecting the institution's power dynamics, social structures and individual dispositions.

The research also highlighted the dynamic interplay between individual-level actions and institutional strategy, illustrating that micro-foundations are the bedrock for emergent strategising. Through continuous engagement with the data, the researcher observed that small-scale, adaptive actions contributed to a cohesive and dynamic strategy. These micro-practices reflect Bourdieu's theory of practice and offer a concrete understanding of how everyday actions contribute to the emergent strategy framework, where strategies evolve in response to ongoing interactions within the institution.

The following section reported on the findings and interpreted them. It detailed the documents analysed to understand and appreciate the history, context and key issues related to emergent strategising. Document analysis helped identify key stakeholders' organisational and external contextual factors.

6.7 Integrated data results

This section integrated findings from document analysis, semi-structured interviews and written narratives to provide a comprehensive understanding of how micro-foundational practices of managers influenced emergent strategising within a PHEI and how they relate to other fields of strategic management. By combining these diverse data sources, the aim was to develop a detailed view and or meaning of daily routines, micro-foundational practices, social interactions, cognition, organisational and external contextual factors and social theoretical perspective on micro-foundational practices that influence emergent strategising by managers in a PHEI that influence emergent strategising at the chosen PHEI in South Africa. Hence, as stated earlier, after the initial

coding of the data from all the data sources, a second-level coding was conducted during which codes were grouped into subthemes (categories). The categories reflected recurring patterns from the data related to participants' actions (doings). The categories were then organised into themes that encapsulated the key findings of the study. Therefore, thematic analysis enabled a deeper understanding of how micro-practices influenced emergent strategising within the PHEI.

Document analysis offered a foundational perspective by revealing formal policies, procedural guidelines and historical contexts that shape the institution's strategic environment. The analysis provided an essential backdrop against which the managers' lived experiences and perceptions can be interpreted. As alluded to earlier, it is worth noting that the researcher was unable to access live documents related to emergent decisions or events, and therefore relied on information provided through interviews and documents to draw conclusions.

Semi-structured interviews added depth to the foundational understanding by capturing managers' insights, experiences and reflections at various levels within the institution. These narratives enabled the exploration of subjective interpretations of strategic processes and the social interactions that drive emergent strategies. These interviews give access to the cognitive processes and individual routines that underpin managerial actions (Appendix G shows an example of a transcribed interview with one of the participants).

Lastly, written narratives, contributed by the managers further enriched the analysis by providing first-person accounts of daily practices and strategising. These narratives offered a unique lens through which the role of individual agency and power dynamics in shaping strategic outcomes can be examined. They also highlighted the organisational and external contextual factors that influence the strategic behaviours of managers. (Appendix H is a reflection from one of the participants).

The integrated approach enabled cross-validation of findings, identification of converging themes and elucidation of the interplay between formal structures and individual practices. The synthesis of document analysis, semi-structured interviews and written narratives strengthens the robustness of the findings and provided a richer, more nuanced portrayal of strategic practices within the PHEI.

The integrated findings was presented in the following sections, highlighting key themes and insights that emerged from the combined analysis of these data sources. The exploration of how managers' social interactions, cognitive processes, daily routines, and power dynamics collectively influenced emergent strategising was provided, offering a comprehensive response to the research questions.

A summary of the key points about the reporting of the gathered and examined data was given in this section, following the description in Chapter 5. Using multiple data sources in an embedded, exploratory and intrinsic case study research design, the empirical phase of the current study employed an overarching constructivist-interpretivist paradigm and a qualitatively driven research methods approach. The study involved one relatively large PHEI, and it was conducted to comprehend micro-practices that influence individual actions and interactions in emergent strategising.

To ensure coherence between the semi-structured interview questions (Appendix B), document analysis and written narratives (Appendix C), the research questions (par. 1.5), the literature review (Chapters 2, 3 and 4) and the qualitative themes links were drawn to confirm focused and interfaced data reporting. These links were presented in Appendix H. The analysis of the qualitative data resulted in the reduction of the collected data to 12 categories, which were then grouped into four themes (Table 6.6). The following paragraphs present the results (par. 6.7.1 – 6.7.4) according to the identified themes and categories. Furthermore, direct quotes from the participants, recorded during the interviews and reflected in the written narratives, are also provided to validate the results and conclusions (the reporting system is referenced in Tables 6.4 and 6.5).

The reporting reference system

Table 6.4: The reporting reference system applied to the semi-structured interviews and written narratives

Example	IP:1
IP refers to the interview participant: a typology of data collection methods used	
Where 1 refers to the interviewee number	

Source: Authors own

Table 6.4 indicates the reporting reference system that was applied to the semi structured interviews.

Table 6.5: The reporting reference system applied to the written narratives

Example	WN:1
WN refers to Written Narratives: a typology of data collection methods used	
Where 1 refers to the narrator's number	

Table 6.5 indicates the reporting reference system that was applied to written narratives.

Table 6.6: Consolidated overarching themes and categories from document analysis, semi-structured interviews and written narratives.

Themes	Code groups/Categories
T1: Strategic Adaptation and Flexibility (Core to emergent strategising)	T1A: Strategic flexibility and agility in educational practices
	T1B: Adaptation in response to contextual needs
	T1C: Strategic and reflexive thinking
T2: Institutional purpose and vision (vision-driven practices influencing strategising)	T2A: Vision embedded practices
	T2B: Institutional values and alignment
	T2C: Internal alignment with long-term goals and vision
T3: Communication and collaboration in decision-making (key to emergent strategising)	T3A: Modes of communication in emergent strategising
	T3B: Cross-functional and departmental collaboration
	T3C: Stakeholder inclusivity and involvement
T4: Influence of leadership and power dynamics (leadership practices shaping emergent strategising)	T4A: Inclusive and collegial decision making
	T4B: Constructive criticism and feedback in strategising
	T4C: Active engagement and inclusivity in strategising

Source: Authors' own

Table 6.4 indicates the consolidated overarching themes and categories from document analysis, semi-structured interviews and written narratives.

6.7.1 Theme one T1: Strategic adaptation and flexibility (Core to emergent strategy)

The theme was core to understanding and appreciating practices related to adaptability and flexibility in real-world challenges or alternatives in the operational environment, particularly in adjusting strategies in response to external pressures and the need for agility. Participants illustrated, emphasised, and demonstrated practices that highlighted

the proactive and reactive nature of strategic flexibility in unplanned contexts (emergent strategising).

The three overarching categories from the participants' data were strategic flexibility and agility in educational practices, adaptation in response to contextual needs and strategic and reflective thinking, which are discussed next.

6.7.1.1 Category T1A: Strategic flexibility and agility in educational practices

A combination of document analysis, semi-structured interviews and written narratives revealed that individuals engaged in micro-practices of iterative investment in technology, ongoing refinement, adoption and modification of new technology, and adaptive daily schedules, as elaborated next.

Document analysis through the AGM 2024 revealed that participants engaged in iterative investment in technology and the ongoing refinement of the system through top-level management, as evidenced next:

"I've indicated that we're in the process of refining all these new technologies that we brought into the business, and that we are getting the hold of the integration."
(CEO Holding Results Presentation March 2024)

Further, through semi-structured interviews and written narratives, participants engaged in actions by adapting to the rise in students using artificial intelligence (AI) as demonstrated by the following quote:

"With the sudden rise in AI use by students, we had to rethink our assessments and policies... we had to adapt quickly to this shift to stay relevant." (IP13)

Similarly, another participant echoed the same sentiment, describing that they had incorporated AI into their strategies and assessments by changing the assessment strategy:

"We've had to change our strategy in terms of assessments, where we are now making allowances for AI...we've incorporated into how we assess, for example, and we now are also teaching around the best use of artificial intelligence." (IP1)

Participants described their willingness to shift assessments and timetabling, as quoted next:

"We moved from final exams to continuous assessment... it's all now based on skills development." (IP11)

Another participant indicated that they shifted academic support sessions. The next excerpt confirms the finding:

"We decided to shift academic support sessions from after class to during class timetables." (WNP6)

The preceding excerpts revealed that participants demonstrated that unplanned strategies evolve in response to unique and changing needs, especially as students' needs evolve. For example, the ongoing system refinement and iterative investment in technology informed strategic flexibility, ultimately shaping the institution's emergent strategy. Hence, participants often required flexibility and agility in making alternative plans (deemed emergent decisions or strategising).

The micro-practices of iterative investment in technology and ongoing systems refinement reflect Bourdieu's concept of technological capital, where institutional norms and strategies evolve in response to external technological advancements. Furthermore, Bourdieu's doxa is illustrated by changes in teaching methods driven by technological advancements and student needs (e.g., a shift towards online and blended learning), ongoing refinement of systems, integration of technology, transition to continuous assessments, departure from traditional examination methods, and emergent decisions made in response to evolving challenges (e.g., new policies for regulating AI usage), concerning the unquestioned norms upheld by the participants. These norms are deeply embedded in their daily practice, and yet evolve in response to changing circumstances. The arbitrary nature of social structures is underscored within the institution, facilitating

emergent strategising. It further exemplifies the often-necessary flexibility and agility in making alternative plans, emerging decisions or strategising.

In relation to literature, the findings demonstrated that emergent strategies evolve in response to unique and changing needs, especially with evolving student needs. The finding corroborates the assertion of Singh and Tustin (2022) that PHEIs respond to changes in the market more quickly than public institutions, and further, with Caerus Capital (2017) that PHEIs are free to experiment with innovative teaching methods and technology that appeal to students. The researcher concurs with Nukunah et al. (2019), that agility is paramount in strategising and it has proved that it is the strength of PHEIs as indicated in section 2.2.2. The idea concurs with the notion of an ephemeral strategy as a transient manifestation (Mirabeau et al., 2014; Mirabeau et al., 2018). It further aligns with the framework of acting strategically through a dwelling worldview (de Metz, et al., 2023). Additionally, it highlights diversity in S-as-P and acknowledges flexible, varied strategy practices, which are evident in the iterative adaptations as indicated by Kohtamäki et al. (2022). Jarzabkowski, et al. (2022), in their exploration of strategy practices, reinforces how agility and iteration spread through day-to-day enactment. Lastly Seidl et al. (2024) offer clarity on what makes an activity strategic, validating the significance of adaptive, on-the-ground decision-making, further echoing that the practices were strategic.

Institutional flexibility was driven by individual-level micro-actions and decisions. These include changes in teaching methods driven by technological advancements and student needs (e.g., a shift towards online and blended learning), ongoing refinement of systems, integration of technology, transition to continuous assessments, departure from traditional examination methods, and emergent decisions made in response to evolving challenges (e.g., new policies for regulating AI usage) highlights the micro-foundation theory (Felin et al., 2005).

The researcher opines that each practice underscores the impact of micro-level interactions on macro-level strategies, showcasing that individual actions and collaborative practices collectively shape emergent organisational strategy. It further

shows that adapting educational practices allows the institution to remain responsive to trends.

6.7.1.2 Category T1B: Adaptation in response to contextual needs

Through a combination of document analysis, semi-structured interviews and written narratives, it was revealed that participants engaged in micro-practices of adaptive strategic decision-making (e.g. a strategic decision was made to open a comprehensive campus), adjusting to external pressures, adapting to a variety of teaching methods through ongoing assessment, transitioning to online platforms, adjusting work processes to enhance students' experience, adjusted assessment to maintain academic integrity as discussed next.

Document analysis, including the AGM on 19 June 2024, the Holdings Integrated Report 2023 and the Holdings Results presentation in March 2024, revealed a strategic decision to establish a comprehensive campus. The next quote provides evidence.

"We've learned a lot of lessons when we opened that first comprehensive campus."
(Holdings results presentation, March 2024)

Similarly, during the Holdings AGM presentation, the Chairman emphasised the Board's strategic decision by explicitly reiterating the sentiments expressed next by the Chairperson at the Holdings AGM on 19 June 2024.

"The board saw the group's contact learning strategy is bearing fruit. As a result, the board proved the construction of a new comprehensive campus in [city]."

Furthermore, participants were involved in decisions related to adapting to the external environment through semi-structured interviews and written narratives. The following quotes provide evidence.

"And that's how it works. And you can't do that in an environment that is as fast-moving as this one has been, because since 2021, since I've started, we've had to adapt..." (IP1)

Another participant indicated the use of various lecturing techniques, as evidenced by the next quote.

“We all viewed the online lecturing as a necessity...and we found out there's a whole variety of techniques and approaches that you can use to enhance the experience of the students in the online session” (IP5)

Another participant indicated that conducting research necessitated a decision to change from online assessment back to venue-based assessments, as demonstrated in the next quote.

“After doing some general research... I suggested changing from online assessment back to venue-based assessments due to plagiarism and dishonesty.” (IP2)

Additionally, more participants indicated a decision to transition to blended learning,

“The transition to virtual platforms wasn't easy, but it was necessary for survival” (IP5)

“The biggest issue came from the pandemic... we had to immediately go down from full contact learning mode into blended learning.” (IP11)

The preceding findings demonstrated and emphasised that participants had to make innovative decisions in response to contextual needs. For example, the decisions to open a new comprehensive campus, to adapt strategies based on emerging trends, to adapt to the pandemic, and to adapt a variety of teaching methods, which is key for emergent strategising (a broader institutional ability to remain flexible, responsive and adaptable).

The ongoing assessment practices and decisions that result in adaptive practices reflect a shift in the institution's mindset, which aligns with Bourdieu's concept of habitus and field. A shift in habitus was demonstrated through adopting online teaching methods and assessment changes as managers adjusted their ingrained practices in response to external pressures. The field of education is developing as conventional face-to-face learning methods are being reinterpreted to incorporate a hybrid approach, wherein online and face-to-face learning coexist as viable alternatives.

These ongoing assessment decisions, such as adjustments to work processes, quick and adaptive responses, and decision-making that resulted in adaptive practices, exemplify

the interaction between structure and agency, wherein individual responses to a crisis (such as the pandemic) propel significant strategic transformations inside the institution. Gradually, these novel methods became ingrained in the institution's culture, illustrating that adaptation to contextual demands fosters enduring strategic agility. The institution's capacity for rapid adaptation to the new reality underscores its strategic flexibility, a notion endorsed by its leadership in digital learning design (Bird et al., 2021a).

Through ongoing decision-making regarding environmental assessment, participants adapted their evaluation methods to uphold academic integrity. They responded to the pandemic by shifting to blended learning, demonstrating their adaptability in response to contextual needs. For instance, they addressed integrity issues and student outcomes via virtual platforms. Therefore, the evaluation of the institution's engagement can imply that it resulted in changes in communication and work processes. Consequently, the institution expanded into online lecturing and developed distance learning programmes. It corroborates with Bird et al. (2021a), that one of PHEIs' strengths is their digital learning designs, and the findings further corroborate that technology is disrupting traditional formal processes. According to Mense et al. (2018), learning is becoming ubiquitous because of technology. It also stimulates economic development as indicated by Mense et al. (2018) and aligns with section 2.2.2. Furthermore, these findings corroborate section 2.2.4 and 2.5.2 and the assertions by Bird et al. (2021b). Lastly, the findings are supported by Kohtamäki et al. (2022) who support the multiplicity of contextual and behavioural responses within S-as-P.

From a micro-foundational perspective, the findings highlighted the importance of individual actions of ongoing assessment and decisions in shaping broader institutional outcomes. Where managers at all levels were required to continually assess the environment and make decisions to adapt their actions and behaviours to meet the demands of the crisis (Felin et al., 2007), when aggregated, these individual adjustments created the foundation for the institution's broader strategic shift toward digital learning and remote work.

The researcher contends that the institution's adaptation in response to contextual needs underscores the importance of adaptability in strategising. Over time, these new practices

became ingrained in the institution's culture, reflecting that adaptation to contextual needs fosters long-term strategic agility. It is commended that through rapid adjustments in work processes and decision-making, the institution has demonstrated its capacity to evolve in response to immediate and long-term challenges, setting a precedent for continued adaptability in the future.

6.7.1.3 Category T1C: Strategic and reflective thinking

A combination of document analysis, semi-structured interviews and written narratives revealed that individuals engaged in micro-practices of learning through reflecting on past experiences, modified strategies, refined strategic decisions through informal collaboration and discussion, engaged in ongoing mental engagements and shifted their mindsets. The following quotes provide evidence.

Through document analysis, the CEO, during the Holdings Results presentation in March 2024, reflected on the experience as quoted.

“We've learned a lot of lessons when we opened that first comprehensive campus. If I can just rewind a few years.”

The CEO further reflected as follows:

“We believe it is now time to build our Durbanville comprehensive campus. Previously, we believed in our contact learning strategy, and we knew that it will show growth over time, but we didn't have any concrete evidence of that to our investors as well as to our board.”

Furthermore, all participants reported instances of constant reflective thinking in both the semi-structured interviews and written narratives. The next quotes illustrate the finding:

“...I'm constantly thinking, how can we do this differently next time?” (WN17)

Another participant indicated that reflection resulted in developing a new tracking and follow-up process, as quoted next.

*“...development of a new attendance tracking system and follow-up process”.
(WNP9)*

Further, another participant indicated that these reflections on past experiences resulted in adapting routines to meet emerging needs, as indicated next

“I suggested a time where we need to make it rather in the timetable scheduled”
(IP7)

Additionally, reflection led to a shift in mindset to accommodate new practices, as indicated in the next quote.

“...it was quite a shift in mindset to see that allowing students...” (IP15)

Furthermore, it resulted in participants' ongoing mental engagements with strategic issues

“The reality is that sometimes you you're thinking.” (IP13)

The practice of reflection, whether on past experiences or current issues, was essential for continuously refining and adapting strategies in response to evolving challenges and opportunities. Through formal moments, the executive refined and redefined strategies that worked and those that did not and considered alternative approaches to solving problems or improving processes. For instance, the CEO's statements during the Holdings Results presentation in March 2024 emphasise that strategic decisions were influenced by reflection on prior experiences. These practices demonstrate adaptive strategies that strike a balance between immediate operational needs. Through informal moments of strategic reflection, participants can refine and redefine strategies that are effective and those that are not. For instance, developing new tracking systems, adjusting timetables and mindset shifts were all micro-level actions that contributed to emergent strategising. They demonstrate strategic and reflective thinking and are embedded in their daily practices

The participants' capacity to engage in reflective thinking during routine tasks underscored the adaptive nature of their strategies. Rather than relying exclusively on formal strategic planning, they employed everyday tasks as opportunities for reflection and improvement. This aligns with Bourdieu's concept of praxeology, as it underscored

the idea that daily practices are not merely operational tasks but can be spaces for strategic reflection and adaptation (Everett 2002).

Bourdieu's praxeology supports that routine tasks offer strategic reflection and adaptation opportunities as participants continually refine their strategies based on real-time feedback and operational evidence. These practices further illustrated Bourdieu's belief that individual actions are influenced by habitual behaviour and the context in which they operate. It further demonstrated that strategic thinking is embedded in daily practices and illustrated the interplay between structure and agency. Managers' ability to reflect on their actions while performing routine tasks highlights the strategic nature of everyday activities. These findings corroborate the writing of Greenberg et al. (2013) who aver that behaviour is a joint product of the person and the situation as indicated in section 4.4.1 and 4.5.2 and the findings align with Jarzabkowski et al. (2021), who argued for the evaluation of practices based on their strategic relevance, emphasising reflection and forward thinking.

From a micro-foundational perspective, individual interactions and decisions during routine tasks aggregate into more significant strategic shifts within the institution. Participants' everyday actions and informal moments of reflection create micro-level opportunities for emergent strategising. Interpersonal dynamics among participants further foster innovative thinking, emphasising that these informal exchanges contributed to strategy evolution and facilitated real-time strategic adjustments at the institutional level. Furthermore, the informal moments of reflection during routine tasks influence broader strategic outcomes by enabling participants to respond flexibly to new challenges, which enhances the institution's overall strategic flexibility.

Managers' interpersonal dynamics and informal communication during these reflective moments contribute significantly to the evolution of the strategy. As they engaged in respectful dialogue and exchanged ideas, they co-created new strategies through their daily interactions. This further reinforces the micro-foundational perspective that individual actions and interactions are crucial in shaping macro-level strategic outcomes (Felin and Hesterly 2007) and emphasising that real-time strategic thinking occurs within the constraints of daily routines and operational demands.

The researcher argues that strategic and reflective thinking is not a formal, isolated event but emerges through managers' lived experiences and daily practices. They enable the refinement of plans in real-time, contributing to emergent strategising. Utilising Bourdieu's praxeology, the research underscores that habitual activities provide avenues for strategic contemplation, whereas the micro-foundational approach accentuates the significance of human interactions in influencing macro-level strategic results.

6.7.1.4 Theme conclusion

The results conclude that managers engaged in micro-practices that promoted strategic flexibility and adaptation to external challenges. These practices enabled individuals to remain agile in their educational practices. Furthermore, the institution was able to remain responsive to emerging trends. The manager's actions were an immediate response to the evolving conditions. These actions were not pre-planned but emerged as responses to changing educational needs and external pressures.

Practices like adapting assessment methods to technological changes, such as AI, correspond with literature indicating that PHEIs tend to be more flexible and responsive to market shifts compared to public institutions (Singh and Tustin 2022). Caerus Capital (2017) posits that PHEIs engage in more liberal experimentation with innovative teaching methods and technologies to maintain competitiveness, which aligns with this study's findings concerning swift adaptations to student needs and technological advancements.

Through real-time modifications, managers influenced the institution's capacity to maintain agility and strategic flexibility. Therefore, it corresponds with emergent strategy, wherein individuals consistently modify their practices to adapt to external and internal influences. The adaptability in modifying evaluations and integrating novel educational instruments demonstrates the spontaneous evolution of emergent methods, shaped by these micro-practices.

These findings correspond with Bourdieu's notion of habitus, as participants' entrenched inclinations and accrued experiences enabled them to address obstacles proficiently. Moreover, the micro-foundation theory corroborates this, as the observed micro-practices directly impacted overarching institutional initiatives (Felin et al., 2005). Therefore,

educational institutions must be adaptable, prepared to embrace new innovations and consistently refine their tactics to maintain relevance.

6.7.2 Theme two T2: Institutional purpose and vision (Vision-driven practices influencing strategising)

The theme examines the institution's long-term vision and core values, which guide practices that result in emergent strategising. Participants illustrated and demonstrated purpose-driven practices that align with daily actions and strategic decisions with the institution's vision, adapting to changing contexts while upholding the fulfilment of the mission.

Three overarching categories identified from the data sources that capture the practices are vision embedding practices, institutional values and alignment and internal alignment with long-term goals and vision. They are further discussed next.

6.7.2.1 Category T2A: Vision embedding practices

A combination of document analysis, semi-structured interviews and written narratives revealed that individuals engaged in micro-practices of aligning their activities with the institutional vision, which further cascaded down to focusing on aligning day-to-day activities with this vision. Although this alignment primarily demonstrated a top-down cascade, it also showed signs of upward influence. Feedback loops, interpretive enactments and adaptive practices by frontline managers subtly shaped how the vision was understood, communicated and sometimes refined at higher institutional levels. Day-to-day micro-practices include involving the executive teams, driving toward long-term goals to increase student numbers and adapting assessment practices to align with the vision of accessibility through moving away from formative sit-down exams to continuous assessment. They are further elaborated next.

Through the Holdings AGM presented on 19 June 2024, the Group Chairperson demonstrated alignment of the activities with the vision by approving the construction of a new comprehensive campus. The following quote attests to this sentiment.

“The board saw the group's contact learning strategy bearing fruit. As a result, the board approved the construction of a new comprehensive campus in Durbanville”.
(The Chairman Holdings AGM 19 June 2024)

Semi-structured interviews and written narratives provided further. One participant indicated that they initially focused on day-to-day tasks, but now they focus on actions that ensure student needs are met. The next quote provides evidence:

"Initially, we were very focused on the day-to-day because, you know, you just wanted to get things done. And how do we get through it? And how do we know in the new institution, how do we do things to make sure that our students are okay? So, I'm just very much focused on getting from one day to the next..." (IP1)

Another participant indicated that the executive team, through talk/discussions, made it understandable what was required of them, and then they planned and strategised around that. The following quote provides evidence:

“Our executive team... makes it understandable for you as to what exactly is required... then you plan and strategise around that.” (IP2)

Furthermore, the next quote illustrates that the participant engaged in practices of driving toward long-term goals with a dual purpose of increasing student numbers as evidenced by the next quote.

“The goal of the organisation is to have... 100,000 students by 2026... [This is] driven by both social impact and financial gain.” (IP4)

Another participant demonstrated that they moved to continuous assessments by stating that:

“We moved away from the formative sit-down exams to the continuous assessment method... it worked a lot better because now students don't have to do summative exams.” (IP11)

The preceding excerpts revealed that participants integrated their responsibilities and decisions in real time to confront new problems and opportunities while remaining aligned with the institution's vision by aligning day-to-day activities with a vision. This highlights the integration of vision into strategic (for example, the Board's decisions of sanctioning campus construction) and tactical actions (involving executives in decisions, balancing daily tasks with the vision, and moving to continuous assessment) actions.

Bourdieu's concept of habitus elucidates that these vision-embedding methods are not merely reactions to external pressures but are integral to the institution's entrenched culture. The results indicate that the institutional habitus collective dispositions and practices influencing behaviour emphasises purpose-driven action. Participants' behaviours demonstrate a developing organisational culture in which connecting daily activities with the institution's vision has become instinctive. Furthermore, Bourdieu's concept of the field demonstrates that the institutional environment influences strategies aligned with broader goals.

These micro-practices are influenced by the higher education sector, where institutions must reconcile social effects with financial objectives while addressing external challenges. The capacity of participants to negotiate, understand and implement institutional values in their daily tasks exemplifies the interaction between structure and agency in Bourdieu's theory (Bourdieu 1990; Harker, Mahar and Wilkes 1990b). The institutional vision is a pivotal tool for direction-setting, offering a formal framework for matching daily actions with long-term strategic goals. It is not only a rhetorical device but is actively utilised by participants as they evaluate and manage operational decisions within their particular contexts. Micro-practices are embedded in the day-to-day interactions and adaptations and shape broader institutional strategies, adapting the field to meet new realities (Barney et al., 2013). As such, adaptability allowed participants to negotiate, interpret and enact institutional values in dynamic contexts. They must balance the requirements of their positions within the organisation while also exerting individual agency to tailor their approach to the specific settings they face. Furthermore, in relation to literature, it echoes the argument by Li et al. (2025) who advocate for strategy's integration with purpose, radical intent and long-term vision.

The foregoing examples illustrated the effects of the institution's vision's direct influence on participants' micro-practices. Participants regularly integrated the institution's vision into their everyday tasks, whether by ensuring student well-being, aligning with executive objectives or revising assessments. These techniques allowed them to modify methods in response to emerging issues while aligning with the institution's overarching purpose. The overarching concept of vision embedding was illustrated, wherein participants perceived the institutional vision as a guiding framework that facilitated flexibility and adaptation while ensuring their activities aligned with the institution's long-term objectives.

Bourdieu's concept of habitus elucidates that these vision-embedding methods are not merely reactions to external pressures but are integral to the institution's entrenched culture. The results indicate that the institutional habitus, collective dispositions and practices influencing behaviour emphasised purpose-driven action. Participants' behaviours demonstrated a developing organisational culture in which connecting daily activities with the institution's vision has become instinctive. These micro-practices are influenced by the higher education sector, where institutions must reconcile social effects with financial objectives while addressing external challenges.

The capacity of participants to negotiate, understand and implement institutional values in their daily tasks exemplifies the interaction between structure and agency in Bourdieu's theory (Bourdieu 1990; Harker et al. 1990b). Micro-practices are embedded in the day-to-day interactions and adaptations and shape broader institutional strategies, adapting the field to meet new realities (Barney et al., 2013). As such, adaptability allowed participants to negotiate, interpret and enact institutional values in dynamic contexts. They must balance the requirements of their positions within the organisation while also exerting individual agency to tailor their approach to the specific settings they face.

From a micro-foundational perspective, these findings underscored the significance of individual activities in influencing the institution's strategic trajectory (Felin et al., 2005). The micro-level decisions made by participants, including the revision of evaluation techniques, alignment with institutional goals, and prioritisation of student well-being,

contribute to the overarching strategy of vision alignment. These adaptive methods ensure the integration of the institution's long-term goals into its daily operations, thereby enhancing its overall strategic performance.

The researcher commended the institution's dedication to vision integration; wherein individual participants continually connected their choices and initiatives with its broader objective. These micro-practices of vision-oriented adaptation facilitate emergent strategising, allowing participants to consistently revise and modify methods to address current and long-term obstacles. In this regard, Bourdieu's praxeology underscored the interconnection between daily practices and strategic thinking, whereas the micro-foundational approach illustrates that individual interactions and decisions influence the institution's overarching strategic results.

6.7.2.2 Category T2B: Institutional values and alignment

A combination of document analysis, semi-structured interviews and written narratives revealed that individuals engaged in practices of acquiring additional equity through leadership engagement. Furthermore, the micro-practices of writing one's modules to create value-aligned resources, offering more money to appoint a lecturer, working with two different platforms (face-to-face and online platforms), printing the institutional purpose and values everywhere on campus demonstrated that decisions were guided and aligned to institutional values.

Document analysis of the Holdings Summary Results for the year ending 31 December 2023 revealed that leadership acquired equity interests, for example, *an additional 14.6% equity interest* in a key subsidiary.

Through semi-structured interviews and written narratives, one participant reported developing various approaches to writing study materials. The following quote provides evidence:

“.....we try to come up with different ways of maybe writing our own study guides, ...” (IP11)

Another participant demonstrated negotiating for a resource despite budgetary constraints:

"I had to discuss with my manager to offer more money to appoint a lecturer who was essential for our new programme. This was strategically necessary despite budget constraints." (IP12)

Another participant indicated the difficulty of working with distance and face-to-face contact learning, as confirmed in the next quoted:

"Working with distance learning and with face-to-face contact learning... two different teaching platforms... you cannot combine them, because then you set yourself up for failure." (IP3)

Lastly, participants printed the purpose and values as a daily reminder to other institutional members. The following quote provides evidence:

"We've printed our purpose and values everywhere on campus... it's about making everyone aware of who we are, holding ourselves accountable, and making sure our strategy aligns with that identity." (IP13)

These examples illustrated that micro-level actions consistently align with the institution's values. Whether participants negotiated budgets, developed educational materials or balanced multiple teaching platforms, they ensured that their strategic decisions aligned with the institution's core values of quality, accountability and growth. Participants helped embed values into their immediate practices and the institution's broader strategy framework. Therefore, these value-based practices that anchor emergent strategies occur as participants interpret values in ways that influence emergent strategising, resulting in value alignment, strategic adaptation and resource negotiation, which contributes to institutional values and alignment. Therefore, participants navigated complex operational challenges while remaining anchored in the institution's core values.

In relation to literature, it aligns with Jarzabkowski et al., (2022), who state that there should be links between institutional values and ongoing strategising.

The decision highlights Bourdieu's capital theory, where economic capital (budget) and cultural capital (qualified educators) are negotiated, reflecting agency within resource constraints and emergent strategising informed by institutional values. Additionally, it reflects Bourdieu's concept of habitus the structured yet adaptive dispositions through which actors navigate institutional contexts. Therefore, habitus shapes innovative responses to institutional challenges.

The findings highlighted that values-driven practices are not merely theoretical but actively operationalised in day-to-day tasks. For instance, negotiating for the appointment of key personnel despite budget constraints reflects a values-based decision, prioritising quality education. Similarly, developing study guides in-house demonstrates an innovative response to resource limitations, ensuring that institutional standards are upheld despite operational challenges. This corroborates the concept of values and extends beyond *episteme* and *techne* (Flyvbjerg, 2001; Manosevitch et al., 2013). *Phronetic* focuses on knowledge that can be used in the real world, which aids in decision-making about what can and should be done, as well as how to do it (Manosevitch, 2013; Manosevitch et al., 2013). Participants' ability to interpret and apply institutional values in complex contexts demonstrated the practical, values-driven nature of their decision-making.

From a micro-foundational perspective, these findings underscored that individual and collective behaviours collectively influence institutional results (Felin et al., 2005). The micro-level decisions on resource allocation, study guide development and the management of teaching difficulties contribute to the institution's evolving strategies. These measures ensured that institutional principles are consistently integrated in both short-term decisions and long-term initiatives. By making values-driven decisions daily, participants enhanced the institution's symbolic capital, thereby strengthening its reputation for prioritising quality, accountability and growth. The method coincides with the micro-foundational approach, which focused on individual actions within the limits of the institution, collectively influencing bigger strategic outcomes (Barney et al., 2013; Lippman et al., 2020).

The researcher argues that the institution's focus on values-based practices empowers individual actors to align their decisions with its core mission. These micro-practices of values alignment facilitate emergent strategising by ensuring that daily decisions reinforce the institution's long-term goals. Bourdieu's capital theory and habitus offer a valuable perspective for understanding how participants navigate resource constraints while remaining committed to institutional values, highlighting the interplay between structure and agency in shaping strategic adaptation. Furthermore, the micro-foundational perspective highlights that these individual and collective actions contribute to the institution's broader strategic outcomes, ensuring that values remain central to its decision-making processes.

6.7.2.3 Category T2C: Internal alignment with long-term goals and vision

Through a combination of document analysis, semi-structured interviews and written narratives, the study found that individuals engaged in micro-practices of integrated thinking demonstrated a shared collective understanding of the institution's values. Furthermore, micro-practices of utilising all managers to buy in demonstrate that through talk, there was internal alignment with the long-term goals of the institution. Ongoing improvements (feedback loops) through student surveys and meeting shareholder expectations through the practice of working with distance students present some complexities and pose a challenge in aligning with long-term goals, as well as constant shifts in decision-making.

Document analysis of the Holdings Integrated Report 2023 revealed integrated thinking practices, indicating a shared collective understanding of the institution's values. The next quote attests to this assertion:

“Integrated thinking allows us to be adaptable, while ensuring our strategy remains relevant and focused on the core aspects of our business that are required for growth and sustainability.”

The preceding sentiments illustrate internal collective decision-making actions aligned with long-term goals and vision. Through the practice of integrated thinking, the institution ensures that all departments are interconnected in their actions and contribute to long-term objectives and vision (goal coherence).

The findings from semi-structured interviews and written narratives revealed that participants collectively understood the institution's overarching mission through their talk, indicating that line managers and top management should buy into whatever is happening within the institution. The evidence is provided next:

"You need all of your line managers and top management to buy into what you're doing." (IP10)

Furthermore, student feedback and quality assurance practices informed ongoing improvements as evidenced by the next quote:

"Student surveys inform improvement plans... part of quality assurance." (IP11)

Another participant indicated that efforts are shown through the need to meet shareholder expectations, as shown by the link between vision and operations, as evidenced in the next quote.

"Well, the overarching [goal] is we need, you know, to report back to our shareholders, and we've made promises. Right, as a business like this is what we're going to be doing, and when it comes to our level, we need to now show that we've done everything that we can do to make sure that we've reached organisational goals." (IP1)

Another participant outlined practical challenges in aligning with various modes of delivery, such as distance and face-to-face learning that were introduced by the institution, illustrating the complexity of maintaining vision alignment in a dynamic educational context:

"Working with distance learning and with face-to-face contact learning... two different teaching platforms... you cannot combine them, because then you set yourself up for failure." (IP10)

As another participant reflected on the evolving nature of decision-making within the institution:

"The constant shifts in decision-making reflect that growth phase. While the top-down approach can sometimes be frustrating, I believe that as we mature, there will be more opportunities for collaboration." (WNP6)

The excerpts revealed that participants adapted to contextual and operational challenges in real-time while remaining internally aligned with the institution's long-term goals for effective strategising, ultimately enabling participants to harmonise their efforts with the institution's overarching mission through a shared appreciation and understanding. It underscores the significance of emergent alignment with the institution's vision and goals, emphasising that it stems from collective understanding rather than a formal directive solely driven by operational needs. Findings indicate that participants actively engage in ongoing response alignment practices, which foster goal coherence and prompt adjustments to support a unified strategy. The spontaneity in alignment reflects the institution's shared vision, demonstrating that organic internal collaboration is essential for achieving strategic objectives. Furthermore, the results emphasise that while maintaining alignment with the institutional vision is a priority, adapting to contextual and operational challenges is crucial for effective strategising, ultimately enabling participants to harmonise their efforts with the institution's overarching mission through a shared appreciation and understanding. In relation to literature, the findings align with Jarzabkowski et al., (2021) who critique practices that fail to influence outcomes, reinforcing the strategic merit of long-term alignment.

Bourdieu's notion of field emphasises that participants navigate the institutional field, securing symbolic capital to gain influence. As such, it demonstrates that unplanned strategies evolved in response to unique and changing needs within the different departments and campuses (Atkinson 2021). Adaptability, community engagement and strategic communication are combined to achieve institutional goals. Bourdieu's concepts of capital, field and habitus underscore the navigation of the institutional field, the accumulation of symbolic capital, and the adaptation of practices to build effective collaboration networks (Bourdieu 1990).

Micro-foundations theory highlights that aligning micro-level initiatives with macro goals fosters a cohesive institutional strategy. Therefore, it elucidates that adaptive, small-scale actions contribute to broader institutional success, reflecting the dynamic nature of organisational strategy in the education sector.

Integrative thinking practices are evidenced by collective understanding, goal coherence reflected in constant shifts in decision-making that signify a shared understanding, ongoing improvements through feedback loops such as student surveys, and the fulfilment of shareholder expectations through comprehensive reporting. These indicators demonstrate internal alignment with the institution's long-term goals and vision. These practices are important as participants take a holistic approach to strategising.

The institution's departments, resources and external pressures are analysed collectively, ensuring that every action aligns with the institution's fundamental goals. The strategy enabled flexibility in addressing emerging challenges while emphasising the essentials for long-term growth and business continuity. It indicated that the institution values flexibility in its operations, promoting strategies that can be adapted in real-time while aligning with its overarching vision. The adaptability ensured that even as external circumstances change, the core mission and long-term strategic goals such as growth, sustainability and institutional integrity remain central, guiding the decision-making and implementation processes.

The researcher posits that collective, holistic individual actions lead to emergent decisions, and alignment mediates macro-level relationships. The institution's balance between being responsive to immediate needs and remaining committed to its foundational vision ensures its strategic relevance in a changing landscape. Adaptability is critical to emergent strategising, where strategies evolve through ongoing interaction with the institution's internal and external environments.

6.7.2.4 Theme conclusion

From the institutional purpose and vision results, it can be concluded that managers engaged in vision-aligned micro-practices that ensured their daily tasks consistently aligned with the institution's long-term vision. The institution's strategic initiatives were

deeply rooted in its overarching mission, and they correspond with the proposition by Mirabeau et al., (2014), who discussed strategies as unplanned, although they are guided by the institutional vision, which provides the direction for the institution. These micro-practices underscore the impact of Bourdieu's field, wherein individuals' behaviours are moulded by the institutional context and aligned with enduring objectives. Managers ensured that their day-to-day operations and activities supported the broader institutional goal, indicative that embedding a clear vision into daily actions allows institutions to navigate external pressures while staying true to their purpose. Additionally, institutional values played a central role in decision-making, showing that symbolic capital (prestige and integrity) drives strategic alignment, enhancing the institution's standing.

The institutional purpose and vision theme are linked to emergent strategies through how participants aligned their actions with the institution's long-term vision and direction. While the vision provided a framework and direction, specific strategies emerged through individuals' everyday micro-practices. Rather than following a strictly planned strategy, participants responded to external changes while ensuring their actions remained aligned with the institution's overarching mission. The theme allowed emergent strategies to unfold purposefully, ensuring that even as strategies evolved, they remained coherent and aligned with long-term goals and institutional direction.

6.7.3 Theme three T3: Communication and collaboration in decision-making (key to emergent strategy)

The theme was central to understanding the significance of communication and collaboration in emergent strategising, particularly facilitating adaptable responses and collective adjustments in decision-making. It illustrated that highly collaborative or ad hoc communication patterns enabled emergent strategising that adapted to new insights or challenges in the operational environment.

The data identified three overarching categories: modes of communication in emergent strategising, cross-functional and departmental collaboration and stakeholder inclusivity and engagement. These are discussed next.

6.7.3.1 Category T3A: Modes of communication in emergent strategising

Document analysis, semi-structured interviews and written narratives revealed that individuals engaged in micro-practices of formal and informal communication structures, including vertical and horizontal approaches, which served as an institutional communication framework facilitating interactions.

Documents, including the Holdings Results stakeholder meeting in March 2024, the presentation of the Financial Results for the year ending 2023 and the Holdings Integrated Report 2023, underscore the constant application of diverse communication tools. These documents demonstrated the institution's focus on clear, transparent, structured and organised communication, primarily through formal meetings and presentations. Moreover, emails, Teams, WhatsApp and Live Sheets were essential to the institution's communication framework, facilitating formal and informal interactions.

Through semi-structured interviews and written narratives, participants described structured communication, informal exchanges and adaptive collaboration practices that promote transparency and engagement. These practices enhanced communication and collaboration in emergent strategising through formal meetings, informal exchanges and different digital platforms.

One participant stated they have formal, structured, scheduled meetings once a month. The following quotes offer examples:

"We have formal, structured, scheduled meetings like once a month, usually, like we got a MANCO meeting that meets and so all the managers and all the PCs would meet in that environment and discuss whatever topics. The rest would be informal if we needed to clarify certain things, Teams calls usually." (IP1)

Another participant echoed the same sentiments that, as an international company, they have a variety of meetings with the executives, head of schools and online, as shown by the next quote:

"We are an international company... meetings with our executive managers, head of school, day-to-day management meetings... a wide variety of meetings that we do online as well." (IP3)

Elaborating that daily online and in-person meetings were essential for operational coordination. Another participant similarly echoed that:

"We have a lot of online meetings... we also deal with each other by email communication and telephone communication." (IP12)

This excerpt emphasised the practice of multiple modes of communication, such as emails and telephone calls, for ongoing collaboration and clarity. Participants further indicated that informal communication played a role in communication by stating that:

"We've learned... it's better to pop an email afterward to confirm what was discussed informally." (IP9)

Email was an informal follow-up to confirm decisions and maintain accountability through escalation. Lastly, another participant stated

"If it's not very, very important that it needs to be escalated... we would just pop into someone's office and quickly chat to resolve it." (IP9)

It indicated a practice of quick, face-to-face, informal exchanges to resolve immediate issues.

The preceding quotes illustrated that participants employed a combination of formal structures, such as scheduled meetings, and informal communication, including quick chats and emails, to navigate daily challenges and coordinate strategic actions. Whether during formal meetings for long-term planning or spontaneous conversations to address immediate issues, communication emerged as a central practice that fosters collaboration, responsiveness and alignment across the institution. These diverse communication practices also promoted transparency and engagement, facilitating collaborative efforts and emergent strategising. The micro-practices of structured communication, informal exchanges and adaptive collaboration enabled vertical and horizontal interactions, allowing participants to adjust strategies in real-time and maintain strategic agility. The findings aligned with Kohtamäki et al., (2022), who identified communication as a key connector in S-as-P work.

These practices illustrated that Bourdieu's habitual practices have been influenced by the institutional context and their previous experiences with both formal and informal communication styles. For instance, the reliance on formal meetings, like MANCO gatherings, alongside informal conversations, highlights a dual communication habitus within the institution. Furthermore, participants typically engaged in structured, hierarchical communication (like formal meetings) and informal, flexible interactions (such as quick chats or emails) to address issues and adapt accordingly. These communication methods are not random; they are influenced by the participants' habitus, which embodies their roles within the institution and their understanding of communication facilitated strategic modifications. While participants leverage their social capital (networks and relationships) for informal conversations, their cultural capital (knowledge, skills, and professional experience) shaped their communication style in formal contexts.

Additionally, social capital, which related to informal communication channels, such as WhatsApp groups, face-to-face chats and emails, was enabled by the social relationships participants had cultivated. Their ability to navigate informal channels was directly linked to the social capital that they possessed. Individuals with strong networks or close professional relationships can rely on these channels to quickly address issues, make informed decisions, and maintain flexible strategic processes.

Cultural and symbolic capital was reflected in informal meetings, where individuals with more symbolic capital (such as those in leadership roles) tended to use their power to influence and dominate discussions, ultimately shaping outcomes. Their authority within the institutional field allows them to shape strategy through formal communication structures. Similarly, cultural capital—such as technical knowledge or experience in strategic planning—enabled individuals to contribute more effectively in formal and informal settings.

The institutional field dictated the formal structures that participants must navigate (e.g., scheduled meetings, formal presentations) while providing space for informal communication (e.g., quick chats, emails), supporting more spontaneous, adaptive decision-making. The field influences participants' interaction and communication, as specific modes of communication were more acceptable or effective depending on the

institutional rules and power dynamics. For instance, participants in leadership positions relied on formal meetings such as the AGM to exercise their authority and guide strategic decision-making, while those with less power used informal channels to influence decisions more subtly or indirectly. Furthermore, the institutional field also facilitated the emergence of digital communication platforms, such as Microsoft Teams and WhatsApp, as part of the communication landscape. These platforms created new opportunities for flexibility and agility in strategising, enabling participants to adapt quickly to changes without formal meetings.

The findings indicated that participants utilised various communication tools from formal meetings to spontaneous chats, facilitating flexibility in addressing operational needs and strategic goals. These practices align with the concept of reality construction through communication, as proposed by Rüegg-Stürm et al., (2015), which posits that communication is essential for any social system to function effectively. Hence, communication was the foundation for emergent strategising, enabling managers to coordinate actions, share information and align their efforts with the institution's broader objectives.

From a micro-foundational perspective, the findings underscored the significance of small-scale communication practices in shaping the institution's broader strategic outcomes (Felin et al., 2005). Participants' adaptive actions, such as engaging in informal chats to swiftly resolve issues or sending follow-up emails to confirm decisions, enhance the institution's overall strategic agility. These micro-level interactions ensured that communication was not merely a process for sharing information but a vital tool for coordinating strategies and aligning efforts across the organisation. The utilisation of multiple communication channels reflects the dynamic nature of emergent strategising. By maintaining open lines of communication through various tools, participants ensured that the institution remained responsive to new challenges and opportunities. It aligns with Felin et al., (2005), who assert that micro-level actions are crucial in shaping macro-level outcomes.

The researcher argues that modes of communication play a crucial role in facilitating both formal and informal interactions across various levels of the institution, enabling swift

responses and fostering a collaborative environment. The effective use of multiple communication channels, such as meetings, emails, and digital platforms, has been pivotal in driving strategic decision-making and daily operations. Nevertheless, specific challenges persist, particularly the over-reliance on formal communication structures, which can limit spontaneity and the timely sharing of ideas. While the institution's communication strategies commendably foster alignment across managerial levels, more flexible and open communication methods are essential for enhancing emergent strategising and promoting innovation.

6.7.3.2 Category T3B: Cross-functional and departmental collaboration

A combination of document analysis, semi-structured interviews and written narratives revealed that individuals engaged in micro-practices of both formal and informal collaboration, including spontaneous calls and formal meetings. Document analysis revealed a practice of incorporating diverse perspectives in strategic discussions, as evidenced by the frequent reference to *"Our... community"* in institutional documents such as Holdings Integrated Report 2023. Furthermore, the document echoed practices of collaboration and community engagement, as quoted next.

"...collaborations; community engagement and social impact as part of teaching and learning..."

Through semi-structured interviews and written narratives, participants consistently demonstrated practices of diverse perspectives. One participant stated that they usually have scheduled meetings where they discuss issues and make follow-up through calls. The following quote provides evidence of these practices:

"Yes, so we normally have scheduled meetings where we discuss whatever needs to be discussed, and we usually would call each other if we needed to interact further." (IP1)

Another participant stated that scheduled and spontaneous interactions were used when they had coordinated the phasing out of a programme. The next quote provides evidence:

"Yes, at the moment, my programme is on phase out, and we need to coordinate with our students, and there wasn't a clear path of how this programme was going

to phase out on the... specifically, and we needed to consult with our head office manager as well to come up with an actual plan on the steps we made." (IP1)

Participants engaged in practices of collaborative issue resolution by taking notes and addressing them in academic management:

"In academic management meetings, we discuss issues... whoever's responsible will take notes and address it." (IP11)

Another made it clear that they shared information collaboratively across campuses to address issues collaboratively:

"We operate in a collaborative manner... if there is an issue at one campus, we make sure the other campuses are aware." (IP2)

Additionally, participants even engaged in participative decision-making and experimentation by coming up with strategic ideas and experimenting, as stated next:

"Participative decision-making... you come up with strategic ideas... experimenting with different types of questions... practical applications." (IP3)

They even engaged in practices of supporting cross-functional tasks during absences to cover up for each other, as indicated next:

"If one of us is sick... we can link across campuses to perform the tasks." (IP2)

Another participant stated that they engaged in respectful, collaborative interactions for decision-making as explained next:

"Interactions here are respectful and collaborative... It's not 'I'm the manager, so I decide,' but 'how do my decisions impact your department?'" (IP13)

Additionally, the same participant elaborated that they included junior staff in strategic planning to increase the pool of ideas, as indicated next:

"Bringing in junior staff as part of the strategic planning process helps... because if they're involved from the beginning, they're more equipped to execute the plan effectively." (IP13)

The preceding excerpts illustrated the micro-practices of scheduled meetings, including junior staff members in the strategy, respectful and collaborative interactions, cross-functional tasks that coordinate between campuses and departments, the incorporation of diverse perspectives and spontaneous discussions that are essential to emergent strategising. Participants engaged in interactive discussions that promoted shared responsibility, enabling them to solve problems collaboratively and adapt strategies to address immediate needs. The collaborative flexibility allowed unplanned, emergent solutions to develop, emphasising the significance of inclusive and interactive decision-making. It resulted in cross-functional and departmental collaboration, illustrating participants working together to address challenges and co-created strategies.

Bourdieu's habitus concept helped explain how participants' collaborative interactions contributed to explain that participants' collaborative interactions contribute to emergent strategies. The findings suggested that the institution that foster a collaborative approach to decision-making. Through repeated interactions in cross-functional meetings and informal discussions, participants developed a shared understanding of institutional goals, which became embedded in their strategic practices.

Bourdieu's theory of capital including social capital (networks and relationships) and symbolic capital (institutional prestige) was also pertinent to understanding that participants could use their relationships across departments to influence strategic outcomes. For example, collaborative decision-making cultivated social capital as participants engaged with colleagues across functions and campuses, reinforcing the institution's values of inclusivity and responsiveness.

The findings emphasised that emergent strategies were often driven by collaborative processes that swiftly responded to unforeseen issues through collective problem-solving. For instance, interactions involving junior staff in strategic planning and inter-campus coordination during crises demonstrated that participants from various departments contributed their insights to refine and adjust strategies. The collaborative approach yielded a more robust and responsive strategy, aligning the institution's goals with the realities on the ground.

By encouraging collaboration across hierarchical levels, including the involvement of junior staff in strategic planning, the institution cultivated symbolic capital, enhancing its reputation as an organisation that values inclusive decision-making. These interactions enabled participants to adapt their strategies to emerging challenges, illustrating that cross-functional collaboration solidified the institution's symbolic capital and promoted agile responses to strategic needs.

These practices align with Chia et al., (2018), who argue that practical coping and ongoing improvisations are central to emergent strategising. The collaborative environment enables participants to navigate uncertainties and adjust strategies on the fly, reflecting the dynamic, adaptive nature of institutional strategising (Chia et al., 2018). It also corroborates Bouty et al.'s (2019) findings on day-to-day practical coping activities and ongoing improvisations.

From a micro-foundational perspective, these findings underscore the significance of individual acts of collaboration in shaping the institution's strategic outcomes (Felin et al., 2005). The participants' engagement in cross-functional discussions, including diverse perspectives, and participation in spontaneous problem-solving are micro-level actions that contribute to the institution's broader strategy. These practices demonstrated collaborative decision-making, allowing the institution to remain agile and responsive within a rapidly evolving educational landscape.

Felin et al.'s (2005) micro-foundations theory supports the notion that individual actions such as engaging in strategic discussions and sharing insights across departments, accumulated to drive emergent strategies. Through these small-scale interactions, participants enhanced the institution's collective problem-solving capacity, enabling it to continuously adapt to evolving internal and external pressures.

The researcher argues that cross-functional collaboration is essential in facilitating emergent strategising by uniting diverse perspectives and promoting inclusive decision-making. These collaborative practices empower participants to navigate uncertainties and address unforeseen challenges with adaptive solutions. The institution's focus on cultivating a culture of open communication where junior and senior staff participate in

strategic discussions ensures that ground-level insights are incorporated into the strategic framework, enhancing implementation and engagement.

Bourdieu's concept of habitus further reinforced the notion that collaborative practices are deeply embedded in the institution's culture, shaping participants' approach to decision-making and strategising. Furthermore, the micro-foundational perspective underscored that individual actions such as engaging in cross-functional discussions and collaboratively solving problems contribute to the institution's broader strategic success (Felin et al., 2005). By fostering a supportive environment for collaboration, the institution enhanced its capacity for emergent strategising and long-term resilience.

6.7.3.3 Category T3C: Stakeholder inclusivity and involvement/engagement.

Through a combination of document analysis, semi-structured interviews and written narratives, it was revealed that individuals engaged in micro-practices. The latter included allowing more students to register, moving some programmes to contact learning, relying on stakeholder committee meetings for feedback, interacting with the corporates. These also included creating an opportunity to include opinions from the people, consulting with more people and incorporating stakeholder input crucial in shaping stakeholder inclusivity and involvement in the institution's emergent strategies.

An analysis of the Annual General Meeting (AGM) in March 2024 and the Summary Results for the year ending 31 December 2023 demonstrated the practice of considering stakeholders' needs in strategic decisions. For instance, during the AGM, the institution's leadership stated that

“...And I want to highlight to the investor community that as part of our... philosophy, we are allowing more students to re-register with arrear balances.”

Through semi-structured interviews and written narratives, participants explained the practices that point to integrating input from various stakeholders' junior staff, external partners, students, and industry leaders into their decision-making processes.

The executive pointed out moving a programme to contact learning mode as indicated by the following quote:

“...we announced the move of our higher certificate in Paralegal Studies to the contact learning mode.” (AGM, March 2024)

Another participant indicated that they sought stakeholder feedback through a stakeholder committee meeting. The following quote provides evidence:

“We have programme stakeholder committee meetings... for feedback to determine how we can improve our offering to our students.” (IP9).

Additionally, another participant indicated that they interacted with corporates to leverage corporate partnerships to foster creativity and innovation, as stated next:

“Interacting with the corporates creates new... leads to more creativity in order to expand the possibilities.” (IP10)

Another participant added that they included opinions from people to advocate for more inclusive decision-making processes:

“They need to create an opportunity to include opinions from the people that are implementing these strategies, and that is not always available...” (IP1)

Furthermore, another participant stated that they have many more people to consult, as indicated in the next quote:

“I’ve got a lot more people I can consult now... Once you see people as individuals beyond their job titles, you realise they all have valuable insights.” (IP13)

Moreover, another participant stated that they embedded stakeholder input into educational materials by planning for a new study guide:

“When we plan a new study guide, it is now something that we actually incorporate into our study material... it permeates everything we do.” (IP12)

The preceding quotes demonstrated the integration of feedback from diverse stakeholders to ensure that strategic decisions reflect the genuine needs of the institution’s community. Whether by consulting industry partners or involving junior staff in strategic discussions, these practices yielded various inputs, fostering innovation and adaptive strategies. Participants’ practices led to inclusive decision-making, responsive

collaboration and strategic alignment with stakeholder needs, all of which contribute to the broader theme of stakeholder inclusivity. They illustrated the institution's ability to engage diverse perspectives, developing emergent strategies that are contextually relevant and aligned with external expectations and demands.

For instance, the decision to modify programme delivery modes based on stakeholder input, such as transitioning the Paralegal Studies programme to face-to-face learning, demonstrated that an engaged stakeholder directly informed strategic adjustments. Therefore, a collaborative approach ensured that the institution remained responsive to educational trends and industry expectations. The findings align with those of Kohtamäki et al., 2022; Li et al., (2025), who highlighted stakeholder engagement and the radical roots of inclusive strategising.

Bourdieu's concept of field was evident in the collaborative environment fostered by the institution, where stakeholders from various levels students, staff, industry partners, and alumni are involved in the strategic process. The participation of these diverse actors shaped the institution's interactions and led to emergent strategising. By creating opportunities for different stakeholders to contribute, the institution enhanced its ability to adapt to external changes while maintaining a coherent strategy. Moreover, symbolic capital played a vital role in these interactions, as the institution accumulated prestige and legitimacy by adhering to industry standards and incorporating stakeholder feedback into its strategic decisions. For instance, developing new qualifications and study guides informed by stakeholder input enhances the institution's symbolic capital, reinforcing its reputation as an organisation that values collaboration and responsiveness.

These practices align with the configuration school of strategy (Mintzberg et.al., 1999) and section 3.3.1.2, emphasising the importance of communal socialisation in strategic decision-making (Denis et. al., 2010; Mintzberg, 2017). By drawing on stakeholders' insights at multiple levels, the institution fostered a culture of inclusivity and collaboration, resulting in flexible, context-aware strategies that reflect diverse viewpoints.

These stakeholder engagement practices align with micro-foundation theory, highlighting those individual contributions, such as insights from junior staff or industry partners, that combined to shape emergent strategies (Felin et al., 2005). The involvement of

stakeholders enhanced the institution's strategy by providing practical, real-world insights that ensure strategic decisions are contextually relevant and responsive to emerging trends. Furthermore, the findings emphasised that individual stakeholder inputs contribute to the institution's emergent strategies. Participants ensured that the institution's strategies reflect diverse viewpoints and align with external demands by involving stakeholders in the decision-making process. These micro-level actions, such as seeking feedback from programme committee meetings or consulting external partners, allowed the institution to continuously adapt its strategic approach, enhancing its academic offerings and social impact.

Additionally, the institution's reliance on stakeholder inclusivity in shaping its strategic direction illustrated those micro-foundations, the small-scale actions of individuals and groups collectively influenced its broader strategic outcomes (Felin et al., 2005). The process strengthened the institution's collaborative culture and ensured its strategies remain flexible and adaptive in a rapidly changing educational landscape.

The researcher argues that stakeholder inclusivity is crucial for the institution's internal growth and its ability to adapt and thrive in the competitive landscape of higher education. By involving stakeholders at various levels, students, staff, industry partners, and alumni, the institution guarantees that its strategic decisions are shaped by diverse perspectives, thereby enhancing the relevance and impact of its academic offerings. The researcher further notes that the institution adopted a collaborative approach to strategy formation, as inclusivity fostered a supportive environment for emergent strategies. By continuously drawing on the unique insights of its stakeholders, the institution fortified its strategic framework and enhanced its capacity for future growth.

Bourdieu's concept of field further underscores the importance of stakeholder engagement in shaping strategic interactions. At the same time, symbolic capital was accumulated as the institution responded to external pressures and incorporated stakeholder feedback. The micro-foundational perspective further emphasised that individual and collective inputs contributed to the institution's adaptive strategies, ensuring its approach remained dynamic and responsive.

6.6.3.4 Theme conclusion

From the results, it can be concluded that communication and collaboration played a critical role in emergent strategising. Managers engaged in practices that integrated formal and informal communication channels to support real-time strategic adjustments. The results demonstrated that cross-functional collaboration and stakeholder inclusivity enhanced responsiveness and that structured meetings and spontaneous conversations ensured that strategies could be adjusted rapidly to reflect evolving circumstances. Feedback ensured that strategies aligned with diverse needs.

The findings illustrated Bourdieu's concept of social capital, wherein robust social networks facilitate immediate adaptations via informal communication channels. These findings underscore the necessity of sustaining different communication modalities formal meetings to direct strategy and informal interactions for rapid adaptation. Cross-functional collaboration enhances strategic agility by enabling departments to collectively address emerging challenges. Informal exchanges and structured communication processes allowed participants to quickly align with evolving strategic needs, reflecting the emergent nature of strategy (Mintzberg and Waters 1985b), where strategies unfold in response to feedback and real-time challenges.

Effective communication and teamwork were crucial in facilitating emergent methods. Formal and informal communication channels enabled managers to implement real-time modifications and coordinate responses to unexpected obstacles. These micro-practices facilitated strategic agility by allowing managers to react promptly to changing circumstances. The collaborative decision-making across departments and stakeholders created a dynamic environment that allowed strategies to develop in response to the institution's varied needs. Illustrating the dynamic essence of strategy: instead of adhering to inflexible plans, managers adjusted to new information and input through ongoing communication and coordination, enabling strategies to evolve seamlessly.

6.7.4 Theme four T4: Influence of leadership and power dynamics (Leadership practices shaping emergent strategising).

The theme was crucial for understanding the impact of leadership practices and power dynamics on emergent strategies. It mainly concerned leadership influence and the structures of power dynamics that shaped strategising and the effectiveness of constructive feedback. Participants exhibited practices related to leadership, power and institutional structures within the environment, which were elaborated on in the category discussions next.

The three overarching categories identified in the participant data were inclusive and collegial decision-making, constructive criticism and feedback in strategising, and active inclusivity in strategising.

6.7.4.1 Category T4A: Inclusive and collegial decision-making

Through a combination of document analysis, semi-structured interviews and written narratives, it was revealed that individuals engaged in micro-practices of shared responsibility, consulted with colleagues to incorporate diverse voices, involved junior staff in strategic planning, utilised ideas from all levels, welcomed differing opinions, implemented measures to ensure that the policies were aligned, wrote their study guides and included everyone who could contribute to foster a culture of inclusivity and collegiality in decision-making.

Document analysis revealed that senior management built a wide community that fed off one another, which included staff and shareholders, as stated in the Holding Results presentation in March 2024, in which the CEO remarked:

“...It goes wider than the institution”. The staff as well as the shareholders all become part of this community, and that's what we want to get right that ... is to build this community that will feed off one another beautiful.” Furthermore, the CEO discussed that as a community, they were going to build the [.....] comprehensive campus, as evidenced by the next quote:

“We believe it is now time to build our [.....], comprehensive campus. Previously, we believed in our contact learning strategy, and we knew that it will show growth over time, but we didn't have any concrete evidence of that to our investors as well as to our board” (CEO Holding Results presentation March 2024)

Furthermore, the results from semi-structured interviews and written narratives indicated that participants demonstrated involving staff at all levels in strategic decisions. The following quotes provide evidence of these practices.

“By involving junior staff in strategic planning, I have created a more inclusive approach.” (WNP14)

Similarly, another participant echoed that in decision-making making they used ideas from all the levels to allow for flexibility in their strategies, as indicated by the following quote:

“[To make a decision] We use ideas from all levels..... allowing flexibility in our strategies.” (WNP15)

In addition, another participant added that they involved everyone; however, differences in opinions would emerge and they worked through them to reach a common goal, as indicated below:

“Differences of opinion emerged, but we worked through academic debates to reach a common goal.” (IP10)

Further, another participant demonstrated that they placed measures to ensure that policies are aligned with student needs and institutional programmes by stating that:

“So we had to immediately put in measures making sure that the policies aligned, so that we can bring in the students into our campuses, making sure they fit in with the programmes and the curricula. We had to make sure that we've got lecturers in place, that we have got strategies in place.” (IP9)

In addition, the participant indicated that they came up with collaborating on content development as the following quote indicates:

“...and then we try to come up with different ways of maybe writing our own study guides, authoring our own study guides.” (IP11)

Lastly, another participant indicated that they promoted participative decision-making across the institution as evidenced by the quote below:

“Ja, okay, You know we believe in participative decision making...including everyone that can contribute” (IP3)

The preceding excerpts highlighted participants' micro-level actions established through shared responsibility and consultation with colleagues, ensuring inclusivity and collegiality in strategising. Participants cultivated an environment where shared responsibility drove collective decision-making by engaging individuals at all levels low, middle and top management and extending beyond the institution to engage all stakeholders, including students, shareholders and other relevant parties. The strategy fostered engagement and cultivated a more innovative workforce that was adept at overcoming problems through cooperation and problem-solving, instilling confidence in the workforce's resilience. The varied micro-practices contributed to the emergence of shared responsibility, collaborative ownership and strategic flexibility, resulting in inclusive and collegial decision-making. Therefore, the institution cultivated a culture of collaborative engagement in strategic processes. Furthermore, participants consistently used the term “we” to emphasise the communal approach to decision-making, illustrating that collective input shaped the institution's emergent strategies.

These findings resonated with Bourdieu's social theory, particularly in the context of inclusive decision-making and social capital mobilisation. By fostering an environment of collegiality and collaboration, participants cultivated a shared habitus—a set of dispositions and practices that guided strategic decision-making across the institution. The inclusive approach enabled managers to redistribute decision-making power,

allowing historically marginalised voices, such as junior staff, to contribute to strategic processes. Furthermore, Bourdieu's concept of capital was evident as participants leveraged social capital encompassing relationships, networks and collaborative practices to enhance their strategic flexibility. The institution's collegial leadership practices mobilise various forms of capital, such as cultural capital (knowledge and expertise) and symbolic capital (reputation and legitimacy), to build an organisational culture that prioritises inclusivity and adaptability.

As such, Bourdieu's social theory, mobilising various forms of capital: social, cultural, and symbolic enhanced decision-making, redistributed agency throughout the organisation and therefore, empowered a broader range of voices. The redistribution of power allowed the institution to reshape its managerial field, promoting a more inclusive and resilient organisational culture. These skills are essential for navigating the intricate and dynamic contexts of contemporary organisations, coinciding with strategic management literature that advocates for a more nuanced comprehension of the practical enactment of strategy (Eisenhardt, 200).

The findings aligned with research on strategic processes, highlighting that power-sharing and inclusive leadership fostered engagement and innovation in complex organisations. It is particularly relevant in institutions where distributed authority enabled diverse perspectives to shape strategic outcomes. These practices also aligned with the configuration school of strategy, which emphasises the importance of collective action in shaping strategic direction (Mintzberg et.al. 1999; Denis, Langle, and Rouleau, 2010).

The findings also aligned with the micro-foundational perspective, highlighting that the individual interactions and contributions shaped the institution's strategic direction (Felin et al., 2005). Through participative decision-making and collaborative discussions, participants engaged in micro-level practices that enhanced the institution's capacity for resilience and innovation. These interactions created dynamic feedback loops, where individual actions influenced organisational strategy, allowing the institution to continuously adapt to internal and external pressures. Moreover, the micro-foundational perspective offered valuable insights into the mechanisms of strategy formation,

emphasising that those individual contributions, regardless of their size, collectively shaped the institution's strategic outcomes.

The researcher argues that the institution's adoption of inclusive and collegial decision-making practices marks a significant shift in the understanding and implementation of strategic processes. These practices are not merely procedural; they are transformative, changing the fundamental dynamics of the institution's strategic management. By fostering a collaborative environment, the institution boosted its capacity for adaptation, enabling it to navigate the complexities of the higher education sector with greater agility. Furthermore, focusing on this micro-level actions helped to understand that strategies are developed and continually modified in response to changing circumstances. The perspective enriched strategic management discussions by illuminating the often-overlooked interactions that drive organisational resilience.

6.7.4.2 Category T4B: Constructive criticism and feedback in strategising

Through semi-structured interviews and written narratives, participants demonstrated practices of constructive criticism, feedback, and constantly revisiting decisions (iterative strategy development) in shaping emergent strategising. Moreover, participants employed formal and informal feedback loops, enabling frontline insights to influence emergent strategising. Participants indicated that their decision-making processes were refined through constructive criticism during meetings, enabling adaptability. The following quotes provide evidence of these practices:

“Constructive criticism during meetings shapes our approach, enabling us to adapt better.” (IP2)

Another participant echoed the same sentiments that the practice of openness to feedback helped to refine strategies (align with departmental goals with the broader institutional vision) as indicated in the next quote:

“Feedback helps align departmental goals with the broader institutional vision.” (IP13)

Additionally, another participant indicated a practice of constantly revisiting decisions based on feedback, as indicated by the following quote:

“We constantly revisit decisions based on feedback, ensuring that our strategies evolve to meet current demands.” (WNP16)

Another echoed the same sentiments on the practice of addressing issues identified through surveys and feedback loops:

“...and then based on the surveys and also issues that we pick up, maybe in modules and so on”. (IP11)

Furthermore, another one indicated a practice of embracing criticism to develop solutions, as indicated by the next quote:

“...even in the criticism itself, it's constructive with a possible solution.” (WNP13)

These quotes underscored the micro-practices of feedback that fostered emergent strategising. Participants consistently engaged in practices of being open to feedback (through feedback loops) and constructive criticism, ensuring that their strategies evolved in response to insights from the frontline. These practices fostered alignment between departmental and institutional goals, enabling participants to refine strategies in response to real-time challenges and promote a culture of continuous improvement. These practices facilitated diverse input, which is essential for promoting emergent strategising and crucial for iterative improvements and strategic refinement across departments.

For instance, participants' utilisation of surveys and meetings to gather insights demonstrated the institution's commitment to inclusive feedback processes. These feedback mechanisms enhanced departmental cohesion and guaranteed that strategies are continually refined to align with the broader institutional vision. The emphasis on solution-oriented feedback further exemplified the institution's focus on positive, actionable improvements, which fostered innovation and adaptive capacity.

The findings resonates with those of several researchers (Jarzabkowski, Kavas and Krull, 2021; de Metz, Jansen van Rensburg and Davis, 2023 and de Metz et al., 2023), who highlighted the importance of continuous feedback and adjustment in emergent strategy. Further, Bourdieu's concept of the field is especially pertinent for understanding that constructive criticism and feedback influence emergent strategising. The institution's strategic discussions take place within a dynamic field where participants are encouraged to critique strategies while adhering to accepted norms and practices (Power 1999; Grenfell 2016). The interactive field facilitates the exchange of feedback across various organisational levels, allowing the institution to refine strategies in response to both internal pressures and external expectations. Moreover, the institution's feedback practices correspond with the social dynamics of the field, where symbolic capital (prestige, legitimacy) is bolstered through participative feedback processes. As participants engaged in feedback loops, they enhanced the institution's capacity for adaptability, positioning it to respond effectively to future challenges.

These practices correspond with the configuration school of strategy (Mintzberg, 1989; Mintzberg, Ahlstrand and Lampel, 1999), highlighting the significance of adaptive articulation in strategising, which was later supported by Monib et. al., (2021), that strategies must be adaptively articulated, and the process emphasises individual cognition, communal socialisation, or a simple response to environmental influences (Mintzberg 2017b; Mintzberg, Ahlstrand and Lampel, 1999b). The researcher concurs that strategising should be configurative and transformative, highlighting the positive, solution-oriented nature of feedback within the institution. Furthermore, the feedback served as input, allowing the institution to adjust its strategies based on individual cognition, communal socialisation and responses to environmental influences, thereby reflecting the dynamic nature of strategic processes.

It is commendable that the institution embraced constructive criticism as it served as a means for continuous improvement, allowing participants to challenge current strategies and suggest solutions that aligned with the institution's long-term goals. By cultivating an environment where critique was welcomed, the institution ensured its strategies remained flexible, adaptable and in tune with the broader educational landscape.

From a micro-foundational perspective, the findings emphasised the significance of individual feedback in shaping the institution's strategic outcomes (Felin et al., 2005). Participants' contributions, whether through constructive criticism in meetings or informal feedback during collaborative sessions, acted as micro-level efforts that influenced the institution's overall strategic direction. These small-scale interactions enabled emergent strategies to develop iteratively, ensuring that strategies evolved in response to current demands. By concentrating on frontline insights, the institution ensured that its strategies were informed by those most closely connected to its operational realities. Bottom-up feedback fostered organisational coherence while enabling the institution to adapt to internal challenges and external influences. Consequently, feedback processes enhanced strategic alignment and reinforced the institution's resilience and adaptive capacity.

The researcher argues that the institution's feedback culture facilitated emergent strategising. By systematically integrating constructive criticism into decision-making processes, the institution guarantees that strategies are iteratively refined to address evolving needs and new opportunities. Bourdieu's field theory posits that feedback functioned within a structured realm of interaction, where established norms guide the flow of critique. In the field, feedback loops are crucial for refining strategies and maintaining alignment with both internal expectations and external pressures.

6.7.4.3 Category T4C: Active engagement and inclusivity in strategising

Through a combination of document analysis, semi-structured interviews and written narratives, it was revealed that individuals engaged in micro-practices of active participation, involving junior staff in strategic planning, resolving through academic debate, and working toward the same vision, allowed for different viewpoints to shape strategic direction, hence achieving active engagement and inclusivity in strategising.

For example, through document analysis, the CEO in the Holdings results presentation in March 2024 stated that they believed that it was time to build the comprehensive campus, as indicated by the following quote.

"We believe it is now time to build our [.....] comprehensive campus. Previously, we believed in our contact learning strategy, and we knew that it will show growth over time, but we didn't have any concrete evidence of that to our investors as well as to our board". (CEO Holdings Results in March 2024)

Through semi-structured interviews and written narratives, participants further revealed practices of engaging all staff in strategic meetings. The next quotes provide evidence.

"By involving junior staff in strategic planning, I have created a more inclusive approach." (WNP14)

Additionally, another participant indicated resolution of differences through academic debates, by stating that:

"These differences are usually resolved through academic debate, where everyone is given the opportunity to voice their concerns." (WNP18)

Another participant further elaborated that the understanding of a collegial approach ensured that everyone worked toward the same vision, as the next quote indicates:

"It's a more collegial approach... we're all working toward the same vision; so it's less about hierarchy and more about shared responsibility." (IP13)

The foregoing excerpts revealed the importance of engaging all staff in strategic discussions through active participation and ensuring that all levels of the institution contribute to emergent strategising. It was achieved through collaboration across levels, indicating active engagement and inclusivity in emergent strategising, which led to active engagement and inclusivity in strategising. The findings corroborate those of Storbacka et al., (2016), that value co-creation necessitates actors participating in service-for-service exchanges and associated interactions to facilitate resource integration. The findings also resonate with those of Li and Jarzabkowski (2025), who argue for reinstating the radical, participative and democratic nature of strategy work.

The foregoing discussion reflects Bourdieu's social capital, where open dialogue facilitates consensus for inclusivity. Additionally, Bourdieu's field, which is characterised as the environment where agents and their social standings exist, is shaped by the

distribution and accumulation of capital (Bourdieu 1986). Leaders who prioritise inclusion initiatives are transforming the organisational landscape into a more egalitarian and collaborative one, consistent with Bourdieu's focus on the interplay of various forms of capital (economic, social, cultural, and symbolic) in creating and perpetuating social structures.

Moreover, Bourdieu's concept of the field postulates that strategic conversations within the institution occur in a structured environment where various stakeholders participate in exchanges guided by established norms. Leaders can transform the field into a more equitable space by encouraging inclusion and active participation, reducing hierarchical constraints and prioritising collective agency. The process fostered shared ownership of strategies, enabling the institution to adapt and evolve in response to internal needs and external challenges. Furthermore, Bourdieu's theory emphasised that social capital, developed through open dialogue and teamwork, is essential for forming a collective strategic vision. By leveraging different types of capital, the institution transformed its environment into one where inclusive engagement fostered strategic agreement. Additionally, the micro-foundational viewpoint emphasises that individual efforts and collective action strengthened the institution's capacity to address complex challenges and devise effective strategies (Felin et al., 2005).

Engaging stakeholders and inclusivity in structured debates were often practised to align with emergent strategising and demonstrated that they played a vital role in refining emergent strategies. The findings corroborate Storbacka et al.'s (2016) assertion that value co-creation necessitates actors participating in service-for-service exchanges and associated interactions that facilitate resource integration.

Examining from a micro-foundational perspective, the results highlighted that the individual contributions shape the emerging strategies of the institution (Felin et al., 2005). The active involvement of participants whether in debates, collaborative discussions, or through junior staff participation reflected micro-level practices that impacted the institution's strategic course. By cultivating an inclusive culture, the institution guaranteed

that its strategies were shaped by the collective perspectives of all stakeholders, which improved both strategic alignment and adaptability.

The researcher supports Felin and Foss's (2005) the assertion that micro-foundationally, the need for a united front among managers illustrates that collective agency within management can enhance the effectiveness of emergent strategising by strengthening negotiating power with higher authorities. It was evident in the institution's ability to leverage inclusive decision-making to build consensus around strategic initiatives, such as the decision to construct a new comprehensive campus in the same province as the head office, which reflected the collective input of stakeholders.

The researcher also contends that active engagement and inclusivity provided a continuous improvement platform, ensuring that strategies emerged and remained relevant and responsive. Consequently, actor engagement was a fundamental micro-foundation that aligned theory with practice and facilitated empirical study. Therefore, prioritising active engagement and inclusivity in emergent strategising enhanced the institution's ability to adapt to future challenges and seize new opportunities. By embedding inclusive practices within its strategic framework, the institution ensured that its strategies remain relevant, resilient and responsive to both internal and external influences.

6.7.4.4 Theme conclusion

From the results, it can be concluded that leadership was pivotal in developing emergent strategies within the institution. Leaders engaged in inclusive leadership practices, where decision-making involved staff at all levels, promoting a culture of shared responsibility. The findings on inclusive leadership and shared decision-making align with Mintzberg's (1989) discussion on the role of leadership in emergent strategy, where leaders foster a culture that encourages bottom-up contributions. Leaders encouraged constructive feedback and criticism to continuously refine strategies, improving the overall strategic process and fostering an environment where innovation could thrive. Furthermore, leaders also promoted active engagement, allowing for collective ownership of decisions.

The inclusive approach exemplifies Bourdieu's notion of symbolic capital, wherein leaders enhance their influence by promoting collaboration and shared ownership. Field theory posits that leadership practices are influenced by the institutional environment, allowing leaders to foster active engagement in decision-making. Inclusive leadership enhances emergent strategising by utilising the insights and contributions of employees throughout the organisational hierarchy. Leaders prioritising constructive feedback and engagement facilitate adaptive and innovative strategies, enabling the institution to effectively address evolving challenges.

Leadership practices influenced emergent strategies by enhancing inclusivity and collaboration in decision-making processes. Leaders cultivated an environment that encouraged feedback, constructive criticism and engagement from staff across all levels, enabling the development of strategies through bottom-up contributions, wherein junior staff and departments shaped the strategic direction. Inclusive leadership facilitated the emergence of strategies through collective input rather than top-down directives. Leaders' capacity to incorporate feedback and facilitate real-time adjustments ensured that strategies were developed in response to internal and external challenges. This inclusivity demonstrates that emergent strategies can be influenced by diverse perspectives within the institution, fostering a collaborative and adaptive strategic environment.

In conclusion, the themes presented in this section collectively illuminate how managerial micro-practices shaped and are shaped by the institutional context in which they occur. These findings revealed that emergent strategising in the higher education environment is not a linear or top-down process, but rather a dynamic interplay of adaptation, collaboration, institutional vision and leadership influence. Viewed through the lens of Bourdieu's theory of practice, these micro-practices reflected the recursive relationship between agency and structure, where habitus, field and capital continuously interact to produce contextually embedded strategies. Together, these themes offer a nuanced understanding of how strategy is enacted in practice, contributing to both the theoretical discourse and practical considerations of strategic leadership in higher education.

Table 6.7 presents a summary of the key findings from the study, along with their corresponding theoretical and practical implications. It captures how each theme relates

to the broader conceptual framework, particularly Bourdieu's theory of practice. It highlights the potential relevance of these insights for practitioners, institutional leaders and policymakers in the higher education context

	Theme	Category	Micro Practices	Main Findings	Meaning in Theory	Meaning in Practice
RQ3: What role do daily individual routines play in facilitating emergent strategising of PHEI managers?	1. Strategic adaptation and flexibility (Core to emergent strategising)	1.1 Strategic flexibility in educational practices	Iterative investment in technology, ongoing refinement, adapting daily schedules and adapting teaching methods, and assessment models (e.g., moving from final exams to continuous assessments) to address AI usage and maintain educational relevance.	Participants demonstrated micro-practices of adapting teaching methods (e.g., shifting from final exams to continuous assessments) and policies to respond to technological trends.	Bourdieu's concept of habitus shows that ingrained dispositions help individuals adapt strategies in a changing field and contribute to emergent strategising. Bourdieu's concept of technological capital states that institutional norms and strategies evolve in response to external technological advancements, shaping emergent strategising. Bourdieu's doxa pertains to the unquestionable norms observed by the institution's managers. These	It showed that adapting educational practices (like continuous assessments) allowed the institution to remain responsive and resilient to emerging trends.

	Theme	Category	Micro Practices	Main Findings	Meaning in Theory	Meaning in Practice
					norms evolved in response to external changes and shaped emergent strategising. Each practice underscored the impact of micro-level interactions on macro-level strategies, showcasing that individual actions and collaborative practices collectively shaped emergent organisational strategising.	
		1.2 Adaptation in response to contextual needs	- Implementing blended learning and - utilising new digital tools to engage students and - respond to operational disruptions like the pandemic,	Participants quickly adjusted to operational challenges, such as the pandemic, by shifting to blended learning and incorporating new tools to	Bourdieu's belief is that individual actions are influenced by habitual behaviour and the context in which they operate.	Demonstrated institutional agility in responding to unexpected challenges through adjustments in course delivery.

	Theme	Category	Micro Practices	Main Findings	Meaning in Theory	Meaning in Practice
			- adaptive strategic decision-making (e.g. a strategic decision was made to open a comprehensive campus), - adjusting to external pressures, - adapting to a variety of teaching methods through ongoing assessment, - transitioning to online platforms, - adjusting work processes to enhance students' experience, - adjusted assessment to maintain academic integrity	enhance student engagement.	It further demonstrated that strategic thinking is embedded in daily practices and illustrated the interplay between structure and agency influencing emergent strategising. Bourdieu's concept of habitus involves external forces (such as the pandemic and technological advancements) disrupting the institution's ingrained practices and routines, forcing actors to adopt new ways of working. The field of education itself is evolving, as traditional face-to-	

	Theme	Category	Micro Practices	Main Findings	Meaning in Theory	Meaning in Practice
					face learning models are being redefined to include a hybrid model in which online and face-to-face learning coexist as valuable options, shaping and reshaping the institution's strategic direction. Micro-foundation theory emphasises that small individual actions drive more significant strategic responses. The ongoing assessment practices and decisions that result in adaptive practices reflect a shift in the institution's mindset, which reflects Bourdieu's habitus and field	

	Theme	Category	Micro Practices	Main Findings	Meaning in Theory	Meaning in Practice
					driving emergent strategising. Microfoundational perspective, emphasising that real-time strategic thinking occurs within the constraints of daily routines and operational demands. Utilising Bourdieu's praxeology, the research underscores that habitual activities provide avenues for strategic contemplation, ultimately influencing emergent strategising. The micro-foundational approach accentuates the	

	Theme	Category	Micro Practices	Main Findings	Meaning in Theory	Meaning in Practice
					significance of human interactions in influencing macro-level strategic results.	
		1.3 Strategic and reflective thinking	✚ Learning through past experiences, constantly thinking, strategic reflection, adapting routines to meet emerging needs, a shift in the mindset to accommodate students' needs ✚ Informal moments of strategic thinking	Participants engaged in reflective decision-making and informal collaboration to refine and improve strategies, showing that reflection feeds into ongoing strategic adaptation.	Praxeology (Bourdieu) views everyday practices and actions as opportunities for reflection, strategic adaptation especially in the context of emergent strategising. Bourdieu's belief is that individual actions are influenced by habitual behaviour and the context in which they operate, and are intertwined therein. It further demonstrated that strategic thinking is embedded in daily practices and	Reflective practices allowed institutions to refine strategies and address emerging challenges continuously.

	Theme	Category	Micro Practices	Main Findings	Meaning in Theory	Meaning in Practice
					illustrated the interplay between structure and agency. From a micro-foundational perspective, individual interactions and decisions during routine tasks aggregate into more significant strategic shifts within the institution. Reinforcing the micro-foundational perspective that individual actions and interactions play a crucial role in shaping emergent strategising (strategic outcomes).	

	Theme	Category	Micro Practices	Main Findings	Meaning in Theory	Meaning in Practice
RQ2: What is the influence of cognition by PHEI managers in emergent strategising?	2. Institutional purpose and vision (Vision-driven practices influencing strategising)	2.1 Vision embedding practices	✚ Focusing on aligning day-to-day activities and program development with long-term institutional vision, ✚ ensuring all actions support the broader purpose, ✚ involving the executive teams, increasing student numbers, ✚ moving away from formative sit-down exams to continuous assessment.	Daily actions and program development were aligned with the institution's long-term vision (e.g., embedding skills development into assessments), showing strong purpose alignment.	Bourdieu's concept of field shows that the institutional environment shapes emergent strategies aligned with broader goals. Bourdieu's concept of habitus elucidates that these vision-embedding methods are not merely reactions to external pressures but are integral to the institution's entrenched culture. Thereby influencing emergent strategising. The capacity of managers to negotiate, understand, and implement institutional values in their daily tasks exemplifies the	Ensured that day-to-day actions are purpose-driven and supported the institution's long-term vision and mission.

	Theme	Category	Micro Practices	Main Findings	Meaning in Theory	Meaning in Practice
					interaction between structure and agency in Bourdieu's theory. Bourdieu's praxeology underscores the interconnection between daily practices and strategic thinking, whereas the micro-foundational approach illustrates that individual interactions and decisions influence the institution's overarching emergent strategising.	
		2.2 Institutional values and alignment	 Making resource allocation decisions (e.g., hiring faculty) based on institutional values such as academic	Decision-making and resource allocation were driven by institutional values (e.g., academic integrity),	The institutional values highlight Bourdieu's symbolic capital; hence, values-driven decisions enhance institutional	Aligned resource allocation and strategic decisions with core institutional values, ensuring

	Theme	Category	Micro Practices	Main Findings	Meaning in Theory	Meaning in Practice
			integrity and quality, ✚ writing one's modules to create value-aligned resources, ✚ offering more money to appoint a lecturer, ✚ working with two different platforms (face-to-face and online platforms), ✚ printing the institutional purpose and values everywhere on campus	ensuring strategies aligned with the institution's mission.	prestige and integrity. The decisions (emergent strategies) highlight Bourdieu's capital theory, where economic capital (budget) and cultural capital (qualified educators) are negotiated, reflecting agency within resource constraints and emergent strategising informed by institutional values. Additionally, they reflect Bourdieu's concept of habitus—the structured yet adaptive dispositions through which actors navigate	mission-driven outcomes.

	Theme	Category	Micro Practices	Main Findings	Meaning in Theory	Meaning in Practice
					institutional contexts. Thus, habitus shapes innovative responses (emergent strategising) to institutional challenges. By aligning decisions with the institution's core values, participants navigate the complex balance between economic realities and mission, demonstrating the interplay between structure and agency in Bourdieu's theory. From a micro-foundational perspective, these findings underscore that individual and	

	Theme	Category	Micro Practices	Main Findings	Meaning in Theory	Meaning in Practice
					collective behaviours collectively influence institutional results in this context of emergent strategising. The different practices contribute to the institution's emergent strategising. Thus, the manager's actions and decisions ensured that the institution's values are consistently reflected in short-term decisions and long-term strategies, including emergent strategising.	
		2.3 Internal alignment with long-term goals and vision	- Integrated thinking, - shared collective understanding, - utilising managers for buy-in, and	Participants emphasised the importance of collective understanding to ensure internal alignment with	Bourdieu's habitus and field underscore that collective actions are shaped by a shared understanding of	Ensured departments and teams remained aligned with long-term goals through feedback loops, fostering

	Theme	Category	Micro Practices	Main Findings	Meaning in Theory	Meaning in Practice
			 ongoing feedback loops, such as student surveys, should be used to ensure that departmental actions align with institutional long-term goals.	long-term goals, using feedback loops (e.g., surveys) to inform strategies.	institutional goals, fostering alignment. Micro foundations theory highlights that aligning micro-level initiatives with macro goals fosters a cohesive institutional strategy and emergent strategies. Bourdieu's concepts of capital, field, and habitus underscore the navigation of the institutional field, the accumulation of symbolic capital, and the adaptation of practices to build effective collaboration networks for	coherent emergent strategising.

	Theme	Category	Micro Practices	Main Findings	Meaning in Theory	Meaning in Practice
					emergent strategising.	
RQ1: How do the social interactions of PHEI managers drive emergent strategising?	3. Communication and collaboration in decision-making (Key to emergent strategising)	3.1 Modes of communication in emergent strategising	- Utilising formal structured meetings, such as MANCO meetings, day-to-day management meetings, online meetings, and - informal communication methods (e.g., quick chats, popping an email, face-to-face pop in) to enable real-time adjustments and long-term planning. - Utilising vertical communication approaches - Utilising horizontal communication approaches - Utilising varied meetings	Formal (e.g., scheduled meetings) and informal (e.g., quick chats) communication practices fostered collaboration, responsiveness, and real-time strategy adjustments.	Social capital (Bourdieu): Informal networks facilitate real-time adjustments, while formal structures guide planning. Bourdieu's habitual practices have been influenced by the institutional context and their previous experiences with both formal and informal communication styles. Cultural and symbolic capital was reflected in informal meetings, where individuals who possess more	Communication practices enabled real-time responsiveness and long-term strategic alignment through varied channels.

	Theme	Category	Micro Practices	Main Findings	Meaning in Theory	Meaning in Practice
			- Daily online and in-person meetings - Multiple modes of communication such as emails telephone calls		symbolic capital (such as those in leadership roles) tended to dominate discussions and influenced outcomes The institutional field dictated the formal structures that participants must navigate. From a micro-foundational perspective, the findings underscore the significance of small-scale communication practices in shaping the institution's broader strategic outcomes encompassing	

	Theme	Category	Micro Practices	Main Findings	Meaning in Theory	Meaning in Practice
					emergent strategising.	
		3.2 Cross-functional and Departmental Collaboration	✚ Formal and informal collaboration across departments and campuses to coordinate responses to emergent challenges and develop shared solutions. ✚ incorporating diverse perspectives ✚ scheduled and spontaneous interactions ✚ Collaborative issue resolution ✚ collaborative information sharing ✚ participative decision-making ✚ supporting cross-functional tasks during absences	Collaboration across departments and campuses facilitated coordinated solutions for emergent issues, supporting agile and collaborative strategic efforts.	Bourdieu's theory of field underscores that cross-departmental collaboration strengthens the shared institutional field. Bourdieu's habitus concept helps explain that participants' collaborative interactions contribute to emergent strategising. Bourdieu's theory of social capital (networks and relationships) and symbolic capital (institutional prestige) was pertinent to understanding that	Cross-departmental collaboration fostered agility and alignment in addressing emergent issues institution-wide.

	Theme	Category	Micro Practices	Main Findings	Meaning in Theory	Meaning in Practice
			- respectful, collaborative interactions for decision-making - inclusion of junior staff in strategising.		managers could use their relationships across departments to influence emergent strategising. From a micro-foundational perspective, these findings underscore the significance of individual acts of collaboration in shaping the institution's emergent strategising. Individual actions, such as engaging in strategic discussions and sharing insights across departments, accumulate to drive emergent strategising.	

	Theme	Category	Micro Practices	Main Findings	Meaning in Theory	Meaning in Practice
		3.3 Stakeholder inclusivity and engagement	✚ Incorporating feedback from various stakeholders (e.g., students and corporate partners) to shape strategy and ✚ ensure inclusivity in decision-making. ✚ moving a programme to contact learning mode, ✚ inclusion of opinion from people, ✚ embedded stakeholder input	Practice of allowing more students to register, moving some programmes to contact learning, relying on stakeholder committee meetings for feedback, interacting with the corporates, creating an opportunity to include opinions from the people, consulting with more people and incorporating stakeholder.	Bourdieu's social capital underscores that stakeholder engagement expands social capital, leading to more informed, adaptive strategies and emergent strategising. Symbolic capital plays a vital role in these interactions, as the institution accumulates prestige and legitimacy by adhering to industry standards and incorporating stakeholder feedback into its strategic decisions. Bourdieu's concept of field is evident in the collaborative environment fostered by the institution, where stakeholders from various levels	Incorporating stakeholder feedback ensured that strategies align with diverse needs, enhancing inclusivity and responsiveness.

	Theme	Category	Micro Practices	Main Findings	Meaning in Theory	Meaning in Practice
					(students, staff, industry partners, and alumni) are involved in the strategic process. Microfoundation theory highlights that individual contributions, such as insights from junior staff or industry partners, combine to shape emergent strategising.	
RQ4: How do organisational and external contextual factors influence emergent strategising of PHEI managers? And	4. Influence of leadership and power dynamics (Leadership practices shaping emergent strategising)	4.1 Inclusive and collegial decision-making	✚ consultation with colleagues, ✚ involving junior staff and multiple levels in decision-making to foster shared responsibility and enhance collaboration, ✚ utilising ideas from all levels, ✚ putting in measures to ensure that the policies aligned,	Leaders practiced inclusive decision-making by involving staff at all levels in strategy formation, fostering shared responsibility and collaborative ownership.	Bourdieu's Symbolic capital underscores that inclusive leadership practices increase leaders' influence by fostering collective ownership. Bourdieu's social theory, particularly in inclusive decision-making	Inclusive decision-making fostered shared ownership and strengthened strategic collaboration across all organisational levels.

	Theme	Category	Micro Practices	Main Findings	Meaning in Theory	Meaning in Practice
RQ5: How do power dynamics by PHEI managers influence emergent strategising?			✚ writing own study guides, and ✚ including everyone (community), ✚ collaborating on content development		and social capital mobilisation. micro-foundational perspective, highlighting that the individual interactions and contributions shaped the institution's strategic direction Bourdieu's social theory indicates that, mobilising various forms of capital—social, cultural, and symbolic enhances decision-making, redistributing agency throughout the organisation and empowering a broader range of voices The micro-foundational perspective offers valuable insights into the mechanisms of	

	Theme	Category	Micro Practices	Main Findings	Meaning in Theory	Meaning in Practice
					strategy formation and emergent strategising, emphasising that those individual contributions—regardless of their size—collectively shape the institution's emergent strategising.	
		4.2 Constructive criticism and feedback in strategising	- Encouraging open feedback - Constructive criticism to improve strategic decisions and alignment continuously. - constantly revisiting decisions (iterative strategy development), - Formal feedback loops, - informal feedback loops - openness to feedback helped	Open feedback and constructive criticism were encouraged to refine strategies, allowing continuous strategic improvements based on collective input. constructive criticism, feedback, and constantly revisiting decisions in shaping	Bourdieu's habitus underscores that encouraging open feedback shifts individual dispositions towards continuous strategic improvement and emergent strategising. Bourdieu's concept of the field is especially pertinent to understanding that constructive	Constructive feedback loops drove iterative improvements and fostered a culture of strategic refinement and adaptability.

	Theme	Category	Micro Practices	Main Findings	Meaning in Theory	Meaning in Practice
			- to refine strategies, addressing issues identified through surveys and feedback loops - embracing criticism to develop solutions	emergent strategising embracing criticism to develop solutions, addressing issues identified through surveys and feedback loops, continually revisiting decisions based on feedback, openness to feedback,	criticism and feedback influence emergent strategising. The institution's strategic discussions occur within a dynamic field where participants are encouraged to critique strategies while following accepted norms and practices. The institution's feedback practices correspond with the field's social dynamics, where symbolic capital (prestige, legitimacy) is bolstered through participative feedback processes that encourage	

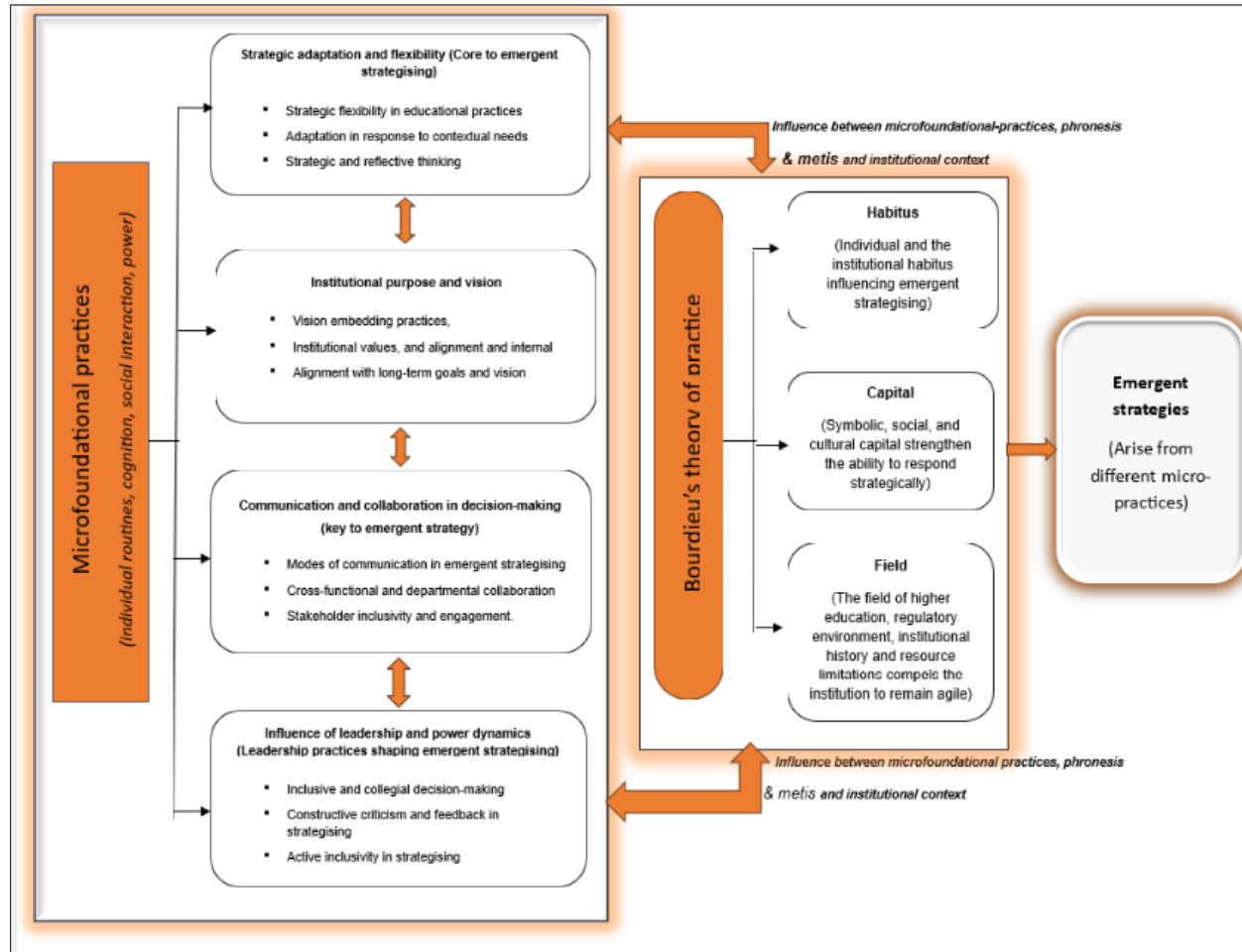
	Theme	Category	Micro Practices	Main Findings	Meaning in Theory	Meaning in Practice
					emergent strategising. From a micro-foundational perspective, the findings emphasised the significance of individual feedback in shaping the institution's emergent strategising (strategic outcomes).	
		4.3 Active engagement and inclusivity in strategising	- Promoting active participation and engagement in strategic discussions ensures that different perspectives are considered. - engaging all staff in strategic discussions through active participation, allowing different viewpoints to shape strategic direction and	Leaders promoted active engagement and inclusivity in strategic discussions, facilitating a collaborative environment in which different perspectives shaped emergent strategies.	Field and social capital underscore that active engagement fosters shared understanding and strengthens collaboration within the field. Bourdieu's concept of the field emphasises that strategic conversations within the institution occur in	Promoted a collaborative environment where different perspectives were valued, leading to more inclusive and flexible strategies.

	Theme	Category	Micro Practices	Main Findings	Meaning in Theory	Meaning in Practice
			- ensuring all levels of the institution contribute to strategy formulation through collaboration across levels, - resolving through academic debate, - understanding of a collegial		a structured environment where agents—various stakeholders—participate in exchanges guided by established norms. From a micro-foundational perspective, the results highlight that the individual contributions shaped the emergent strategising of the institution.	

Table 6.2 indicates summaries of the discussion of findings and the theoretical and practical implications of the findings.

6.8 Theorising emergent strategising

Figure 6.2: Theorising emergent strategising: Bourdieu's perspective



Source: Author's own compilation

Figure 6.2 further demonstrated the integration of Bourdieu's theory of practice with the core themes that emerged from the data, in response to the main research question. The model demonstrated that emergent strategies are shaped by the interaction between contextual organisational themes and Bourdieu's conceptual tools, habitus, field, and capital. These themes included leadership and power dynamics, communication and collaboration, institutional purpose and vision, and strategic flexibility. Therefore, emergent strategising manifested itself through the micro-practices of managers within the institution. Through "*phronesis*" and "*metis*", managers facilitated emergent strategies from daily unscripted practices, incorporating varied individual practices. Additionally, strategy was developed not only in the context of the building worldview but also in response to what was happening within and without, and the dwelling worldview attempted to handle immediate challenges.

The study revealed four distinct themes illuminating the micro-foundational practices of emergent strategising within a South African educational institution. According to Bourdieu's social theory, these findings were analysed through the lens of capital, habitus and field, which are the essential elements for understanding how emergent strategies developed through daily interactions (Gomez 2015; Harker et al., 1990b). The study followed the constructivist-interpretivist paradigm, employing a case study approach to develop theory inductively, using the data to explain how emergent strategising arises from micro-foundational activities. This theoretical development is consistent with previous scholarship in social theory and microfoundations, as noted in (Grenfell, 2016a; Charmaz, 2017; Creswell and Creswell, 2018)

Integrating Bourdieu's perspective into emergent strategising

The emergent strategies identified in the study are fundamentally shaped by Bourdieu's theoretical constructs of habitus, capital and field. These strategies do not arise from formal plans but develop organically from the everyday practices of individuals operating within a structured social field. Habitus influences individuals to confront challenges, capital determines access to resources and authority and the field shapes the broader context in which strategies develop.

The theorisation provides a framework for understanding how educational institutions in South Africa can cultivate emergent strategies by leveraging micro-foundational practices built on strategic flexibility and adaptation, institutional purpose and vision, communication and collaboration in decision-making and leadership influence, and the role of power dynamics. As such, the findings offer valuable insights for practitioners seeking to foster agile and adaptive institutions in the face of increasing complexity and change.

6.9 Reflective final thoughts

There is an overemphasis on formal strategic planning in S-as-P literature; neglect of informal, episodic micro doing of strategising by different actors emergent strategising that is informed by the “*phronesis*” and “*metis*” (Whittington, 2012, 2018; Chia et al., 2018a). A volatile, complex environment such as PHEIs requires adaptive, emergent strategies beyond formal planning tools. Therefore, this study aimed to address the gap in existing studies and explore micro-foundational practices that influenced emergent strategising at an PHEI.

Therefore, based on the foregoing discussion and to answer the main research question, it is apparent that micro-practices are influential in emergent strategising at the PHEI. Emergent strategising occurs within and without in response to the ever-changing environment. Informal, unscripted activities result in emergent strategising instead of formal planning and strategising activities. Emergent strategising manifests itself through the micro-practices of managers within the institution. Through *phronesis* and *metis*, managers facilitated the emergence of strategies from daily, unscripted practices, incorporating a variety of individual practices. Additionally, strategy develops not only in the context of the building worldview but also in response to what is happening within and without, and the dwelling worldview attempts to handle immediate challenges. The researcher concurs that managers engaged in these “unscripted practices” and developed strategies through discursive constructionism (Potter and Hepburn 2008), using their resources. Reinforcing the idea of ephemeral strategies contributes to emergent strategising and demonstrates that short-lived responses influence, adapt, and shape longer-term strategising within the organisation. It further highlights the dynamic

interplay between agency (individual managers' actions) and the broader institutional context (field and habitus).

6.10 Chapter Conclusion

Chapter 6 presented the data analysis and discussed the findings to gain a more profound and thorough understanding of micro-practices influencing emergent strategising. An intrinsic case study approach was employed within a constructivist-interpretivism paradigm or worldview. The case study was guided by three research methods that examined the subtle nuances of emergent strategising.

Many studies focus on formal strategising; this study focused on the informal, unscripted practices of emergent strategising. The findings included rich descriptions with verbatim quotes that offered an account of micro-practices influencing emergent strategising, demonstrating informal, unscripted practices. The findings indicated that a varied array of micro-practices influence emergent strategising at the organisations from the daily organisational coping requiring "*phronesis*" and "*metis*".

Chapter 7 provided a summary of the main findings of the research and link them to the main research problem and inquiry-based research questions. This includes developing a social theoretical perspective on micro-foundational practices that influence emergent strategising and making some recommendations for future research.

Chapter 7: Significant findings of the study, recommendations and conclusions

“As both a research field and an emerging managerial practice, behavioural strategy is fundamentally about making these implicit psychological assumptions explicit by exploring the intersection of psychology and strategy to understand and improve strategic decision-making” (Foss et al., 2024).

7.1 Introduction

This chapter summarised the study's major findings, as discussed in previous chapters. It started with an introduction, gave an overview of the study, the response to the research questions, discussed the research contribution, the researcher's reflection, conclusions and recommendations for future studies drawn from the study, limitations, and lastly, concluded the chapter. The study aimed to explore how foundational practices influenced emergent strategising across multiple organisational levels in a PHEI.

7.2 Study overview

Heeding the call that most S-as-P research focuses on formal planning and strategising activities and negated informal, episodic micro doings of strategising that was informed by “*phronesis*” and “*metis*” leads to emergent strategies (Whittington, 2012, 2018; Chia et al., 2018a). Using a practice-based, qualitative case design, it uncovered that micro-foundational everyday practices, routines and informal actions shape strategic direction in resource-constrained and legitimacy-sensitive contexts.

The study sought to investigate strategy as a uniquely informal and unscripted activity that frequently results in strategy formation. What occurs in the organisation and is done by individuals are the micro-level activities supported by the micro-foundational perspective, emphasising the individual and their interaction (Johnson et al., 2016; Felin et al., 2015a). Despite what has been researched recently, there was need for more

research on the episodic micro-doing of strategy by different actors (Brad, Chia and Nair 2020; Golsorkhi, Rouleau, Seidl and Vaara 2014) that is informed by the "*phronesis*" and "*metis*" (Chia et al., 2018a). The constructivist-interpretivist paradigm considered the social aspect of strategising, constructivists' empirical programme drove it by creating new, richer understandings and interpretations of social worlds and contexts.

Previous research had focused only on some of the management levels (top, middle, and lower) of the organisation within a PHEI in the South African context, whereas this study focused on all levels. The study aimed to theoretically inform understanding of the micro-foundational activities, processes and practices characterising the emergent strategising linked to current PHEI practices in a South African context. Secondly, how strategising, in the context of Bourdieu's perspective, was an essential element for understanding how emergent strategies developed through daily practices and interactions. Thirdly, methodologically, the study sought to integrate research methods and philosophical assumptions. Lastly, the study identified micro-foundational practices that influenced emergent strategising and proposed a detailed understanding of the meaning and significance of these practices in shaping emergent strategising.

Chapter 1: Research Orientation

Chapter 2: Contextualisation of Higher Private Education Institutions in South Africa

Chapter 3: Strategising

Chapter 4: The role of the individual in strategising

Chapter 5: Research methodology

Chapter 6: Data analysis, presentation and discussion of the findings

Chapter 7: Recommendations and conclusions

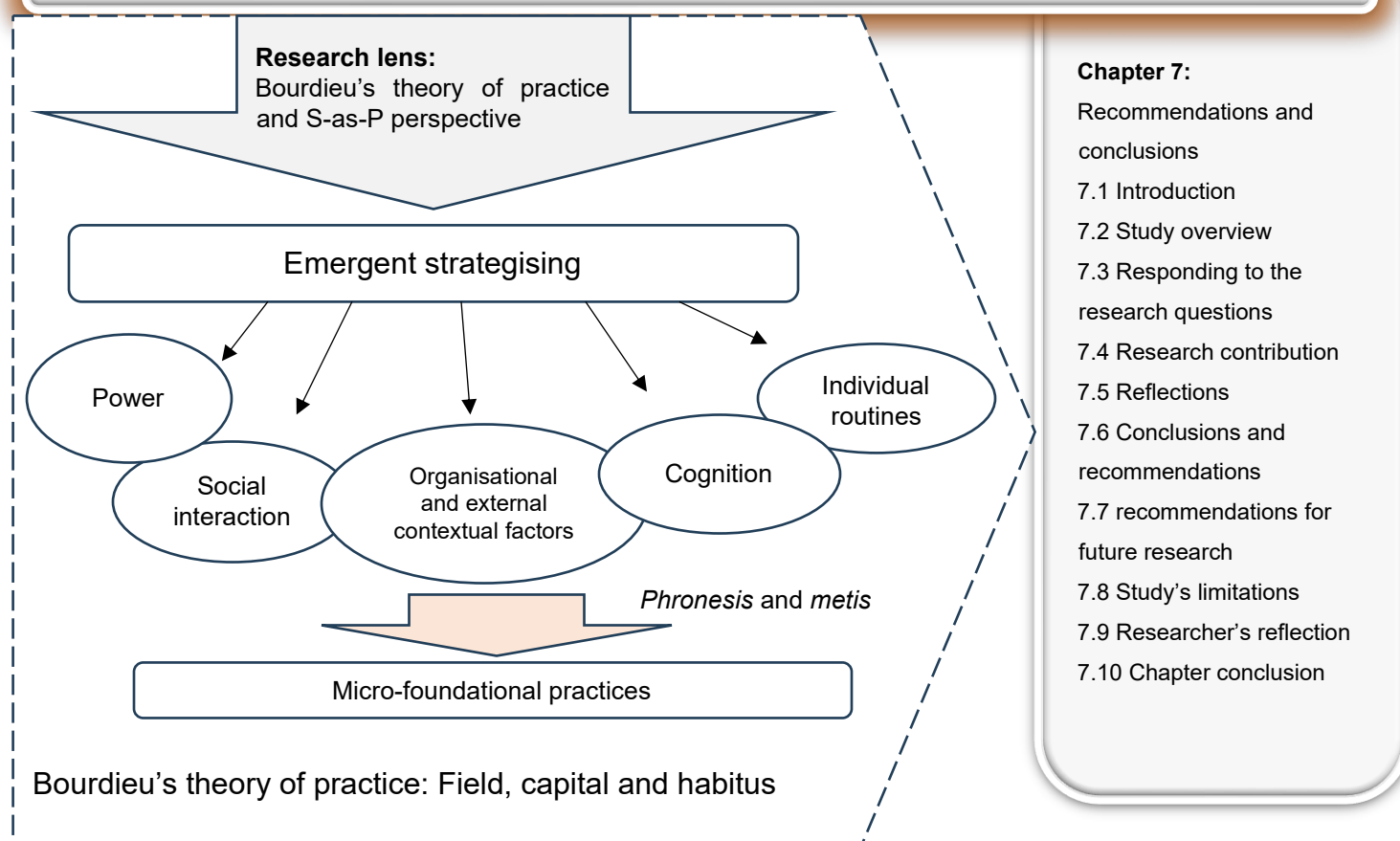


Figure 7.1: A diagrammatic presentation of Chapter 7 and the overview of the study.

Source: Author's own

The purpose of Chapter 7 was to answer the research questions and describe the theoretical contributions of this study. The study theoretically assisted in understanding the micro-foundational activities, processes and practices characterising emergent strategising linked to present PHEI practices in a South African context involving a multilevel perspective (low, middle and top managers). Secondly, the study advanced the micro-foundational practices that had a role in emergent strategising and other subfields in strategic management. It helped change the perception of how micro-foundational practices influenced emergent strategising and how they related to other sub-fields of strategic management. Methodologically, the study integrated research methods and philosophical assumptions. Lastly, by conducting the empirical test, the study developed a detailed view and/or meaning of the micro-practices that influenced emergent strategising and how they relate to other fields of strategic management. Finally, the study's recommendations for future research was be presented.

Secondary research was conducted through a literature review to address the primary research question, while primary research involved collecting data for the empirical study. A qualitative research design was selected for this study, and data was collected using document analysis, semi-structured interviews and written narratives with 18 participants were managers in a PHEI. Research participants were selected by employing non-probability judgment sampling. The data collected for the empirical study was analysed using thematic data analysis by Braun et al.,’s (2006) descriptive phenomenological approach, Sinfield, et al., (2023) and Atlas Ti data analysis software version 24, after which the results were presented in Chapter 6. The subsequent section addressed the research questions by presenting conclusions and recommendations for each objective.

7.3 Responding to the research questions

This section addressed the research questions formulated for the study. The five inquiry-based research questions were addressed; first, it fulfilled the study's primary research question. Table 7.1 indicated the relationship between the study's research objectives, the literature review and the empirical study.

Research questions

In this study, the researcher answered the following fundamental question:

The study's general question and specific questions were (as shown in Table 7.1):

Table 7.1 Summary of the linkages between the research questions, literature review and empirical study

Research questions	Literature review	Empirical study	Match to findings
General research questions			
How do managers' micro-foundational practices influence emergent strategising at a PHEI?	Chapters 2, 3 and 4		Emergent strategising manifested itself through the micro-practices of managers within the institution. Through " <i>phronesis</i> " and " <i>metis</i> ", managers facilitated emergent strategies from daily unscripted practices, incorporating varied individual practices. Additionally, strategy developed not only in the context of the building worldview but also in response to what is happening within and without, and the dwelling worldview attempts to handle immediate challenges.
Inquiry-based research questions			
1. How do the social interactions of PHEI managers drive emergent strategising?	Chapter 4	Semi-structured question 1 Written narrative question 2 Document analysis	Interaction across departments through varied means and ways fostered knowledge-sharing and adaptability, shaped emergent strategies through collective decision-making
2. What is the influence of cognition by PHEI managers in emergent strategising?	Chapter 4	Semi-structured question 2 Written narrative question 1 Document analysis	Managers' cognitive alignment with the institutional vision and goals guided strategic adaptation and the development of emergent strategies.
3. What role do daily individual routines play in facilitating emergent strategising of PHEI managers?	Chapter 4	Semi-structured question 3 Written narrative question 3 Document analysis	Recurring routines contributed to informal, adaptive strategies, influenced managers' responses to challenges and opportunities
4. What are the organisational and external contextual factors influencing the emergent strategising of PHEI managers?	Chapter 2 Section 3.3.1.2; Section 3.3.2;	Semi-structured question 4 Written narrative question 4 Document analysis	Organisational structures, power relations, and external constraints significantly shaped the development of emergent strategies within the institution.
5. How do power dynamics by PHEI managers in influencing emergent strategising?	Section 3.3.1.2 Section 4.4 Section 3.5.2	Semi-structured question 5 Written narrative question 5 Document analysis	Leadership authority and informal influenced impacted strategic decision-making, affecting the unfolding of emergent strategies.

Based on the empirical research findings reported in Chapter 6 and the literature analysis presented in Chapters 2, 3, 4, and 5, conclusions and suggestions were drawn for each secondary research study. The recommendations and findings for each research question are given in the next section.

7.4 Research contribution

The study adds to the existing body of knowledge on strategy within a constructivist-interpretivism paradigm, which was embedded firstly in practice (ontological consideration), secondly in knowledge and studied concerning the world research as a construction process (epistemological consideration) by focusing on how micro-foundational practices influenced emergent strategising. The contribution was embedded in meaning-making in the cultural and social contexts. It addressed the actual micro-foundational practices of multi-level managers that influenced emergent strategising in South African PHEIs. The following section elaborated on the study's contribution.

7.4.1 Multi-level managerial perspective multi-methods evidence

One of the most significant contributions of this study lay in its multi-level investigation of managerial strategising within a PHEI. By incorporating voices from top, middle, and low (operational) managers. This multi-level perspective was particularly valuable in illuminating the intersections between formal structures and informal practices, as well as the power dynamics and agency differences across managerial tiers, an aspect rarely addressed in prior studies on S-as-P in the South African PHEI context. Moreover, the study derived its analytical strength from the use of multiple forms of qualitative evidence, including document analysis, semi-structured interviews and written narratives. This methodological triangulation not only enriched the data but also enhanced the credibility, depth and nuance of the findings. The interviews provided direct insights into lived strategic experiences and reflexive practices, while the written narratives offered a more introspective account of how strategising evolved.

Together, this approach enabled the identification of micro-level strategic practices, including adaptive decision-making, communication routines, and vision alignment, across various managerial roles. This granular view of strategising contributed to a more dynamic and practice-oriented understanding of strategy formation, further extending the S-as-P literature through a contextually grounded, empirically rich case that reflected the real-world complexity of strategy work in pluralistic, resource-constrained environments.

This contribution was especially relevant considering calls for deeper exploration of episodic, micro-doings of strategising Golsorkhi et al., (2015a) and provided a valuable template for future studies seeking to integrate multi-level, multi-source methodologies in the study of emergent strategy.

7.4.2 Micro-foundational practices in emergent strategising

This study explored the micro-foundational practices in emergent strategising. In an in-depth manner, it examined how micro-foundational practices influenced emergent strategising within an organisational context. In response to more research on the social actor in S-as-P, the different social actors were at the forefront of the exploration.

Within a PHEI, micro-practices denoted the habitual acts, behaviours and decisions made by managers that collectively shape the institution's strategic trajectory. These micro-practices frequently functioned below the level of formal strategy formulation, gently influencing and directing emergent tactics over time. Emergent strategising refers to the evolution of strategies naturally from micro-level interactions, rather than being imposed through formal, top-down planning processes.

Managers navigated a network of conflicting demands in the complex and dynamic environment of PHEIs, where academic objectives, market influences and governance frameworks intersect. While frequently informal or reactive, their micro-practices significantly influenced the emergence and adaptation of strategy in response to internal and external changes.

To develop a detailed view of micro-practices that influenced managers' emergent strategising in a PHEI within the framework of S-as-P, it was crucial to link managers' individual and daily actions, decisions and routines to the overarching process of strategic change and development. The S-as-P perspective perceives strategy not as a remote, top-down procedure but as a phenomenon that arises from the routine actions of individuals within an organisation.

1. Routine administrative practices:

In HEIs, managers consistently performed standard administrative activities, meeting organisation and policy execution. These ostensibly trivial behaviours functioned as

essential micro-practices that impacted emergent strategising. Although commonplace, these actions significantly influenced the institution's operational capabilities, ensuring congruence with both academic and commercial goals. A manager's decision to prioritise specific projects or departments owing to budget restrictions quietly modified the institution's strategic focus over time.

These practices encapsulated the fundamental concept of S-as-P, wherein strategy arose from the behavioural patterns that managers exhibited regularly. Decisions made at this micro level may not seem strategic initially. Still, over time, they established avenues for the institution's strategic orientation to evolve, especially in response to external forces such as market demands or academic competition.

2. Practices in decision-making and problem-solving:

Decision-making was a crucial micro-practice that managers in the selected PHEI undertook. Managers continuously adapted and adjusted when external stakeholders, such as students, regulatory agencies and market competitors, regularly influenced strategic objectives. A manager needed to decide on implementing new academic programmes, weighing student demand, profitability and the institution's objectives.

Decision-making procedures, frequently triggered by urgent problems or opportunities, facilitated emergent strategising by influencing the institution's direction in real-time. The S-as-P viewpoint emphasises that these micro-decisions, when combined, are the foundation for strategy over time. Managers in PHEIs are not merely executing a predetermined plan but actively formulating it through their reactions to daily obstacles and opportunities.

3. Communication and interaction practices:

Informal communication and interactions among management in the selected PHEI are essential micro-practices that influence strategic direction. This encompasses informal discussions at meetings, email correspondence and interdepartmental partnerships. In these daily interactions, managers exchange knowledge, negotiate resources and shape one another's perceptions of institutional goals.

From an S-as-P perspective, these communicative micro-practices are crucial as they underpin collective sensemaking. Strategy in higher education institutions is not developed in isolation; it is collaboratively established through interaction among many stakeholders. Managers who engage proficiently in these conversations can impact strategic results by moulding the narratives and interpretations that direct institutional goals.

4. Adaptation and flexibility in resource management:

PHEIs frequently encounter variable situations, such as alterations in student enrolment, financing difficulties, or modifications in regulatory mandates. Managers' capacity to modify resource management strategies in reaction to these changes is vital for emergent strategising.

The micro-practices of adaptation illustrate the fluidity of strategising in PHEIs, where emergent strategising arises not from an overarching strategic plan but from quotidian actions that enable the institution to maintain competitiveness and alignment with its objectives. The S-as-P viewpoint emphasises the significance of these adaptive techniques, which are rooted in the necessity of navigating an ever-evolving environment.

5. Boundary-spanning and external engagement practices:

Managers in PHEIs frequently participate in boundary-spanning activities, including establishing alliances with other educational entities, interacting with industry stakeholders and sustaining relationships with accreditation authorities or regulatory agencies. These external engagements are essential micro-practices that influence emergent strategy by introducing fresh possibilities, information and viewpoints.

By employing these boundary-spanning methods, managers shape strategic outcomes by aligning the organisation with broader market and societal trends. A manager who effectively negotiates a relationship with a technology firm for curriculum creation can strategically enhance the institution's reputation as innovative and pertinent to industry needs. The S-as-P approach emphasises that strategy is not solely internally developed but frequently co-created through contacts with external entities, making boundary-spanning a vital strategic practice.

6. Reflexive practices and strategic learning:

Reflexivity, defined as the capacity of managers to contemplate their acts and consequences, constitutes a crucial micro-practice that affects emergent strategising in HEIs. Reflexive methods entail managers consistently evaluating the results of their decisions, modifying their behaviours and deriving lessons from achievements and setbacks. A manager may recognise that a previously enacted policy resulted in unforeseen effects, necessitating a strategy revision.

Reflexive micro-practices empower managers to be strategically adaptable, guaranteeing the institution's responsiveness to internal and external changes. The S-as-P viewpoint emphasises the significance of learning and reflexivity in developing emergent strategies, as managers consistently enhance their practices to align more effectively with the institution's changing strategic objectives.

7. Influence of organisational culture, power and social norms:

The micro-practices of managers at PHEIs are profoundly rooted in the institution's organisational culture, power and social norms. These principles, encompassing values such as academic independence, student-centredness and market competitiveness, direct management in their everyday actions. In an PHEI that prioritises student success, a manager may continuously emphasise behaviours that foster student involvement and support, thereby advancing strategic efforts to improve retention and graduation rates.

From the S-as-P viewpoint, organisational culture is essential in influencing the micro-practices that facilitate emergent strategising. Their objectives and the organisation's cultural and social standards shape managers' behaviours. Comprehending these micro-practices necessitates understanding the institutional framework in which managers function.

7.4.3 Contribution to theory

Bourdieu's perspective, a theory of practice, is an integrated theoretical and methodological approach attempting to transcend sociological dichotomies. In unpacking the micro-practices, which are "concrete human activity" in a social world, managers revealed that these practices are influenced by individual agency and overarching

structural pressures, including organisational norms, power dynamics and cultural expectations. The findings suggest that managers frequently manoeuvre through a complex interaction between their tendencies and the limitations imposed by the organisational environment. Managers' emergent strategising was influenced by *phronesis* and *metis* (their talents and experiences), as well as the organisation's expectations and regulations, which both facilitated and constrained their activities. It illustrated Bourdieu's concept of practice as a dynamic interplay between individual agency and external structures rather than solely one or the other. The managers' accounts demonstrated how their daily activities, spanning informal negotiations to resource distribution, are embedded within this duality, emphasising the nuanced impact of power and capital (social, cultural and symbolic) on strategic practices at the micro-level.

The micro-foundational perspective and the Bourdieu perspective underpinned the study. It is rooted in understanding individual outcomes. The perspective was used to unpack collective concepts to better understand individual-level factors affecting organisations (aggregate phenomena). Furthermore, the perspective facilitated how individual interactions lead to emergent, collective and organisation-level outcomes and performance, and how micro-level actions and interactions mediate macro-level relationships.

The findings from semi-structured interviews and written narratives corroborate the usefulness of micro-foundational perspectives as a lens to explore the micro-practices of managers that influence emergent strategising. In unpacking the collective concepts to better understand how individual-level factors affect organisation (aggregate phenomena), managers who participated in the study were presented with platforms to reveal the subtle nuances (micro-practices) that influence emergent strategising with typical examples. The empirical study findings indicated that managers' micro-practices, including decision-making routines, communication patterns and resource allocation techniques, significantly influence the organisation's strategic orientation. These micro-practices illustrated how individual acts, interactions and adaptations contribute to the development of emergent strategies, frequently in unplanned ways. The results

underscore the significance of agility and responsiveness in management, indicating that strategic changes often arise via tiny modifications rather than large, top-down initiatives. This substantiates the micro-foundational perspective by demonstrating how organisational outcomes are intricately rooted in individual managers' daily actions and decisions, establishing the connection between micro-level practices and macro-level strategic results.

7.4.4 Contribution to practice

1. Augmented self-awareness and reflexivity

Participation in the study allowed managers to reflect on their daily routines in ways they may not have previously considered. The semi-structured interviews and written narratives prompted them to rigorously analyse their decision-making processes, communication patterns and management styles. Self-reflection has probably improved their reflexivity, increasing their awareness of how their micro-practices affect overarching strategising.

2. Understanding the strategic Impact of micro-practices

Through participation in the study process, individuals acquired a profound comprehension of how their ostensibly minor, routine acts collectively influence the organisation's evolving strategy. The study enabled managers to express and acknowledge the importance of their micro-practices, furnishing them with insights to facilitate better-informed and strategic decision-making.

3. Enhanced collaborative practices

Participation in the study allowed managers to reflect on the effects of their relationships with colleagues and strategic outcomes—emergent strategising. Through exchanging experiences and contemplating their practices, they gained novel insights into the influence of collaboration and communication on the formation of emergent strategies. This enhanced comprehension can foster more deliberate and practical cooperation in their professional capacities.

4. Empowerment through knowledge

The findings presented to the managers indicated that their contributions are essential to the organisation's success, potentially empowering individuals to adopt a more proactive

role in influencing the strategic direction of their companies. Understanding that their micro-practices have significant implications for strategising may motivate them to assume responsibility for their positions and adopt more inventive or flexible methodologies.

5. Opportunity for skill development

Engaging with the research and reflecting on management practices afforded managers a chance for personal and professional advancement. The analysis enabled them to pinpoint opportunities for enhancement in their management and strategic approach applicable to future situations. Hence, it may lead to increased decision-making capabilities and a heightened proficiency in navigating intricate organisational environments.

7.4.5 Methodological contribution

The study utilised method triangulation by integrating semi-structured interviews and written narratives to investigate the micro-foundational practices that affect emergent strategising. The incorporation of qualitative approaches facilitated a more thorough and nuanced examination of the intricate micro-practices of managers. Integrating multiple data sources provided the research with a comprehensive, multifaceted perspective on how individual activities influence overarching strategic planning.

Firstly, semi-structured interviews yielded profound insights into the managers' life experiences, uncovering the conscious and unconscious micro-practices they employed. Concurrently, written narratives provided a reflective platform for managers to express their practices in connection to broader organisational contexts. The employment of various methodologies ensured that the results were not confined to a singular viewpoint but instead uncovered consistent patterns across diverse data collection techniques, thereby augmenting the research's dependability and depth. The methodological innovation resides in how these methodologies collectively elucidate the micro-practices that may be challenging to capture using a unique approach.

Secondly, the study revealed that method triangulation is especially effective for

examining micro-foundational viewpoints, as it enabled the researchers to explore the concrete and abstract elements of managerial practice. The study revealed behaviours and the underlying cognitive processes that inform these behaviours by merging document data, interview data and written narratives. The comprehensive methodology enabled the analysis of how individual actions aggregate to create emergent strategies, offering a deeper insight into the functioning of micro-foundations within actual organisational contexts.

Thirdly, the study's methodological contribution is its capacity to reveal what managers perform and how and why they participate in particular micro-practices, comprehensively examining the social and cognitive processes that support strategy formation. This triangulation approach facilitated the connection between the theoretical assumptions of micro-foundational perspectives and the actual experiences of practitioners.

Additionally, the research was based on a constructivist-interpretivist paradigm, which posits that knowledge is socially constructed through interactions and the interpretation of experiences. The philosophical approach was crucial for comprehending the micro-foundational practices of managers, as it facilitated the examination of the subjective interpretations that managers attribute to their actions. The constructivist-interpretivist perspective enabled the research to extend beyond the basic identification of micro-practices, exploring how individual interpretations, contextual factors and structures influence these practices.

Additionally, this paradigm recognises that managerial practices are not objective, static activities; instead, they are continually influenced by managers' shifting perceptions of their positions, the business and the wider environment. Therefore, this corresponds with the dynamic essence of strategy, wherein actions and results are collaboratively developed through continuous interactions between individuals and their environment. The interpretivist approach facilitated the exploration of these subjective and emergent dimensions, enhancing the comprehension of how strategies materialise in practice.

Finally, the methodological contribution of incorporating a constructivist-interpretivism paradigm is its facilitation of alignment between methodological choices and the theoretical framework of the investigation. The interpretivist method was crucial for elucidating managers' intricate, lived experiences, thereby offering empirical validation for the micro-foundational and Bourdieu's perspectives. This philosophical underpinning guaranteed that the research was attuned to the intricacies and variability of real-world strategising, providing a more dynamic and socially informed perspective on micro-foundations.

Lastly, the integration of method triangulation with a constructivist-interpretivist worldview enhances the field of strategic management research. The study highlighted the importance of integrating multiple qualitative approaches within an interpretivist framework, offering a blueprint for future research to explore complex, emergent processes, such as strategy creation. The methodological approach emphasises the necessity of capturing both objective and subjective aspects of practice, which is essential for comprehending the development of strategies in practice rather than in theory.

7.4.6 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and Agenda 2063

The study also informs wider development agendas by backing Africa's strategic goals under the Agenda 2063 framework and the UN's Sustainable Development Goals. It helps to achieve SDG 4 by boosting the internal strategic capabilities of higher education institutions and SDG 16 by promoting inclusive, reflective and participatory approaches to governance. Moreover, it supports Aspiration 6 of Agenda 2063 by demonstrating that African professionals, particularly middle and lower-level managers, can play a transformative role in shaping the future of institutions. By validating these micro-foundational contributions, the research redefined strategy-making as a key means not only to drive organisational performance but also to achieve Africa's long-term human development and economic objectives.

7.5 Reflection

This part aims to delineate my perspective as the researcher and its impact on the formulation of the present study. I further reflect on my experience and the scholarly rigour of the current research.

7.5.1 My research lens

This section is based on the importance of reflexivity in conducting qualitative research, especially in composing one's research, specifically about sharing one's reflective self and subsequent research lens, and how these shape one's declarative self. As a qualitatively driven study, all data collection methods were qualitative. As the researcher, I was the primary research instrument. My research lens shaped the scope of the research, the data collection process, and ultimately, my reported findings. This lens has subjective and objective qualities, and it is not bias-free. It is, therefore, paramount to reveal the qualities of my research lens by presenting my reflective self. My reflective self, therefore, informs the reader on how I came to report the research findings. These reported findings present my declarative self: I am declaring to the reader my findings and my interpretation thereof following the research.

My reflective self is expressed in various sections throughout this thesis. In Chapter 3, for instance, after doing a comprehensive literature review, I describe the specific theoretical and subsequent conceptual framework that I have chosen to guide the empirical phase of the current research. In Chapter 5, I reveal my philosophical disposition and consequential research approach. In Chapter 6, I discuss my observations and experiences during the interviews and the analyses. I further provide my views on interpreting the findings in Chapter 7 and future research and managerial recommendations. I also want to reveal my motivation for choosing the current research topic, as well as my experiences in life as a researcher.

7.5.2 Why I chose this topic

As a strategy lecturer, I found it increasingly intriguing that most textbooks are quite prescriptive. However, in the real world, it seldom works that way. Textbooks in strategising do not prepare a person to deal with the complexities and challenges of real-

world strategising, especially in a dynamic environment. I wanted to explore the contribution of every level of managers in the organisation to strategising. I wanted to explore the human side of strategising, managers' actual doing of strategy, and how they interact with each other when they strategise, which are subtle nuances of strategising.

I secondly chose to investigate strategising at a PHEI because I have been lecturing at various private providers on a part-time and full-time basis for almost a decade. I have witnessed that junior or low-level managers seldom strategise, and I took it upon myself to explore their role. Additionally, I have an insider opinion of South African PHEIs on how they operate regarding the need for survival and maximising profits, no matter what it takes. Therefore, it has become apparent that, as a lecturer with an appreciation of PHEIs, I can conduct research in this context and study the subtle nuances of emergent strategising intrinsically.

7.5.3 Reflections on academic rigour

I have meticulously adhered to numerous requirements and employed diverse aspects to illustrate the scholarly rigour of the current research, as Trafford and Leshem (2008) recommended. The knowledge gap and the ensuing research questions were explicitly articulated and clarified. I introduced a theoretical and subsequent conceptual framework that informed the current research, following a thorough engagement with the theory pertinent to the primary constructs of the study. I have detailed the research design and selected suitable research methods, data-gathering procedures and analyses.

Critical debates encompassed compelling points presented in the research. The findings included clear debates connected to existing theory and eventually related to the research topics. All research topics were addressed, including their connection to conceptual findings, ultimately resulting in the theorising of the findings for future research in this domain. The research was undertaken to investigate how micro-practices of managers influence emergent strategising in a PHEI. The study, guided by constructivist-interpretivism philosophical underpinnings and a mainly qualitative approach, has placed the social actor at the centre of inquiry. It has been confirmed that micro-practices influence emergent strategising in case study organisations. It has provided explanatory

insights into how micro-practices influence emergent strategising activities. Instead of rational, formal and structured strategising, the informal, unscripted activities formed through “*phronesis*” and “*metis*” in a dwelling worldview respond to what is happening to the operating environment.

The micro-practices of strategy actors influence strategy praxis (emergent strategising). The research also assisted in understanding the micro-practices and processes and characterising the emergent strategising linked to the PHE. Secondly, the study developed a detailed view of micro-foundational practices that had a role in emergent strategising and other subfields of strategic management and further the study of integrated research methods and philosophical assumptions. Managers engaged in various micro-practices (individual-level actions) to influence emergent strategising (macro-level consequences). These micro-practices (Table 6.4 and figure 6.2) support the link between micro-level actions and macro-level results (emergent strategising). Lastly, micro-practices by leadership indicated that they are conducive to emergent strategising, shedding light on managers' negotiation and navigation of the institutional field in that regard.

The research questions were answered, and the aim was adequately achieved. In summary, the academic rigour of this research was maintained by meticulous design and implementation of triangulated techniques, adherence to a defined research philosophy, thorough and transparent data analysis, ethical integrity and continuous reflexivity. The amalgamation of these aspects resulted in a study that is methodologically robust, credible and poised to offer significant insights into the micro-foundational practices shaping emergent strategising in PHEIs.

7.6 Conclusions and recommendations

This study aimed to explore the influence of micro-foundational practices on emergent strategising by managers at a PHEI. Utilising S-as-P, micro-foundational perspective and Bourdieu's concepts of habitus, field and capital, the research revealed that strategy is not merely formulated but experienced — influenced by cognition, social interactions, routines, internal and external contextual and power dynamics.

7.6.1 Conclusions, recommendations for practitioners and researchers

Results from all five secondary research enquiries indicate that emergent strategy is shaped by both internal and external influences, manifesting in dynamic, contextual and frequently informal manners. The study emphasised a multi-level perspective, illustrating the distribution of strategic agency among operational, middle and senior management, a distinctive contribution to S-as-P literature in HE. Table 7.2 summarises the conclusions and recommendations for practitioners and institutions from the five enquiry-based questions.

Table 7.2: Summary of conclusion

CONCLUSIONS: SECONDARY RESEARCH QUESTION 1
• Social interactions greatly influence emergent strategising, particularly in collaborative decision-making processes. • Managers have official (formal) and informal conversations in which they discuss problems, share ideas and create emergent strategies. • The degree of cooperation and collaboration and openness of communication across various management levels affect how strategies are developed. • It is highly influenced by leadership philosophies and the power dynamics in social interactions, whether emerging strategies (techniques) are embraced or rejected. • Managers who have developed social capital and trust can better strategise in ways adaptable to shifting organisational needs.
Recommendations: For practitioners: • Encourage open, frequent communication through collaborative forums and team huddles. • Build cross-functional teams to break down silos and promote idea diversity. • Use facilitative leadership to flatten hierarchy and promote inclusive strategy-making. • Prioritise relationship-building to enhance trust and alignment. For institutions: • Institutionalise mechanisms for peer-to-peer dialogue and informal strategy spaces. • Align leadership development with collaboration, empathy, and power-sharing.
CONCLUSIONS: SECONDARY RESEARCH QUESTION 2
• The cognitive functions of managers such as interpretation, learning and sense-making are essential to their understanding of and reactions to strategic problems.

- Emergent strategising might be aided or hindered by cognitive biases and personal perceptions. Over-reliance on previous achievements, for example, may make it more difficult for managers to adjust to new difficulties.
- Emergent strategising requires managers to think critically and be willing to question preconceived notions.

Recommendations:

For practitioners:

- Engage in cognitive flexibility training to surface and challenge assumptions.
- Adopt reflective practices (e.g., journaling, peer coaching) into routine work.
- Apply scenario planning and foresight techniques to build strategic agility.

For institutions:

- Embed structured reflection in operational workflows.
- Create a culture that values learning, curiosity and non-linear problem-solving.

CONCLUSIONS: SECONDARY RESEARCH QUESTION 3

- Daily routines give emergent strategies the consistency necessary for gradual adaptation, which is why they are so important. The structure required for experimentation and tiny modifications to blossom into larger strategic directions is created by repetitive operations.
- While strict routines can inhibit innovation, flexible managers are more likely to contribute to emergent solutions.
- Facilitating emergent strategising requires time management skills and the ability to balance ordinary duties with strategic thinking.

Recommendations:

For practitioners:

- Allocate protected time for strategy thinking and informal exploration.
- Make routine work adaptable to allow space for experimentation.
- Integrate strategic tasks into everyday workflow to reduce tension between the tactical and the strategic.

For institutions:

- Recognise and reward micro-strategic behaviours in performance evaluations.
- Encourage operational leaders to embed flexibility within routine structures.

CONCLUSIONS: SECONDARY RESEARCH QUESTION 4

- Emergent strategising is greatly influenced by internal elements such as leadership style, business culture and organisational structure. Managers are more likely to practise strategic improvisation when they work in an environment that values experimentation and innovation.
- External forces, such as regulations, market conditions and technology breakthroughs, bring about emerging strategising and changes in strategic priorities.
- Organisations trying to balance the necessity of emergent strategies and day-to-day operations must be able to handle the tension between change and stability.

Recommendations:**For practitioners:**

- Remain attuned to external developments and align day-to-day actions accordingly.
- Build adaptability into individual work practices and team operations.

For institutions:

- Routinely assess environmental shifts and prepare flexible strategy responses.
- Foster an organisational culture that embraces experimentation and iteration.
- Ensure alignment between structural design, leadership practices and adaptive capacity.

CONCLUSIONS: SECONDARY RESEARCH QUESTION 5

- Power dynamics powerfully shape emergent strategy. When more influential managers steer emergent strategies (through official authority or informal networks), some managers may feel excluded from the process.
- The organisation's power structure affects who can launch and lead emergent tactics. Power battles between the commercial and academic sectors can also impact the course and outcome of strategic initiatives.
- Empowering middle and lower-level managers increases their involvement in emergent strategising, guaranteeing a greater variety of concepts and creativity.

Recommendations:

For practitioners:

- Create inclusive platforms for bottom-up input on strategy.
- Empower mid-level managers through training, delegation and strategic authority.
- Identify informal influencers and include them in strategy dialogues.

For institutions:

- Proactively manage power asymmetries by clarifying roles and bridging logic divides.
- Establish shared ownership of strategy between academic and administrative domains.

Source: Author's own

7.6.2 Recommendation to improve theory

1. Refining the micro-foundational perspective in strategic management

The study's findings indicate a necessity to enhance the micro-foundational perspective in strategic management to address the fluid and dynamic characteristics of emergent strategising more effectively. Future theoretical advancements should investigate the recursive interplay between micro-practices and macro-strategic results, emphasising that minor, everyday actions influence long-term organisational strategising. By examining how micro-actions might collectively induce strategic changes over time, theorists can enhance their comprehension of the mechanisms by which individual agency affects aggregate events.

2. Incorporating power and capital dynamics into micro-foundational theories

Bourdieu's notions of habitus, field and forms of capital (social, cultural, and symbolic) provide significant insights into the power dynamics that underpin micro-practices. Scholars should investigate the impact of various forms of capital on micro-level strategic decision-making to enhance theory. How can a manager's cultural capital (expertise and education) and social capital (organisational relationships) affect their capacity to contribute to emergent strategies? This integration can provide a more comprehensive understanding of how power and resources impact strategic outcomes.

3. Bridging agency and structure in strategic management theory

The study emphasises the significance of individual agency and institutional constraints in influencing managerial practices under strategic management theory. Future theoretical advancements may be gained from a more explicit integration of agency and structure in elucidating strategic processes. This entails acknowledging that although managers exert agency in their decisions, their actions are invariably limited by the organisational and societal frameworks within which they function. Theorists can construct models that encapsulate this duality, providing a more equitable perspective on the functioning of micro-foundations within broader organisational contexts.

4. Formulating longitudinal models of emergent strategy development

Current theories on emergent strategising frequently omit a temporal aspect, concentrating primarily on static representations of strategic activity. This study highlights the need for further longitudinal models that track the evolution and accumulation of micro-practices over time to identify emergent strategies. Future theoretical research may investigate the temporal dynamics of strategy development, analysing how historical practices influence contemporary decisions and how present acts establish the foundation for future strategic transformations.

5. Enhancing the function of reflexivity in micro-foundational theory

The notion of reflexivity, where managers critically evaluate their actions and their strategic consequences, emerged as a central element in the study. Integrating reflexivity into micro-foundational theories helps to enhance the comprehension of how managers deliberately influence emergent strategies. Therefore, it entails theorising those reflexive

practices, including self-monitoring and adaptive learning, facilitate managers in aligning their micro-practices with overarching organisational objectives.

7.6.3 Recommendations to improve practice

1. Encourage reflexive awareness

Managers should be prompted to enhance their reflexivity in daily practices. By fostering an understanding of how their micro-actions impact broader strategic results, people can make more deliberate decisions that align with the organisation's strategy. This can be achieved through regular reflection sessions or coaching programmes that assist managers in critically evaluating their methods and judgements.

2. Facilitate collaborative micro-practices

Companies should provide platforms for collaboration and transparent communication to effectively leverage the potential of emerging strategies. Promoting cross-functional teams and informal networks enabled managers to share insights and adapt more readily to alterations in the organisational environment. This collaborative method can facilitate the alignment of micro-practices with overarching objectives and strategies.

3. Grant autonomy and resources

Empowering managers with the discretion to make micro-level decisions is essential for emergent strategising. Organisations should strive to furnish the requisite resources, tools and flexibility that enable managers to adjust their processes in response to the evolving strategic environment. This may involve decentralising decision-making procedures and reducing bureaucratic limitations that restrict management autonomy.

4. Establish training programmes emphasising micro-foundations

Organisations should allocate resources to training initiatives, highlighting the significance of micro-foundational viewpoints. These programmes instruct managers on identifying the strategic consequences of their daily actions and aligning their micro-practices with overarching organisational goals. By understanding the relationship between individual actions and collective outcomes, managers can more effectively support the development of emergent strategies.

5. Integrate continuous feedback mechanisms

Establishing feedback loops that link individual acts to their strategic consequences enables managers to adjust their micro-practices in real-time. Consistent feedback from colleagues, supervisors and external stakeholders can help managers refine their processes and ensure their actions contribute to the organisation's long-term success.

7.7 Recommendation for future research

- Future research could benefit from closer collaboration with the organisation to access real-time documentation of strategic decisions, enhancing the analysis of emergent strategising.
- Explore comparative studies across different institutional contexts (private vs. public Institutions).
- Examine the role of digitalisation and technology in micro-practices.
- Investigate the longitudinal impact of micro-practices on strategic outcomes.

7.8 Limitations

- **Context-specific findings** —The study focused on a single PHEI in South Africa, therefore limiting generalisability to other institutions or regions.
- **Qualitative approach** – While providing rich insights, the case study method does not allow for broad statistical validation of findings.
- **Subjectivity in interpretation**—Given the constructivist-interpretivist paradigm, the researcher's interpretation could influence the findings, introducing bias.
- **Time constraints**—The data were collected within a specific period, potentially missing long-term strategic evolution within the institution.
- **Limited participant pool** – The study focused on managers, which may exclude perspectives from other key stakeholders like faculty, students or administrative staff.

7.9 Researcher's reflection: A Journey of learning and transformation

Firstly, undertaking this research has involved both academic and personal transformation. Entering the study with prior experience in the sector, the researcher initially viewed managerial practice through a more operational lens. However, immersing herself in the lived experiences of others—and applying both Bourdieu's theory of practice and the descriptive phenomenological approach—reshaped her understanding of

organisational life and how she navigates the world. I became increasingly attuned to the nuanced, often invisible micro-practices that influence institutional direction, and more sensitive to complexity, ambiguity and emergent meaning.

Secondly, engaging in the layers of meaning-making required by qualitative inquiry sharpened my critical thinking and deepened my commitment to reflexivity. As a former insider, I had to confront and bracket assumptions, prioritising participant-led insight over familiarity. Through this process, I developed a habit of asking “why” behind everyday decisions and interactions—not only in research but also in my personal and professional life. I learned to sit with uncertainty, resist quick conclusions and value the iterative, unfolding nature of meaning. In many ways, this journey has made me a more philosophical person—curious, cautious and increasingly committed to questioning taken-for-granted assumptions. Ultimately, this experience has enriched her understanding of emergent strategising and transformed how she views the purpose and power of qualitative research itself.

Lastly, this study makes a significant contribution to understanding how managerial micro-practices shape emergent strategising within PHEIs. By applying Bourdieu’s theory of practice to a real-world organisational context, it revealed how strategic actions are embedded in everyday routines, shaped by institutional habitus and influenced by contextual pressures. The findings further challenge the assumption that strategy is solely formulated at the executive level, offering instead a grounded view of strategy as something enacted, adapted and negotiated across multiple managerial levels and locations. Practically, the study provides insight into how institutional leaders can support the development of more inclusive, responsive and emergent strategies. Theoretically, it extends micro-foundational perspectives on strategy in under-researched higher education contexts. This research underscores the importance of recognising the everyday strategist (practitioner)—those whose seemingly routine actions significantly contribute to institutional agility and direction.

7.10 Chapter conclusion

The purpose of Chapter 7 was to relate the findings reported in Chapter 6 to the research questions and, consequently, to describe the new theoretical contributions of the current research. The main research question and all the investigative research questions were first addressed, culminating in a conceptual discussion of social interaction as a social mechanism in shaping strategising to address the current study's main aim. This included proposing a conceptual framework to guide future research in the field of social interaction in strategic planning. Next, a discussion of the limitations was followed by a discussion of the contributions of the current research. Recommendations for future studies, as well as for the managers of the case study companies, were presented next. A conclusion of the current study was lastly followed by the researcher's reflections on the current research.

Bibliography

- Abdalla, M.M., Oliveira, L.G.L., Azevedo, C.E.F. and Gonzalez, R.K. (2018) 'Quality in Qualitative Organizational Research: types of triangulations as a methodological alternative', *Administração: Ensino e Pesquisa*, 19(1), pp. 66–98. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.13058/raep.2018.v19n1.578>.
- Abell, P., Felin, T. and Foss, N. (2008) 'Building micro-foundations for the routines, capabilities, and performance links', *Managerial and Decision Economics*, 29(6), pp. 489–502. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1002/mde.1413>.
- Abell, P., Teppo, F. and Nicolai, F. (2016) 'Building Micro-Foundations for the Routines, Capabilities, and Performance Links', *wiley*, 29. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1002/mde>.
- Adams, W.C. (2015) 'Conducting Semi-Structured Interviews', *Handbook of Practical Program Evaluation: Fourth Edition*. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781119171386.ch19>.
- Akademia (2025a) *Akademia | Studeer in Afrikaans*. Available at: https://akademia.ac.za/home/?utm_source=chatgpt.com (Accessed: 26 May 2025).
- Akademia (2025b) *Language Centre - Akademia*. Available at: https://akademia.ac.za/language-centre/?utm_source=chatgpt.com (Accessed: 26 May 2025).
- Akinyode, B.F. and Khan, T.H. (2018) 'Step by step approach for qualitative data analysis', *International Journal of Built Environment and Sustainability*, 5(3), pp. 163–174. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.11113/ijbes.v5.n3.267>.
- Alexander, B. (2020) *Academia next: The futures of higher education*. Available at: <https://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=fJbFDwAAQBAJ&oi=fnd&pg=PP1&dq=Demographic+changes+in+higher+education&ots=56r2D2iUva&sig=vF1Y917sRvpTkaWk0wktG5ks2O4> (Accessed: 20 May 2025).
- Altbach, P. and de Wit (2025) 'Globalisation and the geopolitics of higher education', *researchcghe.org*, 57(5), pp. 43–50. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/00091383.2025.2539045>.
- Altbach, P.G., Reisberg, L. and Rumbley, L.E. (2009) 'Tracking_an_Academic_Revolution,_UNESCO_2009', *UNESCO 2009 World Conference on Higher Education*, 0, p. 69.
- Altbach, P.G., Reisberg, L., Rumbley, L.E., Stephen, J., Lemoine, P.A., Jenkins, W.M., Richardson, M.D., Jacob, W.J., Gokbel, V., Gleason, N.W., Shahjahan, R.A., Sonneveldt, E.L., Estera, A.L., Bae, S., Marginson, S. and Marginson, S. (2018) 'Global higher education learning outcomes and financial trends: Comparative and innovative approaches', *Journal of Education and Development*, 1(1), pp. 5–17. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijedudev.2017.03.001>.
- Altbach, P.G. and De Wit, H. (2020) 'Postpandemic Outlook for Higher Education is Bleakest for the Poorest', *International Higher Education*, (102), pp. 3–5.

Available at: <https://ejournals.bc.edu/index.php/ihe/article/view/14583> (Accessed: 24 June 2026).

Altbach, P.G., Wit, H.D.E. and Woldegiyorgis, A.A. (2021) 'Public vs. private participation in higher education: Realities and debates Background paper prepared for'.

Amineh, R.J. and Asl, H.D. (2015) 'Review of constructivism and social constructivism', *Journal of Social Sciences, Literature and Languages*, 1(1), pp. 9–16.

Andersen, T.J. and Nielsen, B.B. (2009) 'Adaptive strategy making: The effects of emergent and intended strategy modes', *European Management Review*, 6(2), pp. 94–106. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1057/emr.2009.7>.

Andresen, F., Schulte, B. and Koller, H. (2020) 'Foresight-as-Emergence: An Integrative Framework of Strategic Foresight Based on Complexity and Practice Theory', *IEEE Transactions on Engineering Management*, pp. 1–13. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1109/TEM.2020.2985664>.

Arbidane, I., Bahdanava, A., ... A.K.-... C.S. of and 2020, undefined (2020) 'University brand development under conditions of social demographic changes', *atlantis-press.com* [Preprint]. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.2991/AEBMR.K.200318.029>.

Aristotle. and Sachs, J. (1999) *Aristotle Nicomachean Ethics: Translation, Glossary and Introductory Essay*. Focus Publishing.

Aristotle's Ethics: Critical Essays (1999). New York: Rowman & Littlefield.

Arnold, J. (2010) *Work psychology _ understanding human behaviour in the workplace-Prentice Hall_Financial Times* (2009).

Atakan, M.G.S. and Eker, T. (2007) 'Corporate Identity of a Socially Responsible University – A Case from the Turkish Higher Education Sector', *Journal of Business Ethics* 2007 76:1, 76(1), pp. 55–68. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1007/S10551-006-9274-3>.

Atkinson, W. (2021) 'The Class Structure of Capitalist Societies', *The Class Structure of Capitalist Societies* [Preprint]. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003129615/CLASS-STRUCTURE-CAPITALIST-SOCIETIES-VOLUME-2-ATKINSON>.

Bağış, M. (2020) 'A Longitudinal Analysis on the Micro-Foundations of Strategic Management: Where Are Micro-Foundations Going?', *Business & Management Studies: An International Journal*, 8(2), pp. 1310–1333. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.15295/bmij.v8i2.1454>.

Balogun, J., Jacobs, C., Jarzabkowski, P., Mantere, S. and Vaara, E. (2014) 'Placing Strategy Discourse in Context: Sociomateriality, Sensemaking, and Power', *Journal of Management Studies*, 51(2), pp. 175–201. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1111/joms.12059>.

Balzer, W.K. (2020) *Lean higher education: Increasing the value and performance of university processes, Lean Higher Education: Increasing the Value and Performance of University Processes, Second Edition*. Taylor and Francis.

Available at: <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781351216944/LEAN-HIGHER-EDUCATION-WILLIAM-BALZER>.

Bandyopadhyay, S., Bardhan, A., Dey, P. and Bhattacharyya, S. (2021) *Bridging the education divide using social technologies, Bridging the Education Divide using Social Technologies: Explorations in Rural India*. Springer Singapore. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-33-6738-8>.

Barca, M. and Ceyhan, S. (2025) 'Rethinking Organizational Hierarchy: A Critical Analysis of Strategic Management Schools', 11B, pp. 45–58. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1108/S2051-23332025000011B004>.

Bardis (1979) *Social Interaction and Social Processes*. JSTOR. Available at: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41886414> (Accessed: 24 June 2026).

Barney, J. and Felin, T. (2013) 'What Are Microfoundations?', *Academy of Management per*, 27(2), pp. 138–155.

Baumgardt, J. and Lekhetho, M. (2013) 'The challenges of transformation in higher education and training institutions in South Africa', *dhet.gov.zaS Badat Development Bank of Southern Africa, 2010•dhet.gov.za*, 4(3), pp. 421–432. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.5901/MJSS.2013.V4N3P421>.

Beaumie, K. (2019) 'Social constructivism', *The Globalization of World Politics*, (2006), pp. 192–206. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1093/hepl/9780198825548.003.0012>.

Bekele, T. and Ofoyuru (2021) 'Emerging university-society engagements in Africa: An analysis of strategic plans.', *ERIC TA Bekele, DT Ofoyuru Journal of Comparative and International Higher Education, 2021•ERIC*, 13(1), pp. 151–180. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.32674/JCIHE.V13I1.1690>.

Bellucci, C.F. and Lavarda, R.A.B. (2018) *Strategy as practice and case study, European Academy of Management*.

Berger, P. and Luckmann (1967) 'Aspects sociologiques du pluralisme', *JSTORPL Berger, T Luckmann Archives de sociologie des religions, 1967•JSTOR*, 23(1), pp. 117–127. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.3406/ASSR.1967.2621>.

Berisha, H., Mustafa, S. and Ismail, Y. (2018) 'Strategy as practice: An organizational culture approach in a higher education institution in Kosovo', *Journal of Educational and Social Research*, 8(3), pp. 37–50. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.2478/jesr-2018-0029>.

Bezuidenhout, G. (2020) 'Social Interaction shaping strategy- A case study at two small South African Private Higher Education Institutions', 2017(1), pp. 1–9.

Bird, A. and Mugobo, V. (2021a) 'BRANDING PRIVATE HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS IN SOUTH AFRICA THROUGH THE EVALUATION OF CURRENT BRANDING MODELS'. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.21303/2504-5571.2021.001841>.

Bird, A. and Mugobo, V. (2021b) 'Branding private higher education institutions in South Africa through the evaluation of current branding models', *EUREKA: Social and Humanities*, (3), pp. 15–27. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.21303/2504-5571.2021.001841>.

Bird, A. and Mugobo, V. (2021c) 'The Footprint and sustainability of Private Higher Education Institutions in South Africa', *EDUKASI: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam (e-Journal)*, 9(2), pp. 270–291. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.54956/edukasi.v9i2.40>.

Bird, A. and Mugobo, V. (2021d) 'The Footprint and sustainability of Private Higher Education Institutions in South Africa', *EDUKASI: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam (e-Journal)*, 9(2), pp. 270–291. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.54956/edukasi.v9i2.40>.

Bizcommunity (2024) *South Africa to welcome new private university by 2026*. Available at: <https://www.bizcommunity.co.za/article/south-africa-to-welcome-new-private-university-by-2026-033625a> (Accessed: 26 May 2025).

Blacklock, J.D., Baird, J. and Stensaker, B. (2025) 'Evolutionary stages in risk-based quality regulation in Australian higher education 2011–2024', *Policy Reviews in Higher Education* [Preprint]. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/23322969.2025.2493115>;WEBSITE:WEBSITE:TFOBP;PAGEGROUP:STRING:PUBLICATION.

Bonache, J. and Festing, M. (2020) 'Research paradigms in international human resource management: An epistemological systematisation of the field', *German Journal of Human Resource Management*, 34(2), pp. 99–123. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/2397002220909780>.

Borrás, S., Chaminade, C. and Edquist, C. (2009) 'The challenges of globalization: Strategic choices for innovation policy', *The Innovation Imperative: National Innovation Strategies in the Global Economy*, (January), pp. 7–23. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.4337/9781848446090.00011>.

Boström, L., Collén, C. and Damberg, U. (2021) 'A rapid transition from campus to emergent distant education; effects on students' study strategies in higher education', *mdpi.com* [Preprint]. Available at: <https://www.mdpi.com/2227-7102/11/11/721> (Accessed: 27 May 2025).

Bourdieu, P. (1959) *Distinction: A social critique of the judgement of taste*, *Nucl. Phys.*

Bourdieu, P. (1977) *Outline of a Theory of Practice*.

Bourdieu, P. (1986) 'The forms of capital', *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education* [Preprint]. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1002/9780470755679.ch15>.

Bourdieu, P. (1990) 'The logic of practice. Translated by Richard Nice.', *Stanford University Press*, 7(1).

Bourdieu, P. (1998) 'Practical Reason: On the Theory of Action', 50(May 1968).

Bourdieu, P. and Wacquant, L.J.D. (1992) 'An invitation to reflexive sociology', *Educational Review*, pp. 540–540. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/00131911.2018.1443558>.

Bouty, I., Gomez, M.L. and Chia, R. (2019a) 'Strategy emergence as wayfinding', *Management (France)*, 22(3), pp. 438–465.

Bouty, I., Gomez, M.L. and Chia, R. (2019b) 'Strategy emergence as wayfinding', *Management (France)*, 22(3), pp. 438–465.

- Bowen, Glenn A. (2009) 'Document analysis as a qualitative research method', *Qualitative Research Journal*, 9(2), pp. 27–40. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.3316/QRJ0902027>.
- Brad, M., Chia, R. and Nair, A.K. (2020) 'Strategy-in-Practices: A process philosophical approach to understanding strategy emergence and organizational outcomes', *Human Relations* [Preprint]. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0018726720929397>.
- Bratton, J. (2020) *Work and organizational behaviour*. Available at: <https://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=qhIHEAAQBAJ&oi=fnd&pg=PR7&dq=organisational+behaviour+&ots=R55tih0xdQ&sig=UU8n-wMK0HPXdD37E7rhsi-GgP4> (Accessed: 18 June 2026).
- Braun, V. and Clarke, V. (2006) 'Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology: in Qualitative Research in Psychology', *Uwe Bristol*, 3(2), pp. 77–101. Available at: <http://eprints.uwe.ac.uk/11735>.
- Braun, V. and Clarke, V. (2012) 'Thematic analysis, APA Handbook of Research Methods in Psychology', *APA handbook of research methods in psychology, Vol 2: Research designs: Quantitative, qualitative, neuropsychological, and biological.*, pp. 57–71. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1037/13620-004>.
- Braun, V. and Clarke, V. (2021) 'Conceptual and Design Thinking for Thematic Analysis', *Qualitative Psychology*, 9(1). Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1037/qup0000196>.
- Brinkmann, S. and Kvale, S. (2018) *Doing interviews*. Sage.
- Brooks, I. (2008) *Organisational Behaviour Individuals, Groups and Organisation 4th edition*.
- Bryman, A. (2016) 'Social Research Methods'.
- Buckner, E. (2017) 'The Worldwide Growth of Private Higher Education: Cross-national Patterns of Higher Education Institution Foundings by Sector', *Sociology of Education*, 90(4), pp. 296–314. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0038040717739613>;WEBSITE:WEBSITE:SAGE;JOURNAL:JOURNAL:SOEA;WGROU:STRING:PUBLICATION.
- Burke, G.T. and Wolf, C. (2020) 'The process affordances of strategy toolmaking when addressing wicked problems', *Journal of Management Studies* [Preprint]. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1111/joms.12572>.
- BusinessLive (2025) *Private sector steps into the tertiary education gap*. Available at: <https://www.businesslive.co.za/fm/features/cover-story/2025-05-08-private-sector-steps-into-the-tertiary-education-gap/> (Accessed: 26 May 2025).
- BusinessTech (2025) *The private company taking on South Africa's biggest universities*. Available at: https://businesstech.co.za/news/business-opinion/599104/the-private-company-taking-on-south-africas-biggest-universities/?utm_source=chatgpt.com (Accessed: 26 May 2025).
- Caerus Capital (2017) 'The Business of Education in Africa', pp. 1–280.
- Cakir, A.E. (2012) 'Applying contingency theory to international organizations: The case of European integration', *Journal of International Organizations*, pp. 7–24.

- Carcary, M. (2009) 'The Research Audit Trial — Enhancing Trustworthiness in Qualitative Inquiry', *Electronic Journal of Business Research Methods*, 7(1), p. pp11-24-pp11-24. Available at: <https://academic-publishing.org/index.php/ejbrm/article/view/1239> (Accessed: 22 May 2025).
- Chankseliani, M., Qoraboyev, I. and Gimranova, D. (2021) 'Higher education contributing to local, national, and global development: new empirical and conceptual insights', *Higher Education*, 81(1), pp. 109–127. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-020-00565-8>.
- Charmaz (2014) 'Constructing Grounded Theory research', *NLN publications*, (15–2233), pp. 33–59.
- Charmaz, K. (2017) 'The Power of Constructivist Grounded Theory for Critical Inquiry', *Qualitative Inquiry*, 23(1), pp. 34–45. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800416657105;PAGE:STRING:ARTICLE/CHAPTER>.
- Chia, R. (2004) 'Strategy-as-practice: reflections on the research agenda', *European Management Review*, 1(1), pp. 29–34. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1057/palgrave.emr.1500012>.
- Chia, R. and Holt, R. (2006) 'Strategy as practical coping: A heideggerian perspective', *Organization Studies*, 27(5), pp. 635–655. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0170840606064102>.
- Chia, R. and Rasche, A. (2018) 'Epistemological alternatives for researching strategy as practice: Building and dwelling worldviews', *Cambridge Handbook of Strategy as Practice, Second Edition*, (October), pp. 44–57. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1017/CCO9781139681032.003>.
- Chia, R.C.H. and Holt, R. (2018) *Strategy without Design: The silent efficacy of indirect Action*.
- Clegg, S.R., Kornberger, M. and Pitsis, T.S. (2016) *Management and organizational behaviour, Problemy Zarzadzania*. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.7172/1644-9584.44.15>.
- Clegg, S.R., Schweitzer, J., Whittle, A. and Pitelis, C. (2017) 'Strategy : theory & practice', pp. 1–474.
- Cockburn, I.M., Henderson, R.M. and Stern, S. (2000) 'Untangling the origins of competitive advantage', *Strategic Management Journal*, 21(10–11), pp. 1123–1145. Available at: [https://doi.org/10.1002/1097-0266\(200010/11\)21:10/11<1123::AID-SMJ130>3.0.CO;2-R](https://doi.org/10.1002/1097-0266(200010/11)21:10/11<1123::AID-SMJ130>3.0.CO;2-R).
- Coleman, J.S. (1990) 'Foundations of social theory', *American Journal of Sociology*, 91(11), pp. 1309–1335. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1086/228423>.
- Coombs, H. (2022) 'Case Study Research Defined-Single or Multiple?-Definition of a Case Study'. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.7604301>.
- Cope, J. (2003) 'Towards a dynamic entrepreneurship learning (Working Paper) ', *Management*, pp. 1–36.
- Costa, C. and Murphy, M. (2018) *Bourdieu, Habitus and Social Research: The Art of application*.
- Costa, C. and Murphy Mark (2015) 'Bourdieu, Habitus and Social Research'.

Council on Higher Education, & S.A.Q.A. (2025) 'Council on Higher Education and South African Qualifications Authority Joint Communiqué 1 of 2025: Re-registration of HEQSF-aligned qualifications on the National Qualifications Framework', *Joint Communiqué 1 of 2025: Reregistration of higher education qualifications on the National Qualifications Framework (NQF)* [Preprint].

Creswell and Creswell (2018) *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative and Mixed Methods Approaches*.

Creswell, J.W. (2007) *Qualitative enquiry & research design, choosing among five approaches*, Book. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.aenj.2008.02.005>.

Creswell, J.W. (2009) 'Mapping the field of mixed methods research', *Journal of Mixed Methods Research*, 3(2), pp. 95–108. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1558689808330883>;PAGE:STRING:ARTICLE/CHAPTER

Creswell, J.W. (2012) *Qualitative inquiry and research design*.

Creswell, J.W.. (2017) 'Qualitative inquiry and research design : choosing among five approaches'. Available at: https://books.google.com/books/about/Qualitative_Inquiry_and_Research_Design.html?id=Ykruxor10cYC (Accessed: 2 August 2025).

Creswell, J.W. and Poth, C.N. (2018) *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches*, Sage Publications, Inc. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1524839915580941>.

Creswell, W.J. and Creswell, J.D. (2018) *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative and Mixed Methods Approaches*, *Journal of Chemical Information and Modeling*.

Critchley, H.D. and Nagai, Y. (2012) 'How emotions are shaped by bodily states', *Emotion Review*, 4(2), pp. 163–168. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1754073911430132>.

Cronin, K., Midgley, G. and Jackson, L.S. (2014) 'Issues Mapping: A problem structuring method for addressing science and technology conflicts', *European Journal of Operational Research*, 233(1), pp. 145–158. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ejor.2013.08.012>.

Darby, J.L., Fugate, B.S. and Murray, J.B. (2019) 'Interpretive research: A complementary approach to seeking knowledge in supply chain management', *International Journal of Logistics Management*, 30(2), pp. 395–413. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJLM-07-2018-0187>.

Davis, A. (2013) 'Exploring the strategising practices of middle managers - A case study at a South African University.'

Denzin and Lincoln (2018) 'Qualitative Research', *Qualitative Research*, 18(1), pp. 1689–1699. Available at: [https://doi.org/10.1108/S1479-8387\(2011\)0000006007](https://doi.org/10.1108/S1479-8387(2011)0000006007).

Denzin, N.K. (2009) 'The elephant in the living room: Or extending the conversation about the politics of evidence', *Qualitative Research*, 9(2), pp. 139–160. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1468794108098034>.

Denzin, N.K. and Lincoln Yvonna S (2018) *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research*, Synthese. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11229-017-1319-x>.

Department of Higher Education and Training (2013) *Department of Higher Education and Training on its 2013/14 Annual Report | PMG*. Available at: <https://pmg.org.za/committee-meeting/17633/> (Accessed: 24 June 2026).

Department of Higher Education and Training (2023) 'Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) Annual Report 2022/2023'. Available at: www.careerhelp.org.za (Accessed: 20 May 2025).

Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) (2025) 'PROVIDING APPROPRIATE VOCATIONAL SKILLS DEVELOPMENT AND EDUCATION FOR THE WORLD OF WORK'.

Department of Higher Education and Training of South Africa (2014) 'Annual report', p. 156.

Department of Higher Education and Training South Africa (2023) 'National Plan for Post-School Education and Training 2021-2030'.

Department of Higher Education SA (2022) 'Combining Skills into Creative Education', *Annual Report* [Preprint].

Department of Higher Education SA (2026) 'Deputy Minister Dr Mimmy Gondwe to lead an intergovernmental crackdown on bogus colleges in Polokwane Issued by the Ministry of Higher Education and Training'.

Department Science Technology and Innovation (2024) *STATEMENT BY THE MINISTER OF HIGHER EDUCATION, SCIENCE AND INNOVATION, PROFESSOR BLADE NZIMANDE ON DEREGISTRATION OF THE EDUCOR COLLEGES* 26 March 2024. Available at: https://www.dsti.gov.za/index.php/media-room/media-room-speeches/minister/4218-statement-by-the-minister-of-higher-education-science-and-innovation-professor-blade-nzimande-on-deregistration-of-the-educor-colleges-26-march-2024?utm_source=chatgpt.com (Accessed: 26 May 2025).

Derry, R. (1999) 'The mother-child paradigm and its relevance to the workplace', *Business and Society*, 38(2), pp. 217–225. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/000765039903800207>; CTYPE:STRING:JOURNAL.

Detienne, M., Vernant, J.-P. and Lloyd, J. (1978) 'Cunning intelligence in Greek culture and society / Marcel Detienne and Jean-Pierre Vernant; translated from the French by Janet Lloyd.'

Dewey (1922) 'Valuation and experimental knowledge', *JSTOR*, 31(4), p. 325. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.2307/2179099>.

Downs, A., Durant, R. and Carr, A.N. (2003) 'Emergent Strategy Development for Organizations', *Emergence*, 5(2), pp. 5–28. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1207/s15327000em050204>.

Downs, A., Durant, R. and Carr, A.N. (2004) 'Emergent Strategy Development for Organizations', *Emergence*, 5. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1207/s15327000em050204>.

Eisenhardt, K. (2000) 'Dynamic capabilities: what are they?', *Wiley Online LibraryKM Eisenhardt, JA MartinStrategic management journal, 2000•Wiley Online Library*, 21, pp. 1105–1121. Available at: <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1002/1097->

0266(200010/11)21:10/11%3C1105::AID-SMJ133%3E3.0.CO;2-E (Accessed: 30 December 2024).

El-Hassan, K. (2025) 'Recent Trends in Global Quality Assurance in Higher Education', <https://services.igi-global.com/resolvedoi/resolve.aspx?doi=10.4018/979-8-3693-6915-9.ch020>, pp. 479–488. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.4018/979-8-3693-6915-9.CH020>.

Elliott, J. (2005) 'Using narrative in social research: Qualitative and quantitative approaches'. Available at: <https://www.torrossa.com/gs/resourceProxy?an=4913882&publisher=FZ7200> (Accessed: 30 December 2024).

Essop, A. (2005) *The Changing Size and Shape of the Higher Education System in South Africa, 2005-2017. The Changing Size and Shape of the Higher Education System in South Africa*.

Everett, J. (2002) 'Organizational Research and the Praxeology of Pierre Bourdieu', *Organizational Research Methods*, 5(1), pp. 56–80. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1094428102051005>.

EWN (2025) *Stadio Holdings reports increased profits off the back of growth in student numbers*. Available at: <https://www.ewn.co.za/2024/03/18/stadio-holdings-reports-increased-profits-off-the-back-of-growth-in-student-numbers> (Accessed: 26 May 2025).

Farnese, M.L., Barbieri, B., Chirumbolo, A. and Patriotta, G. (2019) 'Managing knowledge in organizations: A nonaka's SECI model operationalization', *Frontiers in Psychology*, 10(December), pp. 1–15. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2019.02730>.

Faure, M. (2013) 'Understanding Aristotle's prudence and its resurgence in postmodern times', *Phronimon*, 14(2), pp. 45–84.

Felin, T. and Foss, N.J. (2005) 'Strategic organisations: a field in search of micro-foundations', *Strategic Management Journal*, 29(September), p. 120295. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.techfore.2020.120295>.

Felin, T., Foss, N.J. and Ployhart, R.E. (2015a) 'The Microfoundations Movement in Strategy and Organization Theory', *Academy of Management Annals*, 9(1), pp. 575–632. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/19416520.2015.1007651>.

Felin, T. and Hesterly, W.S. (2007) 'The knowledge-based view, nested heterogeneity, and new value creation: Philosophical considerations on the locus of knowledge', *Academy of Management Review*, 32(1), pp. 195–218. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.5465/AMR.2007.23464020>.

Flick, U. (2022) *An introduction to qualitative research*. sage.

Flyvbjerg, B. (2001) *Making Social Science Matter, Making Social Science Matter*. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1017/cbo9780511810503>.

Foerster, H. (2003) 'On constructing a reality', *Springer*, pp. 35–46. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1007/0-387-21722-3_8.

Foss, K. and Foss, N. (2022) *Economic microfoundations of strategic management: The property rights perspective*. Available at: <https://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=OfaVEAAQBAJ&oi=fnd&pg=PP>

5&dq=Foss+N+J+Microfoundation&ots=6om0L9SsST&sig=IwHuByT6ZMwp85VOpYp4qvjxb-s (Accessed: 18 June 2026).

Foss, N.J. (2003) 'Bounded rationality and tacit knowledge in the organizational capabilities approach: An assessment and a re-evaluation', *Industrial and Corporate Change*, 12(2), pp. 185–201. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1093/icc/12.2.185>.

Foss, N.J. (2010) 'Micro-foundations for management research: What, why, and whither?', *Cuadernos de Economía y Dirección de la Empresa*, 13(42), pp. 11–34. Available at: [https://doi.org/10.1016/S1138-5758\(10\)70002-5](https://doi.org/10.1016/S1138-5758(10)70002-5).

Foss, Nicolai J and Lindenberg, S. (2013) 'Microfoundations for Strategy : of Value Creation', *Academy of Management Perspectives*, 27(2), pp. 85–102.

Foss, Nicolai J. and Lindenberg, S.M. (2013) 'Micro-Foundations for Strategy: A Goal-Framing Perspective on the Drivers of Value Creation', *SSRN Electronic Journal*, 27(March). Available at: <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2237857>.

Foss, N.J. and Linder, S. (2019) 'Microfoundations'. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108685498>.

Foss, N.J., Mazzelli, A. and Weber, L. (2024) 'Behavioral Strategy: Exploring Microfoundations of Competitive Advantage', *Elements in Business Strategy* [Preprint]. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009566759>.

Foss, N.J., McCaffrey, M.C. and Dorobat, C.E. (2022) "When Henry Met Fritz": Rules As Organizational Frameworks For Emergent Strategy Process', *Journal of Management Inquiry*, 31(2), pp. 135–149. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/10564926211031290;WGROU:STRING:PUBLICATION>.

Foss, N.J. and Pedersen, T. (2014) 'Microfoundations In Strategy Research', *Strategic Management Journal*, 37(13), pp. E22–E34. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1002/smj.2362>.

Frödin, O. (2024) 'Cognitive microfoundations and social interaction dynamics. The implications of complexity for institutional theory', *Theory and Society*, 53(5), pp. 1019–1047. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1007/S11186-024-09574-3/METRICS>.

Fumasoli, T. and Hladchenko, M. (2024) 'Strategic management in higher education: conceptual insights, lessons learned, emerging challenges', *Tertiary Education and Management* 29:4, 29(4), pp. 331–339. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1007/S11233-024-09134-5>.

Gaventa, J. (2003) 'Power after Lukes: An overview of theories of power since Lukes and their application to development'.

Gavetti, G. (2012) 'Perspective—Toward a Behavioral Theory of Strategy', *Organization Science*, 23(1), pp. 267–285. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1287/orsc.1110.0644>.

Ge (Rochelle) (葛贊), Y. (2022) 'Internationalisation of higher education: new players in a changing scene', *Educational Research and Evaluation*, 27(3–4), pp. 229–238. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13803611.2022.2041850>.

Gidson, J.L., Ivancevich, J.M., Donnelly, J.H.J. and Konopaske, R. (2012) *Organisations Behaviour, Structure, Processes*.

Giroux, H.A. (2010) 'Rethinking education as the practice of freedom: Paulo Freire and the promise of critical pedagogy', *Policy Futures in Education*, 8(6), pp. 715–721. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.2304/PFIE.2010.8.6.715>;CTYPE:STRING:JOURNAL.

Gleason, N.W. (2018) *Higher Education in the Era of the Fourth Industrial Revolution*, *Higher Education in the Era of the Fourth Industrial Revolution*. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-13-0194-0>.

Gogus, A. (2012) 'Constructivist Learning BT - Encyclopedia of the Sciences of Learning', in N.M. Seel (ed.). Boston, MA: Springer US, pp. 783–786. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4419-1428-6_142.

Golsorkhi, D., Rouleau, L., Seidl, D. and Vaara, E. (2012) 'What is Strategy-as-Practice?', *Eero* [Preprint]. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.5167/uzh-44942>.

Golsorkhi, D., Rouleau, L., Seidl, D. and Vaara, E. (2014) 'Introduction : What is Strategy as Practice ? Strategy as Practice as a research approach'.

Golsorkhi, D., Rouleau, L., Seidl, D. and Vaara, E. (2015) 'Introduction: What is strategy as practice?', *Cambridge Handbook of Strategy as Practice, Second Edition* [Preprint]. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1017/CCO9781139681032.001>.

Golsorkhi, Damon., Rouleau, Linda., Seidl, David. and Vaara, Eero. (2015) *Cambridge handbook of strategy as practice*. Cambridge University Press. Available at: <https://research.aalto.fi/en/publications/cambridge-handbook-of-strategy-as-practice> (Accessed: 2 June 2025).

Gomez, M.Lé. (2015a) 'A Bourdieusian perspective on strategizing', *Cambridge Handbook of Strategy as Practice, Second Edition*, (September 2015), pp. 184–198. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1017/CCO9781139681032.011>.

Gordon, V.A. (2025) 'Foresight, strategy, and impact', *Improving and Enhancing Scenario Planning*, pp. 395–405. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.4337/9781035310586.00030>.

Govender, D. and Law, G.G. (2025) 'Decoding Postgraduate Student Enrolment Choices: Key Factors Driving Student Enrolment Choices and Decisions in Public versus Private Business Schools in South Africa'. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.25159/UnisaRxiv/000120.v1>.

Greenberg, J., Schmader, T., Arndt, J. and Landau, M. (2013) 'Social Psychology The since of Everyday Life', 53(9), pp. 1689–1699.

Grenfell, M. (2016) *Pierre Bourdieu: Key Concepts*. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.33858/0500-000-016-026>.

Guba, E.G. and Lincoln, Y.S. (1994) 'Competing paradigms in qualitative research', *Qualitative Methodologies in Organization Studies*, pp. 105–117. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-65217-7_2.

Guba, E.G. and Lincoln, Y.S. (2005) 'Paradigmatic Controversies. and Contradictions', *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research*, pp. 193–215.

Harker, R., Mahar, C. and Wilkes, C. (1990) *An Introduction to the Work of Pierre Bourdieu: The practice of Theory*.

Harrington, A. (2005) 'Modern social theory: An introduction', *Oxford University Press*, pp. 2–15.

- Harvey, J.F. (2022) 'Microfoundations of sensing capabilities: From managerial cognition to team behavior', *Strategic Organization* [Preprint]. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/14761270221142959>.
- Hashim, M.A.M., Tlemsani, I., Matthews, R., Mason-Jones, R. and Ndrecanj, V. (2022) 'Emergent Strategy in Higher Education: Postmodern Digital and the Future', *Administrative Sciences*, 12(4). Available at: <https://doi.org/10.3390/admsci12040196>.
- Helfat, C.E. and Peteraf, M.A. (2015) 'Managerial cognitive capabilities and the microfoundations of dynamic capabilities', *Strategic Management Journal*, 36(6), pp. 831–850. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1002/SMJ.2247;PAGE:STRING:ARTICLE/CHAPTER>.
- Hopkins, B.C. (2015) *The philosophy of Husserl, The Philosophy of Husserl*. Taylor and Francis. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315712277/PHILOSOPHY-HUSSERL-BURT-HOPKINS>.
- Horst, S.O., Järventie-Thesleff, R. and Baumann, S. (2019) 'The practice of shared inquiry: how actors manage for strategy emergence', *Journal of Media Business Studies*, 16(3), pp. 202–229. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/16522354.2019.1641672>.
- Horst, S.-O.O. and Järventie-Thesleff, R. (2016) 'Finding an emergent way through transformational change: a narrative approach to strategy', *Journal of Media Business Studies*, 13(1), pp. 3–21. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/16522354.2015.1123854>.
- Hughes, J. and McDonagh, J. (2017) 'In defence of the case study methodology for research into strategy practice', *The Irish Journal of Management*, 36(2), pp. 129–145. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1515/ijm-2017-0013>.
- Humble, N. and Mozeliuss, P. (2022) 'The threat, hype, and promise of artificial intelligence in education', *Discover Artificial Intelligence*, 2(1), pp. 1–13. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1007/S44163-022-00039-Z/TABLES/2>.
- Hyett, N., Kenny, A. and Dickson-Swift, V. (2014) 'Methodology or method a critical review of qualitative case study reports', *International Journal of Qualitative Studies on Health and Well-being*, 9(1). Available at: <https://doi.org/10.3402/qhw.v9.23606>.
- Ingold, T. (2000) *Culture, perception and cognition, The Perception of the Environment*. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203466025-18>.
- James, M. (2018) 'Emergent Strategy', *The International Encyclopedia of Strategic Communication*, (July), pp. 1–10. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781119010722.iesc0067>.
- Jarzabkowski, P. (2003) 'Strategic Practices: An Activity Theory Perspective on Continuity and Change'.
- Jarzabkowski, P. (2005) 'Strategy as Practice: A New Perspective', *Strategy as Practice: An Activity Based Approach*.
- Jarzabkowski, P., Balogun, J. and Seidl, D. (2007) 'Strategizing: The challenges of a practice perspective Introduction', *Human Relations*, pp. 5–27.

- Jarzabkowski, P. and Fenton, E. (2006) 'Strategizing and organizing in pluralistic contexts', *Elsevier*, 39(6), pp. 631–648. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/J.LRP.2006.11.002>.
- Jarzabkowski, P., Kavas, M. and Krull, E. (2021) 'It's Practice. But is it Strategy? Reinvigorating strategy-as-practice by rethinking consequentiality', *Organization Theory*, 2(3). Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/26317877211029665>;WEBSITE:WEBSITE:SAGE;WGRO UP:STRING:PUBLICATION.
- Jarzabkowski, P., Lê, J., Seidl, D. and Vaara, E. (2025) 'Two Decades of Revolutionizing Strategy Research: How Strategy-as-Practice Illuminates the Complex, Dynamic and Consequential Ways of Doing Strategy', *journals.aom.org*, 4(2), pp. 55–76. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.5465/AMC.2023.0005>.
- Jarzabkowski, P., Seidl, D. and Balogun, J. (2022) 'From germination to propagation: Two decades of Strategy-as-Practice research and potential future directions', *journals.sagepub.com* P Jarzabkowski, D Seidl, J Balogun *Human Relations*, 2022•*journals.sagepub.com*, 75(8), pp. 1533–1559. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/00187267221089473>.
- Jarzabkowski, P. and Whittington, R. (2008) 'A strategy-as-practice approach to strategy research and education', *Journal of Management Inquiry*, 17(4), pp. 282–286. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1056492608318150>.
- Jason, B. (2011) 'Global Panaceas, Local Realities: International Agencies and the Future of Education.', *Paper Knowledge . Toward a Media History of Documents*, 48(3), pp. 12–26.
- Jenkins, R., Bourdieu, P. and Nice, R. (1993) 'The Logic of Practice.', *Man*, 28(3), p. 617. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.2307/2804264>.
- Jensen, O. (2017) 'Public–private partnerships for water in Asia: a review of two decades of experience', *International Journal of Water Resources Development* [Preprint]. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/07900627.2015.1121136>.
- Johnson, G., Langlely, A., Melin, L. and Whittington, R. (2016) *Strategy as Practice: Research Directions and Resources*, Cambridge University Press. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511618925>.
- Johnson, G., Whittington, R., Scholes, K., Angwin, D. and Regner, P. (2014) *Exploring Strategy*, Pearson Education Ltd. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781107415324.004>.
- Judson, K.M. and Taylor, S.A. (2014) 'Moving from Marketization to Marketing of Higher Education: The Co-Creation of Value in Higher Education.', *Higher Education Studies*, 4(1), pp. 51–67. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.5539/hes.v4n1p51>.
- Kayyali, M. (2025) 'The Evolution of Quality Assurance in Higher Education: Models, Systems, and Frameworks', <https://services.igi-global.com/resolvedoi/resolve.aspx?doi=10.4018/979-8-3693-6915-9.ch001>, pp. 1–26. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.4018/979-8-3693-6915-9.CH001>.

- Kelly, M., Dowling, M. and Millar, M. (2018) 'The search for understanding: The role of paradigms', *Nurse Researcher*, 25(4), pp. 9–13. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.7748/nr.2018.e1499>.
- Khandkar, S. (2009) 'Open coding', *academia.edu* [Preprint]. Available at: <https://www.academia.edu/download/34014007/open-coding.pdf> (Accessed: 17 February 2025).
- Kim, B. (2001) 'Social constructivism', *cmapsconverted.ihmc.us* [Preprint]. Available at: <http://cmapsconverted.ihmc.us/rid=1N5QXBJZF-20SG67F-32D4/KimSocialconstructivism.pdf> (Accessed: 28 May 2025).
- Kogut, B. and Zander, U. (1992) 'Knowledge of the firm. Combinative capabilities, and the replication of technology', *Knowledge in Organisations*, (August), pp. 17–36. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1287/orsc.3.3.383>.
- Kohtamäki, M., Whittington, R., Vaara, E. and Rabetino, R. (2022) 'Making connections: Harnessing the diversity of strategy-as-practice research', *Wiley Online Library M Kohtamäki, R Whittington, E Vaara, R Rabetino. International Journal of Management Reviews*, 2022•Wiley Online Library, 24(2), pp. 210–232. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1111/IJMR.12274>.
- Kopmann, J., Kock, A., Killen, C.P., Gemünden, H.G., Neugebauer, F., Figge, F. and Hahn, T. (2016) 'Planned or Emergent Strategy Making? Exploring the Formation of Corporate Sustainability Strategies', *Business Strategy and the Environment*, 25(5), pp. 323–336. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1002/bse.1875>.
- Kuh, G. and Ikenberry, S. (2009) 'More than You ink , Less an We Need : Learning Outcomes Assessment in American Higher Education Management Systems', (October), pp. 1–36.
- Labaree, D.F. (1997) 'Public goods, private goods: The American struggle over educational goals', *American Educational Research Journal*, 34(1), pp. 39–81. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.3102/00028312034001039;PAGE:STRING:ARTICLE/CHAPTE R>.
- Lahire, B. (2001) 'Catégorisations et logiques individuelles : les obstacles à une sociologie des variations intra-individuelles', *Cahiers internationaux de sociologie*, 110(1), pp. 59–81. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.3917/CIS.110.0059>.
- Langley, A. and Abdallah, C. (2011) 'Templates and turns in qualitative studies of strategy and management', *Research Methodology in Strategy and Management*, 6(April), pp. 201–235. Available at: [https://doi.org/10.1108/S1479-8387\(2011\)0000006007](https://doi.org/10.1108/S1479-8387(2011)0000006007).
- Latour, B. (2005) *Reassembling the social*. Oxford Press. New York.
- Lavarda, R.B. and Bellucci, C.F. (2022) 'Case Study as a Suitable Method to Research Strategy as Practice Perspective', *Qualitative Report*, 27(2), pp. 539–554. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2022.4296>.
- Lemoine, P.A., Jenkins, W.M. and Richardson, M.D. (2017) 'Global Higher Education: Development and Implications', *Journal of Education and Development*, 1(1), p. 58. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.20849/jed.v1i1.253>.

Li, Q. and Jarzabkowski, P. (2025) 'Reinstating the radical: Trajectory, debates, and proposals for strategy as practice', *Journal of Business Research*, 187. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2024.115055>.

Lincoln, Yvonna.S. and Guba, Egon.G. (1985) 'Lincoln and Guba ' s Evaluative Criteria', *Naturalistic Inquiry*, (1985), p. 3684.

Lippman, S.A., Rumelt, R.P., Storbacka, K., Brodie, R.J., Böhmman, T., Maglio, P.P., Nenonen, S., Business, J.A.Y.B.D.E.S. of, Vaz, S.L., Bernardes, M.E.B., Bulgacov, S., Milagres, R.D.M., RESEARCH, S., Felin, T., Foss, N.J., Ployhart, R.E., ERROR, Foss, N.J., Lindenberg, S.M., Molina-Azorín, J.F., Minxin Pei Department of Politics Princeton, NJ 08544, USA, P.U., Westgren, R.E., Foss, N.J., Pedersen, T., Approach, M.D.T. with S.M.-F.A.D.C., Suddaby, R., Coraiola, D., Harvey, C., Foster, W., Jimenez, M., García, H.S., Beristain, C.I., the, B.M. for, Massis, A. De, Foss, N.J., Linder, S., Rodgers, W., Degbey, W.Y., Housel, T.J., Arslan, A., Khan, O., Daddi, T., Iraldo, F., Felin, T., Foss, N.J., Coviello, N., Kano, L. and Liesch, P.W. (2020) 'Microfoundations of collaborative networks: The impact of social capital formation and learning on investment risk assessment', *Technological Forecasting and Social Change*, 161(September), p. 120295. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.techfore.2020.120295>.

Lombardo, E. and Kantola, J. (2021) 'Social constructivism', *The Routledge Handbook of Gender and EU Politics*, (December 2020), pp. 43–55. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781351049955-5>.

Lubinga, S.N., Maramura, T.C. and Masiya, T. (2023) 'Adoption of Fourth Industrial Revolution: challenges in South African higher education institutions', *Journal of Culture and Values in Education*, 6(2), pp. 1–17. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.46303/JCVE.2023.5>.

Lynch, R. (2006) *Corporate Strategy*, *Journal of Business Strategy*. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1108/eb039673>.

Lynch, R. (2015) *Strategic Management*. 7th ed, Pearson. 7th ed. Pearson Education Limited.

MacKay, B., Chia, R. and Nair, A.K. (2021) *Strategy-in-Practices: A process philosophical approach to understanding strategy emergence and organizational outcomes*, *Human Relations*. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0018726720929397>.

Maguire, M., education, B.D.-A.I. journal of higher and 2017, undefined (2017) 'Doing a thematic analysis: A practical, step-by-step guide for learning and teaching scholars.', *ojs.aishe.orgM Maguire, B DelahuntAll Ireland journal of higher education*, 2017•*ojs.aishe.org*, (3), p. 3351. Available at: <http://ojs.aishe.org/index.php/aishe-j/article/view/335> (Accessed: 30 December 2024).

Mail & Guardian (2024) *Educor qualifications are valid, says department – The Mail & Guardian*. Available at: https://mg.co.za/education/2024-04-03-educor-qualifications-are-valid-says-department/?utm_source=chatgpt.com (Accessed: 26 May 2025).

Malterud, K., Siersma, V.D. and Guassora, A.D. (2016) 'Sample Size in Qualitative Interview Studies: Guided by Information Power', *Qualitative Health Research*, 26(13), pp. 1753–1760. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1049732315617444>.

Manosevitch, E. (2013) 'Higher Education Exchange', p. 60. Available at: <http://kettering.org/wp-content/uploads/HEX-2013.pdf#page=64>.

Manosevitch, E. and Flyvbjerg, B. (2013) *Making Social Science Matter, Making Social Science Matter*. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1017/cbo9780511810503>.

Marginson, S. (2018) 'Public/private in higher education: a synthesis of economic and political approaches', *Studies in Higher Education*, 43(2), pp. 322–337. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2016.1168797>.

Marginson, S (2022) *Globalization in higher education*. 1st ed, *books.google.com*. 1st ed. Taylor and Francis. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003207528-2>.

Marginson, Simon (2022) 'What is global higher education?', *Oxford Review of Education*, 48(4), pp. 492–517. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/03054985.2022.2061438>.

Maritz, R. (2008) 'Strategy-making approaches followed in South African organisations'. Available at: <https://repository.up.ac.za/handle/2263/29380> (Accessed: 29 May 2025).

McDonald, N., Johri, A. and Ali, A. (2025) 'Generative artificial intelligence in higher education: Evidence from an analysis of institutional policies and guidelines', *Elsevier* [Preprint]. Available at: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2949882125000052> (Accessed: 21 May 2025).

McGee, J. (2015) 'Strategizing', *Wiley Encyclopedia of Management*, 12(January 2014), pp. 1–3. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118785317.weom120170>.

Mcmahon, W.W. (2009) *Higher Learning, Greater Good: The Private and Social Benefits of Higher Education*. John Hopkins University Press. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.3167/latiss.2011.040106>.

Mense, E.G., Lemoine, P.A., Garretson, C.J. and Richardson, M.D. (2018) 'The Development of Global Higher Education in a World of Transformation', *Journal of Education and Development*, 2(3), p. 47. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.20849/jed.v2i3.529>.

Mercer, J. (2007) 'The challenges of insider research in educational institutions: wielding a double-edged sword and resolving delicate dilemmas', *Oxford Review of Education*, 33(1), pp. 1–17. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/03054980601094651>.

Merriam, S.B. (1998) 'Qualitative Research and Case Study Applications in Education. Revised and Expanded from "Case Study Research in Education."', *Quality research and case study applications in education*, pp. 26–43.

Merriam, S.B. (2009) *Qualitative Research: A guide to design and implementation*.

Merriam, S.B.. and Caffarella, R.S.. (2008) 'Learning in adulthood: a comprehensive guide'.

de Metz, N., Jansen van Rensburg, M. and Davis, A. (2023) 'Acting Strategically During Change: A Process and Dwelling World-view Approach', *Journal of Change Management*, 23(3), pp. 250–268. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/14697017.2023.2238744>.

Meyer (2025) 'Taking a seat at the table: the value of private higher education in South Africa', *South African Journal of Higher Education*, 39(1), pp. 255–277. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.20853/39-1-5956>.

Miles, M.B., Huberman, M.A. and Saldana, J. (2014) *Qualitative Data Analysis: A methods Sourcebook*.

Mintzberg, H. (1978) 'Patterns in Strategy Formation', *Management Science*, 24(9), pp. 934–948. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1287/MNSC.24.9.934>.

Mintzberg, H. (1989) 'Mintzberg on Management. Inside Our Strange World Of Organizations', <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/017084069001100414>, 11(4), pp. 599–599. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/017084069001100414>.

Mintzberg, H. (1990) 'The design school: Reconsidering the basic premises of strategic management', *Strategic Management Journal*, 11(3), pp. 171–195. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1002/smj.4250110302>.

Mintzberg, H. (1994) 'Rethinking strategic planning part I: Pitfalls and fallacies', *Long Range Planning*, 27(3), pp. 12–21. Available at: [https://doi.org/10.1016/0024-6301\(94\)90185-6](https://doi.org/10.1016/0024-6301(94)90185-6).

Mintzberg, H. (2017) 'The Ten Schools of Thoughts by Henry Mintzeberg', *International Journal of Latest Engineering Research and Applications (IJLERA)*, 2(1), pp. 32–36. Available at: www.ijlera.com.

Mintzberg, H., Ahlstrand, B. and Lampel, J. (1999) 'Strategy safari: a guided tour through the wilds of strategic management', *Choice Reviews Online*, 36(06), pp. 36-3419-36–3419. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.5860/choice.36-3419>.

Mintzberg, H. and Waters, J.A. (1985) 'Of strategies, deliberate and emergent', *Strategic Management Journal*, 6(3), pp. 257–272. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1002/smj.4250060306>.

Mirabeau, L. and Maguire, S. (2014a) 'From autonomous strategic behaviour to emergent strategy', *Journal of Management Inquiry*, 31(8), pp. 1202–1229. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/10564926211031290>.

Mirabeau, L., Maguire, S. and Hardy, C. (2018a) 'Bridging practice and process research to study transient manifestations of strategy', *Strategic Management Journal*, 39(3), pp. 582–605. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1002/smj.2732>.

Mlambo, V.H. and Mpanza, S. (2024) 'Current challenges in South Africa's in Higher education sector: A literature review', *ALUSTATH JOURNAL FOR HUMAN AND SOCIAL SCIENCES*, 63(3), pp. 22–40. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.36473/UJHSS.V62I4.2261>.

Model, A.M., Positioning, T., Systems, O., Planning, S., Chain, V. and Entrepreneurial, T. (1998) 'Mintzberg ' s Ten Schools of Thought about Strategy Formation Mintzberg' s Ten Schools of Thought about Strategy Formation', pp. 1–3. Available at: <http://opentuition.com/wp-content/blogs.dir/1/files/group->

documents/23/1271485643-

MINTZBERGTENSCHOOLOFTHOUGHTFORSTRATEGYFORMATION.pdf.

Molina-Azorín, J.F. (2014) 'Microfoundations of strategic management: Toward micro-macro research in the resource-based theory', *BRQ Business Research Quarterly*, 17(2), pp. 102–114. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.brq.2014.01.001>.

Monib, F.A., Qanet, J., Nabeel, M.D. and Abdi, R. (2021) 'Comparative Study of Strategic Management Schools (Prescriptive, Descriptive and Integrated)', *Open Journal of Business and Management*, 09(04), pp. 1965–1979. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.4236/ojbm.2021.94106>.

Morgan, H. (2022) 'Conducting a Qualitative Document Analysis', *Qualitative Report*, 27(1), pp. 64–77. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2022.5044>.

Morrison, T. (2025) 'Mixed Methods Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis: Bridging Lived Experience and Contextual Complexity', *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 24. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/16094069251400179>.

Mullins, L.J. and Christy, G. (2010) *Organisational Behaviour, Industrial and Commercial Training*. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1108/eb003495>.

Mutongoza, B.H. (2025) 'Nothing but noise: Challenges impeding the transformation of higher education in South Africa', *Interdisciplinary Journal of Education Research*, 7(1), pp. a06–a06. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.38140/IJER-2025.VOL7.1.06>.

Myburgh, Z. (2021) 'Quality management of reaccreditation processes in private higher education institutions in South Africa'. Available at: <https://search.proquest.com/openview/001d0bbbc2e97be5abd942d6794a8b60/1?pq-origsite=gscholar&cbl=2026366&diss=y> (Accessed: 21 May 2025).

Myburgh, Z. and Calitz, T. (2020) 'Quality Management of programme reaccreditation at Private Higher Education Institutions in South Africa', *The Independent Journal of Teaching and Learning*, 17(2), pp. 91–106. Available at: <https://ijtl.iie.ac.za/>.

Myers, D.G. and Twenge, J.M. (2018) *Exploring Social Psychology Eighth Edition, McGraw-Hill Education*.

Navarro (2006) 'In Search of a Cultural Interpretation of Power_The contribution of Pierre Bourdieu'.

Ngwenya, A., Davis, A. and Ncube, D. (2022) 'The practical relevance of strategy education: Evidence from the lived experiences of business school alumni', *Industry and Higher Education*, 0(0), pp. 1–16. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/09504222221135444>.

Noe, R.A., Hollenbeck, J.R., Gerhart, B.A. and Wright, P.M. (2024) 'Fundamentals of human resource management', p. 583.

Nonaka, I. (1994) 'A dynamic theory of organisational knowledge creation', *Zeitschrift fur Naturforschung - Section B Journal of Chemical Sciences*, p. 25. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1515/znb-1961-1011>.

- Nonaka, I. and von Krogh, G. (2009) 'Tacit knowledge and knowledge conversion: Controversy and advancement in organizational knowledge creation theory', *Organization Science*, 20(3), pp. 635–652. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1287/orsc.1080.0412>.
- Nonaka, I. and Takeuchi, H. (2004) 'Inter-organizational Knowledge Creation: Knowledge and Networks', *Hitotsubashi on Knowledge Management*, pp. 247–286.
- Nonaka, I., Takeuchi, H. and Umemoto, K. (2014) 'A theory of organizational knowledge creation | International Journal of Technology Management'. Available at: <https://www.inderscienceonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1504/IJTM.1996.025472> (Accessed: 25 June 2026).
- Nonaka, I. and Toyama, R. (2007a) 'Strategic management as distributed practical wisdom (phronesis)', *Industrial and Corporate Change*, 16(3), pp. 371–394. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1093/icc/dtm014>.
- Nowell, L.S., Norris, J.M., White, D.E. and Moules, N.J. (2017) 'Thematic Analysis: Striving to Meet the Trustworthiness Criteria', *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 16(1), pp. 1–13. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1609406917733847>.
- Nukunah, C.N.T. epse, Bezuidenhout, A. and Furtak, A. (2019) 'The contribution of a private higher education institution to the South African higher education landscape', *South African Journal of Higher Education*, 33(1), pp. 283–300. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.20853/33-1-2689>.
- Nutt, P. (2010) *On the study of process: Merging qualitative and quantitative approaches, Handbook to decision making*.
- Ogunbanjo, B. and Olajide, D.K. (2025a) 'The Political Economy of Cross-Border Higher Education in an Era of Complexity: Analysis of the Role of OECD/UNESCO Guidelines in the Development of Quality Assurance and Regulation', *Integral Research*, 2(2), pp. 52–88. Available at: <https://integralresearch.in/index.php/1/article/view/196> (Accessed: 20 May 2025).
- Okulich-Kazarin, V., Artyukhov, A., Skowron, Ł., Artyukhova, N., Dluhopolskyi, O. and Cwynar, W. (2023) 'Sustainability of Higher Education: Study of Student Opinions about the Possibility of Replacing Teachers with AI Technologies', *Sustainability* 2024, Vol. 16, Page 55, 16(1), p. 55. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.3390/SU16010055>.
- Okulich-Kazarin, V., Artyukhov, A., Skowron, Ł., Artyukhova, N. and Wołowiec, T. (2024) 'Will AI become a threat to higher education sustainability? A study of students' views', *mdpi.com* V Okulich-Kazarin, A Artyukhov, Ł Skowron, N Artyukhova, T Wołowiec *Sustainability*, 2024•mdpi.com [Preprint]. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.3390/su16114596>.
- Pathak, A. and Intratat, C. (2012) 'Use of Semi-Structured Interviews to Investigate Teacher Perceptions of Student Collaboration Background of the Project', *Malaysian Journal of ELT Research*, 8(1), pp. 1–10.
- Patton, M.Q. (2002) 'Qualitative research and evaluation methods', *Qualitative Inquiry*, 3rd, p. 598. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.2307/330063>.

Pierre, B. (2005) *The Social Structures of the Economy*, Pierre Bourdieu, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2005, *Historical Materialism*.

Pierre Bourdieu (1977) *Outline of a Theory of Practice*.

Polanyi, M. (1966) 'The Logic of Tacit Inference', *Philosophy*, 41(155), pp. 1–18. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0031819100066110>.

Polit, D.F. and Beck, C.T. (2013) 'Is there still gender bias in nursing research? An update', *Research in Nursing and Health*, 36(1). Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1002/nur.21514>.

Ponterotto, J.G. (2005) 'Qualitative research in counseling psychology: A primer on research paradigms and philosophy of science', *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 52(2), pp. 126–136. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-0167.52.2.126>.

Potter, J. and Hepburn, A. (2008) 'Discursive Constructionism', *Handbook of constructionist research*, (January 2008), pp. 275–293.

Power, E.M. (1999) 'An Introduction to Pierre Bourdieu's Key Theoretical Concepts', *Journal for the Study of Food and Society*, 3(1), pp. 48–52. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.2752/152897999786690753>.

Praveena and Sasikumar (2021) 'Application of Colaizzi's Method of Data Analysis in Phenomenological Research', *Medico Legal Update*, 21(2), pp. 914–918. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.37506/MLU.V21I2.2800>.

Pretorius, M. and Maritz, R. (2011) 'Strategy making: The approach matters', *Journal of Business Strategy*, 32(4), pp. 25–31. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1108/02756661111150945>.

Pretorius, M. and Stander, K. (2012) 'The identification of management consultant liabilities during strategising', *African Journal of Business Management*, 6(50), pp. 11963–11975. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.5897/ajbm12.549>.

Pusser, B. (2006) 'Reconsidering higher education and the public good', pp. 11–27. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1515/9780791481264-002>.

Quaye, I., Osei, A., Sarbah, A. and Abrokwah, E. (2015) 'The Applicability of the Learning School Model of Strategy Formulation (Strategy Formulation as an Emergent Process)', *Open Journal of Business and Management*, 03(02), pp. 135–154. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.4236/ojbm.2015.32014>.

Rabetino, R., Kohtamäki, M., Foss, N.J., Rahman, N. and Huikkola, T. (2025) 'Microfoundations for business model innovation: Exploring the interplay between individuals, practices, and organizational design', *Journal of Product Innovation Management* [Preprint]. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1111/jpim.12784>.

social theory perspective', *Organization Studies* [Preprint]. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0170840609104809>.

Rashid, Y., Rashid, A., Warraich, M.A., Sabir, S.S. and Waseem, A. (2019) 'Case Study Method: A Step-by-Step Guide for Business Researchers', *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 18, pp. 1–13. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1609406919862424>.

- Raskin, J.D. (2002) 'Constructivism in psychology: Personal construct psychology, radical constructivism, and social constructionism', *American Communication Journal*, 5(3).
- Raskin, J.D. and Sampson, K. (2002) 'A_constructivist_perspective_on_the_scie.pdf'.
- Ravitch, S.M. and Carl, N.M. (no date) 'Qualitative research: bridging the conceptual, theoretical, and methodological', p. 590.
- Reath, A. (2022) 'Kantian Constructivism and Kantian Constitutivism: Some Reflections', *Kant Yearbook*, 14(1), pp. 45–69. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1515/kantyb-2022-0003>.
- Reay, D. (2004) "'It's all becoming a habitus": Beyond the habitual use of habitus in educational research', *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 25(4), pp. 431–444. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/0142569042000236934>.
- Regnér, P. (2003) 'Strategy creation in the periphery: Inductive versus deductive strategy making', *Journal of Management Studies*, 40(1), pp. 57–82. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-6486.t01-1-00004>.
- Republic of South Africa (1997) 'Higher Education Act 101', *Government Printer*, 1997(November 1997), pp. 1–53.
- Robbins, S., Judge, T. and Millett, B. (2015) *OB: the essentials*. Available at: [https://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=BzTiBAAQBAJ&oi=fnd&pg=PP1&dq=Robbins+and+Judge+\(2015\)&ots=gT7B3z20TV&sig=NMySBsJ9qrgHDazN07A6iLqPfzl](https://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=BzTiBAAQBAJ&oi=fnd&pg=PP1&dq=Robbins+and+Judge+(2015)&ots=gT7B3z20TV&sig=NMySBsJ9qrgHDazN07A6iLqPfzl) (Accessed: 28 May 2025).
- Rodrigues, M., Silva, R., Borges, A.P., Franco, M. and Oliveira, C. (2024) 'Artificial intelligence: threat or asset to academic integrity? A bibliometric analysis', *Kybernetes* [Preprint]. Emerald Publishing. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1108/K-09-2023-1666>.
- Rouleau, L. and Cloutier, C. (2022) 'It's strategy. But is it practice? Desperately seeking social practice in strategy-as-practice research', *Strategic Organization*, 20(4), pp. 722–733. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/14761270221118334>.
- Rüegg-Stürm, J., Arx, W. Von and Grand, S. (2015) 'Constructivist paradigms: Implications for strategy-as-practice research', *Cambridge Handbook of Strategy as Practice, Second Edition*, pp. 78–94. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1017/CCO9781139681032.005>.
- Rumbley, L.E., Altbach, P.G., Reisberg, L. and Leask, B. (2023) 'From expansion to academic drift and declining student numbers: The Dutch case', *assets.pubpub.org*, pp. 3–22. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003447863-2/TRENDS-GLOBAL-HIGHER-EDUCATION-FUTURE-INTERNATIONALIZATION-LAURA-RUMBLEY-PHILIP-ALTBACH-LIZ-REISBERG-BETTY-LEASK>.
- Sahni, G. (2021) 'Organisational Behaviour', *Organisational Behaviour*, pp. 1–459. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003194736>.
- Saidi, A. (2024) 'Promoting access to, and success in postgraduate education in South Africa: A synthesis of emerging issues', *South African Journal of Higher Education*, 38(1). Available at: <https://doi.org/10.20853/38-1-6304>.

- Saliya, C.A. (2017) 'Doing Qualitative Case Study Research in Business Management', *International Journal of Case Studies*, 6(2017–12), pp. 96–111.
- Sammut-Bonnici, T., Vella, A. and Baldacchino, G. (2020) 'University of Malta Strategic Plan 2020-2025: serving students, scholarship and society, sustainably'. Available at: <https://www.um.edu.mt/library/oar/handle/123456789/54462> (Accessed: 27 May 2025).
- Samson, S., Williamson, C. and Davis, A. (2022) 'Managerial Survival: Middle Manager Sense-Making during Organisational Change', *International Journal of Management, Knowledge and Learning*, 11. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.53615/2232-5697.11.315-327>.
- Santini-Hernández, G. (2022) 'Pedagogy and andragogy, a shared approach to education in entrepreneurship for students in higher education', *Springer*, pp. 233–251. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-87865-8_13.
- Santos, L.L. da S., Tureta, C. and Felix, B. (2021) 'A Qualitative Method Proposal for the Study of Strategy as Practice', *Revista de Administração Contemporânea*, 25(2). Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1590/1982-7849rac2021190353.en>.
- Satterwhite, R., Sarid, A., Cunningham, C.M., Goryunova, E., Crandall, H.M., Morrison, J.L., Sheridan, K. and Miller, M. (2020) 'Contextualizing our Leadership Education Approach to Complex Problem Solving: Shifting Paradigms and Evolving Knowledge: Priority 5 of the National Leadership Education Research Agenda 2020–2025', *Journal of Leadership Studies*, 14(3), pp. 63–71. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1002/JLS.21717>.
- Saunders, M., Lewis, P. and Thornhill, A. (2016) *Research Methods for Business Students*. Pearson Education Limited.
- Saunders, M., Lewis, P. and Thornhill, A. (2023) *Research Methods for Business Students*. Pearson Education Limited
- Scholes, G.J.& K. (2011) *Exploring Strategy Text & cases*. London. Prentice Hall.
- Schunk, D. and Usher (2019) 'Social cognitive theory and motivation', *books.google.com*, pp. 9–26. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1093/OXFORDHOB/9780190666453.013.2>.
- Scott, W.R. (2004) 'Reflections on a half-century of organizational sociology', *Annu. Rev. Sociol.*, 30, pp. 1–21.
- Seeber, M., Cattaneo, M., Huisman, J. and Paleari, S. (2016) 'Why do higher education institutions internationalize? An investigation of the multilevel determinants of internationalization rationales', *Higher Education*, 72(5), pp. 685–702. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-015-9971-x>.
- Seidl, D., Ma, S. and Splitter, V. (2024) 'What makes activities strategic: Toward a new framework for strategy-as-practice research', *Strategic Management Journal*, 45(12), pp. 2395–2419. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1002/SMJ.3668>.
- Sgobbi, F. (2025) 'In search for employability strategy: emergent approaches by higher education institutions', *Higher Education* 2024 90:5, 90(5), pp. 1257–1272. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1007/S10734-024-01375-Y>.

Shah, S.T.H., Jamil, R.A.J., Shah, T.A. and Kazmi, A. (2015) 'Critical Exploration of Prescriptive and Emergent approaches to Strategic management: A review paper', *International Journal of Information, Business and Management*, 7(3).

Shameem, M. and Shaffi, M. (2023) 'The perceptions of key stakeholder groups on how transnational higher education contributes to building a knowledge-based economy in a developing country'. Available at: https://aru.figshare.com/articles/thesis/The_perceptions_of_key_stakeholder_groups_on_how_transnational_higher_education_contributes_to_building_a_knowledge-based_economy_in_a_developing_country/23769894 (Accessed: 20 May 2025).

Shazia, S. (2014) *Self-concept, learning styles, study habits and academic achievement of adolescents in kashmir: A study on psychological variables and academic*. Available at: [https://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=753dAgAAQBAJ&oi=fnd&pg=PA7&dq=Shazia,+S.,+2014.+Self%E2%80%93concept,+learning+styles,+study+habits+and+academic+achievement+of+adolescents+in+kashmir:+A+study+on+psychological+variables+and+academic+achievement+of+adolescents+in+Kashmir.+Anchor+Academic+Publishing+\(aap_verlag\).&ots=NQZb0UU6ef&sig=F5E_xIUyh0PmV8Q_s-yeQAI7wNc](https://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=753dAgAAQBAJ&oi=fnd&pg=PA7&dq=Shazia,+S.,+2014.+Self%E2%80%93concept,+learning+styles,+study+habits+and+academic+achievement+of+adolescents+in+kashmir:+A+study+on+psychological+variables+and+academic+achievement+of+adolescents+in+Kashmir.+Anchor+Academic+Publishing+(aap_verlag).&ots=NQZb0UU6ef&sig=F5E_xIUyh0PmV8Q_s-yeQAI7wNc) (Accessed: 30 December 2024).

Sinfield, G., Goldspink, S. and Wilson, C. (2023) 'Waiting in the Wings: The Enactment of a Descriptive Phenomenology Study', *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 22. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/16094069231207012>.

Singh, D. (2025) 'Motivations That Drive Student Enrollment and Retention: A Case Study from a South African Private Higher Education Institution', *Academic Achievement - Perspectives of Students, Teachers, and Institutions* [Preprint]. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.5772/INTECHOPEN.1010180>.

Singh, D. and Tustin, D. (2022) 'Stakeholder Perceptions and Uptake of Private Higher Education in South Africa', *International Journal of African Higher Education*, 9(1), pp. 21–52. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.6017/ijahe.v9i1.15231>.

Smets, M., Greenwood, R. and Lounsbury, M. (2015) *An institutional perspective on strategy as practice*, *Cambridge Handbook of Strategy as Practice*, Second Edition. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1017/CCO9781139681032.017>.

Smith, E.E. and Gaya, H.J. (2016) 'Developing a Qualitative Single Case Study in the Strategic Management Realm: An Appropriate Research Design?', *International Journal of Business Management & Economic Research*, 7(2), pp. 1–10.

Soliman, S., Anchor, J. and Taylor, D. (2019) 'The international strategies of universities: deliberate or emergent?', *Studies in Higher Education*, 44(8), pp. 1413–1424. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2018.1445985>.

Spender, J.-C., Baumard, P. and Wauchope, S. (2000) 'Tacit Knowledge in Organizations', *The Academy of Management Review*, 25(2), p. 443. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.2307/259026>.

Stadio Holdings (2024) *Overview - STADIO Holdings*. Available at: <https://stadio.co.za/overview/> (Accessed: 26 May 2025).

Stahl, G. (2015) 'Egalitarian Habitus: Narratives of Aspiration and Change', *Bourdieu, Habitus and Social Research*, pp. 21–38.

Stake, E.R. (1995) 'The Art of Case Study Research (PDFDrive).pdf', p. 175.

Stan, L. (2017) 'Roots of Russia's War in Ukraine', *The European Legacy*, pp. 630–631. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/10848770.2017.1304057>.

Stoltz-Urban (2026) *Private Higher Education as the "Cinderella" of South Africa's post-school education and training landscape - Universities South Africa*. Available at: <https://usaf.ac.za/private-higher-education-as-the-cinderella-of-south-africas-post-school-education-and-training-landscape/> (Accessed: 21 May 2026).

Storbacka, K., Brodie, R.J., Böhmman, T., Maglio, P.P. and Nenonen, S. (2016) 'Actor engagement as a microfoundation for value co-creation', *Journal of Business Research*, 69. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2016.02.034>.

Strauss, A. and Corbin, J. (2004) 'Open coding'. Available at: https://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=wBci-WKsAMAC&oi=fnd&pg=PA303&dq=Open+Coding&ots=ud1ELQ8yE_&sig=CvjKdGZeL7CasfRomxXnhtzmAqc (Accessed: 17 February 2025).

Tamrat, W. (2020) 'The Disjuncture between Private Higher Education and Internationalisation', *International Journal of African Higher Education*, 7(2). Available at: <https://doi.org/10.6017/ijahe.v7i2.13231>.

Tamrat, W. (2024) 'Private Provision of Higher Education in Ethiopia: Emergence, Scope and Status', *Springer*, pp. 53–75. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-56882-4_3.

Tamrat, W. and Demas, S. (2022) 'Can university exit exams fix some systemic problems', *academia.edu*, 37(3), pp. 443–460. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/02680939.2020.1852604>.

Tamrat, W. and Teferra (2022) 'Advancing Transnational Higher Education in Ethiopia: Policy Promises and Realities', *journals.sagepub.com*, 26(5), pp. 623–639. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/10283153211042088>.

Teece, D. (2007) 'Explicating dynamic capabilities: the nature and microfoundations of (sustainable) enterprise performance', *Wiley Online Library*, 28(13), pp. 1319–1350. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1002/SMJ.640>.

Teixeira, P., Kim, S., Pablo, L. and Gilani Zulfiqar (2017) *Rethinking the public-private mix in higher education*. Rotterdam: Sense Publishers. Available at: <http://journal.um-surabaya.ac.id/index.php/JKM/article/view/2203>.

Study', *StatPearls* [Preprint]. Available at: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK470395/> (Accessed: 30 December 2024).

Tilak, J.B.G. (2008) 'Higher education: A public good or a commodity for trade?: Commitment to higher education or commitment of higher education to trade', *Prospects*, 38(4), pp. 449–466. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1007/S11125-009-9093-2>.

- Tilak, J.B.G. (2014) 'Private higher education in India', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 49(40), pp. 32–38. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/2347631114558192>.
- Tsoukas, H. (2010) 'Practice, strategy making and intentionality: a Heideggerian onto-epistemology for Strategy as Practice', *Cambridge Handbook of Strategy as Practice*, pp. 47–62. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511777882.004>.
- Tuckett, A.G. (2005) 'Applying thematic analysis theory to practice: a researcher's experience.', *Contemporary nurse : a journal for the Australian nursing profession*, 19(1–2), pp. 75–87. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.5172/CONU.19.1-2.75>.
- UNESCO (2026) *Higher Education Global Trends Report: Towards inclusive, equitable*. Available at: <https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/higher-education-global-trends-report-towards-inclusive-equitable-and-quality-higher-education> (Accessed: 12 June 2026).
- UNISA (2016) 'Policy on research ethics - University of South Africa', pp. 1–35.
- Vaara, E. and Whittington, R. (2012) 'Strategy-as-Practice: Taking Social Practices Seriously', *Academy of Management Annals*, 6(1), pp. 285–336. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.5465/19416520.2012.672039>.
- Westgren, R.E. (2014) 'Microfoundations in Strategy and Explanatory Reductionism'.
- Van der Westhuizen (2026) *Private higher education steps up as universities hit capacity limits – Moonstone Information Refinery*. Available at: <https://www.moonstone.co.za/private-higher-education-steps-up-as-universities-hit-capacity-limits/> (Accessed: 21 May 2026).
- Wheeler, A. and Wiese, L. (2024) 'Reforming higher education in South Africa by addressing gender inequalities', *Journal of Adult and Continuing Education* [Preprint]. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/14779714241252739;PAGE:STRING:ARTICLE/CHAPTE> R.
- Whittington (2012) 'Big strategy/small strategy', *journals.sagepub.com*, 10(3), pp. 263–268. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1476127012452828>.
- Whittington, R. (2004) 'Strategy after modernism: recovering practice', *European Management Review* [Preprint]. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1057/palgrave.emr.1500006>.
- Whittington, R. (2006) 'Completing the practice turn in strategy research', *Organization Studies*, 27(5), pp. 613–634. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0170840606064101>.
- Whittington, R. (2007) 'Strategy practice and strategy process: Family differences and the sociological eye', *Organization Studies*, 28(10), pp. 1575–1586. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0170840607081557>.
- Whittington, R. (2018) 'Greatness takes practice: On practice theory's relevance to "Great Strategy"', *pubsonline.informs.org*, 3(1), pp. 343–351. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1287/STSC.2017.0040>.

- Whittington, R. (2019) *Opening strategy: Professional strategists and practice change, 1960 to today*. Available at: [https://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=oO-MDwAAQBAJ&oi=fnd&pg=PP1&dq=Whittington,+R.+\(2021\).+Opening+strategy:+Professional+strategists+and+practice+change,+1960+to+today.+Oxford+University+Press.&ots=KJJzIl1TRh&sig=nLxsTwmwLKCZIK3aDppDTTj9D-A](https://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=oO-MDwAAQBAJ&oi=fnd&pg=PP1&dq=Whittington,+R.+(2021).+Opening+strategy:+Professional+strategists+and+practice+change,+1960+to+today.+Oxford+University+Press.&ots=KJJzIl1TRh&sig=nLxsTwmwLKCZIK3aDppDTTj9D-A) (Accessed: 27 May 2025).
- Whittington, R. (2025) 'Tall or flat: The microfoundational bathtub and the water of practices', *Strategic Organization* [Preprint]. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1177/14761270251330965/ASSET/15CCDB92-19CB-4983-83F0-47F26C106D23/ASSETS/IMAGES/LARGE/10.1177_14761270251330965-FIG2.JPG.
- Whittington, R. and Cailluet, L. (2008) 'The crafts of strategy', *academia.edu R Whittington, L Cailluet Long Range Planning, 2008•academia.edu*, 41(3), pp. 241–247. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/J.LRP.2008.03.003>.
- Whittington, R., Jarzabkowski, P., Mayer, M., Mounoud, E., Nahapiet, J. and Rouleau, L. (2003) 'Taking Strategy Seriously: Responsibility and Reform for an Important Social Practice', *Journal of Management Inquiry*, 12(4), pp. 396–409. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1056492603258968>.
- Whittle, A. and Mueller, F. (2010) 'Strategy, enrolment and accounting: The politics of strategic ideas', *Accounting, Auditing and Accountability Journal*, 23(5), pp. 626–646. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1108/09513571011054918>.
- Williams, G. (2016) 'Higher education: Public good or private commodity?' Available at: <https://doi.org/10.18546/LRE.14.1.12>.
- Woldegiorgis, E.T. (2024) 'The impact of neo-liberal frameworks on student mobility and internationalisation in African Higher Education', *journals.co.za*, 38(6). Available at: <https://doi.org/10.20853/38-6-5971>.
- Wood, L.M., Sebar, B. and Vecchio, N. (2020) 'Application of rigour and credibility in qualitative document analysis: Lessons learnt from a case study', *Qualitative Report*, 25(2), pp. 456–470. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2020.4240>.
- Yang, Y. (2014) 'Bourdieu, Practice and Change: Beyond the criticism of determinism', *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, 46(14), pp. 1522–1540. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/00131857.2013.839375>.
- Yin, R.K. (2003) 'Case design and methods', *American Psychological Association.*, pp. 3–24.
- Yin, R.K. (2011) *Qualitative research from start to finish*, Nucl. Phys.
- Yin, R.K. (2018) *Case study research and applications: Design and methods*, *Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Research*. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/109634809702100108>.
- Zaghmouri, N. (2024) 'The Social Practices of Dynamic Capabilities, an Analysis of Organizational Adaptability in Public Hospitals', *papers.ssrn.com* [Preprint].

Available at: https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=5179408
(Accessed: 22 May 2025).

Zaman, K. and Mohsin, A. (2014) 'Internationalization of Universities: Emerging Trends, Challenges and Opportunities', *Journal of Economic Info*, 1(1), pp. 1–9. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.31580/jei.v1i1.100>.

Zongozzi, J.N. and Ngubane, S.A. (2025) 'Equitable access to digital higher education for students with disabilities in South Africa'. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.4102/ajod>.

Appendix A: Participant information sheet

Emergent Strategy-Making in Higher Education Private Institutions by Managers: A Micro-Foundational Perspective.

Dear Prospective Participant

My name is Grace Magama and I am researching under the supervision of Prof P. Venter, Professor of Strategy at School of Business Leadership (SBL) UNISA. I have received funding from the Directorate Student Funding (Unisa Postgraduate bursary) for registration and research-related expenditures. We cordially invite you to participate in a study entitled: Emergent Strategy-Making in Higher Education Private Institutions by Managers: A Micro-Foundational Perspective.

The aim/purpose of the study.

The research aims to gain a deeper understanding of micro-practices as a micro-foundation in influencing emergent strategising and present a theoretical perspective to guide further inquiry in this area of interest.

Reason to participate.

You are invited to participate in this study because of your employment as a private higher education institution (PHEI) manager, which forms part of this qualitative case study research. I intend to request all your organisation's managers to participate in this study. To participate in this study, you must be employed as a low, middle or top-level manager.

Nature of participation.

The study involves three methods of data collection.

Document analysis:

Document analysis will not directly involve you as a participant. Document analysis is a research technique that entails reviewing and analysing written or recorded materials

relevant to the research topic. Reports, emails, memos, and other relevant materials may be included in these documents. The document analysis aims to collect information that will help with the research project. Identifying key themes, patterns, and relationships within the documents and documenting any relevant information will be part of the analysis. The analysis may also include comparing and contrasting various documents to understand the topic under consideration better. However, as a participant, your cooperation and permission to share relevant documents will be greatly appreciated if necessary for the research project.

Observations:

The observation will involve me watching and taking notes on how you perform your work duties in your environment, and I will be observing your actions and interactions with others. The observations will be non-intrusive, and I will not interfere with your work. The duration of the observation will depend on the specific tasks being performed, but I will inform you in advance of the estimated duration.

Interviews:

This phase will entail a semi-structured individual interview, which will be audio voice recorded. This interview will be conducted at a venue of your choice, for example your office or a conference room. The questions, which will be asked during the interview, will focus on the times when you were involved with emergent strategising given the unprecedented environment (devised emergent strategies for your organisation) with your colleagues and how you experienced these sessions. During the interview, I will take notes to ensure that I capture all the information you share. The interview should take approximately 60 minutes.

Right to withdraw.

Participation in this study is voluntary, and you are not obligated to do so. Non-participation carries no penalty or loss of benefit. If you choose to participate, you will be given this information letter to keep and will be asked to sign a written informed consent form. You have the right to withdraw at any time and for any reason.

Potential benefits of the study.

The findings of this study are expected to contribute to a better understanding of how micro-foundational practices influence emergent strategising by managers.

Inconvenience caused in taking part.

The only inconvenience that can be anticipated is the time spent participating in the interview and focus group discussion, as well as the time required to write the naive sketch.

Issues of confidentiality.

I will be the only person who knows your true identity. There will be no disclosure of personal or identifiable information that allows you to be identified as a participant. You will be assigned a pseudonym (a false name, such as participant A), and you will be referred to in the data as such. Your anonymous data may be used for other purposes, such as research reports, journal articles, and conference participants, in addition to this study. I assure you that the confidentiality of information will be maintained in all research outputs resulting from the study. There will be no disclosure of personal or identifiable information that allows you to be identified as a participant. The study's organisations will also not be disclosed in any of the research outputs.

Storage and destroying of the information

In accordance with the Unisa Policy on Research Ethics, electronic copies of the data will be kept for a minimum of five years after the study is completed. These transcribed word documents, as well as my field notes, will be stored in a locked cabinet at my residence for future research or academic purposes. The electronic data will be stored on a password-protected computer in encrypted files. Future uses of the stored data will be subject to additional Research Ethics Review and, if necessary, approval. After this time period has passed, all information (electronic files and records) will be permanently deleted, and paper-based information will be shredded.

Payments and incentives.

You will not be compensated or rewarded for your participation in the study. You will not be charged for taking part in the study.

Ethical considerations/ requirements.

This study meets the requirements outlined in the Unisa Policy on Research Ethics and has been approved in writing by the College of Economic and Management Sciences' Research Ethics Committee. If you want, you can get a copy of the approval letter from the researcher.

The research findings.

If you would like to be notified of the final research findings, or if you require any additional information, please contact me, Grace Magama, the researcher, on 0027 78 935 335 or 42073790@mylife.unisa.ac.za or gracemagama@gmail.com. If you have any questions about how the research is being conducted, please contact Prof P Venter on 082 416 6801; ventep@unisa.ac.za.

Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet and for participating in this study.

Kind regards,

Grace Magama (researcher)

Appendix B: Interview guide

The topics to be discussed in each interview are listed below. Questions may not be asked in the exact sequence and manner depicted below—this is determined by the progression of each unique interview and subsequent probing. Questions such as "tell me more," "how do you feel about this?" "what is your opinion?" "explain," and "can you give me an example" are used to probe each topic.

Introduction:

Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed

The purpose of the interview is to explore how micropractices of managers influence emergent strategising. Specific details relate to the role of social interaction, cognition, daily routines, organisational and external contextual factors, and power in influencing emergent strategising of private institution managers.

NB: The interview will take approximately 30-45 minutes

Do you consent to participant and to the recording of the interview or taking notes.

Questions:

1. How do you typically interact with other managers in your private institution? How does this social interaction contribute to new decisions or ideas that emerged from the social interactions?
2. Can you describe a time when your thinking or perspective changed, and how that influenced your approach to developing plans and actions to achieve specific goals or objectives in your private institution?
3. How do your daily routines (e.g., morning meetings, planning sessions, etc.) support or hinder your ability to engage in emergent strategising?
4. In your experience, what are some inside (internal) or outside (external) factors that have influenced emergent strategising in your private institution?

5. Can you describe a situation where power dynamics among managers influenced emergent strategising in your private institution? How was this resolved, and what was the outcome?

Follow-up Questions:

- Can you give me an example of how your interactions with other managers led to the emergence of a new strategy?
- Can you describe a situation where an organisational or external contextual factor significantly impacted emergent strategising in your private institution?
- Can you elaborate on how power dynamics among managers can impact emergent strategising in your private institution?

Conclusion:

- Thank the participant for their time and insights
- Ask if there is anything else they would like to add
- Remind the participant that their responses will remain confidential
- Confirm their consent to use the information gathered in the interview for research purposes.

Appendix C: Written Narrative

Participant Information

Name (Optional): _____ Position/Title: _____

Department: _____ Date: _____

Thank you for participating in this research study. The following prompts help you reflect on and document your experiences related to the micro-foundational practices of managers influencing emergent strategising in Private Higher Education Institutions (PHEI). Please provide as much detail as possible in your responses. You can type your responses directly into this document or use another format that is comfortable for you.

Narrative Prompts

1. Daily Routines

Prompt: Describe a typical day at work. Focus on your daily routines, habits, practices and or activities. How do these routines contribute to your strategic decision-making (strategic outcomes) and emergent strategising?

Response:

2. Social Interaction

Prompt: Reflect on your interactions with colleagues, subordinates, and other stakeholders. How do these social interactions drive or influence emergent strategising? Provide specific examples if possible.

Response:

3. Cognition and Decision-Making

Prompt: Consider the cognitive processes (thought processes, reflections and cognitive strategies) you use in your role. How do your thoughts, perceptions, and decision-making processes influence emergent strategising? Describe any particular strategies or approaches you use.

Response:

4. Organisational and external contextual factors

Prompt: Identify and reflect on any organisational structures, policies, or external factors that significantly impact your strategic practices. How do these factors influence your ability to engage in strategic decisions and in emergent strategising?

Response:

5. Role of Power

Prompt: Discuss the role of power and authority in your position. How does your use of power influence emergent strategising? Provide examples of situations where your power dynamics affected strategic outcomes.

Response:

Additional Reflections

Prompt: If there are any other experiences, insights, or reflections that you believe are relevant to this study and have not been covered by the above prompts, please share them here.

Response:

Thank you for taking the time to provide these detailed narratives. Your insights are invaluable to this research. If you have any questions or need further clarification, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Contact Information:

Researcher Name: Grace Magama

Email: 42073790@mylife.unisa.ac.za

Phone: +27 789 325 335

Guidelines for Submission

Submission Format: Please submit your written narrative as a Word document or PDF.

Submission Deadline:

Submission Method: Email your completed narrative to 42073790@mylife.unisa.ac.za or researchacademia561@gmail.com or gracemagama@gmail.com

Appendix D: Informed consent to participate in this study

Emergent Strategy-Making in Higher Education Private Institutions by Managers: A Micro-Foundational Perspective

I, _____ (participant name), confirm that the person asking my consent to take part in this research, Ms Grace Magama, has informed me about the nature, procedure, potential benefits and anticipated inconvenience of participation.

I have read and understand the study as explained in the participant information letter.

I had sufficient opportunity to ask questions and I am prepared to participate in the study.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without penalty.

I am aware that the findings of this study will be anonymously processed into a thesis and possibly for journal publications and/or conference proceedings.

I understand that the study will entail interviews and written narratives and that I am invited to participate in all two methods.

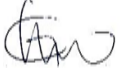
By signing this informed consent document, I declare that I am willing to participate in a semi-structured individual interview, as well written narrative and to the recording of the semi-structured interview.

I have received a signed copy of the informed consent agreement.

Full Name of Participant: _____

Signature of Participant: _____ Date: _____

Full name of researcher: Grace Magama

Signature of researcher:  Date 31/01/2024

Appendix E: Signed consent form

INFORMED CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY

Emergent Strategy-Making in Higher Education Private Institutions by Managers: A Micro-Foundational Perspective

I, Dr Willem C Bouwer (participant name), confirm that the person asking my consent to take part in this research, Ms Grace Magama, has informed me about the nature, procedure, potential benefits and anticipated inconvenience of participation.

I have read and understand the study as explained in the participant information letter.

I had sufficient opportunity to ask questions and I am prepared to participate in the study.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without penalty.

I am aware that the findings of this study will be anonymously processed into a thesis and possibly for journal publications and/or conference proceedings.

I understand that the study will entail three phases and that I am invited to participate in all three phases.

By signing this informed consent document, I declare that I am willing to participate in a semi-structured individual interview, as well to be observed and to the recording of the semi-structured interview.

I have received a signed copy of the informed consent agreement.

Full Name of Participant: [REDACTED]

Signature of Participant: [REDACTED] Date: 31 May 2024

Full name of researcher: [REDACTED]

Signature of researcher: [REDACTED] Date 31/01/2024

Appendix F: Coding Report

The coding report summarises the research data's key themes, categories, and codes. The coding structure below reflects the emergent patterns identified through document analysis, transcripts from semi-structured interviews, and written narratives. The report is organised around four core themes and associated categories, with coding examples and quotes drawn from participant responses and institutional documents.

Theme one T1: Strategic adaptation and flexibility (Core to emergent strategy)

The theme relates to adaptation in a changing environment and focuses on how institutions adjust strategies due to external pressures and the need for agility in decision-making.

Category T1A: Strategic flexibility in educational practices

Codes:

Adapting teaching methods: Changes in teaching methods prompted by technological advancements and student requirements (e.g., a shift towards online and blended learning).

Iterative investment in technology: Integrating technology

Ongoing refinement of systems: Refining technology systems

Responsive assessment models: Transition towards continuous assessments, departing from traditional methods exams.

Unplanned strategic shifts: Emergent decisions taken in response to evolving challenges (e.g., new policies to regulate AI usage).

Participant quotes:

"We had to rethink our assessments quickly... adapting to AI trends among students." – IP13

"I've indicated that we're in the process of refining all these new technology that we brought into the business, and that we are getting the hold of the integration"
CEO Holding Results Presentation March 2024.

"We decided to shift academic support sessions from after class to during class timetables." WNP6

"We've had to change our strategy in terms of assessments, where we are now making allowances for AI...we've incorporated into how we assess, for example, and we now are also teaching around the best use of artificial intelligence." IP1

"We moved from final exams to continuous assessment... based on skills development." – IP11

Category T1B: Adaptation in response to contextual needs

Codes:

Operational adjustments: Strategies evolved due to pandemic impacts (e.g., shift to online learning).

Program expansion: Expanding educational offerings to meet emerging needs.

Institutional agility: Adapting policies to sustain operational effectiveness.

adaptive strategic decision-making: a strategic decision was made to open a comprehensive campus

adjusting to external pressures: a decision to continuously adapt after 2021

adapting to a variety of teaching methods: decisions and actions to transition to blended learning

Participant Quotes:

"And that's how it works. And you can't do that in an environment that is as fast-moving as this one has been, because since 2021 since I've started, we've had to adapt..." IP1

"We all viewed the online lecturing as a necessity...and we found out there's a whole variety of techniques and approaches that you can use to enhance the experience of the students in the online session" IP5

"After doing some general research... I suggested changing from online assessment back to venue-based assessments due to plagiarism and dishonesty." IP2

"The transition to virtual platforms wasn't easy, but it was necessary for survival" IP5

"The biggest issue came from the pandemic... we had to immediately go down from full contact learning mode into blended learning." IP11

"We've learned a lot of lessons when we opened that first comprehensive campus" Holdings results presentation March 2024

"The board saw the group's contact learning strategy bearing fruit. As a result, the board proved the construction of a new comprehensive campus in Durbanville"

Category T1C: Strategic and Reflective Thinking

Codes:

Reflective decision-making: Learning from past experiences to enhance strategies.

Strategic adaptation: Modifying strategies through continuous reflection.

Collaboration and debate: Strategic decisions refined through informal collaboration and discussion.

ongoing mental engagements: decisions refined through ongoing mental engagements

strategic reflection: a shift of the mindset to accommodate new practices

Participant Quotes:

"I'm constantly thinking about how we can improve for next time." – WN17

"The reality is that you're always rethinking your approach to adapt." – IP13

"We've learned a lot of lessons when we opened that first comprehensive campus.

If I can just rewind a few years"

"We believe it is now time to build our Durbanville, comprehensive campus. Previously, we believed in our contact learning strategy, and we knew that it will show growth over time, but we didn't have any concrete evidence of that to our investors as well as to our board".

".....development of a new attendance tracking system and follow-up process". WNP9

"I suggested a time where we need to make it rather in the timetable scheduled" IP7

".....it was quite a shift in mindset to see that allowing students" IP15

Theme two T2: Institutional purpose and vision (Vision-driven practices influencing strategising)

The theme relates to purpose-driven strategy, which stressed aligning strategies with the institution's vision and core values.

Category T2A: Vision embedding practices

Codes:

Purpose alignment: Aligning daily actions with institutional vision.

Vision-driven decision-making: Strategic decisions anchored in long-term institutional goals.

Mission coherence: Keeping strategies focused on mission fulfilment.

Executive team involvement: involving the executive teams, increasing student numbers,

Mission coherence: moving away from formative sit-down exams to continuous assessment.

Participant Quotes:

"The board saw the group's contact learning strategy bearing fruit. As a result, the board approved the construction of a new comprehensive campus in Durbanville".

The Chairman Holdings AGM 19 June 2024

"Initially, we were very focused on the day to day because, you know, you just wanted to get things done. And how do we get through it? And how do we now in the new institution, how do we do things to make sure that our students are okay? So I'm just very much focused on getting from one day to the next..."IP1

"Our executive team... make it understandable for you as to what exactly is required... then you plan and strategize around that." IP2

"The goal of the organization is to have... 100,000 students by 2026... [This is] driven by both social impact and financial gain." IP4

"We moved away from the formative sit-down exams to the continuous assessment method... it worked a lot better because now students don't have to do summative exams." IP11

Category T2B: Institutional values and alignment

Codes:

Values-based decisions: Decisions made to reflect institutional values (e.g., student welfare, academic integrity).

Resource allocation: Prioritizing resources in alignment with values.

Balancing short- and long-term goals: Decisions reflect immediate needs and long-term vision (e.g. decision to consolidate control).

Participant Quotes:

"during the year 14.6% effective equity interest in....." Holdings Summary Results for the year ending 31 December 2023

".....we try to come up with different ways of maybe writing our own study guides, ..." IP11

"I had to discuss with my manager to offer more money to appoint a lecturer who was essential for our new program. This was strategically necessary despite budget constraints." IP12

"Working with distance learning and with face-to-face contact learning... two different teaching platforms... you cannot combine them, because then you set yourself up for failure." IP3

"We've printed our purpose and values everywhere on campus... it's about making everyone aware of who we are, holding ourselves accountable, and making sure our strategy aligns with that identity." IP13

Category 3: Internal Alignment with Long-Term Goals and Vision

Codes:

Shared understanding of vision: Participants demonstrated alignment with institutional vision through collective understanding (e.g. integrated thinking).

Goal coherence: Ensuring that strategies and decisions reflect long-term institutional goals.

Feedback loops: Using internal feedback (e.g., surveys) to align operations with broader goals.

Participant Quotes:

"You need all of your line managers and top management to buy into what you're doing." IP10

"Student surveys inform improvement plans... part of quality assurance." IP11

"Well, the overarching [goal] is we need, you know, report back to our shareholders, and we've made promises. Right as a business like this is what we're going to be doing, and when it comes to our level, we need to now show that we've done everything that we can do to make sure that we've reached organizational goals." IP1

"Working with distance learning and with face-to-face contact learning... two different teaching platforms... you cannot combine them, because then you set yourself up for failure." IP10

"The constant shifts in decision-making reflect that growth phase. While the top-down approach can sometimes be frustrating, I believe that as we mature, there will be more opportunities for collaboration." WNP6

Theme three T3: Communication and collaboration in decision-making (Key to emergent strategising)

The theme emphasises the importance of various forms of communication and teamwork in strategising.

Category T3A: Modes of communication in emergent strategising

Codes:

Formal communication structures: Use of scheduled meetings and formal channels for strategic alignment.

Informal exchanges: Quick, real-time decision-making through informal conversations (e.g., email, Teams, face-to-face).

Vertical and horizontal communication: Communication across levels and departments.

Participant Quotes:

"We have formal, structured, scheduled meetings like once a month, usually, like we got a MANCO meeting that meets and so all the managers and all the PCs would meet in that environment and discuss whatever topics. The rest would be informal if we needed to clarify certain things, Teams calls usually." IP1

"We are an international company... meetings with our executive managers, head of school, day-to-day management meetings... a wide variety of meetings that we do online as well." IP3

"We have a lot of online meetings... we also deal with each other by email communication and telephone communication." IP12

"We've learned... it's better to pop an email afterward to confirm what was discussed informally." IP9

"If it's not very, very important that it needs to be escalated... we would just pop into someone's office and quickly chat to resolve it." IP9

Category T3B: Cross-functional and departmental collaboration

Codes:

Collaborative problem-solving: Departments work together to address emergent issues.

Cross-functional decision-making: Coordinating between campuses and departments.

Inclusivity in strategy creation: Involving junior and senior staff in the strategy process.

Formal and informal collaboration: spontaneous calls and formal meetings

Participant Quotes:

"Our community".

"Yes, so we normally have scheduled meetings where we discuss whatever needs to be discussed, and we usually would call each other if we needed to interact further." IP1

"Yes, at the moment, my program is on phase out, and we need to coordinate with our students, and there wasn't a clear path of how this program was going to phase

out on the specifically, and we needed to consult with our head office manager as well to come up with an actual plan on the steps we made." IP1

"In academic management meetings, we discuss issues... whoever's responsible will take notes and address it." IP11

"We operate in a collaborative manner... if there is an issue at one campus, we make sure the other campuses are aware." IP2

"Participative decision-making... you come up with strategic ideas... experimenting with different types of questions... practical applications." IP3

"If one of us is sick... we can link across campuses to perform the tasks." IP2

"Interactions here are respectful and collaborative... It's not 'I'm the manager, so I decide,' but 'how do my decisions impact your department?'" IP13

"Bringing in junior staff as part of the strategic planning process helps... because if they're involved from the beginning, they're more equipped to execute the plan effectively." IP13

Category T3C: Stakeholder inclusivity and engagement

Codes:

Involvement of external stakeholders: Engaging industry partners, students, and staff in decision-making.

Feedback loops: Using program committees and surveys to gather input for strategic refinement.

Inclusive strategy creation: Ensuring all stakeholders have a voice in shaping strategy.

Participant Quotes:

"And I want to highlight to the investor community that as part of our philosophy, we are allowing more students to re register with the rear balances"

"....we announced the move of our higher certificate in Paralegal Studies to the contact learning mode". AGM March 2024

"We have program stakeholder committee meetings... for feedback to determine how we can improve our offering to our students." IP9

"Interacting with the corporates creates new... leads to more creativity in order to expand the possibilities." IP10

"They need needs to be an opportunity to include opinions from the people that are implementing these strategies, and that is not always available..." IP1

"I've got a lot more people I can consult now... Once you see people as individuals beyond their job titles, you realize they all have valuable insights." IP13

"When we plan a new study guide, it is now something that we actually incorporate into our study material... it permeates everything we do." IP12

Theme four T4: Influence of leadership and power dynamics (Leadership practices shaping emergent strategising)

The theme pertains to power dynamics and strategising. It explores how leadership influence and power structures affect strategic decision-making and the importance of constructive feedback.

Category T4A: Inclusive and collegial decision-making

Codes:

Power-sharing (inclusivity): Involving staff at all levels in strategic decisions.

Collegial leadership: Collaborative decision-making that minimizes hierarchy.

Shared responsibility: Fostering a culture of collective ownership of strategies.

Participant Quotes:

"....It goes wider than the institution". The staff as well as the shareholders all become part of this community, and that's what we want to get right that study is to build this community that will feed off one another beautiful". CEO Holding Results presentation March 2024

"We believe it is now time to build our Durbanville, comprehensive campus. Previously, we believed in our contact learning strategy, and we knew that it will show growth over time, but we didn't have any concrete evidence of that to our investors as well as to our board".

"By involving junior staff in strategic planning, I have created a more inclusive approach." WNP14

"[To make decision] We use ideas from all levels..... allowing flexibility in our strategies." WNP15

"Differences of opinion emerged, but we worked through academic debates to reach a common goal."IP10

"So we had to immediately put in measures making sure that the policies aligned, so that we can bring in the students into our campuses, making sure they fit in with the programmes and the curricula.. We had to make sure that we've got lecturers in place, that we have got strategies in place" IP9

".....and then we try to come up with different ways of maybe writing our own study guides, authoring our own study guides," IP11

"Ja, okay, You know we believe in participative decision making.....including everyone that can contribute" IP3

Category T4B: Constructive Criticism and Feedback in Strategising

Codes:

Openness to feedback: Leaders encourage feedback to refine strategies.

Constructive criticism: Criticism is solution-oriented and leads to actionable outcomes.

Iterative strategy development: Continuously improving strategies based on internal feedback.

Participant Quotes:

"Constructive criticism during meetings shapes our approach, enabling us to adapt better."IP2

"Feedback helps align departmental goals with the broader institutional vision." IP13

"We constantly revisit decisions based on feedback, ensuring that our strategies evolve to meet current demands." WNP16

".....and then based on the surveys and also issues that we pick up, maybe in modules and so on". IP11

".....even in the criticism itself, it's constructive with a possible solution" WNP13

Category T4C: Active engagement and inclusivity in strategising

Codes:

Active participation: Engaging all staff in strategic discussions.

Inclusive debate: Allowing different viewpoints to shape strategic direction.

Collaboration across levels: Ensuring all levels of the institution contribute to strategy formulation.

Participant Quotes:

"We believe it is now time to build our Durbanville, comprehensive campus. Previously, we believed in our contact learning strategy, and we knew that it will show growth over time, but we didn't have any concrete evidence of that to our investors as well as to our board". CEO Holdings Results in March 2024

"By involving junior staff in strategic planning, I have created a more inclusive approach." WNP14

"These differences are usually resolved through academic debate, where everyone is given the opportunity to voice their concerns." WNP18

"It's a more collegial approach... we're all working toward the same vision, so it's less about hierarchy and more about shared responsibility." IP13

Conclusion

The coding process revealed four essential themes that deepened our understanding of emergent strategising in a PHEI: strategic adaptation and flexibility, institutional purpose and vision, communication and collaboration in decision-making, and leadership influence and power dynamics. These themes illuminated how participants navigated complex environments while aligning actions with the institution's objectives.

Strategic adaptation and flexibility emphasised the need for adaptability in emergent strategising. Participants exhibited practices that facilitated strategic adaptability, modifying their activities in response to shifting external forces and internal dynamics. Thus, illustrating that emergent strategising was perpetually influenced by dynamic factors rather than fixed goals, highlighting the necessity of cultivating an agile organisational culture.

Institutional mission and vision emphasised that a collective sense of purpose directed micro-practices within the organisation. Participants consistently associated their actions

with the institution's overarching goal, guaranteeing that, even during periods of uncertainty, their strategies conformed to long-term objectives. The vision-embedded approaches for strategising underscore the significance of fostering a clear and coherent institutional mission, which acts as a foundation for developing emergent strategies.

Communication and collaboration in decision-making highlighted the critical need for cross-functional collaboration in developing emergent strategising. Participants utilised formal and informal communication channels to engage in continuous debate, facilitating emergent strategising. Through cross-departmental collaboration and the integration of stakeholder feedback, they guaranteed that initiatives remained adaptable to varied requirements and changing circumstances. The results underscore the necessity of open communication to facilitate agile strategising.

The influence of leadership and power dynamics emphasised the influence of leadership practices and power dynamics on emergent strategising. Leaders cultivated an inclusive culture and promoted collaborative strategy development, enabling junior staff to share their views and feedback. Leaders engaged in inclusive leadership practices, where decision-making involved staff at all levels, promoting a culture of shared responsibility.

These findings present significant implications for theoretical and practical applications. They theoretically expand Bourdieu's social capital theory inside strategic management and illustrate that social and symbolic capital enable emergent strategising, primarily through communication networks and leadership influence. The findings indicated that educational leaders should foster environments encouraging structured and spontaneous interactions to maintain adaptability in a swiftly evolving context. Promoting transparent communication and enhancing interdisciplinary collaboration are essential for cultivating strategic agility.

The rigorous coding ensured that themes were firmly grounded in the data, augmenting the findings' validity.

Appendix G: Transcribed semi-structured interview TM4

Interview with TM4

Q1.

We mostly interact in meetings, because we are all working remotely. We are not on the same campus, and we don't see each other face to face, that much so we mostly talk to each other in meetings. Okay, in meetings. So if you want to ask somebody something, you ask them quickly in an email or on the chat in teams. So we use that also very often in the chat function on the teams app. If you quickly want to ask somebody something, or so everybody in our organization has got their teams app open the whole day on the screen and so on, so they will see the message pops up. So we use emails and we use the chat function in teams.

The teams app, if you quickly want to ask somebody something or so, everybody in our organization has got their teams app open the whole day, on the screen and so on, so they will see if a message pops up. So we use emails and we use the chat function in teams.

Fantastic. So how does this social interaction contribute to new decisions or ideas?

Um, well, it influenced it a lot, because all of them are formal communication, and if you quickly want to make a decision on something, um, we use some email and do a round robin, and if everybody agrees, then you don't have to even to set a meeting to discuss it. If everybody answer positively on the round robin, then we make a decision.

So essentially, there's some collaboration and consultation there?

Yes, we do the consultation, also mostly via email, because it takes less time.

Okay, can you give me an example, perhaps, of how your interactions with other managers led to the emergency of a new strategy?

I think when, when we were still maybe all working on campus for everything that happened, we set a meeting, and we get together in a boardroom and we discuss and we make a decision, and so on so post covid, and everybody went online. I think the whole structure in organizations change, because now we don't meet in boardrooms anymore. We do a quick teams meeting, but we even try to avoid teams meeting, because that also takes more time. So just dropping a email with the topic that we want to decision on and get everybody's opinion on it. Say, for instance, when, when I revise a policy, I do the draft of the policy, I send it to all the heads of schools, they reply with their comments, and I work it into the policy,

and then we finalize the policy, so we cut out a lot of discussion, lot of meetings and so on. Everything we try to streamline the structures to get things done as quickly as possible.

Fantastic. That's an excellent example. We can move on to question two, yeah. Can you describe a time when your way of thinking or perspective on a particular issue changed? So a follow up question to that is, how did this change in your mindset influence how you approached developing plans and actions to achieve specific goals or objectives. So essentially, here, I'm interested in how you approach problem solving and decision making. So maybe let me repeat the question. Can you describe a time when your way of thinking or perspective viewpoint on a particular issue changed?

Q2

Okay, I'm trying to stay on top of on top of things, so I attend a lot of online webinars, and I read a lot of articles and so on, and especially on on things related to my field of study or research or governing higher education institutions and so on. So the moment when I read somebody or article or attend a webinar, and there's something that can make processes smoother, or can make decision making smoother. I immediately try to to implement it. And sometimes you sit in a meeting and somebody just mentioned something, and you think, ah, but we can implement it, and we can do it like that. So mainly what influenced me is my interaction with other people, either in meetings or webinars, or when I then read interesting material on processes and so on. Essentially, a way of thinking is it changes at a given time because of what you are faced with. So essentially, you are adaptable. Um, yes, yes, um, even if I attend a conference and I learn something there, it influenced my decision making in future. So if I can give an example, I may, somewhere in May, I attend a community engagement conference at Roche University in Grahamstown, and that changed my whole thinking on community engagement, on tertiary education and how we must approach our research participants and communities in which we live, and how we must engage them in our research processes and so on. So it changed my whole paradigm of thinking. And since May, everything that I do, I do with what I've learnt at that conference in the back of my mind, Oh, great. That's wonderful. I think we are done with question two. We can move to question three, how do your daily routines, for example, morning meetings, planning sessions, whatever that you do on a daily basis, how do they support or hinder your ability to engage in emergent strategizing? I I don't think it hinders it. It's always time consuming to to have appointments and meetings and interactions with people, but everything that you do contributes to strategizing, because in every meeting, you pick up something that will influence your way of thinking and your strategy for next year or the next semester or so, because if people interact with you, they ask you questions, or they bring their problems to the table, or they identify barriers. So you learn from every single person that you've got interaction with and that influence your strategy

for the future. So you use the information that you get on a daily basis through interaction with other people to shape your strategy for the future.

Mm, great. Sounds great. Can you provide a specific example of how your routine either, in this instance you you said, support. Can you provide a specific example of a routine that supported your ability to develop new strategies? Yeah? Yes, the fact that we work online and that we work mostly from home, um, can can lead to something that you are always available. So every time when a person say, can we have a meeting, you accept the meeting invite, and then your meetings are scattered over the whole day, and sometimes you've got a meeting at nine o'clock and then at 1030 and then at one o'clock again, and so on. And the bits of time between meetings becomes almost empty or unproductive times because you it's not enough to actually start with a project or to make progress and so on, because you must almost jump into the next meeting. So I'm trying to to strategize also my meetings, and to say, say, for instance, I want to do all the meetings that I want to do, say, on a Monday and Thursday or whatever, or as early in the morning as possible, so that I can have the rest of the day to work uninterrupted, then on a project or read the student visas or dissertation or whatever. So since we are working online, my strategy has become too compact by meetings, either to one day per week or two days per week, or to a time slot early in the morning, one following the other one, so that I can have more uninterrupted time. So that's a practical example of what I picked up and what I'm now doing, since we are mostly working online.

Q3

Okay, I think the main influence for all my strategies, internal and external, is the vision of our organization, um, our vision and mission and what we work for. So at, we want to create wider access for students, and we want to get them ready for work, and we want the student always to be in the center of everything we do, and that influence my whole way of thinking and strategizing and so on. So I'm looking at our programmes that I ask myself, even if students apply for a specific program, for Masters or Doctoral Program, and maybe they short some experience or subjects in a qualification, I always try to see but our our vision is to wider education. How can I maybe accept this student and do breaching with the student and so on, so that the student can get access to this qualification that the student want to be on? How can we change the curriculum and make it more relevant so that it addresses the world of work. How can I spend more of my time to attend to student problems and issues and queries, so that our students feel important and listen to and so on. So the same outside the organization as well. is growing. We want to become a bigger role player in society. We want to become a university one day. So I'm trying to get more involved with other universities, get involved with research projects, with peers from other universities. Attend more CHE meetings, functions and so on, so that I can learn what's happening there. I'm going to more international and national conferences to meet academics there and to learn from there what to do to be the best, so that we can really strengthen our

profile in society out there, so it's mainly the main drive is our mission and vision, and that influence the actions that I'm taking in my strategies.

Q4

Okay, I think what what not to implement from the outside, maybe two things policies, because every qualification must be going through CHE processes, and it takes, sometimes a year, two years and so on. So if you want to change something in a curriculum or make a program more relevant, you have to go through policies and red tape and all those things. Another thing is funding. It's expensive to engage with other universities, to engage with communities and community projects outside your own institution, and to attend meetings and functions and conferences so and so. Funding is always a problem, and because we are a private institution, some public universities don't really want to work with you and build relationships with you and so on. Because there's always there that politics between public institutions and private institutions, so that sometimes is a barrier, because public institutions look down to you and they don't think that you are on the same level as they and your qualities maybe not the same as them and so on. So we still have that politics from public institutions that looks down on us as private institutions. Yeah, and then, as I've said, policies from from decision makers like the Department of HE and CHE and then definitely funding, because we as privates, we don't get any external funding like the public institution, so we work with very limited money.

Yeah, say, for instance, I want to my strategy is that we want to be national role player on research level. When you are in a public institution, you can just go there and university will pay if I want to attend to conference or even publish a paper. I must pay my own conference fees. I must pay my own accommodation. I must pay my own transport. So there's no funding to really give life to the strategies that you've made on paper. I want to become a bigger role player in South Africa as a research from a private institution, but there's no funding to do it. I have to do it out of my own pocket. That's a practical example.

Q5

Yeah, I think it plays a big role, um, colleagues and their opinions and their way of thinking and so on, because you know that if you formulate a strategy, it need to be approved on the next level by your seniors or manager above You, and it must even be accepted by your peers. So the moment when maybe you've got some out of the box ideas for a new strategy, but you know your peers won't buy into it, or you know that your superior won't approve that strategy, then it inhibits your freedom to formulate that strategy. So from the beginning, you only formulate strategies that you know will be accepted by your peers and by your superiors. So it has got a huge influence in the way that you strategize and that you think and so on. But everything happens within the framework of your organisation's vision and mission and long term goals and everything and so on.

But apart from that, you also think about the personalities of people working with you and that you are reporting to, and that also influence the way in which you formulate a strategy.

it definitely influence emerging strategies power dynamics, because some sometimes you just get over ruled. If you put something on the table and the superior would just say, No, I'm not even going to think about that, or I'm not going even to listen to you about that, or whatever. So it is got in, it's it's got a huge influence, and it is a barrier, the power, the level on which you are and to whom you report to, and so on. So power dynamics are real and alive.

Appendix H: Filled in Written narrative MM4

Written Narrative

Participant Information:

Name:

Position/Title: Discipline leader

Department: Entrepreneurship, Innovation and Technology

Date: 09 Oct 2024

Thank you for participating in this research study. The following prompts help you reflect on and document your experiences related to the micro-foundational practices of managers influencing emergent strategising in Higher Private Education Institutions (PHEI). Please provide as much detail as possible in your responses. You can type your responses directly into this document or use another format that is comfortable for you.

Narrative Prompts

1. Daily Routines

Prompt: Describe a typical day at work. Focus on your daily routines, habits, practices and or activities. How do these routines contribute to your strategic decision-making (strategic outcomes) and emergent strategising?

Response:

Formal Meetings and Task Prioritization

My daily routines primarily involve meetings, such as weekly campus meetings where all managers come together to discuss deliverables. I also attend quarterly management (MANCO) meetings with top management, where we discuss broader institutional strategies and issues that affect various departments. These formal meetings are essential for ensuring everyone is aligned with the institution's goals.

Challenges in Meeting Overload

While meetings are important, they can also consume much of my time, making it difficult to focus on other strategic tasks. I find that meetings are often scheduled out of routine, even when they don't add significant value, which detracts from time I could spend on emergent strategizing.

Using Email and Microsoft Teams for Efficiency

On a daily basis, I also rely on email and Microsoft Teams to track progress, communicate with different departments, and manage ongoing tasks. However, organizing and prioritizing emails is key to managing the influx of information effectively. I have developed a system of color-coding emails to prioritize urgent tasks, which has helped me react quickly to emerging issues.

2. Social Interaction

Prompt: Reflect on your interactions with colleagues, subordinates, and other stakeholders. How do these social interactions drive or influence emergent strategising? Provide specific examples if possible.

Response:

Collaborative Decision-Making

Social interaction with other managers, both formally in meetings and informally through face-to-face conversations, plays a critical role in decision-making. One example is when I collaborated with module leads and library staff to address the issue of students lacking financial calculators. Together, we devised a solution to purchase calculators that students could check out from the library, ensuring they had the necessary tools for their studies. This process required input from finance, library management, and campus leadership, highlighting the importance of teamwork in strategy development.

Teamwork and Problem-Solving

Teamwork is essential in my role, as decisions made at the management level impact various departments. For instance, informal discussions often provide new perspectives that help streamline processes or develop new ideas. However, to ensure everyone is on the same page, we always formalize decisions through emails or Teams updates, reinforcing transparency and accountability.

3. Cognition and Decision-Making

Prompt: Consider the cognitive processes (thought processes, reflections and cognitive strategies) you use in your role. How do your thoughts, perceptions, and decision-making processes influence emergent strategising? Describe any particular strategies or approaches you use.

Response:

Shift from Proactive to Reactive Thinking

One significant shift in my cognitive approach occurred when I transitioned from the role of academic manager to discipline leader. Previously, I had a proactive mindset, planning ahead to address potential issues. However, as academic manager, I had to adapt to a more reactive approach, dealing with challenges as they arose. This shift was difficult at first, but I learned to prioritize tasks and organize my workflow to handle unforeseen issues more effectively.

Adapting Strategic Planning to New Realities

As part of this cognitive shift, I implemented a color-coding system for emails to prioritize urgent tasks and manage my workload. This change helped me adapt my strategic planning to the demands of a role where I couldn't always plan ahead. I now approach strategic planning with a more flexible mindset, ready to adapt as new challenges arise.

Reflective Practice:

4. Organisational and external contextual Factors

Prompt: Identify and reflect on any organisational structures, policies, or external factors that significantly impact your strategic practices. How do these factors influence your ability to engage strategic decisions and in emergent strategising?

Response:

Internal Bureaucracy Slowing Decision-Making

A key internal factor that influences emergent strategizing at our institution is bureaucracy. Decision-making is often delayed due to the need to consult with multiple departments and wait for feedback. For example, making a simple decision about a module often requires input from several stakeholders, which can take days or even weeks to finalize.

External Constraints from the Council on Higher Education (CHE)

Externally, the Council on Higher Education (CHE) plays a significant role in shaping our strategies. We must ensure that all programmes and modules comply with CHE standards, which sometimes constrains our timelines and processes. For instance, when we moved to a new campus, we had to ensure that the CHE was informed and that all accreditation requirements were met, which delayed several initiatives.

5. Role of Power

Prompt: Discuss the role of power and authority in your position. How does your use of power influence emergent strategising? Provide examples of situations where your power dynamics affected strategic outcomes.

Response:

Power Shifts Between Roles

Power dynamics became evident when I shifted from the role of academic manager to discipline leader. As academic manager, I had more authority, and colleagues responded quickly to my requests. However, in the discipline leader role, which is more focused on long-term strategy rather than daily operations, I noticed that responses from colleagues were slower, highlighting the influence of role-based authority on how tasks are prioritized.

Impact of Power on Strategic Outcomes

These power dynamics can significantly impact emergent strategizing within the institution. Managers with higher authority tend to receive quicker responses, which allows them to implement strategies more efficiently. In contrast, managers with less authority may face delays in getting the information or support they need, which can slow down the strategizing process.

Additional Reflections

Prompt: If there are any other experiences, insights, or reflections that you believe are relevant to this study and have not been covered by the above prompts, please share them here.

Response:

The balance between functional and operational tasks often requires flexibility, as I must adapt to the needs of both the campus and head office. While managing these dual responsibilities can be challenging, I believe that clear communication and collaboration across departments help mitigate potential conflicts. By fostering a culture of openness and teamwork, we can continue to improve our strategies and achieve the institution's broader goals.

Thank you for taking the time to provide these detailed narratives. Your insights are invaluable to this research. If you have any questions or need further clarification, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Appendix I: Ethical clearance

Ref #: 2023_SBL_DBL_028_FA_ 0911

Name: Ms Grace Magama

Student #: 42073790

Graduate School of Business Leadership_RERC

Date: 16/11/2023

Dear: Ms Grace Magama

Decision: Ethics Approval from
November 2023 to October 2026

Researcher: Ms Grace Magama

42073790@mylife.unisa.ac.za

Pretoria

42073790@mylife.unisa.ac.za 0789325335

Supervisor: Prof Peet Venter ; Ventep@unisa.ac.za

Emergent Strategy-Making in Higher Education Private Institutions by Managers: A Micro-
Foundational Perspective

Qualification: DBL

Thank you for the application for research ethics clearance by the Graduate School of Business Leadership_RERC for the abovementioned

research study Ethics approval is granted for three years.

The low-risk application was reviewed by Graduate School of Business Leadership_RERC on **21 August 2024** in compliance with the

Unisa Policy on Research Ethics and the Standard Operating Procedure on Research Ethics Risk Assessment.

The proposed research may now commence with the provisions that:

1. The researcher(s) will ensure that the research project adheres to the values and principles expressed in the UNISA Policy on Research Ethics.

2. Any adverse circumstance arising in the undertaking of the research project that is relevant to the ethicality of the study

should be communicated in writing to the Graduate School of Business Leadership_RERC .

3. The researcher(s) will conduct the study according to the methods and procedures set out in the approved application.

4. Any changes that can affect the study-related risks for the research participants, particularly in terms of assurances made

with regards to the protection of participants' privacy and the confidentiality of the data, should be reported to the Committee in writing, accompanied by a progress report.

5. The researcher will ensure that the research project adheres to any applicable national legislation, professional codes of

conduct, institutional guidelines and scientific standards relevant to the specific field of study. Adherence to the following

South African legislation is important, if applicable: Protection of Personal Information Act, no 4 of 2013; Children's act

no 38 of 2005 and the National Health Act, no 61 of 2003.

6. Only de-identified research data may be used for secondary research purposes in future on condition that the research

objectives are similar to those of the original research. Secondary use of identifiable human research data requires additional ethics clearance.

Page 1 of 2

7. No field work activities may continue after the expiry date (**October 2026**) submission of a completed research ethics

progress report will constitute an application for renewal, for Ethics Research Committee approval.

Additional Conditions

1. Disclosure of data to third parties is prohibited without explicit consent from Unisa.

2. De-identified data must be safely stored on password protected PCs.

3. Care should be taken by the researcher when publishing the results to protect the confidentiality and privacy of the university.

4. Adherence to the National Statement on Ethical Research and Publication practices, principle 7 referring to Social awareness, must be ensured: "Researchers and institutions must be sensitive to the potential impact of their research

on society, marginal groups or individuals, and must consider these when weighing the benefits of the research against any harmful effects, with a view to minimising or avoiding the latter where possible." Unisa will not be liable for any failure to comply with this principle.

Note

The reference number 2023_SBL_DBL_028_FA_0911 should be clearly indicated on all forms of communication with the intended research participants, as well as with the Committee.

Kind regards,

Prof N Mlitwa

Chair of Graduate School of Business Leadership_RERC

E-mail: wiltonb@unisa.ac.za

Prof P Msweli

Executive Dean / By delegation from the Executive Dean of Graduate School of Business Leadership_RERC

E-mail: mswelp@unisa.ac.za

Page 2 of 2

Appendix J: Language editing certificate

EDITING AND PROOFREADING CERTIFICATE	
	22 Osche Street The Reeds Centurion 0157 14 October 2025
TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN	
This certificate serves to confirm that I have edited Grace Magama's thesis titled, "EMERGENT STRATEGY-MAKING IN PRIVATE HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS BY MANAGERS: A MICRO-FOUNDATIONAL PERSPECTIVE."	
I found the work easy and intriguing to read. Much of my editing basically dealt with obstructionist technical aspects of language, grammar and syntax, which could have otherwise compromised smooth reading as well as the sense of the information being conveyed. I hope that the work will be found to be of an acceptable standard. I am a member of Professional Editors' Guild.	
Hereunder are my contact details:	
	
Jack Chokwe (PhD – University of Leicester (United Kingdom))	
Contact numbers: 072 214 5489	
jackchokwe@gmail.com	
www.academicproeditor.co.za	
	