

**A CO-PRODUCTION AND MULTIPLE CONSTITUENT APPROACH TO  
PERFORMANCE AND EFFECTIVENESS IN HIGHER EDUCATION**

**DAMIAN JOHN FEARON**

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## **Abstract**

There is a perceived increase in the use of internal and external indicators and measures of quality within UK universities, such as the National Student Survey and The Times HE league tables (Bryde and Leighton, 2009). This has resulted in the adoption of more corporate styles of management involving increased control (Melo, Sarrico and Radnor, 2010). This has also been referred to as a New Public Management approach (Hood, 1995). The purpose of this management approach was to rationalise government bureaucracy to a more efficient and effective state via the introduction of market mechanisms to implement policy decisions (Van Thiel and Leeuw, 2002). This policy approach was observed in the introduction of student fees and the requirement for performance data to enable informed decisions for prospective students. This has resulted in a period of turbulence within higher education, as organisations attempt to find their place within this new regime. The aim of this research is to explore this phenomenon using an action research project. This has a dual purpose; to enable the improvement of the situation of a particular higher education institute and also provide data to develop substantive and potentially generalizable theory. The theoretical perspective used is interpretive involving exploration of the perceptions of stakeholders within the case study organisation. Data were collected using participant observations and interviews. The data were analysed using a form of grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006), both initial and axial coding. The analysis produced a conceptual framework to demonstrate understanding of the context, consisting of the following categories; direction; deliver, dialogue and develop. The emergent core category relates to the impact that performance indicators, created by policy, have within an organisation. The findings have added to the organisational development and performance management knowledge domains by the production of an interpretive, substantive framework that can be used to articulate understanding of an organisational sub-unit responding to transformative policy change.

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To Elaine, Tom, Josh and Ben who are my greatest and proudest achievements, and always will be.

To my Mum and Dad who constantly remind me of the fact that you can do anything if you put your mind to it.

For my Uncle Tom, who many years ago, offered me advice to stay in education until I know what I want to do. The good news is, I still don't!

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

The purpose of this chapter is to introduce the reader to the aims of the research and the rationale that underpins it. This chapter also familiarises the audience with the context for the study and the relationship, of the research, with the central theoretical theme of organisational effectiveness. It is the changing context of the English higher education sectors that forms the backdrop of the research problem. For clarity, particular attention is given to the structure of the thesis and in particular a brief summary of the methodology and methods used is presented. The final part of the chapter discusses the potential contribution to knowledge.

The concept of organisational effectiveness has become more pertinent, within Universities in the United Kingdom, due to the increase in internal and external influences and the multiple demands made on Higher Education Institutions (HEI's) from the associated stakeholders, (Appelbaum 1997, Bryde and Leighton 2009). The research takes place in a context of a sector undergoing significant, multiple level transformation.

This chapter is structured as below in Table 1.1

Section	Theme of Interest	Comments
<b>1.1</b>	Research Aims, Rationale and Objectives	This section will provide details of the research aims and objectives.
<b>1.2</b>	Policy Context	This section will provide details of the multi-level context of the subject case study. This is critical to the research as the policy context has a significant impact on the organisation. This is the origin of accountability through outputs and information.
<b>1.3</b>	The Student Experience and Student as Consumer	This section explores how government policy potentially creates a policy framework that creates a 'market' for higher education services.
<b>1.4</b>	Higher Education Accountability and New Public Management	This section introduces the reader to the concept of accountability in higher education.
<b>1.5</b>	Thesis Structure and Summary of Methods	The structure of the thesis is provided in tabular form to allow the reader to navigate the document.
<b>1.6</b>	Contribution to Knowledge	The anticipated contribution to knowledge will be described.
<b>1.7</b>	Links to Next Chapter	A summary of the key points and its relationship with the next chapter is provided.

Table 1.1 Chapter Structure

## **1.1 Research Aims, Objectives and Rationale**

The aim of this study is to produce an interpretive, grounded theoretical framework that demonstrates understanding of the concept of organisational effectiveness in an English Higher Education Institution, through the perceptions of the key stakeholders involved.

Due to the interventionist nature of the action research strategy, the study also aims to improve the effectiveness and performance of the subject case study organisation.

### **Research Objectives**

To achieve the research aims the following objectives were established:

1. To increase theoretical sensitivity to the extant theories of organisational effectiveness;
2. To investigate and explore, organisational effectiveness through the participants' perspectives of a period of significant change in English Higher Education Policy ;
3. To improve the current situation within the case study;
4. To develop an interpretive, grounded theoretical conceptual framework to support understanding of effectiveness in the subject organisation.

### **Research Rationale**

The author of the research project is the Student Experience Enhancement Coordinator for a School within a university in England, United Kingdom. The role requires the author to ensure that the School provides students with the best learning experience possible, through the provision of improvement and enhancement initiatives. The author intends to use this action research project to enable improvement in the subject case and to add to the body of

knowledge concerning organisational effectiveness. It is these dual intentions that provide the motivation to study and enhance the subject case.

### **Research Context**

It is the effects of the changing context of English higher education, on the subject university, that acts as the catalyst for this study.

### **Case Study**

The case study is a single School within a post 1992 University based in England, United Kingdom. The university currently has approximately 25,000 students studying there on 250 degree courses, with 2,500 staff spread over three city centre campuses and it can trace its origins back to 1825.

The university is a corporate institution which has exempt charitable status granted under the terms of the Charitable Act 2011. The organisation is exempt from regulation and registration by the Charity Commission. However, the organisation must have a Principal Regulator to ensure their compliance with the appropriate charity law. The principal regulator, of the organisation, is the Higher Education Funding Council for England, this is true of all 'exempt universities in England. This is an important fact as it is this relationship and the associated policies that have an impact on the university and the higher education sector generally.

This is a purposive sample and it is chosen to help understand the phenomenon of organisational effectiveness, during a period of transformation through policy, from the social actors' perspectives, (Silverman 2010). Table 1.1 below summarises the case study and its purpose within the research process.

Sample	Description of case	Research problem	Data Sources	Investigator	Output
English HEI	Single School within a English post 1992 University	Effectiveness/Performance in multi-stakeholder, co-creation of value environment	Field study, observations, critical events and interviews	Single	Extending theory of organisational effectiveness, performance and improved performance within case study

Table 1.2: Case Study Organisation – An English Higher Education Corporation

## 1.2 Policy Context

Universities have become more concerned with their performance relative to others and the satisfaction of students. This stems from changes in higher education policy. Historically, universities were self-regulated with a light touch from government. (Shattock 2006, p.135) refers to this as “inside out” policy or “self governance” (Shattock 2008, p.182). However, recent policy has shifted the form of governance to “outside in” and this stems from the requirement to educate more, incorporate market mechanisms (via fees), improve the quality of the experience and to link the role of universities to the economic development of the country (Shattock 2006). These changes, introduced via a series of reports and white papers; The Future of Higher Education (2003); The Higher Education Act (2004); Securing a Sustainable Future for Higher Education (John Browne 2010) and Students at the Heart of the System (BIS 2016) signify the start of the explicit management of the higher education process (Hemsley-Brown and Oplatka 2006) and the

movement to marketization of the process (Molesworth *et al.* 2009) and students as consumers (Cuthbert 2010). The key regulator involved in the active management of the higher education sector is the Higher Education Funding Council for England and their role and the implications of the same are discussed in detail below.

As explained above, the case study organisation operates, as an exempt charitable corporation, within the English Higher Education sector. Higher Education providers are held to account and regulated by an operating framework that is overseen by the Higher Education Funding Council England (HEFCE) on behalf of the Business Innovation and Skills Department of the Government. The role of the Higher Education Funding Council for England is that it:

*“funds and regulates universities and colleges in England. We invest on behalf of **students and the public** to promote excellence and innovation in research, teaching and knowledge exchange”* (Department for Business Innovation and Skills 2011).

HEFCE also has a financial responsibility to “distribute public money to universities and colleges in England, incentivising excellence in research, learning and teaching and knowledge exchange” (Skills 2011).

For example, for 2015/16 the grant allocations for colleges and universities was £3,971 million apportioned as follows:

<b>Activity</b>	<b>Grant Allocation</b>
Teaching*	£1,418 million
Research	£1,558 million
Knowledge exchange	£160 million
Non-consolidated transitional funding for research	£52 million
Funding for national facilities and initiatives	£130 million
Capital funding	£603 million
Postgraduate Support Scheme	£50 million
* The figure for teaching includes funds for student opportunity and other targeted allocations. Refer to HEFCE Funding documents.	

Table 1.3: Breakdown of HEFCE funding for 2015-16

### 1.2.1 Quality Assurance

One of the conditions of receiving grant support from HEFCE, is that HEIs must register with the Quality Assurance Agency. The purpose of the Quality Assurance Agency, through the Quality Code is to be, “the definitive reference point for all UK Higher Education providers. It makes clear what Higher Education providers are required to do, what they can expect of each other and what the general public can expect of them (Quality Assurance Agency 2008). The Quality Assurance Agency also assists “higher education providers to maintain academic standards”, to help in conversations with stakeholders about outcomes and attributes these are related to the concept of qualification descriptors. The purpose is to also provide “common understanding of expectations associated with typical qualifications” and “important points of reference to higher education providers and external examiners”.

At the national level, sharing of best practice is carried out by bodies such as the Higher Education Academy. “The Higher Education Academy is the national body that champions teaching quality” and their mission is:

“The HEA provides value to the higher education sector by focusing attention on the contribution of teaching to the wider student learning experience. We do this through accreditation of the good standing and teaching professionalism of individuals and through recognition of institutional commitment to the professional development of their teaching staff. This recognition is enabled by the HEA’s lead in the development and on-going management of the UK Professional Standards Framework” (Higher Education Academy).

The Academy is funded by the four funding councils of England, Northern Ireland, Wales and Scotland (HEFCE) and by subscription from universities; the subscription provides the opportunity to gain access to networks of expertise, such as the HEA.

### **1.2.2 Information Provision**

Another (J Browne 2010) key condition, that has an impact on the subject organisation, is the mandatory requirement of HEFCE for the provision of information by the subject organisation to enable transparency and accountability. Another intended use of the information is to provide prospective students with information to enable informed decisions prior to making their choice of university.

Two pivotal reports were published at the outset of this research project; the Browne Report (2010) and a white paper ‘Students at the Heart of the System’. These reports altered the funding arrangements for study at university and fundamentally altered the relationship students have with universities. This occurrence is another factor that has changed the context of the operations of higher education.

### 1.3 The Student Experience and Student as Consumer

The basic tenet, of these reports, is that the student should be at the core of the higher education process, both financially responsible and as the arbiter of value. It is the students' perceptions of their experience, together with the external monitoring of quality by the Higher Education Council, through the QAA, that will determine the effectiveness of the organisation (J Browne 2010).

One of the intentions of the Browne Report was to increase the information available to prospective students so as to improve their decision making when choosing a place to study. This information can be accessed via a UK Government supported comparison website, Unistats. The information is provided primarily in the form of Key Information Sets. These data sets enable students to compare Universities and Colleges using specific criteria contained within the data sets. The specific criteria relate to the following categories:

*National Student Survey Results* – a survey run by IPSOS MORI on behalf of the Higher Education Funding Council for England (and includes Wales and Northern Ireland). This survey gathers *opinion*, from final year students, of their experience of their course using a questionnaire containing twenty two questions. The questions cover six educationally related aspects and these are; teaching; assessment and feedback; academic support; organisation and management; learning resources; personal development. The final question asks the students their opinion of their 'overall satisfaction' with the course. This question is not a function of the other twenty one questions; it is an individual question that requires the student to consider their overall experience, over the entire duration of the course, and encapsulate it within a five point Likert scale. The scale consists of at the lower end of the scale definitely disagree and the higher end, definitely agree (there is also a not applicable option, point three). For the purposes of data analysis, a response at point three is considered not satisfied. This is a contentious issue as it

means students cannot consider a category as being not applicable to them despite circumstance to the contrary.

*Destination of Leavers from Higher Education Survey* – a survey that asks students what they are doing six months after graduation. This acts as a proxy indicator of the value of university study as it shows the proportion of students who are working including the level of the employment, those who continue with further study and those who are unemployed.

*How the course is taught* – this indicates the types of educational activities the student would expect from a given university and includes lists of; lectures; tutorials; seminars, external visits; placement visits. Again this is a proxy indicator of the learning activities, patterns of study and learning experience available at different institutions.

*How the course is assessed* - this provides an indication of the proportion of written exams, coursework and practical exams is recorded.

*Course Accreditation* – this provides data as to whether the course is accredited by a Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Body. These bodies will accredit courses that meet their professional standards criteria and therefore students who are successful should be able to progress to achieve professional status in their chosen field. This is also a proxy indicator of external validation.

*Course Costs* – the current tuition fee and likely accommodation costs for the particular university.

These data sets use information derived from the following 'official' information sources, such as; Higher Education Statistics Agency; The Skills Funding Agency and IPSOS MORI (who carry out the survey on behalf of HEFCE).

This implicitly limits the use of this information to the time period prior to entering higher education. Another contemporary use of such data sets is to inform the organisational improvement and enhancement process. This relates closely to the concept of organisational learning and also to the process of how the organisation is managed. The intended result should be a more market (demand) led and responsive higher education sector. The need for oversight, transparency and control found within this structure causes a focus on particular aspects of the organisations results and outcomes and behaviours (Department for Business Innovation and Skills 2011).

#### **1.4 Higher Education Accountability and New Public Management**

Associated with the use of indicators to inform choice and decision making, discussed above, there is also evidence of a migration to the use of more *corporate* management styles involving, for example, increased control, within organisations. (Melo *et al.* 2010) describe a movement from professional and academic accountability to more managerial approaches; for example, the use of key performance indicators such as those found on the performance dashboard, within the subject University. This dashboard displays a plethora of indicators such as; student retention rates, student progression rates and success rates.

The contemporary issue of accountability of publicly funded organisations, as discussed in (Melo *et al.* 2010) is apparent in the above examples and these indicators exert pressure to perform on university staff. This issue is related to the concept of 'New Public Management', (Hood 1991) and can be explained by the fact that publicly funded service organisations exchanged more autonomy, in their decision making, for more accountability to the public and other stakeholders. This accountability is a difficult and new concept for Universities to comprehend and include within their *raison d'être*. This focus on transparency and the observability of outputs and auditing is a symptom of "results based management" (Van Thiel and Leeuw 2002). This phenomenon can be seen in all areas of the public sector. For example, the

National Health Service report ambulance response time using two categories; immediate life threatening category Red 1 respond within 8 minutes and also in education, Secondary School Achievement and Attainment Tables record schools GCSE A\* - C (or equivalent). These are publicly available data to ensure transparency and accountability for performance.

The New Public Management philosophy attempted to lessen the two central tenets of historical public sector management styles by prescribing a reduction of the perceived differences between the public and private sector. (Hood 1995) offers a description of the shift in four main areas of management as shown in the table below:

<b>Public Sector</b>	<b>New Public Management</b>
Focus on policy	Focus on (active) management
Focus on Process	Focus on Outputs
Hierarchy	Competition
Fixed Pay	Variable Pay

Table 1.4 Shift in Focus of Management Styles

There are also other internal student feedback mechanisms, for example; Module Appraisal Surveys, Boards of Studies and Student Surveys, for first year, second year and postgraduate students internally. The influence on the management and administration of HEIs is intensified, from these external sources, such as the National Student Survey (NSS), Key Information Sets (KIS) and in particular, Higher Education league tables, such as those found in The Times Higher Education and The Guardian. As previously described these are meant to be informational resources that enable rational student choice prior to joining a university. But their actual impact is very different within organisations.

Potentially, the viability of Higher Education Institutions could be deemed to be open to the vagaries of market mechanisms, (O'Neil and Palmer 2004)

that is, the student's perception of the relationship between price (fees paid) and *perceived* value, that is, the student's experience. This could infer that HEI's will be required to develop and adapt to meet both market and stakeholder demands. It may be this ability to develop and adapt that may determine the feasibility of higher education organisations. This research project is concerned with the impact of this changing process on the actors associated with the learning process and the student experience.

### 1.5 Thesis Structure

The thesis is presented, as Table 1.3 below; the action and research aspect of the research project had many iterative cycles and these are reflected in the narrative account in chapter 6. However, they are presented within the formal report as two major cycles that represent the initial phase of data collection and analysis to produce the sensitising conceptual framework (phase 1). This sensitising framework was used to enable the data collection process of theoretical sampling during phase 2.

Chapter	Purpose
1	<b>Introduction:</b> The purpose of this section is to introduce the reader to the aims of the research and the rationale that underpins it. This chapter also familiarises the audience with the context for the study and the relationship, of the research, with the central theoretical theme of organisational effectiveness.
2	<b>Outset Literature Review:</b> The purpose of the outset literature review within this study, is to act as an introduction to the study and to provide theoretical context within the organisational effectiveness knowledge domain and to scope and frame the problem (Easterby-Smith <i>et al.</i> 2015).
3	<b>Research Approach:</b> This chapter describes the overall research approach used in this research project, it is heavily

	<p>informed by the work of;(Crotty 1998);(Blumer 1969);(Corbin and Strauss 2008);(Charmaz 2006);(Coghlan and Brannick 2014); (Saunders <i>et al.</i> 2012); Bryman and Bell (2007); Silverman (2010) and Creswell (2009).</p> <p><b>Research Strategy: Action Research:</b> This section provides a descriptive account of and justification for the strategy chosen for this research, that is, Action Research. An action research methodology enables “dual imperatives” to take place, and they are that the action taken should result in improvement in the perceived problem area of the subject organisation and secondly research; there should be a contribution to knowledge in the substantive area.</p> <p><b>Research Methods: Grounded Theory:</b> This chapter will provide details of the various methods of data collection and analysis. These techniques includes the use of <b>grounded theory</b> as an analytical technique and in particular the use of theoretical and purposeful sampling</p>
4	<p><b>Core Action Research Cycles:</b> The purpose of this chapter is to present a narrative account of the interventions undertaken during the <i>action</i> period of the action research project including some analysis in the form of reflections carried out by the researcher.</p>
5	<p><b>Core Thesis Cycle 1:</b> The purpose of this chapter is to elaborate on phase 4 ‘evaluating the action’ by providing an account of the core thesis cycle 1, this relates to the <i>thesis</i> aspect of the project; the reflective and theoretical feature.</p>
6	<p><b>Core Thesis Cycle 2:</b> The purpose of this chapter is to provide the reader with a description of the data collected during phase 2 of the Thesis Research Cycle.</p>
7	<p><b>Discussion of Theoretical Framework:</b> The purpose of this chapter is to present a theoretical framework that demonstrates understanding of the problem situation.</p>
8	<p><b>Conclusions:</b> The purpose of this chapter is to summarise the</p>

	research process and report the main findings, including their significance.
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Table 1.5 Thesis Structure

## Summary of Methodology and Methods

The research approach is interpretive in nature and uses a form of social constructionism; symbolic interactionism in particular (Blumer 1969). It uses the construction of meanings, by the participants, to achieve understanding of the organisational development phenomenon within the subject case study. The research uses an action research methodology as this enables action to be taken that should result in improvement in the perceived problem area of the subject organisation and secondly research to be embarked upon and therefore a contribution to knowledge in the substantive area of organisational effectiveness (McKay and Marshall 2001 p 46); (Zuber-Skerritt and Perry 2002).

The data collection and analysis section of the research process is undertaken using grounded theory procedures at its core. Grounded theory is a systematic, methodological and analytical process used to generate substantive theory from emergent data within a given context. It consists of a logical series of research activities that begin the generation of data; a sequential and iterative routine of analysis – that starts with open coding, progresses to axial coding, the identification of a core category and the generation of theory.

### 1.6 Intended Contribution to Knowledge

The intended contribution to knowledge is the provision of a grounded theory that will demonstrate understanding of the actions of the social actors in this particular case study (Charmaz 2006). The central phenomenon of interest is organisational development and effectiveness in the context of a higher education institute responding to transformational change within its sector.

## **1.7 Summary and Links to Next Chapter**

This chapter introduced the research aims and objectives and briefly reviewed the context of the case study.

The next chapter provides the outset literature review and the purpose of this section is to increase the theoretical sensitivity of the researcher and to inform the reader of the appropriate body of existing knowledge relating to the phenomenon under study (Birks and Mills 2011).

## 2. OUTSET LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Introduction

The purpose of the outset literature review within this study, is to act as an introduction to the study and to provide theoretical context within the organisational effectiveness knowledge domain and to scope and frame the problem (Easterby-Smith *et al.* 2015).

This section appraises the extant literature with regard to Organisational Effectiveness, Organisational Performance, Organisational Development and Change and Projects as intervention mechanisms. The intention is not to provide a comprehensive literature review, due to the interpretive and emergent nature of the research methodology. The overall intention is to report the findings, interpretations and understanding of the researcher and to not be bounded by extant literature and authors (Charmaz 2006). The key themes of this knowledge domain are identified and appraised to provide the researcher with “theoretical sensitivity” (Charmaz 2006 p 135). The purpose of the literature review is also to contextualise the study for the reader (Dunne 2011).

Table 2.1 indicates the chapter structure and the key theoretical themes discussed.

Section	Theme of Interest	Comments
2.1	Purpose of the Outset Literature Review	The purpose is to act as an introduction to the study and to provide theoretical context within the organisational effectiveness knowledge domain. The intention is not to provide a comprehensive literature review, due to the interpretive and emergent nature of the research process.

<b>2.2</b>	Organisational Effectiveness and Development	This section will provide critical appraisal of the various definitions of organisational effectiveness and organisational development generally and OD/OE in HEI context. Identify the seminal texts and authors.
<b>2.3</b>	Performance, Performance Measurement and Performance Management	This section will provide critical appraisal of the various definitions of organisational performance and OP/OPM in HEI context. Identify the seminal texts and authors.
<b>2.4</b>	Projects and Projects as Intervention Mechanisms	This section explores the use of projects as intervention mechanisms to effect change within organisations.
<b>2.5</b>	Summary and Links to Next Chapter	This chapter will summarise the findings from the extant literature and therefore provide direction for the research project.

Table 2.1 Chapter Structure

The purpose of a literature review is determined by the research approach; broadly speaking, deductive or inductive (Saunders *et al.* 2012). A deductive approach requires the identification of the appropriate and relevant theories and associated variables, which may include at the beginning, the creation of a theoretical framework and this is followed by the collection of data to test the appropriate theories and concepts found within the framework. More inductive and interpretive forms of research require an acceptance that the research process will be led by the situational data. This process can be informed by extant literature, of the particular knowledge domain, but it should not be limited by it (Creswell 2009, p.26) also refers to the use of literature in qualitative studies as “learning from participants” and not allowing the literature and theory to become prescriptive in the interrogation of the participants. This is an important consideration when using grounded theory as it is the emergent data that forms the basis of the demonstration of understanding in the particular context.

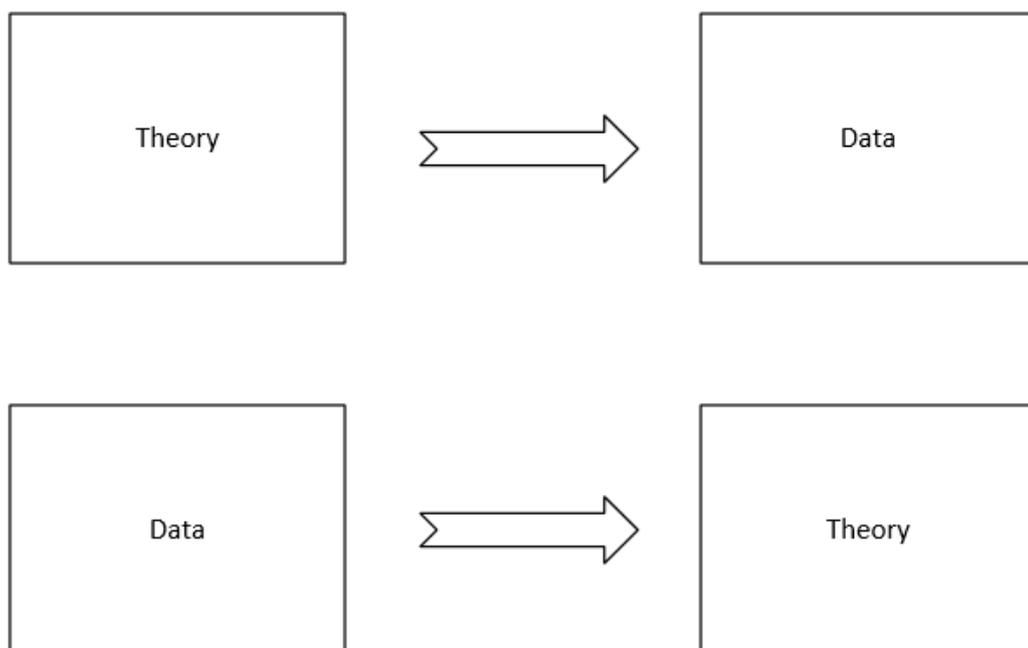


Figure 2.1 Data from Theory or Theory from Data

(Eisenhardt 1989) explains the importance of defining a research question at the outset of case study research and also discusses the role of a priori knowledge and how it can be used to influence emergent forms of research.

(Eisenhardt 1989) also suggests that extant literature should be used to provide a firmer empirical grounding for the emerging theory. However, this view is qualified with the observation that extant theoretical concepts are only provisional, that is, open to further and different interpretation, within inductive and theory building research, as opposed to theory testing research. Theory building research should begin “as close as possible to the ideal of no theory under consideration and no hypothesis to test” (Eisenhardt 1989, p.536). Extant literature should be referred to and used to identify some important variables but not “about specific relationships between variables and theories as much as possible” (Eisenhardt 1989, p.536). The following study of the extant literature is an attempt to increase sensitivity to the organisational effectiveness knowledge domain, to identify the key themes associated with the research problem of organisational effectiveness and performance and as part of the problem scoping process.

The extant literature was used at the beginning of the research process to improve theoretical sensitivity; it was not carried out to determine all there is to know about a particular concept. A rigid theoretical framework was not used as it was believed that this may shape the research process too much (Corbin and Strauss 2008). This is a difficult process to undertake and the scope of the review is critical as it must be enough to provide sufficient knowledge to be aware of the data but not so much as to determine what is observed.

(Patton 1990a) suggests that reviewing the literature can be problematic in qualitative forms of research as the process could introduce bias and limit the attentiveness to the emergent data of the particular case. The literature was used initially to provide familiarity with the initial key themes, but it is important to be open at all times to the data and an intensive literature review at this stage may provide too much influence on the research process and in particular the emergent data (Corbin and Strauss 2008). The notion of sensitivity is critical to this research process as the research needs to be open to the data but there is acceptance that undertaking an initial literature

review will support the process of recognising relevant data for the analysis process and for the organisational development knowledge domain.

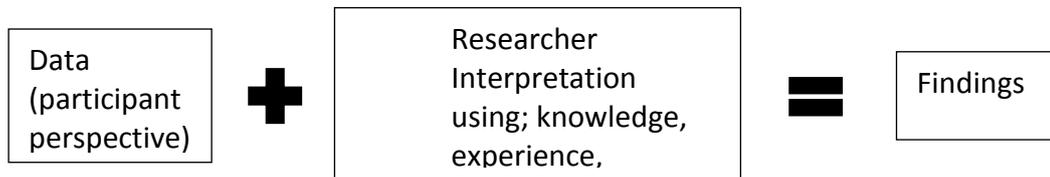


Figure 2.2 Diagrammatic Representation of Sensitivity (Corbin and Strauss, 2010)

A systematic literature review was undertaken using a planned approach, as prompted by (Saunders *et al.* 2012) and (Bryman and Bell 2007). The literature review was guided by the research problem, the overall research aim and the initial observational data which suggested that the research problem of organisational effectiveness was related to the use of performance data in the form of key performance indicators. Therefore, the research aim and initial data provided focus for the literature review on the following subjects and knowledge domains; organisational development and effectiveness, which then led to performance and performance management. The project as change mechanism is included here as the initial action undertaken was the creation of a project to align the case study with the university strategy. These themes were initially searched broadly and then more particularly in relation to universities. This process is described in the table as presented by (Saunders *et al.* 2012).

<i>Parameter</i>	<i>Broader Focus</i>	<i>Particular Focus</i>
<b>Language of Publications</b>	UK and US English	UK English
<b>Subject Areas</b>	Organisational Effectiveness Organisational Change and Development Performance Management Projects as Intervention Mechanisms	Organisations Generally with UK Universities

<b>Business Sector</b>	General Business Organisations	UK Universities as Organisations
<b>Geographical Area</b>	Global	UK
<b>Publication Period</b>	Last 10 years plus seminal texts	Last 5 years (post Browne Report)
<b>Literature Type</b>	Journal Papers, Conference Papers, Books and Technical Papers	Refereed Journals and Books

Table 2.2 Parameters of Research

A relevance tree or mindmap was produced that enabled the development of the relationships between the initial relevant topics, (Saunders *et al.* 2012).

The key themes and the associated authors are presented in the table below:

Theme of Interest	Key Author(s)
<b>Organisational Effectiveness</b> Goal Based Approach Systems Based Approach Multiple Constituency Approach	Cameron (1986); Zammuto (1982) (Connolly <i>et al.</i> 1980); Georgopolous and Tannenbaum (1957); Simon (1997); Pellegrinelli and Bowman (1994)
<b>Organisational Development and Change</b>	Franco and Bourne (2003); Lewin (1951); Barnett and Carroll (1995); Weick and Quinn (1999); Pettigrew, Woodman and Cameron (2001); Cicimil (1999); Appelbaum (1997)

<p><b>Performance, Performance Measurement and Performance Management</b></p>	<p>Radnor and Barnes (2007); Cameron (1978); Melo, Sarrico and Radnor (2010); O'Neil and Palmer (2004); Kaplan and Norton (1992); Pfeffer and Sutton (1999); Neely, Gregory and Platts (2005); Alves et al (2010); Neely, Adams and Crow (2001); Neely (2004); Kennerley and Neeley (2003);</p>
<p><b>Projects and Projects as Intervention Mechanisms</b></p>	<p>Winter (2007); McElroy (1996); Weick and Quinn (1999); Pellegrinelli and Bowman (1994); Smith and Winter (2007); Artto et al (2007); Winter et al (2006); Weick and Quinn (1999).</p>

Table 2.3 Key Literature Themes and Authors

## 2.2 Organisational Effectiveness and Development

Judging the effectiveness of an organisation is difficult, due to it being subjective in nature and therefore choosing the dimensions by which to judge an organisation's effectiveness is problematic (Cameron 1986); (Oghojafor *et al.* 2012); (Baruch and Ramalho 2006). A structured literature review undertaken by (Lecy *et al.* 2012) found that of the 64 papers reviewed 43 did give a definition of effectiveness, thereby demonstrating the difficulty in a singular definition. All work related to organisational development, organisational theory, adaptation and change is ultimately about this difficult concept effectiveness, (Cameron 1986). It is this premise that underpins this research project. It is about performance and effectiveness primarily from the perspective of those directly involved in the arena of learning; the academic staff and the students.

Historically, there are a number of definitions of organisational effectiveness and they can be classified under the following headings; goal based; systems based.

### **2.2.1 Goal Based**

Most organisations create goals and they are usually found in the mission, purpose and core values of the organisation. Within the subject organisation this is defined as: “*our mission is to serve and enrich our students, clients and communities by providing opportunities for advancement through education, training, research and the transfer of knowledge.*”

An organisation can therefore be defined as being effective if the organisational objectives are attained (Oghojafor *et al.* 2012). These objectives are ordinarily defined by those in a position of authority or power (Barnard 1938, cited in Zammuto, 1982 p22; (Connolly *et al.* 1980)). There is a close link here between goals and measurable, explicit outcomes. This definition is observed, within the case study, by the use of key performance indicators, for example, the measurement of the number of 2:1 or first class degree classifications awarded or the student retention rates. These are actually proxy measures of effective performance as they imply that teaching has been effective if these measures are as they should be, as determined by somebody in authority. However, the factors affecting these outcomes, the educational processes, are varied and may only be spuriously related to the outputs. They also do not measure or fully consider the inputs, resources and otherwise, that account for the given results. For example, it does not explicitly consider the efforts and contribution of the agents involved.

### **Systems Based**

The systems approach does take a more holistic approach to organisational effectiveness. It developed out of a social sciences approach to organisations. This approach considered the required efforts, of the actors involved, in the process to ensure they were not extended beyond their

capabilities (Georgopoulos and Tannenbaum, 1957, cited in Zammuto, 1982 p22).

### **2.2.2 Administrative Effectiveness**

Another alternative definition of effectiveness, that considers organisational efficiency from an administrative perspective, is posited by (Simon 1997) and it provides critical analysis of the four generally accepted “principles of administration” and these are:

*“Administrative efficiency is increased by a specialisation of the task among the group.*

*Administrative efficiency is increased by arranging the members of the group in a determinate hierarchy of authority*

*Administrative efficiency is increased by limiting the span of control at any point in the hierarchy to a small number*

*Administrative efficiency is increased by grouping the workers, for purposes of control, according to (a) purpose, (b) process, (c) clientele, or (d) place.”*

The intention of *specialisation* is to improve efficiency (effectiveness!?) however (Simon 1997, p.30) argues that is too “simplistic” as an organisation can operate with employees performing different tasks, but performing these tasks in an inefficient or ineffective way. Simon argues that the key is to specialise in a way that will lead to effectiveness. The key question then becomes effective in what? This is particularly pertinent in the case study organisation as the organisation has several goals; teaching and learning; research; industrial engagement and civic engagement. These objectives are the main pillars of the subject organisation’s strategy.

The efficiency of an organisation is also related to how it is arranged, usually in some form of hierarchy or relational form. This relational form is used to enable control and authority. The notion being that employees should accept ‘orders’ from their superiors. But Simon argues that command can also be abused due to its conflict with specialisation as the specialists, for a particular

process, research for example, may inform the role of an individual and therefore break the rule of 'unity of command', that is, one master. This difficulty can be found due to the absence of a defined process for the resolution of this conflict. Empirically this has been observed in the host organisation and is evident in the conflict between the multiple goals and responsibilities of the actors involved. Academic members of staff are expected to teach to a diverse range of students; HNC, Level 4 to level 6 undergraduate; Level 7 Masters degree; PhD Supervision; Research including conference papers, journal papers, academic text books; industrial networking to ensure the currency of the vocational teaching. Students also have a varied portfolio of objectives including; attending lectures and tutorials; laboratory work; project work; studying including reading; working part time; working full time, social diary, family and personal time. This demonstrates just how difficult it is to judge effectiveness in this particular organisational context.

The goal, system and efficiency based approaches make the assumption that there is an appropriate, single set of criteria and consequently a single way that will result in an effective organisation (Connolly *et al.* 1980). This is not the case and particularly not in an organisation with approximately 25,000 students and approximately 2,500 staff members!

(Simon 1997) also posits that the application of a single theory to the analysis of, and recommendations for, organisational efficiency is misguided due to the number of contradictions created and criteria omitted. Simon suggests that "all the relevant diagnostic criteria be identified" (p.43). This would advocate that a broad understanding of the given context is required, together with their respective levels of importance as demonstrated through their relative weighting. Simon advocates organisational analysis through the identification of a series of concepts, which are supported by theory, to enable a rich description of the organisation to emerge. These concepts to be beneficial, during the analysis, must be "operational" (p. 43) that is recognisable or "correspond to empirically observable facts or situations".

This is provided, during this research, via the creation of the 'sensitising concepts' framework at the end of the first phase of observation.

The literature appears to conclude that organisational effectiveness cannot be singular, as soon as multiple social actors are involved there will be multiple perspectives and therefore no particular view of effectiveness. This is usually overcome by the use of power and authority to determine choice of what is important!

### **2.2.3 Multiple Perspective**

The multiple perspective view of effectiveness that came to the fore in the 1970s considers that effectiveness is a construct of the many actors involved in, and associated with, the organisational processes and their individual judgements or states of satisfaction (Oghojafor *et al.* 2012). The main issue for consideration is that it is inappropriate for organisations to be judged on singular criteria (Herman and Renz 2008).

It is the perception of the main actors involved in the educational process; the academic staff and the students, of the interaction between the objectives of the organisation, the personal goals of the actors; the intervention strategies to improve performance and the operational activities stage that this research project studies; the point where plans become an operational reality, as discussed in (Pellegrinelli and Bowman 1994).

Strategies and awareness of the requirement to change, usually provided through feedback mechanisms and performance indicators, are useful, or are effective, only when new processes become operational within the organisational context, that is, at the point where the work is done (Franco and Bourne 2003). It is at this point that value is created; where the work is done to achieve the organisational and multiple individual goals. This, therefore requires the organisation to change in some way in response to feedback at the appropriate level, that is, where value is added for the particular stakeholders.

## 2.2.4 Organisational Development and Change

Within the literature there is a recognition that there are different types of change experienced by those in organisations. The epitome of change being the 'episodic' change model, proposed by Lewin (1951) – unfreeze, change and refreeze model. This model infers that following analysis, the current situation requires improvement; this is then followed by reparation and then a return to a new and improved mode of operation that occurs once more in a state of equilibrium.

An alternative perspective on change is to focus on how the process is undertaken within the organisation (Barnett and Carroll 1995). This study examines both of these perspectives, within the subject organisation, in order to determine both what will enable effective performance and how change can best be brought about to implement what is important.

Another perspective on change is that of continuous and evolutionary change that demonstrates accrued benefits (Weick and Quinn 1999), (Pettigrew *et al.* 2001). This type of change infers a more creative, adaptive and more agile organisation that is more responsive to its stakeholders. This responsiveness is enabled by "tightly coupled interdependencies" these relationships may be found in organisations that consist of close community associations. The responsiveness refers to the limited time lag between the observation of an issue and the corrective action being taken (Weick and Quinn 1999). Within a HEI there are time lag issues observed, due to the cyclical nature of the academic years and the process of feedback collection. Depending on the nature of the perceived deficiency corrective action may only be able to be undertaken that will benefit, at best, the students in the next academic year. This is also conditional on the change being beneficial to the next cohort of students with their own perspectives on value.

The requirement for organisations to change is well documented and defined in the literature. Organisations usually change in response to both internal and external factors. This research project focuses on all of the areas

highlighted by (Pettigrew *et al.* 2001) as being ‘underdeveloped’ within the study of organisational change:

- “(1) The examination of multiple contexts and levels of analysis.*
- (2) The inclusion of time, history, process and action*
- (3) The link between change processes and organisational performance outcomes*
- (4) The investigation of international and cross cultural comparisons*
- (5) The receptivity, customisation, sequencing, pace and episodic versus continuous change processes, and*
- (6) The partnership between scholars and practitioners”*

This research will focus in particular on the implications of multiple perceptions of value (1), over an extended period of time; this longitudinal study is intended to be five years (2). It will also focus on the link between interventions made in the action cycles and reflection on the improvement of the process (3). The project will also observe the impact of the change process and the impact this has on the social group (5). The researcher, although a participant, will also adopt the role of consultant when determining the nature of the interventions or action to take in response to observed data (6).

(Cicmil 1999, p.6) calls attention to the major cues on the theme of change including positioning the intervention project within the three concepts of “strategy, structure and processes”; “the transformation process” and the removal of “impediments”. This reinforces the notion that change occurs within a context and this cannot be ignored. The context of change projects is usually a “socio-technical system”, that is, a complex and changing environment of technology, accepted systems and processes and social actors with varying goals, motivation and values (Appelbaum 1997, p.452). Cicmil’s work concluded that there are three deficiencies in the process of organisational change; “what, how and why”. The “what” of the intervention refers to clarity being required for the outputs of the project and how the

outputs will be measured. The “how” refers to better consideration to be afforded to the process or events required to produce the required outputs and finally the “why” alludes to improving the organisations appreciation of the aim of the intervention.

### **2.3 Performance, Performance Measurement and Performance Management**

This study is ultimately about creating an effective organisation and enabling performance for all stakeholders involved. Effectiveness is particularly viewed through the lens of the social actors within, and how they perceive the ability of the subject organisation to improve or facilitate positive performance. It is particularly about how organisations facilitate performance and therefore perceived effectiveness for all stakeholders concerned. The research project focuses on how the social actors, in the subject organisation, perceive effectiveness, performance and particularly the process of development and improvement.

Performance is about the effectiveness of an organisation to meet stakeholder demands. (Cameron 1978, p.540) states that “effectiveness is generally the ultimate dependant variable in research on organisations” and considers it to be about the difference in “high quality (effective) performance and poor quality (ineffective) performance”. As we have seen in the introductory chapter, the regulatory, overseeing agencies (‘inside out’) and the student (bottom up) (Shattock 2008) will be the assessors of effectiveness.

(Cameron 1978) also discusses the difficulty in defining effectiveness due to the changing conceptualisation of organisations through the different use of metaphors. The subject organisation, and the sector at large, is currently going through such a re-conceptualisation due to the changing nature of the Higher Education policy and funding landscapes. (Melo *et al.* 2010, p.234) discuss the “unprecedented pressures to reform universities” particularly the movement to a “mass higher education system” although the latter may be

altering again due to the fee structure proposed by the current coalition government (Browne 2010).

(Cameron 1978) also considered the choice of indicators as being based on the “values and preferences of individuals” and in the current environment that seems to have been placed in the hands of the overseeing agents and ultimately students. (O'Neil and Palmer 2004, p.39) confirm this when they discuss the notion of service quality in higher education and the difficulty in choosing “the most appropriate measurement tools in order to gain a better understanding of the quality issues that impact on student experiences”. This is seen, within the subject organisations, with the likes of the module appraisal surveys and externally in the National Student Surveys. (O'Neil and Palmer 2004, p.40) refer to this as a “disconfirmation approach to measuring service quality...the difference between a student's expectations and their perceptions”.

The use of external forms of performance indicator such as the National Student Survey fall into (Cameron 1986, p.542) “high performing systems model”, that is, the organisation can be compared to other higher education providers, by the prospective students. This is the intention of the performance indicators, the provision of choice to the students based on information provided by the governing agencies will cause universities to concentrate on improving the service they offer to students or they will perish!

However, organisational effectiveness should be a “multidimensional construct” (Cameron 1978, p.534) this suggests that the indicators currently used, within the subject organisation, both internally and externally are too limited. They do not sufficiently cover the magnitude of variables that can affect the quality of the student experience. The mere use of the singular term ‘students’ to represent the number of students within the United Kingdom is absurd. According to data from the Higher Education Statistics Agency there were approximately 2.3 million students registered at UK universities in 2014/15 academic year. UCAS figures show that 532,200 students entered UK higher education in 2015. There is also confusion

between “determinants of effectiveness” and “indicators of effectiveness”. For example, in the National Student Survey there are questions on the student’s perception of the quality of teaching. This could imply that a good quality perception, of teaching, is a determinant of good quality learning or a good quality education. Pedagogically this is not the case, as learning requires input, such as engagement and effort, from the student to achieve learning. So why do we use performance measurement systems?

Historically, organisations judged their level of performance by how efficiently they produced their products for their customers. This was the scientific consideration of the quantity of resource input required to produce the product, compared to the outputs; linked to the work of Taylor in the early twentieth century (Martinez *et al.* 2007). This is ultimately an analysis of efficiency. This concept was strongly related to the discipline of operations management. (Martinez *et al.* 2007, p.384) state that “operations management is concerned with the management of organisational activities” and that “the two most important aspects of performance are efficiency and effectiveness”.

(Martinez *et al.* 2007) go on to describe three distinct phases of the development of performance management, including the early 20<sup>th</sup> century period which concentrated on the efficiency of the delivery of the various products, based on the mechanistic scientific approach of Frederick Taylor and Frank and Lillian Gilbreth, who developed the concept of “time and motion studies” in which the activities of the worker were recorded and then redesigned to minimise their effort and produce the most efficient production method. There was little consideration of the worker beyond their utility and an autocratic management style dominated.

The second phase, which followed World War Two, introduced the concept of quality and a more participative approach, due to the competitiveness of the Japanese companies and the human relations school. This manifested itself in the pursuit of the eradication of defects and more autonomy for the workforce.

The introduction of business process re-engineering encouraged a focus on how effective processes are to deliver value. This then led to a consideration of how the processes could be improved and the introduction of the balanced scorecard (Kaplan and Norton 2001) used performance metrics beyond the traditional financial and economic measures.

Performance measurement arrived within public sector organisations, following the Labour Government requirement for more transparency, following their ascendancy to power in 1997 (Martinez *et al.* 2007). This need for transparency required measurable units to be recorded for communication to the wider stakeholders.

(Melo *et al.* 2010, p.235) define performance management as “an integrated system where performance information is closely linked to strategic steering”. The authors offer a three stage performance management process: data collection, reporting and acting upon information. This paper introduced the need for “steering”, and in particular, action being required following receipt of the performance information. This action phase is very important when using the system to drive organisational development. This notion also links very closely with the work of (Pfeffer and Sutton 1999) citing the requirement for action following receipt of feedback. It is this responsive, corrective action that the UK government is trying to promote through the use and publication of indicators. (Neely *et al.* 2005, p.1229) categorise performance measurement as:

*“Performance measurement... the process of quantifying the efficiency and effectiveness of action*

*A performance measure... as a metric used to quantify the efficiency or effectiveness of an action*

*A performance measurement system...a set of metrics used to quantify both the efficiency and effectiveness of actions”*.

(Neely *et al.* 2005) also refer to the requirement of measures to “stimulate action” and it is appropriate action that should improve organisational effectiveness.

The requirement to close the loop is apparent at the programme level in the subject organisation; through the use of programme Annual Monitoring Reports which are produced by the programme managers to demonstrate their response to the feedback received. This links closely with the previous observation of accountability to the managers of the organisation. However, at an individual level the closing of the loop or corrective action is not explicitly measured.

(Melo *et al.* 2010, p.237) describe, within universities, a shift from “bureaucratic and collegial models of governance towards more managerial ones” creating issues of accountability. Traditionally academics were autonomous and relied on “professional accountability” to peers and not to the notion of more public or stakeholder accountability, through published performance data, as seen in the Module Appraisal Survey and National Student Survey, for example.

Within the School of the case study, evidence of this requirement for transparency and collection of feedback and performance data is demonstrated in a variety of ways, including, for example:

<b>Feedback Instruments – Internally Objective</b>	<b>Purpose</b>
Module Appraisal Surveys	Internally, all levels of students' perceptions of module performance are completed by students at the end of the academic year.
Post Graduate Experience Survey	Post graduate students provide feedback on their perceptions of their educational experience.
Boards of Studies	Once per semester Students Representative provide feedback to programme teams.
Student Voice	The Students Union also obtain students feedback on student perception of their experience
PDPR	Individual academic staff performance is measured through the PDPR process, a bi-annual review with line managers.
<b>Feedback Instruments – Internally Subjective</b>	<b>Purpose</b>
Webhub – Performance Dashboard	“outcomes” as described by Cameron (1978), for example, the number of students attaining 2:1 or above as a classification of degree, are published on the web hub using data extracted from the student information system. Also retention and completion rates amongst other objective measures are recorded.

<b>Feedback Instruments – External Subjective</b>	<b>Purpose</b>
National Student Survey	A UK national student experience survey administered by Ipsos Mori
University League Tables	Various media league tables, for example The Times and The Guardian publish tables that are a result of consideration of both subjective data; satisfaction with course, teaching and feedback and objective data; spend per student and student staff ratio. These are all proxy indicators of quality.
<b>Feedback Instruments – External Objective</b>	<b>Purpose</b>
Research Excellence Framework	A system for assessing the quality of research within Higher Education Institutes in the United Kingdom.

Table 2.4 Internal and External Indicators of Effectiveness

The performance management systems appear to be largely one dimensional; they measure the perceived experience and performance of the organisation through the lens of the student. However, in order to be effective as an educational organisation there is an expectation, at a certain level, of performance required by the student as a stakeholder and contributor to the learning process. This concept becomes more complex under the student as consumer metaphor. This creates a symbiotic relationship between universities and students, through the mutual achievement of goals through a “shared experience” (Alves *et al.* 2010 p 174)

(Neely *et al.* 2001, p.6) introduced an appropriate measurement framework to be used within organisations. The framework enables an organisation to decide on what criteria to select for measurement and also who is to be

measured. The prism has five facets: stakeholder satisfaction; strategies; processes; capabilities and stakeholder contribution". (Neely *et al.* 2001, p.10) described how the performance prism tool was used within various organisations both private and not-for-profit. The case studies demonstrated how the tool enables organisations to focus on what is important and what data is required to support this. The not-for-profit example discusses the "vital few" measures that are "critically important to the success of an organisation. This again links the performance measurement system to the goals and objectives of the organisation.

Two facets of the prism are pivotal when considering educational performance and they are capability and stakeholder contribution. The capabilities of the student and their contribution are critical to the success of a University. (Neely *et al.* 2001, p.7) refer to this as a "symbiotic relationship" and it is true that the performance measurement system of the subject university fails to recognise this important variable or metric. This led to the proposition that performance in a HEI is about the interaction and performance of the stakeholders involved and particularly the student and the organisation.

(Neely 2004) concluded that performance management systems have a contribution to make to organisations. (Kennerley and Neely 2003) suggest that performance measurement systems should evolve as the organisation evolves and this evolution should be managed. Therefore, there may be a requirement for the performance management of the subject organisation may need to evolve to match the new performance reality. The case study has historically carried out pilot projects as intervention mechanisms to bring about the new processes or products.

## **2.4 Projects and Projects as Intervention Mechanisms**

The Student Experience Enhancement Project (SEEP) was created as the initial intervention mechanism to bring about improvement within the case study context. The SEEP was a project with a goal defined as "a project to

create structures and systems that should align the School processes with those implied in the Mission and Strategic Plan of the University and consequently produce an increase in perceived quality of service provided to stakeholders". By definition this is a 'soft' project, as described by (McElroy 1996, p.327), as its goal is the creation of the abstract notion; alignment the School's processes with the intended goals of the University. The opposite of this soft method, as described by (McElroy 1996) is the more familiar 'hard' project with the production of a tangible artefact as the output.

A project was chosen, as the vehicle to bring about change, due to the mechanistic, task and goal oriented form a project can take. Additionally, it gave the author a greater sense of control and certainty when considering formulation of the project. (McElroy 1996) describes this approach as 'intervention', the changes were decided upon and commenced by the author in his capacity as a manager with a clearly defined goal; "To improve the Student Experience!"

It could be argued that the goal of this planned change project, the alignment of the processes of the school with the intent of the organisation, could demonstrate a weakness within the host organisation as they do not have the ability to continuously adapt to their environment as suggested by (Weick and Quinn 1999). The reason for choosing a project as the intervention mechanism was to enable the goals of the project to 'cut through' the current operational practices; to avoid a common fault of management issue, described by (Pellegrinelli and Bowman 1994) as using "the status quo to overcome the status quo". The author anticipated some difficulty in attempting to introduce new processes to staff members, due to the critical nature of academics generally and the complex structure of committees and communication structures. An impersonal, ordered, clear and objective project was chosen to overcome these problems, (Winter *et al.* 2006, p.639) refer to this method as 'projectification'.

The SEEP project was used as a "vehicle for achieving change" (Pellegrinelli and Bowman 1994, p.127) and consideration was also given to the project as

a “social process” as described by (Winter *et al.* 2006) that is, regard was given to the impact of the project on the social context in which it occurs. This enabled an alternative view of a project from that of “project as instrumental process” to that of “project as social process” (Winter *et al.* 2006, p.642). This facilitated the study of the impact of the project and its appropriateness as a change mechanism in the given organisational context.

Projects are often used within organisations to translate plans into operations; they are used as intervention mechanisms. At the outset, of the research project, the decision was taken, by the author, to use a project, as an intervention mechanism, to attempt to bring the School into line with the Strategy of the University as a whole. This follows the metaphor of ‘episodic change’ as described by (Weick and Quinn 1999) and the unfreeze/change/freeze model previously proposed by (Lewin, 1951). Figure 1 describes this concept in diagrammatic form.

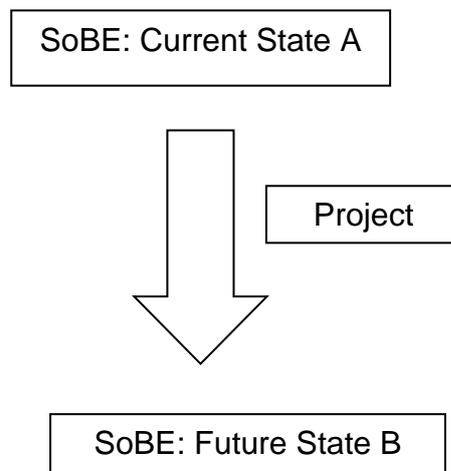


Figure 2.3: Paradigm shift – A to B; Project as Vehicle for Change of State

## 2.5 Summary and Links to Next Chapter

This chapter discussed the key themes associated with the research problem including the descriptive accounts of organisational effectiveness; the multiple perspectives of effectiveness; performance and performance management and in particular the requirement for stakeholder (student) contribution and the use of projects as intervention mechanisms. This

chapter has illustrated that all work related to organisational development, organisational theory, adaptation and change is ultimately about effectiveness, (Cameron 1986). This research attempts to investigate this phenomenon of effectiveness and performance, through the perceptions of the actors involved within the case study.

It has also been demonstrated that judging the effectiveness of an organisation is difficult, due to the subjective nature of evaluation, the multiple actors involved and the choice of the dimensions by which to judge (Cameron 1986). This difficulty is prevalent in HEIs as there are many social actors involved in the process, many levels of analysis and consequently multiple perceptions of effectiveness.

The next chapter describes the research approach and methods used to investigate this phenomenon from the perspective of those immediately involved in the operational running of a particular case in an HEI. The research takes the form of a real time, interactive dialogic analysis (Pettigrew *et al.* 2001) (Pettigrew *et al.* 2001).

### 3. RESEARCH STRATEGY

#### 3.1 Introduction

This chapter describes the overall research approach, the research strategy and the research methods used in this research project, it is heavily informed by the work of;(Crotty 1998);(Blumer 1969);(Corbin and Strauss 2008);(Charmaz 2006);(Coghlan and Brannick 2014); (Saunders *et al.* 2012); (Bryman and Bell 2007); (Silverman 2010) and (Creswell 2009). The research strategy is represented in the Figure 3.1 below

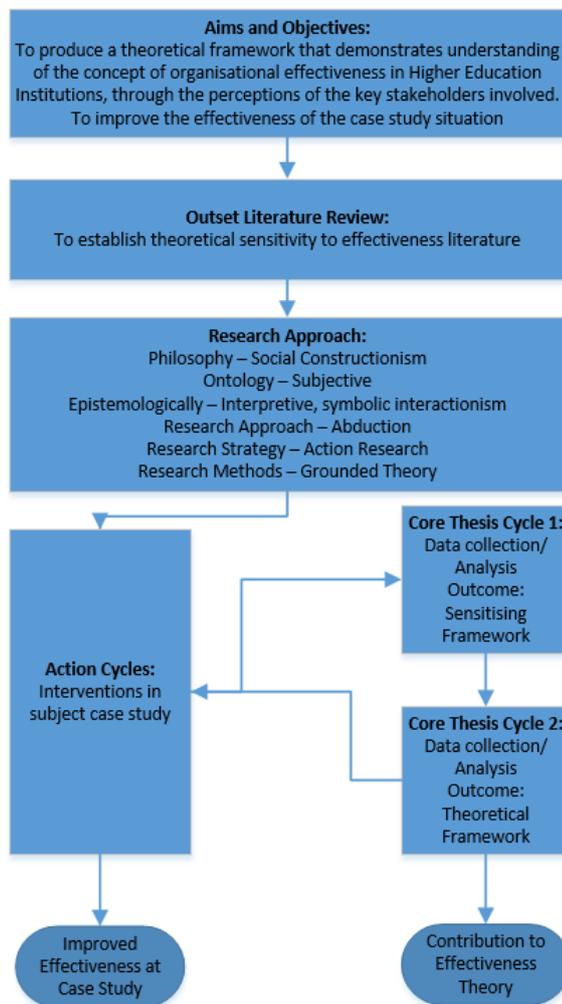


Figure 3.1 Research Process Diagram Showing Dual Purpose: Action and Research

Figure 3.2 below further explains the sequential nature of core thesis cycles 1 and 2 in more detail:

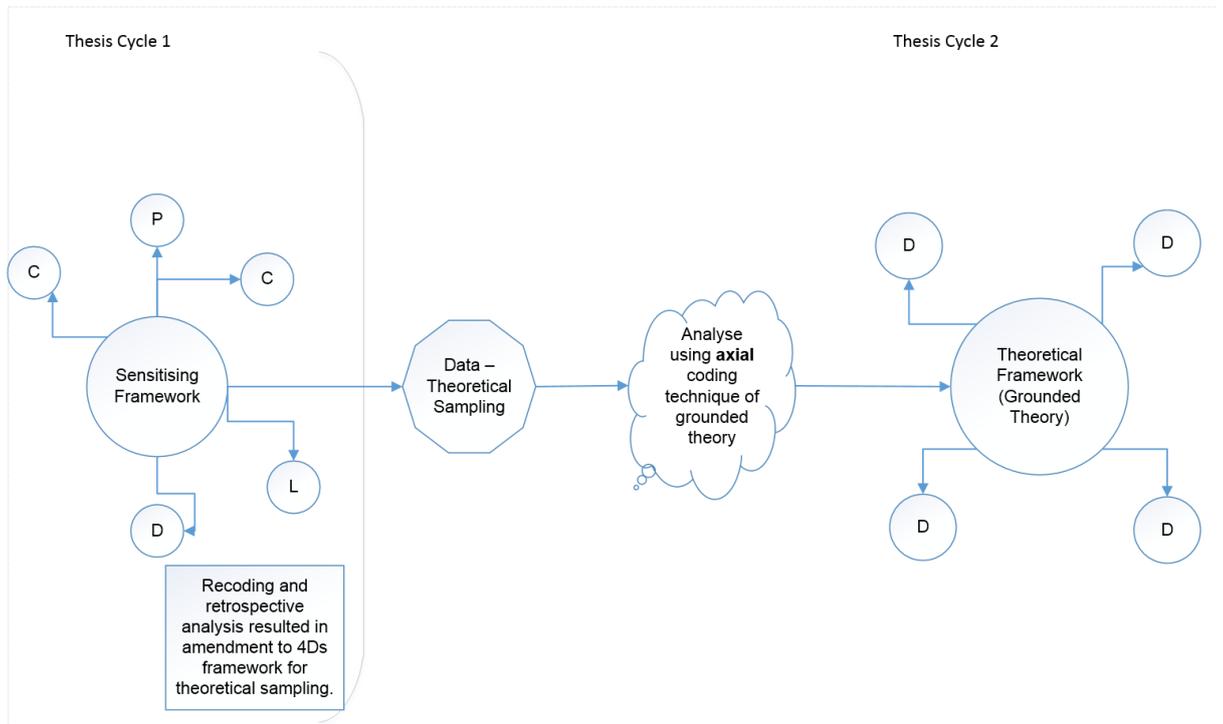


Figure 3.2 Linear Research Process Relationship between Thesis Cycle 1 and 2

The framework for the chapter is described in Table 3.1 below and starts with a description of the research philosophy that underpins the thesis and the exploratory investigation. The research philosophy comprises consideration of epistemology; ontology; axiology and how these, in turn, influence the methodology and in turn the methods used to gather and analyse data.

Section	Topic	Comments
<b>3.1</b>	Introduction and Aims of Chapter	This section introduces the overall research approach for the project.
<b>3.2</b>	Research Philosophy	This section will provide the reader with information regarding the philosophy that underpins the development of knowledge in this research process (Saunders et al., 2012). It discusses the ontological, epistemological and axiological options available. The research philosophy is constructionism and is underpinned by an interpretivist epistemology using a “symbolic interactionist” position in particular.
<b>3.3</b>	Research Approach	The research approach section describes deductive, inductive and abductive approaches. The choice is abductive in nature and uses systematic combining and theoretical comparison from grounded theory to achieve this.
<b>3.4</b>	Research Choice	The methodological choice is multi-method qualitative. The methodology is also exploratory, with the purpose of gaining insight into effectiveness within the case study.
<b>3.5</b>	Research Strategy	Action Research: to provide the basis for understanding the dual purpose of action research.
<b>3.6</b>	Research Methods	Grounded Theory: to provide details of the data collection and analysis techniques used within the research.
<b>3.7</b>	Time Horizon	The project is longitudinal, the action

		research form of research strategy requires that the study of action takes place over an extended period.
<b>3.8</b>	Verification Strategy	This section describes the techniques used, within the research process, to ensure that the data collection and analytical processes where appropriate for the qualitative form of research used.
<b>3.9</b>	Summary and Links to Next Chapter	This section will summarise the research approach and provide links to the next chapters.

Table 3.1 Chapter Structure

There are a number of frameworks that can be used to structure an approach to a research project and all assist the researcher in the critical choices to be made. (Crotty 1998) provides a concise framework, composed of four elements to be considered and responded to by the researcher when considering the process of research. These elements require the researcher to respond to prompts relating to; ontology; epistemology; theoretical perspective; methodology and methods. This approach enables the researcher to ensure and confirm that each of the four components are compatible with each other in a logical and congruent way. The four elements are represented in the diagram below (Crotty 1998, p.4):

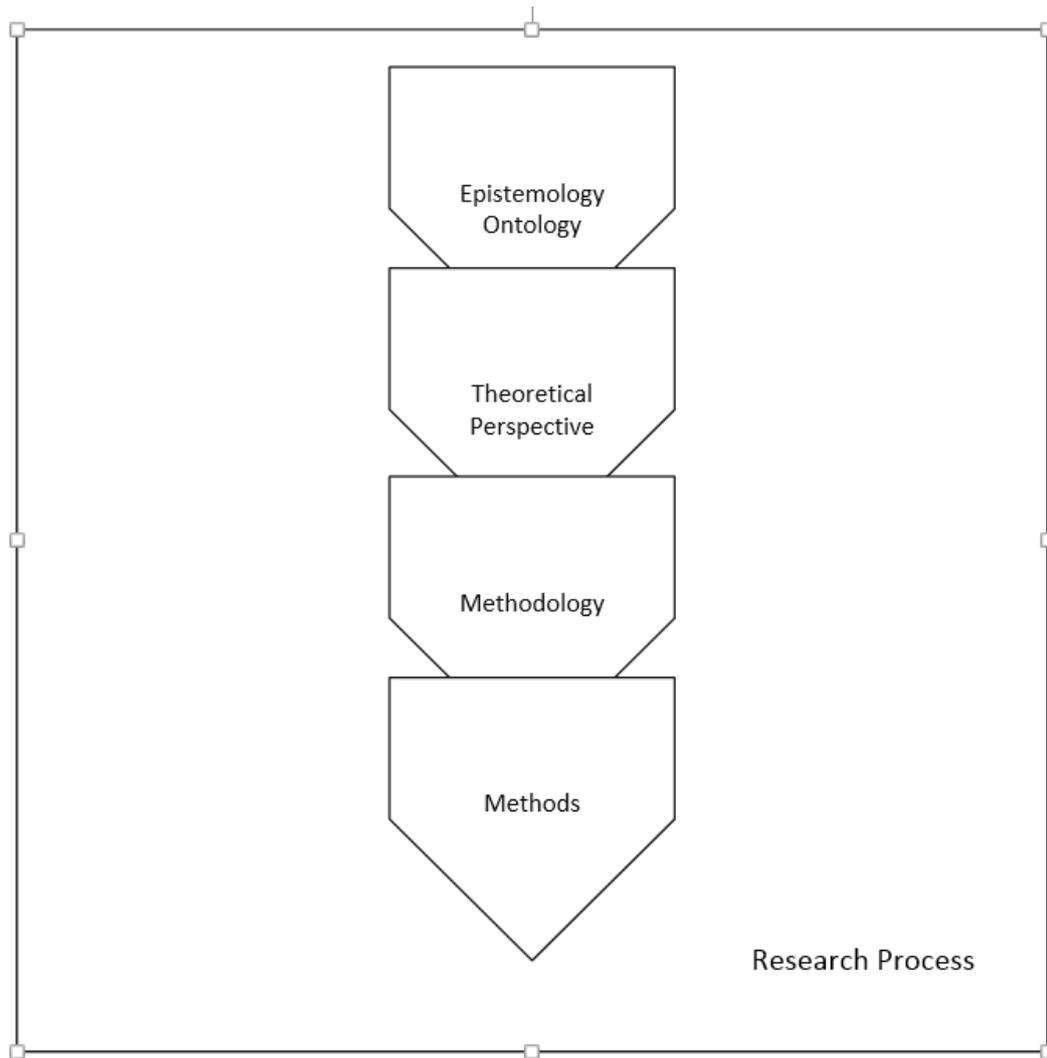


Figure 3.3 Elements of the Research Process (Crotty 1998)

(Saunders *et al.* 2012, p.128) also offers assistance to the researcher by representing the overall research process as a comprehensive “research onion”. The layers of which should provide a checklist of the elements to be considered during the project, the layers (elements of the research process/design) are provided in tabular form below, Table 3.1. (Saunders *et al.* 2012) provides a logical and clear framework that enables a sequential consideration of the research process that is comprehensive yet accessible and coherent.

Element of Research Process (Onion)	Research Options
Research Philosophy:	Objective and Subjective

Ontology Epistemology Axiology	Observable phenomena and Subjective meaning Value free and value bound
Research Approach	Deduction, abduction and Induction
Methodological Choice	Mono method quantitative/qualitative; multi-method quantitative/qualitative; mixed method simple/complex
Strategy (ies)	Experiment; survey; archival research; case study; ethnography; action research; grounded theory; narrative inquiry
Time Horizon	Cross sectional or longitudinal
Techniques and Procedures	Data collection and data analysis

Table 3.2 Tabular Representation of (Saunders *et al.* 2012) Research Onion

### 3.2 Research Philosophy

Research philosophy “relates to the development of knowledge and the nature of knowledge” (Saunders *et al.* 2012, p.127). (Denzin and Lincoln 2000) refers to this as “worldview” and this relates to the researcher’s outlook “about the world and the nature of research” (ibid p.6).

The research philosophy has an effect on the way research is approached and it is therefore critical to be aware of this at the outset of the research process. The philosophy represents what principles and standards the researcher finds acceptable. To continue the “worldview” (ibid p.6) and observation analogy, it has been referred to as the “theoretical lens” through which reality is viewed Dobson (2002 cited in Krauss, 2005, p. 759); (Creswell 2009, p.62). The “understandascope” a cartoon by Leunig, M (1984) appropriately represents this perspective as the telescope lens we use to view, and therefore interpret, the world and its associated issues.



Figure 3.4 The Understandascope. Image Courtesy of Michael Leunig

The chosen approach should also depend upon the purpose of the research and the phenomenon under consideration (Krauss 2005). The research, in this instance, explores the phenomenon of effectiveness within a given social situation from the perspective of the social actors involved. The situation under study, a school within a Higher Education Institute within the United Kingdom. This is a multi-faceted and multifarious situation that requires an approach that will best represent and explicate the views of those involved.

The research philosophy is represented by the assumptions made about ontology, epistemology and axiology which in turn should be reflected in the research methodology and associated methods used. The first aspect of the research philosophy to be presented is the ontology.

### **3.2.1 The Ontological Position**

This element of philosophical perspective relates to the view that a researcher has about reality and “how the world operates” (Saunders, Lewis

and Thornhill, 2012 p. 130). This is represented as a spectrum of potential perceptions ranging from external and objective to internal and subjective as depicted in Table 3.3 below:

Perception	Spectrum	
What is the perception of reality?	External and objective (Objectivism)	Internal and subjective (Constructionism; Subjectivism)

Table 3.3 Research Philosophy: Ontology (from Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2012 p. 129).

(Bryman and Bell 2007, p.22) categorise ontology along a spectrum, at one end there is objectivism and that is described as, “social phenomena confront us as external facts that are beyond our reach or influence”. The important factor here is that of externality; the social situation has a “reality external to social actors” (Bryman and Bell 2007, p.22). The perception of there being a reality that is exceptional and separate from the individual or group cognition of it, means that internal thought processing or interpretation are not required, the thing or concept is at it is. For example, within this study an objectivistic view of organisations could be the fixed perception of the University structure and departments, roles and systems and processes; as something that has “an almost tangible reality of its own” (Bryman and Bell 2007, p.22).

At the opposite end of the spectrum meaning is considered to be internal and subjective, constructionism (constructivism) and subjectivism are found here. These ways of looking at the world can be described as “social phenomena and their meanings are continually being accomplished by social actors” (Bryman and Bell 2007, p.23). This end of the spectrum is interpretive in nature and knowledge is particular to those involved and it is therefore flexible and peculiar, it is ephemeral, not fixed, but contextual in both time and place. Constructionism and subjectivism are both interpretive but they are subtly different; the difference is explained in figure 3.3 below:

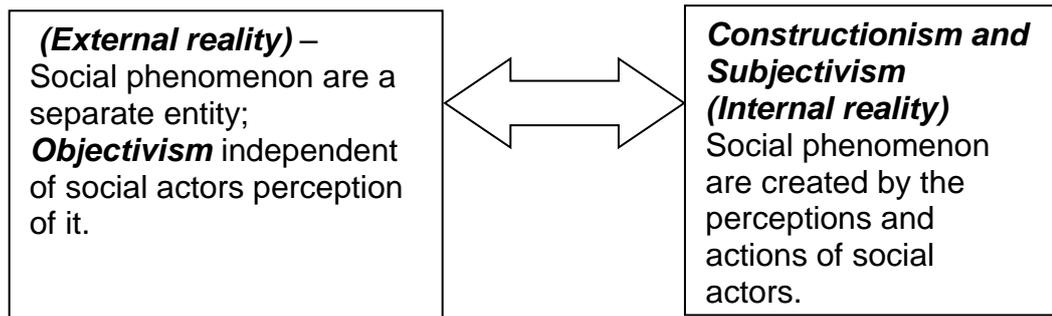


Fig. 3.5 Philosophical Continuum (Adapted from (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2012 p. 129)).

### 3.2.1.1 Ontology: Objectivism (External Reality) (Benzies 2001)

Objectivism is the main depiction of the positivistic perspective and is described thus; “social entities exist in reality external to and independent of social actors” (Saunders *et al.* 2012, p.131).

(Creswell 2009) refers to this as the scientific method and considers it is therefore more suited to quantitative forms of research than qualitative. This philosophy is resolute in nature, as it attempts to reveal relationships consisting of causes and their consequent effects. This form of belief is reductionist as it attempts to reduce problems or concepts into smaller more testable variables and the relationships between them. The research method associated with this worldview are linear or logical in their process, for example, consider existing theory; collect data, test theory, conclude and revise theory (ibid p.7).

The objectivistic ontological perspective is closely aligned with the positivistic perspective and also the scientific methods, that is, the testing of theories or hypotheses to determine if they can be authenticated or invalidated. This testing is to do with control; the control over pre-determined variables. This control is manifested in the use of experiments and/or through the control of the samples used including the regimented and repeatable data collection techniques (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007). It is through this rigid process, of control, that positivist researchers provide validation and generalizability.

Using this perspective the researcher adopts an unbiased and inert position when collecting the data through experimentation, observation or other means (Charmaz 2006, p.5).

### **3.2.1.2 Ontology: Subjectivism (Internal Reality; Meaning is Ascribed by Subject)**

This perspective “asserts that social phenomena are created from the perceptions and consequent actions of social actors (Saunders *et al.* 2012, p.132); (Crotty 1998); (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007). It is the meaning that social actors give to their context and social situations that is of interest to researchers with a subjectivist viewpoint (Saunders *ibid*, p. 131).

The basic premise, for this perspective, is that there are multiple perceptions of reality that are determined by the different actors involved. This specific philosophical view of reality is appropriate for the case study organisation as the organisation is populated by multiple social actors with diverse backgrounds. The complexity, due to this multiplicity of perspective could not be best represented objectively by the use of samples and the initial identification of variables to study. It is in the richness of this multiplicity of perspectives that the interesting part of the problem is formed. The University currently has approximately twenty five thousand students ranging from undergraduates with an average UCAS entry point level of 320 points to Post Graduate research students studying for PhD. The staff are also from a diverse range of backgrounds and professional / academic disciplines. Each member of this social group could possibly have a different relationship with, and therefore perspective of, the organisation. In this instance meaning is ascribed to the object, whatever that may be, by the person (subject) viewing it. Another form of subjectivism is constructionism and there is a subtle difference between constructionism and subjectivism, this is explained further in section 3.2.1.3 below (it is in the interaction that the subtle difference occurs).

### **3.2.1.3 Ontology: Constructionism (Internal Reality; Meaning is Ascribed by *Interaction* between Subject and Object)**

Constructionism posits that meaning is constructed in the interaction between the object and the subject and therefore there could be different meanings attributed by different actors (Crotty 1998). Meaning is created in the process of “interplay between object and subject” (Crotty 1998, p.9). One such process is that of symbolic interactionism (Blumer 1969). Symbolic interactionism is a theoretical perspective that fits well with the constructionism ontology and is appropriate for the research aims. Symbolic Interactionism provides three fundamental tenets as presented by (Blumer 1969 p 2):

*“...human beings act toward things on the basis of the meanings that the things have for them... the meaning of such things is derived from, or arises out of, the social interaction that one has with one’s fellows...these meanings are handled in, and modified through, an interpretive process used by the person in dealing with the thing he encounters.”*

(Blumer 1969) considers the notion that social life tends to be composed of the multiple actions of an individual or the multiple actions of a group to overcome the obstacles they encounter. The important aspect of this is that it consists of a society in action and therefore it must be viewed from that perspective. Society is concerned with the complex nature of relationships with regard to action, see also (Patton 1990a). Evidence of this is seen, for example, through the consideration of structures, roles and hierarchies within organisations. This is emphasised by (Blumer 1969) in the following statement:

*“A cardinal principle of symbolic interactionism is that any empirically oriented scheme of human society, however derived, must respect the fact that in the first and last instances human society consists of people engaging in action”*

It is this “engaging in action” with others that is of interest; it is this interaction that informs human behaviour. Within this interaction objects need to be considered, as the social world contains objects and the objects themselves are a product of symbolic interaction.

(Snow 2001, p.371) discusses the “principle of symbolisation” in that it is the interpretations of symbols, such as, the processes and documents, that give meaning and action within a social organisation. However, Snow (ibid) suggests caution with the reliance on such symbols as they are possibly not being constantly reflected upon as they may generally be accepted as normal within the organisation. It is probably only during a period of reflection, such as this research process, that actors may consider the symbols openly. This research is concerned with the symbols, such as, performance indicators and the meaning that participants ascribe to such artefacts and the consequences of this action.

The role of frameworks is also discussed by (Snow 2001) with reference to the work of Goffman (1974). Frameworks can enable thorough analysis and interpretations of social situations, however, (Snow 2001) discusses the problems associated with using extant frameworks to investigate as this may be considered a more structured and narrow approach.

As described later in chapter 5 the research uses grounded theory as the method of analysis; grounded theory is epistemologically underpinned by the tradition of symbolic interactionism and informed by the philosophy of pragmatism (Corbin and Strauss 2008, p.2); (Charmaz 2006). Charmaz (ibid) on the other hand also discusses a more flexible approach to grounded theory and proposes the use of constructionism as an epistemological underpinning for a research process. The analytical process within grounded theory, through axial coding, focuses on action in terms of the participants response to various situations and the ramifications of the reactions (Charmaz 2006).

### **3.2.1.4 Ontology: Pragmatism (Many ways of Interpreting the World, Use What Works)**

Pragmatism refers to a philosophy that is concerned with “applications – what works – and solutions to problems” (Creswell 2009 p. 10). There is a concern for solving the problem; “for answering a particular question” (Saunders *et al.* 2012, p.130), rather than concentrating on the philosophical discussion. Pragmatism allows for the most appropriate philosophical position to be used to achieve the required data to solve the research problem (Saunders *et al.* 2012). This therefore enables a degree of flexibility and avoids the potential uncompromising position of selecting a single epistemological perspective. Pragmatism can be defined succinctly as - use what works!

(Corbin and Strauss 2008, p.4) discuss the origins of the pragmatic position with reference to the utility of knowledge and that there should not be a “false dualism” between knowledge and the utilisation of the knowledge. The obtaining of knowledge can be used to solve real world problems. This originates in the writing of Dewey (1929 cited in (Corbin and Strauss 2008, p.2)) who was concerned with the “acting and interacting of self-reflective beings”. It is concerned with the process of action and reflection and the new knowledge this can create. It asserts that knowledge is also assumed to be transient and therefore only valid at a given point in time.

The purpose of this research is to both create and use knowledge to solve the perceived problem of effectiveness at the subject organisation and therefore its ontological position could be considered to be pragmatic. However, despite being used to solve a particular problem the ontological, epistemological and axiological positions are clear and still support this notion of research and pragmatic action being taken.

The ongoing discussion around objectivist and subjectivist ontologies about what constitutes reality is important, for this research, as it will determine whether effectiveness is considered a concept that an organisation

possesses that can be observed, analysed and then adjusted. Or alternatively, is it an ongoing construct created by the social alliances and actions of those actors within the organisation? The ontological perspective adopted by this research relates to the latter position; that of constructionism and in particular symbolic interactionism.

### **3.2.1.5 The Chosen Ontology**

The ontological position that underpins and influences this research is constructionism and the belief “that social phenomenon are created from the perceptions and consequent actions of social actors” within any given social context, (Saunders *et al.* 2012, p.132).

It could be argued that there are clear, objective and unambiguous manifestations, of certain aspects of the organisation. Evidence of this is provided in the structural and physical ways the case study organisation is presented to the stakeholders, via written documentation, such as, strategy and organisational hierarchy diagrams and also through the processes and the physical representations, for example, Campuses, Buildings, Faculties, Schools. However, a social constructionism response would be that these objects are, or were constructed, *in meaning*, at some point in time by the social actors involved. This interpretation is relative to the how the community of stakeholders create meaning, of the given social situation, through social interaction using the symbols described above (Saunders *et al.* 2012). It is this area that is investigated and explored within this research. It is the use and interpretative meaning of these objective ‘things’ by the various actors, together with their social interaction with each other, to enable performance or create their experience that will produce useful knowledge. In particular, it is symbolic interactionism that the research purports to use. This involves perceiving the case study organisation partly as being organised by a dominant discourse orchestrated by those in power; the overseeing agents and the student body (Campbell 2000 p 23). The organisation is also partly factual and objective, that is, comprised of physical objects, such as, buildings, tables, chairs and people.

### **3.2.2 Epistemology**

Epistemology is concerned with “what constitutes acceptable knowledge in a particular field of study” (Saunders *et al.* 2012, p.132). (Saunders *et al.* 2012, p.127) broadly classify research philosophy into three perspectives and these are; positivism; realism and interpretivism.

#### **3.2.2.1 Positivism**

Refers to a “deterministic philosophy in which causes probably determine effects or outcomes” (Creswell 2009, p.6). This philosophy seeks to reduce research problems into smaller subsets or variables to be tested for causal relationships, usually, in a numerical or statistical way (Creswell 2009).

#### **3.2.2.2 Realism**

This approach similar to positivism and it adopts a scientific approach to the creation of knowledge, (Saunders *et al.* 2012). Realism is categorised in two forms, the first being direct realism, portrayed as “what you see is what you get: what we experience through our senses portrays the world accurately” (Saunders *et al.* 2012, p.136). This suggests that there is no further reflection or mental processing required to appraise what has been observed and therefore it could result in no change.

Critical realism disputes this and suggests that a two stage process is required, the first being the observation of an event or situation followed by the mental processing or consideration of the event; this consideration could lead to a better understanding of the phenomenon and therefore the possibility of change (Saunders *et al.* 2012, p.136). Critical realism lends itself to management research due to its propensity to cause change (Crotty 1998).

#### **3.2.2.3 Interpretivism**

The concern of interpretivism is that of the subjective meaning that members of a social group attach to social action or activities and the interpretation of those actions that leads to understanding (Bryman and Bell 2007). The key to this form of research is to obtain an empathetic understanding of the particular social organisation by immersion within it (Saunders *et al.* 2012). (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007, p.8) when discussing naturalistic inquiry propose that “any hope of discovering *laws* of human behaviour is misplaced, it is suggested, since human behaviour is continually constructed, and reconstructed, on the basis of people’s interpretations of the situations they are in”. They further propose that to better understand the behaviour of social groups we must use methodologies and methods that enable “access to the meanings that guide their behaviour” (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007, p.8).

In epistemological terms this research project is interpretive. It is through the study of human behaviour, in terms of behavioural responses to the changing context of the higher education sector, that understanding of what it means to be effective is sought.

### **3.2.3 Axiology**

Axiology relates to the roles of values contained within the research and in particular the position and role of the researcher. The role is either value free and therefore the researcher objectively views the data as it is, objectively; as in a controlled scientific experiment, or value laden with the researcher being immersed and participating within the research process.

It is the intention of this study to create substantive knowledge, that is, new knowledge within the context of the subject organisation. The interpretivism tradition is used to observe the “social world” of the actors, of the subject organisation, and interpret and demonstrate understanding of the phenomenon of organisational development: performance and effectiveness from their perspective (Saunders *et al.* 2012, p.137).

In the context of this study, an English Higher Education Institute, it is the study of how the social group (stakeholders), particularly lecturers and students, perceive *organisational* performance and effectiveness which manifests itself in the learning (student) experience or learning, including the actions they take. It is the actions and behaviour of these stakeholders towards each other, as a result of their perceptions, that is of interest to the researcher (Saunders *et al.* 2012). The researcher interacts with the social group under study using the symbols and language that are familiar to those involved (Crotty 1998). The researcher became the hub of discussions around the concept of effectiveness. The people who approached or who were approached by the researcher enabled entry into their world (Patton 1990a).

The immersion of the researcher as participant observer acknowledges their position as offering interpretation of data, social actors meanings, to generate or construct theory (Charmaz 2006). Therefore, the values of the researcher are implicit within the interpretation and this renders the interpretation as not only provisional but value laden!

### **3.3 Research Approach**

The research approach involves consideration of the relationship between theory and the research process (Saunders *et al.* 2012);(Bryman and Bell 2007). Each of the approaches below denote a different relationship between theory, the research process and the research paradigm.

#### **3.3.1 Deduction**

In this approach the research starts with a study of the extant theory and a series of propositions and or hypotheses and tests these using data to amend the extant theory. During the research process variables are identified and causal relationships are determined, that is, the problem is being reduced to its most simplistic form (Saunders *et al.* 2012).

### 3.3.2 Induction

Alternatively, induction starts with a problematic situation about which data is collected. The data is then analysed to attempt to make sense of it and an explanatory theoretical framework could be developed, following consultation with appropriate extant literature (Saunders *et al.* 2012).

### 3.3.3 Abduction

The research approach adopted was one of abduction as described by (Saunders *et al.* 2012, p.148). There is a “wealth of information” available with regard to organisational development and performance management in general but there is relatively limited literature with regard to organisational development and performance in the current higher education context. Initially “inductive inferences are developed and deductive ones are tested iteratively throughout the research” (Saunders *et al.* 2012, p.163). The deductions are tested in the action phase of the action research process.

The purpose of the chosen approach is to elicit rich data related to how social actors (stakeholders) perceive the concept of performance and effectiveness within the host organisation. The data should inform the research study as to the key stakeholders (academic staff and student) perceptions of the meaning of organisational effectiveness.

## 3.4 Research Choice

The methodological choice is multi-method qualitative. The methodology is also exploratory, with the purpose of gaining insight into effectiveness within the case study. The various methods used to collect and analyse data are discussed in more detail in the next two chapters.

### **3.5 Research Strategy: Action Research**

This section provides a descriptive account of and justification for the action research strategy chosen for this research. An action research methodology enables “dual imperatives” to take place, and they are that the action taken should result in improvement in the perceived problem area of the subject organisation and secondly research; there should be a contribution to knowledge in the substantive area of organisational effectiveness (McKay and Marshall 2001, p.46, Zuber-Skerritt and Perry 2002).

#### **3.5.1 Definition of Action Research**

(Reason and Bradbury 2013, p.1) define action research as a “participatory, democratic process concerned with developing practical knowing in the pursuit of worthwhile human purposes, grounded in a participatory worldview”. (Dick 2002) proposes that action research “is a family of research methodologies which pursue action through change and, concurrently, better understanding through research”.

(Coghlan and Brannick 2014, p.6) also define action research as a methodology that “uses a scientific approach to study the resolution of important social or organisational issues together with those who experience the issues directly”. This enables a collaborative, participative form of research, in that; those who are involved in the action are also involved in the research. (Reason and Bradbury 2013, p.1) consider action research as “a family of practices of living inquiry that aims, in a great variety of ways, to link practice and ideas in the service of human flourishing”. The process itself and the results of the process are change and improvement within a community, in collaboration with the researcher in real time. Action research is a synchronous form of research in which organisational activity is studied and altered in real time (Chandler and Torbert 2003).

It is about working together to achieve “positive change” (Reason and Bradbury 2013, p.1) and in particular it is “the pursuit of practical solutions to issues of pressing concern to people” (Reason and Bradbury 2013, p.4). It can therefore be seen that action research deals with real problematic situations within specific organisations and uses the organisation and its participants as a source of empirical data, to not only improve the situation, but to pursue the creation of knowledge simultaneously during the same process.

Action research is appropriate in this situation as the organisational issue is framed around the adaptation of higher education institutes to their changing context. This is an ongoing process which has the capacity to impact on all aspects of the organisation (Coghlan and Brannick 2014).

### 3.5.2 Objectives of Action Research

The action research process can be described succinctly as; action is undertaken to provide practical benefit to a particular situation and the associated social group. In parallel with the action, research is undertaken, through analytical reflection on the process and associated emergent issues. This is undertaken in a systematic, cyclical and iterative way.

In conjunction with the process of taking action; research is undertaken using the action research project as the source of data to analyse and to ultimately generate theory. The emergent theory can be particular *and* generalizable but it is always grounded in world data” (Gummesson 2000, p.63).



Figure 3.6 The Dual Purpose of Action Research

(Coghlan and Brannick 2014, p.11) make a distinction between the specific inquiry into the action cycle and the corresponding reflective “meta” cycle about the action research cycle and the emergent concepts. They refer to (Zuber-Skerritt and Perry 2002, p.175) in drawing a distinction between the “core” action research process which revolves around the particular participants concerns, in this case the impact of the operationalisation of effectiveness measures and the “thesis” research project with a theoretical concern for the larger knowledge domain of organisational effectiveness and development, refer to Figure 4.3, for a diagrammatic summary of this. Organisational effectiveness is the knowledge domain that this research is concerned with contributing to, as part of a PhD submission process. (Zuber-Skerritt and Perry 2002, p.176) recommend that at least two action research cycles are required for a PhD submission, to enable “a distinctive contribution to knowledge”.

*Core Action Research* (Zuber-Skerritt and Fletcher 2007, p.421) provide clearer delineation between the core action research project, the “fieldwork” and the thesis action research referred to as “individual work” that contributes to meta-learning (Coghlan and Brannick 2014, p.12). The “fieldwork” takes place within the operational field that the researcher is immersed in. In this study it is as an academic member of staff within a school that offers vocational programmes of study. Within the field the researcher gathered data using various ethnographic techniques, such as, participant observation and the use of journals and memos and interviews. The participants also formed part of the fieldwork phase through the process of data collection both *passively*, that is, being observed and *actively* through interaction with the researcher during informal conversations regarding effectiveness and formal interviews as part of the theoretical sampling process in grounded theory. The participants took part in the action phase through delivering innovative practices through their programmes and during reflection (feeding back to the researcher). The participants are part of, to varying degrees, the ‘plan, act, observe, reflect’ process (Zuber-Skerritt and Fletcher 2007);

(Zuber-Skerritt and Perry 2002) or alternatively in the 'construct, planning action, taking action and evaluating action' (Coghlan and Brannick 2014).

As a consequence of the extensive and intensive reflection (analytical) process, using grounded theory coding, a unique and grounded contribution to knowledge should be formed. To be considered appropriate findings or theory, in action research and the interpretivist theoretical perspective these findings should be deemed "authentic", that is, they are valid if the participants can recognise themselves in the findings (Charmaz 2006).

Action research enables inquiry into a specific context or set of circumstances. The case study organisation is a higher education institute, based in the United Kingdom. The specific circumstance, as described in chapters 1 and 2 are that the context of higher education has, and is, fundamentally changing. The marketization of the higher education sector that includes greater monitoring and accountability, both *formal*, from Government and regulatory bodies, *informal* through stakeholders and *informational* via media and other journalistic and information sales driven organisations.

This period of the longitudinal study provided an excellent opportunity to study the potential impacts of this circumstance in higher education. Action research is an appropriate method to explore the issues and to subsequently transform organisational responses due to its twin objectives of appropriate action and research.

The creation of an action research project could be viewed as a proactive attempt to shape a positive future for the case study organisation (Levin and Greenwood 2008). Action research is therefore inextricably linked with the knowledge domain of organisational development and consequently organisational change.

### **3.5.3 Action Research and the Theoretical Perspective**

It is important that the theoretical perspective that underpins the research is congruent with the methodology and the methods chosen (Crotty 1998). The theoretical perspective used in this research is interpretive. This section attempts to demonstrate positive alignment of this research project with the interpretive theoretical perspective, and action research as a methodology for achieving the research objectives.

The interpretive (internal meaning) nature of action research can be contrasted with the positivistic (external meaning) scientific approach to indicate that action research is a particular methodology closely aligned with interpretive forms of research.

	<b>Positivist</b>	<b>Interpretivistic</b>	<b>Action Research</b>
<b>Aim of Research</b>	The creation of universal knowledge; theory building and testing	Understanding through group perspective	Knowledge in Action Theory building in Action
<b><i>Theoretical Perspective</i></b>	<i>Objective</i>	<i>Interpretive</i>	<i>Interpretive</i>
<b>Type of Knowledge Acquired</b>	Universal Covering Law	<i>Particular</i>	<i>Particular</i> Situational Praxis
<b>Nature of Data Validation</b>	Context Free, Logical	Validation Strategy related to process	Contextually embedded experiential
<b>Researcher's Role</b>	Observer	<i>Participant Observer</i>	Actor and Agent of Change and <i>Participant Observer</i>
<b>Researcher's relationship to</b>	Detached Neutral	<i>Proactively Reflective</i>	Immersed and <i>Proactively</i>

<b>setting</b>			<i>Reflective</i>
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Table 3.4 Adaptation of (Coughlan and Coughlan 2002) Comparison of Positivist Science and Action research

The ontological position that underpins and influences this research is constructionism and the belief “that social phenomenon are created from the perceptions and consequent actions of social actors” within any given social context, (Saunders *et al.* 2012, p.132). Participative forms of action research support this view in that action is taken as a result of the interpretation of the participants’ perspective following analysis (using grounded theory).

Using a positivist theoretical perspective would result in the researcher’s role being an “external agent” who is engaged with the organisation to facilitate action and reflection within the action research project, whilst observing from the outside (Coughlan and Coughlan 2002, p.227), this could be similar to a consultants role. However, the researcher’s role within this context of participative action research is one of an insider, acting as an interpreter of the perceptions of the social group they are engaged with and an active participant of.

The role of the researcher is closely related to the theoretical perspective; the researcher acts as an interpreter, as a vessel between the participants “voice” or how they articulate their experiences and the resultant grounded theory (Genat 2009, p.111). This places participative action research as epistemologically interpretive, as it attempts to understand participants meaning. The concern of this epistemology is that of the subjective meaning that members of the social group attach to social action or activities and the interpretation of those actions that leads to understanding (Bryman and Bell 2007). The key to this form of research is to obtain an empathetic understanding of the particular social organisation by immersion within it (Saunders *et al.* 2012).

The role of the researcher in the creation of both action and knowledge requires understanding of the epistemological perspective of the researcher and understanding their role within the action research process (Genat 2009).

(Genat 2009, p.102) refers to the role of the researcher within collaborative forms of action research as “that of an agent collaboratively and actively engaged in the construction of local knowledge and theory with a particular group of research participants”. The research participants are referred to as the Critical Reference Group by Clarke (2005) cited in (Genat 2009). This research did not use a critical reference group but used participant observation, which included signification dialogue and conversation, as the group became familiar with the role of the researcher and the action research project. The use of qualitative forms of inquiry are more appropriate in action research as it is rich data that is required from participants who “are knowledgeable, interested, motivated and open to participating in solving their own problem(s) and improving their own situation” (Zuber-Skerritt and Fletcher 2007, p.423).

(Riordan 1995, p.7) refers to a form of “engaged participant” as being different from the scientific approach of a “detached observer”. The scientific observer, historically, has been charged with explaining from a detached perspective what is happening in a given social setting with a view to identifying variables that can be used in a predictive way for future similar cases. This research takes the opposite stance of seeking to understand the social situation from within. This relates largely to the axiological approach and the position of values within this research. This project adopts a value laden approach as the participant observer seeks to understand and interpret the experiences of the social group and being aware of and immersed in the process makes it easier to replicate meaning or demonstrate understanding.

This project is a form of “insider action researcher; the researcher has a dual role of both active participant in the organisation and undertaking research *with* the particular social group (Coghlan and Brannick 2014) and (Roth *et al.* 2007). The role of the researcher is critical within interpretive forms of

research and the researcher faces three key challenges, “access to management reality”; “preunderstanding and understanding and quality” (Gummesson 2000, p.14). All of these challenges are relevant in the context of action research within an organisation. This is discussed further in the next section

Pre-understanding and theoretical sensitivity are similar concepts; they refer to the collective intelligence that the researcher brings to the research project. A lack of pre-understanding can be a hindrance to research as it reduces the interpretive capacity of the researcher who has insufficient experience, as they are not necessarily aware of the context of a given situation.

The research in this case, was undertaken by an academic with eleven years’ experience as an academic and therefore may be considered qualified with some degree of pre-understanding. “Selectivity” refers to the concept of imposing extant theories on data and therefore displaying bias (Gummesson 2000), this is to be avoided and is explained later in this section and relates to what Glaser and Strauss refer to as emergent (inductive) versus forcing (deductive) data. However, social constructionism allows meaning to be generated in a participative way between the social group and the researcher. Meaning is created in the “interplay between object (social group) and subject (researcher)” (Crotty 1998, p.9).

The action research process is also aligned with an inductive/deductive (abductive) research approach in which inductive (emergent data) is used to create hypotheses (deductive) which are then tested in the action phase.

#### **3.5.4 Types of Action Research**

Action Research is an appropriate title for a category of research that displays the characteristics described above. There are, however, various forms of action research and they are described briefly below (Coghlan and Brannick 2014, p.54):

### **3.5.4.1 Action Research in Organisational Development**

This form of action research traces its origins from the work of Lewin (1946) and the notion that diagnosis of problems is insufficient and to be more meaningful there has to be a resultant change within the social community, in this case a university. This was the catalyst for the involvement of the group members in the change process through collaboration in the dual process of research (producing and analysing data) and the intervention process to bring about improved activity (Coghlan and Brannick 2014, p.55). The concept of cyclical processes of plan, act, reflect also originate here.

### **3.5.4.2 Cooperative Inquiry**

Cooperative Inquiry is a type of action research that focuses on second person form, that is, the social group working together as researchers and researched. "This is not research on people or about people, but research *with* people" (Heron and Reason 2008). The basic tenet of this work is that there are four ways of knowing; experiential; presentational; propositional and practical and that these four are used during the iterative action research cycles to bring about change.

### **3.5.4.3 Appreciative Inquiry**

Appreciative Inquiry is a form of action research that enables change to take place based on consideration of what is positive and working well in an organisation. This affirmative focus enables the generation of images that are positive and therefore more powerful in leading to radical change through action (Bushe 1998, Coghlan and Brannick 2014). The appreciative inquiry groups consider what is working well and then determine how that level of performance could occur more often, the group then discuss what resources are required to meet this new state and the action is taken to implement the changes (Coghlan *et al.* 2003). A criticism of this form of action research is that it denies problems or problematic situations. This is not correct as appreciative inquiry addresses these issues in a positive and constructive

way (Coghlan *et al.* 2003). Appreciative Inquiry is influenced quite strongly by social constructionism, in that reality is socially constructed and if this constructed reality is positive this can become a motivation and inspirational driver to change.

#### **3.5.4.4 Participatory**

The form of action research undertaken in this research project was largely participatory. The researcher engaged fully with the social group and interpreted the emergent data from the action taking place. However, due to the group being time poor, the researcher was left alone to reflect on the action taking place. Once the reflection had taken place, in the systematic cycle, the researcher fed their findings and plans for action back to the group for approval and validation before engaging in the action cycles. It was at this point that the members of the group were able to choose to implement the innovative proposals or not. The intervention was only undertaken if the particular members deemed it appropriate for their particular programme. Some of the interventions were adopted at a School level and others are being adopted at an organisational level.

#### **3.5.5 Characteristics of Action Research**

(Coghlan and Brannick 2014, p.6 p 6) define action research using three attributes; “research *in* action, rather than research about action; a collaborative democratic partnership; a sequence of events and an approach to problem solving”. The main characteristics are recorded in Figure 3. 4.2.

Research in action refers to an organised approach to the study of an issue that is pertinent to a given organisation. The case, on this this occasion, is a post 1992 Higher Education Institute. The goal is to improve the problem situation and to add to a particular domain of knowledge; in this case organisational effectiveness. The outcome, of improved performance and effectiveness, was agreed between the participants at the outset of the project. The agreement took place at a senior management level within the

subject. It was at this level that the greatest potential for change was located and also the greater willingness to develop. This is because this group were under the greatest pressure to perform through the accountability to the various key performance indicators. Action research, in this sense, is also collaborative, the community with the issue under investigation are also actively involved in the iterative process of knowledge creation.

The outputs of action research are practical solutions to the problem under consideration and “knowledge that is useful for practitioners and robust for scholars” (Coghlan and Brannick 2014, p.6).

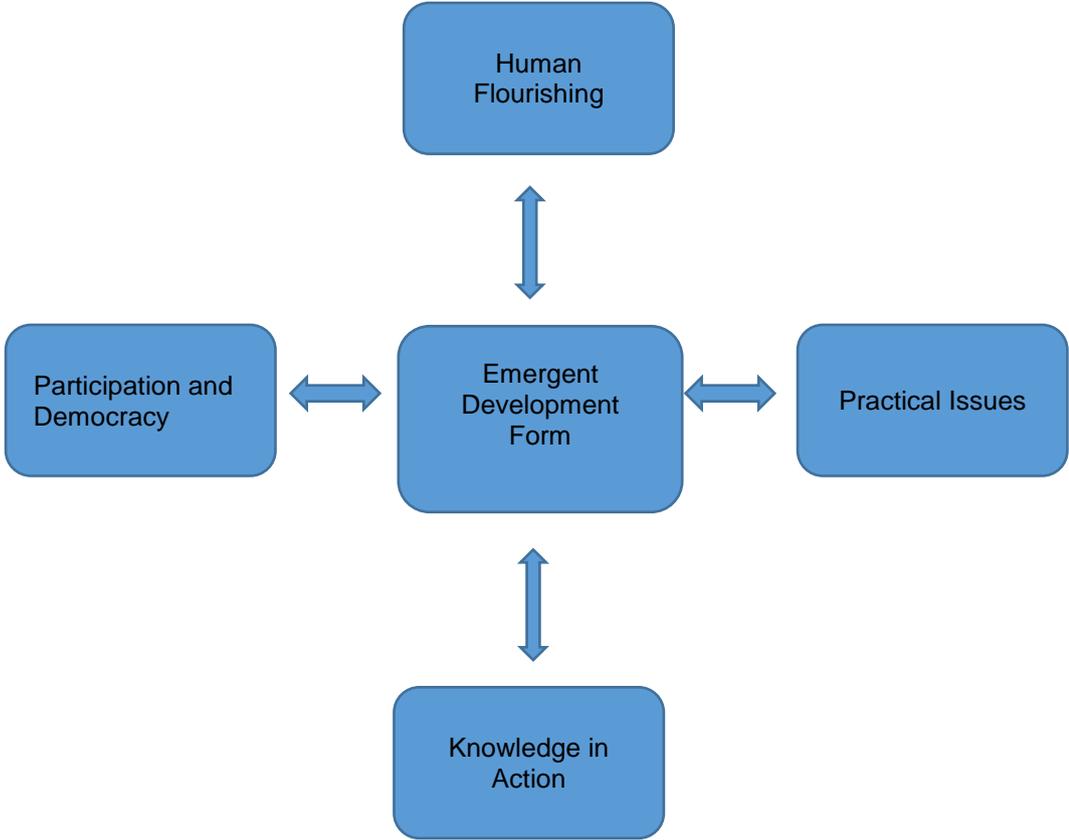


Figure 3.7 Characteristics of Action Research (Reason and Bradbury 2013, p.5)

### 3.5.6 Action Research Process

Theory can be generated through the demonstration of holistic understanding of the problem. This is undertaken by the systematic integration of the emergent data, its analysis and the use of multiple and multidisciplinary literatures and theories (Eden and Huxham 1996). This therefore requires that appropriate data collection and analysis methods be used to enable proper use to be made of the empirical data and validation of the action research process.

(Eden and Huxham 1996 p 81) provides twelve contentions that, in their view, are aspirational by which action research can be judged. The eighth of these relates to “the process of exploration”. This will be explored further during this section.

The intention of this section is to explain the cyclical processes of action research and their importance in the context of a *guided approach* to organisational development. The guided approach is also closely aligned to the perspective that organisations are viewed as a social construction (Campbell 2000). It is important to note that this paradigm underpins the research process. The action research cycles are explicit and presented in a logical format here. However, it is important to note that during the research the sequential cycles of action do not always flow so logically and unhindered. (Heron 1996) warns against becoming too rigid in the following of the cycles. A contrast is offered between Apollonian approach in which the cycles are rigidly applied and a Dionysian approach through which there is a more flexible and open approach to the interaction between taking action and the associated reflexivity.

Action research has 5 distinct phases (Coghlan and Brannick 2014, p.10) together with a pre phase of context setting:

*Constructing* – decide which questions to ask. This involves consideration of what issues emerge from

Planning Action

*Taking Action* – asking the questions using qualitative interview techniques

*Evaluating the action* – reflection on 1 and 2.

*Constructing / further planning (and return to 1.)*

### Pre- Phase: Context

This is an attempt to articulate the organisational issue that requires attendance by considering the issues in the context of the organisation. As described earlier in this thesis the concept of organisational effectiveness has become more pertinent, within Universities within the United Kingdom, due to the increase in internal and external influences and the multiple demands made on Higher Education Institutions (HEI's) from the associated stakeholders (Bryde 2009). The issues of accountability and transparency and the introduction of new forms of public management, (Melo *et al.* 2010), (Hood 1991), push higher education institutes into the realms of the unknown or at least unfamiliar territory that is market led. (Levin and Greenwood 2008) posit that this transitional period is an opportunity for action research, as benefit will be derived through a more participative and wide ranging consideration of the future role of universities. This action research project attempts to explore this transition and search for effectiveness through its constructed meaning for those involved in the case study. This research should inform the "re-contextualisation" of the university within this changing environment (Levin and Greenwood 2008, p.213).

### Constructing (Organisational Analysis)

Historically this phase of the action research process has been about the diagnosis of the problems of the organisation. This relates to an objective and positivistic form of philosophy, in that, the premise is that there is something inherently wrong with the organisation and this can be found

through the application of a scientific process and then corrected to a desired state (Coghlan and Brannick 2014); (Bushe and Marshak 2009). This is very much based around Lewin's framework; unfreeze, change, refreeze.

New and emergent disciplines of organisational development are concentrating more on the philosophical standpoint that meaning, of effectiveness in this case, is socially constructed (Campbell 2000). This then gives an emphasis on the language and symbols associated with organisational development that leads to constructed meaning within a group. This is an emergent form of sense-making for the group and for the researcher (Bushe and Marshak 2009). This perspective also encourages consideration of the vocabulary of discourse between the group and the researcher at the outset of the research project. (Bushe 2012) suggests caution in the tone of the initial questions as either too negative, referred to as the "shadows" or too simple in consideration of the positive may influence the outcome. A negative initial tone could cause a focus on problems and too positive a tone may encourage risk taking; this is prevalent in appreciative inquiry. "Generativity" is called for that should enable new ways of thinking and actions to emerge that were previously unavailable and to be convincing enough for people within the host organisation to act on them (Bushe 2012 p 49).

One of the key components of action research is the notion of access to a given social context of interest. The issue of access relates to two key perspectives; how to obtain access and the adequateness of the access (Gummesson 2000). Physical access was granted to the researcher at the outset of the project by the Senior Management Team of the case study. Additionally, the researcher is an active member the social group under study so was continually immersed in the problem situation. The periodicity of access is important to enable thorough understanding over an extended period of time; the research period in this case was just over 6 years. As is seen later in this section the researcher assumes a multiple role of researcher or analyst, participant, catalyst/therapist and change agent; these roles are suggested by (Gummesson 2000, p.39). The key roles here are

therapist as this is when data was elicited from the participants, analyst when constructed data is coded and analysed using grounded theory methods and catalyst as through dialogue and action in the form of experimentation changes were made within the host organisation.

### Planning Action

Action research is also inextricably linked with the knowledge domain of organisational development and consequently organisational change. Action research is undertaken to bring about change and positive organisational development. There are a number of approaches to change (Coghlan and Brannick 2014); (Buono and Kerber 2008) provide three:

*Directed Change* – is an authoritarian approach to change in that the leaders of the organisation decided on what needs to change and informs those below in the hierarchy of this decision and its implication. As can be expected this is the form of research in which there is significant resistance.

*Planned Change* – a process of change that provides a logical and sequential course of designed actions. The sequential steps of this process would be; to see if there is a requirement to change, followed by a definition of a future desired state, which includes the identification of a gap and then undertaking a project to bridge this gap. This will involve the treatment of the process as a project after the successful completion of which the new state will exist.

*Guided Changing* - the important issues here are obvious from the description, guided implies maintaining a direction and the changing aspect suggests that within this overall direction organisational members should be encouraged to adapt and improvise on response to local context.

This action research project initially used a planned approach to change using the systematic and logical approach of project management; a definite objective, the improved student experience, achieved through the changing

of behaviours of staff and students and improvement to particular process including but not limited to; teaching; assessment and feedback techniques; process improvement such as induction. However, towards the end of the project the organisational development process resembles the guided changing approach more closely. (Bushe and Marshak 2009) refer to this as dialogic change..

During the transition phase, when action or actions are being undertaken as interventions, data is collected through the social interaction. But this social interaction has two purposes; it is the collection of data for the action and research process and it enables learning for the researcher and the social group (Coghlan and Brannick 2014). Data is generated in the researcher's role of participant observer, explained elsewhere. This data is recorded in the form of journal items (observations and thoughts) and analytical memos as required for the grounded theory method. The grounded theory method of analysis is critical to the validity of this project and is therefore explained further in the next chapter.

#### Take Action

This refers to the interventions that took place as a result of the theoretical reflection of the problem situation within the specific context carried out in the 'evaluate action phase'. These interventions are recorded in Chapter 6.

#### Evaluate Action

The purpose of action research is not just to understand and explain but to also improve or change the phenomenon under study. The Action Research approach to a study has the dual imperative of action and knowledge creation about the particular action (Coughlan & Coughlan, 2002). It is about learning from activity and is a form of empirical research. This learning from action refers to the (Schein 1995) research; the emergent lessons learned are translated (hypothesised) into action within the organisation and their implications are reflected on again to develop theory. The intention is to

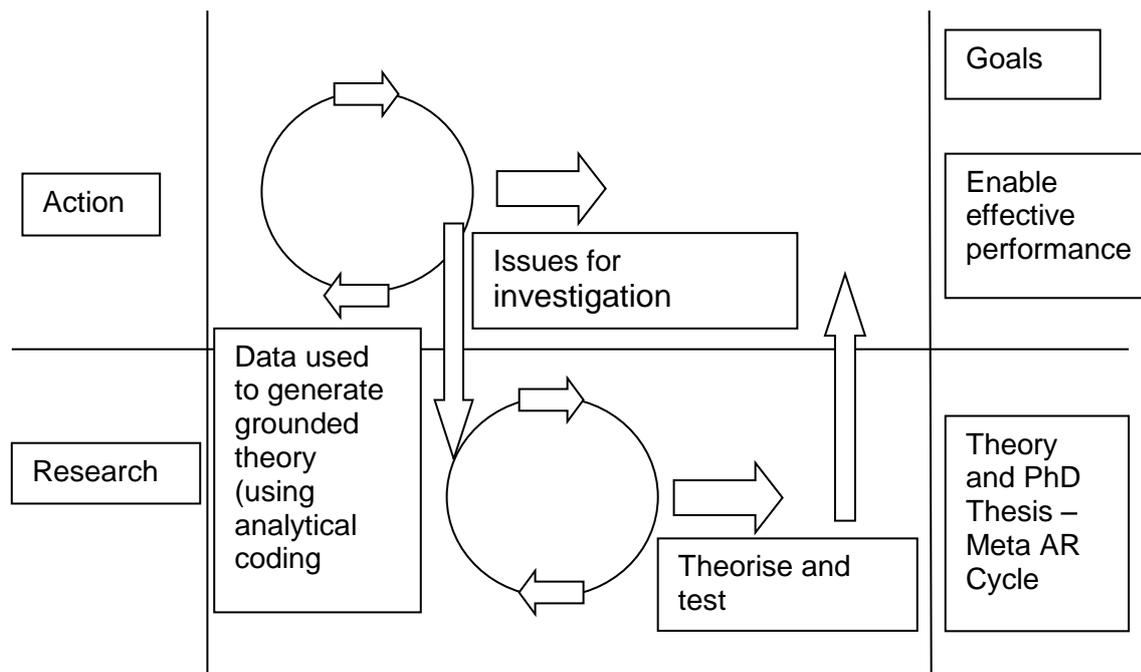
improve the capacity of the subject organisation to develop, transform and become more effective.

(Coghlan and Brannick 2014, p.18) use the analogy of the action researcher being an “actor-director” in the production of a movie. This enables the action researcher to take part in the “action” and to then step behind the camera to study the take as a director and critique it. This stepping outside of the action for reflection is a fundamental part of the action research process and enables the author to theorise. The reflection phase comprises consideration of three elements (Coghlan and Brannick 2014):

Content	Consideration of <b>what</b> is happening and the issues associated with it.
Process	Consideration of the procedures undertaken to achieve improvement, <b>how</b> the project is implemented
Premise	A critical appraisal of the concealed issues that may be implicit in the content and processes.

Table 3.5 Framework for Reflection on Action (Coghlan and Brannick 2014)

Figure 3.8 below demonstrates the separate goals of action and research within the action research cycle but also their interdependence; the ‘ issues for investigation’ highlighted during the action phase inform the research phase.



*Figure 3.8 The Action Research Process; Demonstrating the Distinction Between Action and Research and the Abductive Nature of the Method, based on Zuber-Skerritt and Perry (2002) and (McKay and Marshall 2001)*

The author’s perspective on the action researcher role is one of an insider attempting to operate inside and outside of the problem and organisation. The lens through which the observations take place, are the lens of experience but also an objective lens that assesses the situation via theory, (Dick, 2002).

(Coghlan and Brannick 2014, p.21) refer to “knowing in action” as a key element of action research and individual reflective inquiry. “Knowing in action” refers to what becomes normal and acceptable in daily life including organisational practices. In order to disrupt what is considered normal a gap is required to pause and reflect on what is going on within the organisation. This is often very difficult as most participants are caught up in the busyness of their lives to enable reflection and evaluation to take place.

Action Research is a participative process with the level of participation found anywhere along a continuum from indirect (being observed) to direct (co-researchers) (Coghlan and Brannick 2014).



Figure 3.9 Action Research Continuum

This action research project is at the participative and collaborative end of the continuum. The purpose was to improve the given social situation for all the participants concerned. The adoption of this approach has support from the various stakeholders, particularly the Senior Management Team, within the School. This support was forthcoming as the action research approach enables the intervention project(s) and the PhD thesis to progress in tandem; you cannot have one without the other. The motivation of the research project is to take action to produce theory *and* benefit the organisation; action research is action and research (Dick, 2002). The process of evaluation is also collaborative and involves the social group.

### 3.5.7 Improvement and Theory Generation

#### 3.5.7.1 Improvement

(Garratt 2011) uses ecological metaphors when discussing how organisations must adapt to “uncertainties and discontinuities” in order to survive as a ‘going concern’. It represents this in a concise formula reproduced below:

$$\text{Rate of Learning} \geq \text{Rate of Change} = \text{Survival}$$

Figure 3.10 Formula for the Survival of an Organism (Organisation) (Garratt 2011)

A key outcome of the insider action research process is the creation or improvement of “learning mechanisms and processes” within the organisation, that enables the adaptation or transition to an improved situation (Stebbins *et al.* 2006, Roth *et al.* 2007, p.45). There are a number of learning mechanisms that are used within this project; cognitive, structural and procedural. “Cognitive mechanisms provide language, concepts, models, symbols, theories and values for thinking, reasoning and understanding learning issues”(Stebbins *et al.* 2006, p.108). It is these symbols that are also used by the researcher as sources of data as it is the use of these mechanisms that are of paramount importance in the social construction methods employed in the research process. It is through the alteration of these symbols that change and innovation can occur.

This suggests that what is required is not transition to a given state, but for organisations to be systematically transient, adaptive and being socially constructed by those within and without. This reinforces the concept of the organisation being responsible for the creation of the perceived reality or “simultaneity” referred to earlier in this chapter. However, this is manipulation of the construction of meaning and this can create a more positive response and construction of meaning by the participants. The interventions undertaken to improve the situation are also the source of rich data for the theoretical aspect of the research.

### **3.5.7.2 Theory Generation**

(Eden and Huxham 1996) discuss the expectation that theory will be *generated* using action research rather than *tested* due to the unique and potentially unrepeatability nature of each social setting. Instead they profess that theory will be derived from a potentially incomparable set of data and a holistic multi-disciplinary theoretical sensitivity to that data that the researcher and participants offer. Extant theory can be used as part of the process of “synthesis” of the data and the use of the particular extant theory of choice (Eden and Huxham 1996, p.80).

(Trowler 2014, p.19) describes three ways in which insider action research studies can offer a contribution to knowledge, these are; theoretical; methodological and professional.

*Theoretical contribution* the research findings should contribute, in some way, the theoretical literature related to the particular focus of the meta research. In this project that is organisational effectiveness. However, due to the emergent nature of the research and the requirement for theoretical integration (Charmaz 2000); (Corbin and Strauss 2008) the core category may alter or there may be a number of potential theoretical arenas that the research could contribute. At this moment in time the main theoretical concepts are; organisational effectiveness; multiple stakeholder perceptions of organisations; organisational effectiveness in co-production/co-creation of value scenarios and effectiveness in socially constructed organisations. It is the combination of these theories that provide a unique contribution to knowledge (Eden and Huxham 1996 p 80).

*Methodological contribution* the contribution that the chosen research design makes. This could be the overall research approach or the particular aspect or form of action research, as described earlier, for example appreciative inquiry or participative inquiry as used in this research.

*Professional contribution* this is the contribution made to the associated practice, in this scenario the practice of academic staff and students alike. These actors are only the starting point of the investigation. It is through interpretation and understanding of their everyday experiences of their situation that wider implications are uncovered. Within this research the impact of this research was promoted through gradually receiving a wider audience, through attendance at meetings at different levels of the organisation, refer to Appendix M below for a summary of the impact

Action research is a collaborative change process; it is carried out to improve a given organisational situation with the cooperation of the social actors

involved. It is also a participative procedure in which the researcher acts as both participant and researcher.

The process is twofold; its objectives are both an improved situation for the organisation and there should be a “meta” output of research based on the process and content of the action.

Both processes are carried out synchronously in that action is taken and reflected upon concurrently in cycles as the project develops. Action research also utilises a developmental and emergent theory and it is important that rigorous and valid research methods are used (Eden and Huxham 1996 p 80). Grounded theory is therefore an appropriate method to use, in conjunction with this, to develop grounded, emergent theory.

The next section describes how the grounded theory method was used as part of the organisational assessment and research phase to create data, analyse it and then attempt to produce substantive theory from it.

### **3.6 Research Methods: Grounded Theory**

This section will provide details of the various methods of data collection and analysis. These techniques include the use of grounded theory as an analytical technique and in particular the use of theoretical and purposeful sampling. Various techniques of data collection are described, such as; participant observation, journaling, memos and semi structured interviewing are used as methods of data collection. The use of extant literature, during the analysis phase, is described in the description of theoretical comparison and theoretical sensitivity.

The research process was broadly split into two phases; phase 1 consisted of data collection and analysis as described below. This phase resulted in the production of a sensitising framework. This sensitising framework was then used to inform phase two of the data collection and analysis through theoretical sampling of the clues provided from the sensitising framework.

Grounded theory is a systematic, methodological and analytical process used to generate substantive theory from emergent data within a given context. It consists of a logical series of research activities that begin the generation of data; a sequential and iterative routine of analysis – that starts with open coding, progresses to axial coding, the identification of a core category and the generation of theory (Charmaz 2006). The following section will describe grounded theory including its origins together with a descriptive account of the processes used in this research project.

#### **3.6.1 Origins of Grounded Theory**

Grounded Theory and its use in social research was created to provide qualitative social inquiry with a rigorous, systematic methodology that was equivalent to those found in scientific quantitative approaches in social science (Charmaz 2000). The methodology was influenced by the originators background, Glaser bringing the objective, positivistic systematic approach

and Strauss providing the field research ingredient of pragmatic, study using symbolic interactionism (Charmaz 2000). Glaser and Strauss (1967) used the pragmatic perspectives of the “early symbolic interactionists” (Suddaby 2006, p.633) to study emergent data in an objective way. This approach enabled the creation of knowledge using the “ongoing interpretation of meaning produced by individuals engaged in a common project of observation” (Suddaby 2006, p.633). Glaser and Strauss developed a collection of systematic practices to enable the collection and analysis of data and the subsequent creation of a grounded theory. Grounded theory historically was underpinned by positivist traditions; there is an objective reality, about a particular social situation, that can be uncovered by the ordered use of the methods of grounded theory. Corbin and Strauss consider the requirement “appropriate measures to minimise the intrusion of the subjectivity of the researcher”. (Charmaz 2000, p.513) refer to the writing associated with this form as “silent authorship”. The authors of this form are simply vessels reporting and communicating with their audience, in an expert way.

(Charmaz 2006) offers an alternative to the objectivist approach and introduces a constructivist approach to grounded theory. (Charmaz 2000, p.513) describes grounded theory as offering “a set of flexible strategies, not rigid prescriptions” that can be influenced by a number of theoretical perspectives, such as pragmatism, explained later and constructionism; in particular symbolic interactionism. Charmaz (ibid.) recognises that in constructivist grounded theory the researcher produces and interprets the meaning of the data in a co-creative process with the participants. This co-creation of meaning is fundamental to constructionism; it requires the researcher to use tools that will enable access into the lives of the participants.

Ontology (Epistemology)	
Objectivism	Interpretive
Glaser (1978)	
Glaser and Strauss (1992)	
Corbin and Strauss (1990, 1998)	Corbin and Strauss (2008)
	Charmaz, (2008)

Figure 3.11 The Historical Development of Constructivist Grounded Theory

This research project has adopted grounded theory as an analytical tool to enable a thorough understanding of a particular complex situation; it is, in this context, to construct the interpretive meaning of effectiveness using the associated social actors within the case study organisation. The key objective is to use the coherent guidelines and processes in a transparent way to produce an interpretive “explanatory framework” (Charmaz 2006, p.510) that captures an interpretation of the lives of those under study. (Charmaz 2000, p.522) refers to this succinctly through the observation that qualitative, ethnographic forms of research and the interpretation of meaning are closer to creating a painting than to taking a photograph.

### 3.6.2 Components of Grounded Theory

There are key processes that should be present within a grounded theory study are shown in the table below together with the associated authors. (Charmaz 2000, p.510) and (Birks and Mills 2011, p.9);

<b>Charmaz (2000, 2006)</b>	<b>Birks and Mills (2011)</b>
Simultaneous collection and	Concurrent data generation or

analysis of data,	collection and analysis
A two-step data coding process	Initial coding and categorisation of data Intermediate or axial coding
Comparative methods	Constant comparative analysis using inductive and abductive logic
Memo writing aimed at the construction of conceptual analyses	Writing memos
Sampling to refine the researcher's emerging theoretical ideas	Theoretical sampling
	Theoretical sensitivity
	Selecting a core category
	Theoretical saturation
Integration of the theoretical framework”	Theoretical integration

Table 3.6 Components of Grounded Theory Process

The aim of grounded theory is to present a co-produced explanatory theoretical frameworks from the data that emerges from this case and to also produce actionable, useful knowledge for use within the particular case via the action research aspect of the overall process (Charmaz 2000).

### 3.6.3 Data Selection (Selection of Setting and Timeframe for Study)

“Through our methods, we first aim to see this world as our research participants do – from the inside” (Charmaz 2006, p.14). This quotation encapsulated the reason for using the particular case as it enabled the author to obtain a unique perspective on the research problem of effectiveness within higher education institutes (Charmaz 2006).

The context, for the study, is a period of great change within the higher education sector as a result of the (John Browne 2010) and in particular the

introduction of tuition fees and the subsequent ‘marketisation’ of higher education (Jongbloed 2003).

The case study is a post 1992 University based in England, United Kingdom. This is a purposive sample as it should demonstrate the features of interest to the research project, (Silverman 2010). (Eisenhardt 1989) discusses the use of building theory from case studies and the notion of theoretical sampling versus representative sampling. This research project also discusses the potential for multi-level and multi-perspective analysis that this form allows.

Description of case	Research problem	Data Sources	Investigator	Output
Single School within a UK post 1992 University	Effectiveness/ Performance in multi-stakeholder, co-creation of value environment	Field study, observations, critical events and interviews	Single	In progress (extending theory of performance and improved performance within case study)

Table 3.6: Details of Case Study

### 3.6.4 Simultaneous Data Collection and Analysis

This section examines the methods of data collection used within the case study to gather pertinent data for analysis. This process is fundamental to the grounded theory approach the initial data is collected and coded it is these that produce the sensitising concepts that influence the remainder of the research. (Birks and Mills 2011) refer to data generation to ensure that the researcher’s position and role in the process is made explicit. The researcher is engaged directly with the, or as one of the, participants in the creation of both data *and* meaning. Primarily there are two streams of data produced

within this project with dual and overlapping purposes, these are explained in Table 3.5 below.

<b>Data Stream</b>	<b>Research Purpose</b>	<b>Comments</b>
1. Data from action: the “core action research cycle”	To feed into cyclical action research process, to modify action.	To improve the situation of the case study <i>and</i> to inform the meta, thesis research process.
2. Data from “Meta”, or the “core thesis cycle”	Analysis using grounded theory techniques to enhance knowledge and theory.	To inform meta, thesis cycle research process (perceptions of organisational effectiveness).

Table 3.7 Purpose of Dual and Overlapping Data Streams

The data referred to also have a dual purpose it is initially used in the evaluating action phase of the AR cycle to inform and improve the core action research process. It is also to enable the thesis cycle research process for the thesis element of the project to proceed. The thesis level data consists of the perceptions of effectiveness of the social actors involved in the case study, how access was obtained to this is described in the next section.

### **3.6.5 Phase 1 (Core Thesis Cycle 1) Initial Data Collection: Observation, Field notes, Memos and Diagrams**

The initial phase of data collection was undertaken with the purpose of achieving research objective 3: *“To create a sensitising conceptual framework for further investigation through theoretical sampling”*. This section describes the data collection techniques used to gather data to subsequently enable the first stage of grounded theory analysis to take place, this is referred to as initial coding.

### **3.6.5.1 Accessing the Field: Fieldwork and Participant Observation**

Ethnography relates to studies of participants in a particular setting and it is associated with anthropological research of social groups in which the researcher immerses themselves in the group to better understand that particular group (Bryman and Bell 2007). Ethnographic studies within organisations enable data to be collected from the researcher's involvement in the daily activities of the business (ibid.)

This research project utilises an overt mode of observation defined more precisely as a 'participant as observer'. This role is described more fully in Chapter 5 as part of data collection techniques of the core thesis cycle 1. The next few sections describe the various methods that were used to record data during the researcher's role as participant as observer. Although the methods of data collection and analysis are presented separately and sequentially here, for clarity, the data collection and analysis processes ordinarily took place simultaneously. These pieces of data collection and reflection and analysis were recorded in a series of journals.

### **3.6.5.2 Field notes**

The creation of field notes is a key step between data and analysis it forms part of the analytical core to create sensitising concepts for the research process. Sensitising concepts provide initial ideas for the researcher to pursue (Blumer (1969 cited in Charmaz, 2006, p.16). These initial thoughts are, naturally, influenced by the theoretical sensitivity of the researcher; theoretical sensitivity encompasses the researcher's perspective informed by their professional and personal histories. In this research the sensitising concepts broadly relate to the overriding theoretical topic of organisational effectiveness. (Charmaz 2006, p.17) is not critical of this, as it is considered "a place to start, not to end". It is the point at which further investigation begins. These concepts are used as provisional, unconfirmed clues requiring further investigation through comparison to further data.

### 3.6.5.3 Memos

(Charmaz 2006) refers to writing memos as providing an interval that enables a researcher to pause, consider the issue at hand creatively and to record the findings. Memos are also used, with grounded theory, to aid the researcher in their reflection and the interpretive coding process between data and analysis. The researcher's role is critical to this element and there must be acknowledgement of this within the research for transparency. (Birks *et al.* 2008) describe the four process related purposes of memos; Mapping, Extracting, Maintaining and Opening Communication. *Mapping* is used to make explicit the research process and provide both a theoretical audit trail of data and associated interpretation but also a research process audit trail that provides details of theoretical sampling and other related activities. *Extracting* meaning from the data in categorical and conceptual terms, through researcher interrogation and interpretation, is another function of memos. "Memos are therefore the vehicles that transport the researcher from the concrete to the conceptual" (Birks *et al.* 2008, p.71). *Maintaining momentum*- memos are representative of an analytical moment in time that records the researcher's thoughts and interpretations. These interpretations are accepted as being ephemeral and therefore flexible and can be revisited and altered as the research progresses. Awareness of this enables the research to proceed in a tentative manner without fear of stalling. *Opening communication*; qualitative research is participative and the recording of memos allows open communication to be maintained with the interested community.

(Charmaz 2006, p.82) suggests that memos should be informal and of different lengths but it is important that the thoughts are recorded for future consideration. Memos are heavily used in the coding process when explicating categories to expose components and processes within it.

This process demonstrates just how important the memo writing process is as part of the grounded theory research method. One of the main advantages, is the various levels of abstraction that memos can be recorded

at, thereby enabling the capacity to record empirical data to highly abstract theoretical concepts (Charmaz 2006). The researcher found the process of memoing invaluable. The value of this process is incredible and is realised fully at the end of the process during theoretical integration and the creation of grounded theory.

#### **3.6.5.4 Diagrams**

(Corbin and Strauss 2008) also describe the use of different forms of diagrams to help in the process of the conceptualisation of concepts and the various relationships amongst them. This is a straightforward way of demonstrating the holistic and integrated nature of the research problem. Sensitising frameworks, which are often presented in diagrammatic form, allow the researcher and the audience to see the integrated nature of the problem and to also attempt various iterations of analysis using alternative assessments of relationships.

#### **3.6.6 Phase 2 (Core Thesis Cycle 2): Theoretical Sampling: Data Collection: Qualitative Interviewing**

Theoretical sampling is an important process within grounded theory studies. It encourages the researcher to let the emergent data lead the analytical process. Decisions as to what data to collect are governed by the initial analysis of the emergent data into concepts and categories and these categories are explicated during the theoretical sampling process (Charmaz 2006, Birks and Mills 2011). It could be likened to a detective following clues to solve a particular crime, it is a trail to follow. This infers that it is a navigation tool that aids the researcher in the journey of data collection and interpretation. Theoretical sampling should not be confused with sampling within scientific research; it is not selecting a sample that statistically best represents a group (Charmaz 2006) it is about finding as much as possible about the particular emergent categories created during the initial coding phase, described as phase 1 above. The purpose is not to produce generalisability (in theory) but specificity (Charmaz 2006, p.101).

The methods used to undertake theoretical sampling, that is, to collect further data may be logical, such as interviews described below. However, theoretical sampling will also be undertaken concurrently during the participant observation, journaling and memos phase that continues alongside the more explicit interviews stage. The explicit interview phase is described below.

(Charmaz 2006, p.25) describes intensive interviewing as being part of an interpretive enquiry process and its purpose is to enable an “in-depth exploration of a particular topic”, in theoretical sampling, the topics are the emergent themes found in the emergent phase of the participant observation of the research project data collection. Through this process the intention is to understand the phenomenon through the experience, thoughts, opinions and perspectives of the participant. This is obtained by asking the participant to describe their lived experience and importantly to reflect on this.

Within this project the journal and observational data was coded using a form of grounded theory advocated by (Charmaz 2006) to identify concepts and then categories. The process is to “generate theory through data rather than prior hypothesis” (Silverman 2011, p.73). The concepts that emerged during this initial phase are presented in Chapter 5 of this thesis. These concepts will form the basis of the next phase of data collection, through qualitative interviews as “theoretical samples”.

The samples used should be representative of the concepts we are interested in knowing more about and not statistically representative of the general, or particular part of, the population. To this end a purposive sample was carefully chosen using the logic of theoretical sampling. The purposive sample relates to the theoretical sampling process and the most appropriate members of the population were chosen, that is, those best placed to expand and explicate the concepts under further investigation (Patton 1990b, p.169). The strategy does include the use of negative and comparative cases. These

were used because these opposites emerged from the data when exploring effectiveness.

The theoretical sampling process is representative of the abductive research process as described earlier in chapter 3. The research begins with the examination of the emergent data and concurrent analysis through memoing and journaling, propositional ideas are then constructed and these propositional ideas are then tested through the collection of further empirical data through theoretical sampling (Charmaz 2006, p.103). The abductive process and in particular the creation of tentative “theoretical explanations” (Charmaz 2006, p.104) links grounded theory with the ‘action’ phase of the action research aspect of the research. It is during this analytical phase that, not only is there a search for data to explicate but there is also consideration of solutions to improve the given situation. The next section describes ‘how’ theoretical sampling was undertaken, in part, using interviews.

#### **3.6.6.1 Qualitative Interviewing** (King and Horrocks 2010) *and (Patton 1990a)*

This section describes the theory that underpins the qualitative interviewing process utilised within phase 2 (Core Thesis Cycle 2) of the data collection process. Qualitative interviewing using the interpretivist perspective enables the participants “meaning and experience” (King and Horrocks 2010, p.26) King and of the concepts to emerge. The sampling strategy can be found in Appendix F.

The interviewees were recruited through an email invitation that included Interview Guide and Participant Information Guide was sent to all interviewees to inform them of the overall purpose of the research and to obtain their agreement to participate. Copies of the Interview Guide and Participant Information Guide are included in Appendix E for information. The interviews were undertaken in a neutral location for anonymity and to put the interviewees at ease, away from the distractions of their offices. The opening questions were used to relax the interviewees and establish rapport. This

process would lead to the achievement of obtaining rich data. All the interviews were recorded using a digital voice recorder and anonymity was maintained throughout for ethical reasons. The “broad, open-ended” (Charmaz 2006, p.26) questions were used to elicit the participants’ responses from the interviewees; these are included in Appendix E, for reference.

The interviews were used as part of the continued data collection process, alongside continuing participant observation, journaling, memos and diagrams. The interview, in this situation allowed the researcher to have “more direct control over the construction of the data” (Charmaz 2006, p.28) and this “analytical control” (ibid) is important within the context of theoretical sampling. The control was exerted by the interviewer in the “interview guide” as suggested by (King and Horrocks 2010, p.35). However, it was borne in my mind that there was always a requirement to remain open to the data and to therefore be adaptable to the participants’ perceptions of the concepts within the case study context (Charmaz 2006).

In order to gain rich, meaningful access to the participant’s experiences various phenomenological methods were used including those associated with Personal Construct Theory (Kelly, 2005 cited in King and Horrocks 2010). This technique uses techniques, such as; imaginative variation; the repertory grid; the Pictor Technique to name a few. (Burr *et al.* 2014) discuss how Personal Construct Psychology is consistent with the use of Grounded Theory as it emphasises the “individual experience” or perceptions in a given context and it is a constructivist philosophy for the explorative forms of inquiry.

Using the Pictor technique, the interviewee was asked to consider a typical week or semester from their perspective and to consider this time period using the emergent concepts; the people, processes, organisation, KPIs, communication, capability. The interviewee was able to determine other variables and sub-variables of the given concepts. The participant was required to arrange the concepts, by recording on post it notes, so as to

communicate their role in the typical week. The interviewee observed the process and required commentary from the participant to enable further exploration.

### **3.6.7 Constant Comparative Analysis**

This is part of the concurrent data collection and analysis phase and it refers to the requirement to compare the data from a variety of perspectives (Corbin and Strauss 2008); “incident to incident, incident to codes, codes to codes, codes to categories and categories to categories” (Birks and Mills 2011). This helps the researcher to identify the properties and dimensions of the research problem (code or category) in an inductive way (Charmaz 2006, p.179). It is at this point that the researchers “worldview” is brought to bear on the data through “interaction” with it, this interaction is interpretive (Charmaz, *ibid*). This part of the process is thought to “fracture” the collected data’ that is to separate it, through line by line coding, for example. This form of coding directs us where to go (Charmaz 2006, p.100) and what to examine further.

### **3.6.8 Theoretical Comparison and Theoretical Sensitivity**

During analysis and comparison, the researcher may not always be able to recognise or understand what they are seeing and therefore construct meaning. At this stage a researcher can access or appeal to their (similar) experiences and or the extant literature to help explicate meaning and identify properties and dimensions of the particular category (Charmaz 2006, Corbin and Strauss 2008). This can give rise to iterative, messy interplay between data, extant literature and analysis (Suddaby 2006, p.637). (Birks and Mills 2011) propose that the extant literature can also be treated as data; the analysis of the literature can assist the research in clarifying the route for further theoretical sampling and data collection. Reliance on literature as data may increase as the grounded theory develops and becomes more abstract and theoretical (Birks and Mills 2011).

This describes the fact that the researcher uses their intellectual capacity within the analysis process to interpret the data and therefore the perceptions of the participants (Corbin and Strauss 2008, p.33); (Birks and Mills 2011). This is a very private and unique process and it is at this point that the research is uniquely interpretive and diverges from objective forms of research. This is part of the interactive, co-creative process by which the researcher comes to know the phenomenon through the eyes of the participants. The intellectual capacity involves sometimes subconscious interplay with the data by the researched based on their own intellectual capacity. It is not possible to preclude influence from previous theories and (Dey 1999, p.251) refers to the difference “between an open mind and an empty head” which suggests that some theoretical sensitivity is acceptable, if not essential to interpretation of the data.

### **3.6.9 Coding**

Coding is the title given to the progressive, logical and analytical process of grounded theory. It is the link between the emergent data and the grounded theory with each of the separate phases relating to greater levels of abstraction (Birks and Mills 2011). The objective of this process is to produce “a high level conceptual framework that possesses explanatory power supported by advanced analytical processes” (Birks and Mills 2011, p.95). (Charmaz 2006, p.46) refers to coding as the “pivotal link” between data and the creation of theory. Coding, as a process is the drawing out of concepts from the emergent data and the classification of the same by definition of categories and the inherent properties and dimensions (Corbin and Strauss 2008). The overall coding process is shown in matrix form in Figure 5.13 below, this form was used during the analysis process for grounded theory generation. The detailed axial coding are included in Appendix D.

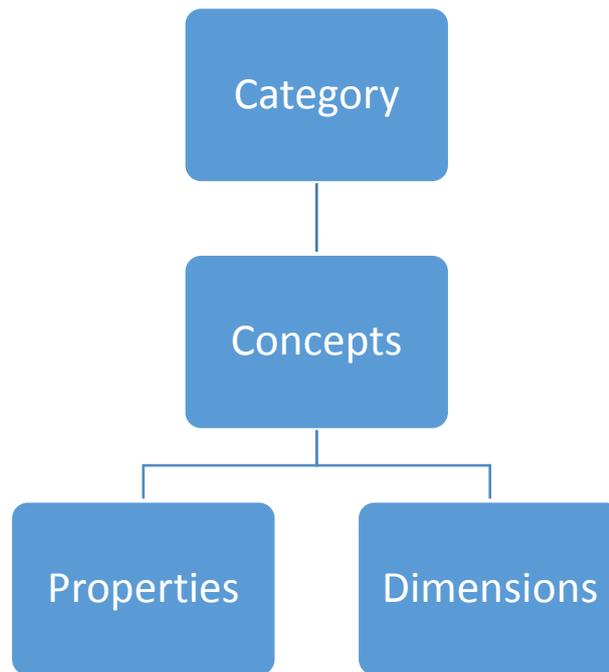


Figure 3.12 Diagrammatic Representation of Categories

### **Core Thesis Cycle 1: Initial or Open Coding**

The first phase of coding and therefore the development of a substantive theory is initial coding. This process requires close reading of the data and uses strategies, such as line by line coding, this attention to specific detail and not the whole prevents the researcher from using theoretical sensitivity when cognitively processing the data (Charmaz 2000). This is often referred to as taking the data apart or “fracturing” the data (Glaser and Strauss, 1967 cited in (Birks and Mills 2011, p.95)). This research project used transcribed field notes of observations and journal items for the initial coding process. This initial phase is critical as it starts the journey of theory development, however, the developed categories are considered conditional. They are conditional on the requirement of remaining open to the data and also to “other analytical properties”

The size of the bits of data for analysis at this stage can vary from words to lines to paragraphs but the researcher must be able to extract theoretical categories. The resultant codes, concepts and categories provide the point of

departure for the developing theory. This phase is described more thoroughly in Chapter 5 Core Thesis Cycle 1.

### **Core Thesis Cycle 2: Focused Coding (Intermediate or Axial Coding)**

This is the second phase of data analysis, if initial coding takes the data apart, this process puts it back together again in a more connected, conceptual and abstract way. Axial coding is predominantly about making connections; it is about relationships between categories (Charmaz 2006). This will also be carried out during the initial or open coding phases so the boundaries are not fixed (Corbin and Strauss 2008). It is the process of relating concepts to each other and trying to make connections explicit. (Corbin and Strauss 2008, p.103) call this “theoretical integration”. In order to achieve this integration comparative methods are used to further enhance the development of theory by identifying to the connections between categories and the properties and dimensions contained therein. This process is not necessarily sequential it can take place at the same time as open coding as the researcher is often making connections between categories and formulating tentative relationships (Corbin and Strauss 2008, p.60).

It is a framework for the researcher to use, a logical process through which the following are looked for; conditions, actions and interactions and consequences. Matrices are useful here to map the various connects across categories and cases, for example. This research project used an axial coding template to carry out this phase of the data analysis. The axial coding templates are a critical part of this analysis and they are found in Appendix D for reference.

There are frameworks for enabling this process of elaboration (Charmaz 2006, p.61) refers to Corbin and Strauss’ frame to ensure connections between categories are seen and these are shown in the table below:

<b>Term</b>	<b>Analytical Process</b>
Conditions (Context – micro and macro)	Examine the circumstances that provide structure to the given situation. (Why, where, how come)
Actions/Interactions	What are the participants' responses to the associated events? (By whom and how?)
Consequences	What are the results of the above? (What happens as a result?)

Table 3.8 Adaptation of Corbin and Strauss's Axial Coding Frame

The overall process is elaborated to include the entire theory generation process from initial, open coding to theory integration in Figure 6.1 at the beginning of the next chapter.

### **3.6.10 Selecting a core category**

(Birks and Mills 2011, p.100) refer to the creation of a core category occurring at a point in time, "when the researcher can trace connections between a frequently occurring variable and all of the other categories, sub categories, properties and dimensions". Once the core category was identified theoretical sampling was undertaken to populate or saturate this category further, this is carried out through a process of making further connections to ensure that the core category is prevalent within all categories. The emergent core category is presented in chapter 7.

### **3.6.11 Theoretical saturation**

According to (Charmaz 2006, p.113) theoretical saturation occurs "when gathering fresh data no longer sparks new theoretical insights, nor reveals new properties of your core theoretical strategies". (Dey 1999, p.257) is critical of this term and states that categories are "better described as *"suggested"* by the data" and that the term "theoretical sufficiency" is more

appropriate than saturation, as saturation infers fullness; rather than the self-appointed state assumed by the researcher. A state of awareness was reached, by the researcher, that manifested itself in the correct anticipation of occurrences. A point was reached when analysis of the data resulted in repetition of explanatory findings.

### **3.6.12 Theoretical integration**

This represents the final piece of grounded theory research and it takes the form of the construction of a theory that can be used to explain and explicate the particular concept under study, in particular context (Birks and Mills 2011). (Charmaz 2006) states that theory in social inquiry should emphasise understanding and interpretation. This research project is underpinned by social constructionism and in particular symbolic interactionism and these paradigms view theory as circumstantial and contingent. Grounded theory in this context results in a theory that is interpretive rather than explanative and general.

### **3.6.13 Summary and Links to Next Chapter**

This chapter has provided an introduction to the origins of grounded theory and in particular its appropriateness and congruence with the social constructionism ontology. The chapter described the two main phases of data collection using observation, journals, memos, diagrams and qualitative interviews. The chapter progresses to explain the use of grounded theory as a valid form of analysis to ensure that there is clear process in the progressive and simultaneous analysis of data.6. Core Action Research Cycles: Narrative Account

## **3.7 Time Horizon**

The project is longitudinal; the action research form of research strategy requires that the study of action takes place over an extended period.

Start of Study	Completion of Study	Duration of Study
September 2009	December 2015	6 years and 3 months

Table 3.9 Duration of Study

### 3.8 Verification Strategy

There are multiple definitions of the concept of research validity. The positivistic and realist perception, of validity, does not necessarily ring true within interpretive forms of research (Butler-Kisber 2010). Validity in the positivistic approach applies to the notion of the objectivity, truthfulness and generalisability of the findings (Crotty 1998). Interpretive approaches, on the other hand, use the language of credibility, originality and resonance, for example (Charmaz 2006).

In interpretive forms of qualitative and social research, the goal is to comprehend, capture and communicate the complex nature of the social group's situation. This is undertaken in sociological studies in many forms including the immersion of the researcher in the social context and the subsequent observation and analysis of the actions of the subject group, as they go about their lives (Creswell 2009).

The pivotal role of the researcher as the "instrument" of the research, (Patton 1990b) Patton (1990, p. 472), should be explicit from the outset. The acknowledgement of the position of the researcher and their role in the process is important and provides a form of substantive validation; this process is co-created in that it takes place between multiple actors including the participants and the researcher (Creswell, J. 2007, p. 206).

(Patton 1990a) Patton (1990, p. 461) states that qualitative inquiry requires consideration of three constituents and the study should confirm and clarify the response to each of the following:

- 1. Rigorous techniques and methods for gathering high-quality data that is carefully analysed, with attention to issues of validity, reliability and triangulation;*
- 2. the credibility of the researcher, which is dependent on training, experience, track record, status and presentation of self; and*
- 3. philosophical belief in the phenomenological paradigm, that is, a fundamental appreciation of naturalistic inquiry, qualitative methods, inductive analysis and holistic thinking."*

Eisner (1991) refers to the weight of gathered evidence that provides confidence to the researcher and lends credibility to the arguments and conclusions offered. This relates to the concept of "substantive validation" (Creswell, 2007, p206) in which the researcher is able to reflect on their contribution to the interpretive process and that the interpretation is

recognisable to the participants. This interpretation is improved through the translation, analysis, explication and communication of the observed and collected data. The data is organised into something meaningful and truthful. The interpretation can be linked and compared to previous research, in the form of theoretical comparisons; comparing collected data to extant literature and experience (Corbin and Strauss (2008) p75). This provides further validation to the work, or more specifically the interpretation of the data.

Reliability is provided by the integrity of the research process and in particular the data collection and analysis. Grounded theory provides a very tight methodological approach to enable credibility of process to be both transparent and valid. Action research with its cycles of collection and analysis, including the use of explicit reflective pauses by the researcher also maintain the integrity of the research process. Validation in Action Research is observed in the cyclical process and in the integrity of the methods that are used to collect and analyse data during the reflection part of the cycle, (Dick, 2002). It is this cyclical process that generates the data and the opportunity for reflection and making sense of what has been observed. The translation of the concept of verification into a plan for action within the research takes the form of "Verification strategies" Creswell (2007) p207.

Table 3.10 below provides details of the verification strategy used within the study, this is included to provide transparency regarding the validity of the approaches taken.

<b>Verification Strategy</b>	<b>Response used within Study</b>
Prolonged Engagement and Observation in the Field	The research study takes the form of a longitudinal case study. The participant observation commenced December 2009 and was completed December 2015. The researcher gained the trust of the social actors being studied and became the person to go to with regard to issues of effectiveness.
Triangulation	The prolonged immersion also enabled multiple sources of data to be used ranging from observation and conversation to the analysis of documents, for example, minutes of meetings, University documentation.

Peer Review	Peer review was undertaken using a number of strategies including, internally; a critical friend, a senior member of the academic programme was used to act as a commentator on the process and the content findings. Additionally, the findings were presented at internal research conferences and the research process was communicated for critical review. This is a form on “consensual validation” received from peers with the required level of appropriate knowledge (Eisner, 1991). Externally, the research findings were also presented at the International BAM Conference at key times for appraisal by a related, academic audience.
Negative Case Analysis	Through the purposive sampling process cases that were at both ends of the ‘effective performance’ spectrum were identified and data collected through interview and observation.
Researcher Bias	The researcher is the Student Experience Coordinator and a teacher for the host organisation and therefore there may be an issue of bias towards the academic process and academic members of the social group under study. However, this is dealt with primarily via the constant comparison process and the maintenance on an objective and critical view of the data using the grounded theory coding techniques.
Member Checking	This process was undertaken informally during discussions with the participants and also more formally with presentations at research events and university teaching and learning and staff development events. Hammersley and Atkinson (2007, p.180) describe the positive and negative aspects of respondent validation. The positive perspective

	is the requirement and ability of the participants to be able to sanction the findings and outcomes of the analytical process as being reflective of their experiences. However, consideration should be given to the issue that the participants may not be able to reflect on their experiences in the same way and to the same depth as the researcher.
Rich, thick description	This was provided in the analytical memos and included constant comparison.
External Audits	The research findings were presented at a number of Conferences including the British Academy of Management Conferences in 2012 and 2013.

Table 3.10 Verification Strategy

Creswell (2007) recommends that at least two of the procedures are used to ensure correct validation. This project used all of the procedures included in the table above.

Researcher bias is recognised as a potential criticism and it has been described that the personal experience of the researcher is used in the interpretive process via theoretical sensitivity. In the process the experiences of the researcher are used to offer alternative possibilities or explanations for the data in a critical format. This is used in conjunction with reference to literature and theory. It is important that the researcher maintains an analytical distance from the data. To ensure this separation the researcher recorded their emotional responses in the journal items.

The use of the constant comparison method also ensures that the researcher's and participants' inherent assumptions are examined.

### 3.9 Summary and Links to Next Chapter

In summary the research philosophy that underpins the research is as described in Table 3.5 below. The "research onion" (Saunders *et al.* 2012) and Crotty's elements of research (Crotty 1998) were used as the framework to present and justify the choices made. This chapter makes clear that the

research approach is subjective, interpretive and value laden. The research strategy is action research and the research method uses grounded theory.

<b>Ontology</b>	<b>Epistemology</b>	<b>Axiology</b>	<b>Research Approach</b>
The nature of reality?	What is acceptable knowledge?	Values in their role in the research?	The relationship between theory and data
Social Constructionism	Interpretivism: Symbolic Interactionism	Value laden	Abductive

Table. 3.11 Summary of Research Approach

The next chapter will provide a descriptive, narrative account of the core action research cycles.

## 4. CORE ACTION RESEARCH CYCLES

### 4.1 Introduction to Action Research Narrative

The purpose of this chapter is to present a narrative account of the interventions undertaken during the *action* period of the action research project including some analysis in the form of reflections carried out by the researcher. It will be an historical account of the action taken during the entire duration of the action research project from September 2009 until December 2015. It will be retold in a neutral form to enable the reader to judge the interpretations and the future claims for knowledge (Coghlan and Brannick 2014) This process is carried out in accordance with phase three of the action research cycle 'Taking Action' (Coghlan and Brannick 2014, p.10)). The Figure 4.1 below shows how the action research cycles interact with the core thesis cycles and how these in turn are sequentially phased.

### Core Thesis Cycle 1

### Core Thesis Cycle 2

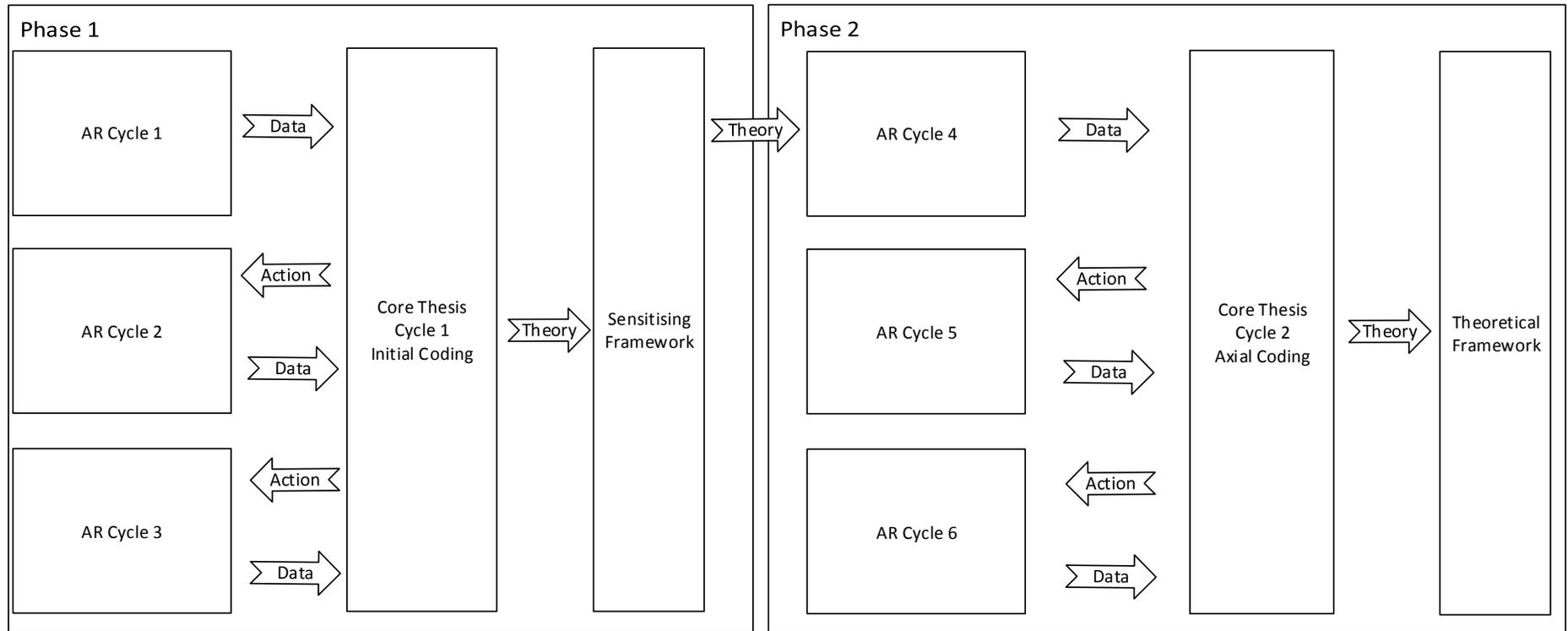


Figure 4.1 Logical Representation of AR Processes

The chapter is structure is a described in Table 4.1 below:

Section	Topic	Comments
<b>4.1</b>	Introduction and Aims of Chapter	This section introduces the purpose of the chapter; to provide details of the data collection and analysis techniques used within the research.
<b>4.2</b>	Narrative Account of Action Research Cycle 1	This section provides an account of the interventions undertaken and the reflective pauses of the researcher that form part of the simultaneous data analysis.
<b>4.3</b>	Narrative Account of Action Research Cycle 2	This section provides an account of the interventions undertaken and the reflective pauses of the researcher that form part of the simultaneous data analysis.
<b>4.4</b>	Narrative Account of Action Research Cycle 3	This section provides an account of the interventions undertaken and the reflective pauses of the researcher that form part of the simultaneous data analysis.
<b>4.5</b>	Narrative Account of Action Research Cycle 4	This section provides an account of the interventions undertaken and the reflective pauses of the researcher that form part of the simultaneous data analysis.
<b>4.6</b>	Narrative Account of Action Research Cycle 5	This section provides an account of the interventions undertaken and the reflective pauses of the researcher that form part of the simultaneous data analysis.

4.7	Narrative Account of Action Research Cycle 6	This section provides an account of the interventions undertaken and the reflective pauses of the researcher that form part of the simultaneous data analysis.
4.8	Summary and Links to Next Chapter	This section will summarise the key themes associated with the narrative account of the action taken and provide links to the next chapter.

Table 4.1 Chapter Structure

During the narrative description, “reflective pauses” will be inserted to make transparent the observations and thoughts of the researcher as the text proceeds (Coghlan and Brannick 2014, p.170),. The author used the acronym OATS to describe the process of **o**bserving **a**ctions and then **s**tepping **b**ack and **t**hinking and **t**heorising about the meaning of the event. These are included to separate the account of the journey and events that took place along the way from the interpretation and meanings constructed by the researcher (Coghlan and Brannick 2014, p.169). The reader can read these reflections as they wish, either during or separately after reading the account of the action taken.

The reflective pauses provide helpful analytical navigational pointers for the reader to follow as the research project progresses. It also demonstrates how the methodological, analytical process took place alongside the action being taken as is described graphically in Figure 6.1. Within the reflective pause three forms of reflection are used in accordance with (Mezirow 1991); content reflection – how ideas are applied; process reflection –how problems are solved and premise reflection – consideration of questions being asked. The reflective processes are also an attempt make explicit the thought processes and interpretations of the researcher (Raelin 2001). This enables and encourages the reader to engage at a deeper level with the cognitive processes that underpin the action taken and the theory developed. It also

enables the reflective process to be publicised and consequently assessed for validity.

The action and interventions took place in a particular, appropriate setting that would enable the organisational development phenomenon to be investigated. The setting is described below and the unit of analysis is the operational level of the organisation and in particular the students and academic staff within this context.

This study focuses on the process of change and adaptation, undertaken by the social actors of the case study over a period of time, stated below in Table 4.2. (Pettigrew et al. 2001, p.698) refer to challenges associated with this as firstly “to catch reality in flight” and secondly to remove attachment to a particular methodology by studying “long term processes in their contexts”. This enables a phenomenon to be studied in a more holistic way as the associated issues will emerge as the study progresses, provided the process is not too constrained. This is a difficult process to manage and the levels of analysis must be considered. In this particular case it is limited to the academic staff and student relationship as this is the main context where value is added within the organisation (Pettigrew et al. 2001). However, using the theoretical sampling approach (see later in chapter for explanation), other lines of inquiry have also been followed outside of this initial scope to help better understand the problem at multiple levels. This included consideration of issues vertically up to public policy through the various layers of the organisation and horizontally across layers.

<b>Start of Study</b>	<b>Completion of Study</b>	<b>Duration of Study</b>
September 2009	December 2015	6 years and 3 months

Table 4.2 Duration of Study

The next section, of this chapter, provides an account of the journey undertaken by the researcher and the participants of the case study over this period of time. It describes the action taken, some of which was planned and

other action was reactive. But above all the action taken was responsive to the factors occurring and the needs of the social actors in this context.

The analytical process consisted of two core thesis phases; the initial phase consisted of the collection of data through observation over a period of 3 years to produce a sensitising conceptual framework for further analysis, through theoretical sampling and further observations, in the second phase. This process enabled the initial findings to be investigated further to enable the explication and saturation of the key concept (Charmaz 2006); (Corbin and Strauss 2008).

## **6.2 Narrative Account of Action Research Cycle 1 – (2009 – 2010) Start of Core Thesis Cycle 1**

At the outset of this action research project, in March 2009, the researcher was appointed as the School's Student Experience Enhancement Coordinator. This was a Principal Lecturer position and was advertised internally within the subject school. The role had the particular objective to improve the student experience; an incredibly broad, far reaching and at times, overwhelming remit. Initially, there were few parameters set and there was no clear description of how success would be measured or performance would be monitored. The initial six months were difficult as defining the parameters and components of the student experience was very difficult. All the members of the senior management team had an opinion of what was required to improve the experience. The (not so) implied objective for the role was to improve the response to 'Question 22: Overall I am satisfied with the quality of the course' score on the National Student Survey for the subject School. To overcome these complex issues and to enable the role to have a particular focus, and the implied objective to be achieved, the researcher created the Student Experience Enhancement Project.

## Reflective Pause AR 1.1

### Content:

It is clear now that the job specification would be difficult to write and the reasons are that the role, or purpose of the role, was too broad to define. There are too many variables associated with the concept of satisfaction.

### Process:

This is an example of the recognition that something, the NSS, is significant but there is uncertainty about what to do, what action to take. This is because the NSS and other media league tables are new to the higher education environment. However, the creation of a role, that is, by definition, complex, broad in its scope and ambiguous, provides the opportunity to apportion accountability to that role and the person who occupies it. It also provides the opportunity to respond in an innovative way. The researcher created a project to attempt to provide clarity of objectives for the researcher and the collaborative team and a timeframe for the goals to be achieved.

### Premise:

This is the first indication of the emergent data related to **multiple perspectives, ambiguity** and lack of **goal clarity** related to this role and goal and the phenomenon generally. This theme also diffuses throughout the emergent data of the case study. The issue of ambiguity in response to a clear, unambiguous goal; improve the NSS score. There is a freedom in the way to respond but the output is clear – improve the response to the NSS.

**This is a way of delegating accountability, through the indicators, without accepting any responsibility for the solution. This occurs at the meta level between the overseeing agents and the sector; despite the creation of the Higher Education Academy but also within organisations between managers and those at the value adding, operational edge of the organisation.**

### Response:

Some form of control needs to be taken as the concept of student experience is too ambiguous, broad and complex. A possible solution to this is to use a **project as a temporary endeavour to achieve particular goals in a particular timeframe**. This therefore provides an illusion of control!

### Theory (Emergent Literature):

Goal clarity and strategic Anchoring – leading to required focus.

Ambiguity and outcomes

Use of projects to achieve strategic outcomes.

Multiple perceptions, multiple stakeholders! Zammuto!

Consequently, to obtain a sense of control, one of the first undertakings was to ensure that the subject school was aligned closely with the University Strategic Plan for Learning and Teaching. In order to achieve this the researcher created the Student Experience Enhancement Project (SEEP) in October 2009, please refer to Appendix B for a copy of this report.

The objectives, of the project, were incorporated into six work packages that were identified by the subject case study collaborative project team as being significant and important in achieving the improvement in quality of the courses and consequently an improvement in the student experience. The work packages were as follows; WBS1 Performance Management Reporting System; WBS2 Teaching and Learning; WBS3 Assessment and Feedback; WBS4 Student Support; WBS5 Staff Development and WBS6 Information and Communications Technology, see Figure 4.2 for details.

The SEE Project was presented to the Senior Management Team (SMT), for approval, at one of the regular bi-monthly meetings and its content and objectives were agreed. The date of the meeting was October 2009. The SMT was considered to be the main 'client' for the action research project and they acted on behalf of the entire school, who were the main beneficiaries of the project.

More importantly, the above project deliverables also provided the initial scope and focus for the project. These work packages dictated the interventions undertaken at the outset of the project. The focus of the other interventions were in response to the emergent data from the action taken and the theoretical reflection by the researcher (as demonstrated in the reflective pauses) and the broader thesis cycle of the research project, refer to Figure 3.3 within chapter 3 for a diagrammatic representation of the dual cycles of action and research and reflection on the action taken.

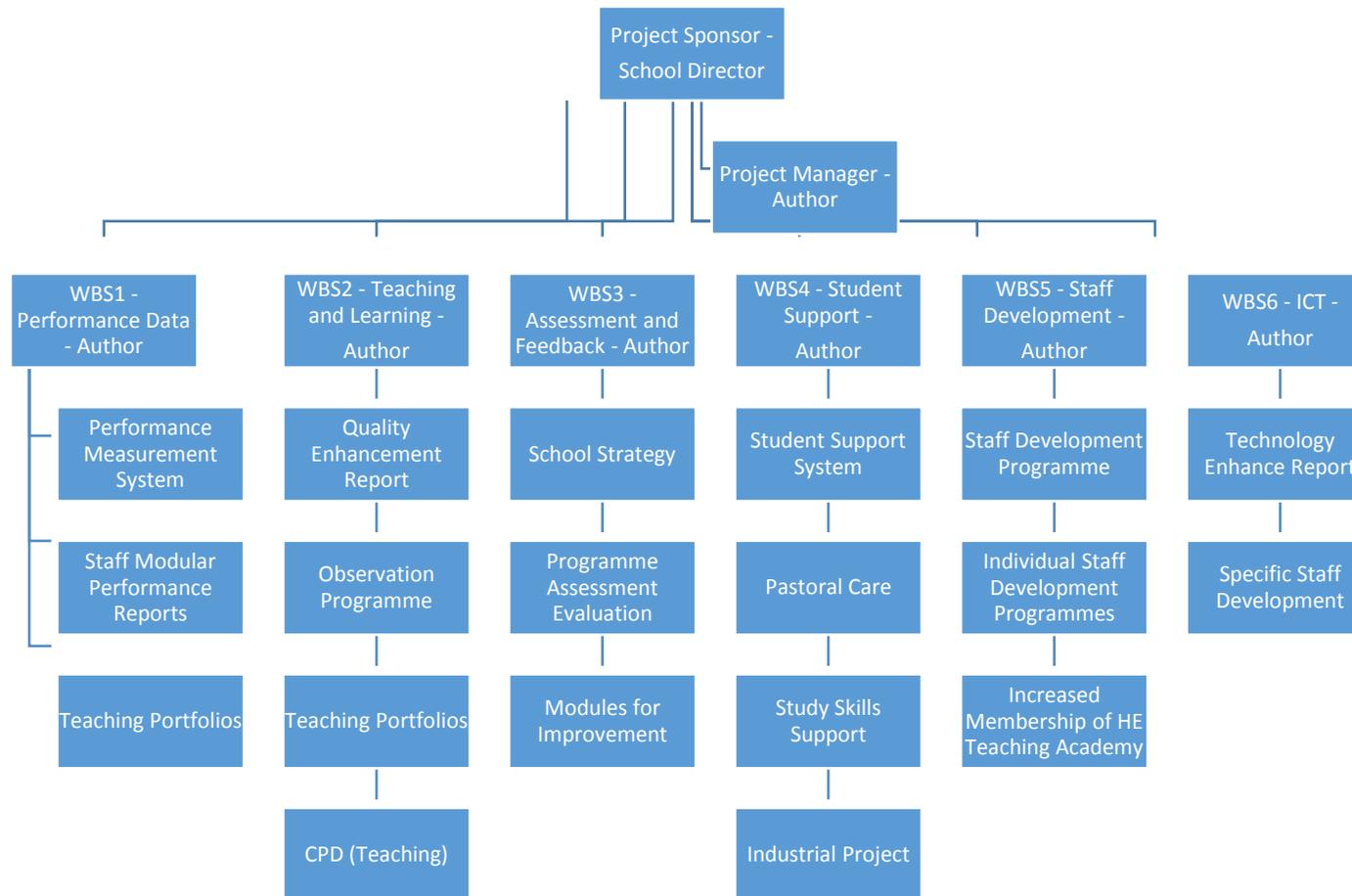


Figure 4.2 Student Experience Project Work Breakdown Structure

## Reflective Pause AR 1.2

### Content:

It was observed at this point that the education, learning process was linked to specific and measurable outputs, as seen in the indicators D1 to D6 above within the Learning and Teaching Strategy of the case study organisation.

### Process:

The indicators seen in the Learning and Teaching Strategy document are derived from the HEFCE Strategic Plan 2006 – 2011, cascaded down to the subject university Strategic Plan and more specifically to the Learning and Teaching Strategic Plan (2007 – 2012). The concept of focus also emerges here as the 'scope' of the project defines the areas of interest and provides an indication of what areas are appropriate or instrumental in improving the student experience 'measurably'.

Another interesting point is that the researcher was responsible for all work packages despite requesting that responsibility be shared equitably! The issue of accountability rested firmly with the Student Experience Enhancement Coordinator.

At this time the Student Experience Enhancement Coordinator believed that if we improved the capability of the staff and therefore the quality of the service provided the indicators would improve. Therefore, at this point in time the outcomes were not the focus, but the improvement of the **processes** including the capability of the staff to carry out the appropriate processes.

### Premise:

However, even at this early stage, of the process, the researcher was concerned about the pressure from 'external influences' such as the league tables published in the likes of The Times and The Guardian newspapers and the internal pressures from the University management (refer to Journal 1).

The emerging issue of the difference / conflict between the values of the managers and their role of administration of the organisation and academic staff and those of academics teaching and undertaking scholarly activity. The managers appeared to be concerned with the indicators and the speed of the response whereas the academic staff were concerned with the **academic process** and their **professional integrity** to do what was academically correct.

**Response:**

Concerns over the capability of the staff to meet the current and anticipated demands from the issue of raised expectations. To provide staff development opportunities to improve capability.

**Theory (Emergent Literature):**

Implementing Strategy through Projects – see Pellegrinelli and Bowman (1994)

Strategy into Action

Performance Management Systems

Performance Indicators and the issue of focus

Performance and Outcome Based Indicators – the effects of having outcome based indicators

Staff capability and Agency (confidence to perform under new circumstances)

**4.3 Narrative Account of Action Research Cycle 2 – (2010 – 2011)**

From discussions with the senior management team, that included programme leaders, the primary concern at this point was the development of staff to ensure that the school staff could meet the anticipated expectations and the outcomes and indicators previously described in the Strategic Plan. The best example of the staff development of this time was the 'Carpe Diem' two day workshop. This was an introduction to how information and communications technology, using a blended learning approach, could be used to support and reinforce traditional didactic teaching in a more efficient way. The course was attended by approximately 50% of the academic staff.

During this cycle the researcher was also required to undertake a presentation to the school to inform all staff of the anticipated requirement to change due to the upcoming changes in the amount of fees to be paid by the students as recommended in the Browne Report (Browne 2010).

The complexity of the situation was discussed during a Senior Management Team Away Day in May 2010. There was an obvious and distinct difference

between the internal data in the form of module appraisal feedback and other traditional indicators such as increasing student numbers that demonstrated demand. However, the 'external' feedback, in particular the National Student Survey and the position in the media league tables was poor.

This caused tension and anxiety to the school's Senior Managers due to their accountability to the Senior Managers of the Faculty and in turn the University. This anxiety was transferred to the Programme Leaders to improve the performance of their staff.

It was discussed at this time that one of the key variables of the media league tables was the UCAS (University and Colleges Admissions Service) entry point requirements for the courses. The higher the entry requirement the higher the university appeared to be placed within the table.

Consequently, the entry points required for entry were increased in all the courses, with the exception of a couple of course that historically recruited low numbers. The staff student ratio was also discussed, another variable within the league tables, and the staff student ration was improved from 1:44 to 1:28.

It was at this point that the researcher enrolled upon a part time PhD within the subject university. The decision to use an Action Research methodology came a few months later as part of the research proposal.

The Browne Report was published on the 12<sup>th</sup> October 2010, the intention of which was to put the student at the centre of the university experience. This was the report that the subject university had been preparing for and probably why the university management was so concerned with quality.

At this time a peer review process was introduced to ensure teaching quality was consistent. It also ensured that the individual academic was made responsible and accountable for their teaching effectiveness. The peer review process was made part of the PDPR process so as to enable this part of the academic role to be discussed more openly and meaningfully and for

the individual staff member to be accountable for their performance. Teaching is obviously a significant and important part of the student experience but it is a part that historically was considered private and therefore beyond the control of managers.

Teaching observations were also undertaken by an external academic, who was considered experienced and appropriate to undertake this role. This was met with some resistance from academic staff as this was the first time any form of external, independent teaching observation had taken place.

At this time there was also a critical incident relating to the key performance indicators associated with retention, listed in Teaching and Learning Strategy above as, *D2 – Student retention to increase to 90%*. The researcher was requested to produce a report for the senior management team for discussion.

At this time due to a number of reasons including the interruption and disruption to staff caused by students calling to their offices unannounced and the number of complaints from students with regard to staff not being in their offices when they called, a school surgery hours policy was introduced. All academic staff were required to publish a timetable, on their doors and in the module handbooks that informed students of their availability for consultation. The period for availability was to be a minimum of four hours per week.

#### **4.4 Narrative Account of Action Research Cycle 3 – (2011 – 2012)**

At the beginning of this cycle the researcher became aware of their role as being an insider action researcher and considered viewing the problem situation through the lens of experience and also standing back to reflect on the data using extant theory to explain (Dick 2002).

The goal of the research project was confirmed as not being to just tactically improve the NSS satisfaction response, but to improve the capacity of the organisational ability to enhance the student experience. The creation of an organisation that is more responsive and adaptable to external demands, whilst still maintaining its core values and principles. Evidence of a more responsive organisation is demonstrated through the introduction of the “*You said... We did...*” campaign that was undertaken at this time. The university attempted to exhibit, to the students, its responsiveness by displaying, publicly via posters, a series of problematic issues they had changed in response to student feedback. This was a student engagement strategy that was undertaken by many universities at this time, this would suggest that this originated at a central body, such as the Higher Education Academy and then diffused throughout the higher education sector.

Another critical incident at this time was the accusation made to the researcher that there was not enough action being taken and therefore progress being made. The response from the researcher was that there was insufficient time allocated to the role and everyday academic activities took precedence as the student experience was important on an individual professional level.

### **Reflective Pause AR 3.1**

#### **Content:**

The senior managers concern for progress stems from the pressures they were under to improve the situation from their senior management team. The survival of the school was perceived to be at risk given the low base scores for overall satisfaction in the NSS survey.

#### **Process:**

There is insufficient time to assimilate the new role into the existing role as an academic member of staff. No time allowance was made for the inclusion of the new role. This is also a general problem for all staff in the school as there is insufficient time to assimilate new processes or even consider introducing innovative practices into their daily 'busyness'. Staff also perceived that there was a lack of support (from managers) to introduce the necessary changes.

#### **Premise:**

This is evidence of the perceived conflict between doing and changing. The timing of interventions need to be correct to fit in with the organisational rhythms.

#### **Response:**

Provide a staff development event that is given at an appropriate time and with appropriate involvement of academic staff.

#### **Theory (Emergent Literature):**

Ambiguity  
Assimilation of new with maintaining current levels of performance.

The researcher also did not have any line management responsibility. Therefore, any progress had to be achieved through the Programme Managers, who had the line management responsibility for senior lecturers. This also reinforces the emerging themes from the data that if a role or process is important time and other resources must be allocated to fulfil it.

The researcher and a member of the Senior Management Team undertook a presentation to communicate to all the school staff the anticipated changes

as a result of the publication and implementation of the Browne Report 2010. This involved describing the predicted behaviours of students, as consumers! There was also opportunity for the staff to provide their immediate feedback on the situation described. The main concerns appeared to be support and the timing of the interventions to enable assimilation of the new processes with the existing. The senior management perception of this is that academic staff have sufficient time to assimilate these changes. However, the academic staff perception is that there is insufficient time and support to assimilate the anticipated changes whilst existing processes continue .

An Innovation Workshop was undertaken, over a two day period, during the beginning of the summer break 2011 on June 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup>. This was timed to be appropriate for the rhythms of the organisation and to enable time to assimilate before the next academic year. The purpose of the workshop was to encourage innovation in curriculum design including an attempt to challenge, through debate and discussion (dialogue!), current practices in teaching, learning and assessment for the new academic framework in September 2011 and the new frontier of increased fees and students as arbiters of value, in the following academic year.

This workshop was followed by another critical incident as the school was restructured. The purpose of this was to improve the student experience through making the business unit more effective. The main change was the separation of line management of staff from the management of the programmes. The management and control of the staff was transferred further up the management chain to the higher level senior managers (Grade 10). The role title, of the grade 9 staff changed from 'Director of Studies to 'Programme Manager' to emphasis their role and responsibility to the programme. The role was also redefined to include responsibility and accountability for the programme performance. This was measured using internal and external indicators including the module appraisals (internal measures) and the NSS (an external measure).

## Reflective Pause AR 3.2

### Content:

This restructuring provided clarity of goals, responsibility and accountability; the programme leader is now **accountable** for the performance of their programmes in terms of the key performance indicators. This shared the responsibility for the indicators with the Student Experience Coordinator.

### Process:

This could be seen as an attempt to obtain further **control** by the higher level senior managers. However, the removal of the management of the programme staff restricts the ability of the programme leaders to perform effectively.

For the purposes of the achievement of the project outcomes this now provides the researcher with a team committed, through their clearly defined role, to improving the student experience. Previously to this the researcher had felt isolated; accountable for the improvement in the NSS but with limited ability to execute plans without support.

### Premise:

The issues of **control** emerge here together with the concept of ambiguity and clarity of role through **accountability**. The notion of accountability can be viewed positively as this now removes the **ambiguous** nature of a complex problem.

### Response:

The creation of a focused team with the collaborative aim of improving the quality of their courses with the researcher acting as the hub. Within the SEEC meetings there was a more positive and proactive approach to the student experience. However, there was also a tendency to **amplify** the accountability through the chain of command rather than **attenuate** the signals from the senior managers.

Consideration of the creation of a more harmonious relationship between staff and students emerges in the data - collaborative and harmonious working.

### Theory (Emergent Literature):

**Collaborative** working towards clear goals – improve the NSS. The **lexicon of the academic** is also observed to change with terms such as accountability and responsibility appearing more regularly. Clarity of responsibility and accountability are required.

Consideration of the theory of **co-production** starts to emerge at this point. It was also at this time that the notion of the requirements of student input into the process started to emerge from the participants. The recognition that learning requires **multi-dimensional inputs**. Also emerging is the theme that there are **multiple perceptions** of what effective performance is between the various stakeholders, for example, senior managers and academic staff; academic staff and students; faculty management and school managers.

(Garavan and Murphy 2001b, Garavan and Murphy 2001a)  
Hill (1995) Managing Service Quality in Higher Education  
Barnard (1948) Service Production

It became clear around this time that academic members of staff were becoming aware that there was a potential imbalance in the clarity of roles and responsibilities. It was being suggested, by the senior managers that the 'student as consumer' was a different student to those experienced historically. Power, in the context of judging effectiveness in performance, appeared to be shifting away from the academic staff, not to the centre, which could be considered equitable, but shifting to the student.

### **Reflective Pause AR 3.3**

#### **Content:**

There is also evidence of this **separation** when staff talk of "the Uni" or "management" as though a separate body exists. There is evidence of **tension** within the organisational community.

#### **Process:**

The tension is observed in the actions of some staff members to **distance themselves** from those actors perceived to represent what is different and new. The tension also originates from what academic staff disagree with. Another issue is the concept of control. The academic staff who have historically held power through controlling the process of education and learning and the obtaining of higher education qualifications an internal locus of control. The locus of control has potentially become external to the staff of the organisation?!

#### **Premise:**

All staff are facing an unknown and uncertain future at this point. This notion of disengaging could be a form of denial or disapproval of the developments within higher education.

#### **Response:**

The dialogue between staff and change agents needs consideration.

It was observed, at this time, that academic staff began to disengage with the management process or the education process. Evidence such as Principal Lecturers resigning, requesting moves away from management or applying to reduce their hours.

The researcher introduced the concept of staff development through the use of 'learning labs' staff development events. There was a Web 2.0 course run in conjunction with the library. The purpose of this was to introduce staff to the use of the internet for collaborative working with and between students. This was a reasonably well attended event as staff were able to see the potential benefits for their academic practice.

#### **Reflective Pause AR 3.4**

##### **Content:**

The attendance at these school specific events tends to be good.

##### **Process:**

The events take place at a time and place that is convenient for the local users.

##### **Premise:**

Consideration of the 'social architecture' required to promote learning and development amongst the academic staff (Bogenrieder 2002). Acceptance is required that learning takes place 'socially' between people and that managers should consider the relational structure of an organisation when trying to change or improve it.

##### **Response:**

The introduction of learning labs that bring together people interested in developing their practice and those willing to share theirs. Co-production and collaborative forms of working are required.

##### **Theory (Emergent Literature):**

Social Architecture – a designed structure that enables organisational learning to take place between the social actors within the system (Bogenrieder 2002). Refer to journal 1.

Co-production and collaborative working.

#### **4.5 Narrative Account of Action Research Cycle 4 – (2012 – 2013 – Start of Core Thesis Cycle 2)**

It was around this time that the researcher started to work with an external management consultant. The consultant specialised in customer relationship management within private sector type organisations. The consultant did not have particular experience of working within a higher education environment. The consultant acted as a good sounding board for the ideas of the researcher and the initial collaborative work consisted of providing definitions of 'performance' and the concept of how the organisation recognises when performance is effective. The meetings discussed the relationship between the student and the school and attempted to identify the requirements for performance including the 'investment' required by the student. This was directly related to the students paying £9000 for the opportunity to study for a degree. The *language* to be used was discussed here and it was carefully chosen to attempt to mitigate the 'student as customer' mentality. This then led to the consideration of the *input required* into the learning process by the students. Logically discussions followed around the *skills* a student would require in order to perform in this context. Students would be required to practice these skills, just as with the development of any other skill!

A mathematical approach to determining the expected number of hours of study was calculated using the Module Pro-formas. The emerging themes from these initial meetings were preparedness for university and developing their capability, by making the required *skills explicit* whilst at university. The concept of *dialogue* with students regarding their performance is starting to become visible.

Through discussion with the management consultant a coherent plan was produced to enable dialogue to begin with students, to prepare them for study including the communication of expectations; the explication of skills and capability required to perform; self-diagnostic tests and transition projects. This process was undertaken using a '*Welcome Pack*' that

introduced the concepts discussed in an easily understood form using an acronym APC to provide clear guidance as to what is important; A represents the academic skills and behaviours necessary to perform effectively; P is the professional skills to be developed so that the student can function effectively in industry and a place of work and C for community to communicate the importance of contributing to society and the importance of social skills. This document is completed by the student and informs them of the next phase of preparation which is the 'Transition Project'. The transition project was used to reinforce the concept of A, P, C and to prepare the student to perform successfully.

This project takes place during the first week of term and includes activities that are representative of the expected activities and skills required to succeed during the student's programme of study. The document also presents the three Es; Engage, Expectation and Evidence, this is an attempt to articulate a shared responsibility for learning and in particular the accountability aspect found in the evidence heading. Students should present evidence of their performance. This evidence is discussed during the third component of this process, the *performance conversation*.

This activity supplements the existing personal tutor session and the students' performance is discussed including any other barriers to the student achieving their goals. The result of this discussion would be an action plan for the staff and student. These conversations take place twice per academic year, one per semester. The Welcome Pack, Transition Project and Performance Conversations were supported by the key staff members within the subject school. This is part of an organisational socialisation process for students and new members of staff.

## Reflective Pause AR 4.1

### Content:

Consideration of **roles and skills and capability required to perform** emerges at this point. The concept of how we **communicate** these factors to students and staff alike becomes significant. Extrinsic motivation of students and staff, organisations focussing on KPIs particularly NSS and league table positions. The focus is on outcomes or results.

### Process:

The skills and capabilities are implicit in the actions of the stakeholders they are not visible and therefore open to interpretation and correction. Can we or should we bring the required actions into the open for discussion.

### Premise:

In collaborative endeavours such as learning the relationships and expectations are important. This is also the emergence of the concept of control. Effective performance occurs when there is **congruency** between the performance of the student to achieve their goals and the organisation and the achievement of theirs. If performance is important then it is the responsibility of the organisation to manage it. **This could be the purpose of the performance conversation and relating this to the motivations of the student and the organisation.**

### Response:

Improvement in the dialogue between University and students. The dialogue should include the required skills and particularly expectations of performance in a clear, meaningful and unambiguous way. Increasing control (management) of student performance.

### Theory (Emergent Literature):

Co-production, capability, agency.  
Performance Conversations (Ford and Ford 1995)  
Personal Agency linked to performance  
Organisational socialisation (Garavan and Murphy 2001b)  
Goal setting theory – Alderman (1999); Locke and Henne (1986); Lathom (2006)

In June 2012 the first staff *organisational socialisation* event took place to enable six new members of staff to make the transition from industry into an academic role. The key themes introduced to the new members of staff were the school's strategies associated with teaching and learning and assessment and feedback. This event was additional to the University

induction process which tends to focus on organisational systems and has a particular human resource bias, for obvious reasons.

#### **Reflective Pause AR 4.2**

##### **Content:**

New members of staff are given an appropriate induction into the local processes, in particular the learning and assessment processes and styles.

##### **Process:**

The intention here was to 'socialise' the new members of staff to the 'ways' of the school.

##### **Premise:**

This is another attempt to set expectations (control) for performance and behavioural norms.

It is also an attempt to ensure staff are aware of the expectations of all stakeholders, clarify goals and restore the balance of power between staff and students.

##### **Response:**

This was received positively as a positive way to inculcate the 'culture' of the school.

##### **Theory (Emergent Literature):**

Organisational Socialisation.

Later in June this year there was a critical incident during a Student Experience Enhancement Committee meeting (SEEC). There was a misunderstanding between two members of staff regarding the interpretation of roles and who would take decisions. This altercation serves as further evidence of the tension between various groups around the university and the issue of who is accountable but has little control. The SEEC meeting at this time became a battleground between Programme Managers and Senior Managers. The Programme Managers were no longer invited to the Senior Management Team meeting. The SEEC was the only method of formal

communication that the Programme Managers had with the Senior Management Team. The next two SEEC meetings were cancelled. This was a reflection of the current issues regarding power, control, disengagement, tension, ambiguity and conflict.

Subsequently in July one of the Programme Managers resigned due to the pressures of accountability without strong guidance on the organisational response to the changing environment. The changing environment is mainly the introduction of student fees of £9,000 from September of this year.

This point marks the end of the initial observation phase; a conceptual sensitising framework was produced at this point using emergent data collected via observation and journal items to date. The sensitising framework is presented in the next chapter as Figure 5.6. This framework was then used as a guide for the next phase of data collection which uses a theoretical sampling technique (Charmaz 2006).

Below is a tabulated model of the linear process of observation; analysis through coding and the action response undertaken for phase 1 and a separate table for phase 2 is included in the next section.

<b>Analytical Process</b>	<b>Action Research Cycle 1</b>	<b>Action Research Cycle 2</b>	<b>Action Research Cycle 3</b>
<b>Data – observations and interviews</b>	Recognition of misalignment, being adrift from previous practices. Tension between business requirements and academic perspective.	Staff capability in new context. Separation of managers and academic staff. Legacy systems and processes. Performance data (internal and external). Academic/student accountability and responsibility.	Staff division. Effective performance – process. Staff and student expectations, dialogue. Identification of what is important.
<b>Coding - Categories</b>	Goal clarity, separation, division, alignment with strategy, values. Validity of feedback.	Performance-accountability, capability, responsibility. Organisational ability to improve.	Stakeholder responsibility, collaborative working, dialogue
<b>Theoretical Coding</b>	Organisational development, strategic anchoring/definition. Performance definition.	Stakeholder management, performance management, expectations management.	Organisational socialisation, co-production, co-creation of value, social cooperation

<b>Action:</b> <b>Response</b> a b l e	Initiate student enhancement project; purpose to align school and University strategy.	Staff training to improve capability.	Welcome Pack including performance conversations. Staff induction process.
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Table 4.3 Summary of Action Research Cycles Related to Thesis Cycle Phase 1

#### 4.6 Narrative Account of Action Research Cycle 5 – (2013 – 2014)

In 2013 in response to the emergent theme of the requirement for clarity an intervention was designed to communicate the expected performance requirements for students in their coursework assessments. This was achieved through the introduction of both marking criteria that describes the required content and academic processes to fulfil the task. In addition to this a grading criteria, was included, that shows the generic expected levels of performance to achieve particular grades.

**Reflective Pause:****Content:**

Feedback from students suggested that they require more guidance on what is required from them when responding to assessment tasks – themes of ambiguity and clarity.

**Process:**

The assessment process was altered by the creation and improvement to the marking criteria to ensure that the criteria for success in terms of content and process are made explicit. This was introduced in conjunction with the inclusion of explicit, generic grading criteria for undergraduate programmes.

**Premise:**

This observation highlights the students need for clarity and also consistency when dealing with unfamiliar circumstances. It also raises the issue a regarding ambiguity – it was observed that staff and students do not like ambiguity. This is one of the factors that causes performance anxiety.

**Response:**

The inclusion of specific assessment marking criteria with the marks apportioned to the different sections. The inclusion of generic grading criteria that are aligned with the various degree award grades.

**Theory (Emergent Literature):**

Ambiguity / Clarity –  
Control  
Behaviour – normalisation.

**4.7 Narrative Account of Action Research Cycle 6 – (2014 – 2015)**

In January 2014 the researcher was also appointed as the National Student Survey Champion for the case study school. This position was replicated, with NSS Champions appointed, throughout all the schools within the university. This was a critical incident as the researcher had occupied this position for five years and this response could be seen as a validation of their role and the importance of the NSS.

The researcher, as a direct consequence of this role, introduced a communications strategy for the NSS. This was discussed and agreed with the programme managers and subsequently used in presentation from with the final year students.

**Reflective Pause:**

**Content:**

The *dialogue* with the students around this important time is critical.

**Process:**

From observations, students at this time are in a highly negative emotional state, due to pressures from the level and volume of academic work.

**Premise:**

The use of a uniform and positively worded presentation that informed the students of the purpose of the NSS and the use of the data – to inform other students.

**Response:**

An attempt was made to create an appreciative and positive context for the completion of the survey.

**Theory (Emergent Literature):**

Positive Organisational Psychology – Cameron, Dutton and Quinn (2003)

Below is a tabulated model of an example of the linear process of observation; analysis through coding and the action response undertaken for phase 2.

T a b Analytical Process	Action Research Cycle 4	Action Research Cycle 5	Action Research Cycle 6
l e 4 . 4 S Data – observations and interviews	The need for guidance for staff and students – What is important? Where should I spend my time?	The widening impact and adoption, by the University, of the interventions undertaken by the case study.	The increased need for clarity and expectations of performance. The recognition that dialogue affects perspective of effectiveness (social construction).
u m Coding - Categories	Direct	Direct, Dialogue, Deliver	Direct, Deliver, Dialogue, Develop
m a r y Theoretical Coding	Ambiguity / Clarity of goals and time for what is important.	Control, Isomorphism	Social construction of meaning of effectiveness (controllable?); Positive Psychology
o f A c t i o Action: Response	Standardised feedback process. Explicit marking and grading criteria	Transition projects, NSS Champions used throughout university	Clearer marking and grading criteria. The creation of positive dialogue around perception of course through standardised NSS presentations.

n Research Cycles: Thesis Cycle 2

#### 4.8 Summary of Core Action Research Cycles 1 and 2 and Links to Next Chapter

From the data presented in Table 4.5 it can be seen that there has been a progression in the research project from the initial creation of the Student Experience Enhancement Project to the development of the student performance conversation process and then on to the wider impact on the University of the actions taken.

The major interventions undertaken during the period of the research project, in response to the emergent themes are also summarised in table 4.5 below:

<b>Emergent Theme from Observations</b>	<b>Intervention (Narrative of Action Taken)</b>	<b>Date</b>
Staff Capability - improve	<p>Researcher is appointed as Student Experience Enhancement Coordinator, a Principal Lecturer role.</p> <p>Staff Development on use of Gradecentre</p> <p>Identified poorly performing modules historically over 5 years and action undertaken.</p> <p>Production of the Student Experience Enhancement Project – to enable focus on enhancement of capability through identification of appropriate work packages.</p>	2009
Performance Data – validity	<p><b>Five Year Trend Analysis of Module Appraisal Surveys</b> results communicated to staff to improve awareness of performance data and to enable reflection and action.</p> <p>Web 2.0 staff development to augment teaching materials, with information and communication technologies using, for</p>	2010

<p>Staff Capability - improve</p>	<p>example, Facebook and Twitter.</p> <p><b>Carpe Diem</b> staff development in conjunction with AEU to introduce online technologies and blended learning approach. Resulting in use of online tests both formative and summative.</p> <p>E-submission pilot within school, staff development undertaken on e-submission with Academic Enhancement Unit.</p> <p>PC Thinkpad tablet laptops purchased to improve e-submission process.</p>	
<p>Technology for improved effectiveness and efficiency</p>	<p>Teaching capability Staff Development - Use of Classroom Voting Systems – 300 clickers purchased.</p>	
<p>Dialogue and feedback – early dialogue</p>	<p>Facebook Community created for new students. Early dialogue between students including monitoring by staff to determine pre induction issues.</p>	
<p>Student Transition and capability</p>	<p><b>Year 1 transition/development handbooks</b> created using Technology and Engineering Faculty grant monies to improve transition of year 1 students.</p>	
<p>Staff Capability</p>	<p>External observation of teaching staff. To determine baseline quality.</p>	
<p>Clarity – time for what is important</p> <p>Distraction and</p>	<p>Student Experience Enhancement</p>	

control, service quality. Clarity – time for what is important.	<p>Committee Meetings start in October 2010.</p> <p>Surgery hours were introduced. All academic staff were to include at least four hours of time in which they are free each week for students to drop in.</p>	
<p>Staff Capability – improve</p> <p>Control – normalisation of behaviours.</p>	<p><b>Learning, Assessment and Feedback (LAF) workshop</b> – to challenge and change current approaches to teaching and assessment – framework for staff produced for use by staff when designing modules for New Academic Framework. 2 day event in conjunction with AEU.</p> <p>Programme managers verified and validated new LAF strategies.</p>	2011
<p>Clarity – time for what is important.</p> <p>Socialisation.</p> <p>Control – normalisation of behaviours.</p> <p>Expectations Management.</p> <p>Expectations management;</p> <p>Dialogue; Control and Normalisation of Behaviours</p>	<p><b>New staff induction programme</b> – all new academic staff were given staff development in LAF strategy of BUE.</p> <p><b>Student Expectations management process</b> started, <b>Welcome Pack</b> sent out with Student Pack to communicate high expectations.</p> <p><b>Student Transition</b> project in week 1.</p>	2012
<p>Clarity – expectations;</p> <p>Dialogue; Control and Normalisation of</p>	<p><b>Assessment and Feedback</b></p> <p><b>Standardisation of marking criteria</b> to be</p>	2013

Behaviours  Control and Normalisation of Behaviours	included in Module Handbooks. Marking criteria to be more explicit in terms of content and process.  <b>Standard Feedback Sheets</b> – discussed and adopted with Programme Managers	
Accountability – individuals allocated responsibility for the NSS process.  Creating a positive appreciative community. Consistent approach - Control and Normalisation of Behaviours	<b>Appointment as School National Student Survey (NSS) Champion.</b> Researcher role is made a university wide position.  <b>NSS Communication Strategy</b> – presentation and other materials provided to Programme Teams.	2014
Expectations management; Dialogue; Control and Normalisation of Behaviours; Socialisation. (First Person: Influence)	<b>Transition Projects</b> – adoption of the project University wide.	2015
Dialogue; Control and Normalisation of Behaviours. (First Person: Influence)	<b>Personal Development Planning</b> – partial adoption of the project University wide	
Clarity, Expectations and Co-Production. (First Person:	<b>Curriculum Enhancement Research Project</b> Researcher took part as a researcher in a	

Influence)	cross university curriculum enhance research project that included representative programmes from all four Faculties in the University.	
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Table 4.5 Student Experience Enhancement Action Research Project Timeline: Summary of Events.

A summary of the emergent data, coded categories and the extant literature used for theoretical comparison and interpretation, within the reflective pauses are shown in table 4.6 below:

Data	Category	Sub Categories	Emergent Theory	Author
Job specification, project outcomes	Direct	Clarity, multiple perspectives, ambiguity	Goal clarity, strategic anchoring, outcomes, multiple interpretations of effectiveness	(Zammuto 1984)
LJMU Teaching and Learning Strategy Outcomes	Direct	Outcomes, pressure from indicators, difference in values, staff capability	Performance Management Systems, indicators and focus, outcome based indicators, staff capability and agency	Goal Theory
Outcome focus (not process),	Direct, Deliver	Expectations, responsibility,	Performance measurement	Neeley Hood (1994);

accountability, external consequences, divergent values, associated anxiety and tension, disengagement	and Dialogue	accountability, reputation (individual and corporate)	(not management!), effect on values New Public Management, Process and outcome indicators	(2007) Palermo (2010) Arnulf (2005) Mant (2001)
Support –staff and student; Surgery Hours; distractions; resistance; control	Direct, Deliver	Expectations, control of behaviours, service	Control and behavioural norms, service industry	Behavioural control; S-D Logic Kotze and du Plessis (2003)
Cascading pressure, outcomes and indicators; assimilate new role; support from managers, conflict between doing and changing	Direct, Deliver, Dialogue, Develop	Expectations, capability,	Capability, agency, change – assimilation of new	
Restructuring of PMs – control, accountability	Direct, Deliver, Dialogue, Develop	Accountability, clarity, remove ambiguity	Service Quality Service Production Co-production	Garavan and Murphy (2001) Hill (1995) Barnard (1948) Kotze and du Plessis

				(2003)
Separation from University, tension,	Direct	Control – shifted to external body (HEFCE)	Power, locus of control, academic autonomy	DeForest (1986) Rotter (1954)
Consider roles and skills to perform	Direct, Deliver, Dialogue	Capability, goals,	Co-production, Performance conversations, personal agency, organisational socialisation, goal setting theory	Ford and Ford (1995), Alderman (1999), Locke and Henne (1986); (Prahalad and Ramaswamy 2004)

Table 4.6 Summary of Emergent Data and the Relevant Theory and Extant Literature

This chapter provided a narrative description of the interventions and actions taken by the case study organisation in response to the given context. The next chapter will describe the Core Thesis Cycle 1; this is the start of the theoretical aspect of the action research project and it contains the data presentation, data analysis and some discussion. It will develop further the theoretical categories described in the reflective pauses within this chapter.

## 5. CORE THESIS CYCLE 1

### 5.1 Introduction

As previously described action research has 4 distinct phases (Coghlan and Brannick 2014, p.10 p 10) together with a pre phase of context setting (constructing), these are shown below:

1. *Constructing* – decide which questions to ask. This involves consideration of what issues emerge from the context of the problem.
2. Planning Action
3. *Taking Action* – responding to the problem situation and intervening
4. *Evaluating the action* – reflection on 1 and 2.
5. Constructing / Further planning (and return to 1.)

The purpose of the previous chapter is to provide a narrative account of the '*Taking Action*' phase of the action research process. The purpose of this chapter is to elaborate on phase 4 'evaluating the action' by providing an account of the core thesis cycle 1, this relates to the *core thesis* aspect of the project; the reflective and theoretical feature. The purpose of action research is not just to understand and explain but to also improve or change the phenomenon under study. The Action Research approach to a study has the dual imperative of action and knowledge creation about the particular action taken (Coughlan and Coughlan 2002). It is about learning from activity and is a form of empirical research. This learning from action refers to the thesis research (Schein 1995); the emergent data is analysed using grounded theory methods and the lessons learned are then translated (hypothesised) into action within the organisation and their implications are reflected on again to develop theory. This process describes the abductive nature of the research approach.

This chapter provides the reader with an account of this process including the theoretical reflection of the action taken as described in chapter 4.

Section	Topic	Comments
<b>5.1</b>	Introduction and Aims of Chapter	This section introduces the purpose of the chapter and to provide details of the data collection and analysis techniques used within the research.
<b>5.2</b>	Data Collection and Analysis Techniques	The data is collected through various observation techniques and recorded in journals. The process of initial coding is explained.
<b>5.3</b>	Presentation of Data	The data is presented in a series of diagrams; this is following analysis using grounded theory initial coding techniques. The initial consideration of appropriate theory from extant literature is presented. This is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 10.
<b>5.4</b>	Emerging Sensitising Framework	The emerging sensitising framework is presented. This is used to inform the theoretical sampling data collection and analysis in core thesis phase 2. The results of phase 2 are presented in Chapter 8.
<b>5.5</b>	Summary and Links to Next Chapter	This section will summarise the findings and provide links to the next chapter.

Table 5.1 Chapter Structure

The chapter will provide the reader with a description of the data collection techniques used during this phase of the Core Thesis Cycle 1. It informs the audience of the methods used, presents the data collected and provides analysis of the data during the discussion. Some theoretical sensitivity is

introduced, however the significant consideration of extant theory is undertaken in chapters 7 and 8.

The main findings and categories to emerge from this phase, described using verbs, due to a focus on process, in accordance with the grounded theory methodology (Charmaz 2006, Corbin and Strauss 2008) are;

Define;  
Perform;  
Contribute;  
Communicate and  
Learn

These high level categories are presented as a sensitising conceptual framework in Figure 5.10 in the conclusion of this chapter. This framework is used as the theoretical structure for the theoretical sampling phase of the data collection and analysis in core thesis cycle 2. This enables further explication of these key emergent themes to take place in Core Thesis Cycle 2.

The core thesis cycles of the action research process occur in two phases; phase 1 is the reflection on the action research cycles 1 to 3 and enabled the production of the sensitising conceptual framework, as discussed above. Phase 2 of the core thesis cycle uses this sensitising framework to enable theoretical sampling to be undertaken, using the emergent themes identified. The core thesis cycle 1 is described in the diagram below:

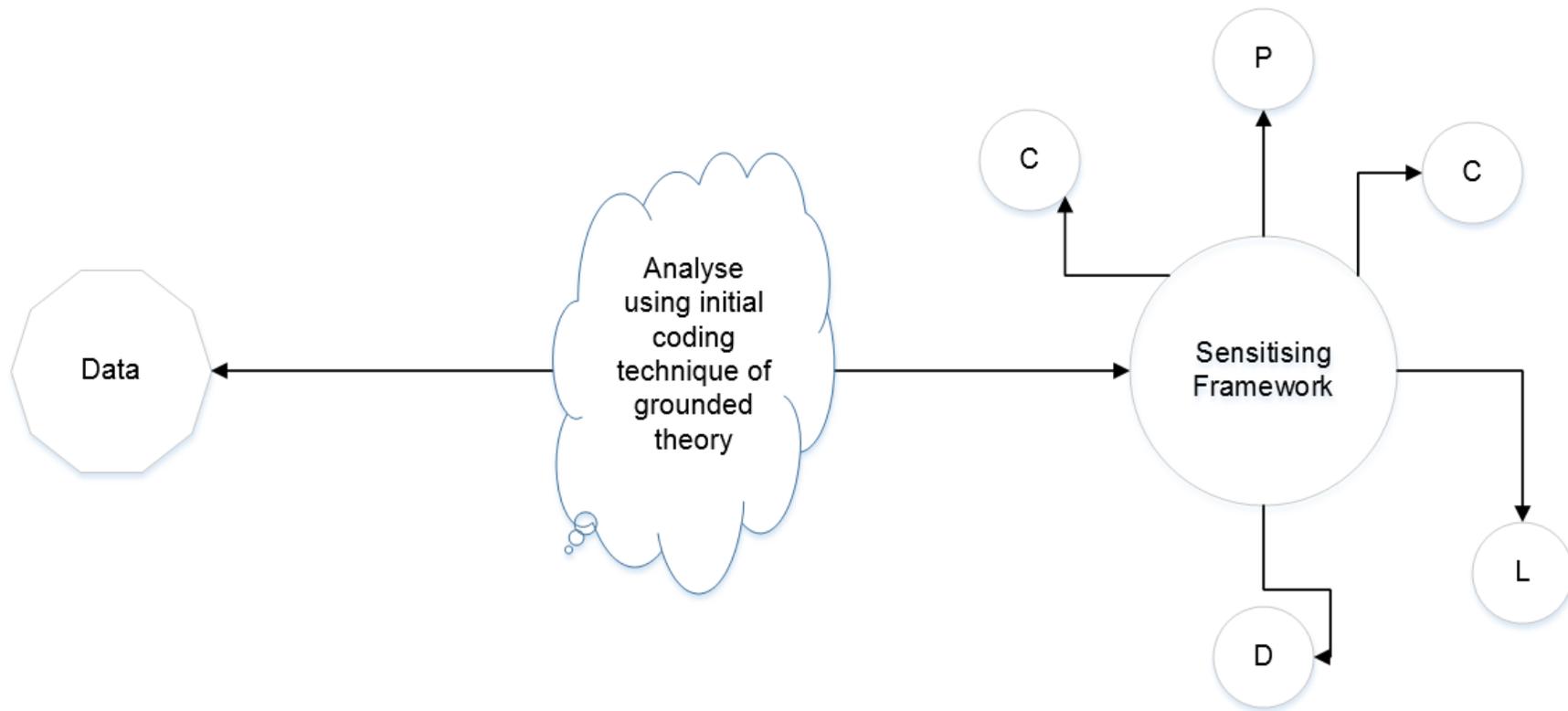


Figure 5.1 Representation of the Core Thesis Process 1 using Initial Coding to Produce a Sensitising Theoretical Framework

The next section describes how the methods used to collect the data and in particular the importance of memo writing in the analytical phase of the research process.

## **5.2 Data Collection and Analysis Techniques**

This section describes the grounded theory methods of data collection utilised in phase 1 of the core thesis cycle, this section describes how the researcher accessed the field and recorded appropriate data for later analysis.

### **5.2.1 Accessing the Field: Observation, Field notes, Memos and Diagrams**

Ethnography relates to studies of participants in a particular setting and it is associated with anthropological research of social groups in which the researcher immerses themselves in the group to better understand that particular group (Bryman and Bell 2007). Ethnographic studies within organisations are useful as they enable data to be collected from the researcher's involvement in the daily activities of the business (ibid.). This immersion within the group and the privileged position it offers enables rich data to be collected through participation in and observation of the activities. This helps the researcher to understand a particular problem from within the particular context.

### **5.2.2 Overt versus Covert Observation**

There are a number of ways in which a researcher can access the field and they are described below. The researcher largely adopted an overt 'open' role, whilst carrying out the data collection; the immediate sample group, within the school, was aware of the researcher's role as both manager and researcher. However, in the day to day dealings with other members of the organisation, outside of the case, conversational data was collected that the participants were potentially unaware of providing (Bryman and Bell 2007).

(Hammersley and Atkinson 2007, p.99) refer to “solicited and unsolicited” accounts. The ‘unsolicited’ accounts that took place, for example during meetings, in the classroom with students, in the staff kitchen or in passing conversations with members of staff from within and outside of the case; they all offered a rich source of data, of the varied perceptions of the social actors within the wider context of the case. This also relates to the impact associated with the notion of wider learning and impact associated with first, second and third person approaches to action research discussed by (Coughlan and Coughlan 2002). Second person learning refers to the potential for action research to go beyond the particular case and to affect other parts of an organisation.

Gold (1958) cited in (Bryman and Bell 2007) provides a continuum that is similar to the classification above. The classification is as follows:

*Complete Participant* - the researcher, as a member of the organisation, gathers data in a completely covert manner, their additional researcher role is unknown to the participants.

*Participant as Observer* – again the researcher is a member of the organisation, but the additional role of researcher is known to the participants.

*Observer as participant* – some, usually structured observation, but little participation.

*Complete observer* – there is no interaction or involvement with the organisation, the researcher carries out their observation in an inconspicuous manner.

Within the role of an observer, there is a requirement to ‘trade’ on the concept of trust between researcher and colleagues. This trust is based on the acceptance, of the participants, that the researcher is acting in the best interests of them and the organisation. Therefore, the researcher must ensure that the sample (colleagues) are aware of the research aims, to avoid being seen as an “instrument of top management” (Bryman and Bell 2007,

p.452). This is aligned to the participatory element of action research and the researcher, who is an experienced member of staff consequently became a confidant or 'agony aunt' of all staff members; a person to go to with issues to be solved or even discussed; this, of course, increased the amount and variety of the data collected.

The method of exploration used, in this case, was participant observation and the particular type was participant-as-observer (Saunders *et al.* 2012, p.345). This enabled the initial exploratory phase 1 of the research subject to take place. There are various types of data that emerge from participant observation, such as, primary observations including data recorded at the point of observation and then recorded in the researcher's journal. There were also secondary observations, which are the researcher's interpretations of an event or conversation. These secondary observations also form part of the analytical process. Additionally, experiential data was collected; this included the feelings and perceptions from the author's experience of the process, often referred to in first person learning (Silverman 2010, p.229).

The data was collected and subsequently recorded within research journals, the use of journals and memos resulted in an overlap of the collection and analysis of the data. The methods associated with the recording of the data were field notes, memos and diagrams. These were discussed in detail in section 5.3.2 Simultaneous data collection and analysis.

The main form of data collection at this stage was participant observation, field notes and in particular memos were also used. This is the data uncovered during the initial observation phase, analysis was carried out to reduce data to a more meaningful and ultimately usable medium (Saunders *et al.* 2012).

### **5.2.6 Analysis of Core Thesis Action Research including Initial Emergent Literature Framework** (*Core Thesis Cycle 1: Data Analysis – Initial Coding (Grounded Theory)*)

Coding is the title given to the progressive, logical and analytical process of grounded theory. It is the link between the emergent data recorded in the research journals as field notes and memos, and the grounded theory with each of the separate phases relating to greater abstraction (Birks and Mills 2011). The objective of this process is to produce “a high level conceptual framework that possesses explanatory power supported by advanced analytical processes”(Birks and Mills 2011, p.95).

The first phase of coding and therefore the development of a substantive theory is initial coding. This process requires close reading of the data and uses strategies, such as line by line coding, this attention to specific detail and not the whole prevent the researcher from using theoretical sensitivity when cognitively processing the data (Charmaz 2000). This is often referred to as taking the data apart or “fracturing” the data (Glaser and Strauss, 1967 cited in (Birks and Mills 2011, p.95)). This research project used the transcribed field notes of observations, journal items, critical incidents and memos for the initial coding process. This initial phase is critical as it starts the journey of theory development, however, the developed categories are considered conditional. They are conditional on the requirement of remaining open to the data and also to “other analytical properties” (Charmaz 2006, p.48). (Charmaz 2006, p.49) provides a framework for coding:

*“Remain open; Stay close to the data; Keep your codes simple and precise; Construct short codes; Preserve actions; Compare data with data; Move quickly through the data”*

The size of the bits of data for analysis at this stage varied from words to lines to paragraphs but the researcher was able to extract theoretical categories. The resultant codes, concepts and categories provide the point of departure for the developing theory. The purpose of the core thesis cycle 2 is to explicate and elaborate the categories created at this stage.

### **5.2.7 The Analytical Process and the Use of Extant Literature**

(Hammersley and Atkinson 2007, p.158) appropriately call data “materials to think with” and this is an excellent label to consider when analysing qualitative data. The authors go on to advance the often repetitive, simultaneous interactive process between data and our thoughts and interpretations of the data. (Charmaz 2006, p.71) aptly calls this process “theoretical playfulness” thereby suggesting that the process is flexible and ethereal. (Corbin and Strauss 2008, p.75) refer to elements of this process as “theoretical comparison” this is the explication of the various components of a concept using the personal experience of the researcher and the extant literature.

The key issue is that it is a comparative method in which the researcher compares the phenomenon under study to other instances found in the literature and lived experience. The process is enhanced by the inclusion of the ideas and perspectives of other writers. (Birks and Mills 2011) propose that the extant literature can also be treated as data; the analysis of the literature can assist the research in clarifying the route for further theoretical sampling and data collection. Reliance on literature as data may increase as the grounded theory develops (Perrow 1961) and becomes more abstract and theoretical (Birks and Mills 2011).

The formal presentation and integration of the literature is contained in Chapter 7 in which the data, key categories and extant literature are synthesised as part of the production of the theoretical framework.

### **5.3 Presentation of Data**

In this section the data will be presented that supports the creation of the tentative sensitising framework, Table 5.1 below contains the transcribed journal items, notes for the Core Action Research Cycle 1 – 3 and details of the initial coding categories. These are accounts of observations and the corresponding reflective theoretical and propositional notes made by the researcher during the period from September 2009 to June 2012.

Table 5.1 below provides a concise summary of the emergent categories uncovered during the first phase of simultaneous data collection and analysis. The table also indicates the process of initial coding from the emergent data to concepts and through to categories. These categories were also used to inform the action taken to respond to these phenomena as part of the overall action research process. The themes and categories uncovered, during the process, were deemed, by the author, to influence the organisation's effectiveness. The categories identified at this time were deemed provisional and tentative. The investigation undertaken during phase 2 of the research proves would enable these to be expanded and explicated.

Field note Item	Observation	Initial Coding	Concept	Category (Theory)
1.	Senior Management Team Away Day discussion regarding performance of school – school is performing well in certain categories; student numbers are healthy and internal feedback in the form of Modular Appraisals are generally positive. Module Appraisals are a student feedback mechanisms completed at the end of the semester. However, the external feedback via the National Student Survey and media league table, for example The Times are not good – Position at this point? Performance data LJMU Webhub Performance Dashboard being discussed?	Appear to be doing well; validity of internal and external feedback; contradiction causing tension; goals - organisational objectives and/or external performance metrics;	Feedback validity. Performance.	<b>Performance definition</b> in context. <b>Performance data.</b> Performance management.
2.	New Peer Review Strategy was drafted, by the author, to ensure that academic staff are accountable for the effectiveness of their teaching. The results of the Peer Review Process were linked to the Personal Development and Performance Review process.	Accountability of teachers; management of staff performance;	Accountability for performance. Staff capability.	<b>Stakeholders: capability, responsibility, role and goal clarity, support</b>

		staff capability; alignment with objectives		
3.	Student Retention Statistics – school highlighted within Faculty as poorly performing – student attendance, engagement, general behaviours?	Blame – accountability. Student responsibility for development.	Student responsibility.	<b>Division</b> within organisation  <b>Disengagement</b>
4.	Introduction of 24 Credit Modules – LJMU Senior Management introduced 24 credit year long modules. This was a big change from 12 credit two semester short modules. Staff made comments regarding the timing of the change or intervention, being inappropriate. Assimilation of new process alongside existing processes and the lack of support provided for the adoption of new processes and systems (Student Information System replaced existing).	Timing and pace of change – mixing existing and new processes. Business operational rhythms – organisational awareness.	Timing, pace of change. <b>Mixing existing and new processes.</b> Operational rhythms.	Organisational capacity to learn.
5.	Within this commentary there was also constant reference to the ‘University’ and ‘they’ with assumed	‘The University’, ‘they’.	<b>Separation,</b> division within	Converting ideas into action

	reference to the Senior Managers (decision makers who authorise change projects) within LJMU.		organisation	
6.	Recognition of author that the goal of the research project is not just to tactically improve the National Student Survey results but over the long term to improve the organisation's capacity to enhance the student experience through learning from stakeholder feedback, and taking appropriate action. This could involve the creation of a more responsive organisation.	Organisations capacity to enhance, Indicators should reflect process. Learning from feedback. Responsive organisation. Response to stakeholders.	<b>Organisational capacity, learning from feedback.</b>	Time for what is important – <b>goal clarity.</b>  Appropriate method of communication – <b>dialogue.</b>
7.	A recognition by the author that the external performance of the organisation, demonstrated through the National Student Survey and media generated league tables is a 'dependant variable', that is, it is linked to a positive student experience. Do the performance metrics reflect the experience or dominate it?	Indicators reflect process or determine it.	<b>Role of external indicators –</b> dictate processes and goals or reflect quality of process.	
8.	The author recognised their responsibility for setting	Plans into action.	Translating	

	goals and attempting to achieve them. The author experienced the difficulty of the translation of ideas into useful value adding activity (reference strategy into action).		abstract ideas into action
9.	A recognition by the author that a project, by definition, is temporary and therefore this reinforced the observation that the creation of capacity for ongoing effective performance should be the goal of the research project.	Project, temporary, ongoing performance.	<b>Capacity for ongoing performance of organisation</b>
10.	Clarity of author's management role. Author had difficulty carrying out management and academic role. The management aspect of an academic's role is not correctly taken into account when workload/resources are allocated. Comments made to author regarding their visibility within the school and their ability to communicate 'across school'.	Allocation of time – what is important. Communication. Visibility of change agent.	<b>Time</b> for what is important – <b>goal clarity.</b> Visibility of change agent <b>Communication of new processes</b>
11.	School Meeting author carried out presentation to entire school with the School Director. The content of the presentation was the changing context of Higher Education. This context included the need to change	Communicate current context. Support for staff. What is	<b>Communicate</b> reasons for change. Time for what is important

	<p>in response to the Browne Report, the new student fee regime and consequent higher expectations of quality. This also created the need to change the staff perception of the student as stakeholder or customer?</p> <p>Some staff raised the issue of support being required and clarity of what processes are important. Staff also raised the issue of assimilating these new expectations with existing 'business as usual' processes. Staff generally appeared to be under pressure, possibly due to a lack of clarity of the new order.</p>	<p>important?</p> <p>Timing of interventions.</p> <p>Business as usual.</p> <p>Under pressure - ambiguity</p>	<p>– <b>goal clarity</b></p> <p><b>Staff support.</b></p> <p>Assimilation of new processes.</p> <p><b>Tension from ambiguity.</b></p>
12.	<p>School Meeting: The author recognises this event as a test of his mettle to demonstrate the ability to communicate in a meaningful way the need to respond to the anticipated change in expectation of 'fee paying' students.</p>	<p>Test of mettle, ability to communicate to entire school, meaningful.</p> <p>'Fee paying'</p>	<p><b>Communication</b></p> <p>of impetus to change.</p> <p><b>Student as customer –</b></p> <p>student role</p>
13.	<p>Learning, Assessment and Feedback 2 day Workshop – event to communicate schools learning and feedback strategy, staff</p>	<p>Appropriately timed, staff participation.</p>	<p><b>Time for what is important</b></p>

	development/participation event. The event was appropriately timed for end of academic year, after administrative period and before summer school and annual leave.		
14.	Appointment of new Vice Chancellor		
15.	School Restructured for the purpose of improving the student experience. Separation of operational management from line management. Control of staff is given to SMT. Very difficult period for PMs. Accountability for performance and student experience of programmes is given to PM. PM has to manage operational aspects of programme, but not staff within the programme.	Accountability for performance. Difficult for PM. Manage operational aspects not staff.	<b>Accountability</b> for performance. <b>Separation/division</b> of roles
16.	The author considered the effectiveness of the Personal Development and Performance Review process within subject organisation. How do we monitor staff capability?	PDPR process, Staff capability.	<b>Staff capability, capability of organisation to improve</b>
17.	The author observed Managers disengaging from the School/LJMU Senior Management. One member of staff moved offices and others have requested moves.	Disengaging, staff moving/requesting moves.	<b>Separation and disengagement</b>

18.	Conversation with a Programme Manager regarding concerns with new members of staff struggling with demands of teaching. Programme Manager had personal concerns for health of new member and professional concerns for student experience and consequently the National Student Survey results.	New member struggling, support, concern for results and individual. Consequence of results.	<b>Support for new staff.</b> Staff capability, induction. <b>Consequences of negative results.</b>
19.	The author initiated a 'learning lab' session. This was an informal session to communicate best practice between members of staff. An attempt to get staff talking about important issues.	Informal session, communicate best practice, between members	Appropriate methods of communication
20.	The author started a series of meetings with an 'external' consultant to produce an expectations management plan. The author blocked days in diary to meet consultant, no external interruptions. The definition of performance is examined and discussed in a Higher Education context. The conclusion was reached that performance in this context is about effective interaction between the parties (stakeholders) involved and that for optimum	External consultant. No interruptions. Define performance. Effective interaction between parties, optimum	Time for what is important. Clarity of goal. Define performance in context. Harmonious and Effective interaction

<p>performance this should be harmonious. Further discussions involved the identification of the necessary requirements for effective performance. This in turn produced a list of required capabilities or necessary academic skills that a student would be required to master in order to develop and achieve success. This dialogue between the author and the external consultant was the catalyst for the student performance management process as part of the pastoral care provision. This became known as the “Performance Conversation” process and used the framework suggested by Ford, Ford and D’Amelio (2008)</p> <p>A further meeting to determine the content of the Performance Conversation created the following:</p> <p>Welcome Pack Transition Process Performance Conversations</p>	<p>performance, identification of necessary requirement, capabilities of student, success, dialogue as catalyst, performance management</p>	<p>between stakeholders. Stakeholder capabilities.</p> <p><b>Dialogue</b> as catalyst for change. Stakeholder performance management. Performance management process.</p>
<p>21. During SEEC meeting there was strong opposition to school taking part in Teaching Awards due to it being</p>	<p>Rewards, locus of control –</p>	<p>Division – opinion and</p>

	unequitable. Clear difference in opinion between main parties	decision making. Difference of opinion.	decision making.
22.	Useful versus abstract mechanisms for improvement – guidance required by staff.	Useful versus abstract mechanisms, guidance	Ideas into action. Operational effectiveness.
23.	Intrinsic versus extrinsically motivated students. Students impact on organisational performance. How do we create effort towards organisational goals? Consideration of performance of students within organisation	Intrinsic versus extrinsic motivation. Students involvement in performance. Effort towards goal	Stakeholder involvement – motivation, impact, capability.
24.	Students as ‘customers’, role definition? Unclear to staff what this means in educational context. Is the customer always right? Does this lead to a transaction form of service?	Imbalance in power, role, clarity, transaction	Role clarity for stakeholders
25.	New staff induction – teaching and learning framework. Author implemented a new process to	Staff induction. New process,	Goal and role clarity,

	introduce staff to school's learning and teaching strategy. This was to familiarise the staff with the required processes.	introduce/familiarise staff with required process.	
26.	During SEEC (25 <sup>th</sup> June 2012) meeting incident following clarification of item to be decided by 'school'. Disagreement over the definition of the 'school'. Them and us mentioned.	Them and us	Division

Table 5.2 Summary of Key Journal Items and Details of Initial Manual Coding

The next section presents and describes the key categories using diagramming techniques and summary explanations. The properties of the categories will also be included to indicate the various dimensions observed during the study and requiring further study.

#### **5.4 The Emergent Sensitising Framework**

This section presents and provides definitions for the key categories from the emergent data. These categories emerged following the initial coding of the data (Charmaz 2006 p 47); the initial coding process is summarised in Table 5.1 above. These codes and categories are defined as being tentative and provisional at this time therefore requiring further explication. The diagrams are supported with data where possible, however, some of the categories and sub categories are propositional requiring data in the next phase. This also reflects the broader abductive nature of the research process as the presence of these propositional categories can be investigated in the next phase.

##### **5.4.1 Category: Define**

The first emergent category, requiring consideration was '*define*'. This category can be specified as relating to any data that reflects the participants concerns with regard to the process of the provision of clear guidance and knowing what to do and what is important. The key categories and sub-categories are identified in diagram 5.1 below. The sub-categories are then explained in the next sections.

This category attempts to encapsulate the perception that a better explanation of what the new form or purpose of the organisation would be.

During this period of change there was a great sense of uncertainty, due to the anticipated change in the mode and purpose of higher education. This was due to the alterations in student financing structure and likelihood of changing expectations. Staff members appeared to be searching for an

'anchor' point or perhaps a 'float' would be a better description, that is, something to hold onto; something to guide them in this altering(ed) world.

*“Observation 1: Field notes September 2009*

*Author considered the objectives of the Student Experience*

*Enhancement Project and the lack of clarity of the goal. There is an apparent hierarchy of motives, the highest one being the survival of the school – poor performing schools will be closed – related directly to NSS and other external measures. The author was aware of the short term tactical advantages of trying to enhance the ‘perception’ of quality in the school. But he took the decision to adopt medium term goals and attempt to enhance the quality of the school through properly aligning it with the schools Learning and Teaching Strategy and its component parts. There is also recognition that this approach would have a longer gestation period, that is time, to see the benefits than a more tactical approach.”*

The lack of clarity of the objectives was also demonstrated within the purpose of the Student Experience Enhancement Project. As described in the Core Action Research Cycles of chapter 4; this project was another example of uncertainty and ambiguous aims. Observation 1 refers to a 'hierarchy of motives' and how these aims, were initially implicitly linked to the performance indicators, in this case the National Student Survey (NSS) at the senior management level. There is also reference to the

Even at this early stage in the process there also appears to be difference in goals; one managerial relating to the meeting of the anticipated future relevance of performance indicators, in a short term, tactical way and the implications to the school. The other perspective of academics being the longer term goals of improving the educational experience.

*“Observation 2: Field notes 18.2.2010*

*Within the organisation we have senior managers running a business and teachers teaching; is this, a business? Definitions considered – a*

*university; an institution of higher learning and a business; a commercial or industrial enterprise and the people within; teaching; the activities of educating and instructing. Is a university just like any other business?”*

There is also another aspect of goals definition and choice to be considered and that is the distinction between defining goals as measurable outputs and the goal being the process or journey.

*“Observation 27: Field notes 11.5.2012*

*Should we be product focused (extrinsic) and/or process focused (intrinsic) – the academic process.”*

This relates to one of the conundrums that surfaced at this time; the marketization of higher education into products that are purchased and consumed by students. It is the outcomes that are valued rather than the process.

There is also the issue of the temporary and temporal nature of goals as found in the Student Experience Enhancement Project (SEEP). The goals are open to interpretation and change over time. In terms of first person learning this entry also features the researchers need for clarity in the purpose of their role and the project.

*“Observation 9: Field notes 7.1.2011 (First Person Learning)*

*Recognition of author that the goal of the research project is not just to tactically improve the National Student Survey results but over the long term to improve the organisation’s capacity to enhance the student experience through learning from stakeholder feedback, and taking appropriate action. This could involve the creation of a more responsive organisation.”*

This is augmented by the first person deliberations below.

*“Observation 11: Field notes 4.5.2011*

*The author recognised their responsibility for setting goals and attempting to achieve them. The author experienced the difficulty of the translation of ideas into useful value adding activity.” and*

*“Observation 13: Field notes 7.5.2011 (First Person Learning)*

*Clarity of author’s management role. Author had difficulty carrying out management and academic role. The management aspect of an academic’s role is not correctly taken into account when workload/resources are allocated. Comments made to author regarding their visibility within the school and their ability to communicate ‘across school’.”*

There was reluctance by other senior managers to clarify the purpose or goals of the role.

After approximately two years of uncertainty and ambiguity in May 2011 there was an attempt to clarify the new context during a presentation to the entire school including academic, technical and administrative staff:

*“Observation 14: Critical Incident 11.5.2011*

*School Meeting author carried out presentation to entire school with the School Director. The content of the presentation was the changing context of Higher Education. This context included the need to change in response to the Browne Report, the new student fee regime and consequent higher expectations of quality. This also created the need to change the staff perception of the student as stakeholder or customer?*

*Some staff raised the issue of support being required and clarity of what processes are important. Staff also raised the issue of assimilating these new expectations with existing ‘business as usual’ processes. Staff generally appeared to be under pressure, possibly due to a lack of clarity of the new order.”*

At this point the anticipated changing role of the student is introduced for discussion with staff. This is the first instance of the concept of student consumer and customer being discussed. The student as customer and the anticipated higher expectations is also discussed. This caused anxiety amongst the audience and issues of support were raised and how the new regime could be brought in alongside the existing legacy systems, processes and attitudes. This was also intended to lessen the uncertainty felt by staff by introducing them to the anticipated changing landscape and the forecasted student response.

Another aspect of the requirement for clarity is observed below, this was undertaken to inform new members of staff the importance of the Teaching and Learning Strategy.

*“Observation 28: Critical Event 28.6.2012*

*New staff induction – teaching and learning framework. Author implemented a new process to introduce staff to school’s learning and teaching strategy. This was to familiarise the staff with the required processes.”*

The above journal entry relates to the observation that there appears to be a division in the goals of senior managers and those of the academic staff. The journal entry below further supports this finding.

*“Observation 3: Field notes 19.3.2010*

*Awareness of a tension between the values of the academic staff and that of the management. Do Doctors and Nurses care for their patients or the KPIs? Do academic staff have loyalty to the organisation, the student or the educational process, themselves or all four?”*

A comparison is made, in the above journal entry, with medical staff and this potentially relates to the values implicit in the goals of the different staff.

*“Observation 8: Field notes 7.1.2011*

*Within this commentary there was also constant reference to the ‘University’ and ‘they’ with assumed reference to the Senior Managers (decision makers who authorise change) within LJMU.”*

This division is further supported in the above journal entry. Within the subject university there is constant reference to ‘them’ and ‘us’ which suggests disengagement or division between various staff. Another journal entry, below, refers to the acts of physical disengagement as staff requested to move away from managers.

*“Observation 20: Field notes 20.12.2011*

*The author observed Managers disengaging from the School/LJMU Senior Management. One member of staff moved offices and others have requested moves.”*

A critical incident reported below describes an event that further supports the category of division between certain parties within the organisation.

*“Observation 29: Critical Event 28.6.2012*

*During a SEEC meeting during a discussion about who should complete the Programme Handbooks; clarification was requested as to what items would be completed by the ‘school’. There was then a strong reaction to the use of the term ‘school’ as if this implied a separate body, that is, the senior managers of the school were separate from the other members.*

*SEEC has become something of a battleground between the SMT and the PMs as this is the only formal line of communication they now have. The underlying issue here is that the PMs feel disempowered because of their change in titles, see observation 15, and their frustration at being held accountable for the performance of their programme, over which they have little control; information voids, no power (line management of staff), not able to make decisions.”*

### **5.4.1.3 Sub-Category Ideas and Operations**

At this stage there was concern from participants with regard to the ability of the organisation to translate ideas and strategies into meaningful action at the operational level. This relates to the 'communication', 'separation' and the 'define' category as those at the operational level require clarity as to what is required to be done and what is important.

*“Observation 8: Field notes 7.1.2011*

*Within this commentary there was also constant reference to the ‘University’ and ‘they’ with assumed reference to the Senior Managers (decision makers who authorise change) within LJMU.”*

*“Observation 25: Field notes 24.4.2012*

*Staff are interested in ‘doing’ they do not appear to want to deal with abstract concepts; they want mechanisms that work.”*

### **5.4.2 Category: Performance**

This category can be defined (specified) as relating to any data that reflects the participants concerns with regard to the process of performing or taking action towards a particular goal.

#### **5.4.2.1 Sub-Category: Measurement**

There was concern observed with regard to the impact of measurement on the stakeholders involved in the process, but academic staff and students in particular. The question of what motivates stakeholders is observed, outputs, such as indicators or grades or the process. Also concern is raised about who is required to perform in the context of student as consumer.

*“Observation 10: Field notes 11.1.2011 (First Person Learning)*

*A recognition by the author that the external performance of the organisation, demonstrated through the National Student Survey and media generated league tables is a 'dependant variable', that is, it is linked to a positive student experience. Do the performance metrics reflect the experience or dominate it?"*

*"Observation 26: Field notes 25.4.2012*

*Some students, as partners, in performance of HEI's are extrinsically motivated by the tangible rewards of the activity not the activity (the academic process) itself. Are universities becoming extrinsically motivated themselves by the KPIs such as NSS and league tables (Gague and Deci (2005))"*

*"Observation 27: Field notes 11.5.2012*

*Observation that performance occurs when there is congruency between the performance of student and HEI.*

*Theory - If performance is important to the organisation then it should be managed (Armstrong, 2000 and Radnor and Barnes 2007)*

*This phenomenon becomes entangled with the EFQM model used by LJMU, as the pursuit of excellence should include the other stakeholders of the organisation and perhaps, in particular the students. This is related to observations, by DF, in conversations with staff that there is an apparent shift in power from staff to student (Browne Report) related to anticipated (and experienced) transaction approach expected by some students.*

*Customer focus – student as customer LJMU as service provider and alternatively university as customer and student as provider!*

*Issues to consider are: continuous learning, leadership and consistency of purpose, partnership development.*

*We need to address the issue of customer/provider and provider/customer.*

*This is a fundamental observation at this stage, up to this point I have concentrated, largely, on the university role, the concern has only been about us.*

*I need to determine how do the students fit into our vision, mission and goals. Do we achieve our mission and objectives if the students choose not to engage or are not motivated?*

*Should we be product focused (extrinsic) and/or process focused (intrinsic) – the academic process.”*

*“Observation 25: Field notes 24.4.2012*

*Staff are interested in ‘doing’ they do not appear to want to deal with abstract concepts; they want mechanisms that work.”*

This is probably the most significant category as can be seen by the amount of related data.

#### **5.4.2.2 Sub-Category: Capability**

The above observation relates to the notion that staff are interested in taking action that is meaningful and adds value. The concern is the capability of those who need to perform and whose responsibility is it to provide opportunities to develop. They do not have time for diversions or distractions they need to be efficient in order to be effective in the current context of low resources and high expectations.

*“Observation 23: Critical Event 15.3.2012*

*The author started a series of meetings with an ‘external’ consultant. The definition of performance is examined and discussed in a Higher Education context. The conclusion was reached that performance in this context is about effective interaction between the parties (stakeholders) involved and that for optimum performance this should be harmonious.”*

The above relates also to the issue of clarity, it was through discussions with the external consultant that a clear(er) definition of the requirements of performance came to fruition.

*“Observation 26: Field notes 25.4.2012*

*Some students, as partners, in performance of HEI’s are extrinsically motivated by the tangible rewards of the activity not the activity (the academic process) itself.”*

Evidence of the pursuit of success in terms of achievement of targets and key performance indicators.

#### **5.4.3 Category: Contribute**

This category can be defined (specified) as relating to any data that reflects the participants concerns with regard to the process of what action should they be taking in order to add or produce value.

*“Further discussions involved the identification of the necessary requirements for effective performance. This in turn produced a list of required capabilities or necessary academic skills that a student would be required to master in order to develop and achieve success. This dialogue between the author and the external consultant was the catalyst for the student performance management process as part of the pastoral care provision. This became known as the “Performance Conversation” process and used the framework suggested by Ford, Ford and D’Amelio (2008)”*

*“Observation 24: Field notes 22.3.2012*

*A further meeting to determine the content of the Performance Conversation created the following:*

*Welcome Pack*

*Transition Process*

*Performance Conversations”*

The observation below highlights the difficulties that new staff encounter after joining the organisation.

*Observation 21: Critical Event: 21.12.2011*

*Conversation with a Programme Manager regarding concerns with new members of staff struggling with demands of teaching. Programme Manager had personal concerns for health of new member and professional concerns for student experience and consequently the National Student Survey results.*

*“Observation 26: Field notes 25.4.2012*

*Some students, as partners, in performance of HEI's are extrinsically motivated by the tangible rewards of the activity not the activity (the academic process) itself. Are universities becoming extrinsically motivated themselves by the KPIs such as NSS and league tables (Gague and Deci (2005))”*

*“Observation 27: Field notes 11.5.2012*

*Observation that performance occurs when there is congruency between the performance of student and HEI.*

*Theory - If performance is important to the organisation then it should be managed (Armstrong, 2000 and Radnor and Barnes 2007)*

*This phenomenon becomes entangled with the EFQM model used by LJMU, as the pursuit of excellence should include the other stakeholders of the organisation and perhaps, in particular the students. This is related to observations, by DF, in conversations with staff that there is an apparent shift in power from staff to student (Browne Report) related to anticipated (and experienced) transaction approach expected by some students.*

*Customer focus – student as customer LJMU as service provider and alternatively LJMU as customer and student as provider!*

*Issues to consider are: continuous learning, leadership and consistency of purpose, partnership development.*

*We need to address the issue of customer/provider and provider/customer.*

*This is a fundamental observation at this stage, up to this point I have concentrated, largely, on the LJMU role, the concern has only been about us.*

*I need to determine how students fit into our vision, mission and goals. Do we achieve our mission and objectives if the students choose not to engage or are not motivated?"*

*"Should we be product focused (extrinsic) and/or process focused (intrinsic) – the academic process."*

#### **5.4.4 Category: Communicate**

This category can be defined (specified) as relating to any data that reflects the participants concerns with regard to the process of how objectives and other key information are conveyed to stakeholders.

##### **5.4.4.1 Sub-Category: Expectations**

In order to perform effectively clarity of expectations is required it was decided that improvement in this area was required and this resulted in the introduction of the Welcome Pack. The anticipated expectations of full fee paying students was discussed.

*"Observation 15: Field notes 11.5.2011: (First Person Learning)*

*School Meeting: The author recognises this event as a test of his mettle to demonstrate the ability to communicate in a meaningful way the need to respond to the anticipated change in expectation of 'fee paying' students."*

*"Observation 24: Field notes 22.3.2012*

*A further meeting to determine the content of the Performance Conversation created the following:*

*Welcome Pack*

*Transition Process  
Performance Conversations”*

#### **5.4.4.2 Sub-Category: Information Systems**

It was observed that if information and data, in the form of performance indicators was so significant, improvement was required in the information system to those stakeholders involved in the performance process.

*“Observation 4: Field notes 14.5.2010*

*Senior Management Team Away Day (date?) discussion regarding performance of school – school is performing well in certain categories; student numbers are healthy and internal feedback in the form of Modular Appraisals are generally positive. Module Appraisals are a student feedback mechanisms completed at the end of the semester. However, the external feedback via the National Student Survey and media league table, for example The Times are not good – Position at this point? Performance data LJMU Webhub Performance Dashboard being discussed?”*

*“Observation 6: Field notes 30.11.2010*

*“Student Retention Statistics – school highlighted within Faculty as poorly performing – provision of data?”*

#### **5.4.4.3 Sub-Category: Conversations**

In response to stakeholders it was believed that the most appropriate form of communication was to enter into dialogue. This involves listening as well as talking and this was important to the stakeholders.

*“Observation 23: Critical Event 15.3.2012*

*The author started a series of meetings with an ‘external’ consultant. The definition of performance is examined and discussed in a Higher Education context. The conclusion was reached that performance in*

*this context is about effective interaction between the parties (stakeholders) involved and that for optimum performance this should be harmonious. Further discussions involved the identification of the necessary requirements for effective performance. This in turn produced a list of required capabilities or necessary academic skills that a student would be required to master in order to develop and achieve success. This dialogue between the author and the external consultant was the catalyst for the student performance management process as part of the pastoral care provision. This became known as the “Performance Conversation” process and used the framework suggested by Ford, Ford and D’Amelio (2008)”*

#### **5.4.5 Category: Learn**

This category can be defined (specified) as relating to any data that reflects the participants concerns with regard to the process of how lessons are learned.

##### **5.4.5.1 Sub-Category: Capacity**

There was concern demonstrated to the ability of the organisation to learn from the data it records.

*“Observation 9: Field notes 7.1.2011 (First Person Learning)*

*Recognition of author that the goal of the research project is not just to tactically improve the National Student Survey results but over the long term to improve the organisation’s capacity to enhance the student experience through learning from stakeholder feedback, and taking appropriate action. This could involve the creation of a more responsive organisation.”*

##### **5.4.5.2 Sub-Category: Projects**

The current approach to intervention was to run pilot projects and then disseminate findings throughout the university from it. The suitability of this

mode was raised due to the amount of data and expected response from feedback.

*“Observation 12: Field notes 4.5.2011 (First Person Learning)*

*A recognition by the author that a project, by definition, is temporary and therefore this reinforced the observation that the creation of capacity for ongoing effective performance should be the goal of the research project.”*

*“Observation 22: Critical Event: Learning Lab*

*The author initiated a ‘learning lab’ session. This was an informal session to communicate best practice between members of staff.”*

#### **5.4.5.3 Sub-Category: Feedback**

This relates to how the feedback affects the performance and behaviours of those within the organisation.

*“Observation 10: Field notes 11.1.2011 (First Person Learning)*

*A recognition by the author that the external performance of the organisation, demonstrated through the National Student Survey and media generated league tables is a ‘dependant variable’, that is, it is linked to a positive student experience. Do the performance metrics reflect the experience or dominate it?”*

#### **5.4.5.4 Summary of Key Themes Requiring Further Investigation**

The key categories that emerged from the data analysis were:

##### **Define**

Division and disengagement within the organisation – this requires further investigation but is possibly linked to the ambivalence and ambiguity item. Also the time for what is important category including staff ambivalence to new processes is worth pursuing as without clarity of what is important staff will continue to be ambivalent to innovative alternative processes.

## **Perform**

The performance definition in the given context requires further work in defining what performance means to each of the stakeholders in the organisational context and more importantly their ability to contribute. Validity of performance data is questioned as the data currently appears to be one dimensional; through the lens of the student perception. A multiple stakeholder perspective is required as suggested by (Zammuto 1984), this will enable all stakeholders to contribute and obtain value.

The use of performance management systems including consideration of who should be incorporated within this system, that is, who, what and when requires managing, needs further exploration.

## **Contribute**

The concept of stakeholder responsibility including role and goal clarity needs further investigation as there appears to be an imbalance in the educational process caused by the power shift towards the student. Stakeholder accountability is another key emerging themes from the initial data. Additionally, how these concepts are then reflected in the performance management systems becomes important.

## **Communicate**

Appropriate methods of communication, it would appear from the data that staff and students require more dialogue, development should be more participative. The traditional forms of engagement and participation for staff and students do not appear appropriate. Also, the significance of the oral and written communication forming part of the social construction of what is important and effective needs to be considered carefully.

## **Learn**

The ongoing and reactive nature of small change interventions means that the organisational learning capacity may render projects inappropriate. What may be required is an adaptive and responsive organisation that is constantly changing.

It then becomes increasingly important to be able to convert ideas into action; organisations need to investigate how to best move from abstract ideas to value adding activities.

The key categories and concepts can be seen in the sensitising concept map below, Diagram 5.9.

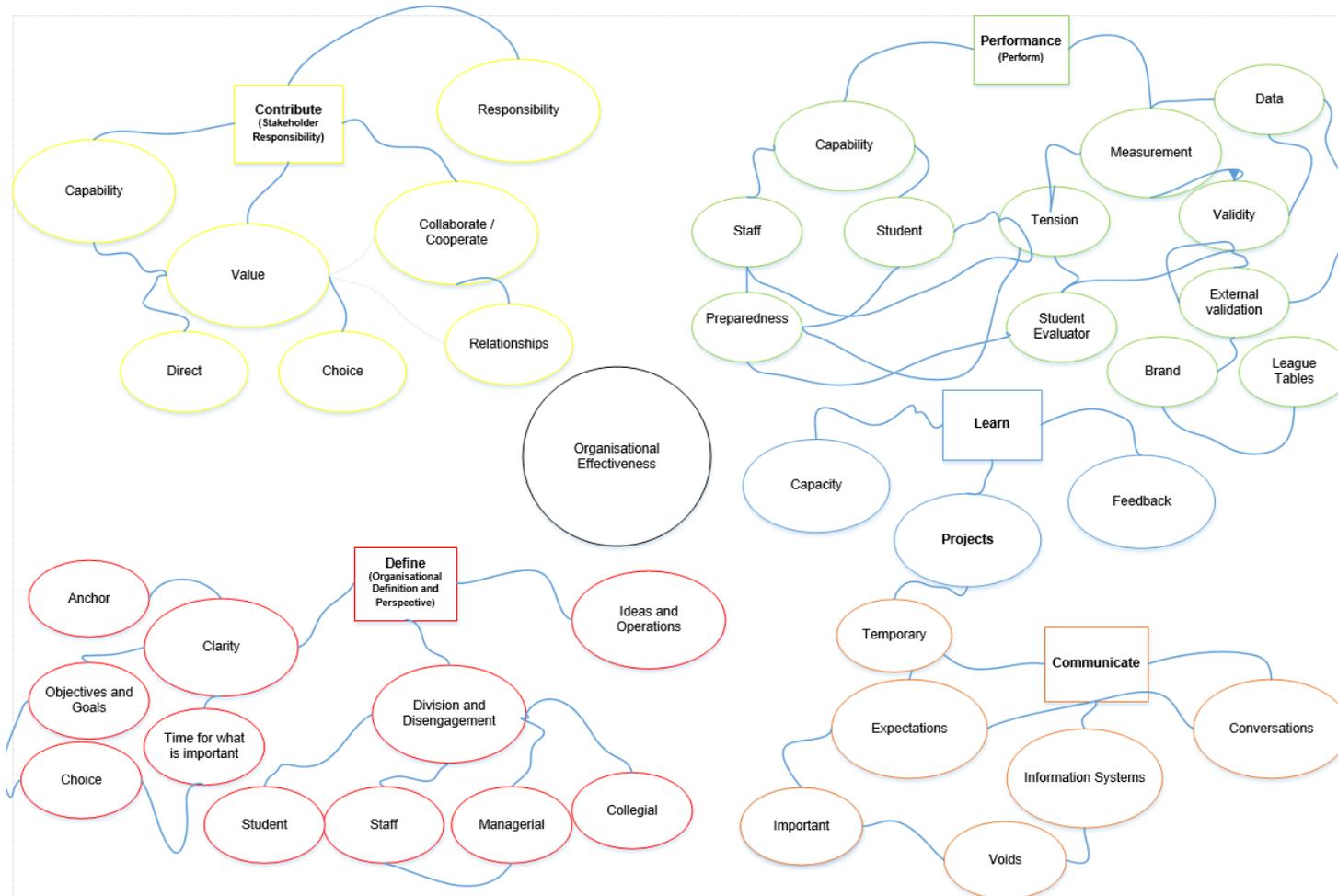


Figure. 5.2 Diagramming: Phase 1 Data Collection and Analysis – Sensitising Framework Map

## **5.5 Summary, Implications (Plans) for Next Action Research Cycle and Links to Next Chapter**

The University may have to rely more heavily on the use of projects to meet the requirement of responsiveness to stakeholder concerns, within a given time frame (Bryde and Leighton 2009). This is evident, within the host organisation, with the advent of the “You said.... We did” campaign that was promoted in 2011. This was a proclamation that the organisation would respond to student feedback with action. This feedback and action cycle is therefore closely linked to the organisational development capacity theme and also infers potential repetition of this cycle. This cycle of stakeholder feedback and organisational (re-)action could lead to a form of continuous change (author) and this could be the model the case study organisation needs to adopt. It could be stated that this cycle, should lead to greater levels of performance and therefore effectiveness within the host organisation.

However, the anticipated requirement for continuous change will, very probably, render the use of projects obsolete. However, projects were deemed important at the outset of the research, by the author, but projects did not emerge as a code or category in the observation and exploratory data collection phase of the research and have therefore been discarded at this point.

The ability of the organisation to adapt and respond to students’ feedback appears to be of paramount importance to the effectiveness of the organisation. However, this was counterbalanced within the data, by the requirement for the students’ performance, within the organisational goal of effectiveness, to be recognised. This moved the research into new directions away from the ‘episodic’ change model that infers stability interrupted, usually with a project, by a turbulent period to change the organisation, followed by a return to stability (Lewin, 1951). The organisational model that emerged is one requiring the ability to adapt and change continuously to stakeholder requests (Weick and Quinn 1999). This progression leads us to

the concept of developing a 'learning organisation' as suggested by (Argyris 1999).

The response initially to the requirement to perform concentrated solely on the role of the subject organisations staff. The staff's capability to perform was the first component to be developed as part of the project. The staff ability to use the various technologies and their teaching abilities was the subject of several staff development events including Carpe Diem and a Learning, Assessment and Feedback Workshop. It was at this point that the emergent data started to suggest that this is only one aspect of the performance conundrum. There was recognition that the students are required to be incorporated into the context of effectiveness. (Cameron 1978, p.534) refers to organisational effectiveness as a "multi-dimensional construct".

The response at this point was to attempt to control (or manage) the input of the students into the achievement of the organisational goals. Performance conversations with students were initiated as part of an attempt to manage both expectations and performance better. At the end of this phase, performance conversations as advocated by (Ford and Ford 1995) were implemented in recognition of the required stakeholder contribution, this is an aspect discussed in (Neely *et al.* 2001) performance prism and requires consideration of the input, of the stakeholders, towards the organisation's objectives. This aspect helped to redress the balance for the staff, from the student as customer notion, to recognition that the education process requires effort from various stakeholders.

### **Validation**

The findings of this phase of this research were validated internally within the case study by presentation of the findings and results, in an academic paper format, in the Annual Research Conference 2012 for the academic staff of the University. A conference paper was also presented at the British Academy of Management Conference, 'Management Research Revisited:

Prospects for Theory and Practice in Cardiff 2012. Positive feedback was received about the content of the paper in both of the conferences.

The main findings within Core Thesis Cycle are presented in the form of a sensitising framework presented in Figure 5.9.

The categories contained at this point are delicate and lacking depth and are therefore deemed tentative or provisional and therefore subject to amendment and refinement as simultaneous data collection and analysis takes place. The sensitising conceptual framework developed at this point will be used to explore and explicate these key categories further in the next cycle of core thesis, research described in Chapter 6. The next chapter describes the next phase of the research process; the core thesis cycle 2.

## **6. CORE THESIS CYCLE 2**

### **6.1 Introduction**

The purpose of this chapter is to provide the reader with a description of the data collected during phase 2 of the Thesis Research Cycle. It also informs the audience of the methods used, presents the data collected and provides analysis of the data and uses emergent literature to further explicate the data.

The chapter will provide the reader with a description of the data collection techniques used during this phase of the Core Thesis Cycle 2. It informs the audience of the methods used, presents the data collected and provides analysis of the data and uses emergent literature to further explicate the data during the discussion.

Figure 6.2 provides a summary of the emergent categories and sub categories and the emerging core category of performance indicators. The connections and relationships are discussed further in chapters 7 and 8.

Section	Topic	Comments
<b>6.1</b>	Introduction and Aims of Chapter	This section introduces the purpose of the chapter; to provide details of the data collection and analysis techniques used within the research and to present the findings and identify and explicate the key emergent themes.
<b>6.2</b>	Data Collection Techniques	The data collection methods are described; observation, memos and qualitative interviews. The process uses a theoretical sampling technique that was informed by the themes identified in thesis cycle phase 1 described in chapter 7.
<b>6.3</b>	Presentation of Data	The data is presented in diagrammatic form.
<b>6.4</b>	Analysis of Core Thesis Cycle 2	This section utilises axial coding to analyse the emergent data. The details of the axial coding process are contained in the appendices of the thesis as analytical memos (axial coding sheets).
<b>6.5</b>	Summary and Links to Next Chapter	This section will summarise the main findings and provide links to the next chapter.

Table 6.1 Chapter Structure

Between the core thesis cycle 1; the result of which was a sensitising conceptual framework and core thesis cycle 2 the ongoing, simultaneous data collection and analysis enabled further explication and subsequent confirmation of the key categories for investigation. These categories formed the basis of a theoretical framework grounded in the emergent data. These categories are discussed within this section. During the recoding and retrospective analysis phase that occurs simultaneously as the project proceeds the framework was improved and resulted in four revised key categories, the 4Ds framework. The key revised emergent and grounded categories are:

*Define* - The definition of this category relates to the requirement of the social actors for guidance and clarity.

*Deliver* - This category can be defined (specified) as relating to the factors affecting the ability of stakeholders to contribute and obtain and deliver value.

*Dialogue* - This category can be defined (specified) as relating to any data that reflects the participants concerns with the process of the exchange of information with regard to performance.

*Develop* - This category can be defined (specified) as relating to any data that reflects the participants concerns with regard to the process of the change and adaptation of the individual or organisation.

Diagram 6.1 shows the logical progression of the research process from thesis cycle 1 that produced the sensitising framework for use in the theoretical sampling phase of thesis cycle 2. It is the 4D framework that was used from this point on as the theoretical framework.

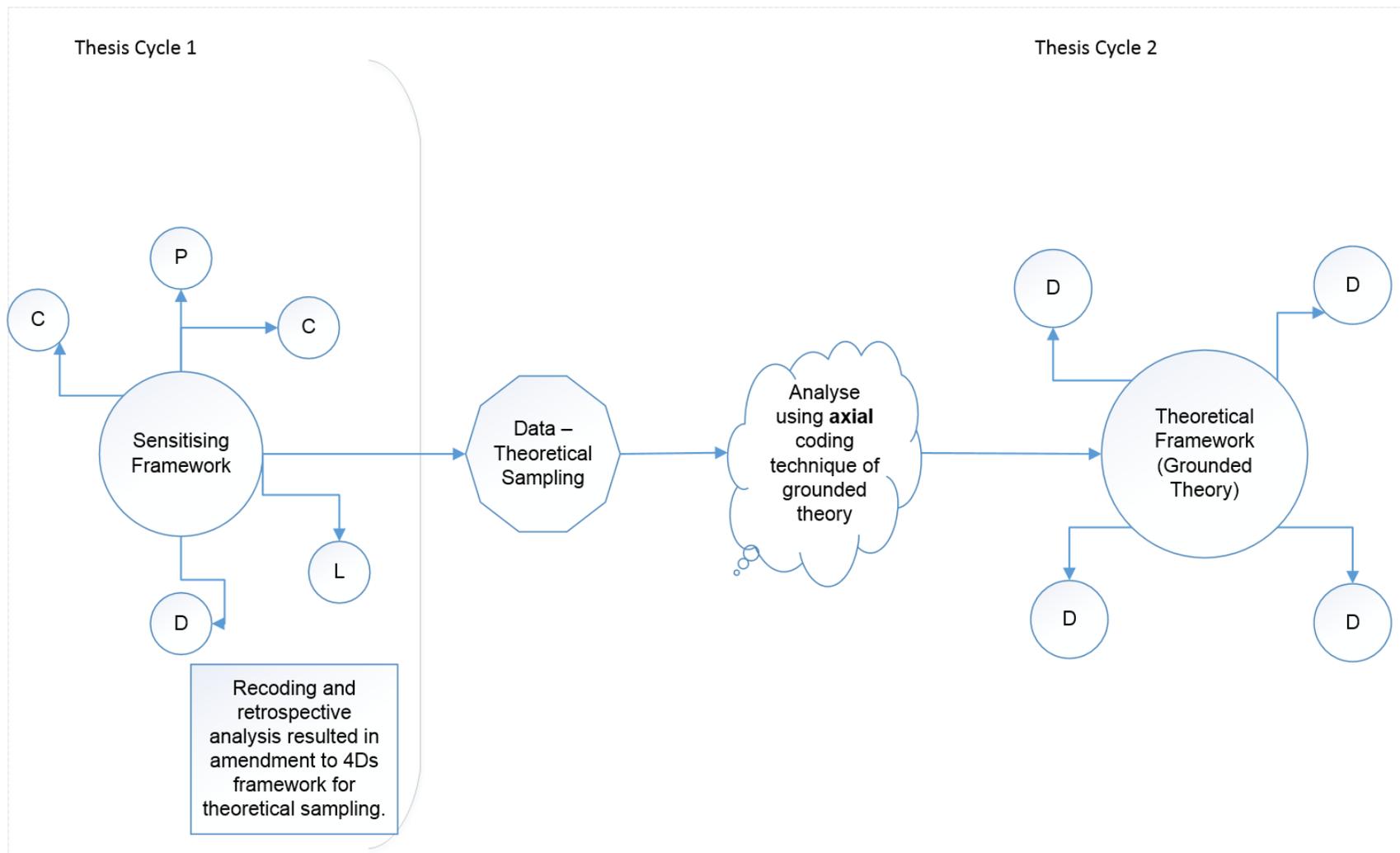


Diagram 6.1 Linear Research Process Relationship between Thesis Cycle 1 and 2

## **6.2 Core Thesis Cycle Phase 2: Data Collection Techniques**

This section describes the grounded theory methods of data collection and analysis utilised in phase 2 of the core thesis cycle. The section also describes how the researcher accessed the field and recorded appropriate data for later analysis. The main form of data collection was the ongoing overt observation in the form of participant as observer. Field notes, memos and diagrams were the formal mode for collecting and recording data for analysis.

Just as in core thesis cycle 1 the main access to the social group was through the means of overt observation and participant as observer.

### **6.2.1 Theoretical Sampling: Data Collection: Qualitative Interviewing**

Theoretical sampling is an important process within grounded theory studies. It encourages the researcher to let the emergent data lead the analytical process. Decisions as to what data to collect are governed by the initial analysis of the emergent data into concepts and categories and these categories are explicated during the theoretical sampling process (Charmaz 2006, Birks and Mills 2011). It could be likened to a detective following clues to solve a particular crime, it is a trail to follow. This infers that it is a navigation tool that aids the researcher in the journey of interpretation. Theoretical sampling should not be confused with sampling within scientific research; it is not selecting a sample that statistically best represents a group (Charmaz 2006) it is about finding as much as possible about the categories created during the initial coding phase. The purpose is not to produce generalisability (in theory) but specificity (Charmaz 2006, p.101). The methods used to undertake theoretical sampling, that is, to collect further data may be logical, such as interviews described below. However, theoretical sampling will also be undertaken concurrently during the participant observation, journaling and memos phase, this continues alongside the more explicit interviews stage. The observation of participants and memoing were the dominant methods of data collection and analysis.

## 6.2.2 Interviews

In addition to the continuing observations a schedule of interviews was undertaken. Those interviewed were chosen in accordance with the principles of theoretical sampling as described below. Details of the sample and questions asked are provided in Appendix F.

(Charmaz 2006, p.25) describes intensive interviewing as being part of an interpretive enquiry process and its purpose is to enable an “in-depth exploration of a particular topic”, in theoretical sampling, the topics are the emergent themes found during phase 1 of the participant observation of the research project data collection. Through this process the intention is to understand the phenomenon through the experience, thoughts, opinions and perspectives of the participant. This is obtained by asking the participant to describe their lived experience and importantly to reflect on this.

Within this project the journal and observational data was coded using a form of grounded theory advocated by (Charmaz 2006) to identify concepts and then categories. A concept “refers to labels given to discrete phenomena...the value of concepts is determined by their utility...one criterion for deciding if a concept is useful is that it will typically be found frequently and members of the organisation under study will recognise it” (Bryman and Bell 2007, p.587). “A category is a concept that has been elaborated so that it is regarded as representing real world phenomena” (Bryman 2007, p.587). The process is to “generate theory through data rather than prior hypothesis” (Silverman 2011, p.73). The concepts that emerged during this initial phase are presented in section 7 of this report. These concepts will form the basis of the next phase of data collection, through qualitative interviews as “theoretical samples”.

The samples used should be representative of the concept we are interested in knowing more about and not statistically representative of the general, or particular part of, the population. The categories emerged from the initial data collection and generation, we then become interested in samples that can

best assist in the exploration and explication of these particular categories. Theoretical sampling is about *what* we are looking for (Charmaz 2006, p.106). To this end a purposive sample was carefully chosen using the logic of theoretical sampling. The purposive sample relates to the theoretical sampling process and the most appropriate members of the population were chosen, that is, those best placed to expand and explicate the concepts under investigation (Patton 1990a, p.169). The strategy does include the use of negative and comparative cases. These were used because these opposites emerged from the data when exploring effectiveness. The emergent data indicated those individuals that represent opposite ends of particular spectrums; effective and ineffective; anxious and calm; clear goals and unclear goals (Charmaz 2006, p.100).

The theoretical sampling process is representative of the abductive research process. The research begins with the examination of the emergent data and concurrent analysis through memoing and journaling, propositional ideas are then constructed and these propositional ideas are then tested through the collection of further empirical data through theoretical sampling (Charmaz 2006, p.103). The abductive process and in particular the creation of tentative “theoretical explanations” (Charmaz 2006, p.104) links grounded theory with the ‘action’ phase of the action research aspect of the research. It is during this analytical phase that, not only is there a search for data to explicate but there is also consideration of solutions to improve the given situation.

Table 6.2 below reaffirms the key themes requiring further exploration and explication to enable a grounded theory to emerge. The key categories are defined to enable categorisation within the themes. The table also shows how through the continuous process of data collection and analysis the framework has progressed and developed. For example, the ‘Define’ category has become ‘Direct’ and ‘Perform’ has become ‘Deliver’ and this then subsumes the original ‘contribute’ category.

Phase 1 Thesis Cycle		Phase 2 Thesis Cycle	
Categories	Definition	Categories	Definitions
Define	This category can be defined (specified) as relating to any data that reflects the participants concerns with regard to the process of the provision of clear guidance.	Direct	This category can be defined (specified) as relating to any data that reflects the participants concerns with regard to the process of clearly defining what is important.
Perform	This category can be defined (specified) as relating to any data that reflects the participants concerns with regard to the process of performing or taking action towards a particular goal.	Deliver	This category can be defined (specified) as relating to any data that reflects the participants concerns with the requirements of performing.
Contribute	This category can be defined (specified) as relating to any data that reflects the participants concerns with regard to the process of what action should they be taking.		This category can be defined (specified) as relating to any data that reflects the participants concerns with regard to the process of responsibility to give for a common objective.
Communicate	This category can be defined (specified) as relating to any data that reflects the participants concerns with regard to the process of how objectives are conveyed to	Dialogue	This category can be defined (specified) as relating to any data that reflects the participants concerns with regard to the process of the exchange of information

	stakeholders.		with regard to performance.
Learn	This category can be defined (specified) as relating to any data that reflects the participants concerns with regard to the process of how lessons are learned.	Develop	This category can be defined (specified) as relating to any data that reflects the participants concerns with regard to the process of the change and adaptation of the individual or organisation.

Table 6.2 Progression of Categories

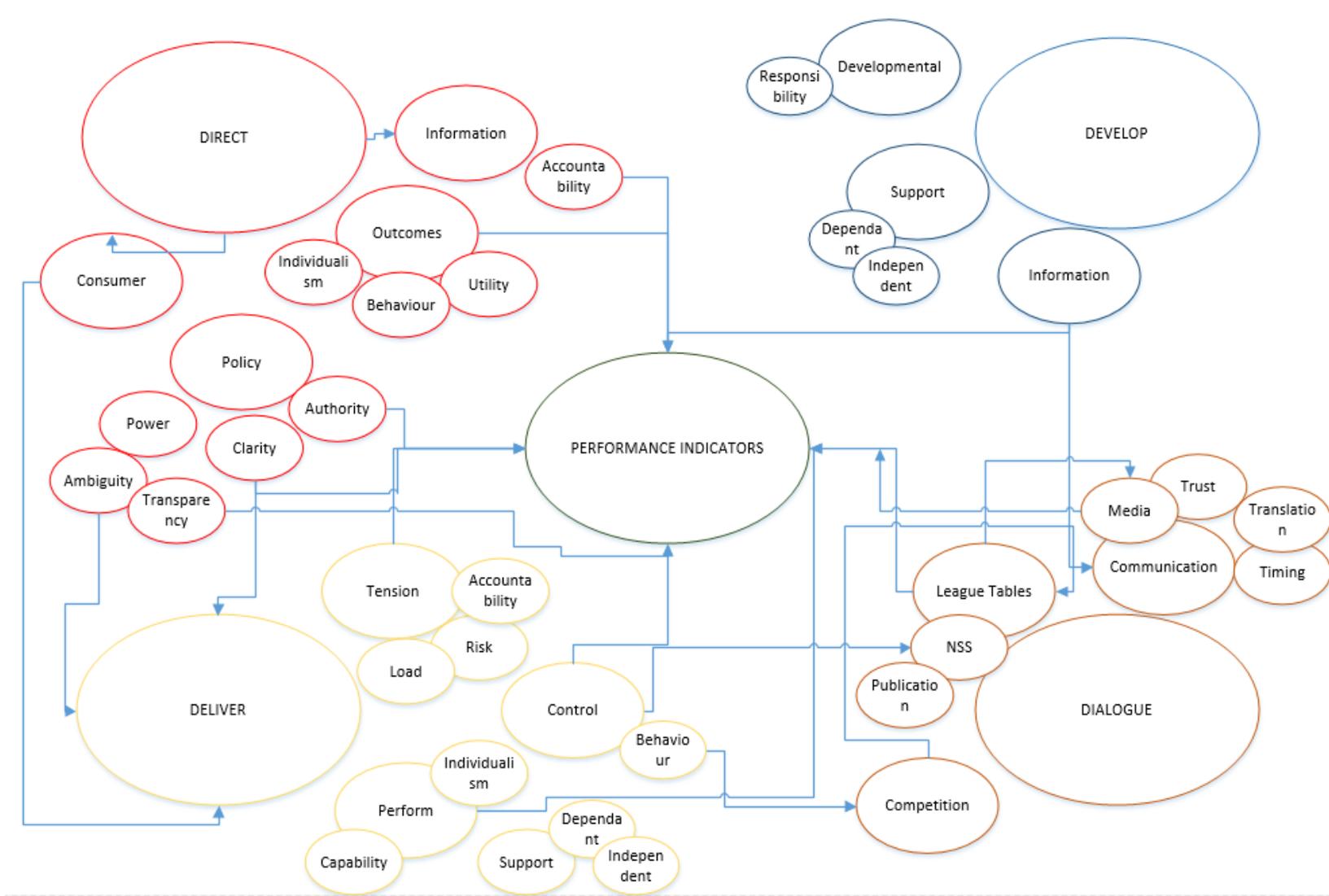


Figure 6.2 Diagrammatic Representation of Emergent Themes including Core Category – Performance Indicators

### 6.3 Data Presentation

In this section the data will be presented, the main form of data collection and analysis were analytical memos and they are included in the appendices of the report. These are accounts of observations and theoretical and propositional memos during the period from September 2012 to June 2016. There are 58 analytical memos in total, comprising 38,438 words.

#### Performance Indicators

Indicators appear to drive or determine behaviour for all participants as can be seen in the comments below. The main purpose they appear to provide is *focus*:

*“so what’s important is one making sure the students hit their grade I suppose or making sure we hit our targets, making sure the students hit their grade and I suppose just on those two points from if you take a step back those two. So we’ve got targets to meet, a set percentage are 2:1s and firsts does that influence how we tackle the students” (IV8)*

However, there is also evidence of questioning the validity of this through the perception that the focus is to *narrow*:

*“exactly the focus is not, the focus is not it’s not integrative enough and not only that it is pretty much it’s very narrow the focus is not very, it is very narrow at the moment.” (IV6)*

It was observed that indicators also appear to *alter behaviours* within the social group, with an academic member of staff referring to the educational habits of students in primary and secondary education prior to them entering higher education as being an influence upon ability and performance at university level.

*“I don’t know the educational system that we’ve got you know right the way back to you know x is in primary school now and that’s how they’re taught to you know perform for a certain thing, you need this information so that you can pass this test and that goes right the way through secondary school and so coming to university and being told no I am not going to give you that information anymore you’ve got to go and find it yourself it’s a bit of a shock. I don’t know how we change that” (IV5)*

This quote also relates to the outcome focus found at primary and secondary schools. This is further elaborated by another academic when considering the student pre-occupation with obtaining employment through their degree and the relationship between student marks and positive feedback and consequently positions in league tables:

*A: and you want them to achieve high marks because*  
*B: you want them to get a good degree which then places us*  
*A: yeah. Ok so you want them to get high marks and then they get a job hopefully*  
*B: yeah*  
*A: and then what was the next one. The logical sequence to this sorry*  
*B: well that places us in a league table*  
*A: yeah*  
*B: allows us to be measured for our performance” (IV5)*

*“So yeah they become completely assignment focused and concentrate just on you know what they’ve got to do for the assignment. And it’s frustrating in lots of modules I find myself saying to students we are trying to prepare you for your job when you leave” (IV5)*

And this is further elaborated by staff concerns regarding meeting targets, the focus on the turnaround time rather than the beneficial nature of formative feedback:

*“yeah because we are coming to the end of this semester and I have just yesterday set out how much all the marking that’s coming in, so I have to start prioritising you know what markings coming in for and when it needs to be completed by so I am making sure I hit the target of the 15 days’ turnaround. So things like these targets are always in the back of your mind when you are planning out your week’s work”* (IV8)

The data also raised the issue that behaviour is altered as the participants ‘focus on outcomes’, the outcomes drive the behaviour, with academic staff stating:

*“Yeah. I think yeah you’d need that to suddenly focus everybody’s attention on. What’s absolutely critical here is to get a good NSS result”* (IV6) and

*“so what’s important is one making sure the students hit their grade I suppose or making sure we hit our targets, making sure the students hit their grade and I suppose just on those two points from if you take a step back those two. So we’ve got targets to meet, a set percentage are 2:1s and firsts does that influence how we tackle the students”* (IV8)

An article written in The Independent by Ali (2015) discussed grade inflation, this article further reinforces this possible alteration of behaviour suggesting that grade inflation is related to the payment by students of fees. However, the emergent data, from this research, would suggest that it is not the notion of customer that alters the behaviour but it is the fear of poor feedback from students in surveys and awareness of the implications of that at local and organisational level.

Students also displayed similar focus on outcomes. The quotation below demonstrates how a particular student did not wish to interact with any social or other offerings from the university; their focus was on getting a degree:

*“and what I want out, what I want from the university is in essence purely academic and the, what is offered apart from that is surplus to what I am looking for so I don’t really, I don’t really go looking for it and it’s not really, it’s not really put to me either to be honest but I don’t really go looking for it” (IV1)*

Observations, by the researcher, also support this category as student attendance within a lecture will reduce once the content required to complete the assessment has been covered. The researcher, an academic and a colleague from the library produced a presentation for a Teaching and Learning Conference entitled ‘Where Have the Students Gone?’ this attempted to explain this phenomenon.

The temporal nature of indicators was deemed important, particularly the fact that they are usually lagging indicators and are therefore received too late to take any positive and meaningful action, with an academic staff member stating:

*“We can’t wait 24 weeks to know that we’ve then lost a fifth of a million pounds, it’s just. If we don’t know in 3 weeks, if we knew in 3 weeks, we could fix it, in ten and a half, we just put extra support and say look we’ll help you guys, I’ll double teach you we’ll do this and this and this. It’s a minor investment in just retaining that quarter of a million pounds” (IV3)*

This quote refers to the receipt of retention indicators for students at a time that makes it difficult for programme managers to respond. It also refers to a more general problem of the lagging nature of the indicators.

There was also concern raised, by academic staff, regarding the organisational and managerial perspective and in particular use of the indicators:

*“and he looked at me and went yeah he said I won’t lie to you this is the business and you know business we need to get students; we need to make money. But I will promise you this he said the money will follow the students.” (IV3)*

*“This is also about power and authority; the indicators are produced by those at the top of the organisation and cascaded down to those at the operational level. The indicators appear to come directly from what the funding bodies deem important, see HEFCE documentation and earlier observational analysis. The focus then becomes about the results and not the process this is frustrating for those at the operational level.” (IV3)*

The NSS is given ‘authority’ within the subject organisation, it appears to have a power and authority of its own. It has become the fulcrum around which the university turns or is moved or changed in some ways. NSS reports are produced annually at various levels; programme; school or department; Faculty and University. A researcher journal and analytical memo observed that:

*“Students have assumed a powerful, consumer role and view feedback as a right to complain – this relates to the language and dialogue of the organisation. They have historically been unaware of the use of their feedback or the implications of the same.”*

The emergent data and observations indicated that it was the publication of the data that created the tension amongst both staff and students. It was in this arena of comparison that the data appeared to lose its original meaning and intent, with a journal item observing:

*“Within the subject university response rates are measured and publicised, during the NSS completion period, on the University intranet. The focus then becomes about getting the response rate up and not*

*getting the right type of response (probably too late at this stage!) by getting the timing of the response correct for the particular group”.*

Due to the transparent nature and publication of satisfaction rates they have become sources of competition or competitive weapons. This causes tension in individual members of staff but also changes organisational behaviour towards the achievement (or appeasement) of the indicators, they are then used further down the supply chain to ‘inform’ students.

Another key emergent theme associated with the ‘direct’ category is to do with *role*, this relates to the definition of the requirements to perform effectively. A student describes their perception of how clear their role is. It would appear that this student (potential first class) believes there is perhaps too much guidance provided:

*“think so I think it’s as clear as it can be. I don’t think its. You’re made aware of, you’re told many times of for example any deadlines you have, you’re explicitly told what the coursework is, you’re explicitly told when there’s a deadline and you’re, everybody knows about blackboards so these aids that there are to teaching, blackboard, the electronic library and everybody is known from that and it’s probably from the first year if anything it makes people aware that those facilities are there.” (IV1)*

This is also a recurrent theme amongst stronger academic students and high performing academic staff members.

During a lecture the researcher was asked to ‘stop feeding’ another student as it was considered that the student was receiving too much support. Further evidence, from the NSS qualitative remarks section, makes constant reference to ‘preference’ being given to support other students. This data highlights the issues that there is an emergence of individualism; students and staff who see success as being a focus on indicators and measures at the expense of other non-measured issues.

Some staff also displayed concern at the amount of support students are provided with and how this negatively impacts on the students' ability to learn independently:

*“but what you’re actually trying to do is obviously get them to think for themselves so that they’ve got that ability for the future that skill and they don’t understand that that’s the case” (IV5)*

Staff also are concerned with the clarity of their role and how they adhere to it and how this affects the student experience, regardless of other political variables:

*“It doesn’t matter whether the manager likes me or he doesn’t like me I don’t care. What I care about is am I following what I am being told to do and are those people that are receiving that service happy with it.” (IV10)*

The successful completion of the role is what is significant and the clarity of the indicators and the explicit expectations appears to be something to hold on to in the wake of other ambiguous processes and expectations. This leads logically to the next emergent sub-theme of expectations.

The Browne Report (2010) introduced fees of £9000 (maximum) from 2012 and put the student at the centre of the higher education experience. The report also explicitly made the ‘individual’ (student) responsible financially for the payment of the fees via a student loan. Placing the individual at the centre of the experience, logically results in multiple perceptions of effectiveness. This action removed the notion of a collective student experience and promoted individual satisfaction. Many various forms of expectation were observed over the period of the study:

The expectation of service; as demanded by certain students, in exaggerated but not unique occurrences are described in a journal item below:

*“Students who consider themselves to be customers appear to misunderstand their role in the educational process. They become quite demanding – examples of students calculating the hourly rate for scheduled activities and commenting on whether they consider them to be value for money. Also because students pay their money they are entitled to choose their level and modes of engagement with the programmes.”*

There is also the expectation of preparedness; that both staff and students are prepared to perform as they enter the organisation, see journal item below:

*“Some students arriving at university ill-prepared due to secondary and post 16 educational system that is also governed by indicators that concentrate on the end product, the award marks as they respond to their indicators including the DfE: input and impact indicators”.*

There are also developmental expectations; expectations that change over a time period. These could be in response to both internal and external stimuli. This occurred during this case study as a new Vice Chancellor was appointed and strategies were changed and staff and students had to adapt, this is seen in the memo extract below:

*“This increase in expectation could be due to the changing culture of the organisation to a more high expectation (was this explicitly communicated?). It could also be due to the expectations becoming more consistent and transparent for everyone in the system – staff and students alike. This is evidenced in the symbols seen. For example, grading criteria and marking criteria, also the increase in entry points onto the courses – this has an impact on the existing ‘legacy’ staff and students.”*

Flexible, dynamic and multiple expectations are experienced when different actors or agencies have different expectations of the organisational role.

There are also expectations created by the key performance indicators themselves. The indicators themselves are used as part of the symbols of the organisation and their significance is socially constructed amongst the actors of the social setting. The social construction through dialogue appears to be largely negative and responsible for changes in behaviour as can be seen by the observation below:

*“I can understand why they have such an importance because of the increased fees because of getting up the table to bring more students in, because it is linked to the organisation being a business. So in effect they are, they could be judged to be seen as our clients and then or customers so you get trapped in this, I need to make sure they are ok so they give me good feedback so they progress. So it’s not and then it could in fact dilute the value of our degree so if they get a first in our university could be judged differently to getting a first elsewhere because of the amount of support and consciousness, how conscious we are on giving them what they ask for” (IV3)*

The methods, and in particular the tone, of the communication of the indicators and their purpose to provide clarity of what is important in achieving effectiveness is emphasised below, in the interview with IV3 an academic member of staff:

*“but that can also be very subjective unless you know I know what performance criteria am I being judged on effectiveness you know”*

*“so it goes back to probably why I wrote these things first you know if you don’t communicate these expectations and this scorecard and then you don’t get engagement and feedback, so I suppose that’s another one you know do you get feedback both from students and staff to tell you where, you know why things are happening and where there are issues. But if you can get that and you’ve got mechanisms to do that then surely you were aware of what I know specifically whether a staff*

*member doesn't feel they have skills in that area and then we are able to do things to improve it and I think a big thing there which links to communication and engagement I suppose is you know collaboration"*

*"So I think your level of effectiveness is only as good as the sort of expectations and the standards that you've set and everybody has to buy in to that both staff and students. So firstly, and it links then to all of this doesn't it, cos if you don't communicate that expectation and that standard and then you don't get people to engage in that standard, it's never going to happen"*

*"well I suppose in the current role I am in as a program leader, if you take that away well you could argue that there's no real what's the push you know what's the goal you know. Alright we've got these nice fluffy programs; you never really know where they're going to do you"*

*"so you know as much as you hate NSS it does give you that hope, that it's motivational on the fearful side but it does motivate a kick in to gear, it's a catalyst to get all this stuff working"*

The data shows that the stakeholders require clarity in terms of expectations and benchmark standards to perform to. There is even irony in the perception that the NSS provides this clarity!

The next quotations emphasis how the communication of expectations is important and how they can change behaviours including the over provision of support by staff:

*"I don't really look at them as a resource. No I think the way students come in to it for me and this links to it in terms of if we look at it from a sort of customer's prospective sort of I look at effectiveness with sort of the service and standards that we're setting. You know things like response, you know Quality, sort of Leading" (IV8)*

*"they're judging us on yeah how nice we might be to them and whether we've given them enough information or you know whether the room is*

*nice that we teach in or things that are outside of our control as well” (IV5)*

*“you do everything for the students you can do, you’re helping them out, you are available, you are going that extra mile to make sure they’ve got everything they want, any queries you’ve got you’re on top, you’re answering it, you are helping them step by step on the coursework. You are trying to make sure that you feed their needs in a way” (IV5)*

This data reflects that some staff do not view students as a resource but as a customer with expectations of particular service standards. This is reinforced by the other comments relating to the extent of the implications of service.

Some staff have offered their perspective on the concept of getting beyond students concern only for themselves and their performance and their individualistic goals.

*“I’m going to jump a little bit here but we have HNCs who are first, you know the first time they are dipping their toes in to the #####, they are thinking about what career and they’ve never been exposed to the industry before. And how I approach it is they turn up, everyone is individual them first couple of weeks and you’ve got to break that down because they are still coming with the mentality of A levels or college where everything is just based upon themselves and they’re so enclosed and they don’t want to share knowledge, it’s all about trying to get the best results at the time” (IV7)*

*“I give them a lecture or a talk I explain to them that the only way we are going to push the boundaries of learning and experience is by sharing ideas and working together as a group and make sure that none of them feel that it’s just about themselves where they’ve got to produce the most amazing piece of work in the sense of if they still have that mentality with they come from college then they are not going to learn nothing.” (IV7)*

This demonstrates that the focus on performance outputs in the form of indicators, is a linear and incremental process that is affected by what precedes the experience and by what succeeds it. Secondary schools are concerned with their performance data including progression to college and the GCSE grade A to C; sixth form colleges or equivalent are concerned with student progression to higher education and universities are largely dominated by progression to professional and managerial roles and to a lesser degree post graduate education. Consider what would happen to the curriculum of degree courses if the policy set by government was to increase the number of post graduate students studying at post graduate level instead of joining the workplace.

*“So what with marketing maybe the other thing that I could point out is the market as in where the student is going. Am I informed of what is going there, what is going on, because we are a university that is very much linked to employability? Employability is a very big issue for us.”*  
(IV10)

This leads logically to the multiple and ethereal nature of effectiveness as there are multiple roles; personal perceptions; ambiguity (political); leadership (direct; personal)

*“I also think, see effectiveness as being able to use my time and my resources efficiently, so it’s sufficient. Efficiency and effectiveness come together for me, efficient use of resources can bring about an effective result”* (IV2)

*“University indicators including Financial indicators, community engagement, industrial engagement and programme level indicators. The busyness of the PL role (and academic role generally) does not allow for reflection or consideration of multiple perspectives of effectiveness.”* (Journal item: Observation - 11.10.2013 Reflection on Interview with PL (Journal 3A))

The first statement relates to personal effectiveness and how that individual's time is used. The second statement from a different member of staff demonstrates how the multiple goals, set by senior management with no clear guidelines as to how they will be achieved (ambiguous process), are not reflected in the indicators; as outputs only. This reflects that indicators are chosen by those in the position of authority.

*“When I first started in 2007 a lot more flexibility but the focus on this customer facing culture wasn't the same. You had the power.” (IV4)*

*“I suppose sometimes I think there's too much emphasis put on certain stakeholders' opinions but there again I can understand why because the environment we are in has changed so it's a pressure but I can understand why the pressures are there” (IV8)*

*“well the student's role has grown in such importance that or the influence of the student has grown in such importance that their actual role has potentially been put in a grey area, has been, their empathise has shifted that the importance of work, of studying and work has shifted from them to how I feel to myself to give them what they want to ensure that they get the marks that they want” (IV8)*

*“yeah so if I haven't told them something then that's and they don't know something it because I haven't told them rather than I have given them the opportunity to go and told them where to read and search things out that's not done it, if I haven't told them they don't know and that's my fault” (IV8)*

*“At this time there is the perception that students have the upper hand or power due to the weighting applied, by the University management, to the NSS. The students may also have a sense of this and this leads to a lack of role clarity with both parties being unsure. (Journal Item)*

*The sword of Damocles is a useful allegory that conveys the nature of teaching with the spectre of the NSS resting just above our heads”*

(Journal Item: Observation: Conversation with PL – 9.9.2013 (Journal 3A))

The above perceptions demonstrate the perceived shift in power towards the student body and how it is altering behaviour on both sides of the teacher: student relationship. This is supported by the comment below by the researcher in a memo item.

“Indicators alter behaviour as seen in the increase of control and active management of the students, the increased awareness and consequent focus on the indicators (refer to number of meetings with National Student Survey as an agenda item also the introduction of the NSS Champion as a role across every school of the university reporting directly to the Pro Vice Chancellor for Education.”

The way the university uses information is highlighted as being important in the interview quotation below:

*“the fact is we gather tonnes of data on our students and yet we don’t use it” (IV3)*

*“Information needs to be managed better at university level. There is an external use of information to enable market type decisions – complete information? There is also internal use of information that enables improvement of organisations to meet the demands of students.” (IV3)*

The above perceptions demonstrate that performance data can be used to improve performance of both the university and the students. But this information needs to be actively managed in a positive and developmental way.

The above section demonstrates the perceptions of staff and students toward the direct category.

## **Deliver**

This category can be defined (specified) as relating to the stakeholders' ability to contribute and obtain/deliver value.

The emergent data demonstrated that there was a perceived tension felt by staff and students alike with regard to their ability to deliver or perform.

*“it’s a very fast moving discipline anyway you know. The stuff our staff teach, in some cases if you teach something in the first year by the time the students have graduated its old technology. And that’s quite frightening” (IV3)*

*“we’re afraid of what it might say and in fact there’s no hitting you over the head with it, if you score badly every week but you can tell us those reasons why it is badly then you might say you know what I’m having to do a lecture and a lecture’s not the best way of doing this, it would be better if it was a field trip and we just do this in one week block you know and that’s sorted. It should be a discussion point. None of this data should be there to hit you on the head with it should be there to kind of support activities to generate” (IV3)*

*“is a first year class so, and this is damning evidence because you’re a brand new member of staff you really you know you’re bricking it when you are first teaching to be told that you’ve got three weeks to get it right or they will hate you for the rest of the four years, and that’s pretty much what some of the feeling was like. I hope I never have this person again to teach me, I don’t want her you know and oddly enough we managed to discuss it and talk about it and say no this is the reality you’ve had three weeks and that’s what they think of you. These are the comments we’re getting back and she was mortified” (IV3)*

*“Now because of the processes we have, policies we have, that culture and that fear that there could be a complaint that now forces you to you*

*know be confirmed to a sort of a time period and place that you need to be in” (IV3)*

*“but I can see lots of people do and I think those people would get you know stressed and worried about it” (IV3)*

*“I suppose sometimes I think there’s too much emphasis put on certain stakeholders’ opinions but there again I can understand why because the environment we are in has changed so it’s a pressure but I can understand why the pressures are there” (IV4)*

The next quotations detail the relevance of the NSS as an indicator within the subject organisation, these are quotations from academic staff:

*“well yeah. I mean when you’ve got like student evaluation there that comes in to it if you’ve got I mean big modules, yearlong modules generally you have two staff on them sometimes, you know one doing one semester one doing the other. When you’ve got semester based it might be two or three each semester if you are carrying someone who’s underperforming you know it just takes one weak link in the chain doesn’t it to bring the whole thing down” (IV3)*

*“then the students will tell us and we give them as many opportunities to tell us through many different channels” (IV3)*

*“Then can tell us to do all the research in the world right but if I consistently get an NSS score of 40 for two to three years on the trot even if I am producing some nice publications there not going to let us do much teaching are they and that’ll restrict me in your options going forward so the prime, that fear of underperforming on the student facing tasks trumps everything else” (IV3)*

*“But what would be a priority is the other, you know well here my only existence for being here is there one other thing does come on that scorecard but my only existence would be the research outputs. And if I don’t hit those you know you are actually even looking at performance related pay you know moving down you know back on the scoring chart,*

*so when I weigh up the pressures you know I am sort of open minded in the fact that they it can be a challenge but everyone's got pressure, everyone's got targets that they are conscious about and it probably does keep them awake at night a bit" (IV3)*

There is also a need to consider the capability of the social actors before there is an expectation to perform. Consideration should therefore be given to the preparation of people to deliver, which should be preceded by a form of diagnosis of ability:

*"I'm trying to do more research and scholarly activity that's the biggest fear I think from a staff point of view"*

*"well I didn't understand any of the processes or procedures"*

*"I still didn't understand because I'd not done the role. So you are sat in a group with people that have maybe done that job for a while and just have never done the formal training so they are catching up or maybe people are sat there doing refresher training and if you asked all the questions that you had in your head you'd never get out of the room" (IV5)*

*"I don't think it's unrealistic I think there's a transition period between working in industry and working in academia and you know just from personal experience the first year was just a whirlwind of trying to get stuff to a decent enough standard to then go and teach cos you come from industry you know your job and you know what you have to do but getting that in to the context that you can teach it to someone who doesn't know anything about industry"*

*"I think that after the first year you kind of just you know you think it's alright and then you get in to the lecture room and you're delivering and you think oh actually I needed to go ten steps back from where I started cos they don't know that information"*

*"so again as new members of staff you know just simple things which we take for granted like how does Blackboard work, how do you put*

*your marks in to Blackboard and all things like that so you've got to try and help them get used to systems and processes and you've also got to be quite firm as well you know these are the deadlines, you've got to do this, you've got to get your feedback, it's got to be in this sort of a way."* (IV5)

There are issues related to confidence due to the individuals lack of professional agency

*"and they just go and do that but the impact that has on you and you think am I good enough. Am I not good enough and what do you do, do you fight that perception, you can't it would be very logical of you do you fight when you are given a reason for rejection for rejection of a bid or something the fact that there is an effect shows you that they didn't read it and that they don't understand it"* (IV10)

The indicators also have an indirect effect on the behaviours of the academic staff towards the educational process and the actions and processes of those involved, particularly the concept of academic support.

*"we do perhaps, I don't like the term spoon feed but that's what I mean"* (IV5)

*"There is an observable increase in tutorials provided to provide support students in their learning. Are we now following the primary and secondary schools' models of education, that is, responding to performance indicators through increased focus on results rather than process and the proper development of learning skills. This is an unspoken truth – to declare it is to condemn ourselves and our practice."* (Journal Item: Observation: Conversation with PL – 21.2.13 (Journal 2))

There is a recognition that education should be a collaborative process however, due to the focus on outcomes and indicators this has been lost.

*“one thing I find funny about students, I mean you see it across all three years and you know I do this myself, or I have done this so I don’t do it as much now but I have done this is that students in trying to improve themselves it’s like a dog eat dog world almost you sort of even though everybody is individual, everybody’s marks are individual and you shouldn’t be, especially in Construction everybody should be working together as it were you know people are afraid to give other people too much help because they think I’m doing all the work and they think they don’t want to share that help with anybody so you find it sort of not at this area but when people are very coy about when they are coming up to an exam are they are coming up to a deadline with research, with coursework and people are very standoffish about how they are getting on and they are not willing to share which you think co-operation” (IV1)*

This is an interesting perspective from a student that supports co-creation amongst students but sees that it does not occur due to individualism.

*“and that’s not the way it is, it’s going to. It’s about being a team player and recognising that what you do adds value to the organisation” (IV1)*

The following quotations demonstrate a perception that there are different categories of responsibility; team; student; individual. All of these are required to be effective.

*“again it’s how I would judge a student in terms of what they should be doing before they get to me in terms of any queries they have or the amount of work they should be doing rather than relying solely on myself to help them through their course. So it’s more focused on what I have said or do rather than have them going away reading, querying what how they are judging an assignment or coursework to go”*

*“well the student’s role has grown in such importance that or the influence of the student has grown in such importance that their actual role has potentially been put in a grey area, has been, their empathise has shifted that the importance of work, of studying and work has shifted from them to how I feel to myself to give them what they want to ensure that they get the marks that they want”*

*“it should and I suppose just going back on a bit not all students are like that you get as I say top ten who will act on this community sharing role then you get the bulk in the middle that are reliant on you and then you get the five or ten percent at the bottom that just don’t engage”*  
(IV8)

Despite this observation the student focus is still singular.

*“well I think then a really effective day then is if you had, if you went to your lectures and your lectures were useful for your development, for your goals. So for your coursework, for your, that piece of work that you know you need to do. If it was a lecture that you thought oh right yeah if I didn’t go that that lecture I would have been hindered in my progress forward or my piece of coursework, then you know it was worthwhile turning up.”* (IV1)

This student comment shows how students focus on the utility of certain offerings and that their behaviours are related to the relationship of the learning process to the achievement of their goals.

The key areas are the tension caused by the indicators and the associated power shift towards students through the indicator mechanisms. This puts pressure particularly on new staff and students who need additional support to settle into a role and understand the procedures and processes. This has an undermining effect on stakeholders and they become reluctant to try new things that may be innovative and improve the process. The issue of control

is also important in that staff are aware of trying to control student behaviour to achieve improved results and there is a problem with a lack of control from disruptions and distractions.

There is also an increase in individualism amongst students and staff as they respond to what is construed as being important; their individual outcomes and indicators that are manifest in module surveys and assessment marks!

## **Dialogue**

This category can be defined (specified) as relating to any data that reflects the participants concerns with the process of the exchange of information with regard to performance.

It was observed that effective performance is achieved if the outcomes and indicators are achieved or positive. This is demonstrated in the student comment below:

*“but your performance in essence is based when it comes down to your marks, coursework marks and then your exams at the end of the year. Any presentations and that gives you your feedback. Your mark for the end of year and that’s how you know if you’ve done well or not” (IV1)*

*“and that’s the only sort of real marker there is at uni isn’t there” (IV1)*

The National Student Survey plays a significant part in the construction of effectiveness within the case study organisation

*“I don’t know really I think its I think it’s just part and parcel of the world we live in now that you know you have to evidence your worth, you have to prove your worth and that’s the kind of you know this sort of information age that we live in and you’ve got and unfortunately you know there’s got to be something that is the key driver to that and for us its NSS and I think any profession there’s going to be something*

*which is you know, if I'm you know I'm going to be most fearful of have I hit that sales target, so whether its sales or NSS there's going to be something which drives it. So cos I'm quite sort of open minded when it comes to the pressure of it and I understand why it's there and I understand we're a business like any other that has to compete. Doesn't necessarily make it easy though you know" (IV4)*

However, care must be taken with regard to the context of National Student Survey, due to the timing of the survey

*"maybe that the course might be a little bit easy perhaps or they are not being challenged towards the end so they take things for granted. I don't know or failing that they are disillusioned because they don't think they are going to get a job at the end of it. It's all those sorts of things could contribute to a sense of negativity when they actually come to fill in the NSS" (IV6)*

*"no but I think there should be. There's got to be something that they've got to bear in mind I think that the timing of these surveys we should project a more positive outlook perhaps" (IV6)*

There are also levels of awareness, amongst staff, of the impact and meaning of the NSS; staff are aware of measures but are not fully aware of the implications at the organisational level of poor perception of performance:

*"well in the sense of I know the NSS is obviously a major thing for the university but I don't understand. From a management level, from yourselves down to us I don't understand that NSS even yourself so maybe you know you'd have to teach me" (IV7)*

*"yeah there's we're always discussing some sort of target on a regular basis you know if it's the NSS if it's the Mirror survey it's the grades, it's the retention so there is always targets to be measured against" (IV6)*

*“It could be an awareness; they may not know that the students fill these module appraisal forms in but things that go on we usually have a long section meeting like we had in June like an end of year one. There’s so many things you know it was like a three or four hour meeting. You come out of the meeting and straightway you have forgotten half” (IV6)*

*“But I suppose my staff are relatively new, most of them wouldn’t know what NSS stood for I think. I was surprised actually at the lack of interest” (IV4)*

Another issue related to dialogue is the communication of what is important in a dynamic and multi goal environment

*“yeah there’s we’re always discussing some sort of target on a regular basis you know if it’s the NSS if it’s the Mirror survey it’s the grades, it’s the retention so there is always targets to be measured against” (IV8)*

*“so if someone is off ill or if the strikes were on, or if there’s one of the other programs wanting you to do a lecture or one of the other colleagues on different module, or if you were asked to do extra curriculum activities say in the construction area and the build up to that, all this extra curriculum activities that aren’t accounted for in this work allocation model so again another target you are judged on the model but then the model doesn’t take account of all separate things that you are doing.” (IV8)*

This emphasises that positive performance is evident only if indicators are achieved and the many actions that are not measureable are meaningless. This relates to issues regarding promotion when the only objective measures appear to be academic journal papers for professorship, even the teaching route requires academic writing about pedagogy rather than excellent teaching.

This leads to the staff perspective on performance being largely negative.

*“I suppose it comes from the other angle I suppose you know when you are not performing you get told when you are not performing in not so much you are performing well its whether your modules mirror survey scores are ok, your NSS scores are ok. If there’s any complaints so it’s more from the other way rather than” (IV8)*

*“but that can also be very subjective unless you know I know what performance criteria am I being judged on effectiveness you know” (IV10)*

The focus on measurable, objective measures is corroborated by the following student statement.

*“but your performance in essence is based when it comes down to your marks, coursework marks and then your exams at the end of the year. Any presentations and that gives you your feedback. Your mark for the end of year and that’s how you know if you’ve done well or not” (IV1)*

However, it is the presence of multiple indicators and perceptions of effectiveness that cause the problem of ambiguity. Knowing what is important is very different from knowing how to achieve it.

*“so again it all comes down to who’s judging your performance and from what prospective because if I’m sure someone from a research prospective will judge my performance as not being very active, not being that great to be honest whereas hopefully someone from the teaching prospective touch wood because I haven’t had any complaints or any yeah or any complaints or any really underperforming modules that they would see that as not, as being ok performance but then it’s the other targets that like I said the research, getting active and research and publishing that I need to up skill on it to hopefully then get the rounded performance rather than just focusing on one but I suppose the other part is should the two be, should everyone be*

*judged on two or should you just have people who are good in teaching teach people who are good in research why should they be linked together, why have one person doing both angles” (IV8)*

*“so that’s the same with the NSS score. We and it seems to be swings and roundabouts as well it seems to be we are either in the depths of despair and then a few weeks later everything is ok again so it seems to be a rollercoaster type thing in terms of the news you get back we’re in the depths of despair, things are bad, numbers are down, budgets are down and then you’ll get an email maybe a couple of weeks later we’ve got spare money available to do different things please apply. So it seems to be a bit of, I don’t know rollercoaster, different messages coming out at times” (IV8)*

There is also the perception of a good NSS score as being a shield to provides protection to the programme for a twelve month period.

*“so that’s the same with the NSS score. We and it seems to be swings and roundabouts as well it seems to be we are either in the depths of despair and then a few weeks later everything is ok again so it seems to be a rollercoaster type thing in terms of the news you get back we’re in the depths of despair, things are bad, numbers are down, budgets are down and then you’ll get an email maybe a couple of weeks later we’ve got spare money available to do different things please apply. So it seems to be a bit of, I don’t know rollercoaster, different messages coming out at times” (IV4)*

*“it’s great yeah, it can be you know if you get a high score you’re laughing you know you’re walking down the corridors thinking well look at my NSS you can’t touch me at the moment, but next year the problem with NSS the next year that can change and it can be totally different. So I think you do have to you know I think you could look at it pessimistically and say you use the other stuff to shield yourself from*

*that risk that you might underperform with the NSS but I look at it more like I do it cos I actually want to be doing it as well” (IV4)*

There is also evidence that suggests that for performance data to be deemed useful it needs to be provided in a timely manner:

*“I sat back and observed her and analysed it all and I said look try and do less of this do this and this and it started to pick up and then six weeks later she’s converted some of the students back and you think there’s a danger there that if you don’t get these early feedback mechanisms and use them real time and all I did was ask the students how’s it going” (IV3)*

*“you’re going to have an informal way of chatting to then finding out you can tell maybe things are not too good or maybe things are going alright so personally for me that’s one of the things that I use and most of the modules I teach on a group, not necessarily a group they also rely on colleagues.” (IV3)*

There is also a requirement for ongoing monitoring of performance and not just periodic feedback that occurs too late to be of use.

*“possibly in a module where you’ve got staged assessments you could monitor performance as well” (IV6)*

*“I suppose I would assess myself so if I got a bad bit of feedback” (IV5)*

*“however we could as well you know after that has been done you could as well be available of the information and say ok these are the questions we asked and these are the areas you scored well, these are the areas you could improve because there’s info to continuously improve so that is a for the employer. So retrospectively we could actually be giving that information maybe later on after that has been done” (IV10)*

*“yeah that particular group that I spoke about we didn’t get good feedback and you know me and Mal have sat and talked about that module for hours and hours and we’ve took a completely different tack on it this year in that we are sort of a tag team so every lecture we are going in together.” (IV3)*

This section focuses on the perceptions of the ‘dialogue’ concept and the findings indicate that indicators or outputs appear to be the prime focus for both staff and students and in particular the NSS looms large in most staff members’ perspectives and dialogue. Students focus on their marks as their only means of judging value and staff use the NSS and other mechanisms the same way but they also realise there should be multiple ways of judging effectiveness.

## **Develop**

This category can be defined (specified) as relating to any data that reflects the participants concerns with regard to the process of the change and adaptation of the individual or organisation. As can be seen by the limited criteria within this category the stakeholders had limited perception of the significance of this category. Perhaps this reflects the propositional nature of this category and a lack of awareness on behalf of the staff.

One member of staff made the following comments regarding the use of performance data in relation to appraising performance in a diagnostic and supportive way:

*“I mean other people around the university say Yeah it makes sense, and that’s exactly what I am proposing now from our school to kind of bring a learning analytical graph altogether” (IV3)*

*“Why are we not doing continual appraisal of performance while the election was on and do you know we work at Barclays Bank in some of*

*these things, Barclays Bank have a live analytics of the Twitter feed. So they can use their software to predict that there's a problem in their network, based on the comments on Twitter so if someone came on and said I'm in Didsbury and the ATMs not working again as opposed to saying the whole ATM network's off they know that there's a localised problem. And they analyse Twitter for positive and negative trends" (IV3)*

Another member of staff made the following comments

*"and I think that inhibits us a lot of the time. Examples would be say the attendance monitoring policy which is much better now which allows you to quickly go on and see a student, and I can quickly go on with the click of a button and see whether a student's been in each week but I can't click on anything online which gives me a snapshot of a student's performance. And you know we're doing these performance conversations with students and we are putting real emphasis on level 6 to try and boost the NSS and that engagement but I'm relying on the student to tell me what grades they got" (IV4)*

And another comment regarding real time performance data:

*"I think, I think it's alright, as I say I think it would be great if they had more you know when I said about the technology about being able to assess how someone is doing"*

The decision as to who is responsible for the development of the students learning; academic designed curricula that enables the student to learn and demonstrate their learning in a supportive environment. Or self-directed students with multiple needs and opportunities.

*“A lot of it comes down to the way in which we design the curriculum for them. You know if you look at, if am looking at my curriculum enhancement bid now it’s to do with how prepared students are to do research. Well actually they are not very prepared because it’s not build in to their curriculum properly and that’s our problem, not theirs”*

*“from the staff aspect probably maybe not early for me but I haven’t got to grips, I haven’t got involved maybe myself enough in terms of developing myself that that next stage that I need to get to” (IV4)*

A final comment related to development tells of the frustration of trying to develop in such a large organisation:

*“it’s like turning a super tanker around, you know it takes a day to turn around” (IV3)*

This category relates to the information requirements needed to develop and improve and in particular for the need for real time data during performance and diagnostic data beforehand. This would help staff and students make better decisions regarding their own performance. It also raises the perspective that staff see it as their professional responsibility to enable student development and they also see it as their own responsibility for their personal development. The staff survey undertaken in 2015 also further supports this perspective on personal and professional development of staff.

#### **6.4 Analysis of Core Thesis Cycle 2 Action Research**

##### **Cycle 2 Data Analysis – Axial Coding (Grounded Theory)**

This is the second phase of data analysis, if initial coding takes the data apart, this process puts it back together again in a more connected, conceptual and abstract way. Axial coding is predominantly about making connections; it is about relationships between categories (Charmaz 2006).

This is also carried out during the initial or open coding phases so the boundaries are not fixed (Corbin and Strauss 2008). It is the process of relating concepts to each other and trying to make connections explicit. (Corbin and Strauss 2008, p.103) call this “theoretical integration”. In order to achieve this integration comparative methods are used to further enhance the development of theory by identifying to the connections between categories and the properties and dimensions contained therein. Although the process is presented here sequentially, in a linear fashion, it is not necessarily sequential as it can take place at the same time as open coding; the researcher is often making connections between categories and formulating tentative relationships (Corbin and Strauss 2008, p.60).

It is a framework for the researcher to use, a logical process through which the following are looked for; conditions, actions and interactions and consequences. Matrices are useful here to map the various connects across categories and cases, for example.

There are frameworks for enabling this process of elaboration (Charmaz 2006, p.61) refers to Corbin and Strauss’s frame to ensure connections between categories are seen and these are shown in the table below:

Term	Analytical Process
Conditions (Context – micro and macro)	Examine the circumstances that provide structure to the given situation. (Why, where, how come)
Actions/Interactions	What are the participant’s responses to the associated events? (By whom and how?)
Consequences	What are the results of the above? (What happens as a result?)

Table 6.3 Adaptation of Corbin and Strauss’s Axial Coding Frame

This phase of the thesis cycle relies heavily on the use of memos; they are used to enable the researcher to stop, reflect on the data collected and to theorise about what has been seen and what the possible interpretations could be. This will include reference to extant literature to be used as additional data but also offer explanation (Charmaz 2006). The researcher's role is critical to this element and there must be acknowledgement of this within the research for transparency.

An example of a memo is included below in Figure 6.4 as a form of validation, to the reader, of the analytical process undertaken during this research project. The memo includes the identification and recording of an event and then uses the analytical framework above to elaborate including the consideration of theory through the use of literature. The complete set of memos are included in Appendix D for reference and transparency.

Item and Date:	Journal Item: Observation – Number of Interventions 9.1.2014 ( <b>Journal 3A</b> )
Summary	<p>Programme leader meeting in which further intervention was introduced to improve performance. The intervention mechanism was a systematic feedback process that incorporated the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Student submission sheet – for student to highlight their perceived weaknesses (academic can then offer specific support).</li> <li>b) Staff feedback sheet – this incorporates marking criteria and grading criteria (expected performance standards)</li> <li>c) Student reflection sheet – to enable student to reflect and consider the implications of the feedback provided for their current and future performance.</li> </ul> <p>Thus was an action taken in response to the observed data that clarity of what is important is required by both staff and students.</p>

	<p>The issue considered important for the research was the resistance and reluctance displayed by the staff due to the time consuming nature of this systematic approach.</p>
Context: Macro	<p>This process is considered good practice at UK University level (refer to 1. the document below Nicol et al). Assessment and Feedback displays poor satisfaction from students across the sector in historic NSS surveys (refer to 2. Below).</p> <p>Resources as demonstrated in the student:staff ratio data. This is a key indicator in some of the media league tables, for example The Guardian, see 4. below.</p>
Context: Micro	<p>School had a student satisfaction rate of 74% for the assessment and feedback category. This was the same as the University average.</p>
Process: Actions	<p>This process would place greater pressure on the academics' time, which has already been constrained due to the University level 15 day turnaround rule. The perception was that this would take longer due to the number of forms.</p>
Process: Consequences	<p>Some staff adopted the process and others adapted the process depending on the number of students studying the module.</p>
Interpretation: Thoughts and connections	<p>One of the purposes of this intervention was to indicate to both staff and student the importance of feedback in the learning process. It did require more time initially but then became 'the norm'. An issue here is that the 'norm' is changing and staff are aware that expectations are higher and that it is the indicators that are driving these.</p>

	<p>Issues of control and ‘micro – management’ and lack of professional trust are discussed amongst staff members. Some initiatives are treated as a personal and professional affront to some staff. I believe there is a link between the level of tension experienced by the managers and the increasing level of control exerted by them over their staff. Evidence of this is seen in the provision of templates for Programme Handbooks, Module Handbooks, Blackboard Community pages with standardised contents.</p> <p>This could also be viewed as positive from the perspective of the students, obviously!!! However, it takes place within an apparent environment of limited resources. Therefore, these new processes appear to add to an ever increasing load placed on academic staff who are expected to teach, research, administer courses, administer collaborative courses, undertake personal tutor roles, industrial liaison roles and consultancy to name but a few.</p> <p>Need to consider the concept of ‘isomorphism’ here. When we share best practice and try to control the processes or normalise the processes, we are undertaking isomorphic processes. We are attempting to ensure that systems and processes are uniform across the organisation. This is potentially dangerous as what works in one part of the organisation may not work in another.</p>
Theoretical category	<p>Direct – inform staff and students as to what is important.</p> <p>Deliver – is there sufficient time to undertake these</p>

	activities. Dialogue -
Extant Theory: Theoretical labels	Personal agency Isomorphism – Powell and Di Maggio (1983) The Institutionalism of Organisational Analysis. Co-production – roles (Whitaker 1980)
Core Category	
Theoretical Comparison	

Evidence	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <a href="#">M:\Management\Assessment and Feedback\nicol, d et al enhancing feedback.pdf</a></li> <li>2. <a href="#">M:\Management\Assessment and Feedback\NSS assessment and feedback issues.pdf</a></li> <li>3. <a href="#">2013 - Higher Education Funding Council for England</a></li> <li>4. <a href="#">University guide 2013: theguardian.com</a></li> <li>5. Programme and Module Handbooks; Community Blackboard sites,</li> </ol>
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Figure 6.4 Example of Memo used in Research Project.

The overall process is elaborated to include the entire theory generation process from initial, open coding to theory integration. The analytical process is too extensive to include within this chapter (over 30,000 words). However, it is included in its entirety in the Appendices.

#### 6.4.1 Selection of a Core Category

(Birks and Mills 2011, p.100) refer to the creation of a core category occurring at a point in time, “when the researcher can trace connections between a frequently occurring variable and all of the other categories, sub categories, properties and dimensions. Once the core category was identified

theoretical sampling was undertaken to populate or saturate this category further, this is carried out through a process of making further connections to ensure that the core category is prevalent within all categories. This, again, is a highly interpretive process and this key theme only be constructed by the researcher during the analytic process.

The core emergent category within this research project appears to be that there are multiple perspectives of effectiveness and therefore it is a difficult concept to determine. However, the perception of effectiveness in the case study is affected by the interpretation of the meta level performance indicators created by those in positions of power within the organisation. The dominant theme appears to be the performance indicators that form a large part of the social construction of the meaning of effectiveness and therefore govern behaviour.

#### **6.4.2 Theoretical saturation**

According to (Charmaz 2006, p.113) theoretical saturation occurs “when gathering fresh data no longer sparks new theoretical insights, nor reveals new properties of your core theoretical strategies”.(Dey 1999, p.257) is critical of this term and states that categories are “better described as “*suggested*” by the data” and that the term “theoretical sufficiency” is more appropriate than saturation, as saturation infers fullness; rather than the self-appointed state assumed by the researcher. A point was reached when the analysis of the data produced the same results and resulted in the same conclusions being drawn.

#### **6.4.3 Theoretical integration**

This represents the final piece of grounded theory research and it takes the form of the construction of a theory that can be used to explain and explicate the particular concept under study (Birks and Mills 2011). This requirement for explanation demonstrates an objective paradigm. (Charmaz 2006) however, states that theory in social inquiry should emphasise understanding

and interpretation. This research project is underpinned by social constructionism and in particular symbolic interactionism and these paradigms view theory as circumstantial and contingent. Grounded theory in this context results in a theory that is interpretive rather than explanative and general.

#### **6.4.4 Verification**

At this stage of the research process verification of the findings are provided by adherence to the verification strategy discussed in Chapter 3.

#### **6.5 Summary, Central Arguments and Links to Next Chapter**

The grounded theory is presented in the next chapter as part of the synthesis of the data and the appropriate extant literature. The central arguments developed as part of this analysis are listed below and they are explicated in the next chapter. The 4D framework is used to explain and explicate the findings.

The central arguments are presented under the appropriate headings of the 4D framework:

##### **Direct**

A<sub>1</sub> - The changes in public policy, as described, have fundamentally altered the power and authority base within the subject organisation.

A<sub>2</sub> - The student and consequently the associated indicators have become the 'dominant coalition' (Connolly 1980) within the case study organisation.

A<sub>3</sub> - The 'dominant coalition' has subsequently altered the student: University relationship. That is the organisational location or locus appears to have shifted in power and purpose. The shift appears, perhaps partially, towards a service relationship.

##### **Deliver**

A<sub>4</sub> – Universities are multiple constituency organisations with multiple actors and multiple goals and therefore require a collaborative approach to performance that harnesses the co-creation of value and enables achievement of multiple goals.

A<sub>5</sub> – The multiple constituents and goals are given attention (focus) at different times; there is a rhythm to the attention paid to each constituent and goal. At any given point in time the social actors are processing multiple goals, outcomes and demands.

A<sub>6</sub> – Due to the multiple constituents and goals the purpose of the organisation is ambiguous. This ambiguity causes difficulty at the operational level.

A<sub>7</sub> – The university through the process of co-creation should attend to the ‘*experience*’ of all stakeholders involved to ensure that they can extract value from their interactions with the university (Ramaswamy and Gouillart 2010).

## **Dialogue**

A<sub>8</sub> – The shift to the student as the dominant coalition has raised the issues of quality and value and moves universities towards offering service encounters, where the student is the arbiter of the value proposition.

A<sub>9</sub> – The use of indicators causes the social setting to change including the issue of ‘*reactivity*’ within organisations, including unintended consequences such as forms of gaming (Espeland and Sauder 2007).

A<sub>10</sub> – Multiple constituency perspectives of effectiveness require an appropriate performance management system.

A<sub>11</sub> – Organisations need to have a performance management system that takes in to account the multiple realities of their organisation.

## **Develop**

A<sub>12</sub> – The perceptions of organisational effectiveness are multiple and socially constructed. The dialogue within the organisation forms parts of the

process of development as conversation and dialogue causes change through social construction.

A<sub>13</sub> - The organisation should create a systematic process of developing through response to multiple and legitimate channels of feedback.

The theoretical integration, in the next chapter, relies on the 4D framework and the arguments and propositional statements contained within to formulate a grounded theory (Charmaz 2006) p156.

## 7. PRESENTATION OF THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: REFLECTION, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

### 7.1 Introduction

The process of 'sensemaking' began with the 'reflective pauses' contained in the narrative account of action in chapter 4, the analysis was developed further in chapters 5 and 6 in the form of open and axial coding, this chapter continues the process by synthesising the concepts and introducing the 'emergent literature' used to facilitate understanding and then to enable further explication. This refers to the emergent literature that was used throughout the process to interpret and enable understanding of the emerging data (Coghlan and Brannick 2014) whilst simultaneously taking action.

The purpose of this chapter is to present a theoretical framework that demonstrates understanding of the problem situation. The theoretical codes, from the extant literature, also provide further validity and credibility to the findings within (Charmaz 2006). The framework is also a social construction of how the participants, including the researcher, made sense and reacted to the changing context. The theoretical framework is used here to show understanding and of and an ability to add to the existing theory. (Charmaz 2006).

Section	Topic	Comments
7.1	Introduction and Aims of Chapter	This section introduces the purpose of the chapter;
7.2	Context	The context of the research and its impact on the findings are described.
7.3	The 4D Theoretical Framework	The theoretical framework that demonstrates

		understanding is presented including theoretical integration.
<b>7.4</b>	Summary and Links to Next Chapter	This section will summarise the main findings and provide links to the next chapter.

Table 7.1 Chapter Structure

The key theoretical concepts that were used during the thesis cycle of the research process are presented and discussed using the conceptual framework below, figure 7.1.

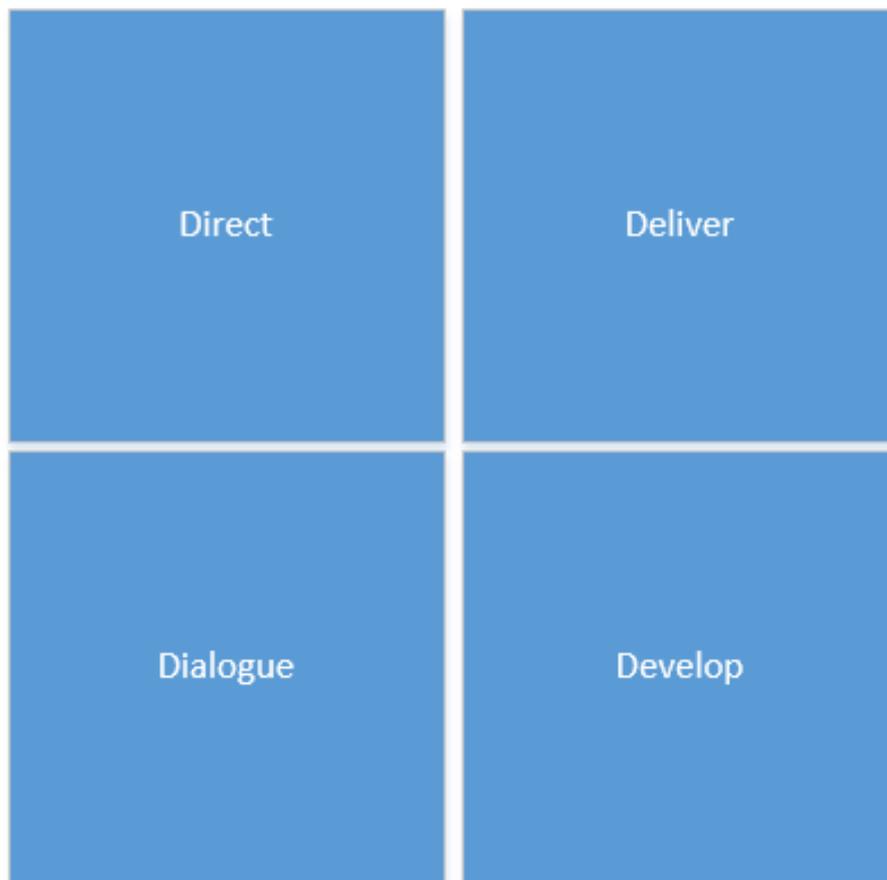


Figure 7.1 Initial Theoretical Framework – 4Ds

The main arguments and theoretical discussions are presented under the headings of the theoretical framework, as shown below:

## **Direct**

A<sub>1</sub> - The changes in public policy, as described, have fundamentally altered the power and authority base within the subject organisation.

A<sub>2</sub> - The student and consequently the associated indicators have become the 'dominant coalition' (Connolly 1980) within the case study organisation.

A<sub>3</sub> - The 'dominant coalition' (Connolly 1980) has subsequently altered the student: University relationship. That is, the organisational location or focus appears to have shifted in power and purpose. The shift appears, perhaps partially, towards a service relationship.

## **Deliver**

A<sub>4</sub> – Universities are multiple constituency organisations with multiple actors and multiple goals and therefore require a collaborative approach to performance that harnesses the co-creation of value and enables achievement of multiple goals.

A<sub>5</sub> – The multiple constituents and goals are given attention (focus) at different times; there is a rhythm to the attention paid to each constituent and goal. At any given point in time the social actors are processing multiple goals, outcomes and demands.

A<sub>6</sub> – Due to the multiple constituents and goals the purpose of the organisation is ambiguous. This ambiguity causes difficulty at the operational level.

A<sub>7</sub> - The university through the process of co-creation should attend to the '*experience*' of all stakeholders involved to ensure that they can extract value from their interactions with the university (Ramaswamy and Gouillart 2010).

## **Dialogue**

A<sub>8</sub> – The shift to the student as the dominant coalition has raised the issues of quality and value and moves universities towards offering service encounters, where the student is the arbiter of the value proposition.

A<sub>9</sub> – The use of indicators causes the social setting to change including the issue of ‘reactivity’ within organisations, including unintended consequences such as forms of gaming (Espeland and Sauder 2007).

A<sub>10</sub> – Multiple constituency perspectives of effectiveness require an appropriate performance management system.

A<sub>11</sub> – Organisations need to have a performance management system that takes in to account the multiple realities of their organisation.

## **Develop**

A<sub>12</sub> – The perceptions of organisational effectiveness are multiple and socially constructed. The dialogue within the organisation forms parts of the process of development as conversation and dialogue causes change through social construction.

A<sub>13</sub> - The organisation should create a systematic process of developing through response to multiple and legitimate channels of feedback.

The next section revisits the context, introduced in chapter 1, within which the case study organisation and this research project operates. This is important as it will describe how the societal and political level goals affect the case study organisation in their pursuit of effectiveness. This will provide the reader with sufficient knowledge to be able to see the relevance of the key emergent categories. The categories will be presented, defined, relationships between categories identified and key arguments will be presented along with the reasoning and evidence to support them. The multiple levels are shown in figure 7.2 below.

## 7.2 Context Re-visited

The following describes the regulatory framework and key themes that are the context for the subject case study and the associated theoretical framework. It should enable better understanding of the problem situation as it is these high level decisions and the provision of prescriptive outcomes that have an incredible impact on the subject university.

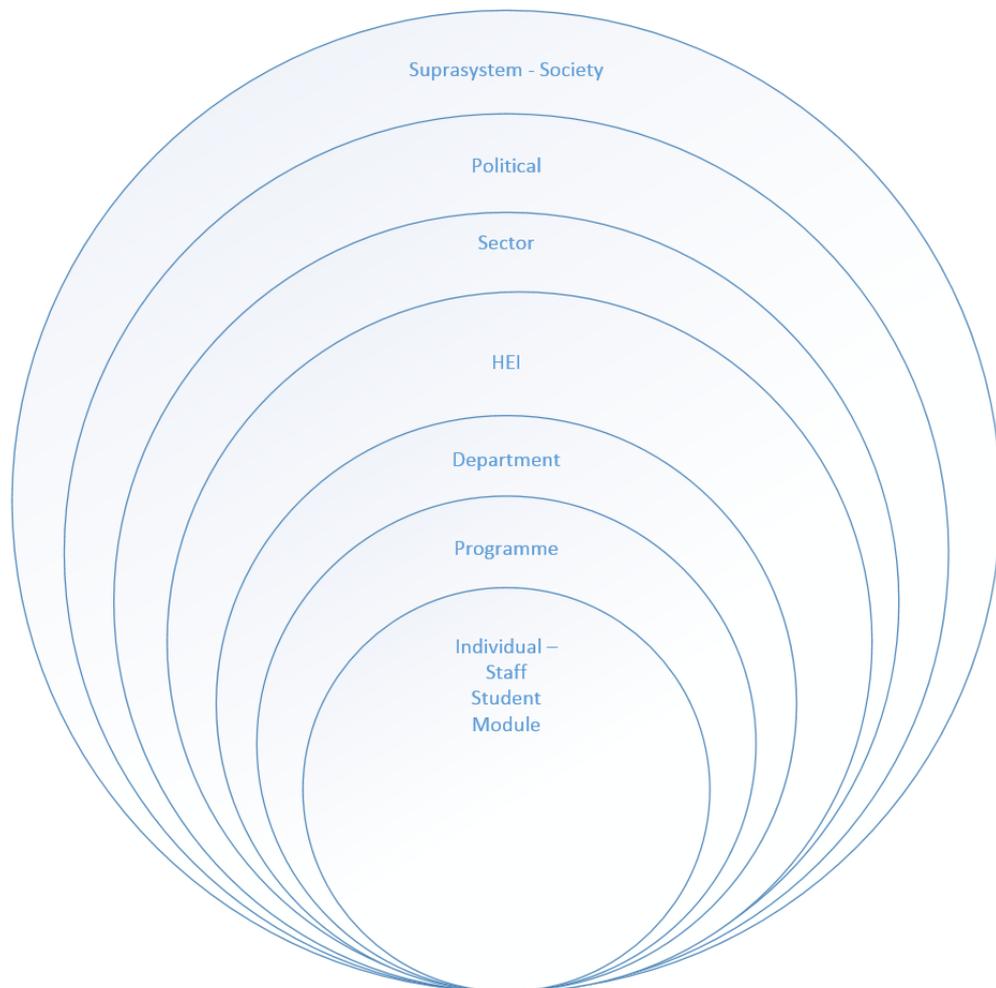


Figure 7.2 The Multiple Levels of Goals in Higher Education adapted from Brown (1999)

### 7.2.1 Regulatory Framework

Universities have become more concerned with their performance relative to others and the satisfaction of students. This stems from changes in higher

education policy. Historically, universities were self-regulated with a light touch from government. (Shattock 2006, p.135) refers to this as “inside out” policy or “self governance” (Shattock 2008, p.182). However, recent policy has shifted the form of governance to “outside in” and this stems from the requirement to educate more, incorporate market mechanisms (via fees), improve the quality of the experience and to link the role of universities to the economic development of the country (Shattock 2006). These changes, introduced via a series of reports and white papers; *The Future of Higher Education* (2003); *The Higher Education Act* (2004); *Securing a Sustainable Future for Higher Education* (Browne 2010) and *Students at the Heart of the System* (BIS 2016) signify the start of the explicit management and control of the higher education process (Hemsley-Brown and Oplatka 2006) and the movement to marketization of the process (Molesworth *et al.* 2009) and students as consumers (Cuthbert 2010). The key regulator involved in the active management of the higher education sector is the Higher Education Funding Council for England.

### **7.2.2 Marketisation**

This research project was undertaken during this period of change within the Higher Education sector instigated by the policy described above. The government white papers, which influenced the changes, “*Higher Education: Students at the Heart of the System*” (Department for Business Innovation and Skills 2011) and the Table 4.3 Summary of Action Research Cycles Related to Thesis Cycle Phase 1 fundamentally, and potentially controversially, altered the financial instrument for funding higher education provision and the relationships therein. Studying at higher education levels would not be funded by grants, but rather by study loans taken out by students as an agreement with the Students Loan Company (SLC). The loan would be repaid by the student once their salary exceeded the benchmark of £21,000. This policy therefore gives the student the freedom to choose where to study and spend their loan.

In order to support that decision, universities are required to provide performance data to HEFCE to enable informed choice. However, this 'marketisation' assumes that all universities are the same. This is true theoretically true due to the policies in place within the United Kingdom there is a regulatory framework in place to ensure consistency and compliance. This system includes the use of level descriptors and other mechanisms to ensure levels are comparable. However, in practice there are clear reputational differences between universities, the Government white paper "Students at the Heart of the System" refers to these universities with higher reputation as being 'more selective'. To overcome the notion of selectivity the report proposes improvements in 'social mobility' improving the number of disadvantaged students who attend such universities. These changes effectively create a market for students and consequently an anticipated market response from universities to improve their offering at potentially less cost (Molesworth *et al.* 2009). The importance of the performance data associated with higher education becomes more significant in this context. As a consequence there is evidence of a corresponding increase in the use of marketing applications to attempt to attract students to the various institutions (Moogan 2011); (Hemsley-Brown and Oplatka 2006).

### **7.2.3 Information**

In order for a 'market' to function properly the student as a consumer of education should possess full and complete information regarding the product they are purchasing and the place they intend to study. This is done through mechanisms such as the Key Information Sets (KIS) accessed through the UCAS and Unistats websites. The supplier, the university, also requires information with regard to the student to determine if the student is capable of completing the programme of study (Jongbloed 2003). There is a lot at stake for both parties the student is financially at risk and the university is both financially, through lost revenue and also by reputation as there are indicators for non-completion. The financial organisation that supplies the student loan, are also a stakeholder in this process and they require information also. The bank is effectively lending money in anticipation of

future collateral, that is, the student is employed and is able to repay the loan. The government intervenes here to provide completion and success data for prospective students. There is potential here, in the future, for banks to use the data to determine the security of their loan to students by assessing the probability of the student completing their degree and thereby being in a position to repay the student loan.

The government has intervened here by ensuring the provision of information to the student about student experiences at universities through the formal agreement mechanisms. The provision of information assumes that prospective students will use the information to make rational decisions and choices.

#### **7.2.4 Managerialism**

Although the unit of analysis is the case study school it would be remiss not to demonstrate awareness of the macro political conditions concerning new public management and accountability. The report will not attempt to distinguish emphatically between new managerialism and new public management to any great extent. (Deem and Brehony 2005 p 219) distinguish between the two forms, stating that new public management proposes less bureaucratic forms of organisation and the formation of “quasi markets for public services” whereas new managerialism is an ideological approach to managing public services including the increased regulation by government and increased managerial power over services and staff. (Ferlie 2008) elaborates further stating the new public management “seeks to produce a smaller, more efficient results orientated public sector”. The focus on indicators is one of the key emergent factors over the period of this study. The subject university displayed several of the other “signs and symptoms” related to these forms including and predicted in (Ferlie 2008, p.325), for example; “market based reforms; higher student fees; explicit measurement of monitoring and performance in teaching and research and the development of stronger and more overt management roles (management must manage)” (Ferlie 2008, p.336). These macro public policy forms have

led to the reform of the subject case study and possibly the Higher Education sector. An important concept associated with reform is the requirement for accountability.

The shift in accountability is not a new concept, the brief summary below shows how the issues of accountability and effectiveness have developed over the last fifty years. (Salter 2002) provide a succinct account of the historical development and their premise is that the internal forms and structures of universities must be able to cope with meeting the demands set by the external environment. Failure to align the structures and outputs may result in the failure of the particular institute. The article examines the necessity for the internal governance structures to be able to adapt to the “political demands they are expected to confront” (Salter 2002, p.246). It is this process of adaptation and its impact on the social actors within the case study organisation that this research seeks to understand. The realignment that took place within this period resulted in significant changes to the organisation; some of these are documented in chapter 4 the Core Action Research Cycles.

Understanding, of the situation, is improved through greater awareness of the origins of the interventions that have taken place in universities in response to government ideological and policy driven changes. The political ideologies that dictate policy decisions taken by governments may be ideologically different from those organisations with the university sector. Historically, universities were autonomous and self-regulating organisations, the mechanisms of self-regulation were peer review and choice (Alexander 2000). This culture of autonomy remained untouched until the 1960's, the Robbins Report (1963) which was written with the following purpose;

*'to review the pattern of full-time higher education in Great Britain and in the light of national needs and resources to advise Her Majesty's Government on what principles its long-term development should be based. In particular, to advise, in the light of these principles, whether there should be any changes in that pattern, whether any new types of*

*institution are desirable and whether any modifications should be made in the present arrangements for planning and co-ordinating the development of the various types of institution'.*

(Dearlove 1998) offers a good account of the development of managerialism in universities stating there were reports undertaken with the purpose of improving efficiency in the 1980s including the Jarrett Report (1985) and the Education Reform Act of 1988 removed Polytechnics from Local Authority control and created a new organisation the Higher Education Corporation, the subject case study is an example of this form. The 1990s involved changes related to public trust in public bodies and as a result governing boards were introduced. The progression was towards the separation of academic work and management and this separation has been observed within the subject case. The purpose at this time was to also align education with industry and employment hence the reason why technical universities were created (former polytechnics). Government appears to be concerned with higher education “as a driver of economic development” (A McCulloch 2009, p.172)

(Cameron and Tschirhart 1992) describe equivalent changes as they occurred in America in relation to the era of ‘post-industrial chaos’ a time of great uncertainty and change. Worryingly this paper states that more universities and colleges fail than do businesses and other government bodies.

This description of the environmental context of the case study, included a brief examination of the historical transformation of the administration of universities and the regulatory framework that is currently in place. This provides an indication, to the reader, of the origins of some of the key themes that emerge from the data. These key themes are:

1. The administration of universities changed (are changing) from self-regulating, collegiate forms to autonomous but accountable forms.
2. Universities are funded by the government for teaching grants and research income.

3. Through the contract mechanisms to receive funding, universities are held accountable to the public through various government agencies.
4. One of the key agencies is the QAA. This agency is responsible for assuring the quality of the products across the higher education sector. It does this through the provision of standard descriptors and outcomes. This is the origin of the focus on outcomes.
5. Part of the accountability requires the provision of performance information to the government agencies. This is a mechanism intended to provide legitimacy for universities to continue to operate. This is the origin of the focus on performance data.
6. Providing funding direct to students in the form of a student loan enables the student to exercise choice in where they study. This is the origin of the marketization of higher education. It is also the origin of the student as the 'dominant coalition' within the sector and it is also the start of the focus on the provision of performance data as a form of advertising and marketing (becoming aware of the implications of the use of data).
7. The contribution of universities (via their graduates) to the economic development of the country became more explicit. This is the origin of the notion of the utility of higher education in relation to employment prospects.

The next section examines the implications of how the meta level context affects the case study. It uses the 4D theoretical framework to assist with understanding.

### **7.3 The Theoretical Framework**

The next section uses the 4D theoretical framework to demonstrate understanding of the case study and the journey of making sense of the response and consequences of the context described. This section describes the theoretical codes used by the researcher and the social actors to construct meaning of journey.

#### **7.3.1 Direct**

The definition of the 'Direct' category relates to the requirement of the social actors for guidance and the impact of policy on the subject organisation.

The key arguments within this category are:

A<sub>1</sub> - The changes in public policy, as described, have fundamentally altered the power and authority base within the subject organisation.

A<sub>2</sub> - The student and consequently the associated indicators have become the 'dominant coalition' (Connolly 1980) within the case study organisation.

The requirement for Higher Education reform at the macro level (Political level in Figure 7.2 above) led to various reports and papers including the government white paper "Higher Education: Students at the Heart of the System" (Department for Business Innovation and Skills 2011). The overarching aim of the white paper is laudable and it proposes that students should have access to education to enable them to reach their goals at various stages of their lives and under varying circumstances. The paper also advocates putting the student at the centre of the higher education experience, this is also positive and worthy of credit. Nevertheless, there appears little consideration of the role of the student within that experience except for the prospective student as user of performance information published to enable informed decisions with the current student as the assessor of value (O'Neil and Palmer 2004). (Shattock 2008, p.187) refers to this as 'users shaping the service from below'. This is a useful term as it captures the current way students are dictating change within the case study organisation.

The tone of the terminology within this white paper appears to be related to economics and competitive markets, for example with statements such as

*"we will move away from the tight number controls that constrain individual higher education institutions, so that there is a more dynamic sector in which popular institutions can grow and where all institutions*

*must offer a good experience to remain competitive*" (Department for Business Innovation and Skills 2011, p.5).

There appears to be little mention of the role of the student in the learning process and when engagement is discussed it relates to how the student engages with the quality assurance and enhancement processes. This form of engagement is encouraged within the subject university through Boards of Studies, Student Modular Surveys and the National Student Survey, for example. (Molesworth *et al.* 2009) lament that the acceptance of students as consumers hinders any notion of the personal development or "transformation" of the student in terms of academic ability.

One of the key arguments of this paper is that there is a lack of critical appraisal of these changes and the suggestion is that this is due to how well and concisely the expected outputs of education, such as, a good job and salary and therefore the associated consequential benefits of increased earning potential, are communicated. The emphasis is on the utility of education in securing employment (Molesworth *et al.* 2009); . This also relates very strongly to the emergent data of requiring clarity. During the course of this study it was observed that the *changes in vocabulary*, indicators and expectations were adopted very quickly by senior managers. Terminology, such as, performance dashboards, student as consumer and the prominence of the National Student Survey at all levels of the university was soon adopted into the lexicon of the university staff and in particular the rate of adoption by senior managers was swift.

Another key argument related to the introduction of this new financial arrangement; with the student acting in a potential consumer role, armed with information, with which to make an informed choice about where in the market to spend their loans, is that the policy has now awarded 'proxy' authority and power to the student. This authority is assumed through the power of government policy and the position of the student as a consumer with choice. This has therefore created a new 'dominant coalition' within the sector; the student (Connolly *et al.* 1980).

However, this choice, if the process is to be believed, relies on the information provided to the Government as part of the funding agreement. This therefore renders this information with authority and significance in marketing terms, to the universities now vying for students to spend their fees at their institutions. So the required performance information, which is intended to reflect the students' ability and performance is used to portray the universities effectiveness when attempting to attract new students. So not only is the students' perception of the experience used as an indicator of effectiveness, the students' performance is also publicised as an indicator of effectiveness of the university itself! This is related to the concept of performance data being closely linked to the marketing of the organisation

The emergent data suggests that within the case study organisation the National Student Survey (NSS) has become the main focus of attention. Within the case study organisation, the significance of the NSS has been amplified and it would appear to be the singular most important indicator in the university. It appears to have altered the entire focus of the university even shifting the focus from learning and academic pursuit to student satisfaction.

The changes described above also stress and therefore create focus on the utility value of education, particularly through the employment statistics. This focus is perpetuated by government policy, university strategy, university managers, academic staff and then observed in the actions and attitudes of students. An example of this is The Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) require universities to provide them with the data to produce the Destination of Leavers from Higher Education (DLHE) data. This data is used to inform prospective students of the numbers of students who are employed six months after leaving higher education and classifies what type of work they are undertaking. This again is a sensible and positive piece of information to be aware of and for the agents of the government to obtain to demonstrate value for money for public expenditure.

The case study university uses historical employment prospects prominently in their promotional literature and events such as Open and Applicant Days, quoting number of students employed and average salaries from the previous year. This instrumental value of higher education is further reinforced by employers, with most employment opportunities displaying a “minimum 2:1 classification” in the job description, to qualify for the role. Observed data, when talking with students during their performance conversations and general conversations, supports this. This is not just confined to full time student with some part time students having formal agreements with their current employers that a 2:1 minimum classification is required or the student will have to pay for their tuition fees themselves upon completion.

This data and dialogue perpetuates the instrumental value of the learning process and renders it an object to be obtained; a key in fact that will allow access into employment. One member of staff referred to the academic role as being “gatekeepers” providing certification and access to the middle class professional employment market.

We need to decide if education is a verb or a noun, a process or a product? This requires the consideration of roles and responsibilities and the process of creating value. At this time the ‘student as consumer’ metaphor was used to try to make sense of this altered relationship by the subject, and other, organisations.

#### **7.3.1.1 Student as Consumer: Service Dominant (SD) Logic**

In order to help with the interpretation and understanding of the student as consumer metaphor the researcher referred to service dominant theory. (Vargo *et al.* 2008 p 145) refers to service as “the application of competences (knowledge and skills) by one entity for the benefit of another”. This definition appears to capture the academics role, however, the authors go on to state that service relies on interaction to create value; it was the concept of interaction and the creation of value that was of interest to the researcher.

(Osborne *et al.* 2012 p 138 - 139) state that services have three “core categories”, firstly that a services consists of a process, secondly that “production and consumption occur at the same time” and lastly that “the user is a co-producer of the service”. These categories are really interesting from an educational point of view as they succinctly describe an active, engaging educational process.

The main tenet of service dominant logic, as described by, (Vargo *et al.* 2008 p, 146) is that value is “in use” rather than “in exchange” as would be with goods dominant logic. The value of the service of ‘education’ may not be achieved until some point in the future, when the student uses the outcomes of their educational experience, for example, during assessment or in the workplace. Under a services logic approach the students supply resources to the co-creation process in terms of finance (fees) and intellect (knowledge and skills). However, ‘value in exchange’ also forms part of the co-creation process as the students pay their fees to access the resources of the university (knowledge, skills and physical resource). Even this access to resource argument may diminish in the future as open educational resources and other technologies develop further. The issue with open educational resources is the lack of certification and verification of learning and therefore eligibility for entry into employment and professional bodies.

The benefits (value in use) of vocational courses could be considered to be the ability of the student to take an active role within a professional organisation upon completion of their degree studies. Emergent data supports this view with students primarily being interested in the utility of what they learn this is also reinforced by industrial partners. During Industrial Liaison Group meetings practitioners always stress the requirement for employment ready students. Whereas, some academic members of staff consider the development of academic skills to be equally important. This reinforces the point that there are multiple perspectives of effectiveness (adding value) with multiple actors in the given social context. This relates to the multiple interpretations of use value discussed in (Vargo *et al.* 2008). Any attempt to shift education to a goods dominant perspective, that is, the value

is in exchange would fundamentally alter the principles of education. The creation of the 'Welcome Pack' discussed below was part of the dialogue created to ensure that this did not happen.

Expectations and clarity of role are very important in such an environment, students will have expectations of their experience, which is derived from the comparison of their expectations and their perception of their experience (Voss *et al.* 2007). This notion of an expectations gap and a requirement to manage expectations and performance was used to inform the creation of the 'Welcome Pack'; this was an attempt to actively manage student expectations and communicate their role requirements an essential part of the co-production process (Kotze and du Plessis 2003). The Welcome Pack was a document sent to the incoming level 4 students prior to their arrival. The contents were intended to ensure that the student were aware of the universities requirements for their active involvement in the educational process.

Service dominant logic enables individuals to extract value from the process in accordance with their own expectations and goals. This is in accord with the multiple constituents perspective of effectiveness (Zammuto 1984)

### **7.3.1.2 Performance Indicators**

In order to better understand this category a multilevel analysis was undertaken to determine the origins of the notion of direction and the indicators for the social actors involved. Figure 7.2 shows the multiple levels involved.

It has been demonstrated that the UK government, or their agents, have a significant impact on the direction that the subject and other universities take. There is a dependant relationship between the case study and the government and their agents; this is due to the authority that the agents possess. However, putting the student in charge of the financing of their study has reduced this dependency to top up grants for a limited number of

programmes sciences and engineering, for example and research money through the Research Excellence Framework (REF).

The emergent data demonstrates that it is performance indicators that are the main concern within the subject department. These indicators appear to originate from the political level of figure 7.2 and this level is informed by or acts on behalf of the suprasystem.

However, during the project it was seen that goals originate at different levels and are then open to various methods of interpretation, alteration or even manipulation. During the course of the study communicated goals were seen to be amplified or exaggerated, with some academics referring to this as “*setting peoples feet on fire*”, the meaning of which is to keep people active and focussed on the particular task at that particular time without consideration of how this could be achieved.

Evidence from the study suggests that the social actors require clear, unambiguous direction about what is important in order to perform at an optimal level. This is not just as simple as stating that it is the student experience or the National Student Survey that is important, it is more about the *relative importance* of any of the goals, at a given point in time. The difficulty academics appear to have is the often conflicting goals that they must attain. For example, an academic member of staff is working in their office on a research bid and a student interrupts to ask for support on a piece of assessment that is due in shortly. The staff member is torn between their own personal goals and the student’s goals. This is a common occurrence. At the back of the staff members mind is the module appraisal and also if the student is level 6; the impact this interaction may have on the student’s response to the NSS. Due to this *tension and authority* that feedback is imbued with, the student will more often than not be supported (Jacobs and Manzi 2006). This could be argued to be positive and good practice; putting the student at the centre of the experience. However, the bid may be unsuccessful and future students will not get the benefit, through research informed teaching, of the work it contained. This also raises another

emergent issue, *distraction and interruption*, academic staff and students find it difficult to perform with distractions. This is why many members of staff choose to work away from their offices as a form of *temporary disengagement*. It is important to remember, that the rhythms of academic life tended to be quite long, measured in terms, semesters or academic years with little or no intervention in-between.

Evidence suggests that another source of tension related to goals and direction is when the goals conflict with the goals of the individual. This relates to both staff and students; a high achieving and high performing, explicitly measured working (studying) environment is not suitable for everyone.

The origins of some of the goals evident within the organisation appear to cascade down from Government policy which is interpreted into strategy at the organisational level and then cascaded further to those at the operational 'face' of the organisation.

### **7.3.1.3 Clarification of Role**

The notion of student as consumer upsets the balance of authority within universities and consequently the process of learning. This is observed in the *anxiety and performance tension* sub categories of the emergent data. (Mills and Morris 1986) discovered that universities appear to have adopted the consumer metaphor more than was perhaps intended in the policy and therefore by government. This relates to the issue of management amplification of the significance of indicators. Consequently, the holding of the metaphor of student as consumer and the maintenance of academic standards causes tension in academic staff. (Long and Lake 1996) disagree with this analogy as it "inverts the structure of authority" within a teacher student relationship and the requirement to perform tends to fall solely to the academic staff member and they exhibit the associated tensions. Additionally, they discuss that this concept may encourage the student to become passive in their levels of engagement with their studies. Levels of engagement of

students with the learning activities that are not directly linked to a piece of assessment are a testament to the instrumental focus of students. The preparation of stakeholders to perform their roles in accordance with expectations through meaningful, timely and focused dialogue, this is discussed later in this chapter.

### **7.3.2 Deliver**

Deliver - This category can be defined (specified) as relating to the stakeholders' ability to contribute and obtain/deliver value.

A<sub>4</sub> – Universities are multiple constituency organisations with multiple actors and multiple goals and therefore require a collaborative approach to performance that harnesses the co-creation of value and enables achievement of multiple goals.

A<sub>7</sub> – The university through the process of co-creation should attend to the '*experience*' of all stakeholders involved to ensure that they can extract value from their interactions with the university (Ramaswamy and Gouillart 2010).

The role and consequently delivery patterns of the subject university has been altered by the authority vested in the student and the focus on outcomes. For the student emergent data and evidence has shown that the student's goal is to *have* a degree, not study or read for a degree as was historically believed (Molesworth *et al.* 2009) argue that the marketization of higher education cause students to focus on having a degree rather than being learners. Students focus on the instrumental value of the degree rather than the learning processes that support successful study.

(Jongbloed 2003) uses a the analogy of the roundabout versus the traffic light controlled junction to describe the roles that government will have to play to regulate higher education in the contemporary 'user finances' scheme. The traffic light system refers to a heavily regulated "system of control" in which central government is pivotal in controlling access and flow through.

However, the roundabout allows control to pass to those using the system at any given time. The second system requires significantly less information to control the process, it is judgement and decisions at the point of action (Jongbloed 2003).

The same analogy could be applied to the operational running of programmes within universities. Students, who have concern largely for the instrumental value of education treat the journey as a passage through a 'new town'. The power of choice is in their hand (steering), the signage has been provided by the university in the form of outline syllabus; lecture and assessment schedules; marking and grading criteria and alternative places to work (libraries and IT suites), it is assumed to be a case of navigating one's way through the terrain and arriving at your destination; probably the steps of the student's first employer, with degree in hand. The signposts and other information all form part of the dialogue in which the meaning of effectiveness is constructed.

### **7.3.2.1 Co-Production and the Co-Creation of Value**

A further theory used to respond to emergent data as an extension of the service dominant (SD) theory was co-production. SD logic emphasises the role of the customer, in this scenario the student, in the value creating processes. SD logic finds its origins in marketing and this may appear to be an unusual perspective to use within higher education. However, due to the contemporary influences on universities as presented earlier, universities have to become more responsive and enhance quality. Universities have to respond to multiple stakeholder demands whilst maintaining the academic integrity of the learning process. The process of marketing is defined by the Chartered Institute of Marketing as: *"Marketing is the management process responsible for identifying, anticipating and satisfying customer requirements profitably."* (Chartered Institute of Marketing)

A main difference with businesses and universities is the requirement to satisfy multiple goals including; individual (personal); academic; professional

body and community (public good) requirements. The act of providing balanced attention to multiple goals is very difficult. This is seen in the emergent data referring to ambiguity, for example, not knowing what is important, the provision of time for what is important and the requirement for clarity. Staff at the subject university also became uncertain due to the perceived shift in the locus of power from academic centric to student centric. Emergent data also demonstrated that students do not react well to uncertainty, causing performance tension, to both parties, linked to uncertainty and the weight of expectations placed upon them.

Co-creation recognises that in service environments “customers are an integral part of the service delivery system” (Kotze and du Plessis 2003 p 187). Additionally, there is recognition that customers are required to perform their roles effectively so that the multiple goals can be achieved. The basic premise is that organisations should offer “value propositions” of which customers will determine their value as they take part, or consume, the service (Payne *et al.* 2008 p 84). In the provision of services, agents, in this case academic staff, assist students to transform themselves through the process of learning. Students affect this process through their ability and levels of participation. It is only the student who through their efforts can achieve this transformation (Whitaker 1980). However, despite the best of intentions represented by higher education policy, as described earlier in this chapter, students as participants can, through a lack of effort or unwillingness to engage, affect the execution of these policies at the operational level. The lecture as a value proposition could be deemed an example of this.

This assumes that other stakeholders are performing effectively and perhaps indicates a business centric philosophy. What is required is a balanced and holistic approach to performance that recognises the multiple actors involved and the roles and actions necessary to perform effectively.

In order to determine value, in a co-creation environment, the processes that add value must first be identified (Payne *et al.* 2008). The performance prism (Neely *et al.* 2002) was used in the case study as it provides the opportunity

to identify the stakeholders involved and the necessary information requirements. These have been identified through the emergent data as important factors. The performance prism exercise was undertaken and a copy is included in the appendices for reference. The performance prism enables the identification of key stakeholders, their wants and needs; their expected contribution, the plans that support them; the associated process; capabilities required and significantly identifies the information requirements including the provision of indicators (Neely *et al.* 2002). This process can also be used to plan for the student experience by determining the stakeholder needs and wants, an understanding of the stakeholder perception of value is critical for this process.

A key associated issue here is the definition of needs, there is potential for differences in definition of what is required in educational terms due to the different goals of different stakeholders (Whitaker 1980). Emergent data points to the dialogue surrounding education relating to its utility, related to obtaining employment. We have seen earlier in the chapter that this is perpetuated by government policy, universities in their promotional literature and, of course, employers.

(Payne *et al.* 2008) refers to the requirement to consider three key components when determining valuable processes within an organisation; customer value creating, supplier value creating and encounter processes. The customer value creating category is appropriate to the educational context as it refers to the contribution students are expected to make, to achieve a goal, including their required capabilities of knowledge and skills and appropriate information. The key consideration is ensuring that the 'value proposition exists' so that value can be co-created (Payne *et al.* 2008 p 86). This element is the responsibility of the academic and university staff. During the action research project several of the interventions were related to staff development to enable academic to be able to deliver valuable propositions. Training was provided in the use of information and communication technologies to enable students to interact with content information at their convenience. Also, the use active learning techniques were promoted to staff

to enable students to obtain value from their sessions. This was undertaken to overcome the passive nature of students in traditional lecture context. This encourages the student to co-create the process.

The supplier approach to value creation encourages the understanding of value from the student perspective and the subsequent design and production of “co-creation opportunities” (Payne *et al.* 2008 p 88). This is similar to the stakeholder satisfaction needs and wants category of the performance prism. An example of the supplier approach is seen in the workshops that were introduced to enable student to co-create with academic staff as they worked on assessments and practical problems in a more relaxed and open context. The workshops also improved the relationship experience of students and therefore engages the student in a more social and experiential process (Payne *et al.* 2008). This is a form of prototyping in that risks were taken by the school in response to feedback from students. The test processes were evaluated and adjusted over time. An example of this, within the case study, is the introduction of a reading week in which students were taken on educational trips to London and to Constructionarium; a site based educational construction experience.

This category also focuses on the need to collect and respond to customer feedback related to the processes considered to be of value. This again is emphasised in the performance prism under an information requirements category. This allows metrics to be aligned with processes that are considered valuable to the multiple stakeholders involved (Payne *et al.* 2008); (Alves *et al.* 2010). Universities will need to collect, manage and respond to multiple streams of information in the form of stakeholder feedback. This will be an iterative and lagging process made more complex by the multiple constituents involved and the temporary nature of student involvement with the university. This creative form of co-creation would enable a positive relationship with indicators and feedback to emerge, thereby reducing the tension associated with the same.

It is the ability to respond that is of concern to organisations that utilise co-creation models, as it relates to resources available to meet demands. Public bodies tend to react slowly due to the bureaucratic, hierarchal nature of the organisations. This has been observed in the subject organisation, for example, when obtaining post approval for new members of staff to fill knowledge gaps within the suite of programmes offered.

This lack of ability to respond due to constrained resources was also evident in the subject in the students' use of physical resources such as classrooms. It was observed that students do not attend classes due to the lack of suitability of the space design. Students bring their own devices with the expectation to work and the spaces are not suitable. This is also related to the outcome focus of education as evidenced within the provision of learning outcomes and marking criteria, for example. (Whitaker 1980) refers to this as a form of non co-operation and could be interpreted as dissatisfaction with a process. The student does not perceive value as the value proposition is not in accord with their goals.

A co-creation model will involve a shift in perception of the relationship between a student and the university, particularly in terms of the power. In part the university will have to design encounters or experiences that involve multi actor co-creation of value. That is, the student should be able to obtain value, within reason, in a way that is personal to them (Payne *et al.* 2008); (Prahalad and Ramaswamy 2004). This will require a more responsive, flexible and receptive university model to emerge. A university that is prepared to share power, authority and creativity (Whitaker 1980) (Sanders and Simons 2009).

Consideration of the encounter process determines the type, intensity and multitude and timing of encounters between the various stakeholders. (Payne *et al.* 2008 p 90) categorise encounter types in a useful and comparable way as follows:

*Communication Encounters* – for example, communicating through advertisements, this is a form of one-way information transfer; the customer cannot respond. Students will typically only engage with lectures that are content based, that is, are transferring required information or knowledge in one way, when the content is directly related to an outcome (usually assessment).

*Usage Encounters* – this is the point where the customer becomes active and participates in the service. In the case study, the students will engage with workshops that support the completion of an assessment in terms of process, particularly if there is intensity of interaction; including one to one tuition with an academic or with their peer group. For this to be successful the students must have clear goals, be aware of their role and be capable of achieving the objectives set. The last criteria relate to the process capability of the student in terms of agency. The student primarily becomes active during the assessment phase of the process.

*Service Encounters* – relate to the notion of dialogue between the service provider and the customer in relation to the creation of goals and the achievement of them. Students at the subject university, as described, have performance conversations to determine their performance and there are also other formal encounters through which feedback is provided, such as, Boards of Studies. These encounters give the students a right to reply and are largely one way from student to staff. This process could be improved through the use of a co-creative approach in which two way dialogue was encouraged.

The dialogic approach is an important part of the co-creation process as it serves a number of functions; it enables the provider to communicate and effect the behaviours of the users so they can extract more and proper value from their encounters and interactions. (Payne *et al.* 2008) advocates the use of scripts and the subject university adopted the use of performance conversation to communicate with students and a framework was provided to academic staff to structure this process. Dialogue also enables learning to

take place if proper “communicative interaction” takes place, only when meaning is made between those interacting (Ballantyne 2004 p 115). It is this meaning of value and what is valuable to stakeholders that is important to determine if organisational development and thereby increased effectiveness is to occur.

A shift towards a co-creation dominant logic and not a university centric logic requires an incredible shift to a focus on the student (learning) experience. This experience will be interpreted by the individual students when compared to their particular goals and their experience in achieving them. Figure 7.4 below, adapted from (Prahalad and Ramaswamy 2004 p 11) locates value in the interaction between the stakeholders and all stakeholders must be able to obtain value, on an individual perspective. The diagram is used to indicate the balance of power or focus should be on the intersection between the stakeholders; where value is added through various demands and corresponding propositions. Power should not be entrenched within one or the other. This is incredibly difficult to achieve with 25,000 students and 2,500 staff members and numerous other stakeholders. This is also incredibly difficult to achieve given the focus on learning outcomes and the utilitarian view of education. However, even with this quite rigid context the focus should be on the intersection, where co production takes place, it is the focus on the experience, and how value is co-created that will lead to improvement and satisfaction.

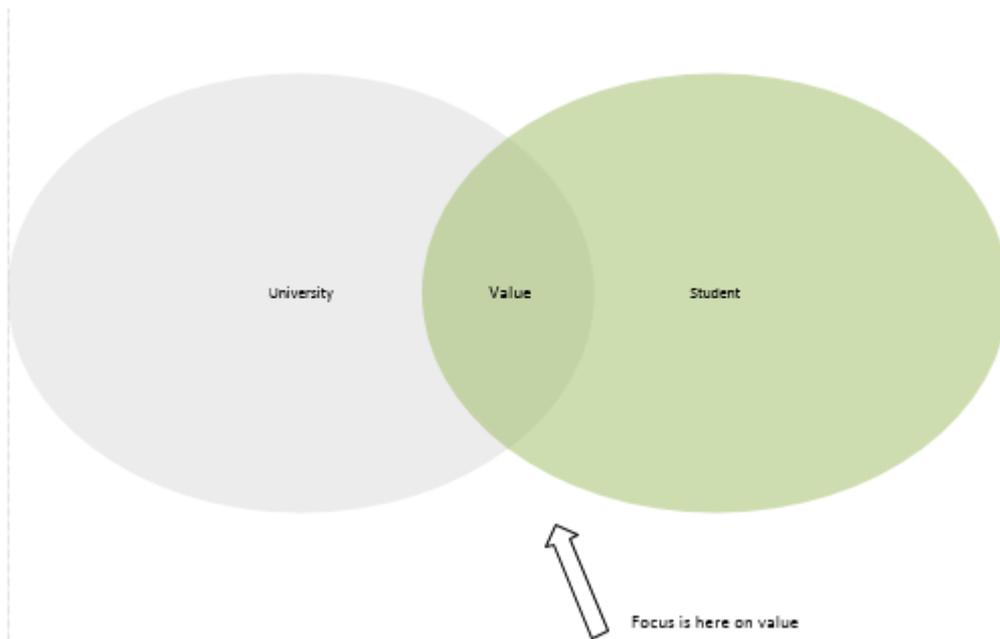


Figure 7.3 Interaction in Co-Creation of Value

The problem with this notion of students extracting individual value from the experience is that it could further promote individualism and become detrimental to education as a social process. Another issue is, that due to the pressures from policy, the emergent data demonstrates that the subject university tended towards consistency in certain aspects of performance and processes.

The focus on co-creation of value enabled the researcher to regain the balance of power, initially from students but later between stakeholders, by identifying the important actions necessary to achieve a good standard of education and making the roles of the stakeholders explicit. The intention was to improve the service and experience of the student and maintain the academic values of the university. The creation of the Welcome Pack, Transition Projects and Performance Conversations were attempts to proactively manage the performance of students to enable achievement of their goals (Kotze and du Plessis 2003); (Kelley *et al.* 1990). The key stakeholder goals, both the university and the individual student, are identified and reinforced through structured dialogue in the performance conversation sessions. (Prahalad and Ramaswamy 2004) stress the importance of dialogue revolving around areas of interest to the parties

involved. The framework for the dialogue during the performance conversations are included in the Appendix C. The dialogue was scripted by the Student Experience Enhancement Coordinator in consultation with an external consultant and academic staff as part of the action phase of the research project. This was linked to the emerging data relating to ambiguity of goals and roles. (Payne *et al.* 2008) describe a framework that can be used to identify and manage the value co-creation processes within an organisation. The framework requires a focus on processes and the identification of processes that add value and support the achievement of both organisational and individual goals. A framework with similar goals was used during this action research project and it was represented in the Welcome Pack via the notion of 'Shared Success and Shared Goals' and is presented in tabular form below, Table 7.4. The key tenets are represented as academic achievement; professional development and community, these are included in the opening section of the Welcome Pack, provided to incoming students and in the Performance Conversation script.

Shared Goals, Shared Success
<p><b>Academic achievement</b></p> <p>We want you to develop the academic skills necessary to enable you to learn throughout your lifetime, both personally and professionally.</p>
<p><b>Professional development</b></p> <p>We want you to develop personal skills, such as self-belief and self-confidence together with the professional skills required for your chosen careers. We want you to develop as an individual who can perform confidently in a variety of social and commercial situations. These are the personal and professional competencies that will set you apart and make you more employable in your future careers.</p>

<p><b>Community</b></p> <p>Developing the personal and professional skills necessary to become an integral member of the academic, professional and wider civic communities.</p>
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Table 7.2 Table of Expectations

The actions and processes necessary to achieve success are broadly identified and also represented in the Welcome Pack and Performance Conversation script, as follows:



Figure 7.4 Performance Framework (Identification of Actions)

The basis of the use of value co-creation frameworks is to move away from the historical approach that encourages the separation of supply (by suppliers) and consumption (by customers) this is a supplier based view of the market (Prahalad and Ramaswamy 2004).

### 7.3.2.2 Collaborative Performance: Student as Co-Producer

The notion of student as co-producer or co-creator of value recognises that in a service context, such as education, the consumer must also produce to achieve value. In educational terms this is often referred to as engagement

or participation and it is linked with issues, such as, success and retention of students. However, education is a different service encounter than other professional service encounters as education takes place over an extended period, requires a high level of intellectual capability, motivation and resilience (Hennig-Thurau *et al.* 2001). This is a salient point because it is a difficult proposition to maintain a good quality level of experience over this extended period. The responsibility to maintain a good quality of educational experience is also a co-production process.

A perspective is offered through service dominant logic literature that students should be regarded as “partial employees” or “co-producers” and therefore managed as such (Mills and Morris 1986 p 726); (Kotze and du Plessis 2003).

According to (Kotze and du Plessis 2003) the three main components of effective customer participation are; role clarity; ability and motivation. These factors should be communicated in a formal organisational socialisation process (Garavan and Murphy 2001b); (Kotze and du Plessis 2003); (Mills and Morris 1986). These issues were addressed during the research project through the ‘Welcome Pack’ and the ‘Performance Conversations’ as part of an improved co-creation approach. The key themes; expect; evidence and engage are shown in Figure 7.5 above:

Preparing to succeed: key themes
<p>Engage</p> <p>It is important that you engage with the learning processes including; the lecturers, the academic community, learning materials, curriculum and your peers. Fully embracing the diverse range of learning opportunities and working successfully with people of different abilities and levels of experience will prepare you for the complex and challenging world of learning and industry.</p>

### Expectations

What you expect from yourself will ultimately lead to what you achieve. There will be challenges along the way, you will need to work hard and be committed to achieve your full potential. We will work with you at every step, but we will not carry you to your goal. As in the world of work there will be individuals who have different expectations, commitments and abilities. Please ensure that you take time to plan what you want to achieve and how you intend to achieve it.

### Evidence

Keeping records of your study hours, challenges and achievements during every stage of your course will prove to be invaluable in your assessments and when demonstrating to a potential employer what you are capable of. Having evidence for what you are capable of will give you self-confidence and potentially a competitive advantage when it comes to gaining employment.

You will be expected to complete an **e-portfolio**, which is a multimedia tool within which you can keep a record of your experiences, action plans and development during your time here.

Table 7.3 Preparing to Succeed

The above themes are supported during the performance conversations and need to be reflected upon in the eportfolio personal development plan. Motivation is addressed in the document through requesting the three main reasons for wanting to study at the subject university and by explicit reference to motivation and challenges to be overcome. The 'Welcome Pack' also contains a self-diagnosis academic skills test to enable students to determine their current skill level with regard to the required academic skills. Role clarity is further augmented through the use of a 'Transition Project'

through students are set tasks in their first week that enable them to see what is expected of them in terms of task and skills.

The documents and processes described above form part of an organisational socialisation approach, which is also recommended as part of a co-production model, (Mills and Morris 1986), Table 7.6 below shows how the case study socialisation process maps against this model:

<b>Organisational Socialisation (Mills and Morris 1986)</b>	<b>Case Study Socialisation Model</b>
Pre-Encounter: Issues of Role Readiness	Welcome Pack – sent August just after acceptance. To communicate expectations.
Initial Encounter: Negotiation, Role Acquisition:	Transition Project – to improve preparedness to study
Role Determination and Role Making	Performance Conversations provide general performance feedback around the academic, professional and community themes. Formative and summative feedback are provided on assessed work, again using scripted feedback sheets.

Table 7.4 Comparison Between Mills and Morris (1986) and Case Study

However, despite the planned and ‘formal’ approach to reduce ambiguity observations suggest that some students are not fully prepared, motivated or able. Some students do not wish to participate fully with the organisation or the formal processes and it may be beneficial to identify and categorise the various types of students using diagnostic testing before they join the organisation. This relates to the concept of multiple perspectives of value and could be addressed if the student motivations could be understood better.

(Kotze and du Plessis 2003) provide a tentative model of antecedents and consequences relating to organisational socialisation including role clarity, ability and motivation and positive customer feedback or satisfaction. The subject case study has seen increased satisfaction rates since the introduction of the 'Welcome Pack', 'Performance Conversations', 'Transition Projects' and increased contact in workshops; all part of our co-creation of value approach.

The next section describes the dialogue category and in particular, the implications of performance indicators in a multi-perspective and co-production context. The Welcome Pack, Performance Conversations and Transition Project were all part of an attempt to improve dialogue and control an element or source of one of the symbols involved in the social construction of effectiveness.

As we have discussed previously, higher education is a sector that is rendered transparent due to the requirement for accountability. There is also sufficient data in the form of official primary data, collected and published by government agencies and second order data published in the form of league tables by media outlets. Students are also aware of their power and authority. This situation empowers students and there are consequently multiple perspectives of value and what processes are perceived as valuable. Due to the prevalence of customer to customer forums, for example, there are also unofficial channels of commentary regarding the effectiveness of universities. A multi-dimensional performance management system is required that collates feedback from multiple sources and the multiple goals within the organisation. This will be discussed further in the dialogue category of the framework.

### **7.3.3 Dialogue**

This category can be defined (specified) as relating to any data that reflects the participants concerns with the process of the exchange of information with regard to performance.

The key arguments within this category are:

A<sub>7</sub> – Multiple constituency perspectives of effectiveness require an appropriate multiple perspective performance management system.

A<sub>8</sub> – The shift to the student as the dominant coalition has raised the issues of quality and value and moves universities towards offering service encounters, where the student is the arbiter of the value proposition.

A<sub>9</sub> – The use of indicators causes the social setting to change including the issue of ‘reactivity’ within organisations, including unintended consequences such as forms of gaming (Espeland and Sauder 2007).

Proposition P<sub>1</sub> – The recognition of effectiveness being a function of the co-creation of value by multiple constituents requires an appropriate performance management system.

### **7.3.3.1 Multiple Constituents**

Organisational effectiveness is a difficult construct to define and there has been a tendency, through research, to attempt to determine the “conditions under which organisations are more or less effective” (Yuchtman and Seashore 1967 p 891). This search for the silver bullet; the conditions under which an organisation will perform optimally, remains elusive. It is a very difficult goal to achieve. One of the key reasons, for this difficulty, is the various definitions, metaphors and criteria used to characterise the effectiveness (Cameron 1986); (Zammuto 1984). The judgement of effectiveness is difficult and often illusive and this complexity is ordinarily dealt with through the ‘normalisation’ of the varied responses or through the statistical calculation of the mean (Zammuto 1984); (Cameron 1986).

Judgements of effectiveness also historically tend to be associated with an interpretation of the way something should be and the way it is. The overriding issue is then; whose perspective is important? (Zammuto 1984). Any organisation could choose a broad range of data, using different forms of

criteria, to determine their effectiveness (Campbell and Lambright 2016). The case study has a multitude of data available, ranging from modular and programme level feedback to institutional feedback from individual employers. However, through observation it was determined that the higher authorities choose to focus on the National Student Survey as the singular most important feedback it receives. The categories contained within the survey form the basis of the themes of quality enhancement and responsive action within the department under study.

There are a number of suggested ways through which the criteria of organisational effectiveness can be judged and these are supported by various theories. The objectives of this research project is to develop understanding of organisational effectiveness from the observed experiences of the case study. In order to better understand the researcher is required to identify the key criteria of the organisation. The ability to do this is associated with the identification of the model of organisational effectiveness used by the case study. Below are the various models of organisational effectiveness as defined by (Cameron 1986) and their applicability and relevance to the case study are discussed.

Using a goal theory approach an organisation is deemed effective if it achieves the goals communicated through the strategy or strategic aims. The aims and purpose of the organisation are determined by the senior management team of the university using their authority and recognition as the 'dominant coalition' as they are acting on behalf of the organisational stakeholders (Connolly 1980). This form of goal based organisation is valid if the goals selected are appropriate, otherwise it could result in an organisation that performs well at achieving inappropriate goals (Rojas 2000). Goal based theories are in effect the satisfaction of an external higher authority by the internal higher authority, for the benefit of both external and internal stakeholders (Yuchtman and Seashore 1967). This model focuses on the organisation at the interface with and satisfaction of, the external environment. The case study organisation is forced to do this by the formal

agreement with HEFCE and also the position of authority adopted by the student.

The systems theory perspective of an organisation considers the organisation as an entity and the success of that entity depends on its ability to interact with its environment. This model essentially considers the inputs and outputs “transactions” of the organisation (Yuchtman and Seashore 1967 p 212). (Connolly 1980) refers to this as three basic processes, of an organisation, that require obtaining materials, production and transfer of goods. An effective organisation, using this model, would be able to obtain resources, transform and dispose of them over time. There is no reference to what the specific goals of the organisation are; just that they are achieved in the efficient way described.

The above constructs of organisational effectiveness enable a singular focus; the achievement of the goals of the ‘dominant coalition’ and the achievement of goals in a resource efficient way. Both of these models circumvent the other, possibly many, criteria and perspectives offered by other stakeholders of an organisation. In an organisation with 25,000 students and around 2,500 members of staff serving multiple employers and other communities it is uncertain that the goals, determined by the few in authority, could be representative of the entire population. Nor that to achieve goals in a resource efficient way would satisfy the many different views of effectiveness. A multiple constituency approach is a potential antidote to this. This approach arose out of dissatisfaction with the pursuit of a single or singular definition of effectiveness (Cameron 1986). This dissatisfaction was observed in the case study emergent data as a lack of focus or clarity for staff and also with students and staff disengaging from the process.

The multiple-constituency model understands organisational effectiveness as comprising multiple perspectives and argues that there is no single unit of effectiveness. Their view on effectiveness places the organisation at the centre of a series of a series of “influence loops” that represent the various stakeholders of the organisation and that there are, therefore, a diverse

range of satisfaction criteria. This is similar to the “organisation as nexus of contracts” model (Atkinson *et al.* 2008 p 27) propose. The organisation and its performance rely on the interaction of the various stakeholders using both implicit and explicit contracts that provide clear expectations and contribution from each of the stakeholders. These are demonstrated in Figure 7.6 below.

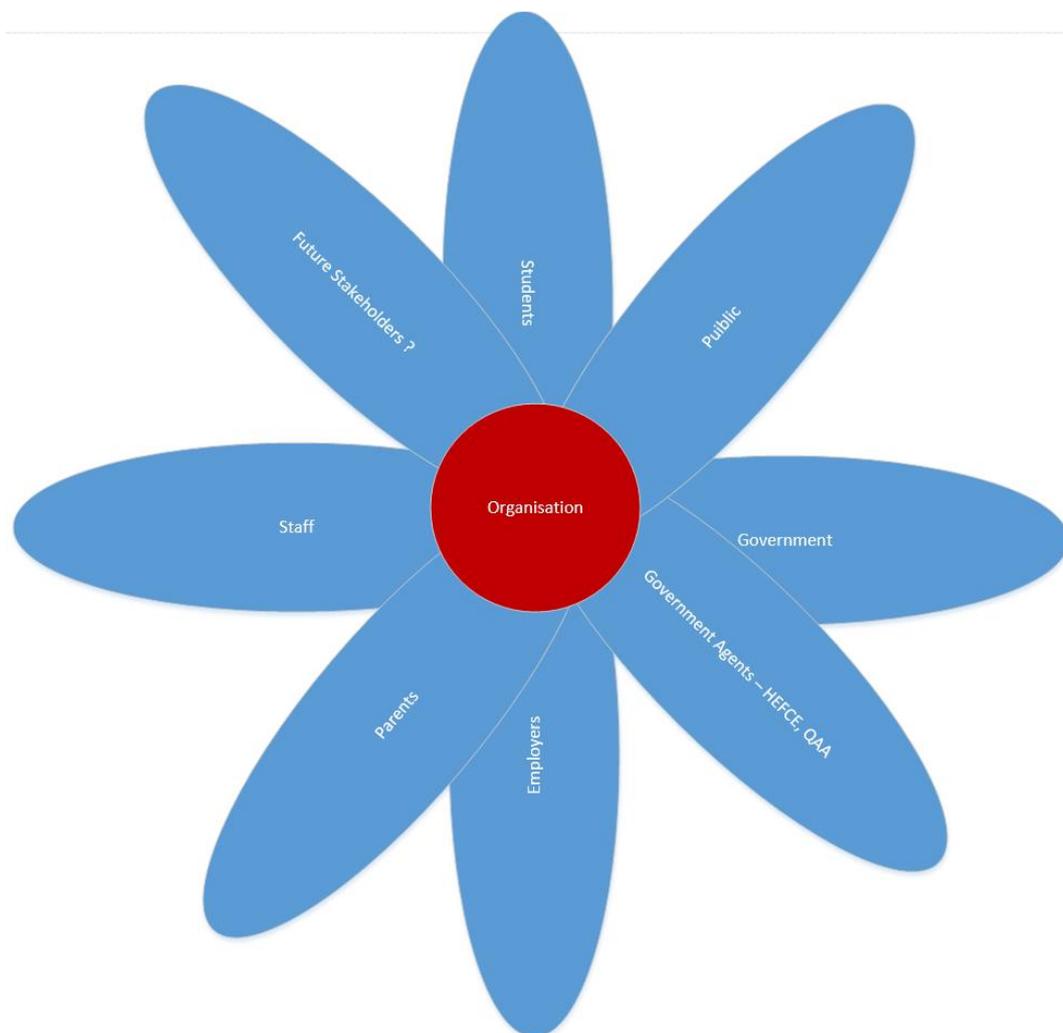


Figure 7.5 Influence Loops (a representation of Zammuto's (1984) 'Influence Loops')

The most significant issue with the multiple constituency model is the approach taken when determining which constituent will be satisfied and to what degree and which constituents will not (Zammuto 1984). Four models of multiple constituency are offered and they differ with respect to the attention paid to the constituents; relativism; power; social justice and evolutionary.

If a relativistic model is used information is collected that is representative of the constituents' perspective of organisational performance, authority is not granted to one of these perspectives as each view is valid. There could be a number of alternative views that are related to the criteria used for judgement and they are all valid. The role of judgement is taken by a person or persons nominated as the user of the data. In the case study this could apply internally to the senior managers of the organisation but also externally to the policy makers. Either way it appears to still relate to those in authority making judgement. Within the case study there is a variation of the relativistic perspective and that is the use of performance data by the various media outlets, such as, The Times and The Guardian in the 'Good University Guides'. These organisations use collated data to produce their own league table that then gain their own currency through circulation. These league tables form part of the social construct of the meaning of effectiveness despite them having no legal or explicit political support. This social construction of effectiveness is further compounded by other media outlets, for example Which magazine are now publishing The Which University guide. This guide uses its own criteria including UCAS points for entry; % of applicants receiving offers; Student Satisfaction and Average Graduate Salary. A search of this website using the course title Civil Engineering, finds a course with a student satisfaction rate of 80% that is categorised as medium, from a range of low, medium and high. The shift to the student centred education has raised the issues of quality and value and moves universities towards offering service encounters, where the student is the arbiter of the value proposition.

This model is associated with the resource dependence model (Zammuto 1984). The criteria are negotiated and the conclusions made based on the relative positions of power of the actors involved. In the subject case study, the policy makers, who act on behalf of government, the public and the students hold the positions of power. The government, holds this position through providing teaching grants to specific subjects and research funding and the students have the ability to choose where they spend their student

loans. The case study, and all universities, are dependent upon these sources of finance for economic sustainability and organisational viability. This therefore grants significant power to these constituents and the criteria associated with their judgement of effective performance. This relates closely to stakeholder theory and the identification of those with high authority and willingness to act (Freeman 2010).

The evolutionary model posited by (Zammuto 1984) states that an organisation functions in a changing, social setting and therefore effectiveness is ephemeral and particular to a contextual set of conditions. Therefore, an effective organisation is one that is sufficiently adaptable to satisfy complex and dynamic criteria. It is the act of becoming effective that is important as the “substantive definition of effectiveness organisational performance continually changes” (Zammuto 1984 p 608). This is particularly pertinent to the subject case study as the constituents of the university change annually.

In order to undertake research into performance and effectiveness it is useful to identify or use appropriate standards or criteria (Cameron 1986). Cameron (ibid) provides guidance for identifying models to enable assessment of organisational effectiveness to take place, this is shown in the table below and the applicability to the case study is also described:

<b>Model</b>	<b>Definition</b>	<b>When Useful</b>	<b>Relation to Case Study</b>
Goal based	Accomplishes stated goals	Goals are clear and consensual	Goals are clear but they are only partially consensual at the sector and policy level
Systems Resource	Acquires resources	Connection between inputs and performance	The input of concern here could be interpreted as the quantity and quality of student intake.
Internal Processes	Absence of internal process strain	Connection between processes and performance	The case study evidence shows strain of internal processes – good will of staff enable performance.
Strategic Constituencies	Minimal Satisfaction of Strategic Constituents	Constituents have powerful influences	Government policy is dominant
Competing Values Framework	Emphasis of criteria in four quadrants	Organisation is unclear about its own criteria	The criteria appear to be all externally produced
Legitimacy model	Survival due to legitimate activity.	Survival or decline of organisation is of interest.	Indicators are used externally to determine legitimacy – by prospective students, using league tables and KIS data.
Fault Driven Model	Absence of faults or characteristics of ineffectiveness.	Strategies for improvement are required. Criteria for	The criteria are not clear with the exception of student satisfaction (NSS). Strategies for

		effectiveness are not clear.	improvement are evident – identify fault and correct. A deficit model dominates the case study.
High Performing Systems Model	Effectiveness judged in comparison to other similar organisations.	Comparisons are required.	Comparison through league table positions and KIS data. Comparisons internally are prevalent.
Multiple Constituency Model	There is no single definition of effectiveness.	Multiple stakeholders therefore perceptions of organisation.	Multiple stakeholder – within student category, research, industry, community, academic.

Table 7.5 Adaptation of Cameron's (1986) Commonly Used Models of Effectiveness

The use of Cameron's' guidelines enables the effectiveness model(s) to be identified and their applicability to the case study to be discussed. From the emergent, observational data it appears that the main criteria for the judgement of effectiveness in the case study organisation is student satisfaction as demonstrated through the NSS responses. The main activities under consideration are the categories of the NSS and the level of analysis relates to the normalised student perception. This indicates that the seven categories (criteria) determined by Government Agencies; Teaching; Assessment and Feedback; Academic Support; Organisation and Management; Learning Resources and Personal Development are the organisational effectiveness criteria. These criteria are utilised within the subject case study and they do provide clarity of what is important.

The criteria also provide legitimacy for the organisation in the public domain; they provide indications of areas for improvement and they allow comparison with other universities. Another argument here is that the criteria used in the

NSS are not necessarily suitable. The criteria used, as listed above, are only partial determinants of effective learning and not indicators (Cameron 1986). The indicators do not consider the obvious input or engagement required of the student. Indicators of success are used internally, such as, retention rates and resultant grades of students and rates of employment. The determinants of these outcomes are not identified nor recorded and therefore any response to improve these outcomes would be undertaken locally either at module, programme or school level.

However, this is further complicated when the multiple constituent criteria are introduced, as the above are related to the student as the 'dominant coalition' (Zammuto 1984). For example, if we consider the evaluative criteria associated with research and the Research Excellence Framework 2020, the wheel of effectiveness spins again and different criteria arise. Direction is required, consideration of the skills necessary to deliver become pertinent; the dialogue and vocabulary change and the organisation requires development. This relates closely to what the social actors refer to as ambiguity and lack of clarity in the data.

This notion of ambiguity is further compounded because higher education is a divergent problem (Cameron 1986) the process of education is not easily quantifiable and it can sometimes be paradoxical, particularly when related to, for example, academic support versus autonomy in learning. This concept of paradox is useful in explaining and understanding the emergent data related to both control *and* freedom. The case study shows examples of how control, of expectations and behaviour, is achieved through performance conversations and also the increase in the amount of small student number workshops, for example. (Cameron 1986) refers to effectiveness studies that found that effective organisations are those that can hold sometimes opposing and varied expectations over time. It is the ability of the organisation to predict where and when this paradox will occur and prepare stakeholders for it. What is required is staff with broad capabilities across the full range of academic activities and the ability to perform whilst holding these divergent criteria at the same time.

The main tenet of the evolutionary perspective is that effectiveness is not found in the satisfaction of one or many constituents but in the ability of the organisation to become effective over time. This means being able to respond perpetually to changing demands (Zammuto 1984).

It is important when analysing perceptions of effectiveness to distinguish between fact and value. A fact is an observable and testable truth, for example in the case study, there is a requirement for coursework to be returned to students within fifteen days. This therefore can be investigated for a given module and the findings can be considered fact. Value relates to constituents' perceptions of a thing and they cannot necessarily be determined as true or false. It relates to the gap between expected performance and the perceived performance. The NSS, for example, is a value based survey and it is validated through the process of normalising student feedback using calculations of the mean across the multiple constituent perceptions of value. This raises questions about the validity of this survey instrument as a true representation of the multiple perspectives that policy encourages. Perhaps, at the very least, the sample could be analysed to provide segmented data, using various criteria, for example, full time versus part time, male and female and age. Otherwise, it remains a crude instrument that is of little use to students and organisations alike.

This data segmentation would allow for universities to be responsive to particular constituents within cohorts. Diagnostic analysis could be carried out on incoming cohorts to determine their 'likely' needs and wants based on more stratified data and therefore organisational effectiveness could be improved.

The multiple constituency approach provides clarity with regard to another theme of the emergent data; the temporal aspects associated with perceptions of effectiveness. Sequencing refers to how staff pay attention to the various constituent demands at specific and appropriate times. From observation of the case study, emergent data suggests that final year

students are given higher priority generally, but even more so between January and April when the NSS survey is undertaken. This is a lesser example of the unintended consequences of indicators. The Research Excellence Framework (REF) is given attention in the lead up to submission, employers are given time at industrial liaison group meetings. It is an illusion of being in control when in fact most staff observed and interviewed felt anything but in control. The breadth of the tasks to be undertaken was broad and the capacity to respond requires capability across many arenas; teacher, counsellor, confidante, coach for example; an academic member of staff requires multiple capabilities to be effective in the contemporary environment.

Additionally, related to the temporal aspect, the composition of the pool of constituents changes over time. This is particularly true for students as they are only temporary members of the university, for a given period of time, from induction to graduation. Therefore, their concern and ability to influence is fleeting and instrumentally and personally motivated. Also, the subject case study has sought to actively change their pool through the increase in UCAS entry points to study on the courses. Additionally, it was observed that the subject university appears to be trying to diminish the number of part time programmes offered, as they are a particularly demanding and difficult to manage group. This is in accord with the notion of organisations ridding themselves of “troublesome” constituents (Zammuto 1984 p 615). This fleeting and temporary involvement is in contrast to the enduring and lasting goals of the organisation. The key is to determine the role that the temporary participants play in the longer term perspective of the organisation.

There is also the additional problem of lagging indicators. The benefits of feedback, through corrective action, are only received by the constituents in the following year and this is a completely different pool of participants with their own specific perspectives (Connolly 1980 p 215); (Herman and Renz 2008) . This reinforces the proposition, stated earlier, that focus should be on the improvement of the value proposition offered and the improvement of the student experience over time. It is an evolving process of the student experience for the benefit of the valuable processes of the experience.

Time also effects the preferences for outcomes in the example above the improved process will become the norm for the next cohort, as it will alter their expectations. The societal context in which preferences are formed will also alter over time thereby changing preferences and constituents themselves (Zammuto 1984 p 611).

The subject organisation recognises that there are multiple constituents to satisfy and this is demonstrated in the themes of their key strategic outcomes; excellence in learning and teaching; scholarship at the core and partnership. Satisfaction of or excellence in these multiple constituents will require an appropriate performance management system. The next section examines the concept of multiple perspectives of performance indicators.

### **7.3.3.2 Performance Indicators**

This section supports and explicates the following arguments:

A<sub>8</sub> – The use of indicators causes the social setting to change including the issue of ‘reactivity’ within organisations, including unintended consequences such as forms of gaming (Espeland and Sauder 2007).

A<sub>9</sub> – Multiple constituency perspectives of effectiveness require an appropriate performance management system.

This leads to the following propositional statement:

P<sub>1</sub> - The recognition of effectiveness being a function of the co-creation of value by multiple constituents requires an appropriate performance management system.

As we have seen performance indicators are required at high level by the funding and overseeing agencies of the UK government as part of the

contractual agreement between them and the universities. The reasoning, provided by the overseeing agency, HEFCE, for indicators is:

*“The UK Performance Indicators (UKPIs) for higher education (HE) provide comparative information on the nature and performance of the HE sector in the UK. They aim to measure how higher education providers perform objectively and consistently.”*

The key areas the agency are concerned with are: widening participation; ensuring that all socio economic classes are represented at university; non continuation rates which ensures that students are progressing through courses successfully; employment of leavers, which logically measures the success of students in obtaining employment to an appropriate level following their studies.

They are usually recorded in the form of outputs; for example; number of students in professional employment (Destination of Leavers from Higher Education Survey); percentage level of student retention over their period of study. Satisfaction surveys, such as, the National Student Survey, a measure the students' satisfaction with their course, usually the perceived gap between their expectation of service and their perceived experience are also recorded to enable prospective students to decide on where and what to study. The Unistats web page and Key Information Sets are created using this collected data.

These appear to be valid information sets to gather, they should enable accountability and assurance that public expenditure is being used equitably and with good purpose. The data also ensures that students are able to make informed decisions when deciding on where and what to study.

The QAA refer, in their Standard Qualification Framework, to programme learning outcomes and provide level descriptors to provide public confidence with the consistent standard of higher education and their qualifications. Outcomes are more difficult to define as they are not necessarily measurable,

for example, an outcome might be “learning” or “education”. It could be argued that these are measured implicitly during assessment and observed in the grade and award classification. However, some of the outcomes may only be realised at some point in the future. This is related to the observation that education could be considered a “post experience good”, that is, the benefits of education to a student may only reveal themselves and become of value at a point in time in the future as their career and life progresses (Vining and Weimer 1992, p.75). This future value of education is incredibly important but it is not measured.

(Campbell and Lambright 2016 p 157) in their study of “human non-profit services” in New York found that funders were motivated to collect performance data, in the forms described above, primarily to enable future funding decisions to be made based on performance related to the outcomes. This corresponds with the observations within this case study and it relates to the imposition of indicators imposed on providers by the funding authorities (Campbell and Lambright 2016).

It would appear that at policy level within the system the indicators used are quite logical and necessary. They appear to be benign and without the ‘weight’ that they are perceived to possess at the university and in particular the lower operational level. It appears to be, from the data, that when the data is externalised or publicised it becomes problematic and causes changes in behaviour. This comparison has more impact at the programme level as this is the unit of analysis for the students, in their decision making. However harmless the indicators appear the pressure increases the lower down into an organisation they descend; it is analogous to the pressures on a submarine at the surface being less than at sea bed. It is also at the programme level that the university would determine viability. There are multiple opportunities for the purpose of the indicators to be misinterpreted and exaggerated for example.

During the observation at the subject case study it was indicators that caused the most tension and had the largest impact on performance, both positive

and negative. When considering this notion (Espeland and Sauder 2007 p 3) refer to this impact as 'reactivity' this is related to the response of actors during ethnographic studies and how being studied modifies their behaviour to a point that it is no longer a true reflection. Their work provides a framework for systematic investigation of reactivity within organisations in response to the use of indicators. Their framework examines the, mechanisms of reactivity and how to characterise the effects. A mechanism is likened to a switch and when switched on (occurs) it will cause different forms of behaviour (ibid p10). These conditions and consequences are recorded in the analytical memos through the various observations and critical events. These are recorded in Appendix D, for reference. Below are recorded the mechanisms of reactivity and the effects that were observed during the duration of the case study. Examples of Mechanisms of Reactivity from Case Study are provided below:

- a. The emergent data, from participant observation, suggests that it is the *publication*, both internally and externally, that provides indicators with their capacity to influence and alter behaviour.
- b. Additionally, the *management level interpretation* of the *significance* of the indicators is another mechanism, for the effects of this mechanism refer to the "quantitative authority" section below.
- c. Another example of a mechanism of reactivity is the observed primary focus on the NSS as a valid satisfaction survey tool and the response to that to ensure enhancement of experience.
- d. The focus on the NSS as the singular most important leads to a narrow consideration of the educational experience.
- e. Clarity of information and focus of response, for example on the categories of the NSS survey.
- f. Within the subject university another mechanism, to signify action is a good result within the NSS, something that works.

Effects of Reactivity Observed in Case Study

- a. Dialogue around the indicators always increases around the time of publication; the NSS in September and any time a broadsheet newspaper, such as when The Times or The Guardian publish their league tables the tension is palpable within management circles. Additionally, observation suggests that little attention is paid to the Post Graduate Taught Experience Survey (PTES) and the Doctoral Research surveys (PRES). These two forms of internal survey are not subject to external publication, yet! This would lead to the conclusion that it is the external publication that is causing tension as there is the assumed link (constructed) between reputation and economic viability.
- b. Another example of the reaction to the external NSS was observed in that staff teaching level 6 students did not want to release marks during the period of the survey, January to April each year. However, this is not possible and staff have reported releasing marks then leaving their office to avoid the potentially negative reaction.
- c. One of the key points made in the paper is relevant to this case study and that it reference to the “quantitative authority” of indicators (Espeland and Sauder 2007 p 7) and the reaction of actors to it. Indicators to appear to have an authority of their own (Jacobs and Manzi 2006) refer their ‘reverential status’ and this again relates to the social construction of the meaning and significance of indicators. Indicators are not benign objects that are used within the case study organisation without critical reflection. The purpose of indicators is, in some way to modify behaviour, to cause a reaction from people within the social context (de Waal 2003). Performance is derived from the interaction of “organisational and human activities”, the organisational activities makes reference to the indicators being used as a technology (de Waal 2003). It was observed that academic staff who are used to historical levels of autonomy react in a negative way to control by managers generally, but equally so to any form of management by survey. Correspondingly, managers who are used to being unable to manage academic staff now have a new tool; the indicator. The indicators can be used as a mediating tool to manage, therefore, it removes the obligation to act in a responsible way; it is

nothing personal nor is it professional it is the figures that need to be adhered to. The indicators have become an unsophisticated and blunt management instrument.

- d. In Espeland and Sauders study of Law Schools in America in which they analysed their reaction to being ranked, by USN. They concluded that a focus on a particular set of indicators leads to what they called a “self-fulfilling prophecy”; all the law courses increasingly conformed to performance under the given criteria of the ranking instrument. This has also been referred to as “accountability myopia” (Ebrahim 2005 p 56) or “focus”. The meaning of effectiveness, of an organisation, converges on the funder or key stakeholder provided criteria to the negligence of all else. There is evidence of this at middle manager (operational) level within the subject case study. This focus is a precondition of isomorphism; this determines that organisations with the same focus will ultimately become the same (Oliver 1988); (DiMaggio and Powell 1983).
  
- e. The increasing clarity of what is important sounds like a panacea for those pursuing effectiveness. However, ambiguity is found in how to respond. “Ambiguity is characterised by the absence of meaning rather than by uncertainty and the absence of information” (March and Olsen, 1976). Emergent data from the case study suggests that this is an issue, the staff often referred to lack of clarity, but it was not what to do but how they should go about it. This is a further component of the multiple perspective approach to effectiveness and making a choice runs the risk of dissatisfaction elsewhere, thereby giving rise to tension.
  
- f. (DiMaggio and Powell 1983) using institutional theory demonstrate that where there is a degree of uncertainty as to how effectiveness is achieved, or outcomes are difficult to measure then the organisational response is usually to standardise processes. Empirical evidence from the case study supports this. Over the period of the case study the university introduced standard programme handbooks, module handbooks, community web pages, personal tutor schedule, a Student Charter. The researcher introduced a transition

process across all programmes within the school, consisting of a Welcome Pack, Transition Project and Performance Conversations also standard feedback sheets were introduced. This is evidence of the concept of isomorphism; the tendency of organisations within the same environments and converging on the same indicators to become the same (Hannan and Freeman 1977).

The above observations also provide credence to the concept of the social construction of meaning of effectiveness and how being effective is defined by a given social group. Effectiveness, in the case study organisation, appears to have been constructed as the achievement of a particular set of indicators. This would suggest that should the indicators change; the organisation would be deemed ineffective!

It is this approach that can be used to explain some of the reactions observed over the period of the study. Above are just some of the examples, there are others referred to in the data analysis chapters, such as performance anxiety and include responses such as disengagement of staff from managers, a perception of a lack of trust and people resigning from their management positions to become senior lecturers again, a role more associated with academic values. The use of the “quantitative authority” of indicators removes the requirement for any form of personal or professional authority on the part of the manager (Espeland and Sauder 2007). In periods of low resource and high expectation this is an efficient method to use.

The requirement for accountability and auditability mentioned above results in indicators cascading down to the university and then subsequently to the operational programme level. These indicators then form part of the university performance management system (PMS) and therefore a powerful symbol in the social construction of the meaning of the effectiveness within that unit. (Campbell and Lambright 2016) in their study of non-profit organisations conclude that due to the multi directional nature of accountability, that it, becomes “relational”, that is, performance becomes about gathering the “perspective of multiple constituents”.

### 7.3.3.3 Performance Management Systems

Performance indicators are part of the broader performance management system; a performance management system is used to determine the appropriateness of actions taken in the pursuit of goals. (Neely *et al.* 2005 p 1229) refer to a performance measurement system as having three components:

*“Performance measurement can be defined as the process of quantifying the efficiency and effectiveness of action  
A performance measure can be defined as a metric used to quantify the efficiency and / or effectiveness of an action  
A performance measurement system can be defined as the set of metrics used to quantify both the efficiency and effectiveness of actions”*

It would appear from the emergent data and the assessment of the models of effectiveness identified above that performance indicators are central in the determination of effectiveness. Performance indicators are also significant due to the impact they have on the social actors. There appears to be a developing single dominant coalition, within the subject university, and that is the performance indicators and in particular the indicators relating to student perception of their experience. This suggests that the indicators have a weight of their own that is reliant on the proxy authority bestowed upon them by the government policy. It is this category that dominates the research and it is this category that appears to be the central theme. However, to properly measure organisational effectiveness consideration of all the actors must be undertaken.

Performance indicators derive their authority through the power invested in them by the overseeing agencies and the intended use of assisting students in their choice of university. Therefore, the data has multiple uses; it is used externally to provide overseeing agencies with data to contribute towards their accountability and auditing requirements. Also the data is used to inform

prospective students of the perceptions of the student perception of historical performance. This particular aspect of the information use relates to performance data being used as a source of competitiveness with other organisations vying for student fees. It is this aspect that possibly causes the indicators to gain their weight and importance within universities. Satisfaction has become a competitive weapon.

From the above it could be concluded that the long term viability of the subject university, and others, could depend upon their ability to manage and manipulate their image through the use of performance data, to recruit students, as much as it does to use the data to improve their performance (Moogan 2011).

During the observational period of the case study the performance indicator concept became more prevalent in the organisational discourse. The impact of indicators cannot be underestimated.

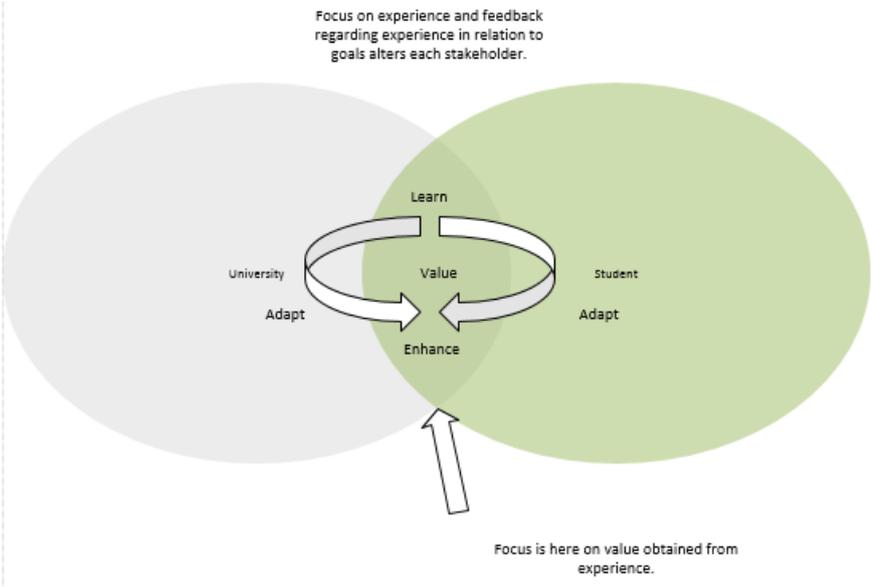


Figure 7.6 Focus on Value Interaction

As has been previously discussed, in this report, the use of performance indicators is closely related to the increased use of more managerial

techniques within the subject university and the environment within which it operates.

Performance measurement and management are associated with the notion of control. Performance Measurement and Management is concerned with the provision of information to enable decision makers to take action. This action is sometimes to correct a problem or to improve a process further through enhancement (Neely 2004). This relates also to the conceptualisation of higher education as a 'service'. Performance measurement and management techniques are therefore being used to improve the *service* for the beneficiaries of the service, the students.

The purpose of the performance management system is to use the performance data to enable the organisation to learn and develop (Atkinson *et al.* 2008). The research carried out by (Atkinson *et al.* 2008) on twelve high performing private companies led to the identification of four key functions a performance management system must achieve:

1. Assist the company in determining if they are receiving the intended inputs from the key stakeholders, including both internal and external stakeholders. This is especially important in an educational environment with the requirement for engagement from key stakeholders, such as, students. The classification of students as internal stakeholders is important in the co-creation of value context. They can alternatively be considered as "temporary employees". This relates to the "value received" from stakeholders (Atkinson *et al.* 2008 p 30)
2. Assist the organisation in the determination of whether it is providing the stakeholders with their needs so that they are able to contribute to the success and achievement of the objectives of the university and their own goals. This relates to the "value provided" to the stakeholders. This is significant in the educational role, as it gives responsibility to the university to prepare stakeholders to perform, again, a key aspect of co-creation.

3. Enable the creation of processes that enable the delivery and achievement of the secondary objectives of the organisation. This relates to the “process efficiency” of the university.
4. Enables the organisation to determine if the contracts, “implicit and explicit” are assisting in the achievement of the organisations primary objectives. The case study primary objectives are included in Table 7.8 below. The primary objectives of the subject organisation are those set by the senior management of the organisation, in this case, the Board of Governors.

The secondary objectives are important as it is the achievement of these objectives that enables the successful attainment of the primary objectives. It is the identification, measurement and management of secondary processes that will ultimately lead to effectiveness (Atkinson *et al.* 2008). Of course, this is assuming that the achievement of singular goals created by the powerful bodies of an organisation is constituted as being effective. However, if we accept the multiple constituency model this will not necessarily be the case.

<b>Mission: Creating a community for learning and knowledge</b>		
<b>Primary Objectives – defined by strategy and core aims</b>		<b>Secondary Objectives (process)</b>
Excellent teaching	Establishing and enhancing the student partnership	Processes that enable engagement; in quality assurance, in curriculum design.
	Excellence in Learning, Teaching and Assessment	Range of pedagogic activities used in sessions; pedagogic staff development; presentation at Teaching and Learning Conference; Peer Observation Feedback

		(PDPR)
Scholarship at its core	Embedding Research and scholarship	Number of papers produced, quality of output, journal ranking, citation impact. Capability events – staff development on research.
A driving force that through partnership supports wealth creation and social well being	Social and economic engagement	

Table 7.6 Primary and Secondary Objectives of Case Study University

This further supports the requirements of a multiple constituent form of performance management system. Collaborative forms of performance require collaborative management and this requires the provision of performance data to all the stakeholders who require it (Busi and Bititci 2006). The performance of the university at the operational level requires performance of a number of stakeholders, one of the primary stakeholders is the students themselves. The performance prism consists of five facets that enables the identification of performance measures within complex multiple stakeholder environments (Neely *et al.* 2002). The first facet allows for the identification of stakeholders and the not only what they want but also what they need (Neely *et al.* 2002). This moves beyond the notion of satisfying students but also recognising their roles and responsibility, thereby shifting the power to the experience. This is very much in accord with the coproduction concept discussed earlier in this chapter. What they need can be related to the identification of their capacity to perform and the acquisition and use of the appropriate skills.

The second facet examines the strategies required to enable the stakeholders to extract value. These require the consideration of the role of

the university in teaching and learning, scholarship and partnerships with communities both civic and industrial, in the context of how they add value to the stakeholders.

The third facet identifies the processes required to enable the subject's strategy to be operationalised. The historical focus of the subject university has been the key processes associated with the twenty-one key questions of the NSS. The processes considered are teaching and how they impact on learning. Consideration of this particular process led to the reduction in lecturing hours and the increase in workshop and tutorial hours as it was considered by the social group that this is where maximum value was achieved in the learning process.

The fourth facet, capabilities, is very important in this context as it relates strongly to the case study focus on co-production and the co-creation of value. The consideration of capabilities requires thought to be given to the "combination of people, practices, technology and infrastructure" that enable the achievement of the organisational processes (Neely *et al.* 2002). It requires the identification of the capabilities required, by all stakeholders, to perform. This is what is required in the co-production process also. Within the case study this led to the examination of the capabilities of staff and students. Staff capability in technology for example was improved through a series of staff development events. The student capability in academic literacy will be improved explicitly through the creation of an Academic and Information Literacy module next academic year.

The fifth and final facet is the stakeholder contribution. This relates to the expectation of stakeholders to perform. This is linked to the communication of expectations contained in the Welcome Pack and the Performance Conversations carried out in the case study processes. The expected contribution is communicated to the students and stakeholders clearly through these documents. This should form part of the organisational dialogue around effectiveness and performance. This contradicts the accepted concept of the satisfaction of stakeholders within the public sector.

Due to the requirement to co-produce and co-create value the student is both recipient of a service with which they can apply satisfaction measures to. But they are also contributors to the process and it is their behaviour and actions that will lead to the successful achievement of their individual goals. So this creates a symbiotic relationship with the university, the success of each other depends on the quality of input from each other (MCadam *et al.* 2005).

The creation of measures related to the identified processes should support a performance enhancement system that continually seeks to improve the effectiveness of the organisation due the central focus on what is required for multiple stakeholders to derive value from the organisation. The mechanism used within the subject case study and as a direct result of this action research study is the performance conversation. This is an attempt to communicate, to students, what is important and to exert some control, in a diagnostic way, of the students' performance towards their own identified goals. These conversations also consider capability as students discuss their requirements for development in their capability to perform. These conversations provide clarity to the student of what is important in terms of key pedagogic issues such as "time on task, student faculty contact and high expectations" (Chickering and Gamson 1999 p 76) and consideration of their other commitments such as employment and engagement with the professional bodies. This is an attempt to prevent "dysfunctional behaviour" and to ensure that student performance is aligned to the organisational goals (de Haas and Kleingeld 1998 p 234).

This approach does not ignore the importance of the public measures and their associated benefits. But measures could be categorised as public or external for the purpose of marketing (legitimacy) and private or internal for the purpose of the management of the enhancement process (Kenis and Provan 2009).

The introduction of multiple perspective forms of performance management and the acceptance that holding the opposing forces of enhancement and stability will become the accepted mode for universities will require an

acceptance of a level of “strategic ambiguity” within the university (Leitch and Davenport 2007, p.44 p 44). Strategic ambiguity allows for interpretive dialogue to take place locally and with respect to those local actors involved in the delivery process. However, the emergent data suggests this is the cause of much tension within the case study organisation and this will therefore require improved communication through management to enable the acceptance and requirement of this tension.

The acceptance of ambiguity and multiple perceptions of value is in stark contrast with the “complex accountability structures” (Campbell and Lambright 2016) of the higher education system that appears to promote short sightedness (Ebrahim 2005) or even single sightedness created by the contemporary policy of student finance and the overseeing agents. There is a requirement to consider the broad range of perspectives, (MCadam *et al.* 2005 p 260) suggests the consideration of “stakeholder windows” to enable the different views of organisational effectiveness to prevail. This would be very important to the case study organisation as each stakeholder, including students, could extract their data and use it to inform their behaviour.

### **7.3.4 Develop**

This category can be defined (specified) as relating to any data that reflects the participants concerns with regard to the process of the change and adaptation of the individual or organisation.

A<sub>11</sub> – The perceptions of organisational effectiveness are multiple and socially constructed. The dialogue within the organisation forms parts of the process of development as conversation causes change through social construction.

#### **7.3.4.1 Learning Organisations**

It is central to the multiple constituency approach that the organisation is fluid, adaptive and able to respond to changing demands. This requires an organisation that is able to learn in order to maintain legitimacy and remain

viable. This was not a central concern of the organisational actors but it is a hypothetical requirement determined by the researcher as a result of observations and theoretical integration. This concept is critically important in relation to the future effectiveness of the case study organisation. It is how the subject organisation is able to learn and develop through dialogue and conversation with stakeholders that will enable success.

A learning organisation is defined as “one that continually improves by rapidly creating and refining the capabilities for future success” and it is this learning and the application of the outcomes that produce improved performance (Wick and León 1995 p 299).

The notion of continually improving relates to the requirement to change and adapt to indicators both internal and external. (Boyce 2003) in her paper proposes that learning is absolutely necessary to achieve and sustain change within the higher education sector. There is reference within this paper to institutional theory and the requirement for the maintenance of organisational legitimacy through multiple constituents. This has been discussed earlier with reference to the power dynamic of the indicators provided from funding agencies. This is associated with an expectation of how an organisation, such as a university, should be. In these situations, an extreme change is unlikely. An alternative perspective of organisational theory is offered and this is related to the social construction of the meaning of the organisation by those actors associated with it. This perspective calls for dialogue to construct meaning and its involvement in change. The concepts of change and learning are closely related, that is, first and second order change and single and double loop learning.

First order change is related to single loop learning and involves the “correction of errors” (Boyce 2003p 126); this is completed without fundamentally altering the organisational infrastructure. However, second order change can fundamentally alter the infrastructure of the organisation, including the mission and strategy, for example. (Argyris 1999) defines two forms of double loop learning, one that can cause temporary but not

permanent change to an organisations infrastructure, due to a restricted amount of learning. Double loop learning that causes permanent, second order change is required to enable an organisation to survive. This will require a continuous ability to reflect and change to maintain viability.

To further explicate this, in the context of the subject case study, (Argyris 1995) during their studies of organisations discuss two models of theory in use that will determine the action taken in response to change depending on the values held by the organisation; model 1 and model 2. Model 1 is the less developed and is often characterised by protection of the existing values, competition and avoid openness or inquiry from others. This often leads 'organisational defensive routines' to attempt to maintain the status quo (Argyris 1995 p 21). In this model the actors' self-confidence and agency is often challenged and results in reluctance to create double loop learning or second order change. The subject case study appears to operate in this fashion with performance tension being a key emergent category due to the anticipated changes to processes and the demands of the students on the individual and the processes. Indicators of performance and satisfaction are viewed as threats under this model. However, a key argument here is the validity of the feedback data. The NSS is a powerful feedback mechanism, but it is flawed in terms of data validation.

Model 2, which is the preferred state, for a complex changing environment requires a more confident individual and a more supportive management structure. This model allows for an openness that can facilitate learning from external intervention such as feedback and thereby enable double loop learning and second order change if required. This should be the model that the subject aspires to. The researcher attempted to initiate this through the introduction of learning labs, through which staff could enter into dialogue around feedback and areas of doubt.

(Wick and León 1995, p.300) use a formulae to identify the variables of an organisation and this is a useful aid to clarifying and the required components of a learning organisation:

“Learning Organisation = Leader with Vision x Plan/Metrics x Information x Inventiveness x Implementation”

The vision aspect should provide a goal or focus for the organisation and this is usually carried out at the high level of the subject case, the mission is clear and has recently been amended. A strategic plan has been implemented and organisational indicators are in place to determine achievement of key processes and outcomes. The information variable is very important this relates to consideration of the indicators, both internal and external as discussed in the previous section, ‘Dialogue’. However, in order for the organisation to develop dialogue and conversation is required to enable change. (Ford and Ford 1995) in their study refer to change being achieved through dialogue and this premise was used by the researcher during the action research project. It was used, formally, during the learning labs and Student Experience Committee meetings with staff and during the Performance Conversations with students. It was also used informally during discussions with Programme Leaders to encourage innovation and “inventiveness” (Wick and León 1995 p 307) to help to alleviate the defensiveness associated with taking chances in the context of the pressure of indicators. The notion of dialogue is aligned closely with the concept of the social construction of effectiveness.

The implementation phase was achieved through the cooperation of the programme leaders. It was important to identify those best placed to implement the interventions to achieve success. It was also important to formally create the opportunities to enter into dialogue with the key stakeholders either through the student experience committee or the performance conversations as this provided a social network with the purpose of creating dialogue as suggested by (Bogenrieder 2002).

The subject organisation was changed through dialogue and action being taken by the person best placed to implement the intervention. The researcher through dialogue with key stakeholders enabled critical

assessment of current practices and subsequent improvement of processes. This will be an ongoing process and although the action research project will come to an end the processes of dialogue and change should be continued.

#### **7.4 Summary and Links to Next Chapter**

This chapter synthesised the emergent concepts and introduced the emergent literature and how this was used to help with the interpretation of the situation and to improve understanding. The next chapter provides a concise summary of the key points and discusses the contribution to knowledge of the research.

## 8. CONCLUSIONS AND CONTRIBUTION TO KNOWLEDGE

### 8.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to summarise the research process and report the main findings, including their significance. It will include the implications for theory demonstrated through a theoretical framework, discuss the proposed contribution to knowledge and the contribution to practice.

This research leads to the presentation of a theoretical framework that is grounded in the emergent data and the interpretation and understanding of the same. A significant finding is that effectiveness is not singular and there are multiple perceptions of the meaning of effectiveness. It is considered epistemologically that organisational effectiveness is socially constructed by the participants. This is due in part to the number of actors involved in the organisational processes; the multiple perceptions, related to their personal goals, motivations and values and the dialogue between the various social groups; there is not one social world, within any organisation, but many. Just as there is not a single definition of effectiveness, there are many.

Section	Topic	Comments
8.1	Introduction and Aims of Chapter	This section introduces the purpose of the chapter.
8.2	Summary of the Research Process	The research process is summarised by reiterating the purpose of each of the chapters and how the aims and objectives were met.
8.3	The 4D Theoretical Framework	The theoretical framework that demonstrates understanding is presented including theoretical integration.

<b>8.4</b>	The Core Category	This section will summarise and explicate the emergent core category.
<b>8.5</b>	The Contribution to Knowledge	An explanation of the multiple contributions to knowledge including; theoretical; methodological and practice.
<b>8.6</b>	Limitations and Future Work	The limitations of the research are discussed together with consideration of future work.
<b>8.7</b>	Chapter Summary	The chapter is summarised including the key points.

Table 8.1 Chapter Structure

## 8.2 Summary of the Research Process

The research attempted to produce a substantive theoretical framework that demonstrated understanding of the meaning of effectiveness to a particular social group over an extended period of time. This section describes the logic of the overall research process that supported the aims and objectives. It also summarises how each of the chapters represent this logical and iterative process.

Chapter one sets the initial context, for the research, as it was understood at the outset of the research process and also states the research aims and objectives. The aim of the research was to produce a theoretical framework that demonstrates understanding of the concept of organisational effectiveness in Higher Education Institutions, through the perceptions of the key stakeholders involved. Another supplementary, but equally important aim, was to improve the 'situation' of the case study through the action research process.

The purpose of chapter two was to provide a brief critical appraisal of the extant literature with regard to Organisational Effectiveness, Organisational Performance, Organisational Development and Change and Projects as intervention mechanisms. The primary purpose of the literature review was also to contextualise the study for the researcher and reader (Dunne 2011). The key themes of this knowledge domain are identified and appraised to provide the researcher with “theoretical sensitivity” (Charmaz 2006 p 135). The intention was not to provide a comprehensive literature review due to the interpretive and emergent nature of the research. The intention of the research was to report the findings, interpretations and understanding of the researcher and not be influenced by extant literature and authors (Charmaz 2006).

Chapters three provides detailed accounts of the overall research approach that were undertaken to achieve the aims and objectives. This includes an account of the grounded theory and action research methods used.

Chapter four provides a narrative account of the action undertaken over the period of the study. These are described as interventions and the intention was to improve the current situation for the social actors involved. This chapter also contains separate analytical reflections that were made by the researcher as the situation proceeded, these were called “reflective pauses” and the intention was to indicate to the reader the thought processes of the researcher separately from the account of the interventions undertaken. This explicitly demonstrates the reflective nature of the action research process (Coghlan and Brannick 2014); (Coghlan and Brannick, 2014, p.170).

Chapters five and six describe the data collection and analysis techniques undertaken including initial and axial coding and present details of the results for the reader. Chapter five provides a sensitising conceptual framework for further investigation in chapter six and the results of that are presented in chapter seven in the form of a theoretical framework; the 4Ds framework.

Chapter seven presents the theoretical framework that demonstrates understanding of the problem situation following the longitudinal data collection and analysis. The process is described in diagrammatic form below, Figure 8.1, for understanding. The diagram only indicates one action cycle and two thesis cycles. This is only for concise presentation both in the diagram and in the thesis. In reality there were several iterations of action and reflection over a five-year period, with some cycles being longer than others.

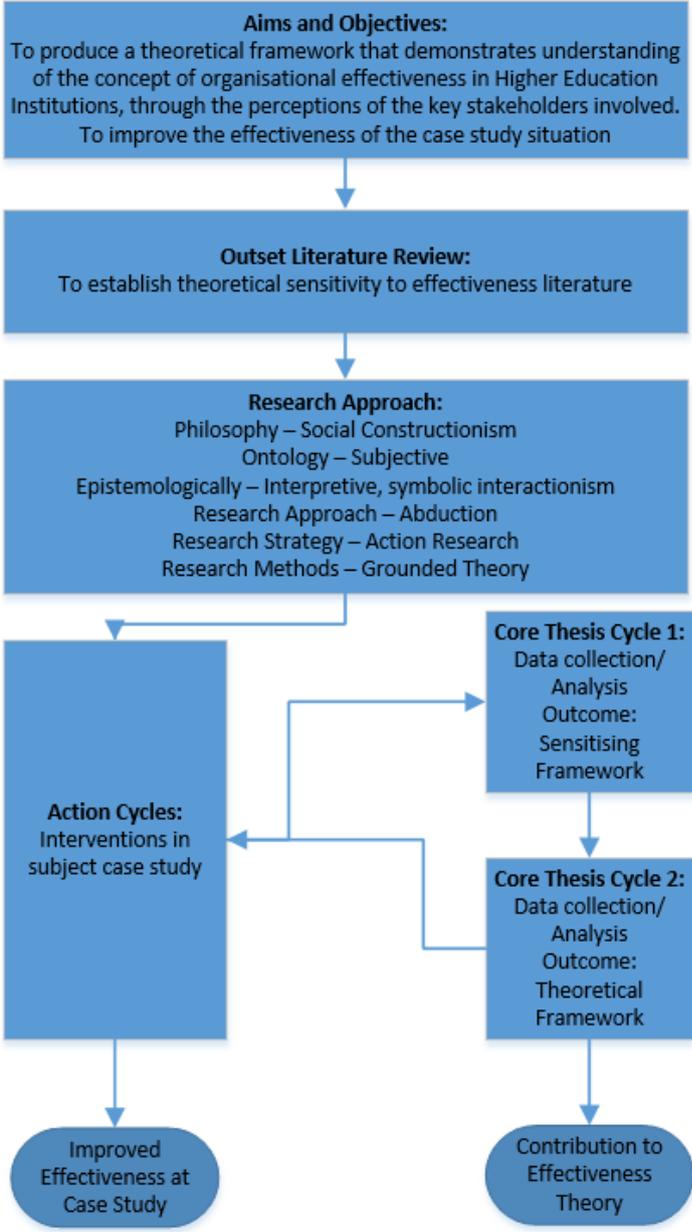


Figure 8.1 Research Process Diagram Showing Dual Purpose: Action and Research

### 8.2.1 Research Aim and Objectives

The aim of the research was to produce a theoretical framework that demonstrates understanding of the concept of organisational effectiveness in Higher Education Institutions, through the perceptions of the key stakeholders involved. A series of objectives were also produced to enable successful completion of the research project. The table below indicates how and where in the thesis the objectives were met.

Research Objective	Thesis Chapter	Comments
1. To increase theoretical sensitivity to the extant theories of organisational effectiveness	Chapter 1 and 2	Chapter 1 describes the context of the research including an awareness of policy level implications for the study. Chapter 2 reviews the extant literature to enable familiarity with the key themes.
2. To investigate and explore, organisational effectiveness through the participants' perspectives of a period of significant change in UK Higher Education	Chapter 3, 4, 5 and 6	Chapter 3 describes the overall research approach including the data collection and analysis techniques used. Chapters 4, 5 and 6 describe the action undertaken by the researcher and provide descriptions of the two analysis phases.
3. To improve the current situation within the case	Chapter 4	Chapter 4 describes the interventions that were

study		introduced during, and as a consequence of, the action research project.
4. To develop an interpretive, grounded theoretical conceptual framework to support understanding of effectiveness in the subject organisation.	Chapters 7 and 8	Chapter 7 and 8 presents the theoretical framework that demonstrates understanding of the process.

Table 8.2 Achievement of Objectives

The research objectives and how they were achieved are summarised and explained below:

Research Objective 1: To undertake an initial outset literature review to increase theoretical sensitivity to extant theories.

The first objective was achieved through an outset literature review and the key finding was that there are different forms of organisational effectiveness including; goal based, systems based and administrative effectiveness. The most pertinent finding was that multiple interpretations of effectiveness make the search for a singular definition worthless (Simon, 1997). This had a fundamental impact on the research process as the aim could not be to find *the* answer as it does not exist. Instead the aim was to improve the situation and enable multiple perceptions of effectiveness to co-exist.

Research Objective 2: To investigate and explore, organisational effectiveness through the participants' perspectives of a period of significant change in UK Higher Education.

This objective was achieved through the research mechanism of participant observation. The method of exploration used, in this case, was participant

observation and the particular type was participant-as-observer (Saunders *et al.* 2012, p.345). This enabled the initial exploratory phase 1 of the research subject to take place. There are various types of data that emerge from participant observation, such as, primary observations including data recorded at the point of observation and then recorded in the researcher's journal. There were also secondary observations, which are the researcher's interpretations of an event or conversation. These secondary observations also form part of the analytical process.

The data was collected using the observational techniques described and recorded in journals as diagrams and field notes (Patton 1990a). The analysis involved analytical memo writing (Charmaz 2006 p 47) and subsequent initial coding. The sensitising framework can be seen in chapter 5 and it formed the basis for the achievement of the next objective.

The sensitising framework was used to influence the data collection in core thesis cycle 2. Just as in core thesis cycle 1, the access to the social group was also through the means of overt observation and participant as observer. Field notes, memos and diagrams were also used as data collection and analysis tools. In addition to the continuing observations a schedule of interviews was undertaken. Those interviewed were chosen in accordance with the principles of theoretical sampling. Decisions as to what data to collect are governed by the initial analysis of the emergent data into the sensitising framework and these categories are explicated during the theoretical sampling process (Charmaz 2006, Birks and Mills 2011). It could be likened to a detective following clues to solve a particular crime, it is a trail to follow. This infers that it is a navigation tool that aids the researcher during the journey of interpretation and understanding. Theoretical sampling should not be confused with sampling within scientific research; it is not selecting a sample that statistically best represents a group (Charmaz 2006) it is about finding as much as possible about the categories created during the initial coding phase. The purpose is not to produce generalisability (in theory) but a clearly defined and particular theoretical representation of the case study context (Charmaz 2006, p.101).

Within this project the journal and observational data was coded using a form of grounded theory advocated by (Charmaz 2006) to identify concepts and then categories. A concept “refers to labels given to discrete phenomena...the value of concepts is determined by their utility...one criterion for deciding if a concept is useful is that it will typically be found frequently and members of the organisation under study will recognise it” (Bryman and Bell 2007, p.587). “A category is a concept that has been elaborated so that it is regarded as representing real world phenomena” (Bryman and Bell 2007, p.587). The process is to “generate theory through data rather than prior hypothesis” (Silverman 2011, p.73).

The first phase of coding, referred to as Core Thesis Cycle 1, and therefore the development of a substantive theory, is initial coding. This process requires close reading of the data and uses strategies, such as line by line coding, this attention to specific detail and not the whole prevent the researcher from using theoretical sensitivity when cognitively processing the data (Charmaz 2000). This is often referred to as taking the data apart or “fracturing” the data (Glaser and Strauss, 1967 cited in (Birks and Mills 2011, p.95)). This research project used transcribed field notes of observations and journal items for the initial coding process. This initial phase is critical as it starts the journey of theory development, however, the developed categories are considered conditional. They are conditional on the requirement of remaining open to the data and also to “other analytical properties” (Charmaz 2006, p.48).

The size of the bits of data for analysis at this stage can vary from words to lines to paragraphs but the researcher must be able to extract theoretical categories. The resultant codes, concepts and categories provide the point of departure for the developing theory.

The second phase of data analysis is referred to as Core Thesis Cycle 2 and if initial coding takes the data apart, this process puts it back together again in a more connected, conceptual and abstract way. Axial coding is

predominantly about making connections; it is about relationships between categories (Charmaz 2006). This will also be carried out during the initial or open coding phases so the boundaries are not fixed (Corbin and Strauss 2008). It is the process of relating concepts to each other and trying to make connections explicit. (Corbin & Strauss, 2008 p103) call this “theoretical integration”. In order to achieve this integration comparative methods are used to further enhance the development of theory by identifying to the connections between categories and the properties and dimensions contained therein. This process is not necessarily sequential it can take place at the same time as open coding as the researcher is often making connections between categories and formulating tentative relationships (Corbin and Strauss 2008, p.60). This process was carried out using an analytical memo pro forma that are contained in Appendix D. These memos were a critical part of the axial coding process.

Research Objective 3: To improve the current situation within the case study  
This objective was achieved through the interventions undertaken during the research process these are recorded in chapter 6 of the thesis. Chapter 6 presents a narrative account of the interventions undertaken during the period of the action research project including some analysis in the form of reflections carried out by the researcher. It is an historical account of the action taken during entire duration of the action research project retold in a neutral form to enable the reader to judge the interpretations and the future claims for knowledge (Coghlan and Brannick, 2014).

Research Objective 4: To create a theoretical, conceptual framework to support understanding of effectiveness in the subject organisation (HEI)  
This objective was achieved as a culmination of all the research work undertaken over a period of six years. It is presented fully in chapter 9 and presented in both concise and diagrammatic form below. The 4-Ds framework was used to represent the emergent data and analytical process that led to understanding. The framework was supported with extant literature in accordance with the notion of “theoretical playfulness” within

grounded theory and the key themes are summarised below for clarity (Charmaz 2006 p 135).

The above paragraphs demonstrate that the research aims were achieved in a logical and coherent way through the successful completion of the research objectives. The next section demonstrates how the research problem is better understood as a result of this process.

### **8.3 The Theoretical Framework**

The key conceptual findings of the research are described in the diagram below. These concepts represent the theoretical interpretation of the perception of effectiveness within the case study over the period of the study.

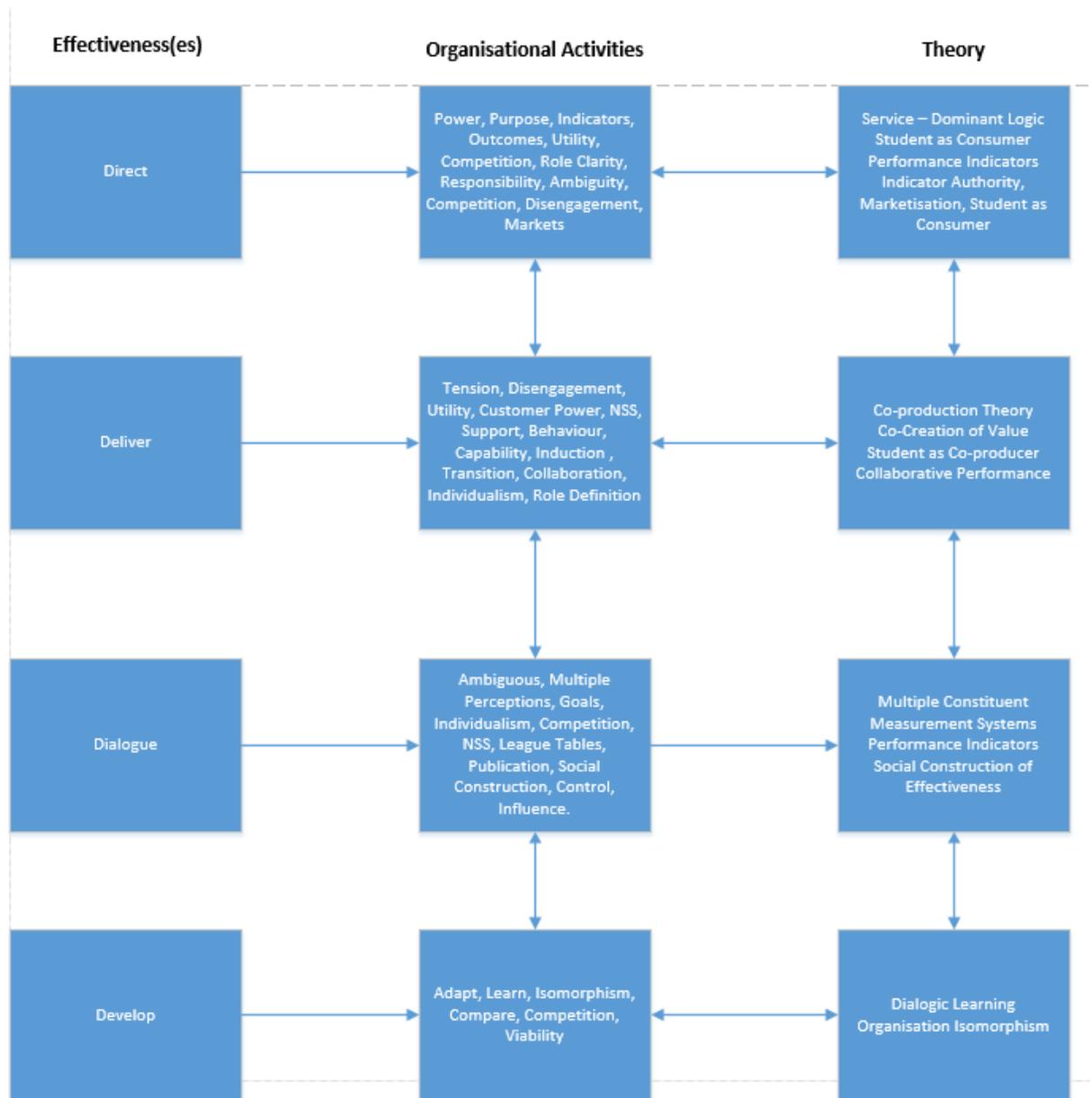


Figure 8.2 The Explanatory 4Ds Framework and the Relationship with Organisational Activity and Theory.

Figure 8.3 below demonstrates the cyclical nature of the 4Ds framework. The policy provides the direction for the organisation which is interpreted and used internally. This direction provides affirmation of the required behaviours of the actors involved, from those in authority. The behaviours are influenced by the dialogue that includes the organisations construction of the meaning of the given direction. The organisation and policy makers should then learn and develop from the dialogue.

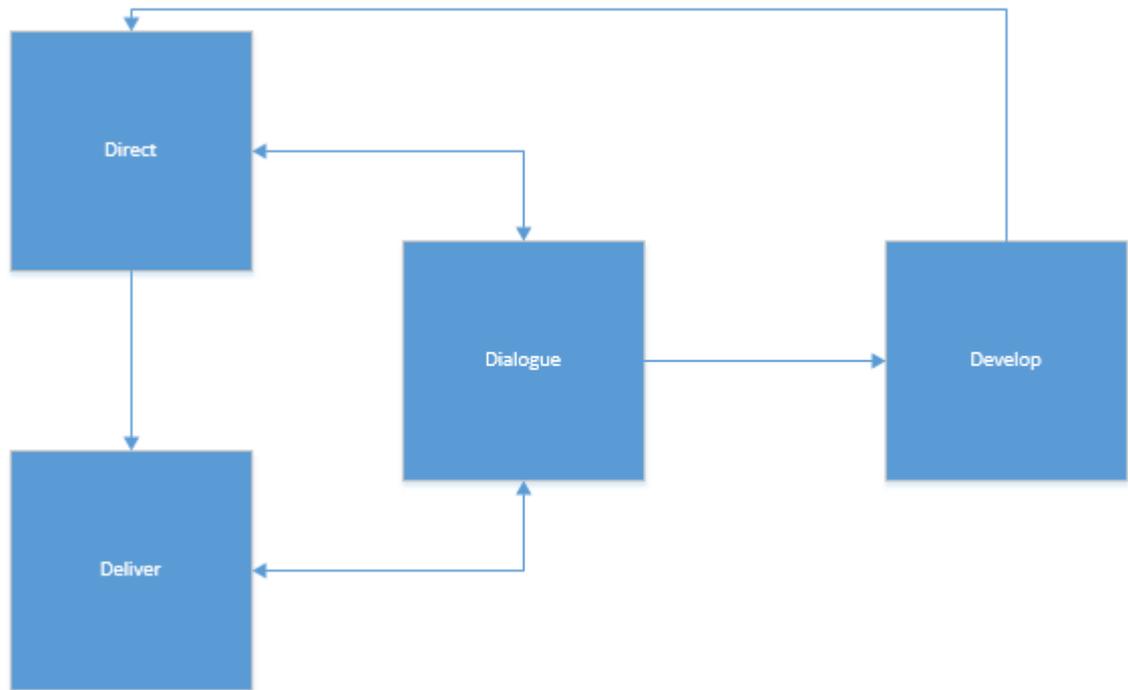


Figure 8.3 The 4Ds Framework as Process.

### 8.3.1 Direct

It is important to note that the above framework occurs within a context and that context exerts a great influence at the lower levels of the system. There are some actors who have greater influence and power, such as the UK Government through bodies such as HEFCE and QAA. Their influence is exerted through the control of finances, particularly research funding through the Research Excellence Framework (REF), granted to Universities. The QAA oversee the quality and consistency of higher education institutions and they achieve this through the use of the provision of outcomes. These are recorded as what a student should be expected to be able to do at the end of the various levels and therefore a degree (level 6) or other qualifications, such as a Masters degree (level 7) or PhD (level 8). These performance indicators are interpreted within organisations and are made manifest in the form of learning outcomes that should be explicit and therefore measurable.

The funding bodies require transparency to ensure that public expenditure, in the form of grants to universities are achieving the required outcomes. The funders achieve this by making the universities, who receive funding, accountable to them through the use of performance indicators. The provision of this information is a condition of the grant process. The information is collected and made public by such bodies as HEFCE and Unistats and HESA. These policy changes have altered the historical relationships between universities and students and subsequently university managers and academic (and other) members of staff. These mechanisms are symptomatic of the “outside in” mode of government policy discussed by (Shattock 2006, p.135). Shattock focused on the argument that the policy suggests marketization and choice for students but paradoxically results in greater control due to the authority of the indicators they create (Espeland and Sauder 2007); (Jacobs and Manzi 2006) and (de Waal 2003).

The UK Government has also allocated power and influence to the student, via the mechanism of choice. This was expressed in the Browne Report (2012) in the form of the provision of a student loan to the individual students. For the higher education system to work as a quasi-economic market, with the student as a consumer, there is a requirement for information to enable a full and informed choice. The Government provides the information through mechanisms, such as, the National Student Survey and supplemental information through Unistats. This information is openly available and the Unistats information is readily available via a link on the UCAS web page. UCAS is the on line student admissions system run on behalf of the university sector.

The information is available as a comparison tool, so that students can compare the different universities they are interested in. It is this publication and subsequent externalisation that changes the benign intent and perception of the information and indicators as it is at this point that it becomes competitive. The performance data now relates to the future success and viability of the organisation.

The performance indicators have been granted a form of quasi authority of their own (Jacobs and Manzi 2006) particularly by managers seeking to exert a form of control over academic staff and students to seek improvement.

Some universities have recognised the importance of this information as it becomes more about marketing and enhancing the reputation rather than the student experience of the organisation (O'Neil and Palmer 2004). Some of the information that is available is subjective and related to student perceptions of their experience, for example, the National Student Survey, run by IPSOS Mori on behalf of HEFCE and other national funding bodies. Other information is objective, for example, the number of contact hours, assessment types, cost of accommodation and graduate employment prospects in the form of data taken from the Destination of Leavers from Higher Education (DLHE).

Due to the importance of the performance data in terms of organisational viability little attention is given, within the subject organisation, to the input of the students. A further theory used to respond to this emergent data as an extension of the service dominant (SD) theory was co-production. SD logic emphasises the role of the customer, in this scenario the student, in the value creating processes. The main tenet of service dominant logic, as described by, (Vargo *et al.* 2008 p, 146) is that value is “in use” rather than “in exchange” as would be with goods dominant logic. The value of the service of ‘education’ may not be achieved until some point in the future, when the student uses the outcomes of their educational experience, for example, during assessment or in the workplace.

Expectations and clarity of role are very important in such an environment, students will have expectations of their experience, which is derived from the comparison of their expectations and their perception of their experience (Voss *et al.* 2007); (Kotze and du Plessis 2003).

Service dominant logic enables individuals to extract value from the process in accordance with their own expectations and goals. This is in accordance

with the multiple constituency concept, co-production and multiple perspective performance indicators and performance management systems.

However, the individual extraction and perception of value may be in stark contrast with the organisations need to perform well on their indicators to enable survival of individual programmes and universities themselves. This leads to greater pressure to perform on the academic institutions at programme and modular levels; this may exceed the individual student and staff capability or requirement. This was evident in the data that demonstrated the anxiety that both staff and students experienced and this led to subsequent disengagement with the process. Perhaps ironically the indicators have become more important than the individual they were created to assist. We make the erroneous assumption that every student is capable of achieving excellence. This has been observed in the case study through the use of institutional indicators that determine that programmes should have greater than 80% 2:1 degree awards.

### **8.3.2 Deliver**

The education and learning process is a co-production process that requires input and contribution from several actors. The public policy information does not account for the efforts of the student other than as through implied, proxy indicators, for example, the entry requirements imply the level of previous effort or intellect and the DLHE results may determine implicitly the efforts of the student during the course. In order to secure a graduate position, employers ordinarily require a minimum of a 2:1 or above grade.

Case study evidence suggests that the student centred policy results in a short sighted approach that is more concerned with the indicators that relate to accountability than to the long term benefits of learning (Ebrahim 2005). This results, potentially, in all students becoming equal in their perceived ability, this is a form of isomorphism (Oliver 1988); (DiMaggio and Powell 1983).

There is no information nor indicators that record the level of engagement nor effort required by the students. This is only implied, again, by the provision of information regarding the type and level of assessment and the marks the students achieve. This reinforces the outcome based educational approach that is required to inform and be accountable to the funding and quality assurance bodies. The use of co-production allows for the recognition of the students, and other stakeholders, role in the collaborative process of learning. The pertinent issue here relates to which party is under the greater pressure to perform the student looking for employment or the members of the organisation ensuring that their sub-unit survives.

However, the organisation must ensure that the “value proposition” for learning encounters exists and they must provide the opportunity for students to learn to contribute to the value process (Payne *et al.* 2008). This requires that encounters are designed in conjunction with students as co-creators of their education not just external arbiters of value! The encounters should be designed in such a way that allows multiple actors to co-create value; this could involve the use of innovative technologies; greater workshop support or peer to peer learning sessions. Disappointingly, the tension is so great on staff and students alike that there is a reluctance to take risks. The result is a higher education system that may be improving on paper but the institutions are in danger of becoming homogeneous monoliths.

The students must be provided with clear expectations of the required level of performance and they must be prepared, by the universities, for their roles and therefore regarded as partial employees or co-producers and therefore managed as such (Kotze and du Plessis 2003); (Mills and Morris 1986).

The use of the co-producer metaphor changed the dialogue and discourse within the subject organisation as an attempt to redress the power asymmetry that had developed as a result of the student as consumer metaphor. There should always be alternative discourse as logical opposition to those with power.

### 8.3.3 Dialogue

The frame of reference used in the use of outcome based approaches to accountability are the achievement of explicit and measurable goals or objectives. Even models that use multiple perspectives imply that effectiveness can be determined but it is not necessarily singular it is very often plural. However, the underlying ideal is that effectiveness is objective and can therefore be determined Herman and Renz (1999). This is the case in most large, complex organisations such as universities.

The danger with using outcome based indicators is that the organisations effectiveness is judged on individual or plural indicators that are determined by others. There are a number of influences on universities as demonstrated in Figure 9.9 (Atkinson *et al.* 2008) and (Zammuto 1984). Currently the dominant, powerful stakeholder is the student body. Unfortunately, this results in the reduction of a complex organisation and its processes to singular measures. In the case of universities this is currently the National Student Survey and in particular a single question; question 22: "Overall, I am satisfied with the quality of my course".

The issue is whether outcome indicators can be used to demonstrate causality. Within the subject organisation three programmes received a satisfaction rate of 100%, for question 22, this year on the NSS. However, not one of the programme leaders could point to one or a collection of factors that could be the direct or singular cause of this. However, they could argue that it was an overall focus on enhancement and attention to students that led to the improvement. The programmes have been making great enhancement efforts for the last number of years. Two of the three programmes were placed on report last year for their scores being below the university average!

There should be recognition that there are multiple perceptions of effectiveness and what is required is not a singular response but a systemic and systematic process of, all stakeholders who seek to extract value,

becoming better. It is the systems organisations have in place that enable the organisation to become better. These systems should remain constant and therefore endure; the constituents and their perceptions of value and effectiveness will change over time.

As we have seen performance indicators are required at high level by the funding and overseeing agencies of the UK government as part of the contractual agreement between them and the universities.

The use of performance indicators within the organisation has a profound effect on the stakeholders. It causes alteration of behaviour to focus on results rather than process and the process of education and learning is fundamental to the future development of an individual.

During the observation at the subject case study it was indicators that caused the most tension and had the largest impact on performance, both positive and negative. When considering this notion (Espeland and Sauder 2007 p 3) refer to this impact as 'reactivity' this is related to the response of actors during ethnographic studies and how being studied modifies their behaviour to a point that it is no longer a true reflection of their intention or potentially their values.

Performance indicators are part of the broader performance management system, a performance management system is used to determine the appropriateness of actions taken in the pursuit of goals and to enable improvement through development, an organisation cannot have measurement without management; there is a responsibility to take responsibility to develop and transform the stakeholders involved in the co-production process.

We have also seen collaborative forms of performance require collaborative management and this requires the provision of performance data to all the stakeholders who require it (Busi and Bititci 2006). The performance of the university at the operational level requires performance of a number of

stakeholders, one of the primary stakeholders is the students themselves. So a performance management system that allows constituents to extract personally valuable and timely performance data is critical. This is also true of the units of the organisation. These business units should be able to extract developmental data that would help them improve their performance.

An evolutionary perspective of effectiveness (Zammuto 1984) would allow an organisation to satisfy complex criteria. The goal of the organisation, using this perspective, is to get better and not attempt to be perfect to all. It is about the process of developing towards effectiveness, not the outputs. The evolutionary perspective or personal transformation would be appropriate for individual stakeholders as well. This leads logically to the next concept in the 4D framework, develop.

#### **8.3.4 Develop**

It is central to the multiple constituency approach that the organisation is fluid, adaptive and able to respond to changing demands. This requires an organisation that is able to learn in order to maintain legitimacy and remain viable. This was not a central concern of the organisational actors but it is a hypothetical requirement determined by the researcher as a result of observations and theoretical integration.

A learning organisation is defined as “one that continually improves by rapidly creating and refining the capabilities for future success” and it is this learning and the application of the outcomes that produce improved performance (Wick and León 1995 p 299). The various stakeholders of the organisation should be provided with their own particular ‘windows’ on performance thereby enabling multiple social constructions of effectiveness to take place at any given time (Campbell and Lambright 2016). It is important that the multiple constituents are provided with correct and pertinent data through an appropriate window; which may be mirrored at times, reflecting their own performance!

Performance enhancement rather than management requires a model 2 approach to learning (Argyris 1995) with confident, capable contributors in a supportive and managed structure that enables change and improvement through dialogue.

#### **8.4 The Emergent Core Category**

Performance indicators have a dual effect on organisations, both positive and negative; they can encourage improvement by causing responsiveness to feedback and they provide data for remote consideration of accountability and transparency. If used appropriately they are a force for positive and transformational development. However, if used inappropriately they can become toxic and cause the slow erosion of values, principles and the erosion of trust between social actors. Whichever way they are interpreted they carry the weight of authority through policy, positional power within organisations and future viability through student choice (Espeland and Sauder 2007); (Jacobs and Manzi 2006) and (de Waal 2003). The vocabulary within the subject organisation changed between managers and academic staff and between students and staff. The concept of process was lost to a focus on results and the utility of the process and the immediacy of results (Ebrahim 2005). The focus on indicators also causes tension amongst stakeholders to the point of disengagement, by certain stakeholders, from the process. These stakeholders hold strongly with the collegial values of the historic processes and policies and others found the process too challenging and demanding. Ironically, subject university is also currently experiencing issues with the retention of students!

The indicators cause a focus on results and outputs only and this causes negative and disruptive patterns of behaviour to emerge. The reason for this is that focussing on the processes that should enable improved outputs does not occur within a sufficiently quick timescale. Which of these perspectives that prevails is determined by the social construction of the meaning of indicators within the organisation.

The perception of organisational effectiveness is socially constructed by the actors within the organisation through interaction with the symbols of the organisation and each other (Campbell 2000). The work by Campbell (ibid) is reflective of the ontological position of this research.

Campbell uses the work of Latour (1993) to express the concepts that aid the actors' construction of meaning; material things such as module handbooks, assessments and other objects; social construction, related to the dialogue within an organisation. This element is significant to this research as the internal dialogue was fundamentally altered by the adoption of an output based, performance indicator system, the final concept relates to power and authority. Again the language associated with this concept is altered to focus on outputs and the authority rests with the indicators, the students and the policy makers.

The importance of the social construction of the ephemeral meaning of the effectiveness of an organisation relies on the social construction of the meaning amongst all social actors. This means that organisations should consider the importance of the discourse including the language and objects that convey meaning.

The future may consist of greater consideration of the language and vocabulary of the organisation found in the documentation and the daily discourse amongst all stakeholders. The image and reputation of the organisation will need to be managed more effectively to control the social construction of the perception of effectiveness. A systematic, organisational approach to this may enable a more positive and transformational meaning of effectiveness to emerge.

## **8.5 Contribution to Knowledge**

### **8.5.1 Contribution to Theory**

This research has contributed to theory through the production of an interpretive, substantive framework that was used to articulate understanding of the context of a university responding to changing policy demands. The research synthesised different theories that were deemed appropriate in response to the emergent data and the action taken to improve the particular situation.

The research identifies that there are four categories that are helpful in explicating the particular understanding of the context. These four categories are; Direct; Deliver; Dialogue and Develop. The 4D framework uses a combination of established theories in a novel and uniquely interpretive way to explicate, arrange and communicate the emergent data from the case study (Charmaz 2006). This framework could be used by those in similar co-production environments to determine the important factors to attend to when facing changes in the authority and power of co-producers.

The research extended the use of theories of service–dominant logic into the higher education domain and logically from this, the theory of co-production and co-creation of value was used in the case study thereby extending the descriptive accounts found in (Alistair McCulloch 2009) and (Kotzé and Plessis 2003). The work demonstrated the importance of high level policy and the necessity to support the intended outcomes of collaborative working, which is necessary in an higher education environment. It extends the theory of co-production by providing empirical evidence of consideration of role clarity and capability in particular (Kotze and du Plessis 2003) when considering the delivery of a service. The research also reinforces the requirement to collaboratively identify and support the obtaining of value within the process, rather than enabling the consumer (student) to determine and extract value as posited by (Payne *et al.* 2008). This extends the work of (Cameron and Tschirhart 1992) by including consideration of stakeholder input into the performance of the organisation. The ability and requirement of the stakeholders to contribute is of paramount importance.

The concept that appeared to have the most impact was the introduction of indicators to enable transparency and accountability. The empirical evidence gathered demonstrated that relationships are altered due to the power and authority that indicators possess and adds to the literature in this area (Jacobs and Manzi 2006); (Espeland and Sauder 2007). The evidence also indicated that that the educational processes are potentially compromised through the standardisation of assessment criteria and the additional support provided to enable short term gain. This relates to extant theory on “accountability myopia” (Ebrahim 2005, p.56) and the theory of organisational isomorphism that describes organisations with the same indicators focus becoming the same or similar (Oliver 1988); (DiMaggio and Powell 1983).

The application of a pseudo collaborative performance management system, through the performance conversations with students was an attempt to provide them with real time personal performance data as part of a multi perspective performance system. This was also an attempt to control stakeholder performance in a context where the contributors’ efforts and results were historically outside that of the subject organisation. The research also promotes the use of a more supportive and developmental “performance enhancement” (Ford and Ford 1995) system and not a performance management system.

Effectiveness is a difficult concept to define in an abstract way and this work demonstrates that it is particular, contextual and socially constructed (Campbell 2000). The research shows that social actors will construct new meanings for organisations if they are provided with new symbols and associated vocabulary. These symbols are required to be reinforced by managers through performance management systems and in their dialogue too; these views quickly become the doctrine of the organisational members. But there are consequences of such dialogue, particularly around indicators; they will change the behaviour of the organisational members under the most pressure to achieve the results. In this case this is the students and the staff with responsibility for programmes. There will be a tendency toward overt

control, often seen as support, to the point where it becomes unclear who is contributing and obtaining the results.

Perhaps the traditional definitions of effectiveness, that belonged to a period of mechanistic, structured organisations, are no longer appropriate for organisations in which multiple and temporary relationships dominate. The definition of organisational effectiveness may have become more fluid and social due to the availability of information and perceptions communicated via the various forms of social media.

### 8.5.2 Contribution to Practice

The action research project resulted in the improvement of the processes of the subject organisation. These are seen in the inclusion of staff and student socialisation processes; the clarification of expectations and required capabilities for effective performance; the transition projects for students to improve their capacity to perform; individual performance conversations to improve personal dialogue around performance

The 4D framework could be used to provide clarity and focus for managers undertaking a change initiative within a co-production or co-creation of value organisational context. It would prove to be useful as a tool to identify the broad range of variables required to be addressed when adapting to initiate model 1 and model 2 type change (Argyris 1995). The table below demonstrates the practical impact of the action research project on the subject organisation. The table contains a timeline and description of the key interventions undertaken.

<b>Emergent Theme from Observations</b>	<b>Intervention (Narrative of Action Taken)</b>	<b>Date</b>
Staff Capability - improve	Researcher is appointed as Student Experience Enhancement Coordinator, a Principal Lecturer role.	2009

	<p>Staff Development on use of Gradecentre</p> <p>Identified poorly performing modules historically over 5 years and action undertaken.</p> <p>Production of the Student Experience Enhancement Project – to enable focus on enhancement of capability through identification of appropriate work packages.</p>	
<p>Performance Data – validity</p> <p>Staff Capability - improve</p>	<p><b>Five Year Trend Analysis of Module Appraisal Surveys</b> results communicated to staff to improve awareness of performance data and to enable reflection and action.</p> <p>Web 2.0 staff development to augment teaching materials, with information and communication technologies using, for example, Facebook and Twitter.</p> <p><b>Carpe Diem</b> staff development in conjunction with AEU to introduce online technologies and blended learning approach. Resulting in use of online tests both formative and summative.</p> <p>E-submission pilot within school, staff development undertaken on e-submission with Academic Enhancement Unit.</p> <p>PC Thinkpad tablet laptops purchased to improve e-submission process.</p>	2010

<p>Technology for improved effectiveness and efficiency</p> <p>Dialogue and feedback – early dialogue</p> <p>Student Transition and capability</p> <p>Staff Capability</p> <p>Clarity – time for what is important</p> <p>Distraction and control, service quality. Clarity – time for what is important.</p>	<p>Teaching capability Staff Development - Use of Classroom Voting Systems – 300 clickers purchased.</p> <p>Facebook Community created for new students. Early dialogue between students including monitoring by staff to determine pre induction issues.</p> <p><b>Year 1 transition/development handbooks</b> created using Technology and Engineering Faculty grant monies to improve transition of year 1 students.</p> <p>External observation of teaching staff. To determine baseline quality.</p> <p>Student Experience Enhancement Committee Meetings start in October 2010.</p> <p>Surgery hours were introduced. All academic staff were to include at least four hours of time in which they are free each week for students to drop in.</p>	
<p>Staff Capability – improve</p> <p>Control – normalisation of</p>	<p><b>Learning, Assessment and Feedback (LAF) workshop</b> – to challenge and change current approaches to teaching and assessment – framework for staff produced for use by staff when designing modules for New Academic Framework. 2 day event in conjunction with AEU.</p>	<p>2011</p>

behaviours.	Programme managers verified and validated new LAF strategies.	
Clarity – time for what is important. Socialisation.  Control – normalisation of behaviours. Expectations Management. Expectations management; Dialogue; Control and Normalisation of Behaviours	<b>New staff induction programme</b> – all new academic staff were given staff development in LAF strategy of BUE.  <b>Student Expectations management process</b> started, <b>Welcome Pack</b> sent out with Student Pack to communicate high expectations.  <b>Student Transition</b> project in week 1.	2012
Clarity – expectations; Dialogue; Control and Normalisation of Behaviours  Control and Normalisation of Behaviours	<b>Assessment and Feedback</b>  <b>Standardisation of marking criteria</b> to be included in Module Handbooks. Marking criteria to be more explicit in terms of content and process.  <b>Standard Feedback Sheets</b> – discussed and adopted with Programme Managers	2013
Accountability – individuals allocated responsibility for the NSS process.  Creating a positive appreciative	<b>Appointment as School National Student Survey (NSS) Champion.</b> Researcher role is made a university wide position.  <b>NSS Communication Strategy</b> – presentation and other materials provided to	2014

community. Consistent approach - Control and Normalisation of Behaviours	Programme Teams.	
Expectations management; Dialogue; Control and Normalisation of Behaviours; Socialisation. (First Person: Influence)	<b>Transition Projects</b> – adoption of the project University wide.	2015
Dialogue; Control and Normalisation of Behaviours. (First Person: Influence)	<b>Personal Development Planning</b> – partial adoption of the project University wide	2015
Clarity, Expectations and Co-Production. (First Person: Influence)	<b>Curriculum Enhancement Research Project</b> Researcher took part as a researcher in a cross university curriculum enhancement co- production research project that included representative programmes from all four Faculties in the University.	2015

Table 8.3 Timeline and Description of Interventions

### 8.5.3 Contribution to Methodology

The use of action research and grounded theory provided the research with a solid analytical and processual foundation to achieve change within the subject organisation. The changes made were embedded within emergent data and the sequential and logical nature of action research enables interventions to take place as they had the authority of empirical data.

(Eden and Huxham 1996, p.80) posit the significance of the “uniquely interlocking set of theories from many disciplines that make the body of theory powerful and useful”. This is what the combination of action research, grounded theory and emergent literature provided within this work.

This study provides a timely study of the functioning of a contemporary university within an output controlled, accountable and information intensive organisational context.

### **8.6 Limitations and Further Study**

The research focused on a particular case study and its strength lies in the rich data that was extracted from the case. However, all research has limitations and this work is no exception as the use of a singular case study might be perceived as a weakness. However, a singular case study enables richer, deeper and more specific findings and data to work with thereby improving the quality and verifiability of the conclusions.

The research produced a particular construction, of the meaning of effectiveness that demonstrates understanding of this particular case. It would be interesting to reproduce the research in another university of a different type. For example, a more research intensive, traditional university would provide a good comparison to determine if the externalisation of performance data has the same detrimental effect on their reputation management. Other departments within the subject university would make good comparative case studies to determine if the subject is a singular outlier within the organisation.

It would also be interesting, and of theoretical value, to reproduce this research in other organisational contexts, for example public authorities, voluntary and private organisations. These would provide an interesting comparative study that could uncover the impact of indicators on alternative forms of social organisations.

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