Constraints and enablements on quality improvement in higher education.

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By

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ABSTRACT

This study contributes to the literature on quality improvement in higher education by examining the structural, cultural and agential constraints and enablements on a quality process at a university in South Africa. It examined four cases and developed an understanding of the complex interaction of structure, culture and agency and the mechanisms that enable or constrain quality improvement in higher education.

The study drew on the literature on higher education quality for the theoretical basis for what is known contributes to the way in which quality assurance and improvement is implemented and its impact on the higher education context. Critical Realism provided the ontological framework and conceptual tools to understand and explore the complex social world within which the quality process took place. The literature on the morphogenetic approach provided the analytical framework for the data analysis and findings.

The data consisted of a set of documents from a quality process that took place over a five-year period. The data analysis revealed that different departmental contexts impact on how mechanisms are activated. Each school context shapes the way in which people engage with the review process and consequently, processes and procedures are mediated in each context. This research therefore adds to the understanding of the way in which quality processes take place at a micro-level within an institutional context and informs the approach to quality improvement more broadly, nationally and internationally.

The research contributes to the knowledge that will inform planning, policies and practices in quality improvement processes in higher education and the findings identify a number of factors (mechanisms) that should inform the way in which a quality process is facilitated, will enable effective self-evaluation and review processes, and consequently are more likely to lead to quality improvement.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

AAB	Academic Affairs Board
AAQB	Academic Affairs and Quality Board
CHE	Council for Higher Education
CQC	College Quality Committee
CS	Culture/Structure
DVC	Deputy Vice Chancellor
FQC	Faculty Quality Committee
GAFC	Governance and Academic Freedom Committee
HE	Higher Education
HEQC	Higher Education Quality Committee
HEQSF	Higher Education Qualification Sub Framework
HoS	Head of School
IAP	Institutional Academic Portfolio
MM	Morphogenetic / static Model
NCHE	National Committee on Higher Education
NEPI	National Education Policy Initiative
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NPO	Non-Project Organisation
NWG	National Working Group
PG	Postgraduate
PR	Panel Report
QA	Quality Assurance
QA	Quality Assurance Unit at University of Natal (pre-merger)
QI	Quality Improvement
QPA	Quality Promotion and Assurance Unit UKZN (post-merger)
QPU	Quality Promotion Unit at University Durban-Westville (pre-merger)
RG	Reference Group
SAHE	South African Higher Education
SAQA	South African Quality Authority
SER	Self-Evaluation Report
SR	School Review
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics
ToR	Terms of Reference
UDW	University of Durban Westville (pre-merger)
UKZN	University if KwaZulu Natal (post-merger)
UN	University of Natal (pre-merger)
UTLC	University Teaching and Learning Committee

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Chapter 1
Introduction

Since the 1980s the issue of quality in higher education has come under increasing scrutiny and most countries have developed and implemented national policies and systems with the stated aim of assuring and improving quality in the sector (Harvey 2005; Shah, 2013). Increased interest and investment in quality related activities has been ascribed to a range of factors including the changing needs of the increasing numbers of students accessing higher education, the growth and diversification of the sector, increasing demand for accountability in the way in which the sector is funded and managed, the influence of neoliberalism and the commodification of higher education outputs and students, and globalisation and the increasing mobility of higher education offerings and students.

In response to national developments and external quality assurance systems with an emphasis on university accountability, institutions have implemented policies and procedures to assure and improve internal quality. Whilst such regimes were first established in developed countries there has been a significant growth more recently in developing countries[1] (Shah, Nair & Wilson, 2011; Singh & Lange, 2007). Institutions have invested significant time, capacity and resources in implementing these processes.

Despite quality always having been a concern in the higher education (HE) sector there isn't agreement about what it means, how it should be measured, and how it can be enhanced (Elassy, 2015; Harvey & Williams, 2010; Vroeijenstijn, 1995; Wittek & Kvernbekk, 2011). As an area of practice or field of study it is vast and complex. The idea of quality and the need for and nature of quality assurance in HE is controversial and contested internationally. The only agreement seems to be that quality is desirable and the pursuit of quality necessary.

[1] The use of the terms “developed” and “developing” is widespread in the analysis and categorization of countries and their economies, though it is variably defined and controversial. See Khokhar, T. & Serajuddin, U. (2015, November 16). Should we continue to use the term “developing world”? Retrieved from: http://blogs.worldbank.org/opendata/should-we-continue-use-term-developing-world.

1.1 Rationale and motivation for the study

When I embarked on this research project I was working in a unit responsible for managing a range of quality assurance and improvement processes in a university. The choice of the area and focus of this research was motivated by issues encountered in my daily practice. The choice of the institution as the site of study was based on my location as a quality consultant in the institution and the interest I had in researching an aspect of my practice in a way that has the possibility to transform that practice and the institution more broadly. An internal quality process, School[2] Reviews, was chosen as the focus of study because as a quality process it was embedded and implemented across the institution and it overtly positioned itself as a quality *improvement* process as opposed to a quality assurance system which monitors and ensures compliance with regulatory policies and frameworks. The overall purpose of the School Reviews was stated thus: "to provide peer recommendations with respect to improving quality in all aspects of the School's functioning" (UKZN, 2004b, p. 6). I chose the process of School Reviews which, as a well-established quality process with a clearly stated purpose, would give me the opportunity to add to knowledge in the field and inform practice in my own institution.

As a quality consultant I was responsible for facilitating the School Reviews process. I had co-ordinated a number of such processes. As a senior member of the unit I had also mentored and supported new members of the team in co-ordinating the School Reviews process. It was my professional judgement that the School Reviews process was a valuable way in which to engage the members of a school in a process that provided an opportunity for them to reflect on their practice, to receive feedback and recommendations from peers on possible ways in which to improve their practice, and to implement changes that would ultimately improve the teaching and learning experience of our students. However, my experience was that the process unfolded differently in each school and consequently, the possibility for improvement was constrained or enabled by the way in which the review took place. Despite policies and procedures that were put in place to structure such processes, it was clear that they were not interpreted and implemented consistently across the institution. Some

[2] As will be explained in Chapter Two schools were either single discipline or a cluster of cognate disciplines and were headed by a Head of School (HoS).

staff members engaged enthusiastically, others overtly or passively resisted the intervention, and many seemed to participate with minimal compliance. Whilst the institution had sound policies and procedures (inherited from its merger institutions as will be explained in Chapter Two) and a stated commitment to quality improvement, the efficacy of these structures depended on a number of other mechanisms which conditioned the process.

The research was carried out during the first seven years of the institution which was formed as a result of a merger, and so it was a period of major change and development which created a particular context within which the reviews took place. Whilst many of these changes mirrored those taking place in HE in South Africa (SA) and around the world, the changes as a consequence of the merger created a particular context within which the reviews took place. The focus on this period of the institution's history and the reviews that were implemented during this time added a particular dimension that would enrich the research. Following the first democratic election held in South Africa in 1994 post the Apartheid era, several policies and legislation were introduced in the HE sector as part of the reconstruction and development of the country. The national system of quality assurance which was a key driver in this transformation project was launched in 2004.

My experience of facilitating a number of reviews and ongoing professional reflection on the process with my colleagues meant that I had some strong ideas about the possible underlying factors or mechanisms that either enable or constrain the review process. I was motivated to understand what mechanisms influenced how the School Reviews process took place. As a practitioner in the field of quality, I saw this research as both a challenge and an opportunity. I was so immersed in getting the job done that I had not taken a step back to theorise my practice.

I was therefore motivated to carry out the research in order to have a more rigorous and valid basis to change my practice and to influence the approach of the unit in which I worked. I was also motivated by the possibility that various "corporate agents[3]" in the institution may use the research as an opportunity to reflect on what is happening

[3] Here the term "corporate agents" is used in its everyday definition namely people employed in a position of responsibility in an organisation or corporation. The term is unpacked in more detail in Chapter Four.

in the institution, their own actions and to inform further decisions and actions in the institution. My insider perspective on the institution and my involvement in the School Reviews process gave me knowledge and insight not available to an outsider but also made it possible that I may not recognise issues or might misinterpret them.

I subsequently resigned from the institution and the data analysis was carried out from a position where I was no longer immersed in the day-to-day life of the institution. The distance gave me a perspective on my own frustrations and personal investment in a particular view of the quality project and I could approach the research from a more objective perspective. This research therefore took up the challenge inherent in the claim made by Trowler (2012) that “theory does not explain the world, rather the world is constructed and reconstructed through theory” and to consider what has been the impact of the under-theorisation of quality related work (p. 277). The challenge to researchers working in the HE sector is to consider the role of theory in their work and this needs to be taken up by those working in quality and quality assurance. My position in relation to this research is discussed in section 4.10 in Chapter Four.

When I began to read and think about the focus of the research I was challenged to make explicit the underlying philosophy that would inform the study. What claims would I be able to make based on my findings? I therefore considered the nature of the world and knowledge about it. I had come to a position where I believed that the world does not exist only because I am aware of it. There is a physical world and a social world which I experience, and which affects how I behave. It was clear to me that my thoughts, ideas and beliefs affected how I behaved and that my behaviour could change the physical world, the social world and my thoughts, ideas and beliefs. I therefore had long eschewed the empiricism of positivism and the relativism of post-modernism. So, when I was introduced to the writings of Roy Bhaskar (1989, 2008) and began to read and think about critical realist ontology, it resonated deeply with my view of the world. It recognises the social world (the focus of my research) as "open" and consequently complex to understand and explain. Phenomena that we study are the result of the interaction of a number of factors (casual mechanisms) that interact in varied and changing ways. We (people or agents) interact within and on the structural and cultural domains which exist autonomously of one another further compounding the complexity of the world and our ability to understand and explain it. The ontological frame provided by critical realism, which I deliberate in more depth in

Chapter Four, aligned with my experience of the varied and complex way in which each School Reviews process unfolded. And more importantly, it made it possible to explain the variation and complexity from empirical evidence.

As mechanisms are not generally directly observable (Bhaskar, 1989), a means of delving down to them is necessary. Abductive and retroductive reasoning makes it possible to infer the underlying factors or casual/generative mechanisms which have shaped the School Reviews, as I will discuss in Chapter Four. I set out to examine the interplay between structure, culture and agency in the schools and to understand the way in which staff members or 'agents' within a school activated structures, how these activated structures interacted with the cultural components within the school and how this either enabled or constrained the School Reviews process and thus the emergence of quality improvement in the school.

I draw on the literature on higher education quality to consider an internal quality process at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN), one of the 26 public HE universities in South Africa. It was established in 2004 from a historically white and a historically black institution as part of national merger policy, as I will discuss in more detail in Chapter Two. After fifteen years, in 2019 it is a majority black, research intensive institution, consistently ranked in the top 6 in South Africa, and relatively well-resourced. At the time of the merger, UKZN had inherited a set of well-established internal quality processes from its merger institutions which it continued to implement post-merger. There was a dedicated quality unit and a number of quality processes were in place. The School Reviews process as an internal quality improvement process will be examined in the context of this one institution in order to shed light on such processes beyond this context. The documentation from four cases, each within a particular school in a different college within the institution provides the data for this study.

1.2 Research goal and question

The goal of this research was to examine an institutional level internal quality improvement process from a position based in critical realism as explicated by Roy Bhaskar (1989, 2008). Drawing on the work of Margaret Archer (1995) to analyse the interplay of structure, culture and agency and explore the possibility for quality improvement at an institutional level, the research aims to:

1. Analyse the School Reviews process to develop an understanding of the mechanisms that enable or constrain quality improvement in HE;
2. Explore the structural, cultural and agential constraints and enablements on quality improvement;
3. Develop an understanding of the complex interaction of structure, culture and agency and its implication for quality improvement;
4. Provide an analysis of the School Reviews process that can be used by academics and quality assurance practitioners to inform quality improvement processes; and
5. Explore the implications of this research for broader quality assurance and improvement processes.

1.2.1 Research question

What agential, structural and cultural mechanisms enable/constrain emergence of quality improvement through the School Reviews process in a university in the South African higher education setting?

This case study of an institution characterised by ongoing change at all levels provides a very rich intersection of several issues that are central to the debates in the area of quality. The main contribution of this research is to provide a close-up and “insider” (Newton, 2000, p. 154) study of quality at an institution from a critical realist perspective. A review of the research published in the *Quality in Higher Education* journal noted that the limited research on internal processes reflects the dominance of external quality activities despite the indication that it is routine internal processes that most impact on quality (Harvey & William, 2010, p. 83). In a further review of key quality assurance research which built on their 2010 research, William and Harvey (2015) note the limited number of papers on internal quality assurance and the ongoing focus on the activities of external agencies.

The changes in HE in South Africa since 1994 have been rapid and dramatic and have impacted the area of quality at an institutional level. Blackmur (2010, p. 67) described research on Higher Education quality assurance as “anodyne and descriptive and devoid of sophistication” and so the use of a strong theoretical framework and careful analytical process, as outlined in Chapter Four, are endeavours to avoid this. I have carried out this research from the perspective of an "insider" who has had the

opportunity to draw on understandings of the organisational context and consequently to examine the issue in depth. This research therefore contributes to an understanding of internal systems of quality in South Africa and internationally.

1.3 Organisation/structure of the thesis

In this chapter, I have outlined the purpose of the research, briefly introduced my ontological assumptions which informed the research, and described the context within which I worked when the research was carried out. I also explained the focus of the research and the research question that I explore in the study.

Chapter Two provides the context within which the School Reviews process is implemented, experienced and engaged with. The broader higher education context which frames the South African higher education and institutional context within which the review take place is examined. The role and purpose of universities are shifting in response to global changes, and consequently the role and function of academics within those institutions is changing. I examine the higher education context in South Africa from this perspective and the way in which quality assurance is impacting the sector. I then outline the institutional context within which the reviews took place. Finally, I describe the institutional quality assurance and improvement processes in general and the School Reviews process is explained.

Chapter Three provides a review of selected literature on quality assurance and improvement. This chapter examines the key concepts and debates in the field of quality assurance and improvement that informed the analysis of the School Reviews process.

In Chapter Four, I make explicit the ontological and epistemological stance I am taking in relation to this research. I explain the methodological framework and describe the methods used to select, interpret and analyse the data, and make explicit my position and actions to ensure that the research stands up to scrutiny with respect to trustworthiness and ethical considerations.

In Chapters Five to Eight, I discuss the findings for each of the four cases that I analysed. Each case is a School Review in a different college in the institution. I examine the interplay between organisational structures and cultures and how this is mediated by agents thus giving rise to the conditions that enable or constrain quality

improvement. Given that structure, culture and agency are analytically distinct, are irreducible to one another and have distinct causal powers and properties (Archer, 1995, see Chapter Four), in each case study I examine structure, culture and agency separately.

Once I examined each case using this framework, I then consider the findings across all the cases in Chapter Nine and attempt to cumulatively identify the material, ideational and agential conditions that may enable or constrain the emergence of quality improvement at a university in the South African higher education context. In this concluding chapter I identify the most significant findings that address the research questions. The limitations of the research are explored, and further research is suggested.

Chapter 2
The context of the research

The ideas and values about the role of a university in society which prevail at an international, national and institutional level create the context within which individuals operate and both enable and constrain their actions. Individuals operate within a cultural milieu that shapes the institutions and the processes that take place within them. Hence, different institutions, schools and individuals within them respond differently to global, national and local structures and cultures. The focus of this research is a quality review process within a university in South Africa. It examines four case studies of a School Reviews process in different schools within the university in order to better understand the way in which quality processes may either enable or constrain the improvement of quality in higher education institutions. The reviews take place within a complex intersection of structures and culture which shape the review process and the way in which people engage within and on it. These structures operate at the level of the school, university, the higher education context in South Africa and more broadly.

In this chapter I consider the context within which the School Reviews process is implemented, experienced and engaged with. Firstly, I examine the broader higher education context which frames the South African higher education sector and institutional context within which the review take place. This includes the way in which the role and purpose of universities are shifting in response to global changes, and consequently how the role and function of academics within those institutions is changing. I examine the higher education context in South Africa from this perspective and the way in which quality assurance is impacting the sector. I then examine the institutional context within which the reviews took place. Finally, I examine the institutional quality assurance and improvement processes in general and the School Reviews process is explained.

2.1 The Higher Education Context

The environment within which higher education (HE) operates has changed significantly over the last few decades fundamentally transforming its relationship to

society. Universities have adapted to changing social, economic and political forces (Kwiek, 2000). The dominance of a deregulated marketplace at local and global level, the key role the market plays in social and political decision-making, reduced public expenditure for social services such as higher education, privatisation of public enterprises and the pre-eminence of the individual good have become deeply embedded in most societies around the world (Martinez & Garcia, 2000) and provides the broader context within which the modern university is operating. The growth of neoliberal discourses and related practices can be seen to give primacy to the marketplace or economy and the determination of social, economic and cultural policies and practices by the private sector (D. Harvey, 2005). The state has increasingly taken on a role to create a context within which private property rights, free markets and free trade are protected and advanced. Globalisation has played a significant role in the changes in higher education institutions including changes in the status, meaning, role and purpose of the university, its relationship to the state, the nature of knowledge and the university's role in public politics and social responsibility (Boulton & Lucas, 2008; Shore & Taitz, 2012).

Underpinning these changes and in reaction to them are different conceptions of the university and contested views of the purpose of universities (Barnett, 2004). Universities have adapted over time to changing conditions within which they operate and to which they contribute; they are both products of and catalysts for social change. Whilst the purpose of a university is contested (Barnett, 2004) and universities across the world vary in vision and mission, size, combination of disciplines and programmes, emphasis on research, and so on, they nonetheless have characteristics that they share and which identify them as a university (Collini, 2012).

The literature on the role and purpose of a university juxtaposes the traditional and modern university which is a useful lens through which to consider the issue but which often fails to note that many institutions are a complex mix of traditional and contemporary dimensions. On the one hand, it is argued, is the traditional university with its roots in the enlightenment era where the purpose of a university was the creation of knowledge in the interests of humanity and public good, underpinned by the free exchange of ideas and knowledge (Graham, 2013). On the other hand is the conceptualisation of the modern university as in the grips of a neoliberal and managerial master which poses a threat to academic freedom and autonomy (Shore

& Wright, 1999). In both cases the main purpose of a university is the advancement of knowledge, but the nature and purpose of this knowledge is contested. In addition, both have a key role to serve the needs of society but what these needs are and who determines them is contested. It is the nature of the role that universities should play in society that is being challenged.

As Collini (2012) argues, universities have to justify their value and importance in intellectual, educational, scientific and cultural terms because the role of a university is "intrinsically and extrinsically linked" to human purpose (p. 54). He argues that as human purpose is more than "about accumulating wealth" modern universities should provide an education which is more than "training future employees in a particular economy" and carry out research which is more than solving "immediate practical problems" (Collini, 2012, p. 7). The increasing pressure for universities to play a central role in economic development, it is argued, is underpinned by the view that knowledge is a resource necessary for economic development (Wright & Rabo, 2010). Knowledge has come to be viewed as a product to be quality assured, marketed and sold in an increasingly competitive and internationalised market place (Harvey, 2009; Lynch, 2006). This has led to the prioritisation of the disciplines of science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) that contribute to the “knowledge economy” both in terms of funding and the demand for these programmes as leading more readily to employment. This has created a context in which trust in public institutions and professionals has declined, and perceived and real threats to academic freedom and autonomy have emerged (du Toit, 2013).

The traditional role of a university as a public good funded by the state in the interests of society is no longer entirely possible as universities respond to increasing demands to provide education as a private investment for individuals who need to acquire skills and knowledge necessary in the world of work, and to increase and widen access, serve social and economic agendas, account for expenditure of public funds, ensure “value for money” and compete effectively in a globalized and deregulated market (Giroux, 2002; Kraak, 2004; Graham, 2013). The change in the way universities are viewed and changes in the expectations in terms of their role (from a public to a private benefit) has brought about many changes in the way in which they are staffed, managed and operate. The traditional view of academic culture as collegial is transforming (Churchman & King, 2009). As the shifts in society began to impact on

universities, they began to take on many of the characteristics of business models in the way in which they operate.

As will be explored in more detail in Chapter Three, the literature suggests that staff in HE institutions are increasingly stressed and demotivated, and creativity and autonomy is being limited. They are confronted by changes in the size and diversity of the student body and have to navigate increased demands for accountability (Bundy, 2006; Nash, 2013; Shore, 2008). The way in which students are perceived and engaged with has also shifted. Students are increasingly conceived of as consumers of the products that universities offer and clients which universities serve and need to please (Harvey & Knight 1996; Morley, 2003; Harvey, 2009). What is taught and the type of graduates that need to be educated is increasingly influenced by the needs of the economy, corporations and employment that students will seek. At the same time universities are increasingly taking on a business model in which they need to carry out research that serves the interest of the university budget and the economy and that competes with other institutions through various ranking systems and enhances image and reputation (Altbach & Hazelkorn, 2017; Graham, 2013). Disciplines have come under scrutiny to justify their continued existence not just on the basis of teaching and research, but increasingly on their economic viability. So issues of performativity, efficiency, measurable outcomes, quality monitoring and accountability, and vocationalism have come to the fore in the sector (Barnett, 2013; Tomlinson, 2018). Staff are under pressure to publish and to bring in third stream income. This is particularly so in South Africa where the funding formula is weighted towards financial incentive for research over teaching.

It is in this context that conceptions of quality and approaches to quality assurance have taken root in the HE sector. Most governments have developed policies requiring some form of external evaluation of HE (accreditation, audit and assessment) for the purposes of accountability, compliance and control, and institutions have a range of systems for internal evaluation (Harvey, 2007; Singh & Lange, 2007). This is explored further in Chapter Three.

Despite limited acknowledgement in the literature on quality, HE institutions have been concerned about issues of quality and standards prior to the advent of formalised and externally driven systems of quality assurance. This was largely addressed through

the system of external examiners, accreditation by professional bodies and a range of activities that lead to improvements in teaching, research etc. It is the changed relationship between HE and society which has shifted the nature and form of this concern (Barnett, 2004; Vroeijenstjin, 1995).

Whilst the impact of neo-liberalism on HE has been well-documented with repeated critique (Giroux, 2002, 2006; Kraak, Lauder, Brown & Ashton, 2006; Kwiek, 2000; Shore & Taitz, 2012), it cannot be argued that the HE purposes, structures and processes should not come under scrutiny and pressure to change. The university “as we knew it” should not be idealised, especially in SA where the HE sector reflected the inequalities and oppression that characterised the apartheid regime. This would at the very least neglect to acknowledge that HE was (and remains) essentially elitist, patriarchal and hierarchical (Nash, 2013; Trowler, 2002).

Claims that the foundations of the HE sector rest firmly in the enlightenment period where its purpose was the creation of knowledge in the interests of humanity and public good, and the free exchange of ideas and knowledge and that this has been eroded by a market-driven economy masks the reality that HE institutions have always excluded certain students. Universities were (and in many respects still are) elitist; as the discussion in Chapter Three on the conceptualisation of quality as excellence will assert. Over time universities have controlled access on religious, vocational, or political criteria and have been "nearly always selective in terms of social class, and in the course of the twentieth century increasingly selective by intellectual aptitude" (Collini, 2012, p. 91). Challenges to the traditional conception of a university has brought a number of positive changes opening access particularly for women, black, minority and ethnic groups (Clegg, 2008) and younger academics. The debate about the role of universities is a critical one and must underpin any discussions about the impact of neo-liberalism and quality assurance systems. This is particularly relevant in SA where the rise of neo-liberalism and the post-apartheid state have aligned and brought to bear competing forces and priorities at every level and in HE sector in particular (Vally, 2007).

2.2 Higher Education and Quality Assurance in South Africa

South African history is steeped in class and race-based exclusion, discrimination and inequality which were entrenched in the apartheid policies that governed the political,

social and economic sectors of the country. After a long period of violent and ongoing resistance and retaliation, a democratic government was elected in 1994.

Post 1994 and the establishment of a democratic dispensation in SA, a range of policies were introduced as key drivers for transformation of the HE landscape into a single co-ordinated system with a central role to play in the broader transformation of the country into a democratic, just and economically productive society. Access to HE institutions had been based on race, language of teaching and learning and qualification type. Earlier policy processes including the National Education Policy Initiative (NEPI) and the National Commission on Higher Education (NCHE) laid the foundations for these goals by proposing that there should be a single, co-ordinated higher education system to provide access for those previously excluded from higher education. The Higher Education Act (Department of Education, 1997b), the White Paper 3 (Department of Education, 1997a), the Council on Higher Education (CHE) Recommendations on size and shape (2000), the National Plan for Higher Education (Department of Education, 2001), and institutional mergers and programme level restructuring (which occurred from 2004) all provided the overarching framework for fundamental transformation in the HE landscape.

The South African HE sector was confronted by the competing demands of economic development in the context of global trends discussed above and the social transformation goals of equity and redress post the apartheid era (Baatjies, 2005; Vally, 2007). Kraak (2004) describes this as the tension between “the high skills thesis” and “the popular democratic position” which has had significant influence on “policy formulation, adaptation, and retraction” (p. 252). On the one hand is the demand for higher education to play a central role in the development of a highly skilled workforce and on the other, is the ongoing challenge to contribute to national and local needs for reconstruction and development and transformation to a democratic, equitable society (Dison, Walker & Mclean, 2008, p. 3).

The Education White Paper 3: A Programme for Transformation of Higher Education (Department of Education, 1997a), identified planning, funding and quality assurance as steering mechanisms that the state would use to drive transformation of higher education. The Higher Education Act (Department of Education, 1997a) provided the legal framework for quality assurance and the Founding Document: Higher Education

Quality Committee (CHE, 2001) outlined the role of the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC). Section 6 of the Founding Document (CHE, 2001) outlines the HEQC understandings of quality which inform its work. In line with many other countries in the world it uses a combination of concepts (fitness of purpose, fitness for purpose, value for money and transformation, all of which are discussed in detail in Chapter Three) in an attempt to balance a number of demands on HE. This provided the framework for greater monitoring and accountability of the sector in the form of programme accreditation and institutional audits by a national body.

The HEQC as the statutory body responsible for developing and implementing a quality assurance system in the higher education sector in SA conducts audits of HE institutions, national reviews of disciplines and qualifications, accredits learning programmes and carries out quality promotion activities. The first cycle of institutional audits began in 2005 and followed a traditional audit methodology which results in panel recommendations and an institutional plan of action to bring about improvements in the institution and consequently, the sector. In 2014 the CHE embarked on a project to enhance quality within the sector through the "Quality Enhancement Project" based on the notion of sharing best practice between institutions. The HEQC is also responsible for programme accreditation and reviews. Its mandate therefore includes both accountability and improvement. Whilst the HEQC is the body or Quality Council with the overarching responsibility for quality within the HE sector, it also works with professional bodies which have the responsibility to accredit programmes and consequently, accredit graduates to practice in a professional capacity within a particular field.

Whilst there have been a number of achievements in HE since 1994, there are many challenges nationally and institutionally that make the work of the HEQC a priority especially in the context of a system characterised by unevenness in quality. The creation of institutional cultures that embrace difference and diversity, the development of academic programmes and academic development initiatives that impact on student performance, improvements in throughput and graduation rates, improvement in participation rates and representation in some disciplines of black and female students, promotion of diversity of purpose and the promotion of intellectual and scholarly engagement (Badat, 2010; CHE, 2013; Jansen et al., 2007; Scott, Yeld & Hendry, 2007) are just some of the challenges that are critical to the transformation

and development of higher education and SA society. Scott et al. (2007) reported a 25% drop out rate in the first year of study and that only 21% of students went on to graduate within the regulation time stipulated to complete the qualification. The report also highlighted the under-representation by race of African students in the Higher Education system. Despite the fact that access and participation rates by race have improved since 1994, undergraduate attrition remains high and uneven across the race groups, and the African, Colored and Indian[4] students have lower graduation rates than White students (CHE, 2018). Even though HE is key to social and economic transformation, funding remains a major obstacle. A lack of funding has resulted in increasing fees and inadequate financial support leading to the ongoing "fees must fall" protests and resultant campus disruptions in 2015 and 2016 (Langa, 2017). Such protests continue at the writing of this thesis.

The understandings of quality which inform the work of the HEQC reflect an attempt to navigate the competing demands of transformation of the HE sector in terms of the national goals for the higher education system, including equity, access, effectiveness and efficiency (fitness of purpose), the specified institutional mission within a national framework that encompasses differentiation and diversity (fitness for purpose); efficiency (value for money) and transformation of individual learners for personal enrichment, as well as the requirements of social development and economic and employment growth (HEQC, 2000). The racially divided and fragmented HE sector under Apartheid reflected the unequal distribution of power and resources in the interests of the white population (Bunting, 2006). Given the uneven quality in the sector and the historical construction of the mission and vision of institutions under Apartheid the interrogation of the fitness of purpose of institutions was a priority and a key driver in transforming the sector.

Another significant development was the National Plan for Higher Education (Department of Education, 2001) which framed changes in the nature of HE institutions and the sector as a whole. The Minister of Education established a National Working Group (NWG) to investigate and advise on ways in which to consolidate the provision of higher education as part of the process to restructure HE to ensure that it contributed

[4] Whilst these racial categorisations established during the Apartheid era are contested they are still used by the South African government for reporting purposes.

to social and economic development (Department of Education, 2001, p. 56). The mergers were intended to achieve a wide range of objectives including reducing the divide between historically white and black institutions, consolidating the use of human resources and bringing about increasing staff equity within the sector, rationalising offerings with the consequent more efficient use of resources and eliminating unnecessary competition in the sector (Ministry of Education, 2002). Through a process of institutional mergers and incorporations which took place between 2004 and 2006, the number of public institutions was reduced from 36 to 23[5]. They were further differentiated in terms of institutional type namely traditional universities offering formative and postgraduate degrees, universities of technology offering career and vocational undergraduate qualifications and limited postgraduate qualifications, and comprehensive universities offering a combination of programmes typical of a university and a university of technology. This fundamental restructuring of the sector proved to be a challenge at a national and institutional level (Jansen, 2003; Mouton, Louw & Strydom, 2013). The site of this study, the University of KwaZulu-Natal, was formally established on 1 January 2004 as a result of the merger of the University of Natal and University of Durban-Westville.

2.3 The University of KwaZulu-Natal

In this section I discuss the institutional context within which the School Reviews which are the focus of this research took place. This research is based at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN) which was established on the 1 January 2004 from the merger of the former University of Natal[6] and the former University of Durban-Westville. The research examines reviews that took place during the period 2006 - 2010. As was pointed out in Chapter One, this period brings a particular richness to the research as it was the early years of a newly formed institution and the early years of a newly established national quality assurance system. As will be shown in this thesis, the implementation of the process has much of use to the sector in 2021 as universities begin to prepare for the second round of national reviews, and as many of the internal review processes have tapered off.

[5] Three new universities have been launched since 2014 bringing the total to 26.
[6] Edgewood College of Education was incorporated into the University of Natal in 2001.

The merger of the two institutions took place in the complex historical context outlined above where shifting international and national forces came to bear on HE. The way in which the National Working Group (2001) characterised each institution and highlighted possible challenges of the proposed merger is significant in that it heralded a process which it recognised would be inescapably challenging and difficult (p. 35). When the merger began both institutions had come through a period of organisational and structural change. The institutions were established under Apartheid to serve different race groups, with consequent different political and ideological realities and institutional cultures. The University of Natal was one of a number of historically English-speaking universities characterised as having collegial leadership, well managed and administered, strong teaching and research traditions, and (to some extent) opposing the apartheid government (Bunting, 2006, p. 50). The University of Durban-Westville was an historically black university set up according to the extension of University Education Act 45 of 1959 to cater for Indian[7] students to fulfil the apartheid instrumentalist need to train 'useful black graduates', run at first by management that supported the apartheid government but which became the site of major resistance in the 1980s and early 1990s (Bunting, 2006, p. 49).

The historical structural inequality in the purpose and funding of institutions under Apartheid meant that the University of Natal was a “well-run institution with financial stability and a solid research tradition” with “substantial experience of managing and administering university activities which are not concentrated in one location” (National Working Group, 2001, p. 35). The University of Durban-Westville on the other hand was described as being “in a good financial position, although it experienced some campus turbulence in recent years” but “its publication output as well as the success rate of its educational processes, fall below the national averages for universities” (National Working Group, 2001, p. 35). In recommending that a unitary model of merger should be adopted, the National Working Group highlighted one of the key challenges of the merger, which was to bring together essentially autonomous campuses across and between institutions “to develop a new academic image and organisational identity which could inspire staff, attract students and ensure the

[7]People designated Indian under apartheid were in fact South African of second, third, fourth, or even fifth level descent of South Asians from the former British

continuation of national and international partnerships" (National Working Group, 2001, p. 36).

In terms of governance the institution had to consider the most effective way in which to manage what post-merger was going to be a large and complex institution, with five campuses, and more than 40 000 students and 4 000 staff. Given the size of the institution, it was decided that colleges, in which cognate faculties were clustered, would be smaller more manageable operational entities with strategic redirection of financial resources and flexibility in budgets. The colleges would be governed by "principled flexibility" in which uniform policy and monitoring frameworks would allow for operational variation to accommodate structures that are better suited to different faculties or schools (UKZN, 2008a, p. 24). This was to "…ensure accountability and authority were placed closest to points of delivery" (Zacharias, Uys & Mneney, 2010, p. 60). The aim was that management responsibility and accountability would be devolved to faculties and schools and core academic administrative functions would be delegated to faculties and schools.

UKZN was organized into four colleges, eight faculties, and 54 schools which operated across five different campuses. Each college was headed by a Deputy Vice-Chancellor and Head of College and consisted of two faculties each headed by a Dean. Faculties were constituted by schools. Schools were either single discipline or a cluster of cognate disciplines and were headed by a Head of School (HoS). The chief governance structure of the college was the Academic Affairs Board (AAB), the faculty had a Faculty Board, and each school a School Board. The university-wide faculties and schools operated across delivery sites where appropriate, which at times saw faculties and schools working across sites more than 80 km apart.

This new structure required the reorganization of the interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary school structure of the former University of Natal and the discipline-based department structure at the former University of Durban-Westville into single or multi-disciplinary schools offering common curricula across sites. The process of re-structuring and the negotiation of a common curriculum brought challenges to "strong discipline-based identities coupled with individual authority over curriculum" by a "more corporate culture, emphasizing rationality and efficiency in the management of a large-scale, very complex multi-campus, multi-college institution" (Webbstock, 2008, p.

192). As will be discussed in Chapter Three, the discipline has been the dominant organising structure within traditional universities across a number of contexts and the key source of identity for most academics (Becher & Trowler, 2001; Henkel 2005). As a consequence, such changes in organisational governance and curriculum structures give rise to conflict between institutional level processes and academics who perceive their identification with a discipline as being at risk (Whitchurch & Gordon, 2010). It is thus perhaps unsurprising that in many contexts, academics who feel changes to be threats to their identities find strategies to resist these changes (Becher, 1981; Henkel, 2005).

This study covers the crucial early years of the institution in a period characterised on the one hand by substantial progress towards establishing an institution with a new identity and mission and characterised on the other hand by instability and conflict which challenged the merger process. A number of events and developments created the overall climate and culture in the institution and the context within which the School Reviews took place. Whilst many of these mirrored many of the changes taking place in HE in SA and around the world, the changes as a consequence of the merger meant that they impacted on staff in a particular way.

2.3.1 The early years 2004 – 2006

The first two years of the merger process (2004 and 2005) were described by members of the executive leadership, in a book documenting the merger, as a period in which there was "massive change occurring without major contestation" (Zacharias et al., 2010, p. 69). New organisational structures (both academic and support) were implemented, new conditions of service established, management and leadership posts filled, common curricula implemented, and physical relocations completed. In 2006, what Zacharias et al. (2010) described as a "general malaise such as a wave of anonymous letters and bad press" was replaced by "general discontent and anxiety" (p. 69). In 2006 a staff strike which began in response to dissatisfaction with salary increases and the payment of bonuses to members of the executive management, was used as a platform for staff to express their concerns about what they perceived as the corporatisation of the university and the authoritarian style of members of management (Patel, 2006).

2.3.2 Strike action, contestation over "academic freedom" and investigations

In 2008 the institution underwent an audit by the HEQC, the national body responsible for quality assurance in the HE sector in SA, as part of the national cycle of institutional audits. Institutional audits are one of the “mechanisms through which the HEQC carries out its quality assurance responsibilities” in which it “will seek to assess an institution’s capacity for quality management of its academic activities in a manner that meets its specified mission, goals and objectives, and engages appropriately with the expectations and needs of various internal and external constituencies.” (HEQC, 2004b). The audit focuses on the institutional quality assurance arrangement for teaching and learning, research and community service. An external audit panel of peers and experts appointed by the HEQC visit the institution to carry out interviews based on the self-evaluation report submitted by the institution. The panel then compiles a report with recommendations to the institution for its comment and the institution is required to develop an improvement plan and provide progress reports on the implementation of the recommendations. The format of institutional audits reflected the way in which the newly constructed SA HE landscape was part of broader quality procedures internationally.

In the Institutional Audit Portfolio (IAP) which was prepared by the institution for the audit, the institution described itself as “a single, unified university in terms of structure, with an emerging institutional identity, a vision to become the ‘Premier University of African Scholarship’, and a sense of being the first truly merged, new South African University” (UKZN, 2008a, p. 20). It acknowledged that the building of the new institution “… has not been pain-free, given that resources had to be stretched across the whole, but despite a range of teething problems, UKZN has moved quickly, with relative stability, into a period of consolidation and strategic planning …” (UKZN, 2008a, p. 20). What the institution described as "relative stability" with "challenges remaining" underplayed the ongoing contestation and rapid change that gave rise to conflict about the way in which the institution was being governed.

The audit visit by the CHE appointed panel took place in October 2008. The audit report however was withdrawn in October 2010 by the CHE after it had considered the concerns raised by the UKZN Vice-Chancellor about both the audit process and the audit report (CHE, 2010). Following institutional audit procedures, the chair of the audit

panel provided oral feedback to members of the university. The report however was not released. The UKZN Vice-Chancellor raised objection against the audit process and report as a letter written to the CHE by the chair of the audit panel which was leaked to the press showed “bias” on behalf of the chair. Whilst the CHE was confident that the report met international standards for audit processes and any concerns about the content of the report could be addressed during the normal audit process, it concluded that the audit process had been "substantially compromised" and the reputation of the institution "would have suffered to some extent" by the leak of a letter from the Chair of the Audit Panel (CHE, 2010, para. 5). However, there was a counter view that the university management wanted the report suppressed as it identified concerns with managerialist approaches and challenges to academic freedom within the institution[8].

In December 2008, in response to concerns about suppression of academic freedom, the Council of the university, which governs the university as the highest decision-making body within the University structure as constituted according to the Higher Education Act, 1997, and the University of KwaZulu-Natal Statute, established the Governance and Academic Freedom Committee (GAFC) to investigate academic freedom and governance at the institution. The terms of the committee included to investigate and undertake an assessment of the university’s governance structures; the fairness of the university’s relevant dispute resolution mechanisms and the extent to which they may be fostering a culture of hostility; and any other relevant factors which have a bearing on academic freedom and / or freedom of expression at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN, 2009b, p. 7).

The GAFC Final Report to Council (UKZN, 2009b) paints a picture of an institutional culture in which open debate is perceived to be impossible, members of the community are “less than civil and which undermine the collegial spirit of a university” and both overt and covert racism is experienced (p. 26). The institution “never had a deliberate agenda to confront issues of racism, transformation and social cohesion” (UKZN, 2009b, p. 79). It concluded that there was a breakdown in communication and that

[8] For a views of these events see Martin Hall, ‘Varsity’s voices of dissent gagged’, Mail and Guardian, 14-1-2011; and Ahmed Essop, ‘CHE panel acted with integrity’, Mail and Guardian 21-02-2011.

opportunity for open and critical dialogue about racial issues needed to be created[9] (UKZN, 2009b, p. 74). It argued that the effects of change can be "mitigated if transformation is accompanied by clear messages and programmes which provide care, support and reassurance to all staff members" and proposed that Council develop an institution-wide strategy and/or policy on race, racism, transformation and social cohesion and that "managers at different levels should be held accountable for the race and transformation in their sections. This should be linked to performance management" (UKZN, 2009b, p. 83). The report also makes recommendations with respect to dispute resolution mechanisms, HR function, retirement age, media and corporate relations, - all issues that were the source of contestation and frustration for staff.

Both merger-related and external demands resulted in contestation and change at the level of structures, culture and agency[10]. Whilst "new shared values (vision/mission) structures, strategies and systems have been implemented", the report concluded that the "alignment of staff, skills and style remain a challenge in the years ahead" (UKZN, 2009b, p. 76). The restructuring was extensive requiring staff to rethink their role and position and was met with mixed reactions. It was experienced by many as bureaucratic and autocratic with a sense of loss of power as they were required to rethink their role and position in a new institution with a new Mission and Vision (UKZN, 2009b).

Whilst the GAFC Report (UKZN, 2009b) concluded that there is "no evidence of a threat to the right to teach, learn and research at the University of KwaZulu-Natal" (p. 24), it pointed out that there is a climate where debate and engagement is curtailed because "a sector within the University fear that when they voice their opinions or comments, which go beyond those relating to teaching, learning and research, they will be dealt with in ways which suppress their right to freedom of expression, and which may result in disciplinary action against them" (UKZN, 2009b, p. 24). The issue

[9] The issue of race remains in the foreground as at the time of writing this thesis a probe into medical school admissions at the institution has been ongoing since 2017. See Nicole McCain R73.5m spent on 'Operation Clever' probe into medical school's admissions, UKZN reveals, News24 08-02-2021.
[10] These terms are used in their everyday sense in the context of this discussion but will be interrogated as specific theoretical concepts used in this study in Chapter Four.

of academic freedom and freedom of expression have been at the heart of many public battles in the institution[11] (Chetty & Merrett, 2014; Freund, 2006; Webbstock, 2008).

The GAFC report (UKZN, 2009b) pointed to issues at the level of structure and organizational culture that still needed to be addressed. At the level of structure, roles of key portfolios and structures for control and areas falling within different strata of management required clarification. It was clear from the report that some staff experienced the executive leadership as "top-down' management" and that the vision of devolution implicit in the college model had not be realised. As a way forward to address these concerns, the report pointed to the need to follow-up recommendations based on institutional self-evaluation during the preparation for the CHE institutional audit and outlined in the UKZN Institutional Audit Portfolio (UKZN, 2008a). It also suggested that a Council review of the college model which was scheduled for 2010 was as an opportunity to address these concerns.

2.3.3 New policies and procedures

Despite the ongoing challenges, the institution moved rapidly over the first five years to establish a corporate identity built on the institution's mission to be "the Premier University of African Scholarship"; and put in place an organisational structure to support the academic endeavour, maintain financial stability, ensure efficiencies in the use of resources and in rationalisation of academic programmes, and promote staff equity (UKZN, 2007). A wide range of policies and projects aimed at transformation, rationalisation and improvement of institutional procedures and processes, increasing research productivity and improving teaching, learning and assessment practices were implemented, for example, Research Policy II: Developing, Retaining and Rewarding Researchers (UKZN, 2007), Performance Management Policy (UKZN, 2008b), and the Teaching, Learning and Assessment Policy (UKZN, 2009a).

In line with its goal to be one of South Africa's leading research institutions, a number of strategic initiatives were put in place to ensure that the research output of the

[11] Instances of managers infringing the rights of academics include the blocking of the appointment of Ashwin Desai and the dismissal of Caroline White. See Nithaya Chetty, ''Abuse of power' shackles academia', Mail and Guardian 26-09-2014 and Staff Reporter 'Stepping out of line', Mail and Guardian 11-02-2011. Instances of stifled debate about institutional matters include the disciplinary hearings against N. Chetty & C. Merrett who criticised the VC who would not table for discussion at Senate a Faculty document on Academic Freedom. See McKune (2009).

institution increased. In 2007 it was reported that research output "has increased by 80% over the short life of the institution to the point where we are the second-highest ranking institution in the country" (UKZN, 2007, p. 14). The research agenda continued to be prioritised and in 2009 in response to ongoing concern raised by the Vice Chancellor about Academic Research Productivity, a Senate task team was established to analyse research data, highlight strengths and weaknesses, and recommend strategies to increase productivity and ongoing monitoring of research data. In its February 2010 report, 'Analysis of Research Productivity at UKZN for the period 2004–2008', the task team made a number of university-wide and College/Faculty level recommendations. The most significant of these in terms of this research were the recommendations pertaining to staff productivity and credentialing. A scale based on ranking increasing productivity requirements for staff and a norm of postgraduate students to be supervised per academic staff member for all staff that fall into the category of senior lecturer was proposed. Based on the analysis of the data which showed a strong correlation between possessing a PhD and supervising postgraduate students and research productivity, the report also recommended that a PhD for academic staff employment at the level of senior lecturer and above should be an absolute minimum requirement. Recommendations were also made to deal with poor performing schools and non-publishing staff.

These recommendations are underpinned by a particular understanding of the role of a university (Graham, 2013; Shore, 2010) and the UKZN mission and vision in the context of incentive-based funding for research output and the financial challenges in HE. A culture of performativity or pressure to perform and to increase productivity based on measurable outputs leads to the need to manage and measure academic workload (Deem, 1998). This performativity discourse was also evident in the recommendation that the University Teaching and Learning Office develop a measurable core teaching workload framework to provide a basis for agreement on a "full teaching workload" in schools and faculties for open, equitable and fair distribution of teaching, in particular with respect to productivity of non-research active staff (UKZN, 2010a).

In 2007 the institution implemented its commitment to the explicit management of teaching and learning when a post of Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Teaching and

Learning)[12] was established to provide leadership in all areas of teaching and learning and to ensure the achievement of the University's vision, mission and strategic plan with respect to teaching and learning. The DVC headed the University Teaching and Learning Office which functions as the operational arm of the University Teaching and Learning Committee, which as a sub-committee of Senate is responsible for policy development, monitoring and evaluation, advocacy of teaching and learning and projects relating to teaching and learning.

The UKZN *Strategic Plan* signals the institution's commitment to quality in teaching and learning. *Goal 4: Excellence in Teaching and Learning* clearly outlines the University's intentions and strategies in this regard. Numerous initiatives were put in place through the University Teaching and Learning Office to enhance teaching and learning at the institutional level. The institutional Teaching, Learning and Assessment Policy which was "to give effect to the University's Strategic Plan and to support the quality of teaching and learning" was approved by Senate in 2008 (UKZN, 2008a, p. 79). The office of the DVC Teaching and Learning was established "with the specific aim of advancing the University's vision, mission and strategic plan with regard to teaching and learning" (UKZN, 2009a, p. 5). Both of these structures signalled a commitment to institutionalise the development, monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning within the institution. The establishment of this office reflects international and national trends in which activities within universities previously considered the domain of academics who worked individually and collegially holding one another accountable become seen to be activities to be managed, measured and evaluated (Boughey, 2009; 2010; Boughey & McKenna, 2011a; 2011b).

The introduction of a Performance Management System in the institution in 2010 followed a similar trend both nationally and internationally as part of increasing managerialism (Deem, 1998; 2001; Brennan & Shah 2000), and the move to increase monitoring and accountability in the sector. The Performance Management Policy (UKZN, 2008b) which was approved in November 2008, had as its stated purpose "…to facilitate and promote the achievement of institutional objectives through the

[12] In 2017 the DVC (Teaching and Learning) was suspended along with four other senior executives following an inquiry into accusations they made against the Vice Chancellor of racism, incompetence and flouting university policies. See Staff Reporter Four top UKZN academics face suspension, sending SRC and union into a tailspin, Mail and Guardian 17-01-2017. The DVC has subsequently left the institution.

effective management of employee performance." (p. 1). The discourse of efficiency and measurement is evident in the purpose statement and reflected the increasing managerialism within the institution. As discussed above, the changing economic conditions within which HE institutions are operating and the consequent changing role of the sector in society brought with it increasing scrutiny of and demands to ensure the quality of the education that students (and future members of the workforce) are receiving and for the institution to be accountable for the expenditure of public funds.

Whilst such performance management systems are framed as opportunities to foster teaching excellence and research productivity by measuring and rewarding performance, they often end up as instruments of monitoring and compliance (Brennan & Shah, 2000; Deem, 1998; 2001; Deem & Behony, 2005; Johnson 2006; Teelken, 2012). The introduction of a Performance Management System is meant to drive achievement of institutional strategic goals and respond to external pressures to increase student throughput and research output. They are supported and implemented by a managerial structure and academic managers who are expected to perform management roles previously carried out by peers (Davis, Van Rensburg & Venter, 2014; Henkel, 1997; Trowler, 1998). These systems and values have been imported from the business world into HE institutions with the expectation that efficiencies and effectiveness within the sector will be enhanced and continuous improvement will result (Deem & Brehony, 2005). Such practices reflect the changing nature of academic work, and changes in the relationship of academics to their employee and to the students that they teach, as discussed earlier. The corporatisation of HE has brought with it the introduction into HE institutions the structures, systems and processes of 'managerialism' which are seen to be at odds with traditional notions of academic freedom, collegiality and scholarship in the academy and to bring about a shift away from collegial systems of self-regulation and accountability (Adams, 2006; Brennan & Shah, 2000; Deem, 1998; 2001; 2005; Johnson, 2006; Weinberg & Graham-Smith, 2012). Maistry (2012) described the implementation of performance management at UKZN as a "surveillance regime" in "response to the pressure to closely monitor the productivity of all members of the university community" (p. 522).

The changes within UKZN reflect a shift in the way in which the institution was being managed based on changing expectations about the university, its purpose in society and the way in which academics should operate. During this period there were increasing demands on research productivity and for effective teaching alongside the implementation of a performance management system. These mechanisms for the management of and quality assurance of the institution introduced a monitoring and policing role and, arguably, saw an emerging culture of compliance into the institution (Maistry, 2012; 2014; Pithouse, 2009). The university was seen by many to be implementing policies that arise out of a particular “efficiency discourse” with an understanding of the university as a business. At the same time the institution was driving a transformation agenda and forging a new identity from and independent of its merger institutions in the South African context (UKZN, 2008a, p. 47).

2.3.4 More changes - review of the college structure

In 2010, five years after the merger, a review of the college model was carried out. The purpose of which was to "assess the functionality of colleges in the form they take at UKZN with the express purpose of improving their effectiveness, and to refine systems so as to ensure that colleges receive the level of institutional support they require to operate efficiently" (UKZN, 2010c, p. 6). Based on recommendations from the review, the institution underwent further restructuring in 2012 when faculties within the college structure were reorganised into schools (UKZN, 2011).

In the previous section I have described the national and institutional context which framed the quality promotion and assurance activities and particularly the School Reviews process during the period when the research took place. In the next section I explain the approach to quality assurance and improvement at the institutional level and outline the School Reviews process in detail.

2.3.5 Quality Assurance at UKZN

The institutional commitment and approach to quality assurance is evident in the location of the overall responsibility for quality assurance with Senate as “the University’s pre-eminent academic policy-making body and custodian of academic standards” and delegation to key committees and portfolios (UKZN, 2008a, p. 62). The institution had in place a number of structures at university-wide, college, faculty and

school level tasked with the responsibility to develop, implement, manage and evaluate quality assurance activities. These included the University Teaching and Learning Committee (UTLC), Academic Affairs and Quality Boards (AAQB) and “In line with the operational principles of devolution and principled flexibility, each faculty has set up a committee structure to manage quality.” (UKZN, 2008a, p. 63). A range of quality management processes such as Programme and Module Approval, Student Feedback on modules and External Schools Review were in place. Support and advice was provided by a centralised unit, the Quality Promotion and Assurance unit (QPA). This approach to quality assurance reflects the shift in the institution and in HE in general away from a collegial process in which staff were trusted to have the expertise to maintain quality (McKenna & Boughey, 2014). Structures were put in place to ensure internal and external accountability for quality by the institution.

The QPA was formed from joining of the Quality Promotion Unit (QPU) at UN and the Quality Assurance (QA) unit at UDW when the two institutions merged in 2004. QPU was established at the then University of Natal in 1998, as a resource to the institution in which the responsibility for quality was seen to lie with all members of staff (Weir, Dixon & Webbstock, 2003). The role of the QA unit at UDW was to reach out to the university community in order to foster a culture of quality because, it was argued, new education policies and practices of an “over-regulated” HE landscape had to be understood and capacity needed to be built to respond to demands of external bodies such as HEQC and SAQA (Kistan, 2005).

The merged QPA’s stated mission was to ensure the promotion and development of a culture of quality at UKZN through a comprehensive quality assurance system that is underpinned by self-reflection, provides claims that are evidence-based, looks at issues from a range of perspectives and is integrated into ongoing institutional activities (UKZN, 2008a). The various quality processes supported by the QPA were deliberately designed as part of a planning, acting, observing and reflecting quality cycle which was intended to support a commitment to continuous improvement (UKZN, 2004b). Webbstock and Weir (2003) anticipated the challenges facing the institution when they argued that “the new external QA environment runs the risk of creating a culture of compliance” which “will have significant implications for quality activities at institutions and could be seen to run counter to the long-term efforts of the

QPU at the University of Natal, and policies and procedures put in place to encourage organisational change and quality improvement in the University." (p. 84).

One of the newly formed QPA's key functions was running a system of School Reviews. The Policy on Quality Assurance and Development for a School at UKZN set out the purpose of School Reviews, what needs to be done, by whom and by when. It functioned as a set of ideas about what quality is and how quality activities should take place. Its aim was to integrate both improvement and accountability aspects of quality to foster a culture of continuous improvement. It stated that "processes are designed to promote self-reflection, to encourage incremental and continual improvement in the core activities of the institution, and to provide evidence of the continued provision of high-quality education, research, and community service" (UKZN, 2004b, p. 2). Whilst self-evaluation and improvement were fore-grounded in the policy it nonetheless signalled that issues of internal and external accountability must be addressed. Schools must be "well-placed to carry activities to the optimum, both in respect to the university and with respect to possible competitors" and be "prepared for the advent of external quality-assurance" (UKZN, 2004b, p. 1). The policy was signalling the changes nationally bringing increasing accountability and the need for the institution to be responsive to external demands.

The overall purpose of School Reviews was "to provide peer recommendations with respect to improving quality in all aspects of the School's functioning" (UKZN, 2004b, p. 6) and was underpinned by annual programme and school self-evaluation which were intended to review all aspects affecting the quality of the programme and school's core activities over a five-year period and to ensure that improvement plans were carried out. The School Reviews Policy emphasised the developmental aspect of the process which was "formative and not punitive" and was "to assist in suggesting ways of improvement, rather than assign blame for any shortcomings" (UKZN, n.d.-b p. 1). It stated that the purpose of the School Reviews process was "to review and evaluate the quality of teaching, the quality of learning, the quantity and quality of research, the quality of leadership and management, in each school" and that the review process was to be particularly concerned that there were adequate quality control checks within the school on a number of listed factors (UKZN, n.d.-b p. 1). These were to be considered "in the light of the University's wider goals and mission statement" (UKZN, n.d.-b p.1). The policy provided clear lines of accountability and assigned responsibility

to the Dean and College DVC for “following through on the recommendations and implementing them as they believe possible and appropriate” (UKZN, n.d.-b p. 3).

The School Reviews process was modelled on a typical audit methodology in that it included evidence-based self-evaluation, peer review, and recommendations that are intended to bring about changes (Brennan & Shah, 2000). Before the external review was conducted, the school was required to prepare a Self-Evaluation Report (SER), which the external panel used as the basis for its validation exercise. The SER formed the basis for interrogation and validation by the panel. The QPA put out a Call for Submissions from students, staff, and other internal and external stakeholders, and these were also made available to the panel. The Terms of Reference (TOR) were negotiated between the Dean, the school and the QPA. In consultation with the school and the Dean, the QPA set up the review panel and organised the process. The College DVC formally appointed the panel which comprised three external discipline experts, a member of the faculty (but not of the school), a student, and a chair who was a senior academic at the university but from a different faculty. The QPA consultant was a member of the review panel to both facilitate the process and ensure that the process was managed consistently across colleges. A programme of interviews was typically set up over two to three days.

The panel considered input from the interviewees, the SER, any submissions and evidence provided by the school and made its observations and recommendations. A member of the QPA wrote the report and the panel provided input before it was finalised and sent to the Head of School for correction of errors of fact. The final panel report was ratified by all members of the panel, scrutinised and signed off by the chair of the panel. The School Reviews policy then required that the final report went to the Dean and the Faculty Board and then to the AAQB where the school was required to provide a plan of action to address the recommendations contained in the report. The AAQB was responsible, in consultation with the Dean and DVC, for developing a programme of reviews and the line managers were responsible for the implementation of the recommendations.

In preparation for each review, a meeting was held between the QPA and the relevant Head of School at which the review process was explained. The QPA addressed a whole school meeting, where again the process was explained. This meeting was also

used as an opportunity to answer questions. At this stage, following this meeting, the School formed a Reference Group (RG) which drove the School self-evaluation process resulting in the School Self-Evaluation Report (SER). There was a standard approach to the development of the SER which is outlined in the Toolbox for Programme and School Self Evaluation and Planning. Each school decided on the most appropriate process for the compilation of the SER. Realising that schools need considerable guidance and training in conducting self-evaluations, the QPA developed the "Toolbox" for self-evaluation purposes, comprising guidelines to a workshop-based process. The explanation of self-evaluation and planning process in the Toolbox for Programme and School Self Evaluation and Planning placed strong emphasis on the self-evaluation as a developmental process "intended to empower programme teams and Schools by increasing their shared knowledge about their offerings and developing capacity for collaborative reflection on their activities" (UKZN, n.d.-c p. 3). It goes on to point out that the development of a system of annual self-evaluation is linked to external reviews that demand a "greater degree of external accountability" and "to trends at a national level through the HEQC (Higher Education Quality Committee) to make institutions more accountable for their institutional quality systems". Therefore, the school reviews were presented as being part of the preparation for institutional audit and consequently, the Toolbox was aligned to national HEQC programme review criteria (HEQC, 2004a).

The Toolbox states that "the Faculty or School should decide on the most appropriate way to coordinate programme, discipline and School self-evaluation processes" (UKZN, n.d.-c p. 10). As will be explored in more detail in Chapter Three, this reflects a particular understanding of quality and impacts on the way in which the process is implemented.

The Policy on Quality Assurance and Development for a School at UKZN indicated that the SER should be based on the annual programme and school self-evaluations, however, this system was very unevenly embedded across the institution. The Toolbox recognised "considerable variation in the existing evaluation practices" (UKZN, 2004b, p. 6) and that self-evaluation is not always inclusive and incisive. The document further indicates that a process of consultation, engagement and support is critical for regular annual reflection to be embedded in the institution rather than a once-off exercise carried out when a school is scheduled for a review. At the same time, the document

went on to point out that there must be both the institutional climate and culture and the capacity and commitment to engage in reflection on reliable data which ensures that the gathering of evidence is not a “paper exercise” but that a portfolio is a “living and organic document that reflects the shared knowledge and understanding of academics working in programmes and in School communities of practice” (UKZN, 2004b, p. 15).

2.4 Conclusion

In this chapter the broader higher education and the institutional context within which the School Reviews process was implemented, experienced and engaged with was explored. The way in which the role and purpose of universities and consequently the role and function of academics within those institutions are shifting in response to global changes was considered. The higher education context in South Africa was also considered from this perspective and the way in which quality assurance is impacting the sector was examined. I then explored the institutional context within which the reviews that are investigated in this study took place. Finally, I explained the institutional quality assurance and improvement processes in general and the School Reviews process was outlined.

All of these processes take place within contested understandings of quality and quality assurance and improvement. In the next chapter the complex nature of such concepts is discussed.

Chapter 3
Quality Assurance and Improvement: key concepts and debates

The cultural system of ideas, perceptions and values about quality frame the way in which structures such as policies and practices addressing quality are designed and implemented as well as the way in which people respond to and engage with them. Within and outside higher education (HE) institutions there are a wide range of stakeholders with competing values, priorities and expectations about HE which underpin differing understandings of quality and expectations of quality assurance and improvement systems and processes. The notion of quality is often assumed to be understood and shared. The everyday use of the term infers that something of good quality is something valuable and worth owning or aspiring to. However, the basis upon which this judgement is made is often subjective and value-laden. The need for quality education however defined is not in dispute and the challenges facing South African (SA) HE are well documented (Badat, 2010; CHE, 2016; Scott et al., 2007; Soudien, 2010) as it struggles to transform an unequal sector in an unequal society. As discussed in Chapter Two, the sector is also dealing with the changing relationship of HE institutions to society.

This chapter examines the key concepts and debates in the field of quality assurance and improvement that informed the analysis of the School Reviews process.

3.1 Understandings of quality

The concept of quality has been part of the academic world for a very long time (Vroeijenstijn, 1995). However, notions of quality are often taken for granted, assumed and seldom problematized or well-theorised but in practice are almost constantly contested (Elassy, 2015; Harvey, 2010; Harvey & Williams, 2010; Wittek & Kvernbekk, 2011). Not only does understanding of the notion differ between people but “the same person may adopt different conceptualisations at different moments” (Harvey & Green, 1993, p. 10). Barnett (1992) argues that there is a relationship between perceptions of “what constitutes quality”, “the ends that education should serve” and “methodologies for evaluating quality” (p. 5). Given that the way in which people engage in quality

assurance and quality improvement processes is based on values and understandings of quality (Harvey, 2007; Harvey & Stensaker, 2008; Newton, 2007), where there is no explicit statement of and shared understanding of quality, people will respond in different ways to procedures and processes. Interests and priorities will differ.

Even though it is argued that it is necessary "to define as clearly as possible the criteria that each stakeholder uses when judging quality, and for these competing views to be taken into account when assessments of quality are undertaken" (Green, 1994, p. 17), the literature indicates that this is not happening (Elassy, 2015; Harvey, 2010; Harvey & Williams, 2010; Wittek & Kvernbekk, 2011). Most institutions and national HE systems work with a number of definitions of quality and assume shared understanding and broad acceptance. The best-known conceptualisations of quality, exceptional or excellence, perfection or consistency, fitness for purpose, value-for-money, and transformation were described by Harvey and Green (1993) and have been widely used to frame quality assurance activities and responses to them by academics, HE institutions and Quality Assurance agencies.

The concept of quality as exceptional, as described by Harvey and Green (1993), is closely linked with the notion of excellence which has a strong association with institutional reputation and high standards of elite universities. High standards and consequently, excellence are guaranteed by the fact that they are set such that only a select few will be able to achieve them. Quality as exception or excellence is essentially intrinsic, perceived and cannot be measured but is claimed to be nonetheless recognisable (Harvey, 2007; Webbstock, 2008; Wittek & Kvernbekk, 2011). It is achieved when both reputation and standards are maintained and protected. Resistance to quality assurance by academics can to some extent be explained by the widespread use of this notion of excellence (Bahari-Leak & McKenna, 2017); quality as excellence is guaranteed by academics who know what it is, have the resources to maintain it, and whose institutions have the reputation which safeguards it. The massification of HE is perceived as a threat to high standards and the involvement of external bodies or agencies as interference and a challenge to academic freedom and institutional autonomy (Singh, 2010). Massification is often deemed to be a problem for quality as excellence because the increasing numbers place pressure on resources. Concerns about 'slipping standards' is seen as a resistance to diversity and the reality that HE is not only serving an elite.

The notion of excellence constructs quality as being context and value free; it exists in an absolute sense in contrast to the notion of quality as 'fitness for purpose' which links quality to the extent to which an institution is meeting its stated mission and vision (Elassy, 2015; Green, 1994; Webbstock, 2008). The idea that quality can be 'context free' is inherently elitist in a massified higher education sector which accommodates a diversified student body who consequently are rendered invisible by an assumption of privilege.

Other conceptions of quality that dominate in HE are 'fitness for purpose', 'perfection', 'value-for-money' and 'efficiency'. These all have their roots in industry (Harvey, 2007; Newton, 2002; Webbstock, 2008) and the way in which they are defined draws on the language and practices that are often associated with the rise of neo-liberalism and managerial practices in HE. As universities are increasingly seen to be responsible for training highly skilled labour for the needs of the economy, so the focus is on efficiency and the extent to which taxpayer funding (in the case of public institutions) are being used in service of the market. They are based on the assumption that knowledge is a product or commodity to be quality assured, marketed and sold in an increasingly competitive market place (Barnett, 2000; 2004; Harvey, 2006; 2007; 2009). A fundamental problem with notions of quality developed in such an industrial context is that it is not clear what the product is, what service is being offered, who is the client and how to "measure" it. Furthermore, the construction of HE in terms of production and product, and student as client, is challenged because it impacts negatively both students and academic staff (Morley, 2003; Harvey, 2009).

The 'fitness for purpose' concept is widely used in HE and links quality judgements to the extent to which a service aligns with the institutional mission or the product aligns with what a client wants (Harvey & Knight, 1996). So, this conception of quality is interested in the extent to which the institution is doing what it claims, and that arrangements are in place to ensure that it can achieve its goals. This concept is usually associated with the satisfaction of external stakeholders such as employers, professional bodies, prospective students and government bodies. However, given that the notion of student as client constructs the student as a recipient of rather than an active participant in the teaching-learning process, this notion of quality can also be problematic in a HE context (Harvey & Knight, 1996). In addition, HE has a number of stakeholders to which it is accountable, so 'fitness for purpose' is counteracted by

'fitness of purpose' particularly in terms of the sector and national goals (economic, education) and emphasis on "customer-satisfaction" (Elassy, 2015; Harvey, 2007). These notions work to recognise that "'quality' and 'standards' are not timeless and invariant" and "cannot be linked to a single, a-historical and universal model of a higher education institution" (Badat, 2010, p. 4). If we are to have 'fitness for purpose' as a key conception underpinning what constitutes quality, then we need to have some kind of contextualized and nuanced understanding of what the purpose of the particular university is in the first place. "Quality and standards are historically specific and must be related to the objectives of institutions and to educational and broader social purposes" (Badat, 2010, p. 4).

In the South African context, the 'fitness of purpose' notion of quality has been included in the definitions used by the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) which as explained in Chapter Two is the formal quality assurance body responsible for quality assurance in the sector. This 'fitness of purpose' understanding of quality makes explicit an expectation that institutions must demonstrate alignment with national policy and goals. As discussed in Chapter Two, the understandings of quality which inform the work of the HEQC reflect an attempt to navigate a number of competing demands. These include the transformation of the HE sector in terms of the national goals for the HE system, including equity, access, effectiveness and efficiency (fitness of purpose), the specified institutional mission within a national framework that encompasses differentiation and diversity (fitness for purpose); efficiency (value for money) and transformation of individual learners for personal enrichment, as well as the requirements of social development and economic and employment growth (HEQC, 2000). Hence, quality assurance has a key role to play in the transformation of the SA HE sector, despite there being so little consensus as to what the purpose of HE is nationally and even less at an institutional level. To have a fit purpose is to have some kind of coherent sense of the role and aims of the institution. There are however a number of indications that SA HE is far from achieving this, such as (1) the tensions between equity and efficiency (as discussed in Chapter Two), (2) the extent to which belonging to an institutional type[13] affects (or does not) its purpose is contested, and

[13] The SA HE sector has three institutional types. A university of technology is intended to offer mainly vocational or career-focused undergraduate qualifications and a limited number of postgraduate qualifications. Traditional universities are intended to offer a range of undergraduate and postgraduate qualifications. Comprehensive universities are intended to offer a combination of qualifications typical

(3) the student protests of 2015 and 2016 have brought into sharp focus that there is little agreement on the purpose of the university in post-apartheid SA (Badat, 2015; Langa, 2017).

Another conception of quality in HE is that of quality as 'transformation'. This notion does not view education as a product or a service to a customer but as an ongoing process of enhancement and empowerment of the student as a consequence of the learning process; quality is therefore the "value added" to students (Harvey & Green, 1993; Harvey & Knight, 1996; Harvey, 2010). Student participation in the learning process is the focus (Ashwin, 2020; Ashwin, Abbas, & McLean, 2016). "Education is not a service *for* a customer (much less a product to be consumed) but an ongoing process of transformation *of* the participant. Transformative education both enhances the knowledge and skills of the participant but also empowers participants" (Harvey, 2009, p. 6). Ashwin (2020) indicates that the purpose of higher education teaching and learning is to bring about a transformative relationship to knowledge. This view of quality is about the process of education and not the product or service, hence quality is contextualised and relational and difficult to "measure" (Webbstock, 2008). Given that a transformation view of quality focuses on the improvement of learning and empowering the learners, the emphasis shifts to "organisational structure that encourages dialogue, team working "and "delegated responsibility for quality and standards" (Harvey, 2007, p. 10). This will be discussed further later in this chapter.

The discussion above has dealt with 'formal' meanings of quality which are relative, context specific and difficult to measure. The use of wide ranging and potentially contradictory notions of quality by the HEQC illustrates that developing a single shared and useful notion of quality is an elusive task. The way in which they have been used by the HEQC is strategically aligned to a broader state agenda. In the South African context transformation goes beyond the individual learner to institutional transformation (Badat, 2010; Luckett, 2010; Quinn & Boughey, 2009; Singh, 2010). The concept, 'transformation', therefore takes a particular form in SA and has less to do with the transformation of the individual student and more to do with the role HE

to both a university of technology and a traditional university. However, there is a lack of clarity as to how these three types have different purposes and concerns as the current funding formula which accords an hierarchical status to research drives academic drift whereby all universities move in the same direction: towards postgraduate education and research production (Kraak, 2012).

plays in the transformation of society at large (Quinn & Boughey, 2009; McKenna & Quinn, 2012).

> The challenge of enhancing quality, it should be clear, extends well beyond issues of access to universities and questions of the opportunities for intellectual, social and citizenship development and for success. It includes issues of institutional and academic cultures, and largely ignored epistemological and ontological issues associated with learning and teaching, curriculum, and pedagogical practice. It further extends to the very ideas and conceptions of the purposes and roles of universities (Badat 2010, p. 6).

It is only then that broader social transformation becomes possible.

However, all these formal definitions of quality fail to take into account how actors construe and construct quality and quality systems; what Newton (2002) describes as the 'situated' meanings of academics. Quality has to be understood from the perspective of those who are affected by it; for whom it has meaning and who resist and engage (Newton, 2007). The way in which academics perceive quality is central to the way in which they respond to quality assurance and improvement processes, how they engage with quality frameworks and policy and what meaning they attach to different aspects of quality. Whilst views about quality processes vary amongst academics (Cheng, 2011; Newton, 2000), for many academics quality processes are understood to be mostly about bureaucratic burden, compliance, control, challenge to autonomy and less about opportunity for improvement (Watty, 2006; Lomas, 2007; Newton, 2008; Shore, 2010). The audit, the most common form of externally driven quality assurance process, has mostly been experienced by academics as a "symbol of distrust in the professionalism of academics" (Cheng, 2009, p. 193). Some staff members feel manipulated and that they are neither trusted nor valued (Boughey & McKenna, 2011a; 2011b). Consequently, the literature suggests that their response to quality processes has largely been resistance, obstruction, distortion, revision, disengagement and "subverting power" by "game playing" (Blackmur, 2010; Harvey & Newton, 2004; Jones & De Saram, 2005; Lomas, 2007; Newton, 2000; 2002; Strydom, Zulu & Murray, 2004; Westerheijden, Hulpiau & Waeytens, 2007).

The consequence of this lack of engagement with the values and methodologies of quality processes is that there is "…little chance that these will either produce accurate

or meaningful assessments of teaching quality, or act as a spur to the quality enhancement of this aspect of individual and institutional activity" (Laughton, 2003, p. 310). Achieving success in quality improvement initiatives is a challenge when quality is essentially contested by competing voices and discourses (Newton, 2010, p. 53). The implementation of effective quality assurance and quality improvement processes "…may be less dependent on the rigour of application, …and more on its contingent use by actors and protagonists, and on how the system is viewed and interpreted by them" (Newton, 2007, p. 19). This gives rise to what is known as the "implementation gap" which is a consequence of a disjuncture between the views of the "managers" and "the managed" (Newton, 2002). Consequently, there will be a difference between what is planned and what happens.

3.2 Accountability and quality improvement

The analysis and practice of quality and quality processes is made more complex by a similar lack of clarity about the nature of quality assurance and quality improvement. A concern for both the assurance and improvement of quality inform both the design and implementation of quality related processes in HE. Quality assurance (QA) is commonly used to refer to quality systems and accountability processes that ensure that quality, however defined, is achieved (Harvey & Green, 1993) and thereby provides reassurance to a variety of stakeholders (Harvey & Newton, 2004). Quality Improvement (QI), on the other hand, refers to those processes that bring about an ongoing change that improves or enhances institutional activities and consequently, the learning experiences of students. It is clear that quality assurance and quality improvement are not distinct activities. Accountability processes such as accreditation and institutional audits have the underlying purpose of improving quality. However as will be discussed further below, quality assurance has come to be associated with compliance to bureaucratic requirements which does not have the desired impact on quality improvement or enhancement.

Many studies of quality assurance that deal with issues of policy and implementation of quality systems in HE, differentiate between systems as either external and hence, accountability driven, or internal and therefore improvement focused (Barnett, 1994; Chidindi, 2016; Gordon, 1998; Harvey, 2009; Harvey & Williams, 2010; Williams, 2016). External quality systems such as accreditation and audit which are well

developed and used extensively in most countries are characterised as summative, policy-driven, and standardised, and which document quality as “product” and tend to foster a “compliance culture” (Barnett, 1994; Harvey, 2009). In contrast QI processes and initiatives are characterised as formative, context-specific, and self-evaluative, and are seen to foster continuous improvement and a “quality culture”, (Barnett, 1994; Fourie, 2000; Harvey, 2009). External and internal processes and consequently accountability and improvement therefore tend to be viewed as on either side of a divide.

The accountability-improvement dichotomy described above represents a “fundamental tension” between control and compliance and quality improvement (Vroeijenstijn, 1995; Houston, 2008; Dano & Stensaker, 2007). On the one hand is the “dominance of quality management as a technology of control” (Houston, 2008, p. 67) and on the other, is “learning about how we can do better towards achieving our purpose” (Houston, 2008, p. 69). Issues of ownership and control are central to quality assurance/improvement systems and how academics engage with them (Barnett, 1994). Quality assurance and quality processes have tended to shift the location of responsibility for quality in institutions to specific units responsible for leading such processes. This has moved the patterns of evaluation in HE away from those that were “internal, self-interested and led to the self-development of the academic community” towards “becoming colonised by a technicism linked to purposive knowledge interests rooted in surveillance, control and external direction” (Barnett, 1994, p. 176).

Barnett (1994) argues that quality assurance methodologies can be broadly categorized on the basis of who controls the process. The type of process – collegial or bureaucratic - is linked to who conducts the evaluation and hence, is in control of the process (for example, audit versus internal peer review). Barnett (1994) goes on to assert that quality evaluation is most valuable when those involved in HE learn about themselves and improve their own practices. Transformation becomes possible when people internal to the institution engage in the type of quality processes that involve self-evaluation and the development of self-understanding. For this to be possible they must initiate, own and control the quality processes. Processes that are driven by external imperatives prioritise the interests of external stakeholders which are usually accountability driven.

The difference between the emphasis, strategies and consequences of quality improvement and assurance raises important questions about the relationship between internal and external quality processes and consequently, accountability and improvement. The tension arises because of the often-competing requirements and goals of accountability to external stakeholders (government and society) and ongoing continuous improvement processes (Dano & Stensaker, 2007; Singh, 2010; Vroeijenstijn, 1995; Williams, 2016).

The approach to quality processes as a choice between accountability and improvement has detracted from the consideration that both have a key role to play in HE and that the challenge is how to hold them in a positive tension with one another. Whilst they are two distinct processes (Harvey & Newton, 2007, p. 232), the implementation of internal systems of quality improvement is inextricably linked to external quality processes. The success of external systems rests on the implementation of changes within institutions (Westerheijden et al., 2007).

Harvey (2010) suggests that external systems may in fact create obstacles to internal quality improvement. In most instances, he argues, because of the resistance to external system the implementation of internal quality systems is often also resisted as they are "viewed by academics as alien, as internal-external requirements that demand compliance rather than encourage engagement" (Harvey, 2009, p. 2). So it is external demands rather than internal review which are driving the quality agenda. However, there is limited evidence that external quality systems stimulate quality improvement within institutions (Harvey & Newton, 2004; Harvey & Williams, 2010; Rosa, Sarrico & Amaral, 2012; Stensaker, 2008; Shah, 2013).

One of the challenges is that the means to measure the impact of quality assurance are inadequate (Newton, 2013). The evidence available suggests that there have been positive impacts such as development of structures and organisational and management processes to promote quality, implementation of new routines and procedures, implementation of information management systems and gathering of useful information, and increasing involvement of students and other stakeholders in the university (Brennan & Shah, 2000; Harvey & Knight, 1996; Harvey & Williams, 2010; Stensaker, 2006; Stensaker, Langfeldt, Harvey, Huisman & Westerheijden, 2011). However, the impact has been limited and uneven particularly with respect to

enhancement of student learning and institutional collegiality (Kristensen, 2010; Shah 2013; Stensaker et al., 2011).

3.3 Internal quality processes and quality improvement

Self-evaluation with peer review or external validation is one of the processes widely used for internal quality improvement (Chidindi, 2017). The use of self-evaluation particularly for internal quality improvement processes is premised on the argument that if transformation in the teaching and learning experience is to take place then quality processes must involve staff members reflecting on current practices, developing self-understanding and identifying shared interests (Barnett, 1994; Henkel, 2005; Kleijnen et al., 2014).

As has already been discussed above, where there isn't a shared understanding of what quality is, the value of quality processes, how quality is being "measured" and why, then staff are likely to have limited knowledge upon which to make decisions about why and how to participate in quality processes. If staff are going to make informed decisions and implement the necessary changes, then review processes should promote dialogue, the identification and sharing of good practice, and should encourage and support reflection (Maher, 2013). These processes are therefore likely to be more effective when there is regular open discussion involving staff and students about quality matters (Bamber, 2011; Kleijnen et al., 2014, p. 123). Whilst many quality procedures are constructed as "open, participatory and enabling", and involve staff in the process of self-evaluation, Shore and Wright (1999) argue that they are in effect "coercive and punitive" (p. 559). This is because a quality culture which is "synonymous with developing a self-critical and reflective community of practitioners" cannot be imposed and has to be integrated with everyday practices (Harvey, 2009, p. 4) and continuous quality improvement processes (Gosling & D'Andrea, 2005; Newton, 2007).

Quality practices that are "embedded in day to day work" rather than an add-on activity carried out in response to internal or external demands (Kleijnen et al., 2014, p. 123) ensure that there are frequent opportunities to meet and collaborate (Srikathan & Dalrymple, 2004; Harvey, 2005). These processes then reflect the normal working practices of staff and are less likely to lead to resistance, disengagement and contestation (Newton, 2000; Blackmur, 2010, Harvey, 2007). In addition, processes in

which staff are able to share information are seen in the literature to be experienced as less bureaucratic and therefore are more likely to get buy-in from staff (Gordon, 1998; Harvey & Knight, 1996; Kleijnen et al., 2014).

Self-evaluation reports have come to be a standard part of both internal and external review and audit processes and usually provide a panel with information and analysis upon which it can base its deliberations (Westerheijden et al., 2007). Systems for managing and improving quality must be robust, transparent and underpinned by the ongoing collection of quantitative and qualitative data, evidence-based analysis and make available time for discussion and reflection (Laughton, 2003; Lomas, 2007; Newton, 2010; Strydom et al., 2004). There must be both the institutional climate and culture and the capacity and commitment to engage in reflection on reliable data which ensures that the gathering of evidence is not a "paper exercise" but reflects the shared knowledge and understanding of academics working together. This means that such processes must be underpinned by well organised internal policies, structures and systems, well developed management information systems, and the participation of external stakeholders (Tavares, Sin & Amaral, 2015).

The alignment between a review process and ongoing academic structures and activities also means that they are less demanding on academic time and workload. For many preparing for and responding to quality assurance procedures is an administrative burden and time consuming (Harvey, 2006; Laughton, 2003; Lomas, 2007; Newton, 2002; Newton, 2010; Stensaker, 2008; Stensaker et al., 2011). One of the complaints raised by academics against quality processes is that they bring extra work. Quality assurance has re-shaped academics' conditions of work and behaviour (Newton, 2002; Trowler, 2002) and increased their workload because quality assurance as an evidence-based exercise requires collection, analysis and collation of large amounts of data, information and documentation (Gosling & D'Andrea, 2005; Newton, 2002; Shore & Wright, 1999).

The role of leadership and management in quality processes is also seen in the literature to be critical in ensuring that the process is open, honest and leads to changes. Staff would need to trust those in management if they are to experience the self-evaluation as unthreatening (Harvey, 2010; Karlsen & Stensaker, 1995). The less threatening the process, the more openly reflective and honest people are likely to be

(Harvey, 2002; 2007). Change processes require leadership which is willing to “listen carefully to supporters and critics and to foster experimentation and evaluation, and facilitate purposeful diversity” (Gordon, 2002, p. 105). For these processes to be effective management must trust staff to be professional and committed, and staff members must trust management and the process (Bamber, 2011; Harvey, 2010),

Collegiality, effective communication, trust, and willingness to engage in open and honest reflection are argued to be necessary for QI (Barnett, 1994; Harvey, 2009; Harvey & Knight, 1996; Kleijnen et al., 2014). Staff who are threatened by what is perceived to be and experienced as an imposition are less likely to participate and trust the process (Laughton, 2003; Newton, 2002; Trowler 2002, 2012). Quality processes must therefore be underpinned be a “culture of collegiality and open communication” and “a willingness to change” (Kleijnen et al., 2014, p. 123). A collegial culture with strong informal relationships is more likely to be characterised by high levels of trust, an open-door policy, and horizontal relationships and the nature and scope of relationships in a school impact the opportunity for generative teacher dialogue (Priestley, Biesta & Robinson, 2012, p. 9).

Follow-up and monitoring of the implementation of recommendations or improvement plans is shown to be necessary (Dano & Stensaker, 2007). Suggested improvements must be made, and a process must be in place to monitor and ensure that this happens (Hulpiau & Waeytens, 2003; Kleijnen et al., 2014). The literature is clear that this is particularly necessary if there is a lack of internally driven continual quality improvement (Harvey & Stensaker, 2008).

Many of these essential aspects of quality improvement processes described in the literature are based on a set of values and behaviors that, it is argued, provide a context within which quality improvement processes involving self-evaluation will be possible. This is grounded in the “quality as culture” approach.

3.4 Quality as culture

In response to growing concern that quality assurance systems driven by external accountability demands and emphasising control and measurement are not leading to the expected improvements in quality, interest turned to the notion of a quality culture and its relationship to internal quality procedures (Gvaramadze, 2008; Harvey, 2009;

Strydom et al., 2004). The notion of culture however shares the same challenges as that of quality; its meaning is assumed and its use in the field of quality is not well understood (Harvey 2010; Harvey & Stensaker, 2008). The quality culture approach is based on the assumption that change will happen if members of the institution share a common set of values, beliefs and norms. In this view quality culture is a set of shared beliefs and norms about quality that shape quality processes and will enable a development-oriented and shared-responsibility approach to continuous improvement in HE. The success of quality processes depends on academic involvement which is meaningful, accurate and ongoing and hence, academics must share these values and support the methodologies that underpin quality review (Cardoso, Rosa & Santos, 2012). Quality culture is therefore conceptualised as the development of and compliance with processes of internal quality assurance and a set of on-going practices characterised by negotiation as opposed to the imposition by management or an external body (Newton 2007, p. 14). It includes shared values, beliefs, expectation, commitment and processes that facilitate and enhance quality (Harvey & Stensaker 2008; Yorke, 2000). The development of effective quality systems and a quality culture that underpins it, it is argued, will ensure that an institution can both meet the challenge of external quality assurance such as audit or accreditation and develop the capacity for sophisticated self-evaluation (Newton, 2007, p. 17). Quality culture is an “approach” which focuses on fostering the expected attitudes and behaviour needed for the effective implementation of a quality system (Harvey, 2007) and to shift quality assurance from an externally imposed requirement to an integral part of HE.

This approach treats a “quality culture” as something separate from or a sub-set of an existing organisational culture (Harvey & Stensaker, 2008). The underlying assumption of the quality culture approach is that a “quality culture” is a positive thing which will necessarily lead to an improvement in quality. It is also based on the assumption that culture can be introduced, changed and directed and therefore, staff can be made aware of the importance of certain shared values, attitudes and behaviours and there are ways in which they can be encouraged to adopt them. In this case culture is something that an organisation *has* and therefore can be developed or manipulated rather than what an organisation *is* and hence, an integrated part of organisational life (Harvey & Stensaker, 2008, p. 431). Harvey and Stensaker (2008,

p. 437) go on to argue that structures of quality assurance are often designed without taking into account existing social structures and tacit institutional ways of handling quality assurance issues (Henkel, 2000; Newton, 2000). Quality culture is a part of a broader organisational culture which that provides the context within which quality assurance and improvement takes place. The organisational culture (what an institution is) exists prior to quality interventions and is often opaque to the people who operate within it. Whilst it pre-exists them they change it as they interact with and in it.

Multiple cultures and sub-cultures exist within an institution (Becher, 1999, Bergquist & Pawlak, 2008) and hence, there are many views of what quality is and many ways in which people respond to quality processes and structures. These cultures permeate all levels of an institution; they exist simultaneously but one usually predominates (Bergquist & Pawlak, 2008). As discussed in Chapter Two, one of the challenges facing institutions is the shifts from a predominately collegial culture to that of a managerial culture. A collegial culture is typically discipline-based and values autonomy and academic freedom, and a managerial culture is understood to be goal-driven and values efficiency and accountability (Berquist & Pawlak, 2008). It is the clash between the managerial and collegial cultures or "cultural dissonance" which creates political and cultural barriers to quality initiatives (Avdjieva & Wilson, 2002). Quality assurance has been associated with a managerial culture and quality improvement with a collegial culture.

There is a multiplicity of often conflicting sets of values, norms, and ideas within an institution and hence, each institutional context and quality culture will be unique. "It is, generally spoken, the interplay of the manifest and formal quality assurance processes and the latent and informal values and assumptions that lie at the heart of enhancing an institutional quality culture" (Vettori, 2012, p. 8).

The issue of resistance and engagement with quality processes form the basis of the four "ideal type" quality cultures described by Harvey and Stensaker (2008) who examine the possible interaction between varying internal dynamics and external conditions. They describe four types of quality cultures which they argue can be used as a tool to both identify and change existing culture and provide "a starting point for investigating how structure and culture can be matched with respect to quality assurance" (Harvey & Stensaker, 2008, p. 437). A way in which to consider how

institutions can balance external accountability and internal improvement priorities which are a necessary feature of any quality system.

The first of the four quality cultures described by Harvey and Stensaker (2008) is the responsive culture which has an external driven improvement focus and consequently, engages with external demands and uses these priorities to shape internal processes. Priority is therefore given to meeting external requirements even when they do not align with ongoing activities. Given that effective improvement processes require staff buy in and ownership, the imposition of external demands can lead to resistance.

The second of Harvey and Stensaker's (2008) four quality cultures is the reactive culture, which is compliance and accountability driven. It exists when external demands drive the way in which an institution sets up and prioritises quality processes. There is very little internal resistance and staff comply with internal requirements to meet external demands. Staff have no sense of ownership over the process as there is little opportunity for engagement.

The main features of the third quality culture, the regenerative quality culture, includes a shared commitment to quality improvement which is embedded in everyday activities and the institution responds to external pressures in terms of its mission, vision and goals (Harvey & Stensaker, 2008). Internal processes are prioritised, and external demands must align with shared internal goals and processes. Quality process are integrated into the ongoing activities.

In a reproductive quality culture, the fourth of Harvey and Stensaker's four quality cultures, the status quo is maintained. Existing norms and goals are deeply ingrained, quality processes assumed to be effective, and practices as part of ongoing activities are well-established. Resistance to reflection and reconceptualization of goals comes mainly from a belief that there is no need for it (Harvey & Stensaker, 2008).

Hence, it should be obvious that a quality assurance system (and 'quality cultures') will be inclined to look very different within a reactive or regenerative cultural setting, or within a responsive or reproductive cultural setting.

Academic resistance to both externally and internally driven quality initiatives needs to be understood in the context of the changing relationship between the university and the state and between academics and institutional management. A shift in the

culture of the university towards a corporate, bureaucratic, entrepreneurial one changes the way managers manage and how academics respond (Avdjieva & Wilson, 2002; Trowler, 2002; Lomas & Ursin, 2009; Newton, 2002). As discussed in Chapter Two, the traditional role and value of universities has come under challenge. The literature suggests that the collegial is being undermined by the managerial, and there are a range of competing interests and expectations. Marketisation of knowledge, managerialism, state intervention, and vocationalism have brought about changes in academic roles in relation to teaching, research, administration, and the community (Barnett, 2000; Deem & Brehony, 2005; Rowlands, 2013). This has resulted in demands for HEIs to make a more explicit and measurable contribution to society and the economy (Shore, 2010). The focus on accountability has affected institutions' approaches to quality assurance which has increasingly been found to be about data collection and analysis, performance monitoring and measuring, bureaucracy, compliance and the concerns of managers.

Quality assurance has thus mostly been seen as driving state and corporate agendas and facilitating the imposition of industrial and managerial constructions of the role of the university and therefore as a threat to autonomy, academic freedom and allegiance to discipline (Lomas & Ursin, 2009; Harvey, 2009; Henkel, 2005; Weinberg, 2007). Changes in the nature and purpose of Higher Education have also brought with them changes in the role and nature of leadership and management. The values traditionally associated with universities – self and collegial monitoring, accountability and autonomy – was the basis upon which professionals and academics were relied upon to ensure quality, has to contend with managerial requirements and ways of operating, and there are a range of competing interests and expectations (Brennan & Shah, 2000; Bergquist & Pawlak, 2008). The consequence of this is that quality related initiatives are often perceived to be or experienced as the imposition of increasing managerialism, a lack of trust in academics and a threat to collegiality and professional life (Blackmur, 2010; Harvey, 2009; Henkel, 2005; Jones & De Saram, 2005; Stensaker et al., 2011; Shore, 2008; Weinberg, 2007).

The structures through which institutions are managed and the culture that is the values, beliefs and ideas that underpin them, inform the way in which members of management and staff interact. There has been a shift to centralised or corporate ways of managing institutions. The role of departmental leaders and senior academics have

changed as the control of knowledge/information and decision-making have shifted into the hands of institutional management (Deem, 2004). This therefore has implications for the exercise of authority and accountability as delegation involves the flow of authority from the top, where the authority rests, downwards. Administrators in effect are ensuring the delegated authority of senior management and council and the resultant shift of authority away from the professoriate and in conflict with the culture of autonomy and collegial governance of traditional academia (Deem & Brehony, 2005; Rowlands, 2013). This impacts on decision-making and the way in which people interact. In a collegial governance system academics have a greater role in deciding how and what they teach, the quality or standards against which it is measured and the use of resources.

Nonetheless there remains "an assemblage…of component parts (departments, centres, units and programmes) and since much of the specialised and detailed expertise of the institution rests there, there are continuing and crucial roles for leadership for heads of department/centres/units and for programme directors/leaders" (Gordon, 2002, p. 106). And it is at this level that the discipline can provide a community within which academics operate and identity is formed with particular purpose and values (Becher & Trowler, 2001, p. 47; Henkel, 2000, p. 159; Knight & Trowler, 2000).

Staff members have both professional and personal identities which are formed from disciplinary discourses as well as their own work and life experiences (Becher, 1994). Whilst an academic identity is defined by three aspects - the institution, the discipline and a sense of the profession - an academic's first allegiance is usually to the discipline (Henkel, 2000). Academic staff in traditional universities, such as UKZN where this study is based, work within disciplines and this has been found to form the primary basis for the development of a professional identity or self-concept. Henkel (2005) argues that the discipline and the department (along with academic freedom) are core to the formation of academic identity and "what gives meaning and self-esteem" (p. 173). This is significant because the way in which the academics respond to quality assurance and improvement activities is influenced by their discipline-based identities. The literature on QA very rarely draws links between academic responses to such processes and their disciplinary allegiances. In this study, the case studies come from across disciplines and the way in which quality processes play out differently across

these varied settings and draw on the different disciplinary identities of academics is examined.

Whilst boundaries between disciplines are blurred, disciplinary differences impact the way in which staff respond to quality assurance and the need for change. Disciplines have different characteristics including the body of knowledge over which it presides, ways of knowing/being, ways in which knowledge is produced and organised, theories, and research methods and focus of research (Becher & Trowler, 2001, p. 41). Certain disciplines lend themselves to greater collegiality because there is so much more that is common across the structure of the knowledge (for example, shared research approaches); there is less space for contention and argumentation in disciplines with very strong and widely shared norms, values and processes (Becher 1994, Becher & Trowler, 2001). In disciplines where there is no such consensus, academics may tend to work more in isolation from one another on their own research projects and within their own schools of thought. This makes shared approaches to quality assurance and improvement less likely. As McKenna and Boughey (2014) argue this is a broad academic characteristic which is more strongly evident in Humanities academics.

The changes in HE have brought with them conflict between organisational expectations and demands, and the way academics understand their role within their discipline (Whitchurch & Gordon, 2010). Whilst quality policies and systems are set up at national and institutional level they are implemented within academic disciplines (Becher & Trowler, 2001, p. 86). “The dominance of the discipline, too, has come under severe challenge as organising structure for knowledge production and transmission, as guardian of academic culture, and as nurturer of academic identity” (Henkel, 2005, p. 173). Nonetheless, the response to quality activities differs across institutions and between disciplines, and the research suggests there is a need to understand a certain degree of resilience by academics as emerging from their seeking to accommodate, defend their values, and sustain the status quo within their academic communities (Becher, 1981; Henkel, 2005).

3.5 Conclusion

Despite many years of quality assurance and improvement activities, the notion of quality remains largely ambiguous. Quality practices have resulted in systems that focus on regulation and the purpose, processes and the effects of quality assurance

are contested. There have been very few studies on the impact of and outcomes of quality processes generally and even less about internal quality processes (Harvey & Williams, 2010, Williams & Harvey, 2015). Impact studies have been limited in their scope and number and have largely been a review of quality systems and consequently, provide limited insight into the impact of quality (Leiber, Stensaker & Harvey, 2015; Singh, 2010; Stensaker, 2008). The research considering the impact of quality assurance processes and procedures suggests that quality processes are not addressing significant academic issues (Laughton, 2003; Newton, 2002; Stensaker et al., 2011) and that they have had limited influence on the transformation of student learning (Harvey & Newton 2004).

There are a wide variety of views about the impact of such processes with students often the least convinced that they have a positive impact (Stensaker et al., 2011). Quality assurance does not “engage the heart of the academic endeavour” (Harvey, 2009) when it does not ensure that students are participating in and being empowered to take control of their own learning process (Elassy, 2013; Harvey & Knight, 1996). It is not clear what it is that works in practice for quality evaluation and enhancement, and why it works or how academics engage with improvement practices (Harvey & Newton, 2004, p. 159). Quality evaluation has the possibility to be transformative if it is “reclaimed from politicians, trust in higher education needs to be re-established, and attention focused on internal processes and internal motivators” (Harvey & Newton, 2004, p. 161).

In the next chapter I interrogate the ontological and epistemological assumptions underpinning the research and the methodological choices I have made. I explain the methodological framework and describe the methods I used to select, interpret and analyse the data used in this research.

Chapter 4
Methodology

In the previous chapter I discussed the literature on quality assurance and improvement in higher education and highlighted the complex and contested nature of the field. I argued that despite the widespread implementation of these processes we do not know enough about the impact they have on quality. In this chapter I will examine how I went about investigating the interplay between organisational structures and cultures and how this is mediated by agents, in order to understand the conditions that enable or constrain quality improvement. The focus of this research is an internal quality improvement process at a university in South Africa in order to contribute to our understanding of how it is that QA and QI emerge as they do within the higher education sector. The unit of analysis of the study is the School Reviews process as described in Chapter Two.

In this chapter I make explicit the ontological and epistemological stance I took in relation to this research. It is necessary to make explicit the ontological and epistemological assumptions underpinning the research as they have implications for the methodological choices I have made and for claims I make (if any) about validity, generalisability, and predictability. I explain the methodological framework and describe the methods used to select, interpret and analyse the data, and make explicit my position and actions to ensure that the research stands up to scrutiny with respect to trustworthiness and ethical considerations.

4.1 Research Question

> What agential, structural and cultural mechanisms enable/constrain emergence of quality improvement through the School Reviews process in a university in the South African higher education setting?

This question hones in on one kind of quality process at one specific university. However, it does so not so much to make sense of what emerged within that particular context at that particular time, but more significantly to enable a more nuanced understanding of how it is that quality processes play out within any specific context. By answering the research question, I seek in this study to contribute towards a wider

understanding of the emergent nature of quality improvement processes. The findings may help to evidence the specific mechanisms at play in each of the school reviews being analysed and such findings may be of interest to readers across other contexts or may serve to illustrate the need to adopt a more complex depth ontology to our understandings of how quality processes emerge. By doing so it will add to the limited research on internal quality processes (Willian & Harvey, 2015) which as argued in Chapter 3 are more likely to lead to quality improvement within an institution.

It is with a brief outline of this depth ontology that I begin this chapter, as I explain how and why I use a view of reality as differentiated and ontologically stratified as explicated by Bhaskar (1989). I then discuss how I have drawn on analytical dualism and Archer's (1995) methodological framework to investigate the cultural, structural and agential conditions that enable or constrain the emergence of quality improvement at a university in the South African (SA) Higher Education (HE) context.

The very act of embarking on a research project involves a commitment to the possibility that something "exists" and that there is a way in which it can be "known". And even more importantly that there is some value or purpose in doing so. Making explicit the assumptions that are being made about the nature of the social world, the possibility for knowing it and the choice of methodology that is coherent with these assumptions has implications for the explanatory possibilities of the research.

In working to make explicit the assumptions that inform this research, I found that critical realism provided the philosophical and social scientific framework that resonated most deeply with my view of the world and my desire to make sense of the reality within which I work "in all its complexity and diversity" (Danermark, Ekström, Jakobsen & Karlsson, 2002, p. 3). The critical project is one in which the task of social research is to excavate the underlying conditions and mechanisms deep below the surface of the empirical world which make knowledge of this world possible. But more importantly given that "we will only be able to understand – and so change – the social world if we identify the structures at work that generate those events and discourses" (Bhaskar, 1989, p. 2), critical realism provided me with the prospect that the world can be transformed by research. An understanding of social structures and power relations provides people with knowledge upon which they can choose to act or not. Otherwise, why bother?

4.2 Critical Realism

Critical realism as a broad philosophical stance encompasses different versions which are united in a critique of both positivist and interpretive views of the world. Critical realism as expounded by Bhaskar (1989) and extended by theorists such as Collier (1994), Sayer (2000), and Archer (2000, 2003) provides an ontological framework which recognises the ontological depth and the resulting complexity of the social world and provides conceptual tools to explore and understand it (and consequently change it).

Bhaskar (1989) posits that the world is intransitive in that it exists and operates independently of our knowledge of it (ontological realism). This view of reality rejects the positivist position which places the researcher/knower in an objective and independent relationship to the researched/knowledge thus conflating what is known with the object itself. Bhaskar (1989) refers to this as the epistemic fallacy. In separating what we know from the object of knowledge itself, knowledge of the social world becomes possible. The social world is unlike the world of traditional positivist research which assumes a closed system within which there is stability and regularity making it possible to predict and determine events and their consequences. The social world is an open system in which social interactions are multiple, complex and changing and hence, is unpredictable, unstable and contingent. This does not mean that it is not possible to have knowledge about it.

Bhaskar (1989) provides an explanation of reality as differentiated into three domains or “ontological strata” which are nested in one another. The Real is the deepest layer and is largely unobservable and consists of structures that have generative powers which give rise to mechanisms. The Actual consists of events that happen when the structures and mechanisms at the level of the Real are activated (or remain dormant when other mechanisms predominate) and emerge in the domain of the Actual. These events arise even if we are unaware of them. The third domain, the Empirical, is our experience, knowledge and observation of the events in the Actual domain.

In order to develop knowledge of the social world we need to move beyond an examination of the observable (the Empirical) to explore the events (the Actual) and then uncover the mechanisms which give rise to these events (the Real). The School Reviews process and the documentation that is produced are “events” at the level of

the Actual which are experienced in multiple ways by staff in the school and university at the level of the Empirical. In order to understand the process and what may constrain or enable the extent to which the School Reviews process can lead to quality improvement, it is necessary to examine the mechanisms that trigger these events.

Generative mechanisms operate when triggered. However, in a complex social world, the effects of some may change or cancel out the effect of others. The power of a mechanism may "be possessed unexercised, exercised unactualised, and actualized undetected or unperceived." (Archer, Bhaskar, Collier, Lawson & Norrie, 1998. p. xii). Events activated in the Real are held in the domain of the Actual regardless of whether they are experienced or not in the domain of the Empirical.

Based on this ontological claim, Bhaskar (1989) challenges the positivist claim that it is possible, once having observed a regular sequence of events, to establish causation. This is because events happen in a context (complex social world) and "causal mechanisms" are "contingent" on that context. In order to understand the world, it is necessary to establish and examine casual mechanisms at the level of the Real, how they work, and under what conditions they are activated or not. The social world has multiple causal mechanisms and structures that depend on the context. Hence, the same causal structures will interact differently with causal mechanisms at the level of the Real and produce different event(s) at the level of Actual. The more complex the interaction of mechanisms the more challenging it becomes to predict or explain the outcomes. This however does not preclude the possibility to anticipate tendencies in outcomes which may be relatively enduring (Carter & New, 2004).

The dominant view of causality as a set of observable regularities has therefore been rejected by those working within a realist paradigm and a counter argument that it must be understood as a result of mechanisms (ways of acting) and liabilities (causal powers) has been provided (Danermark, 2002; Sayer, 2010). Causality, it is argued, is not a linear cause and effect relationship between objects or events but rather powers or liabilities which either enable or constrain actions or effects. This counters the probability arguments made by empiricists which assert that what we observe is what is real and hence, we can infer links between variables. Thus, a casual claim is "about what an object is like and what it can do and only derivatively what it *will* do in any particular situation" (Sayer, 2010, p. 105 his emphasis).

Given the complexity of the social world, casual powers are the consequence of the interaction of mechanisms which exist whether or not a mechanism is exercised and/or experienced. Mechanisms therefore may exert an influence whether active or inactive, and may exert a regular or inconsistent influence, hence events and situations are not "pre-determined"; they are "determined" (Archer et al., 1998, p. 130). The effects of a mechanism(s) are mediated by both context and other mechanisms and are independent of one another. So, to understand an event it is necessary to identify causal mechanisms, the condition under which they are activated and, as importantly, those under which they are not (Bhaskar, 2008). Given the complexity of the social world and the multiple mechanisms that might be at play in the emergence of the events of School Reviews, it is not possible to identify every mechanism at play, and hence, it will always be a partial account. It would be impossible to identify each and every mechanism at play in the emergence of an event at the level of the Actual, such as a School Review or each and every mechanism at play in the emergence of experiences at the level of the Empirical, such as the ways in which academics participated in or resisted the School Reviews.

The nature of an event or object and its causal powers are internally or necessarily related (Sayer, 2010, p. 105) thus making it possible to infer what it is about the object or event that gives rise to its powers or liabilities. However, the activation and experience of causal powers/liabilities and context are contingently related and hence, it is necessary to examine the conditions of their activation and effect.

> Processes of change usually involve several causal mechanisms which may be only contingently related to one another. Not surprisingly then, depending on conditions, the operation of the same mechanism can produce quite different results and, alternatively, different mechanisms may produce the same empirical result (Sayer, 2010, p. 108)

If common or distinguishing properties are found one cannot assume that they are causally significant (Sayer, 2010, p. 139). In social realist research we are interested in finding reasons for things or the likelihood of the occurrence of an event in given circumstances (Carter & New, 2004). There are a variety of structures, mechanisms and events in the complex social world, similar mechanisms can give rise to different events and similar events may be the result of different causes or emergent properties.

Hence, emergence is the process though which new social practices with their own properties and powers come into being (Carter & New, 2004, p. 14; Sayer, 2000).

Experiences and observations at the level of the Empirical are changing, relative and are the starting point for developing understanding of and deepening insight into the social world but it is necessary to examine the world at the level of the Real to excavate mechanisms that give rise to events at the level of the Actual which are observed and experienced at the level of the Empirical. The data comprised school review events that occurred at the level of the Actual, and the experiences of such events at the level of the Empirical, but my role as researcher entailed moving beyond these to examine the mechanisms from which such quality improvement events and experiences emerged.

The social world operates under the influence of many factors which includes the complex nature of relationships between people, situations and ideas, beliefs, values and norms. The influences are multiple and complex, particularly because the social world is “peopled” (Archer et al., 1998, p. 190). As a researcher I position myself in a critical realist frame and assert that it is possible using a theory-guided examination of causal mechanisms to explain a social phenomenon and, given that society is an open system, it will be possible to “conduct a well-informed discussion about the potential consequences of mechanisms working in different settings” (Danermark et al, 2002, p. 2) and to generate “practically adequate” knowledge that builds theory (Sayer, 2010, p. 69) that is “more or less truthlike” (Danermark et al, 2002, p. 10). Realist explanation therefore requires the social scientist to “move back and forth between theoretical description of things and their interrelationships at various levels and discovery and explanation of their properties” (Carter & New, 2004, p. 8). The research we carry out and the theories we develop make it possible to narrow the “ontological gap” between what we know about the world and the world itself (Danermark et al., 2002).

So then how is this possible? What approach do I take to explore a quality improvement process that is implemented and experienced unevenly across schools which are situated in an institution undergoing ongoing change? In the next section I discuss the analytical framework that made it possible.

4.3 Archer's Social Realist Theory: An analytical framework

Margaret Archer (1995, 1996) provides a way in which to come to better understand the social world and the social phenomena which constitute this "reality" that is manifested by the dynamic relations of cultural systems which includes ideas, beliefs, values and ideology, social structures such as material resources and social behaviour, relations in the world, and agency or the human capacity to act. These concepts, which are fundamental to Archer's (1995) work and this research, are explored in depth below.

In Realist Social Theory (1995), Archer applied herself to developing a methodology through which to make sense of the social world and make it possible to move beyond "what social reality is" and "begin to explain it" (Archer, 1995, p. 5). She developed the Morphogenetic/static Model (MM) which as an analytical framework does not have explanatory powers but is a practical tool for understanding society and by taking into consideration time and human actions, the ability to identify and understand instances of change or stasis in the social world (Archer, 1995, p.p. 5-6).

A central concern for those researching sociological issues is the relationship between people and the social world and more particularly the extent to which human behaviour and action is either "determined" or "voluntary". Archer (1995) disputes the notion of *downward conflation* in which structure has "causal efficacy" over agency and therefore rejects positivistic notions of universal laws which determine human behaviour and hence, would allow us to predict human behaviour. Equally she rejects the primacy of individual perceptions, values and meaning, that the social world is entirely a product of human activity or *upward conflation* in which agency has "causal efficacy" over structure (Archer, 1995). For Archer (1995), the interplay between structure, culture and agency is key to understanding the social world. This is only possible if the "fallacy of conflation" is asserted; structure and agency have distinct powers and properties and cannot be conflated.

Archer (1995, p. 14) argues that structure and agency are analytically distinct, are irreducible to one another and have distinct causal powers and properties. The principle of emergence applies to both structural and cultural properties which have temporal priority, relative autonomy and causal efficacy with respect to agency. These structures have generative powers of enablement and constraint that are contingently

activated only when intentionality or agency comes up against them (Carter & New, 2004). Structural effects are triggered when agents act on the basis of their subjectively defined "concerns, projects or practices" (Archer, 1995, p. 76).

For Archer (1995), the Morphogenetic/static Model (MM) provides a resolution to the relationship between individual freedom and structural determinism and its implication for understanding the way in which the social world maintains and changes over time. In the case of agential voluntarism and structural determinism change can only be understood in terms of the powers of either agents or structures. Either structure or agency dominates and the other is rendered inert. In the argument that structure and agency are co-constitutive, *central conflation*, structures are "instantiated" by agents in social action, and hence, the social world becomes volatile (Archer 1995). In response to the concerns about such forms of conflation, Archer argues for analytical dualism.

Analytical Dualism recognises the interdependence of structure and agency, and structure and culture over time whilst allowing for the possibility of examining each separately and hence, how structure or culture shapes the action of agents and how these actions consequently reproduce or transform the original context. The MM model therefore provides researchers with a way in which to consider the activities of people over time and opportunities for change.

To explain the idea of separating out structures and agency for analytical purposes, I first need to more fully articulate what is meant by 'structures' in Archer's MM model. Structures are a "set of internally related elements" with causal powers that derive from underlying strata and are not reducible to them; relations between the constituents of a social structure are internal to it and necessary for its operation (Elder-Vass 2007, p. 40; Sayer 2000, p. 14). Structures include social rules, systems, organisations, policies, roles and positions, resources, units, and committees. Structures exist at macro, micro and individual levels and hence, larger structures can contain other structures. Structures operate at the macro level of society (class, race, gender, for example), at micro-level and at the level of individual or organisations (committees, units, centres, policies, regulatory docs) thus "structuring" the way in which the individuals behave and institution functions. The School Reviews policy is a structure

which provides a framework for the quality improvement process including the purpose of the reviews, what needs to be done and by whom.

Structures have social emergent properties which are activated when people interact with and in them. Hence a social event or phenomenon is a result of and exists because of internal and necessary relations and can be influenced by external and contingent factors (it exists independently of these factors) (Archer, 1995, pp. 173-175). Structures are the result of social interaction, are both reproduced and transformed by people, and have emergent powers that cannot be reduced to the people that produce them. I now move to the other consideration of analytical dualism, that of agency.

The social world is occupied by people who are born into it, live within it, act upon it and leave it either as they found it or changed. Thus it is that structures and culture pre-exist people, can influence how they behave but nonetheless can be changed by their actions. This ability to act is what in social realism is called agency and it is the exercise of agency that either maintains or changes structures and culture. Agency “is the power to maintain or modify the world” (Carter & New, 2004, p. 10). This can be as an individual or a group. It can be “self-conscious” and deliberate or unintended “by virtue of their numbers” or even a result of their inaction (Luckett, 2012, p. 343). Hence, in order to understand the social world, it is necessary to understand how people act, what enables or constrains them and the consequences of this action. The way in which the management and academic staff engage with the review process or exercise their agency to follow the School Reviews process will either enable or constrain the process.

The extent to which people can and do exercise agency depends on their social roles and position in society and on what motivates them to do so, what Archer (1995) calls their own emergent properties and powers. People are born into and live in conditions that they do not create or necessarily choose, and they encounter structures that have generative powers that are contingently activated when agency comes up against such structures. People act on the basis of their subjectively defined “concerns, projects or practices”, this action is a consequence of deliberate reflection on their social contexts through internal conversations and hence, decisions are made about

how to respond and react (Archer, 2007, p. 4). The effects of this enable or constrain human agency.

Agency is an emergent phenomenon rather than a pre-set capacity. People negotiate and mediate structures to realise their stated concerns and projects and hence, adapt and change their world (Archer, 2007; Sayer, 2000). The extent to which people are enabled or constrained by the social world depends to a large extent on their social role and position in society. Archer distinguishes between primary agents and social actors. Primary agents are individuals constrained by the circumstances into which they are born and social actors are individuals that occupy a particular role or position which because of the power that comes with the position they are invested with authority and power (Archer 1995, p. 185). Whilst material and ideational resources shape the context in which all actors operate, whether they be primary or social agents, agency can also be vested in groups of individuals who as “corporate agents” act together around shared interests to bring about social change (Archer, 1995, p. 187). For example, even though the School Reviews policy as structure may require certain behaviours from staff, as corporate agents they can together resist both the policy and not engage with the process as intended.

People are born into the world and occupy positions or roles which exist independently of them. Such roles nonetheless require certain behaviours and actions that are based on the individual’s capacities, weaknesses, beliefs, and values. This enables or constrains their actions and the role itself will be changed by the action of the individual. Both the individual and the role thus have emergent properties which are contingent on the context.

Structures are relatively enduring; this may be as a result of the deliberate or unintended action of people. And, in turn, people are shaped by structures in a particular context which either enables or constrains their capacity to act. Social roles are structurally located and “necessarily and internally related” to other roles and as a consequence have inherent properties and powers which people, as actors, can endow with their own ideals, skills, knowledge, and values. Actors have the power to influence the ideas and values that lead to change (Archer 1995, p. 186). So, for example, a Head of School occupies a role and may possess the experience, knowledge and political will to challenge the School Reviews process. Even so, his/her

properties and powers may be curtailed by structural constraints which are the consequence of other actors occupying roles that have more structural power.

Structure is temporally prior to the actions of people who then through their actions act to defend interests and realise projects and consequently, reproduce or transform it (Archer, 1995, p. 76).

> Society is pre-given for the individuals who never create it, but merely reproduce or transform it. The social world is pre-structured. Agents act in a world of structural constraints and possibilities that they did not produce. Social structure is the ever-present condition and the continually reproduced outcome of intentional human agency. (Archer et al, 1998, p. xvi)

Both social structures and human agency have causal powers and properties and the morphogenetic perspective of analytical dualism allows for theorizing about the temporal relations between structure and agency because "structure and action operate over different time periods – an assertion based on its two simple propositions: that structure necessarily predates the actions which transform it; and that structural elaboration necessarily post-dates those action" (Archer, 1995, pp. 89-90). However, when we act it may be on the basis of inadequate or partial knowledge or understanding. Our knowledge of the world is fallible - so the self-evaluation carried out in the review process, for example, may be based on inadequate or incorrect information which feeds into and sustains faulty assumptions and beliefs. Whilst the review is a collective process, individuals would make sense of things and respond to structures differently.

The MM involves an examination of a social event or situation over a period of time. It therefore moves through a number of phases, starting with an examination of historical context and an understanding of how they are and how they came to be. It is within this context that the people find themselves and within which they make choices (or not). The second phase of the analysis then requires an understanding of the choices made and actions taken and the basis on which these were made possible or not (enablements and constraints). It is out of this that change will emerge (or not).

The Morphogenetic analysis of structure-agency interplay (see Figure 1 below) therefore starts at a point in time (T^1) and the structural conditions present at that time

are identified and analysed. Agents enter into this context which is “not of their making” and which conditions their actions. The next stage (T^2-T^3) involves an examination of how agents respond to the social conditioning potential in the structures. It is during this time period that they can influence social conditions (or not). The last phase (T^4) involves an analysis of how agential action has reproduced (morphostasis) or transformed (morphogenesis) the initial social conditions. This also provides the social conditioning context for the next cycle. Each cycle is continuous and overlapping both the previous and next cycles. This “sequence” is repeated endlessly over time and is called a morphogenetic sequence.

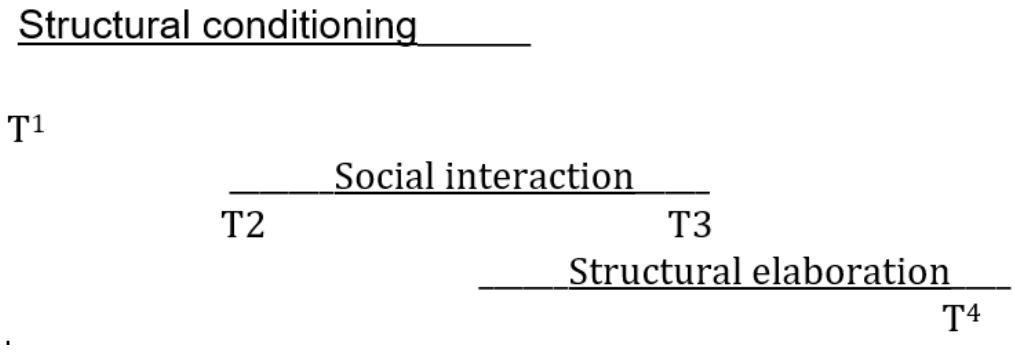

Figure 1: The morphogenesis of structure

The Morphogenetic analysis of the interaction of agency and culture follows a similar set of phases as shown in Figure 2.

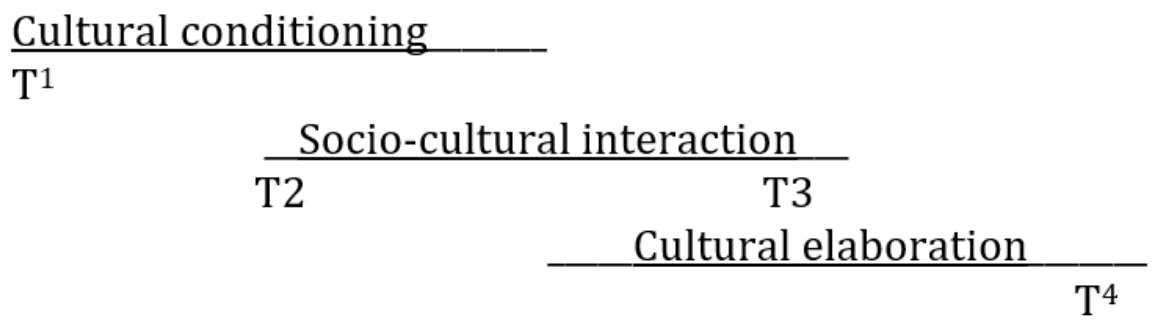

Figure 2: The morphogenesis of culture

In defining “what kind of animal” the cultural system is, Archer (in Archer et al, 1998, p. 504) draws on Popper’s notion of third world knowledge and the dualism between ideas and people who hold them. For Archer (1995), the cultural system is therefore made of theories, beliefs and values that may give rise to human action. Analytical dualism provides a way in which to examine the cultural system ‘unpeopled’ in order

to understand its effects on people and people's effect on it (Archer, 1995, p. 142). By treating the cultural system and socio-cultural interaction (when people engage with the cultural system) as analytically distinct, it is possible to examine how people relate to culture and how the interaction between people is affected by the cultural system of "all things capable of being grasped, deciphered, understood or known by someone" (Archer et al, 1998, p. 504). What people think, believe, value, know or understand will influence how they behave and communicate. For example, in the School Reviews process, understandings of quality will frame how the staff members engage in the process.

Archer (1995) provides an institutional configuration framework which considers relations between parts of the structural system and relations between ideas in the cultural domain to explain the morphogenesis and morphostasis of structures and culture (pp. 218-245) and which have been useful for this study. Agents are understood to have intentions and they act on the basis of these intentions. This action takes place in particular contexts and is either enabled or constrained by the emergent properties of the specific configuration of structures and the cultural system of that context. These intentions and actions (vested interests) will in turn shape the context. Ideas, norms, values and beliefs vary in the extent to which they are shared and hence, the harmony or contestation that may arise as a result. Theories or beliefs exist in logical relationships to other theories and beliefs; these relations are either complementary or contradictory. People then respond and behave in ways that are contingent on the extent to which there are shared ideas and beliefs (integration) or contradiction and disagreement (contradiction) within the system. They do so regardless of whether they are aware of ideas and beliefs that they hold and the way in which they influence behaviour. Hence, agents who are operating from positions of power or who wish to exercise power over others may use this as an opportunity to manipulate both the thinking and behaviour of others.

The complements or contradictions in the particular structure/culture configuration have particular logical consequences that result in either stagnation or change (morphogenesis or morphostasis) (see Figure 3 below). These however are likely outcomes and not deterministic "rules". As discussed earlier there is always likely to be other unidentified mechanisms at play and the situational logics may play out differently to that expected. The situational logics therefore have explanatory value in

accounting for certain reactions and responses and cannot be seen as a set of “rules” to be applied.

S-C INTEGRATION		HIGH	LOW	MORPHOSTATSIS MORPHOGENESIS	T I M E
	HIGH	Concomitant Complementarity	Constraining Contradiction		
	LOW	Contingent Complementarity	Competitive Contradiction		

Figure 3: CS Integration (Archer, 1995:226)

Using the framework, it is possible to explain processes and procedures, actions and experiences in an institution which are shaped by the configurations or ‘situational logics’ of their structural and cultural emergent properties and which “… set up differential power relations and shape the practical situations, daily experiences and events or happenings that individuals encounter” (Luckett, 2012, p. 341).

In the first part of this chapter I have explained the fundamental tenets of critical realism as the philosophical approach which I used to develop an understanding of the complex social reality which is the purview of my research. I also explained the analytical framework which I used to guide the data analysis. Analytical dualism provides me with a framework to investigate cultural, structural and agential conditions and their interaction and to consider the material, ideational and agential conditions that enable or constrain the emergence of quality improvement in the School Reviews process at a university in the SA HE context. Following the work of Quinn and Boughey (2009), Boughey (2009; 2010) and Boughey & McKenna (2011a & 2011b), which analyses the morphostasis/genesis of quality assurance in the external audit process in SA, this study will analyse morphostasis/genesis of quality improvement in an internal review process.

In the next section I explain the way in which the data was selected, interpreted and analysed, and the way in which trustworthiness and ethical considerations were addressed.

4.4 Selection of cases

As explained in Chapter Two, the institution where this study takes place was formed in 2004 as a result of a merger between two regional institutions as part of a national

project to transform the higher education sector in South Africa. It adopted a college model of governance, with four colleges, each consisting of faculties which contain schools, the smallest unit in the academic sector. For the purpose of this study one review from each college was selected; the aim was to provide thick, rich data (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007) to inform an institutional level cross-case analysis.

The issue of quality and the process of quality improvement are complex and the factors influencing it or the mechanisms which give rise to it are multiple. The institution constituted the site of study and each School Review was treated analytically as a separate case or "bounded system" (Brown, 2008) and then a "cross-case" analysis of the four cases was carried out to provide an institutional level perspective on the issues. The use of a case study as an approach (not a method) was chosen because it provided the opportunity for description, exploration and explanation of complex social phenomenon (Yin 2002, p. 3) in an institution which being the site of study is a "single entity, a unit around which there are boundaries" (Merriam in Brown, 2008, p. 3). This allows an analysis of the context which is an integral part of the case and "highly pertinent" (Yin, 2002). Each School Review is different and the context is significant to the way in which the process unfolds; understanding the particular mechanisms at play in each case forms the basis for a cross case analysis.

In December 2011, the time when this research project began, twenty-seven School Reviews had been completed at UKZN. **Table 1** below shows the distribution of the reviews across seven of the eight faculties at UKZN; no reviews had taken place in the Faculty of Education. There had been five to seven reviews per college over this time period. Four reviews were selected from these completed reviews, one from each college.

COLLEGE	**FACULTY**	**Completed reviews (n=27)**
College of Humanities and Social Sciences	Education	0
	Humanities, Development & Social Sciences	5
College of Agriculture, Engineering and Science	Engineering	3
	Science & Agriculture	5
College of Law and Management	Law	1
	Management Studies	6
College of Health Sciences	Health Sciences	5
	Nelson R Mandela School of Medicine	2

Table 1: Number of reviews completed by college and faculty 2005 – 2011

The selection of cases was more a consequence of a series of “one thing led to another” – a pragmatic process of logical elimination rather than inclusion. I started by establishing a time period within which the reviews/cases that I would select would have taken place; this being from the time of the establishment of the institution to the year that I commenced this research. I had initially considered using the faculty as the first level of sampling and selecting one case per faculty, but this meant that there would be eight cases and sets of data; one of the challenges was to make the scale of the project manageable in terms of the time and the resources available to me. So, the next logical choice was to use the college level instead.

The method for selecting the cases was purposive. The schools which were located in faculties (which in turn were located in colleges) were based on broad cognate fields/disciplines, were either single discipline or multi-discipline, and housed either professional or non-professional disciplines. It was therefore not possible to choose what may be considered a representative set from the range of contexts across schools or school types. I was aware that a larger number of cases would increase the likelihood of a broader range of cultural, structural and agential mechanisms being evident in the data. However, given that the research involved documentary analysis and each review generated a large number of reports I had to ensure that the data analysis would be manageable. I was also aware that a single case study per college cannot be held to represent that whole college. So, while the study’s conclusions would not be a definitive identification of all mechanisms at play across all colleges (or even within the selected case studies), they would at least encompass a broader range than if cases came from just one or two colleges. This was especially important given that most of the research on quality processes looks at institutional level or fails to interrogate the disciplines from which the data is collected. Looking at quality processes across disciplines is necessary given that the structure of knowledge can act as an important mechanism in the activities within a university (Maton, 2014) and that the identity of academics, and thereby the enactment of their agency, can be closely tied to their disciplinary norms (Henkel, 2005).

The college structure implemented at UKZN was underpinned by the operational principles of single faculties and schools operating across sites, devolution of core academic administration to units closer to sites of delivery and operational variations appropriate to a faculty or school. A centrally driven policy and monitoring framework

would on the basis of these principles allow faculties and schools to implement policy within broad principles at the same time ensuring that its own context and need are taken into account and are addressed (UKZN, 2008a, p. 24). Each college would have in addition to its own disciplinary context and bias, different implementation of structures, and different cultures and causal configurations. This would add to the richness of the data.

Once I had decided to select one review/case from each college, I had to decide on what basis I would select each School Review. Purposive sampling was used to select the School Review that would constitute the case study within each college (but not be seen to be representative of that college). Initially I thought I would identify the reviews on the basis of there being a complete set of review documents. Taking into account that very few reviews had been completed at the time in terms of the School Reviews policy and given that "absence exerts an impact" and "what happened does not exhaust what could" (Sayer, 2000, p. 12), I decided that the uneven way in which the process unfolded in each case provided a richer set of data from which to gain insight into the review process and hence, I included all reviews in the initial set.

As a College Consultant for one of the colleges, one of my responsibilities had been to co-ordinate the review process. Over the years I had co-ordinated most of the reviews in the college in which I worked and some reviews in other colleges. As a senior member of staff, I had also provided support and guidance to colleagues while co-ordinating reviews and therefore had knowledge of many of the reviews that had been carried out. Thus, I would have more knowledge and insight about some of the reviews and not others. I therefore made the decision to exclude all reviews for which I took full responsibility i.e. where I coordinated the review and wrote the report and therefore had detailed knowledge of (and possibly some influence over) the school and the review process. My reflection on my insider positionality is discussed later in this chapter.

The choice of report from each college was then approached from a pragmatic position; as I had decided to use four cases I would need to select four years from the six-year period. I decided to use the four years 2006, 2007, 2009, and 2010. 2005 was the first year after the institutional merger and the number of reviews carried out were limited. 2008 was the year of an institutional audit which was carried out by the

Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) the permanent sub-committee of the Council on Higher Education (CHE) which is assigned responsibility for quality assurance in South Africa by The Higher Education Act of 1997. The Quality Promotion and Assurance unit, which was responsible for both internal and external quality assurance processes at the institution, was deeply involved in preparation for the audit, and therefore a decision was made to limit its regular quality work. In 2011 the institution begun a process of review of its governance structures (College re-organisation) and again the focus was elsewhere. I then made a list of the reviews conducted in those 4 years. I selected reports making sure that there was a distribution over the four Colleges and the selected time period 2006-2010.

The process felt messy as it was not clearly designed at the outset but emerged as I considered each aspect. Nonetheless it was a systematic process with careful deliberation at each step and the decisions made were carefully considered and clearly recorded.

4.5 Data Sources

The data for this study consisted of a set of documents from School Reviews (n=4) which took place over a five-year period (2006 – 2010) and institutional level policies, procedures, reports and minutes relating to quality assurance and improvement. The purpose of, scope, format and target audience for each document will be explained.

4.5.1 School Review Reports

Gatekeeper permission was provided by the institution's Academic Registrar for use of the various School Review reports maintaining the anonymity of both schools and individuals. The identity of each case is therefore not revealed and all identifying characteristics have been redacted. The study does not attempt to make summative judgements about the extent to which quality per se has improved but rather to make sense of the mechanisms that enable or constrain quality improvement. Hence, the research is not evaluative and does not make judgements about the institution, schools or individuals. At times the redaction of school, discipline and individual identifying information restricted the ways in which the findings could be discussed, particularly where the nature of the discipline or target profession of the school was a major structural or cultural mechanism, however this limitation was necessary for

ethical reasons and I have instead made reference to broader disciplinary fields rather than to the specific department where this played out as a significant issue. The anonymity of the schools constrains what claims can be made as I cannot refer to specifics of how the nature of the particular discipline impacts how it engaged with the review process. I also had to exclude some recognisable data, for example, statistics even though at times these statistics may be pertinent to the case. Such suppression of data is necessary in order to be true to the promise of anonymity, but it could constrain the kinds of conclusions that may be reached.

4.5.2 School Self-Evaluation Reports

The School Self-Evaluation Report (SER) is written by the school and is based on a self-evaluation process guided by the Toolbox for School and Programme Self Evaluation and Planning, as explained in Chapter Two, which provides a broad framework within which each school can work to prepare the SER. The SER consists of a main report and appendices (supporting evidence). It details the purpose of the self-evaluation process and the process by which the report is written and agreed to. It provides an overview of the school and a summary of key issues (strengths and problems) in its programmes including Curriculum design, content and development; Teaching and learning; Assessment; Postgraduate programmes; Student recruitment, admission and selection; Student retention, throughput and impact; Student services; Community service, service learning and work-based learning; Research; Staffing; Infrastructure and library resources; Leadership and management; and School Review. It also details the school plans, goals, achievements and vision for the future. The SERs ranged in length from 44 pages to 112 pages. The length of the report largely depended on the size of the school and the number of programmes, disciplines, student cohorts etc. that are managed by the school.

4.5.3 Review Panel Reports

After a study of the SER, undertaking a series of interviews and interrogating the evidence provided, the panel Chair in consultation with the review panel and with secretarial support from the QPA produces a report of its findings and recommendations. It makes specific recommendations in response to the Terms of Reference. Where applicable it will make commendations. The panel reports ranged in length from 21-30 pages.

4.5.4 School Response Reports

The school is required to compile a response to the panel findings and how they plan to address the recommendations. The school is also expected to provide progress reports on the implementation of the recommendations. The school response and progress reports ranged in length from 3-14 pages.

4.5.5 Faculty Response Reports

The faculty is required to compile a response to the panel findings applicable at faculty level and how they plan to address the recommendations. The faculty is also expected to provide progress reports on the implementation of the recommendations.

The set of documents for each case were different; this was because each review was completed within a specific college, faculty and school context.

Table 2 below details the data sources available for each case.

4.5.6 Institutional records of deliberation, decisions made at relevant committees and email communication

On acquiring ethical clearance, the various committee documents were accessed from my own records, that of the unit in which I worked at the time and by approaching relevant individuals in the institution – my location in the institution meant that I could draw on both my first-hand knowledge and my established relationships to request assistance in accessing documents. As the reports and committee documents were archival records (organisational records, survey data, etc.) I ensured that the version of the documents, policies, and minutes was the “official version” and checked the purpose and conditions under which they were produced and the accuracy thereof.

The data also included email communication with the HoS to confirm that where reports were not available that they had not been provided to the relevant line-manager or tabled at the relevant committee. Minutes of the College Quality Committees (CQC) at which reports were tabled were also examined to confirm the tabling and response to relevant reports. In Case 4 the HoS indicated that the report did not serve at the CQC but was at the School Board; the minutes of this committee were therefore also included in the data set.

DATA SOURCE	Case 1	Case 2	Case 3	Case 4
Self-Evaluation Report (SER)	SER	SER	SER	SER
Panel Report (PR)	PR	PR	PR	PR
School Response Report (SR)	SR 1	SR 1 SR 2 – (revised version of SR 1) SR 3 – (revised version of SR 2)	SR 1	None
	SR 2 progress report	SR 4 progress report 1 SR 5 progress report 2	None	None
Minutes	None	Various CQC	CQC	Board
Email Communication	HOS	None	HOS	QPA HOS
Other	None	None	Faculty Response Report	None

Table 2: Data sources available for each case

4.5.7 Key national and institutional policy and regulatory documents

The key national and institutional policy and regulatory documents were in the public domain. I examined a range of national documents relating to HE regulation such as the Higher Education Act of 1995 and the Higher Education Quality Committee Founding document. The institutional documents I interrogated included policies such as the Policy on Quality Assurance and Development for a School at UKZN, and the Performance Management Policy (UKZN, 2008b). I also examined reports such as the UKZN Institutional Audit Portfolio 2008 and the May 2009 Governance and Academic Freedom Committee Report to Council.

4.6 Documentary analysis

Most qualitative research draws on researcher-instigated data despite that it is possible to use naturally occurring empirical materials which are produced by a society that is mediated by written texts of different kinds (Atkinson & Coffey, 1997; Perakyla

& Ruusuvuori, 2011; Silverman, 2011). The reports that are the data in this study are “naturally occurring empirical materials” in that they were not produced in response to a research question (Merriam, 1998). These documents are a rich source of data, grounded in context (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) and hence, “the research is in more direct touch with the very object” that is being investigated (Perakyla & Ruusuyuori, 2011, p. 869). Documents also provide a source of data “when events can no longer be observed or when informants have forgotten the details.” (Bowen, 2009, p. 31).

In much research, documents are treated as “containers for words, images, information, instructions, and so forth” and hence, as informants rather than “actors in their own right” (Prior, 2008). Research focusing on primary and secondary documents is also often referred to as “histories” (Yin, 2002). However, in this case the documents are “living documents”; they are part of and frame organisational processes and hence, are more than a vehicle or container of a message that must be decoded. The School Reviews reports not only “contain things”; they fulfil a particular function, they “do” things (Prior, 2008, p. 427). Decisions are made on the basis of these documents and hence, they are powerful. The way in which a text/document is activated depends on the particular social/cultural context and hence, what a document “meant” or intended.

The reports represent a dialogue between how “the school” perceives itself and how it is perceived by the institution (internal members) and peers (from other institutions). Whilst the development of the documents was negotiated, the way in which the review process was managed varied across the schools. Some staff members played a more active role in the process and hence, some voices dominated. “Documents should not be treated as necessarily precise, accurate, or complete recordings of events that have occurred.” (Bowen, 2009, p. 33). However, subsequent discussions about what should be done, and subsequent reference to the quality process is in terms of these documents and not in terms of how people experienced the process. So, they are extremely powerful and political and need to be analysed in their own right. Whilst research based on document analysis can only consider that which is reported on paper and reports may only capture intentions rather than actions (Westerheijden, et al., 2006), the content of the SER was triangulated by the panel through interviews and study of supporting evidence. The research also analysed documents from other

stages of the review process which included (where available) the panel report, school response report, faculty response report, meeting minutes and email communication.

The decision not to interview anyone was a carefully considered one. As discussed above the use of the reports as a set of naturally occurring records was made first and then the use of interviews to add to the data was considered. The wide range of people involved would require a number of interviews which would make the data set large and unwieldy. The reports themselves are a rich source and are not at risk of "methodological individualism". Interviews focus on individual experiences and perceptions – as remembered and interpreted – and hence, subjective experiences and attitudes/views etc. are foregrounded. In addition, there has been some time since reviews took place and hence, recall of issues and events may not be accurate (Hulpiau & Waeytens, 2003, p. 146).

4.7 Data analysis

A number of primary and secondary sources were analysed to describe the institutional and national context and contextual conditions in which the School Reviews took place. I read a range of policy documents and research articles to understand the broader socio-cultural, political-economic context within which the institution was functioning. I then did this at an institutional level in order to understand the institutional context within which social practices are located. I examined more closely the discourses and institutional values and assumptions that underpin policy and practice at an institutional level particularly with respect to quality. I did not carry out detailed textual analysis of this data but looked for trends.

I read each set of review reports for all the selected cases making notes and comments using the MS Word comment function thus developing an overall perspective of the reports and the reviews. This perspective was impressionistic, and I drew on my experience and the insights from the literature review to consider how I should analyse it in order to answer the research questions. This initial data analysis was underpinned by a deep engagement with the key concepts and debates in the field of quality assurance and improvement.

I then considered if I should code all reports of a similar type across the cases or all reports per case. I decided to analyse by case; it became evident to me on my first

reading of the reports that they were interlinked and representative of a process. I also concluded that the cross-case analysis would be dealing at the level of the case and not stages of the process as represented by the reports.

Having undertaken the initial analysis, which ensured a close familiarity with the texts to be analysed, I imported all the reports into NVivo, a qualitative data analysis computer software package produced by QSR International. It has been designed for qualitative researchers working with very rich text-based and/or multimedia information, where deep levels of analysis on small or large volumes of data are required.

The next decision was which case to begin with; based on my first readings of the reports I choose Case 3 because it was the most comprehensive and "complete" in terms of the review process and the documentation. It was the only Case where all the steps of the review process had been completed as per the School Review policy described in Chapter Three and all the reports detailed in **Table 2** above were available.

Given the complexity of open social systems, the only way in which we can come to understand the social world is to be able to separate out (at least analytically) and identify its various parts and the way in which they interact to give rise to the world as we experience it. This is the first step in the data analysis process to reduce the data to carefully selected, focused and organised components of the data (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Guided by Archer's (1995) analytical framework discussed above and using the system of nodes in Nvivo I carried out an initial analysis of the reports for Case 3. This involved detailed analysis/analytical separation of the data according to the analytical framework into structure, agency and culture (Archer, 1995). Passages of text were coded as relating primarily to structure, culture and/or agency. The choice of structure, culture and agency was informed by insights gained from the literature and my practice.

Using open interpretive coding I then coded the text within each of these broad categories to identify structures that were in place in the school and institution, what ideas and values dominated in the school and the role that individuals played within the school and the review process (see **Table 3** below).

Structure	Management structures
	Quality structures
	Resources
	Institutional level structures
	Geographic location
Culture	Working environment
	Purpose and mission
	Quality
	Teaching, learning and research
Agency	Institutional level
	Head of School
	Staff
	Students

Table 3: Coding categories

I used this as the basis to analyse the other cases; as I discovered new aspects of structure, culture and agency, I reviewed the other cases to see if the new coding was applicable.

The analysis of the data was an iterative process in which the reports were reread allowing for progressive focusing; a process which involves uncovering and exposing both the particular ”idiosyncratic factors” of each case to note both the presence and absence of the analytical categories.

I used the NVivo annotations feature to comment on selected data and a notebook to capture my thoughts. The initial ‘soft analysis’ of the data was followed by a deeper level of analysis involving abduction and retroduction to develop an explanation of it.

The process of abduction involves a careful consideration of the data using the theory that informs the research in order develop clarification and further insights. Abstraction takes place at the level of the Empirical, applies itself to the level of the Actual in order to make sense of the level of the Real. We engage in a process of abstraction to isolate “in thought” individual aspects of focus and to “distinguish the incidental from essential characteristics” (Sayer 2010, pp. 50-59). So, following the social realist research tradition, I began with description and moved to deeper understanding of the processes or mechanisms that underlie and give rise to what is observed, experienced or described. The aim was to understand what reality must be like to account for what has been observed. Events are the result of the complex interaction between mechanisms at the level of the Real. However, mechanisms operate and interact in a

complex way and it is not possible to observe them. So, for example, in this research the process of soft analysis described above led to my identifying the abstract concept of ‘collegiality’ in the working environment of a school. But this only provided a partial view and in order to undertake analytical dualism I needed to ask myself questions about the structural, cultural and agential components of the data. Furthermore, to provide a complete view of the process, I had to consider how this intersected with other theoretical constructs, such as the leadership style of the HoS and so on.

I applied retroductive reasoning to develop an understanding of differences between the cases (School Reviews) and the causal powers and mechanisms that operate. Retroduction is a way in which one can go about finding ‘explanations’ for actions, decisions to infer properties and powers of mechanisms at the level of the Real (Danermark et al, 2002; Sayer 2010, p. 72). It involves an examination of the phenomenon or event and patterns of outcomes to consider possible mechanisms that have generated it. Given that reality is not what is observed it is necessary to consider what reality must be like to give rise to what is observed and to make inferences about the properties and powers at the level of the Real.

I used retroductive reasoning to develop an explanation for the different way in which the policy was implemented in each school. People interact within and with structures and this will influence what an individual or institution can do (Sayer, 2000, p. 13). Hence the emergent powers of the School Review will be the result of the combination of mechanisms which will modify their powers in particular ways in each case. An analysis of a number of cases allowed me to examine the effects of different mechanisms, the interaction of mechanisms in different ways and the unrealised effects of other mechanisms.

I compared and contrasted each case asking what is different in order to understand the mechanisms activated and relationship between them. This enabled me to identify aspects that are bigger than the particularity of a single case or “patterns of outcomes” and to consider the possibility that this may “confound the mechanisms at work” or “obscure the contexts through which such mechanisms operate to produce a range of outcomes” (Carter & New 2004, p. 22; Pawson 2000, p. 293).

The comparison of different cases involves counterfactual thinking or a consideration of how things would be different if they occurred in ways counter to what actually took

place. What does the existence of this object or practice presuppose? Can A exist without B? What is it about A or B that enables it or constrains it to do certain things? (Sayer, 2000, p. 16).

4.8 Authenticity and trustworthiness

In social science research the focus of study is the social world of people and processes. Unlike research conducted in the natural sciences, claims about the validity of the research based on procedures and results that are replicable and predictable are not applicable (Danermark et al., 2002) The closed system of experimental research may make this both possible and necessary, but the open system of the social world makes such claims not only impossible but, I would argue, not very useful. The notions of reliability and validity are rooted in a positivist paradigm and hence, need to be considered carefully in terms of how they resonate with and are useful for research conducted within a social realist paradigm.

In the natural world research which can both predict outcomes and which can be repeated meets the necessary conditions to be considered valid. This is not possible in the social world as through their interaction in the world people transform both themselves and their world (Danermark et al, 2002, pp. 68-69). In social science research we are seeking to understand the social world, to explain what we observe and to use it to inform future events and actions. Predictability tells us something about events and when and how they may occur but doesn't necessarily help us understand and explain why they occurred when and how they did. Social realist research on the other hand allows for possible causal relationships based on the interaction of mechanisms in particular contexts (Maxwell, 2004). It therefore is able to provide an explanation for events based on an examination of causal mechanisms (Archer 1995, 2000; Maxwell, 2004; Sayer, 2000). However, given the nature of social systems it is not possible to predict outcomes on the basis of such explanations. Nonetheless, judgemental rationality means that even accepting the idea of fallibility doesn't cast the research into a relativist quagmire because critical realism recognises that some explanations are stronger than others (Bhaskar, 2008).

The value of this research lies not in the ability to draw conclusions about all from knowledge about a few (Danermark et al., 2002, p. 77) but in the insights that can be considered by other quality practitioners/institutions/audit bodies etc. I will add to what

is known about this issue. More broadly the institution represents many aspects of the challenges facing South African universities. Whilst it is unique in terms of being a research-intensive institution and the result of a merger between a historically black institution and a historically white institution with a particular set of internal and external challenges, the nature of the challenges is not unique but the form that they have taken are particular to the context. The analysis of cases allows for “generalizability to theoretical propositions and not populations or universes” (Yin, 2002). Whilst reviews follow a methodology that unfolds differently in each school, have different responses and are embraced differently, we are able to identify findings from each review that enable us to understand the emergence of quality processes across university contexts and across time.

Techniques to assure the trustworthiness of the research included ‘thick’ description of phenomena and an audit trail, so that the process of theory development would be both visible and verifiable (Bowen, 2009). The research should be “judged” on the theoretical rigor that underpins it and the methodological meticulousness and transparency of the process by which I reached the conclusions or claims that I am making. Each case study provides a ‘thick’ description of the School Reviews process informed by my position as an “insider” to the discourse and the community of scholars working in the field, an issue I interrogate in more depth later in this chapter. In this research descriptive validity is achieved by quoting from the reports, theoretical validity by locating it within a critical realist frame and using the MM as an analytical tool. The processes of iterative abstraction, retroduction and theoretical saturation ensure that inferences and explanations are more than just the interpretations of the researcher.

4.9 Ethical considerations

The site of the research is the University of KwaZulu-Natal and each case consists of confidential documentation that has been generated by an internal quality improvement process. In terms of formal procedures, ethical clearance was received from Rhodes University where this study is lodged and Gatekeeper’s permission to conduct the research at the University of KwaZulu-Natal was received from the Academic Registrar.

This research was most explicitly not a review of the institution or the quality of its work but a meta-analysis of the underlying mechanisms that constrain or enable quality

improvement processes in the institution and more importantly, in the HE sector as a whole. I therefore decided to identify the institution, especially as key characteristics would serve to identify it and pretence at institutional anonymity seemed ethically dubious. The value of this work lies in its possibility to inform on-going quality work at the institution and more broadly. However, the case studies are based on a review of schools within the institution and anonymity was possible and was maintained by redacting the names of the school and all reference to disciplines and individuals. Where necessary the names of the discipline were removed and indicated by [discipline name] and in some cases, information had to be omitted to prevent identification of either disciplines or individuals.

In this research ethical considerations were not only about individuals but about the schools and the institution. Researching an institution where you work, “insider research”, involves ethical and political considerations. The guiding principles of respect and dignity, transparency, accountability and integrity were considered in designing the research and at each step in the process.

4.10 My role as a researcher

The relationship of the researcher to the research process and object/focus of study is a central consideration regardless of the research paradigm as it impacts not only how one approaches the research (research design) but how it is carried out (analysis and interpretation). Given that this is insider research the need to make explicit my relation to the research and the trustworthiness of my research is even more important.

My position in relation to the research has been declared up front and I have reflected on it throughout the research process. This is necessary because “researchers are active in their rendering of organizational realities, rather than passive transmitters of an observable and externalized truth accessed through the applications of an assumedly neutral suite of established methods” (Rhodes 2009, p. 655). As discussed in Chapter One, I carry with me my “history” of being a member of the institution which is the site of study and within which I was responsible for facilitating some of the quality processes that are the focus of this research. I have “insider knowledge” about the institution because I was both a member of the institution and I had knowledge about the processes that were described and analysed (Hellawell, 2006; Merton, 1972;

Trowler, 2011). As an “insider” my relationship with the object of study is no longer clearly distinct and I had privileged access to people, documents, and information.

Co-ordinating a review gave me access to and insights into the data which enriches the analysis but which has to be managed (Lincoln & Guba 1985). As an insider researching my own institution I would gain access to people, information and insights but this can also be a constraint (Chavez, 2008; Trowler, 2012; Williams, 2009). One of the challenges I faced throughout the research was to be aware of bias and the way in which it is possible to substantiate a preconceived position; searching the data for what I want to “see” or seeing the data from my own “position”, “rather than letting the data speak” (Rogers, Malancharuvil-Berkes, Mosley, Hui, & Joseph, 2005, pp. 379-380).

> Reflexivity—which requires an awareness of the researcher’s contribution to the construction of meanings attached to social interactions and acknowledgment of the possibility of the investigator’s influence on the research—is usually not an issue in using documents for research purposes. (Bowen, 2009, p. 31)

Nonetheless, I have a particular view of higher education and quality assurance/improvement; both in terms of how it is and how I think it should be and have had to be deliberately aware of how this may frame how I use the literature and how I read the data.

Unlike data gathered during interviews, data collection from naturalistic setting is not filtered by interviewer interpretation because its production predates the research; nonetheless I took into account that the analysis of data is viewed from my own perspective as a quality consultant who worked in the institution which is the site of this study and through the filter of my own perspectives, experiences and understandings of the quality field and work in the area. Choices in all aspects of the research were made explicit “turning the analytical frame back on the researcher” (Rogers et al., 2005, p. 381). In making claims about the trustworthiness of my research I recognise and foreground this bias as I try to explain the data providing rigorous and robust justification for the claims that I make.

Whilst “insider knowledge” has the possibility to deepen insight, I set out to be deliberately aware of how aspects of the work and my role have been “normalised” (Trowler, 2012) and hence, to make explicit my own position through self-reflection. Given that I draw on my own “experiential knowledge” (Maxwell, 1997, p. 225) I work with an understanding of reflexivity as the quest to ensure that I, the researcher, do not misrepresent my perspective as “the truth”. Through introspection, a process of “explicit self-aware meta-analysis”, an attempt was made to make explicit the link between knowledge claims, personal experience and social context (Finlay, 2002, pp. 209-211). I found myself plagued by a voice that kept on questioning on what basis I could come to any conclusions. I recognised that I have both an intellectual and moral responsibility to the research and the institution (Rhodes, 2009, p. 653). I was deliberately conscious about how different people working in the institution would respond to what I write about the institution and them. I was very aware that I did not want to break the trust of my colleagues but at the same time I wanted to remain honest to the research. Significantly the cross-case analysis provided me with the opportunity to shift focus from each school to a more general discussion and thereby to make a doctoral contribution to the field.

4.11 Conclusion

In this chapter I have explained the ontological and epistemological assumptions underpinning the research and the methodological framework and described the methods used to select, interpret and analyse the data. I have made explicit my position and actions to ensure that the research stands up to scrutiny with respect to trustworthiness and ethical considerations. The research focuses on the conceptualisation, design and implementation of a review process using the MM framework as a tool to explore the interaction of structure, culture and agency in the process. The study does this by analysing documents that are produced at different stages of the School Reviews process. In the next chapter I discuss the findings for the first of four cases using this framework in order to cumulatively identify the material, ideational and agential conditions that enable or constrain the emergence of quality improvement at a university in the South African Higher Education context.

Chapter 5
Discussion of Findings: Case 1

The unit of analysis of this study is the School Reviews process, an internal quality process at an institution. As explained in the previous chapter I analyse four cases, each a school review in a different college in the institution and examine the interplay between organisational structures and cultures and how this is mediated by agents thus giving rise to the conditions that enable or constrain quality improvement. Given that structure, culture and agency are analytically distinct, are irreducible to one another and have distinct causal powers and properties (Archer, 1995), in each case study I examine structure, culture and agency separately. However, given also that the interplay between them (and the social world) is complex, an issue may be explored in more than one section.

This chapter is the first of four chapters each discussing the findings for a particular case. Once I have examined each case using this framework, I then consider the findings across all the cases in Chapter Nine and attempt to cumulatively identify the material, ideational and agential conditions that may enable or constrain the emergence of quality improvement at a university in the South African higher education context.

5.1 Structure

This section considers the structural domain and the way in which structures at the institutional, college and school level, such as policies, committees, portfolios, and units operate to enable or constrain quality improvement in the review process in this school.

Quality assurance and promotion activities are managed within the university through its regulatory structures such as committees, policies, units, documents and reports. As will be discussed in the sections on culture and agency, the effect of these structures is mediated by the way in which people (agents) on the basis of their ideas, beliefs and values (culture) engage with and in them.

5.1.1 Institutional level Structures

As explained in Chapter Two, the School Reviews policy, an organisational structure, set out the purpose of the reviews, what needs to be done and by whom. The policy also functions as discourse or a set of ideas about what quality is and how quality activities should take place. The policy frames events and experiences, operates within the structural domain but is constrained by mechanisms operating in the cultural domain and mediated through the agency of individuals occupying social roles and by the corporate agency of groups of people. This leads to what Newton (2002) describes as the implementation gap or the difference between what is planned or intended when a policy is developed and the outcomes when it is implemented.

The School Reviews policy required the school to prepare a Self-Evaluation Report (SER), participate in a panel interview process and prepare an improvement plan which feeds into continuous improvement and preparation for external quality assurance. The Panel Report (PR) confirmed that the review of this school[14] was carried out in terms of the policy (University level structure) and followed standard procedures as described in Chapter Two. The terms of reference (TOR) were drawn up in negotiation between the Dean, the school and the Quality Promotion and Assurance unit (QPA) with reference to general quality issues as per the policy. It is evident from the data that TOR were also crafted to address the current issues and challenges faced by the school. In the SER the school provided a detailed account of the way in which it went about ensuring that the members of the school had the opportunity to provide input into the report. So, in effect, the policy as a structure ensured that the school did what was required. However, compliance with the requirements of the policy may be what Newton (2002) calls “game playing”. Staff comply with requirements of the policy as externally imposed, but do not necessarily believe that the process will lead to change and do not engage in the process in a way that change becomes possible and sustainable.

The policy also signalled clear lines of accountability and assigned responsibility to the Dean of the Faculty and college Deputy Vice-Chancellor (DVC) for “following through

[14] As explained in Chapter Four, the identity of each case is not revealed and all identifying characteristics have been redacted. At times this restricted the ways in which the findings could be discussed, particularly where the nature of the discipline or target profession of the school was a major structural or cultural mechanism, however this limitation was necessary for ethical reasons.

on the recommendations and implementing them as they believe possible and appropriate" (UKZN, n.d.-b p. 3). At the same time the constitution of another organisational structure, the College Quality Committee (CQC), had as one its quality monitoring functions that "it requests and considers interim progress reports on the implementation of recommendations from the cyclical School external review processes" (UKZN, 2004a).

Whilst the policy was put in place to enable the School Reviews process, it was constrained when committee and decision-making processes did not function according to procedures. The college and faculty were aware that the reports were not serving at faculty or college level. As discussed in Chapter Two, in the early years of the institution the operation of organisational governance through the college model was criticised for failing to result in the anticipated devolution of management responsibility and accountability to some faculties and schools. In this context. the CQC questioned its role as required by policy and its jurisdiction over faculties (CQC, 2007, item 5.1; CQC, 2008, item 3.5.). It referred the matter back to the faculties and the Deans were requested to report back as to whether reports should serve at the Faculty Quality Committee instead (FQM, 2008 item 4.5). No review report had as yet actually been discussed or approved by the CQC (UKZN, 2010b). So, the committee was constrained by broader institutional and college discourses around governance where there was a lack of clarity as to who had the authority to do what. Given the corporatisation of the institution and the resultant bureaucracy (Chetty & Merrett, 2014, Maistry 2012; Pithouse, 2009), it is perhaps unsurprising that committees were concerned about who had jurisdiction over what.

The School Reviews policy was crafted to require that the Panel Report and School Response report served on the necessary committees in order to ensure and monitor compliance with its requirements. Follow-up is an important element in quality processes to ensure that suggested improvements are put in place (Dano & Stensaker, 2007; Hulpiau & Waeytens, 2003; Kleijnen et al., 2014). It also recognised that there were aspects of the Panel Report that would need to be addressed at levels above the school, which may require further action and hence, the locus of responsibility to address all the issues raised in a review did not lie with the school only. The Panel Report did not serve on the necessary faculty and college committees in this case and this impacted on the potential for recommendations to lead to change

and possible quality improvement. For example, the panel recommended the establishment of a centre and “that the University should support such a centre” and that “structures should be monitored over the next years by the Faculty Quality Committee” (Case 1, PR). Where quality processes identify constraints outside the control of the unit being reviewed, there is the potential for inaction or blame to occur.

However, as noted above the School Reviews policy assigned responsibility to the Dean and college DVC for “following through on the recommendations and implementing them as they believe possible and appropriate” (UKZN, n.d.-b p. 3). Both were social actors who occupied a particular role within the institution and were invested with authority and responsibility because of the power that comes with that position (which is nonetheless constrained) and within which they can exercise agency (Archer, 1995). It is in this social role that they were delegated responsibility via the School Reviews policy to consider and “implement” recommendations made by the panel. The Head of School reported that she received no feedback on the School Response reports that she submitted and was unaware of any structures on which the reports may have served (personal communication, 03-05-2012). It would seem that once the process at the level of the school had been completed, that is, the HoS had submitted response reports, compliance rather than the implementation of quality enhancements was achieved.

In this case there was no systemic accountability for actions and corporate agents were not held accountable for responding to recommendations. In those instances, where the panel had made a recommendation that must be dealt with at a level beyond the school the recommendations remained unaddressed. In turn, the school was also not held accountable for responding to the panel recommendations. The School Response report pointed out that “It is further worth noting that the recommendations made by the panel were soon after the merger so that these recommendations made may be read in a different context now” and “Resources available in 2009 make this recommendation simply not do-able as faculties have to shrink to suit the current financial reality of UKZN” (Case 1, SR2). Hence, the impact of broader structures mitigated significantly on the potential impact of the review.

In response to the Panel Report the school, as required by the School Reviews policy, prepared two reports: one soon after the review and another about two years later.

Both were submitted at the request of the Dean. Even though the school agreed with most recommendations it pointed to structural constraints beyond its control in terms of staffing and resources which were undermining its ability to make the changes recommended by the panel.

As discussed in Chapter Two, the University vision to be the premier university of African Scholarship placed strong emphasis on the university as a research-led institution and consequently on its research endeavours and an increase in research output and staff research qualifications. Nonetheless, the data clearly shows that management was seen by the school as putting constant pressure on it, not understanding the challenges faced by the school and not providing the necessary structures to create the opportunity for research. The panel noted that the school “does not have the capacity to do everything” and hence, the panel recommended that the school choose focus research areas which it could work on in collaboration with other units. The school in its School Response Report acknowledged the value of this recommendation but noted that this would only be possible if staffing matters were addressed. It commented thus: “This will create a huge opportunity for research in this field. That being said, it will only truly be possible to create an atmosphere of research if the staffing levels stabilize” (Case 1, SR1). So, whilst the school agreed with the recommendations it argued that it lacked the capacity to implement them.

The school commented in its SER that "it is hoped" university processes "will take cognisance of the fact that there is a high demand" for staff and that salaries are not "market-related" (Case 1, SER). Staff members with expertise and qualifications in this particular field could command competitive salaries in industry and because university salary structures were not “market-related” the school struggled to attract and retain staff. Despite implementing a number of strategies to “grow our own academics” and encourage students to pursue an academic career, the school struggled to attract them to do so (Case 1, SER).

The shortage of staff had implications for the review process in that the school was constrained in the way it could respond to many of the panel recommendations. It reported that it “… has attempted to follow the recommendations but we simply do not have enough senior staff members …” and “The School has lost so many senior staff

[in discipline X] that it may soon be too late to recover as we are reaching a critical point". (Case 1, SR2).

Another key university structure that was constraining the school's capacity to function effectively was resources. Throughout the SER there are references to plans and what could be achieved if resources and capacity issues were addressed. The viability of programmes was identified as an issue. There were low student numbers and staff members needed incentives in terms of remuneration and/or subvention to remain. The panel linked the future of the school to financial viability which was also impacted on negatively by low postgraduate numbers and publication levels (Case 1, PR). The school however argued that it "brings quality into the faculty" as it attracted "high-calibre" students/top achievers and hence, they believed that there should be internal cross-subsidisation of the schools (Case 1, SER). It lamented that the school was "under constant scrutiny to justify the financial viability" of the programme and that there "should be recognition for the value of the discipline for the School, university and region as a whole" (Case 1, SR2). It reiterated the argument that it offers "great marketing value to the faculty" as it attracted "top end students" (Case1, SER).

A lack of resources and the university requirement to ensure the viability of programmes acts as structural constraint. The panel recommended that even though the school offers a niche programme (which the panel noted is important for the school, the University and the region), financial and staffing resources are required to support the growth of the programme and if not addressed, the school should reconsider the orientation of the programmes that it offers. However, it would need to rethink its purpose and vision, and this requires time to collect and analyse data and to engage in discussion and planning (Laughton, 2003; Lomas, 2007; Newton, 2010, Stensaker et al., 2011). Institutional research priorities and the staffing shortage both act as structural constraints on taking this recommendation forward. While it is necessary that universities need to be financially sustainable and that some courses are difficult to sustain, there has been a notable shift in the HE sector to cost-centre financing whereby each unit has to bring income into the university, through subsidy, student fees or third-stream income, to cover all its salaries and other costs (CHE, 2016). Such an approach is at odds with models where significant cross-subsidisation is considered necessary to ensure that the institution as a whole meets its particular mission. This move to a cost-centre model of universities was evident within this university.

The institution has a number of campuses and schools are distributed over two or more campuses. In this case the school operated across two centres which both offer undergraduate and postgraduate programmes. The SER describes itself as operating in a harmonious and cohesive way across campuses. The panel confirmed that despite the distance between campuses there was a "positive atmosphere, with mutual respect for one another by members of staff at both centres" and "good relations and communication" within and between campuses (Case 1, PR). Nonetheless the cost of travel is identified in the School Response report as a factor limiting the frequency of committee meetings. The distance between staff members constrained the extent to which they could work together and hence, given that quality improvement relies on a culture of ongoing engagement and reflection (Harvey, 2007), the lack of opportunities for staff to work together can also be seen to be a constraint on quality improvement.

The data suggests that the relationship between the school and faculty/university was largely one in which the school perceived itself as being hampered or limited in its functioning by demands being made on it and the failure of the institution to provide the necessary support, resources and staff. There were a number of institutional level structures impacting on the school and constraining the way in which it responded to the review process. In response to both internal and external circumstances and pressures, the university management put in place a process with the stated intention to bring about quality improvement within the institution but operated in ways that both enabled and constrained the process.

5.1.2 School level Structures

As discussed in Chapter Two, a number of key operating principles informed the implementation of the college model of governance in the institution. This included the devolution of authority and accountability to faculties and schools, and “principled flexibility” which was intended to allow for operational variations in structures that best suits particular contexts. The delegation of authority from above brings with it the responsibility to ensure that centrally driven policies, targets, and outputs are implemented and achieved. The devolution of both authority and accountability was in effect to individuals appointed into management roles. Whilst these structures may allow some independence in the way in which the school operates and the way in

which the HoS exercises agency within her “incumbent role” as Head of School, this must be seen within the context of “new managerialism” which has resulted in increasing bureaucracy, accountability and formalised structures (Deem, 2004; Deem & Brehony, 2005; Trowler, 2012).

As discussed above, the policy as a structure determined when and how the review must take place but the way in which the school responded can either enable or constrain the potential of the review to lead to quality improvement. The School Reviews process was based on an annual cycle of programme and school self-evaluation which was designed to be formative, ongoing, and gathers and uses data for reflection and action (UKZN n.d.-c). Quality processes that reflect the normal working practices of staff are more likely to lead to quality improvement (Harvey, 2007) and less likely to lead to the resistance, disengagement and contestation that characterises academic responses to quality assurance (Blackmur, 2010; Newton, 2000). The existence of these activities can therefore enable or constrain the review process.

The data shows that there were very few formal structures in the school, that the school met infrequently and there were very few opportunities for staff to engage in collaborative activities. As per institutional requirements there was a School Board and Board meetings were the only time all academic members and some support staff and students of the school met. There was a constitution but no school level policies. Even though subcommittees were outlined in the constitution these operated on an ad hoc basis as decided by the HoS. The school commented that the various functions took place “in one way or another” even though there is “no formal writing down of these processes” (Case 1, SER). Most communication in the school took place electronically.

The lack of committees and the reliance on the leadership of the HoS is consonant with a collegial culture typical of a contemporary research university in which the lack of bureaucratic structures reflects the trust placed in colleagues to work together without the need for monitoring and management (Bergquist & Pawlak, 2008). However, in a corporate model of governance where there has been corrosion of a collegial culture (as the literature indicates was the case at this institution, see, for example, Chetty & Merrett, 2014; Maistry, 2012; McKune, 2009; Pithouse, 2009;

Webbstock, 2008), the HoS is expected to exercise structural power through such structures and hence, is constrained by what can be done.

In order for quality processes to enhance quality they need an environment within which they can take place (both structural and cultural) and a culture of continuous improvement and the need for reflection and review should be embedded and internalized (Harvey, 2007; Newton, 2007; 2010; Trowler, 1998). In this case there were few regular opportunities for engagement and reflective conversations about quality and hence, this acted to constrain quality improvement. The account of the SER process describes extensive consultation and requests for input. The SER provided a very detailed account of how the school went about compiling the SER, documents the legitimacy of the process and signals collective ownership of the content.

In this case the school approached the review as an opportunity to make changes. The school had only been in existence for a few years, formed as a result of the merger and it viewed the review as an opportunity "… to come to terms with the maturity of the school in terms of its own processes to understand how the school operates in terms of the vision and mission of the university; to see where the school is doing well; how it will pick up where it is not doing well and to get advise [*sic*] on how to improve areas where it might be weaker." (Case 1, SER). So, the school embraced the review as an opportunity to assess how well it is doing and to get advice on how to improve.

The SER process provided an opportunity for whole school engagement and reflection, an opportunity that was not afforded in the regular activities of the school due to the structural constraints outlined above. It was led by the HoS and the liaison team referred to in the SER as the Internal Reference Group (RG) of senior members of staff who had to oversee it and take responsibility for the writing of the report. This group met several times, at venues alternating between the two campuses. Campus meetings and email communication were used to ensure that members of school, who were not on the RG, were "kept informed", "encouraged to participate", and "given the opportunity to ask questions and see how they could contribute to the process" (Case 1, SER). The various reports received from the RG members were then put into one document to form the SER, which was then distributed to all members of the school.

All staff of the school then met, to finalise and ultimately to “take ownership of the document” prior to the SER being submitted (Case 1, SER).

Such collegial collaboration emerged despite institutional level structural constraints because the identified constraints of managerialism were to some extent mitigated by the structural and cultural enablements at school level. As will be shown, the school enjoyed a very strong and shared academic identity.

It is in the process of responding to the PR and recommendations that change becomes possible. Change is enabled or constrained by the way in which staff engage with the recommendations and the broader university framing of the process and the role of the structures and corporate agents in managing the process. Quinn and Boughey (2009) argue that it is “at point of the response to the draft audit report that the interplay of structure and agency also becomes significant” because change is only possible if there are key agents in place who can ensure that the response to recommendations moves beyond structural change to examine the cultural domain and the dominant discourses that gave rise to and sustain these policies, practices and events (p. 270). In order for there to be meaningful change, the response to a review has to be more than “mechanistic implementation” of recommendations (Quinn & Boughey, 2009, p. 264). In this case, it was the enactment of agency by the HoS and Senior Colleagues that allowed the review process to emerge as one in which there was broad representation and engagement despite the institutional level constraints described in the previous section.

The school engaged in a series of planning meetings to discuss and respond to the Panel Report. The first School Response report was a narrative and did not respond directly to each recommendation. It discusses whether or not the school agrees with the panel and it does not provide a plan of action for the implementation of the ToR. It comments that “the process was very beneficial to our school”, that recommendations made by the panel were discussed at school level and it “deliberated on how best to move forward in order to gain the most benefit from the recommendations made by the panel” (Case 1, SR1). It also points to the limitations of the process “There have been some successes and some frustrations…” (Case 1, SR2).

The second School Response report is a progress report written about two years later and it responds directly to each ToR and what has been done to date. In this report

the school comments that “we have attempted to follow the recommendation” and has responded where the recommendations are within its control to make changes. For example, it reports that “the School has had a lengthy process to create templates for each module that reflect current modules correctly. The school had several “template days” where academics on both centres were present, debated and designed templates. The process is now complete; all templates were sent to the QPA in 2009.” (Case 1, SR2). It also reports that the school has “attempted to promote research” and that the subcommittee structure “remains effective” (Case 1, SR2). On the other hand, the school was unable to respond to some recommendations because of university level constraints and the school locates the responsibility at a level beyond the school. The dominant discourse is that of a lack of capacity to make changes in those instances.

Despite the lack of formal opportunities for staff to engage in collaborative engagement and the lack of monitoring to ensure compliance with the School Reviews policy and that panel recommendations were implemented, the school nonetheless responded to some recommendations. The School Reviews therefore enabled quality improvement when changes were made on the basis of the findings and recommendations emanating from the review process.

5.1.3 Quality Structures

As discussed in Chapter Two the School Reviews policy was premised on annual internal ongoing review activities and self-evaluation which rely on systems for managing and improving quality and the existence of quality structures and procedures in the school. The existence of such structures indicates the extent to which staff are actively engaged in an on-going practice as opposed to responding to those required by management or external bodies (Harvey, 2007) and that there is a quality culture and ongoing activity, review and reflection. As discussed quality structures also ensure that there is information and evidence upon which staff can reflect and review.

Recognising that the evidence upon which it must make its findings and recommendations must be factually correct and capture the range of perspectives within the school, the panel interrogated the process followed to compile the SER. The panel commended the school for the effort invested in putting the supporting

documents together and commented that it was obvious that the school had “spent a lot of time compiling the SER” (Case 1, PR). The panel noted that the SER “was informative and readable” but commented that “it was not without error and some aspects were repetitive” and “some of the tables were misleading” and that quantitative data “could have been presented in a much clearer manner” and therefore the panel “sought the assistance of the HoS to clarify uncertainties” (Case 1, PR).

The panel used the SER and other documents to derive the necessary information which together with the input from interviewees formed the basis upon which the panel made its observation, findings and crafted its recommendations. Luckett (2007) argues that evidence accessed in this way is based on empiricist assumptions that panel members can come to accurate, objective and neutral judgements (p. 6). Drawing on the view of reality as explicated by Bhaskar (1989), discussed in Chapter Two, she challenges the capacity of this methodology to move beyond “simple descriptions and extrapolations (at the Empirical and Actual levels), leaving relationships between entities and their relationship to structures (the Real) unclear” and hence, is limited in the extent to which it can lead to change (Luckett, 2007, p. 7). She goes on to argue that people need to be challenged to develop new understandings and ways of doing things supported by institutional conditions which make this possible.

Whilst the school commented in the SER that regular school self-evaluation "is an important component of quality promotion and assurance" to set goals linked to University goals and mission statement and to reflect on achievements and challenges, there was no evidence of systematic implementation of this approach and monitoring of its impact. Much of the information provided to the panel was gathered specifically for review purposes. Module portfolios were prepared for the review (Case 1, PR). There was no evidence of ongoing annual and programme self-evaluation or much engagement at a whole school level and the preparation of the SER was the first time that the school has engaged in such a process. However, the school recognised that the process was also a potential threat to its future as it involved external scrutiny. It referred to the review as “the audit process” and the SER as an “audit report”. The school signalled very clearly from the start that the panel scrutiny needed to take into account that the school was both newly established and was operating within certain structural constraints.

In this case the panel did not find "evidence of adequate internal quality assurance arrangements" for all of the school's processes (Case 1: PR). There were however a number of traditional “quality mechanisms” in place which included the use of external monitoring of pass rates, external examiners and monitoring of research output by staff. The data suggests that the only additional quality structures in place were those that the school was required to implement. There was monitoring of the undergraduate programme by an external body requiring annual reports and in line with the institution’s goal to increase access and success for students (internal external requirements), and there were mechanisms in place for identifying and providing support for at risk students beyond first year. There was limited gathering of data and information upon which reflection about quality can be made. The panel commented that it found no "immediate evidence of a clear teaching philosophy within the school" and that there was no evidence that module templates are used “to inform teaching" (Case 1, PR). The SER process prompted the school to consider the need to implement some quality procedures. It reported that it was in the process of developing a school evaluation policy, that the ongoing review of modules will be "overhauled" and a newly established committee "will look into" setting up a policy to govern module review and timeframes (Case 1, SER).

The school points out that it has been maintaining "high standards" and that whilst recognising that there is a "need to protect the integrity of the core academic activity" it stated that it would "formalize the process by which the quality of the module and programme offerings of the school are ensured" (Case 1, SER). As will be discussed in the next section, the discourse about quality as excellence and standards dominated in the school and hence, quality was assumed to be guaranteed by academics who adhere to standards that are ill-defined and processes that are informal.

5.2 Culture

In the previous section I examined systems, policies and units that, through their structural emergent powers, enabled or constrained the School Reviews process in this case. However, as I pointed out the social world of structures is occupied by people who act within and on a cultural system of theories, beliefs, ideas, and values. So in this section, guided by analytical dualism which allows me to keep the cultural system and socio-cultural interaction analytically distinct (Archer, 1995), I examine the

data to consider the dominant discourses in the cultural domain. In order to identify the underlying causal mechanisms in the domain of the Real that are generating this discourse, I consider the role that these played in creating enabling and constraining conditions for the emergence of quality improvement activities in the school.

As discussed in Chapter Four, the way in which people behave and communicate is affected by what that think, believe, value, know or understand. Discourses exist as mechanisms at the level of the Real, have cultural emergent properties (CEPs) and hence, causal powers to enable or constrain social events and practices (Archer, 1995). I consider what beliefs and ideas the school has about itself and its purpose, understandings about quality and how these frame relationships in the school and between the school and the institution. I examine the discourses at school level and that of the institution to understand how this informs the review process. In examining these I develop an understanding of how staff members have engaged with the school review process and consequently, what in the domain of culture may constrain or enable the process.

A number of education sociologists (such as those referred to in this thesis Bernstein, Becher and Trowler, Bourdieu, Maton, Muller, Wheelahan) have long shown that different fields of study have different knowledge structures and emerging from these differences come very different academic identities, approaches to research and so on. My commitment to anonymity for the schools in these case studies means I cannot provide much more than broad depictions of the nature of the disciplines and fields represented within each case study. I draw mainly on the concepts of Bernstein (2000), Muller (2008; 2009), Becher and Trowler (2001) and Maton (2014) in such commentary.

In this particular case study, the literature allows me to identify this particular school as comprising a number of departments which can each be seen to constitute what Bernstein (2000) terms ‘singulars’ and strong and well-established regions. Singulars have very strong boundaries delineating what ‘counts’ as knowledge within the field and what is seen to be legitimate methodologies for developing such knowledge (Maton, 2014). Regions typically draw from multiple singulars and simultaneously face the world of work. In common with singulars, academics working with well-established regions enjoy a high degree of agreement as to how they function as researchers and

what should be taught in the curriculum, they are able to work together with a high degree of collegiality.

5.2.1 Relationships between people

The school was formed as a result of a merger of schools across three campuses and characterised itself as developing a shared identity. It explained in its SER that staff knew each other prior to the merger and hence, "coming together in a new School did not present any difficulties" and they "found it easy to work together" (Case 1, SER). Consequently, the merger as a broader national and institutional structure has not proved to be a major challenge in this case. The very strong sense of commitment to disciplinary norms and values across all the departments in the school was evident. Muller (2009) indicates that well-established fields such as those within this school have “developed an impressive autonomy over their work, and they tend to present a united front to both the academy and the world.” (p. 214).

Whilst there were limited opportunities for interaction, the panel reported that there was “mutual respect for one another by members of staff at both centres” and "good relations and communication" within and between campuses (Case 1, PR). The panel noted that even though the "merger brought three different institutional cultures together, this does not seem to have impacted negatively on the development of a single School culture” (Case 1, PR). This provided a cultural milieu within which the review process could take place. Staff members were willing and able to work with one another. The school is commended for this by the panel as if it was only a matter of agency within the school. The literature, however, suggests that the likeliest reason for the ease of the merger is related to issues of disciplinary norms, knowledge structure and academic identity. In disciplines where there is more in common across the structure of knowledge (for example, shared research approaches etc.) and shared norms, values and processes there is likely to be less contention and argumentation (Becher & Trowler, 2001; Henkel, 2005). So, the ease with which the schools merged may have had less to do with the goodwill of the agents within the school and much more to do with the shared norms, values and discourses of the discipline (in the domain of culture).

Nonetheless, the structural constraints of geography, discussed in the previous section, meant that there was limited opportunity for collaboration and teamwork, so

vital to collegiality (Harvey 2005, Srikathan & Dalrymple, 2004). As has already been discussed there were few formal opportunities where staff meet and they seldom met informally as a school and whilst there were some instances where staff members worked together within disciplines this engagement was limited.

Despite the collegial environment that prevailed during the review process, staff morale was low; the panel described a number of factors affecting staff morale. There had been resignations and retirements and this capacity had not been replaced, staff members were described as relatively young with a lot of potential, and there were a number of staff members registered for a PhD but there was a lack of staff with research records and supervision experience. Thus despite the strong academic identity forging cohesion in the domain of culture, the 'juniorisation' of the staff acted as a constraint. The 'juniorisation' along with the casualisation of academic staff has been identified as a growing phenomenon in SAHE as a strategy to deal with increasing student numbers and workload (CHE 2016).

Whilst the harmonious relationships within the school and the commitment that staff have towards their teaching and students (along with the way in which the HoS manages the school) created a culture within which staff members were more likely to participate in the review, the School Reviews process was constrained by the impact of the heavy workload and low morale of staff members.

5.2.2 School identity and purpose/mission

The school operated within a set of values and understanding of what it means to teach the discipline and its role more broadly in society, which emerged strongly from its particular fields of study. The way in which it understood its purpose and mission particularly impacted on how it constructed its relationship with management, students, teaching and research and this in turn framed the review process.

The most dominant discourse in the school was of a market-driven social responsibility which is captured in the school's stated aim to meet national needs and market demands. The strongly bounded nature of the knowledge within the school allowed it to identify a very specific market to which it was contributing skilled labour. In response to this external impetus it positioned the disciplines within the school as "designated national scare skills" with a responsibility to train for different sectors of the economy

and thereby contribute to "nation building" (Case 1, SER). It argued that "the training purpose of any university should therefore recognise the needs of the country" and the goal of a university is to produce students with knowledge and skills to tackle real-world problems, training for skills required "in the industry" and will at the time benefit students who will have “excellent employment opportunities" (Case 1, SER). On the other hand, the institution firmly identified itself as a research-led institution which fosters and rewards research output and the improvement of postgraduate education is a major strategic thrust. These are areas that were not very well established in the school.

As discussed in Chapter Two, there are competing views about what the purpose of a university should be. Whether it should be focused on the production and transmission of knowledge and/or meeting market demands to produce graduates with the necessary skills and values to contribute to the economy and society more broadly. The consequence of this is “aspirations to excellence in intellectual research, student education and practical relevance generate competing demands on time and resources” (Graham, 2013, p. 13). There was an evident tension between the Vision and Mission of the school and that of the university. There were competing discourses between the school’s understanding of its role to train students for a very particular and specified profession and the institutional drive to increase PG students and research.

As discussed in Chapter Four, various discourses or “cultural configurations” which exist in logical relationships to one another result in different “situational logics” (Archer, 1995). Where there are two competing discourses which are incompatible and contradictory they push up against one another (Archer, 1995). In this case the school was resistant to institutional priorities at both a structural and cultural level, it sought to protect and reproduce its own cultural systems and values, but this had structural consequences. The school had a strong sense of ownership and accountability for the discipline which in the case of some of the departments was based on its nature as a strong region to develop skilled labour for a specific and high-status profession. The disciplines within the school, along with academic freedom, were core to the formation of academic identity and gave meaning and self-esteem to those in this school. Henkel (2005, p. 173) points out that the focus on the discipline has “come under severe challenge as organising structure for knowledge production

and transmission, as guardian of academic culture, and as nurturer of academic identity". Despite the structural constraints of staff shortages, the school insisted that the discipline should be taught by staff in the school and not by staff in service disciplines. It offered a number of "service courses" to other schools and faculties.

There was a strong discourse of the school as custodian of the disciplines to ensure that each student receives the best possible training to enhance employability of graduates within the profession. This acts in complementarity with the discourse of quality as excellence and standards. This discourse also resonates with the way in which the school constructed itself and its purpose or mission and vision. However, this had structural consequences in that the staff members carried heavy teaching loads which impacted on the research output of staff. The school problematised the issue and asserted its autonomy to deal with it. It posed it thus "One may wonder why the school chooses to pursue adding more service courses each year" (Case 1, SER). Despite heavy teaching loads and the consequent impact on research output (an institutional priority), the school stated in its SER that it takes "service course teaching very seriously" as graduates from other faculties need to know "the power" of the discipline knowledge (Case 1, SER).

A situational logic of contradiction existed between the school's struggle to retain its identity and sustain the discipline on the one hand, and the institutional imperatives on the other (Archer, 1995). The evidence suggests that this impacted on the extent to which the school believed it could respond to the recommendations, and hence, constrained the potential of the review to lead to quality improvement.

The panel also recognised the consequences of the disjuncture between the way in which the school constructed itself discursively and broader university imperatives, but it did not explicitly challenge the school to engage with the underlying beliefs and ideas that gave rise to this tension. However, as Quinn and Boughey (2009) argue, ideas, beliefs, ideologies, values, and theories have to be examined if change is to take place. The panel made recommendations under six broad areas namely teaching, disciplinary focus, research, publicity, service and management structures. The recommendations focused largely on changes to be made at a structural level. However, in the case of research and teaching, it addressed the intersection between structure and culture and its significance for change to take place. It recommended

that the school develop module templates but must “cultivate an understanding” of them and “use them as living documents” (Case 1, PR). In order to address low research productivity, it “needs to recognise that it does not have the capacity to do everything” and “build awareness” and “create an environment that allows research passion to flourish” (Case 1, PR). The review however did not engage the school in a re-examination of the role of the discipline within the institutional context.

5.2.3 Views of teaching and research

Despite heavy teaching loads, shortage of staff and the institutional impetus to increase research productivity, there was a strong discourse within the school which prioritised teaching because they "want each graduate to receive best possible training" (Case 1, SER). They further argued that if this is to be achieved lecturers must be present in lectures and tutorials and provide opportunities for students to "have a one-on-one conversation with their lecturer" (Case 1, SER). Staff were constructed as “custodians” of the discipline who “do not farm out” the responsibility for teaching (Case 1, SER). The school considered "every student as a valuable asset that requires care and guidance" and claimed that they "give opportunity to the talented students to shine" and produce students who have the ability to "solve real-world problems" (Case 1, SER).

The cultural understandings of teaching and the role of the lecturer in the school was in direct conflict with the way in which workloads were constructed at an institutional level. The consequence of this is that staff members had "excessive teaching loads" and because "Faculty deadlines have to be met", research suffered (Case 1, SER).

The way in which the school approached teaching in the discipline meant that "lecturers are present at the tutorial sessions often with additional back-up from another member of staff", have an "open door policy" and "offers support to students" on a "one-on-one basis" (Case 1, SER). The clash of situational logic between the institutional drive for efficiency and research and the school culture of student centredness is reflected in the panel observation that it is the service role and approach to teaching that contributed to "high teaching time" which the panel thinks is commendable but nonetheless "expressed concern" that it is placing too high a demand on staff and impacting on research output and productivity of staff (Case 1, PR).

The panel characterised the school approach to students as having an "overly liberal open-door policy" and warned them against possible negative impact of what it perceived as an "abuse of staff time" (Case 1, PR). The panel also noted that there has been very little effort to work differently and reduce the demand on staff. The school reported that it is "looking into the Open Learning System for tutorials of large classes but this is still in the very early stages" (Case 1, SER). Whilst the panel recommended that the school should consider “the effective use of good postgraduate students” to assist staff with student support and tutorials (Case 1, PR) the school reiterated that it is “committed to continue giving excellent teaching. We are known for this and good at it.” (Case 1, SR2).

In the SER, the school stated that it placed a "high priority" on postgraduate programmes for a "very competitive market place" and "employment opportunities" but it was struggling to attract and retain good students especially at postgraduate level (Case 1, SER). The SER also stated that the school recognised that researching teaching is important, to "underpin their teaching with high quality research and consultancy" but this was not possible because of "the limited number of senior academic staff members" (Case 1, SER).

There was no strategy to increase the research output of the school. The panel commented in its report that the school had placed an emphasis on teaching at the expense of research productivity. The school described its "service role" within the university and the "detrimental effect on their research record" nonetheless it still aimed to increase the number of service courses that it offers. It intended to do so despite the fact that management was putting "constant pressure", not being supportive of the challenges faced by staff and not providing the "necessary structures "to create opportunity for research" (Case 1, SER).

The school discourses about teaching and students were incompatible with wider institutional discourses and structural configurations and hence created a situational logic of competitive contradictions in which the members of the school found themselves required to make choices if change was to take place (Archer, 1995). The review was constrained by these conflicting discourses as it did not lead to engagement with these competing ideas and the structural consequences thereof.

5.2.4 Quality discourses

As discussed in Chapter Two, the way in which an institution engages with quality assurance and improvement depends on how it views quality and the quality culture or set of values that inform quality assurance and improvement practices (Harvey, 2007; Harvey and Stensaker, 2008; Newton, 2007). However, there are multiple cultures and sub-cultures within an institution (Becher, 1999) and hence, there are many views of what quality is and consequently, people or groups of people exercise agency to respond in different ways to quality processes and structures.

As discussed in Chapter Three, there is a range of formal definitions of quality. The best known are quality as excellence or the achievement of often undefined high standards or level of attainment and quality as meeting a particular purpose or fitness for purpose. Other less commonly used notions are quality as value for money and quality as perfection. The notion of fitness of purpose is used alongside these notions where judgements are made about the purpose or goals of an institution or school. The SER evidences a number of different notions of quality.

In its vision statement the school referred to being a "centre of excellence" and a "premier centre in Africa" for "the delivery of quality education, research and service" (Case 1, SER). There were also numerous references to a global context and the school's aspirations to be "nationally and internationally competitive", with "globally competitive teaching, learning, scholarship and research" and "world renowned" and "world class" academics (Case 1, SER). This aligned closely with the quality discourse of excellence at an institutional level. The dominance of the discourse of excellence and standards resonates with that of the institution which gives rise to a situational logic of concomitant complementarity in which common ideas and practices are reinforced (Archer, 1995, p. 179).

Discourses about quality as excellence or as the setting and safeguarding of standards foster resistance where changes are perceived to be undermining quality and driven by external requirements (can be either external to the institution or from institutional level as external to the discipline or school). The discourse of quality as standards safeguarded by the school dominated in this case's SER. The notion of standards was employed in the school with reference to teaching. It described it as of a "high standard", "up to standard" and being "in line with the mission statement of pursuing

excellence in the area of teaching" (Case 1, SER). The meaning of 'excellence' however was not explained and was assumed to be understood and shared. This resonates with the notion of quality as unmeasurable and/or unattainable for most (Wittek & Kvernbekk, 2011). The school also drew on the notion of quality as standards when it referred to the kind of students that they attracted. The panel noted in its report that the school argued that its programmes are "intellectually highly demanding" and described their students as "high achievers", and "cream of the school leavers [*sic*]" who met what the panel referred to as "high entry requirements and tough pre-requisites" (Case 1, PR). Alongside this was the discourse of quality as staff expertise. The school described its staff as "well qualified", as able to command high salaries in industry and also as good, committed teachers who provided the "necessary guidance and resources" and taught well to produce "a well-rounded graduate" (Case 1, SER).

The school argued that it had been maintaining "high standards" and implicit is that it has been achieving and maintaining quality despite the lack of ongoing self-evaluation and the lack of formal quality procedures. However, it did recognise that there was an expectation or a "need to protect the integrity of the core academic activity" and hence, it reported that it was developing a school evaluation policy which would "formalize" the process by which the quality of the module and programme offerings of the school would be ensured (Case 1, SER). It also reported that a Teaching, Learning and Quality Committee was established as part of the SER process and it would decide how to use feedback to identify "where the weaknesses lie" and ensure that content and delivery is "up to standard" (Case 1, SER). The autonomy of staff and the possible contradictory nature of such a process within the school's culture were acknowledged when it noted that it needed to ensure that staff members are not "threatened by the process" (Case 1, SER).

The notion of quality as fitness for purpose also dominated. As discussed earlier, the school aimed to serve national needs and market demands. At the same time recognition from its accrediting body which involved monitoring of undergraduate programmes requiring annual reports and independent examiners for courses that were accredited by the professional body ensured that it was "attracting more top-end school leaving students" (Case 1, SER). However, as discussed above this professional discourse existed in a contradictory relationship with the quality as

excellence discourse and the school's disciplinary identity on the one hand and the priority of the research agenda of the institution on the other.

5.3 Agency

This is the final section of this chapter which discusses findings from the data analysis for Case 1. The previous two sections considered the findings from the analysis of data pertaining to the domain of structure and culture. In this section I "reintroduce the people" and contemplate how they interacted within and on the domains of structure and culture and consider to what extent and in what way this impacted on their actions. (Archer 1995, p. 245). The extent to which people can and do exercise agency depends on their social role and position in society and what motivates them to do so. As discussed in Chapter Four, the methodological procedure (analytical dualism) required me first to examine the structural and cultural domain and then to consider agents and what they do in and about it.

Whilst it is possible through the process of retroduction to postulate plausible mechanisms that explain events, I can only infer what motivates people to act. The use of documentary analysis meant that it is possible to identify what people did but not from their perspective to explain why. It is however possible, drawing on theory and analysis of data, to infer what informed this action.

5.3.1 Head of School

The Head of School as a social actor occupied a role requiring school leadership and management and was expected to ensure that the school does what is required of it as set out in the School Reviews policy. As discussed in Chapter Four, a social actor occupies a role or position which is invested with authority, power and accountability, and is consequently, enabled or constrained by the limits and possibilities of that role. However, according to Archer (1995, p. 187), people "personify" roles and both the role and the individual have emergent properties. The role can reinforce or change the individual as the individual can transform the role. Hence, the HoS is able to exercise agency in making decisions about how to respond to the review process. The policy states that the "school will be asked to prepare a report for the review" but the way in which this is done is not specified in the policy and hence, the HoS can exercise her authority to decide how the school engages with the process. At the same time her

agency can be enabled or constrained by the exercise of agency by staff in deciding how they would participate in the process.

The HoS exercised her agency in the way in which she approached the review. The process of writing the SER was engaged with as an opportunity to make changes. The school commented in its SER “The fact that the School was now nearing the end of the second year since the merger, made the timing of such a process ideal…to come to terms with the maturity of the school in terms of its own processes to understand how the school operates in terms of the vision and mission of the university; to see where the school is doing well; how it will pick up where it is not doing well and to get advise [*sic*] on how to improve areas where it might be weaker” (Case 1:SER).

As already discussed above, the school was one in which the staff had good relationships, met infrequently and had heavy workloads. The approachable and active style of management of the HoS had maintained an environment conducive to collegiality. She was described as "absolutely dynamic" by the panel and based on feedback from the interviews, the panel concluded that she had energy and enthusiasm and communicated and related well to people (Case 1, PR). The panel also established that she was confident in her staff and delegated tasks effectively. She played a key role in the formation of the school and was "successful in bringing people from the two campuses together" (Case 1, PR) as part of the merger process and formation of the new institution and school. It is however not possible to know what motivated her. Whilst she had Personal Emergent Properties that give rise to her management style and the capacity to motivate people, she also exercised power as a result of being a “role incumbent” (Archer, 2000, p. 283) and could make demands on staff members who nonetheless could exercise agency to resist it. She was constrained by the failure of management to address structural constraints such as the limited budget and lack of staff and so despite her agency, as discussed above, whole school engagement was not as optimal as it could have been.

The small size of the school also made it possible for her to conduct business effectively without relying on committees. The strong leadership of the HoS meant that she tended to take charge and had largely managed the school alone. Whilst an executive committee (EXCO) existed, the panel found that it "did not appear confident in their role as individuals representing disciplines and did not appear confident in their

joint management role or have clear direction and vision of administrative duties" (Case 1:PR).

As discussed above despite displaying this assertive leadership she was constrained by failure of the Dean and members of the CQC to both monitor and respond to the Panel Report and recommendations. However, the HoS did not actively pursue the matter. The shifting institutional culture from a collegial one to a managerial one described in Chapter Two in which control and decision-making was centralised suggests that this may have constrained her agency to act. She was reliant on the exercise of agency by the Dean in taking the matter further.

5.3.2 Staff members

As discussed above, the School Reviews policy requires the school to prepare a self-evaluation report, and the HoS as the social actor who has the role responsibility to manage the school had to manage the process. In terms of the quality evaluation framework developed by Barnett (1994) which was discussed in Chapter Three, processes where staff take ownership and learn about themselves and improve their own practices are more likely to lead to quality improvement. He argues that for quality processes to lead to quality enhancement it depends on the extent to which they are collegial or bureaucratic and who is in control and conducts the process and hence, the extent to which it leads to self-understanding.

The literature discussed in Chapter Three also suggests that staff often resist such processes as an imposition of corporate driven, managerial systems into the academic space (Harvey, 2009; Henkel, 2005; Newton, 2002) especially where they are not an integrated part of continuous quality improvement processes (Gosling & D'Andrea, 2005; Newton, 2007). Staff exercise their agency to participate or not in the preparation of the SER and in the interview process when the panel visits the institution. As discussed above the staff in this school had demanding teaching loads but also had a strong sense of ownership and accountability for the discipline and this may also account for their active participation in the review process which placed additional demands on their time. The nature of the knowledge being taught and researched in this particular school had very 'specialised distinctiveness' (Muller 2009) which fostered strong academic identities. These shared identities (and respect for each other's identities) in many ways enabled connection between people across the

merged departments allowing far less friction and conflict that may have been experienced in the merger by other departments.

The process was led by the HoS and an Internal Reference Group (RG) of senior members of staff who had to “oversee” it and take responsibility for writing of the “audit report”. The SER discusses at length challenges with retaining staff and strategies to retain staff - these mainly included ways to generate income (because of competitive salaries offered by industry) and "team building exercises such as local conference attendance" (Case 1, SER). It noted that the school "is desperate to solve the problem, as there is no evidence to date that the university is able to address the situation" and the school is therefore trying to raise funding for a Chair and subvention (Case 1, SER). Staff exercised agency and left the institution in response to conditions that did not suit them.

The panel also questioned members of the school about the SER process and their involvement (exercising agency). Some members of the school indicated that they had not read the SER stating “we did not know we were supposed to read it”, on the other hand some interviewees stated that they were “encouraged to get involved with the SER and everyone had a role to play, it was an open process and they were asked to comment at every stage” (Case 1, SER). It is not possible to fully understand the motivations that influence the way in which staff members exercise their agency to participate or not in the process but the less threatening it is the more openly reflective and honest people are likely to be (Harvey, 2002).

5.3.3 Institutional Management

Management has the ability to exercise agency both directly and indirectly to enable or constrain the review process and consequently, quality improvement within the institution. Management is also constrained by other factors. The institution is driven by its Mission and Vision and strategic plan as spear-headed by a group of people in key roles and positions with resultant power. At the same time the institution has to respond to national imperatives and operate within financial constraints.

The Dean as a social actor who occupies a senior position can transform the role he occupies and make decisions to do things that do not align with policy etc. As discussed above there were structures in place in the institution in the form of a policy

that guided reviews, portfolios which have responsibilities related to a review and committees to monitor reviews. The policy required that the Panel Report serve at the Faculty Board and College Quality Committee and located responsibility with the Dean and college DVC "for following through on recommendations and implementing them as they believe possible and appropriate" (UKZN, n.d.-b p. 3). However, the data shows that members of management can exercise their agency to either enable or constrain the potential of the review to lead to quality improvement as reports were submitted to the Dean but the HoS did not receive feedback and was unaware of any institutional structures on which the reports may have served. As discussed in section 5.1.1, the Dean was in turn constrained by the corporate decision within a college level committee to review approved procedures and refer the matter back to the Deans. His lack of action (along with the structural constraints of the committees) constrained the review process. The nature of this research does not make it possible to explore further the possible factors that impacted on the way in which he exercised his agency or not.

Responsibility rested with the Dean within a governance structure in which he/she can exercise agency to either implement decisions, monitor requirements and ensure compliance or not. Whilst institutional management exercised agency in how it responded to the PR, it was also constrained in how it responded. For example, those aspects which require resources cannot be addressed if resources are not available. So a structure in the form of a policy and a committee set up to manage the review process is countered by the exercise (or not) of agency.

5.3.4 Students

At both cultural and structural levels, the school was concerned about students. As discussed above, its espoused approach to teaching placed students at the centre of the process even when this placed other activities, such as research, at risk. However, student feedback which provides the opportunity for student concerns to be addressed was not used consistently throughout the school. The panel reported that students don't take formal evaluations seriously and that they think that staff don't either (Case 1, PR). Similarly, the voice of students in this review process was largely silent. They were the subject of the SER and were invited to be interviewed. The panel was not able to speak to first- and second-year students as they did not arrive for the scheduled panel interviews and commented that it "therefore is not in a position to assess the

impact of student support" (Case 1, PR). This impacted on the conclusions that the panel could draw about teaching and the student experience in the school. Students exercise agency about whether or not to participate in interviews. There is no evidence to indicate why they didn't turn up but data suggests they had little say in the review process. They did not contribute to the review report. A transformation view of quality should focus on the improvement of learning and empowering the learners and the emphasis should therefore be on "organisational structure that encourages dialogue, team working" and "delegated responsibility for quality and standards" (Harvey, 2007, p. 10).

5.4 Conclusion

The analysis of this case suggests that the quality improvement process was enabled by the school's approach to the review as an opportunity to make changes and the school engagement and reflection during the process. The school implemented some quality procedures during the self-evaluation process and changes on the basis of the findings and recommendations emanating from the review process.

The process was enabled by the shared norms, values and discourses of the discipline (in the domain of culture) and the working environment within the school provided a cultural milieu within which the review process could take place.

The Head of School as a social actor exercised her agency to enable the process in the way in which she approached the review and created an environment conducive to collegiality, but she was constrained by the failure of management to address structural constraints such as the limited budget and lack of staff.

The process was constrained by failure of the Dean and members of the CQC to both monitor and respond to the Panel Report and recommendations. When the Dean was constrained by the corporate decision within a college level committee, his lack of action (along with the structural constraints of the committees) constrained the review process.

Whilst the school responded where the recommendations were within its control to make changes, structural constraints beyond its control in terms of staffing and resources undermined its ability to make all the changes recommended by the panel.

Another constraint was the school's resistance to institutional priorities at both a structural and cultural level. In protecting and reproducing its own cultural systems and values, the extent to which the school believed it could respond to the recommendations, and hence, the potential of the review to lead to quality improvement was constrained. The school discourses about teaching and students were inconsistent or incompatible with wider institutional discourses and structural configurations and the review was constrained by these conflicting discourses as it did not lead to engagement with these competing ideas and the structural consequences thereof.

Change was constrained when the panel made recommendations which focused largely on changes that should be made at a structural level. The potential of the School Reviews process to lead to change was constrained when the review did not engage the school in a re-examination of the role of the discipline within the institutional context. The panel did not explicitly challenge the school to engage with the underlying beliefs and ideas that gave rise to this tension.

Because the Panel Report did not serve on the necessary faculty and college committees, there was no systemic accountability for actions and corporate agents were not held accountable for responding to recommendations. In those instances where the panel had made a recommendation that had to be dealt with at a level beyond the school, the recommendations remained unaddressed. Hence, the impact of broader structures mitigated the potential impact of the review.

The analysis in this chapter was carried out using an analytical framework that enabled me to separate out structure, culture and agency and identify some of the more dominant mechanisms that operate in an integrated way changing or cancelling out their individual effects, to explain events which are experienced, known or observed within the social world. The focus of this analysis was the School Review process, one of a number of internal quality processes at a higher education institution in South Africa, which aims to improve quality within the institution. The insights from the analysis of this case, a review carried out within one school within a college in the institution, will together with those from the other three cases be used to address the research question, what are the agential, structural and cultural mechanisms which enable or constrain the emergence of quality improvement within the university? The

next chapter is the second of four data analysis chapters. Using the same approach, it considers a review in another school in a different college.

Chapter 6
Discussion of Findings: Case 2

Case 2 is a school that also works from across two campuses and has a large staff body. In contrast to the collegiality and shared disciplinary identity of Case 1, Case 2 shows a school battling to develop a shared identity.

6.1 Structure

As discussed in Chapter Four, structures are the result of, exist because of, and are reproduced or transformed by social interaction (Archer, 1995; Sayer, 2000). In this section I consider the School Reviews process and the dominant structures in a particular school and institution which "structure" it and the decisions and actions of agents responsible for the implementation of the process.

6.1.1 Institutional level structures

As discussed in Chapter Two, the frequency of reviews, the procedures to be followed and the people and committees responsible and accountable for the process were all set out in the School Reviews policy (UKZN, n.d.-b). In this case the school complied with the requirements of the School Reviews policy and established the Liaison Committee which worked with a Quality Promotion and Assurance unit (QPA) staff member to draw up "specific terms of reference" that are "negotiated for each review" (UKZN, n.d.-b p. 1). The ToR directed the panel to consider the wide range of issues as required by the policy and also to focus on a number of issues identified by the school and management as needing consideration and were therefore informed by the current challenges facing the school. Almost half of the ToR related to the way in which the school was being managed and the working relationships and environment within the school. Hence, this ensured that challenges pertinent to the school and which may be hampering "quality improvement" would be addressed both by the school in its self-evaluation and by the panel.

The School Reviews policy also required the school to prepare a report based on a self-evaluation process and referred the school to the Toolbox for Programme and School Self Evaluation and Planning (UKZN, n.d.-c) which provided guidelines for a

workshop-based process for the implementation of an ongoing process of school and programme self-evaluation and planning which would feed into the preparation of the Self-Evaluation Report (SER). As explained in Chapter Two, the intention was to encourage the school to engage in a process of consultation and engagement involving all members of staff and hence, a wide range of perspectives would be considered and the likelihood of ensuring the cooperation of staff members in implementing changes would be increased. However, given that structures are mediated by agents the intentions of a policy are not always realised as was evidenced strongly in this case.

The school did not report in its SER on the process for the preparation of the report. The panel established in interviews that a report was prepared by Discipline Coordinators on two campuses and these were integrated by a small team, who were named as the “authors” on the cover of the document. Alert to the implications that the report may not have involved all staff members as required by the policy, had been authored by a few staff members, and hence, may not reflect the views of all staff members, the panel set out to interrogate the way in which the report was compiled. Whilst some staff had seen a draft of the final report they did not make input and other staff had not seen it at all. This became obvious when certain statements in the SER were contradicted by staff members during the interviews (Case 2, PR). The policy as a structure was adhered to by the school when the SER was submitted but the intention of the policy was undermined when the Head of School (HoS) exercised the discretion afforded to him in the policy to decide on the way in which the report would be prepared. The report was not based on a process which provided “a forum for sharing the challenges facing programmes and Schools, where issues and concerns can be discussed and addressed” (UKZN, n.d.-c p. 3). So, the intention of the policy to enhance quality through a process which engaged all staff members in self-evaluation was not achieved. Quality enhancement processes which involve all staff are more likely to get their buy-in (Bamber, 2011; Harvey & Knight, 1996; Kleijnen et al., 2014). The School Reviews process however worked effectively in that when the panel triangulated information, it was able to establish that the report did not provide an accurate and shared view of the school. The extent to which it went beyond the experiences of staff as reported in the interviews to consider the mechanisms at the level of the Real will be considered later in the chapter.

At the first meeting of the CQC following the review, the committee carried out its monitoring mandate by noting that a response report was expected and must be submitted at the next meeting. The report was tabled at the next meeting and dealt with at a number of subsequent meetings. The committee as a structure which was put in place to monitor the School Reviews process functioned to ensure that the policy was implemented but the extent to which it could ensure that the review process enabled quality improvement was constrained by the structures at lower levels upon which college level structures relied to be effective.

The matter remained on the agenda for a number of consecutive meetings initially because the requirements of the policy were not followed and then to monitor progress reports on the implementation of the panel recommendations. The CQC signalled clearly that it valued and supported the process and insisted that correct procedures must be followed when progress reports were considered at two subsequent meetings. In this case the CQC had to ensure compliance with policy and the deliberations on the PR and SR took place over an extended period.

Despite the panel indicating that some of the recommendations were considered urgent, the timeframe it took before the panel report and the school response were considered by the committee tasked to monitor the implementations of the recommendations was lengthy. The panel made recommendations which were considered as both serious in nature and needing to be addressed urgently. The panel commented that it will be “well-nigh impossible for the School to achieve its potential” unless “steps are taken immediately” or “as soon as possible” or “as matter of urgency” (Case 2, PR). They related to issues of staffing, roles and functions, and meetings, and to what the panel describes as an “unfortunate lack of an esprit de corps” requiring team-building as a matter of urgency (Case 2, PR). The delay in the process meant that panel input was not addressed and the impact of the review process was limited.

The monitoring of the implementation of recommendations or improvement plans is necessary if change is going to be possible (Dano & Stensaker, 2007; Hulpiau & Waeytens, 2003; Kleijnen et al., 2014). In this case the Dean of the Faculty and Head of School occupied social roles within which they had responsibilities delegated by policy as structure and were held accountable by the committee to respond to the recommendations. It was evident that the school engaged with the report and

contested some of the findings and recommendations. This was different to the way in which preparation of the SER was carried out and hence, the review process or panel report appears to have had an impact in this regard. However, one of the limitations of documentary research is that it is not possible to know that which is not reported on paper (Westerheijden, Hulpiau & Waeytens, 2006) and what the DVC and the Dean were doing informally to address the matter. Whilst there were substantial delays in the process the data shows that the faculty and college had already begun to address certain recommendations. Governance within the school was prioritised and an Acting HoS was put in place and then a permanent one appointed, some staff vacancies were filled, plans to address space shortages developed and workload issues were addressed (CQC, 2009b).

As discussed above the school prepared and submitted a School Response report. The implementation of recommendations made by a panel depends not only on the external impetus to do so but the capacity of the school to engage with the report and the recommendations. The lack of staff and resources featured as a key structural constraint confronted by the school. The school reported that the budget of the school had been cut and that it was understaffed and that this compromised its capacity to provide services "commensurate with its aspiration to be a premier School within the premier University of African Scholarship" (Case 2, SER) and its ability to realise the “quality” of its offerings, teaching excellence and efficiency. Its capacity to respond to the recommendations and hence, the improvement of quality was constrained.

There were a number of structural constraints that impacted the school’s commitment to the university mission and vision to be the leading University of African Scholarship. The SER made numerous claims that its vision reflected that of the university which was being "passionately pursued on a number of fronts" and key to the strategic implementation of this vision was “quality research promulgation" (Case 2, SER). Whilst the panel reported that there were pockets of excellence in research and commitment to pursue it, there was “overall low output” and the school was not meeting the quantity of research as per University norms for research output (Case 2, PR). The biggest challenge was the high staff: student ratio which the school reported made teaching and academic management "the primary over-riding task of academic staff" and hence, "crowds out the possibility of sustained research output" (Case 2, SER). This was compounded by the fact that most senior staff members did not have

doctorates and could not supervise postgraduate students. Hence, whilst the school was claiming a commitment to realising the university's mission and vision it was unable to do so because of structural constraints. As will be discussed in more details further on in this chapter, the nature of the knowledge fields had an effect in this school. The departments in this school comprised a wide range of regions with weak boundaries and consequently, did not have a shared identity and research trajectory.

The challenge confronting the school was the mismatch between institutional measures of the school's staffing needs and the school experience of under staffing and workload demands. The implications of the high workload and limited staff capacity for quality improvement are twofold. Firstly, the school indicated that it was unable to realise its mission and vision and secondly, it did not have the capacity to engage in quality assurance and improvement activities in an ongoing and in-depth way. The gathering and analysis of evidence to inform self-evaluation and time for reflection is essential if the process is to be ongoing and effective (Laughton, 2003; Lomas, 2007; Newton, 2010) but was constrained in the context in this case.

Another challenge was the geographical distribution of the school across a number of campuses. The governance of the multi-campus institution operated through a system of cross-campus colleges, faculties and schools. In this case different departments (disciplines) were brought together into one school post-merger and it offered both undergraduate and postgraduate programmes in three centres. The school mirrored the broader university structure with the HoS based on one campus where most of the students were located. The data clearly indicates how the post-merger challenges, tension between the campuses and the different styles, culture and ways of doing things across campuses impacted on the whole-school process and consequently, on the ability of the school to engage in ongoing quality enhancement activities. The school reported that the one campus operated as "a seperate [*sic*] but fully integrated unit of the School" (Case 2, SER) but the panel commented that each campus had unique features in how it operated and what its offerings were (Case 3, PR). There were differences in resources on the different campuses. The geographical distance between staff acted as a structural constraint on the review process as ongoing engagement and reflection was not possible. It was not only hampered by the distance but, in contrast to Case One, it experienced a lack of co-operation and working together as a coherent unit.

The panel concluded that the merger had "generated turbulence in both the academic and organisational functions" of the school and had led to "organizational and structural tensions which have significant ramifications for the future of the school" and it was challenged to assess the "merits of the School independently of this" (Case 2, PR). As discussed in Chapter Two, the implications of institutional mergers at the school level were significant.

Data suggests that despite a commitment by the school to align closely with the institutional strategic direction, this was obstructed by a lack of resources and staff. If the school was to successfully respond to panel recommendations with the resultant quality improvement, then those relating to staff capacity and workload would have to be addressed.

6.1.2 School level structures

This school operated over three campuses with the majority of staff and students on one campus. Staff members met infrequently and only for formal board or faculty meetings which were usually held on the largest campus. Any other meetings were organised infrequently and at short notice. The panel reported that there was no clear strategic plan with time-lines and annual targets for goals (Case 2, PR). Quality enhancement processes are enabled when staff work together, share a clear understanding of the nature and purpose of quality systems and activities, and have frequent opportunities to engage about quality matters (Kleijnen et al., 2014) and so it is clear to see how the school context worked as a constraint.

As indicated in Case 1, the structure of knowledge has long been seen to act as a structural mechanism on the workings of an academic unit, from how teaching and research are undertaken through to all other processes (Maton, 2014). In the previous case, the school comprised well established singulars and strong regions. In the case of this school, there was far less coherence as it comprised a set of fields that constitute what Muller (2009) terms ‘newer regions’.

Muller (2009) explains that what he calls ‘newer regions’ have various challenges that singulars and more established regions do not. Regions is a Bernsteinian concept to describe fields of study that draw from multiple singular disciplines and which face the world of work. Singular disciplines differ from regions in that they have clear

boundaries (or ‘strong classification’ to use the Bernsteinian terminology) and there is generally a shared sense between disciplinary members as to what constitutes a problem in the discipline and what methods are appropriate for researching that problem. Regions, without such strong boundaries, can be challenged to reach agreement between members as to what ‘counts’ as an appropriate focus for research or appropriate content for teaching.

While Case 1 showed a collection of singulars and a more established region with a clear sense of professional focus, we see here in Case 2 a set of regions with very weak boundaries. While the data in Case 2 shows a strong discourse of being market-driven, between the different groups of academics brought together into one school, there were very different understandings of which market was the target and what that market needed. This is, in many ways, to be expected as Muller (2009) tells us that newer regions are “more diffuse, fluid and less organised, and consequently send out more ambiguous, frequently contradictory signals about professional requirements to the academy” (p. 214). This was most evident in this case study and drove a need for strong leadership and opportunities to engage with the conflicting academic identities within the school.

Issues of leadership and management were a major concern for the panel. It described "certain discrepancies" between what staff said in interviews and claims in the SER. The SER stated that forward planning took place in an "organized and structured manner" in a consultative process including meetings and briefing sessions held "on a regular basis" (Case 2, SER). It was claimed that “much ground has been made over the past year regarding erecting systems for effective communication”, nonetheless most communication took place over email “as staff members are dispersed over the respective three campus sites and it is logistically difficult to always maintain regular personal contact.” (Case 2, SER). The panel however reported that staff members considered the management structure and style to be "inappropriate" and that there was a lack of consultation about operational decisions (Case 2, PR).

Whilst the school was formed with the intention of creating a seamless cross campus, cross discipline unit, it was reported that the way in which each discipline was “co-ordinated” was different. There were four discipline co-ordinators on the largest/main campus, five discipline and three programme co-ordinators on the other campus. The

university structures did not include discipline co-ordinators and hence, they had no "delegated authority" but nonetheless played a significant role in the school. The school was busy developing clearer roles and responsibility and motivating for remuneration in order to ensure consistency and standards across campus sites and disciplines (Case 2, SER).

At the time of the review the school was fragmented across campuses and disciplines; disciplines were "working in silos" and there was "very little cohesion across the School as a whole" (Case 2, PR). The discipline is often the key community within which academics work, the basis for their professional identity and their primary allegiance (Becher, 1994; Becher & Trowler, 2001; Henkel, 2005). Hence, when it is perceived or experienced to be under threat as has been the case where external and institutional centralised monitoring and compliance policies and procedures have been implemented, staff resist, obstruct, disengage and resort to “subverting power” by “game playing” (Blackmur, 2010; Harvey & Newton, 2004; Jones & De Saram, 2005; Lomas, 2007; Newton, 2000, 2002; Strydom et al., 2004; Westerheijden et al., 2007). Schools were adopted as the primary academic administrative unit in the College Model and the preferred organisational structure for the institution with the deliberate intention that “prior institutional identities would not be preserved on different campuses” (UKZN, 2008a, p. 20). Despite this, this particular school continued to function within disciplines and was divided along disciplinary lines. This suggests that they were working to protect disciplinary spaces and identities. However, this is not simply a matter of obstruction and resistance but also the consequence of differences in research and teaching requirements across disciplines. The structure of knowledge across disciplines differs and the focus of the academic project may therefore of necessity vary. The literature suggests that the merging of departments and subjects without consideration of the community within which academics operate can lead to resistance (Becher & Trowler, 2001; Henkel, 2000; Knight & Trowler, 2000) and this indeed seemed to be the case within this school where there was insufficient shared sense of disciplinary community.

In this case there were few opportunities for consultation and engagement. There was a disjuncture between claims made by the school management and experiences of staff members. On the one hand the school was committed to ensuring that it

functioned at the whole-school level, but the system of discipline co-ordinators continued to reinforce the division of the school on the basis of disciplines.

As discussed above, the school submitted a number of reports to the CQC. The way in which the SER was compiled reinforced disciplinary divides and did not fully engage staff in the process of self-reflection and evaluation. However, the way in which the SR was written indicates a deliberate attempt to make explicit that the process to write this report was consultative and reflected a range of views. Whilst the school "generally endorsed" the majority of panel recommendations it also indicated that on some recommendations there was a "mixed response" and on others that the school was "divided". The school members did not agree amongst themselves on the need for team-building, access to management and participation in decision-making. The school also reported that it was divided over the panel recommendation to explore common curricula across campuses. This signals that there were underlying cultural issues that would need to be explored if these recommendations are to be addressed in a meaningful way, which I will turn to shortly.

The extent to which the School Reviews process will lead to meaningful change depends on the extent to which "the causal mechanisms that give rise to empirical conditions and events identified" by SER/PR are addressed (Quinn & Boughey, 2009, p. 264). The panel made a large number of recommendations most of which dealt with structural issues within the school which depended on action at faculty, college or institutional level and was largely beyond the authority of the school itself. This included the allocation of resources, space and structures, and the clarification and/or implementation of policies, plans, roles and functions.

Whilst the panel made recommendations that would require the school to deal with issues of culture it did not directly challenge the school to examine underlying beliefs and ideas. Those recommendations that dealt directly with culture included the need to address team building and change management, the overall management style including communication, participation and consultation, student dissatisfaction with teaching and the need for encouragement and mentorship of staff. In the final progress report submitted to the CQC, the school reported that the majority of panel recommendations had been addressed. These however were mostly dealt with in terms of structures to be put in place and the ways in which people interacted, in the

domain of culture, remained unaddressed. For example, cross campus team building was addressed by having more frequent meetings. Whilst the panel commented that "Much work needed to be done" to encourage and support staff to be research productive, the SR indicated that this would be addressed by Performance Management as it would enforce the institution's research publication policy (Case 2, PR). If change is to be meaningful then the response to the recommendations by the school would require a process in which it examined the interface between the structural and cultural systems (Archer, 1996). The notion of Performance Management was in contradiction to mechanisms in the cultural domain, making correction or elimination of one of the mechanisms likely (Luckett 2012, 341).

6.1.3 Quality Structures

The SER did not outline the process followed for compiling the SER so during the interviews the panel asked staff members about their role in the process. Most staff members were aware of the report. Some had seen the draft (or a portion thereof) but had not had sight of the final version (Case 2, PR). This became obvious when the panel was unable to validate some matters in the interviews and there were differences in statements in the SER and the evidence presented by several staff members in the interviews. Whilst there was evidence of some requests for input into the report, there was little evidence of a consultative process. The data shows that the report was compiled from input received via email and drafts of the report were distributed by email for feedback.

The SER provided the panel with evidence that it triangulated with other sources of data including input made available during the various interviews and used to deliberate on the ToR and craft a set of recommendations. Whilst the SER in this case study claimed that there was ongoing monitoring by regular progress reports, collaborative planning and international benchmarks, and structured assessments (Case 2, SER) the panel noted no specific reference to quality assurance or the monitoring of academic standards (Case 2, PR). The panel reported that there was little evidence of sustained quality assurance procedures other than occasional use of standard student evaluations for some of the modules, no evidence of peer evaluation and little evidence of ongoing curriculum review. The ongoing collection and interrogation of information about school activities underpins effective quality

enhancement (Harvey, 2007). Regular self-evaluation relies on the existence of a range of quality procedures and systems which are integrated into the ongoing activities of the school (Laughton, 2003; Lomas, 2007; Newton, 2010; Strydom et al., 2004). In this case the absence of these structures suggests that there was limited active and sustained engagement in an on-going process of quality review and improvement and that some of the activities related to the School Reviews process were carried out in only insofar as compliance with the policy could be seen to be achieved.

6.2 Culture

As in the previous case, I examine how the school defines itself, its purpose and quality and how these frame relationships in the school and between the school and the institution. I do this in order to better understand the way in which staff members engaged with the School Reviews process and consequently, what in the domain of culture may constrain or enable the process.

6.2.1 Relationships between people

The school in this case study was formed when different departments and disciplines from different campuses and institutions were brought together in a cross-campus, single governance structure during the merger process (discussed in Chapter Two). The merger was experienced by the school as the complex bringing together of "disparate elements" and a "difficult, complicated and a sensitive exercise" (Case 2, SER).

Whilst the panel confirmed that the school "worked diligently towards blending the different inherited cultures" and there was willingness by staff to "make things work" (Case 2, PR) a number of problems remained unresolved and impacted on the review process. The competing discourse of the school as both the structural and intellectual home of the disciplines, and the discipline as the traditional home within which academics work and identify, were incompatible and contradictory. A situational logic of contradiction existed between the disciplines and the broader institutional imperatives (Archer, 1995).

The panel noted that there was a wide range of perceptions and levels of satisfaction with the progress of the school since the merger. Enthusiasm and determination to

"make it work" were evident in some sectors of staff on specific campuses (Case 2, PR). Engaging staff in a whole-school self-reflection exercise can be challenging and when staff members are disillusioned, fragmented and alienated they are less likely to participate and trust the process (Laughton, 2003; Newton, 2002; Trowler, 2002, 2012). The challenges faced by the merger were difficult to manage and the tensions it generated were compounded by the lack of effective management and leadership post-merger. The difficulty of managing large cross campus schools was recognised as a challenge and that the successful implementation of the College Model of governance would "…depend heavily on the commitment of the leadership to make them work…" (UKZN, 2008a, 36). Leadership is an essential element of a quality culture in which staff work together to enhance quality (Gordon, 2002; Harvey, 2007; Lomas, 2004). The panel commented that the evidence during interviews suggested that the school was "not effectively led", there was "inconsistency and a lack of transparency or consultation in decision making", and decisions were "handed down as instructions" (Case 2, PR). Whilst the responsibility and ownership of the self-evaluation process rests with all staff, middle level leaders are required to provide the necessary leadership through the complex process of change in higher education (UKZN, n.d.-c p. 5). Leadership and management of the process involves the gathering, analysis and interpretation of evidence and the facilitation of the process to ensure that staff participated. Staff would need to trust management to experience the self-evaluation as unthreatening (Bamber, 2011; Harvey, 2010; Karlsen & Stensaker, 1995) but the panel described academics as "disgruntled and somewhat demotivated", the atmosphere in the school as "not very pleasant" and the overall environment as "not conducive to positive and co-operative staff working relationships" (Case 2, PR). The traditional form of governance in HE which assumed the autonomy of and collegial engagement between academics had been replaced by one in which the HoS as appointed manager of the school had responsibility, power and authority to make decisions and manage procedures and people. The contradictions inherent in the privileging of autonomy at the level of culture and the management of staff through institutional structures (curtailing of autonomy) impacted on staff and the quality improvement process.

Another constraint on involving all staff in an open and reflective process was the large number of contract staff who were described as having "dampened morale" and

"uncertainty" about their future (Case 2, PR). The data shows that funds from vacant posts were used to employ part-time staff and contract staff. This also has implications for quality improvement; part-time and contract staff are often on lower salaries and have limited involvement in campus life and hence, are to be less likely to make a contribution to the activities and processes within the school/discipline (Kezar, Maxey & Eaton, 2014). The casualisation of the academic workforce is an international phenomenon and one which has taken a steep hold of the sector in South Africa (CHE, 2016) with 65% of academics now appointed on a temporary basis (CHE 2020). The effects of this process were very evident in this case study as it was a challenge to develop a shared quality culture when many of the staff were on contract, and thereby potentially less committed to the school and/or part-time and therefore less likely to attend meetings and give feedback on draft reports outside of their set teaching hours.

Given the challenges faced by the school, it is possible that they could have approached the review as an opportunity to get outside validation and support to address them. However, in this case there was little trust in the school management responsible for the process and absence of the necessary collegiality and trust for the SER process to be effective.

6.2.2 School identity and purpose/mission

The way in which the school constructed its purpose and mission and the values within which it operated framed the relationships within the school and the way in which it engaged with quality assurance and improvement processes and procedures. The SER presented the school as in the process of establishing itself and working towards a set of goals. It described itself as on a "journey towards its vision" and "moving forward towards the goals we have set ourselves" and that this "entails a journey of exploration", an "incremental process of small step improvements" and "gradual progress" towards "ambitious goals" (Case 2, SER). The SER commented that "the School's objectives are dynamic and subject to change" (Case 2, SER) and the panel noted that there was a "lack of an integrated plan, understood and accepted by all" (Case 2, PR). Hence, the school did not have a clear vision and a plan to achieve it.

The most dominant discourse in the SER was of being market-driven and "socially relevant" and making content and materials relevant to the "SA business scenarios" (Case 2, SER). The purpose, aims and goals of the school were to meet the needs of

business, commerce, industry, and government and to prepare students for the job market and the establishment of alliances and collaborative partnerships with "business, government and industry" was critical to achieving this social relevance (Case 2, SER).

Alongside this discourse of relevance to a diffuse and broad sector of industry was a discourse about its role in realising the institution's strategic thrust which would be achieved by building its reputation and success as a research-led institution with increasing research output and postgraduate student registrations. The SER states that the "The School supports UKZN aspirations" to strive for "international standing", "recognized by higher education rankings" (Case 2, SER) and that it will strive to realise this by "generating more research of a high quality" (Case 2, SER). However, its claims seem to be at odds with what was possible within its context. The panel concludes that one of its weaknesses was that its research output is low (Case 2, PR). As discussed in Chapter Four various discourses or "cultural configurations" which exist in logical relationships to one another result in different "situational logics" (Archer, 1995). Where there are two competing discourses which are incompatible and contradictory they push up against one another (Archer, 1995). In this case the discourse about research in the SER was deliberately aligned with those of the institution and hence, implied a situational logic of concomitant complementarity in which common ideas and practices are reinforced (Archer, 1995, p. 179). However, as discussed above the data showed that despite the SER's attempts to portray one, there was no shared discourse about research within the school. The school seemed to be struggling to establish its identity and a common space across the different disciplines within the school. Muller (2009) is again helpful here in understanding the low research output in that he indicates that 'newer regions' have difficulties developing clear research trajectories because they have a "certain arbitrariness to [them], which derives in part from the fact that the core knowledge base has not yet shaken down into a stable, generally accepted, incremental body of knowledge" (2009, p. 214).

There was a deliberate attempt to align with that of the institution but as will be discussed below this attempt was in conflict with the structural and cultural realities within the school. This tension constrained the potential of the review to lead to quality improvement.

6.2.3 Views of teaching and research

The dominant discourse about teaching and research was that there were challenges that they school was struggling to address. It was reported in the SER that the large numbers of students, high staff: student ratios and heavy workloads were undermining teaching excellence and research productivity (Case 2, SER) both central to the institutional mission and vision and quality. Whilst the school identified a number of teaching challenges, there was little evidence of systematic engagement with ways in which the school could address the issues but rather there was a focus on factors beyond its control.

The SER reported that large classes at lower levels meant there was "little to inspire students" or to "encourage them to attend classes" (Case 2, SER). It also reported that that low pass rates were "partly attributed to students not attending lectures" (Case 2, SER). Whilst it was noted that this would be investigated by a university-wide committee and researched in collaboration with another university monitoring pass rates (Case 2, SER), there was no evidence that the school had attempted to find ways in which it could address these concerns within its own context.

The introduction of new assessment methods was also perceived as having an impact on workload and was seen to fall outside of the mainstream and to constitute instead “student support system/academic development” requiring additional resources (Case 2, SER). While significant structural constraints identified above must be noted, it was evident in the data, that the members of the school (in the SER and the panel interviews) understood their problems as emanating from ‘outside’ of the school itself and needing to be attended to outside of the school, be it through institutional level research into lecture attendance, increased staffing and reduced workloads, or by addressing ‘problems’ with the students outside of the mainstream curriculum.

In a key article, Boughey (2002) pointed out that ‘naming students’ problems’ as emerging from issues inherent within students has allowed many academics to call for issues of high student failure to be addressed through remedial, add-on student support initiatives. This idea has been developed further to discuss how the discourse of the ‘decontextualised learner’ (Boughey & McKenna, 2014; Boughey & McKenna, 2015) allows students to be seen as having difficulties because of their prior schooling, their lack of motivation (supposedly evidenced, in this case, by their lack of attendance

at lectures), their poor language skills, or their lack of cognitive ability. This concept of the problems with student learning emerging from the student herself (and being unrelated to the institutional and disciplinary context) enables an absolving of responsibility by those working within the school.

The cultural understandings of the role of the academic in the school in relation to research were explicitly aligned in the SER to that of the institution but were in conflict with the both the actual everyday practices in the school and the structural conditions needed for this to be implemented. Staff members were unable to cope with an increase in postgraduate supervision and pursue higher degrees as required by university policy. Whilst a strategy to address research output was explained in the SER it was described by some staff as vague and some had never heard of the strategy. The panel advised that it should be workshopped by staff to make it more familiar and get buy-in (Case 2, PR). It is worth noting that Muller (2009) indicates that 'newer regions', such as the school in this case study, suffer from "weak or non-existent disciplinary foundations" making research particularly challenging. Indeed, the PR indicated that research output was hampered by the "absence of a vibrant research ethos" (Case 2, PR).

The challenges faced by the school reflect the changing nature of the university and the consequent impact on the nature of academic work. The pressure put on academics in multiple ways and areas has resulted in demands to make a more explicit and measurable contribution to society and the economy (Rowlands, 2013; Shore, 2010).

6.2.4 Quality discourses

In this school there were a range of competing notions of quality evident in the SER. The most dominant discourse about quality centred on the extent to which the school has aligned its goals and purpose with that of the institution and societal needs more broadly. The school presents itself as supporting the institution in achieving its purpose and more broadly the requirements, needs and demands of the "market", though the weakly bounded nature of the regions within the school made it challenging to identify exactly what market was being referred to. As discussed above, the school states in the SER that it "… supports UKZN aspirations to be the top-ranked African university" and that "....the School was poised to move forward towards its longer-term goals of

meeting the University of KwaZulu-Natal's objective of becoming the “premier University of African scholarship” (Case 2, SER). The extent to which this is shared is not clear given the evident divisions within the school and that it is a recently established school still forging an identity and common purpose. Alongside this is the discourse of quality as fitness for purpose in that the school is claiming that it is meeting the needs of business, commerce, industry, government and preparing its students as "valuable customers" for the job market (Case 2, SER). Thus, positioning of the university as an industry with customers and the neoliberal construction of the university as a marketplace (Harvey & Knight 1996; Morley, 2003; Harvey, 2009). As explained in Chapter Three, this notion of quality is often used alongside other notions such as excellence, value for money, and fitness of purpose (Harvey, 2007; Wittek & Kvernbekk, 2011).

The report also makes numerous claims that it is striving for and achieving excellence and maintaining “standards”. Implicit in these claims is that this is a result of current activity within the school. This school claims that its role is to promote excellence in discipline and “Excellence in African Scholarship” and that it strives to achieve "the highest standards of academic excellence" "that compliments the vision of the University" (Case 2, SER). The SER also claims that "best-practices" and continuous improvement are how the school will maintain "the highest standards of academic excellence" "that compliments the vision of the University" (Case 2, SER). The discourse about quality as excellence also dominates the institutional mission and vision and hence, suggests that a situational logic of complementarity existed and hence, common practices and ideas would be reinforced (Archer, 1995, p. 179). However, excellence in academic offerings for the school also meant aligning them to industry requirements and achieving standards of offerings business fraternities recognised as being high. It is stated in the SER thus “The programmes offered will meet the needs and requirements of the labour market, and make a meaningful contribution to the provision of high-level human capital, particularly in areas that are critical to management and economic development.” (Case 2, SER). The labour market was broadly defined and so this endeavour to identify and meet the needs of this market would be particularly challenging.

The discourse of focusing on excellence of human capital also existed in a contradictory relationship to the priority of the research agenda of the institution. In

practice the school argued that the preparation of graduates for employment meant a heavy teaching load and a commitment to students and consequently, research productivity would suffer. A failure to explore the underlying values and beliefs that informed particular notions of quality and these resultant contradictory discourses push up against one another making change unlikely to take place.

The panel report also used the notions of quality as maintaining "standards" and good pass rates as a measure of this. It reported that students are satisfied with modules which are "relevant and of an entirely satisfactory standard..." and describes modules as being of the "requisite standard" (Case 2, PR). The panel also commented in its report that some panel members were concerned about pass rates being "perhaps rather on the high side and wondered if that had anything to do with standards" thus suggesting that high pass rates are possible if the standard of work is low. However, the criteria for these standards are assumed and not made explicit.

The discourse about quality as fitness-of-purpose and being accountable to both internal and external requirements was evident. The SER included the discourse of monitoring and responsiveness to external demands; it reported that curriculum templates had been "submitted to SAQA and have been accredited", that it is responding to the "market" or "consumer demands", that it meets the requirements of professional bodies and accreditation boards; the evidence suggests that the school responded to the review as another in a line of external demands and the SER was compiled for reporting, rather than development, purposes. This was also evident in the discourse about ensuring that it is achieving targets and indicators and ensuring financially viability. This included meeting Senate requirements vis a vis research, monitoring of staff publications against Senate norms, monitoring of PG enrolments and throughput (Case 2, SER). It did not consider how it would deal with feedback and "closing the quality loop" or ensuring changes were made to address issues raised in the feedback.

The school did not engage in a process to make explicit existing notions of quality or to develop a shared understanding of quality. The panel itself seemed to be working with undefined notions of quality and it did not challenge the school to examine the underlying beliefs and notions that gave effect to conflicting discourses around quality. Resistance and engagement with quality processes depends on the extent to which

there is a shared understanding of quality and a quality culture in which staff work together to implement ongoing quality improvement processes.

6.3 Agency

The previous two sections examined the data to consider the structural and cultural domains in order to contribute to an understanding of the possible constraints and enablements on a quality improvement process in a higher education institution. In this final section of this case study I examine the people who occupy these domains and exercise their agency or their ability to act and how this impacts on the way in which they engage in the quality review process.

As discussed in Chapter Four, whilst the documents that I have analysed in this research provide limited insight into the motivation behind the way in which people behave and the choices they make, the process of retroduction makes it possible to consider mechanisms that may explain certain events and hence, I have to draw on theory to infer what could have led to their behaviour and the choices that they made during the review process.

6.3.1 Head of School

As discussed in Chapter Two, the changes in HE and the rise of “new managerialism” has resulted in the shift of power, responsibility and accountability from committees to individuals (Gordon, 2002; Giroux, 2002, 2006) and was evident within this institution (Chetty & Merrett, 2014; Maistry, 2012). Hence, the role of HoS had certain emergent properties which dictated what he could or ought to do. However, the HoS could also exercise agency to manage the school in a way that reflected his personal management style. Whilst there was a policy in place which set out what was expected of the HoS during the review process, there was flexibility in the way in which this was enacted. As explained in Chapter Two, the unit responsible for the co-ordination of the review process provided a toolbox to guide the review process but the HoS could exercise discretion in the extent to which he follows these guidelines. The Toolbox states that “each programme, School and Faculty will need to consider how appropriate this model is for their particular context and adapt the format accordingly” (UKZN, n.d.-c p. 5).

The HoS in this case exercised his agency when he delegated the responsibility for the preparation of the SER to a small group of staff members including himself and the Deputy HoS. The way in which he managed the SER process did not ensure that all staff were involved and thus failed to provide the opportunity for open and honest, evidence-based reflection.

As discussed above, despite claims in the SER that his management style was inclusive and participatory and that he accommodated people unable to attend meetings, some staff members reported in the panel interviews that his visits to other campuses were irregular and unscheduled, meetings infrequent and at short notice, and that decision making not inclusive and participatory (Case 2, PR). The panel commented that the impact of his style of management was a cause of frustration and that academics were "disgruntled and somewhat demotivated" (Case 2, PR). The panel reported that communication was poor and there was a lack of "personal contact" (Case 2, PR). The HoS also contributed to the delay in ensuring that the SR served at the CQC, in ensuring that it followed the appropriate procedures and that it was in the required format. The style of management within the school characterised the development of the SER which was prepared by discipline co-ordinators on different campuses and distributed via email for comment.

Different exercises of agency within key roles can lead to very different quality events and outcomes. “The actions of the key agents cannot be accounted for by audit processes—the audit methodology is therefore incapable of managing agential responses that may prompt or constrain change” (Quinn & Boughey, 2009, p. 270). Agency is key to the change process as people interpret and implement policies. The quality review process is constrained when management does not ensure that the process is open and honest, and that staff are able to trust both the process and people leading it (Bamber, 2011; Gordon, 2002; Harvey, 2010).

6.3.2 Staff members

The panel had to consider carefully the content of the SER and the input it heard during interviews. One of the purposes of the processes is external validation of claims made in the SER and this is done by considering the content of the SER, the evidence provided to support claims, and following up issues in the interviews. In this case not all staff members attended the interviews. Whilst on one campus most of the staff from

all the disciplines on that campus attended the panel interviews, on another campus only some staff members from one discipline participated. The panel was also concerned at the low number of administrative staff that presented themselves for the interview across both centres. The panel commented that it had difficulty weighing up individual contributions (Case 2, PR). Staff exercised agency when they made a decision about the way in which they participated in the review process. In this case the evidence suggests that just as some staff exercised agency to participate and make their concerns known and raise issues with the panel, other staff exercised agency and made a decision not to participate. This in itself was evidence for the panel that the situation in the school was fragmented across campuses and categories of staff. This appeared to cut across disciplines too.

Whilst the collegiality, effective communication, trust, and willingness to engage in open and honest reflection necessary for quality improvement (Barnett, 1994; Harvey, 2009; Harvey & Knight 1996, Kleijnen et al., 2014) was not evident in this school, staff members that participated in the review were open and honest with the panel. The panel was able to establish the inconsistencies in the SER. Staff also participated in the preparation of the School Response Report and the report reflects that there was discussion and disagreement. The School Reviews process was constrained by the way in which some staff exercised their agency to resist participating in the process, but the policy enabled the process by ensuring that staff participated in the response to the recommendations and preparation of the School Response reports.

6.3.3 Institutional Management

The Dean and DVC of the College were delegated the responsibility for the follow-up and implementation of the recommendations made by the panel in the PR (UKZN, n.d.-b p. 3). The data shows that the DVC as chair of the committee which was tasked to monitor the implementation of the recommendations ensured that the school tabled the report detailing how it intends to respond to the recommendations and that it followed correct procedure and dealt comprehensively with all aspects of the PR. This however was a lengthy process and militated against an immediate response to some of the matters identified as urgent by the panel. The DVC was constrained by the lack of action by the HoS. The DVC was however able to exercise the authority invested in

the role that he occupied to insist that policy was adhered to, was implemented and that the HoS did as required.

6.3.4 Students

As discussed above the school did not have a clearly articulated and shared approach to teaching and the data suggests that the school was not fulfilling its claims to "treat our students as our most valuable customers." (Case 2, SER). This discourse positions the students as recipients of teaching who need to be satisfied, rather than as novice members of the field or as students who seek to gain access to powerful knowledge. Ramsden (2008) argues that student engagement cannot be maintained and enhanced when students are "treated as customers who have a sense of entitlement, rather than as partners who have an opportunity to learn" (p. 7). It is only during active engagement with the educational experience and knowledge that transformation becomes possible for the student, society and higher education (Ashwin, 2020).

Alongside this discourse of the student as customer came comments in the SER that positioned the students as being weak and indicating that the "educational needs of students, particularly those from disadvantaged educational backgrounds" meant there was a need for assistance for "slow learners" (Case 2, SER). This discourse of students as "slow learners" allows them to be decontextualized from their social contexts and responsible as individuals for their own success (Boughey & McKenna, 2016). There is ample research indicating the dangers of such discourses that position higher education knowledge as neutral and all students' challenges as emerging from mechanisms inherent within them as this allows departments to consider higher education success as being meritocratic where those who are deserving succeed and those who are not, do not (see for example Alvarado, 2010; Armstrong & Hamilton, 2013; Bathmaker et al., 2016; Case et al., 2018). Sobuwa and McKenna (2019) argue that the meritocracy account of education dominates and that what we need instead is an account that helps us to identify the complex interplay of mechanisms within the domains of structure, culture and agency. This study is focused on quality processes rather than student learning but it does contribute to a more nuanced account. In this particular case, the framing of students as customers who may need remedial

assistance to succeed was not interrogated to look for more complex explanations of the student experience.

The school stated in the SER that it aimed “to enable our students to compete favourably and equitably on local, national and international job markets” and that it “is committed to the highest levels of service excellence and the continuous improvement of its processes and practices” (Case 2, SER). However, the panel reported that “there was very little evidence of sustained quality assurance procedures being developed and applied, other than the occasional use of standard student evaluations for some of the modules” (Case 2, PR).

Students did not play a role in school governance and the review process. Students’ views and experience were largely absent in the SER process. Less than a handful of undergraduate students were interviewed, and the panel was tentative in the conclusions that it could draw based on student input in the interviews; it commented that it was “difficult to assess how serious or widespread these complaints were…” (Case 2, PR). So, the process was constrained when students did not participate in the panel interview. It is not possible to conclude if they chose not to participate or that the process failed to engage them. There is no data on which to make any possible observations about why the students did not turn up for interviews. It is not clear if they were invited and decided not to participate or if they were unaware of the review process. The failure to involve students and ensure they have a voice in both management and review processes means that quality improvement is undermined. An opportunity to come to more complex understandings of the student experience and of the mechanisms from which student success or failure emerge was missed through the omission of significant student input and the dominance of simplistic discourses about students.

6.4 Conclusion

As in Case Study 1, there were a number of mechanisms that interacted to both enable and constrain the School Reviews process in this school. The quality improvement process in this case was enabled when the DVC exercised the authority invested in the role that he occupied to insist that policy was adhered to and implemented. The committee as a structure which was put in place to monitor the School Reviews process functioned to ensure that the policy was implemented but the extent to which

it could ensure that the review process enabled quality improvement was constrained by the structures at lower levels upon which college level structures relied to be effective. The process was constrained by the fragmented nature of the school in which there were few opportunities for consultation and engagement, little evidence of sustained quality assurance procedures and little trust in the school management which managed the process. It was further constrained by the lack of a shared school identity, a clearly articulated and shared understanding of quality, and a common space across the different disciplines within the school. This lack of school identity was enabled by the diffuse nature of the knowledge within the school which comprised a set of newer regions.

The HoS exercised his agency to manage the school in a way that not all staff were involved and did not provide the opportunity for open and honest, evidence-based reflection. The evidence suggests the process was enabled when a new HoS was appointed who had a style of management that would make the changes possible.

The impact of the review was constrained when deliberations in the CQC took place over a very extended period. Even though there were substantial delays in the process the process was enabled when certain recommendations that required faculty or college level action were addressed. The process however was constrained when some matters identified by the panel as urgent were not addressed; the DVC was constrained by the lack of action by the HoS.

In this case the evidence suggests that the process was enabled when some staff exercised their agency to participate and make their concerns known and raise issues with the panel but the process was constrained when other staff members exercised agency and made a decision not to participate. The process was enabled when the DVC, Dean and CQC, exercised corporate agency to put in place a process to ensure that all staff participated in the preparation of the School Response Report. This ensured that staff could exercise their agency to engage with the report and contest some of the findings and recommendations.

The implementation of recommendations made by a panel depended not only on the external impetus to do so but the capacity of the school to engage with the report and the recommendations. The interplay between mechanisms hampered the school's capacity to engage in the review process. Data suggests that despite a commitment

by the school to align closely with the institutional strategic direction this was obstructed by a lack of resources and staff. If the school was to successfully respond to panel recommendations with the resultant quality improvement, then those relating to staff capacity and workload would also have to be addressed. The process within the school was also constrained when a large number of recommendations, most of which dealt with structural issues within the school, were dependent on action at faculty, college or institutional level.

Whilst the panel made some recommendations that would need the school to deal with issues at the level of culture, it did not directly challenge the school to examine underlying beliefs and ideas. There were underlying cultural issues that would need to be explored if these recommendations could be addressed in a meaningful way. The majority of panel recommendations that were addressed dealt mostly at the level of structures.

In the next chapter I examine the School Reviews process in another school in another college in the institution. I use the same analytical framework to examine structure, culture and agency separately in order to understand the way in which a process governed by the same policy and taking place in similar structures takes effect in the specific context of another school.

Chapter 7
Discussion of Findings: Case 3

The debate about the applicability and value of quality assurance in higher education is ongoing and the research into the efficacy of internal processes has been limited. Despite this a wide range of quality improvement and assurance processes have been implemented across the higher education sector. One such process is the focus of this research. Having looked at the structural, cultural and agential conditions at play in two case studies thus far, I now move on to the third case.

7.1 Structure

7.1.1 Institutional level structures

The review of this school took place in the institution a number of years after a period when "much of its activity has been focused on the improvement of the infrastructure; on the development of new policies; on the renewal of structures; on the design and implementation of new processes and procedures" (UKZN, 2008a, p. 284). The Terms of Reference (ToR) were drawn up in consultation with the Dean and the school and the Self-Evaluation Report (SER) was prepared from input made by members of the school who participated in a self-evaluation workshop (Case 3, PR). The Panel Report (PR) and the School Response report (SR) served at the college level Quality Committee (CQC, 2009a) and the HoS and the Dean reported on progress made on addressing the recommendations. The ToR dealt with the broad issues as specified by the policy and included specific issues and challenges facing the school. In this case the committee and decision-making processes functioned effectively at all levels to ensure that the policy was implemented as intended.

In this case the school, faculty and college level structures functioned effectively and hence, quality improvement was enabled. The policy signalled clear lines of accountability and assigned responsibility to the Dean of the Faculty and College Deputy Vice-Chancellor (DVC) for "following through on the recommendations and implementing them as they believe possible and appropriate" (UKZN, n.d.-b p. 3). The faculty was supportive of the process and its monitoring role and fulfilled the mandate of the policy when a report from the Faculty Management and Quality Committee was

tabled at the CQC meeting. The faculty interrogated the PR and provided a response to recommendations which had to be addressed at Faculty level (Case 3, Faculty Response to the School Reviews Report). The CQC fulfilled its mandate when it requested that a progress report is submitted after a period of one year (CQC, March 2009a). Thus it signalled a clear understanding of its role which included the monitoring of the implementation of recommendations and holding the HoS and Dean accountable for ensuring that changes took place.

However, no formal progress report was submitted after a year. Whilst the school continued to engage with the process, this was not monitored by the CQC. The Head of School commented that "… focus on other things was the issue like re-organisation if I remember well." (Personal communication, 21-05-2012). As explained in Chapter Two, the institution embarked on a review of the organisational structure in 2010 and this appears to have taken priority over other processes in the institution. So whilst the structures functioned effectively to ensure that the policy was implemented, broader institutional level developments acted to constrain the long term monitoring of implementation of changes and hence, to constrain the review process as the impetus to make changes was not sustained by school. Quality assurance and improvement procedures compete with a range of demands and whilst quality improvement was enabled when there was internal impetus to engage with quality processes, this was not enough. As discussed in Chapter Three, increasing monitoring and accountability has been criticised for the negative impact it has had on academic work and institutional structures and goals, however the data suggests that there needed to be an external driver to ensure that quality assurance and improvement was addressed. The data also suggests that even where a school has an intrinsic drive to improve quality there is a need for extrinsic monitoring and accountability. However, this requires both institutional commitment and stability.

In additional to structures to regulate quality activities and a culture that facilitates engagement, there must be the capacity to respond to recommendations. Quality processes bring an increase in workload and demands on staff and resources. In this case, the issues of resources, staffing and workload presented as emerging challenges within the school which if not addressed would interact to constrain the school's capacity to function effectively. They all had the potential to impact on the time that staff had available to engage in gathering, analysis and reflection on data as

well as the implementation of new ways of working. Quality assurance and improvement as an evidence-based exercise is time consuming as it requires the ongoing collection, analysis and collation of data, information and documentation (Newton, 2002; Gosling & D'Andrea, 2005). Hence, any ongoing activities would be constrained if staff members were overloaded by work due to lack of staff.

The panel reported that there were a number of factors impacting on staffing in the school. The most significant being the number of vacant posts which resulted in high pressure on the remaining staff. A number of staff members had been seconded temporarily to work elsewhere in the institution and in partner institutions (Case 3, SER). Unlike in other cases, the panel commented that it agreed with the school's representation of itself as overloaded and that this was a threat to quality and that the school needed to make a choice in this regard. "The panel will recommend that in view of these pressures the School should decide on where its future priorities will lie, especially in the matter of partnerships and co-operation with external projects, with a view to consider some contraction and consolidation" (Case 3, PR). This school had a very strong professional identity and the structure of its knowledge base was as a well-established region, with a deep commitment to its field of work outside of the academy.

Responding to institutional priorities and goals placed demands on the capacity of the school. As discussed in Chapter Two, the institution's Strategic Plan set out how the institution would realise its mission and vision as the 'premier institution of African scholarship' based on a number of goals and strategies. The school reported on a range of strategies to build a "research ethos" and that research output was monitored and promoted through a range of support for staff and PhD students. The panel was asked to assess the school's performance in relation to research and made a number of comments in the panel report, but it did not make any recommendations pertaining to research. However, the CQC recommended that the rate of completion of PhDs be addressed (CQC, 2009a). Thus it signalled clearly the institutional priority in this regard and through its structures ensured compliance and the alignment of the school and institution mission and vision.

The data indicated that the relationship between the school and the faculty and university was largely one of co-operation and alignment of goals. The school had

made a deliberate effort to align itself with the institutional strategic vision and ensured that its activities met outputs as required by broader university policy and procedures. Institutional level structures relating to review processes functioned to enable the school and the way in which it responded to the review process. A situational logic of concomitant complementarity existed in which common ideas and practices were reinforced (Archer, 1995, p. 179). However, limited capacity in the school due to staff shortages and increased work load, as well as competing demands made on staff to meet institutional requirements for research, acted to constrain the sustainability and impact of the process.

7.1.2 School level structures

As discussed in Chapter Two, the school operated within a management structure that was based on single university-wide faculties with schools operating across geographical sites with devolution of governance. Consequently, authority and responsibility was framed by a set of centrally driven institution wide policies and procedures. The School Reviews policy as a structure provided the framework within which reviews had to be carried out. This is premised on internal reviews being conducted on an annual basis and hence, ongoing gathering of data and regular opportunities for staff to consider the evidence and ways in which to improve quality (UKZN, n.d.-c).

In this school the structures were in place within which ongoing consultation and engagement could take place. There were frequent whole-school meetings, weekly research meetings and a series of teaching planning and review sessions and seminars (Case 3, SER). The school did not have a constitution and there were no school-level policies. The only formally constituted committee structure was the School Board and meetings were held as required by institutional-wide policy. In this case there were many opportunities for discussion and working together in the school and a very strong shared professional identity.

It was reported in the SER that weekly meetings were held in which “new information is shared and staff are assisted to solve problems or make plans” (Case 3, SER). The academic governance in this school was reflected in the horizontal governance structures in the school and its location in the discipline and programme rather than school level committees. The panel commented that this reflected the informal way,

based on trust and collegiality, in which the school had tended to operate (Case 3, PR).

This less hierarchical and more collegial approach was enabled by the school's knowledge structures and its position as a profession. Muller (2009, 214) indicates that traditional professions such as "law, medicine, engineering, accounting, architecture" have:

> a robust *professional habitus* and *identity* in their practitioners, deep induction into the 'values of the profession, its standards of professional integrity, judgement and loyalty' (Beck and Young 2005, 188). Indeed, these professional identities, albeit 'projected' from the profession rather than solely 'introjected' from the discipline (Bernstein 2000), are similarly stable and robust.

The school in Case Study 3 probably sits between such traditional professions described above and newer professions such as "teaching, clinical psychology and social work" which have "joined the traditional professions, and have developed their regional knowledge bases, aspiring to the autonomy and stability of the traditionals but not (yet) in their league, both in terms of their social organisation and their disciplinary robustness." (Muller, 2009, 214) While this school may have lacked some of the autonomy and stability of traditional professions developed over hundreds of years, like teaching, psychology and social work, it did have a clearly delineated profession with a strongly articulated shared value system. Unlike Case Study 2, which was a newer region with very little coherence emerging from its knowledge structures, Case Study 3 was able to enjoy more informal, collegial approaches.

This reliance on informal processes of engagement acted both to enable and constrain quality improvement within the school. One of the challenges of a lack of formal structures is that it is not clear where responsibility lies and it is difficult to hold staff accountable and so the HoS is reliant on people's co-operation. In the traditional collegial structures, limited formal structures and monitoring particularly of curriculum and teaching and learning is based on the assumption that staff as experts are the custodians of quality and can be trusted to maintain the necessary standards. The introduction of structures to manage accountability are resisted as an imposition of managerialism and seen to be contradictory to the school's culture.

Where academics resist or distrust the process, engagement is constrained and they are unlikely to participate in quality improvement processes (Laughton, 2003; Newton, 2002; Stensaker, 2008; Trowler 2002, 2012). Whilst the school commented that the review was as an opportunity to "promote quality within programmes", it was also driven by "accountability to the various authorities and consumers of our service" and "ensuring responsiveness to societal needs and problems to inform our curricula" (Case 3, SER).

The data suggests that the school generally embraced the review process and engaged with it in an inclusive and considered manner. It comments in the SER that it approached the review as an "opportunity to engage the entire School in a self-evaluative process" and to embark on a process of a series of programme reviews which involved members of the school and from external units. The approach was "inclusive" and reflects a commitment to engaging and involving all staff (Case 3, SER). There were frequent and regular opportunities for engagement and discussion about quality and the scheduling of programme reviews and a self-evaluative workshop, which were held specifically for the review purpose, were therefore part of the usual way of dealing with matters that involved the whole school. The workshops were well attended by staff and involved external stakeholders including students and staff from other units such as Academic Development and Student Support.

The reports from the programme reviews were compiled from workshop input, using a framework provided by the QPA and circulated for comment by all staff, and written by the respective programme co-ordinators and the Head of School. The panel commented that the SER was "coherent, thorough and frank", that staff spoke "freely" and there was "wholehearted participation" in the process (Case 3, PR). The SER therefore provided the panel with an inclusive perspective of the school and its challenges. The process had been managed in a way to involve all staff and hence, the evidence upon which the panel would deliberate provided it with a perspective that was validated in the interviews. The collegial and collaborative way in which the school engaged with the review enabled the quality improvement process.

The development of the SER drew on a series of ongoing programme reviews and preparation for an institutional audit process which took place the same year. There was already in place routine annual review activity in the school and an accreditation

process by a professional body and this greatly enabled their participation in the school review process. The school was familiar with review processes and was accultured to being held accountable by an external body. Unlike in Case Study 2, where the identity of the market/profession was ill defined, in Case Study 3, the very strong and clear commitment to the profession was everywhere evident.

There was an evident culture of reflection, self-evaluation, accountability, inclusivity and consultation in the school. Hence, these acted to enable active engagement in the review process.

The same process of engagement characterised the way in which the school engaged with the PR. The workshop was well attended and “the participants participated actively and with enthusiasm” (SR, Case 3). The report was interrogated and a co-ordinated response was compiled. The workshop was facilitated by a senior staff member and staff working in groups discussed the recommendations and made suggestions for ways to address the issues. It was this document that served at the CQC. Hence, the policy as structure which required that the school prepare a plan of action to respond to recommendations enabled the quality improvement process.

In this case there were a large number of recommendations most of which dealt explicitly with issues of structure. However, an analysis shows that issues of “culture” would need to be addressed if people were to be challenged to develop new understandings and ways of doing things supported by institutional conditions which make this possible. Drawing on the view of reality as explicated by Bhaskar (1989), discussed in Chapter Four, Luckett argues that the methodology is limited in the extent to which it can lead to change unless it moves beyond observations and experiences at the Empirical and Actual levels to explore casual mechanisms at the level of the Real (Luckett, 2007, 2010), this would mean understanding that recommendations related to simple structures, in the form of new policies or committees for example, would need to take into account deeper structures that played a role in the events and experiences in the school. The structure of knowledge in this school, as a strong profession within a clearly bounded field, coupled with the collegial culture complimentary to the knowledge structures would have effects on how the recommendations would be implemented.

The nature of the recommendations made it possible for the school to focus on implementing policies, targets, and committees without necessarily engaging with underlying issues. It responded to panel recommendations relating to the curriculum which dealt largely with technical details including credits, links between outcomes and teaching methodology, and rationalisation of offerings and placements. Once structures are established, access to and participation in them will depend on a shared set of values and the exercise of agency. Therefore, a failure to ensure that the response to recommendations moves beyond surface level structural change (as an event at the level of the Actual) to examine the deeper structures and the cultural domain and the dominant discourses that gave rise to and sustain policies, practices and events will not lead to be meaningful change.

The SR indicates that the school engaged fully with the PR. The analysis of the PR by the school went beyond the recommendations. This again evidenced the extent to which the school was used to quality processes and to engaging with recommendations and reviews outside of the school. The facilitator had analysed the PR and identified a number of other issues that the panel had commented on in its report but did not make an explicit recommendation. The issues raised by the panel in its report included some identified by the school in its SER and issues that it identified during the review process. The school agreed with the majority of the panel observations and recommendations accepting most, clarifying others, partially accepting some and only directly challenging a few. The review process functioned to successfully identify issues that required change and to engage the school in a process to both decide on actions required and to begin to implement these changes.

The school complied with the university-level policy when it implemented the proposed response to the panel recommendations set out in the report submitted to the CQC. The HoS reported that workshops were held, a strategic plan was developed, committees formed and a funding proposal developed. A number of the recommendations and further issues identified by the school were delegated to the various committees to address. Progress on other recommendations was however curtailed by the reliance on university level response to some issues.

7.1.3 Quality Structures

There was evidence of ongoing review activity within the school. Programme reviews involving all staff were carried out regularly. Most of the information required by the panel was readily available and the panel was able to triangulate it during the interview process. There were also a number of quality mechanisms for "managing" quality in place within the school including those traditionally found in higher education institutions such as monitoring of pass rates and external examiners. This also included the monitoring of throughput (as part of a faculty-level initiative) and regular professional body accreditation for which the gathering and analysis of data and documentation was a requirement.

Whilst there was no explicit school policy which made the gathering of student evaluations or peer evaluations of lectures compulsory, some staff did so when applying for promotion as they were required for this purpose. The review highlighted that the school was not implementing the faculty-wide policy on quality assurance which calls for the integration of student and peer evaluations, and feedback from moderators and external examiners etc. (UKZN, n.d.-a). There was also a university-wide Policy on Quality Assurance and Development for a School at UKZN and there was no evidence that the school had engaged with these policies. The review therefore foregrounded this but there was no interrogation of the underlying reasons at the level of Real as to why the school had not engaged with these processes.

The management of teaching and learning was not institutionalised in the school. The responsibility for the co-ordination of teaching and learning belonged to the programme co-ordinators who had no structural power in that this was not a formal position within the institution. This meant that changes to teaching and curriculum were in effect left to individual academics. This suggests a "light touch" or "hands off approach" to teaching and learning within the school which, according to Boughey and McKenna (2014, pp. 9-10), characterises institutional contexts where there is trust that academics are experts who know what is necessary to ensure the quality of teaching and learning. This was in contradiction to the literature about the institution and the data in this study that characterises the university generally as increasingly managerialist. It is quite possible that the shared knowledge structures within the school and the shared commitment to a clearly delineated profession provided the

school with the means to work in less bureaucratic ways despite shifts at institutional level.

The panel considered “whole school” meetings of value and should be continued (but less frequently), but it recommended that consideration be given to forming a Teaching and Learning Committee, perhaps also taking Quality Assurance as part of its brief (Case 3, PR). That the panel recommended this as a “consideration” rather than a requirement suggests that they recognised that quality assurance was reasonably well managed in the school in the absence of such structures.

The panel justified the call for such a committee by commenting that “Here in a more streamlined and focussed way, expertise in teaching and assessment methodology can be developed and shared. The committee would also more easily liaise with faculty and university-wide teaching and learning and quality assurance bodies.” (Case 3, PR). The panel was also signalling the need to formalise and institutionalise school processes relating to teaching and learning. As discussed in Chapter Two, this aligned with institutional developments including the establishment of the University Teaching and Learning Office “with the specific aim of advancing the University’s vision, mission and strategic plan with regard to teaching and learning” (UKZN, 2009a, p. 5). Here there may be an emergent tension between the school’s focus on quality as related to their professional identity and the structure of professional accreditation and the need to also attend to increased structural requirements within the institution.

While the institution’s formalisation of teaching and learning was largely absent from the school, in that it undertook ongoing quality assurance processes without having a formal teaching and learning committee, the school’s response to the research endeavour was explicitly aligned to that of the university as a whole. The panel reported that the “The university closely monitors research output and has developed a comprehensive document on promoting research output…” (Case 3, PR). There were school norms for publications per staff member per year and research output was monitored and promoted through a range of support for staff and PhD students. The school had a clear strategy for meeting institutional goals. As discussed above, the structures to manage teaching and learning within the school were weak and teaching and learning matters were not prioritised. The privileging of research culture

underpinned by traditional values of academic autonomy and collegiality constructs and sustains a reluctance to manage teaching and learning (Boughey, 2011).

Whilst the school was engaged in regular review processes and there was evidence of both formal and informal quality mechanisms, there was a strong focus on research and a lack of some formal mechanisms relating to teaching. Externally driven priorities including the institutional audit, professional body visits and School Reviews framed the focus of internal review activity. The School Reviews process highlighted the lack of focus on teaching, learning and assessment. Despite lack of structures to support teaching and learning, there was a culture within the school to support ongoing engagement with and a commitment to teaching and learning. This is significant given that the absence of quality structures as designated by the institution cannot be read as a complete lack of quality structures pertaining to teaching and learning within the school. Nonetheless, even within the more informal collegial approach to quality assurance of teaching it was clear that structures for the quality assurance of teaching and learning were not given the same degree of focus as structures for the quality assurance of research in the school.

Institutional priorities were shifting the school focus to research and implementation of managerial structures which may result in a clash of situational logic and consequently impact on both the quality of teaching and learning within the school. Whilst the panel made recommendations in this regard it failed to explore at the level of Real what exists and what is expected, and to direct the school engage with them. I will consider in the next section the extent to which ill-defined and competing notions of quality impacted on the implementation of quality procedures and processes.

7.2 Culture

In this section I examine the discourses that can be linked to the way in which the school was structured and the way in which it operated and thus develop an understanding of and explanation for the way in which staff engaged in the School Reviews process.

7.2.1 Relationships between people

The school was on a single campus and can be described as comprising departments that made up one established region. A region, as explained above, is made when the

field draws from multiple disciplines while also facing the world of work. In this case, the world of work is a clearly defined profession. Apart from the disruption of a physical move to another building the merger as a structure did not seem to have an impact on the school. Both the SER and the PR provided evidence that staff members in this school worked well together with regular opportunities for interaction between staff members. The school met frequently at a whole-school level and the school had a long history of working in teams and in collaboration on a range of projects and partnerships.

Disciplines tend to have different conceptions of knowledge, teaching and research views and practices, and status and rewards (Henkel, 2000). A particular set of disciplinary beliefs, concerns and values has an effect on how individuals in the discipline work together (Becher & Trowler, 2001). This school was home to a professional discipline with a set of values based on providing care of others. Disciplinary values frame the way in which staff think, behave and interact with others. The strongly-held and shared norms, values and discourses within this particular field (in the domain of culture) provided space for staff to work together in a collegial and consultative way (Becher & Trowler, 2001) and consequently, this working practice of consultation and teamwork was a cultural mechanism that gave rise to a culture of engagement. The way in which people interact and the nature and number of opportunities for engagement and collaboration create a culture within which quality improvement is enabled. The process of reflection and engagement can only take place in an environment of trust, honesty and free from punitive outcomes (Bamber, 2011; Gosling & D'Andrea, 2005; Yorke, 2000). A collegial culture with strong informal relationships is more likely to be characterised by high levels of trust, an open-door policy, and ongoing engagement (Priestley, Biesta & Robinson, 2012) and this was evidenced across the data in this case study. The extent to which there are open channels of communication influences generative dialogue.

The panel commented that it was "impressed with the energy, passion and commitment of the staff" and that "staff members work extremely hard and are dedicated to their work" (Case 3, PR). This was despite constraints such as heavy workloads and increasing expectations in terms of research output. The panel was concerned about the impact of school and institutional expectations of all staff members particularly with respect to research output. It commented that "While all

academic staff should be involved to some degree in research, it is not inappropriate for some staff members to aim to become high level researchers while others will concentrate more heavily on teaching, community service, administration, or the like." (Case 3, PR). This is in response to the implementation of institution norms with respect to research output and the School's own goal of an average one research paper per staff member per annum. As discussed in Chapter Two, the changing higher education context has brought shifts in institutional priorities and governance. In this case the institutional mission to increase research productivity was putting pressure on the school in terms of its output, and the panel has not engaged the school (or the institution) in an interrogation of the underlying institutional values that have given rise to what they indicate is too much pressure on individuals. There was thus something of a contradiction between the panel's recommendation and the complementarity between the institutional targets and the school's own processes in regards a focus on research.

The harmonious relationships within the school as well as the commitment of staff members to their profession and students created a culture of engagement and willingness to participate in the review process. This however was threatened by the impact of structural constraints such as workloads and university-level policies.

7.2.2 School identity and purpose/mission

The school had a very strong disciplinary and professional identity and espoused a set of values that aligned with its overall goals as training of competent practitioners and the development of communities. The school constructed itself as socially responsible and relevant. Its mission and vision was strongly values-based. It stated that it "aspires to" "altruism, service, respect, caring, knowledge and diversity" that reflected their role in a professional context (Case 3, SER). As discussed in Chapter Three, disciplinary identity is one factor that influences the way in which academics think, behave, and view their roles (Henkel, 2000) and consequently, where there is a clear disciplinary identity, the way in which they engage in the School Reviews process.

The school drew on discourses which located their teaching in community contexts and described its mission as the "development of regional, national and international communities of professionals and scholars" (Case 3, SER). It has a long history of

involvement in a range of projects and partnerships and collaboration, working in teams and in consultation, and there were frequent claims to being innovative in teaching. The data suggests that these values and understandings of the discipline's role within society informed how it related to management, students, teaching and research. The school therefore had a strong identity and sense of the value and sustainability of the discipline. This served to enable the review process as it gave rise to the engaged way in which the school implemented the School Reviews policy.

7.2.3 Views of teaching and research

Despite there being gaps in the quality structures pertaining to teaching and learning, the data showed that the school presented itself as a space where staff members were open to innovation and new ways of teaching. In the SER, the school claimed a long history of engagement with and commitment to what it frequently refers to as "innovation in teaching" (case based, community based). The school received recognition for this and was called on both within the institution and in national and international partnerships to share its expertise (Case 3, SER). The link between teaching, professional practice and community development was emphasised and there was a very strong complementarity between the school's knowledge field, its professional identity and its approach to teaching and learning. "The school uses a variety of innovative teaching strategies which allows integration of community engagement activities into the content of the curriculum" (Case 3, SER). This discourse about teaching and learning provided a cultural milieu within which teaching is prioritised. Learning was described as "student-centred" and teaching was characterised as "active learning" with a variety of "experiential", "practice-based" and "transparent assessment strategies" (Case 3, SER). The link between theory and practice was seen to be a key strength and was made explicit and "Students observe and are active in the real life situation in the community which is then discussed and explored further in the classroom, and are further enriched by readings and research done in the community" (Case 3, SER).

As already indicated the school had a record of research publications that compared very favourably with other schools in the faculty, young staff members with a growing research record and staff members were committed to research and academic members of staff felt that they were encouraged to pursue research and the attainment

of PhDs (Case 3, PR). The school indicated a commitment to "building a research ethos" and reported on strategies implemented to do this (Case 3, SER). Nonetheless, as discussed above, the institutional drive to increase research output was placing pressure on the school and hence, it could lead to a situational logic of competitive contradictions requiring the school to make changes to its current teaching and learning practices if change was to take place (Archer, 1995). The review process was constrained by these conflicting discourses as the panel did not challenge the school to engage with the underlying beliefs and ideas that give rise to this tension.

7.2.4 Quality discourses

The way in which people understand quality informs the quality culture at different levels within an institution. Individuals and groups of people (disciplines, schools) will respond differently to quality requirements and interventions informed by this understanding (Elassy, 2015; Harvey, 2010; Wittek & Kvernbekk, 2011). The school SER captured a number of views of quality in the school. These discourses undergird quality assurance and improvement structures and practices.

The pursuit of excellence was captured in the school's vision and mission which was to "establish itself as a centre of excellence" and this conception was used throughout the SER, for example "excellence in scholarship" (Case 3, SER). This was aligned to the quality as excellence discourse evident in the institutional mission and vision and strategic plan. There was an evident situational logic of concomitant complementarity (Archer, 1995, p. 179) and hence, ideas and practices at institutional level were reinforced at the school level. The notion of quality as excellence or a gold standard constructs quality as context and value free guaranteed by academics who know what it is and whose institutions have the reputation which safeguards it. This then provides a context within which academics are trusted to assure quality.

Alongside this discourse about excellence ran a discourse about professional expertise. The school commented that "all staff are experts in their area of teaching as well as being qualified [discipline redacted] educators" (Case 3, SER). It has been argued that when such notions of quality dominate this usually gives rise to resistance to what is perceived as the external imposition of quality assurance monitoring and accountability (Laughton, 2003; Newton, 2002). If staff members are experts and the status of an institution rests in its reputation, then any attempts either by external

bodies or internal management practices are construed as interference. Despite the dominance of this discourse there appeared to be very little evidence of such resistance in this school. Given that the school can be characterised as one of the relatively newer professions (albeit more than a hundred years old) with a need to comply with the requirements of a professional body, perhaps it is unsurprising that there was no real resistance. Newer professions are seen to aspire to the autonomy that the traditional professions, developed hundreds and even thousands of years ago, have come to enjoy. But such newer professions do not yet have the same degree of disciplinary robustness (Muller 2009) so while this school had a strong professional identity and concomitant discourse of trusting the experts within in, it did not yet have the disciplinary solidity to drive resistance.

Other ideas and values in the domain of culture appear to be working to facilitate quality practices in the school. As discussed above the “disciplinary identity” and its ongoing involvement in “professional accreditation” gave rise to a culture of both engagement and compliance.

The notion of quality as fitness of purpose was evident in the explicit aligning of the school mission and vision to that of the university, particularly to African Scholarship. The school describes its aim is to “promote relevant scholarship specific to Africa” and “to develop a unique African university environment” (Case 3, SER). In this case the school was claiming quality based on the extent to which it was ensuring that the institution met its stated mission and vision (Webbstock, 2008). The panel affirmed that “School vision and mission is consistent with that of the University, and that the School does endeavour to actualize these statements” (Case 3, PR). As discussed above the alignment between the university mission and vision and underpinning notions of quality and that of the school ensured that these shared ideas and resultant practices were reinforced.

Discourses of quality as meeting external requirements and as “benchmarking” were also evident. The school acknowledged that it must ensure that “the requirements as dictated by specific regulations from the professional body” are met and as being “peer reviewed as part of [project name redacted] initiative” (Case 3, SER). Hence, it could make claims about quality education based on meeting the needs of its professional council for accreditation and the requirements of “the university”. Given this well-

established involvement with and accountability to external bodies or agencies it was less likely to experience the School Reviews process as invasive and a threat to academic freedom and institutional autonomy. As a professional discipline regular monitoring of the programme, preparation of reports and accreditation visits were well integrated into the school structures and a set of values that facilitated ongoing consultation and engagement was well established. A culture of self-regulation which resonated with audit culture and the discourse of self-evaluation ensured that the school participated in the process. Whilst compliance to an authority-driven set of standards may underpin the lack of resistance to the process, active involvement in the review process based on the disciplinary values of collegiality enabled the review process as inclusive and engaged.

7.3 Agency

In the final section of this case analysis I consider agency or the ability to act and the way in which this can maintain or modify the world (Carter & New, 2004, p. 10). I consider the role of agents in the review process and how their actions are both shaped by and give shape to culture and structure that were discussed in the preceding two sections.

7.3.1 Head of School

As discussed in Chapter Four, the changes in HE has brought with it changes to the location and exercise of responsibility and power in HE institutions (Gordon, 2002; Giroux 2002, 2006). The HoS has certain corporate responsibilities for which she is accountable to the institutional management. As a corporate agent she was also required to ensure compliance and accountability to the broader institutional mission, vision and plan. Given that as a social actor she can make choices about how she fulfils this role she exercised agency in making decisions about how she managed the school and the process. The way in which she did this was reflected in her management style. The panel described her as “consensus-reaching” and “consensus-seeking, collaborative” (Case 3, PR). This style resonated with the core values and the nature of the discipline as discussed in the previous section. The panel commented that she was well informed about activities and needs in the school even though she was constrained in her role as she was "thrown in the deep end" when she

was appointed and she received “little training for the position and little or no coaching and guidance from previous heads to ease her into the post” (Case 3, PR).

She played a very active role in both the SER workshop and SR workshop. Staff members were encouraged by the HoS to reflect on the review questions in “an inclusive, but rational and focused” way (Case 3, SER) and to consider the panel recommendations and “how we intend to approach the issues listed” in an “atmosphere of building” (Case 3, SR). She also indicated a commitment to support and encourage staff members and address issues that were impacting on staff morale and capacity to get work done. Her efforts to negotiate workloads were constrained by a lack of resources. Hence, her agency was constrained by factors in the structural domain. Consequently, a co-operative culture within the school was constrained and this has potential to undermine the culture of engagement and reflection that underpinned the quality improvement process.

Whilst the HoS had structural power as a consequence of her corporate role, she exercised power within the role on the basis of her Personal Emergent Properties that gave rise to her management style and the way in which she engaged people in the process (Archer, 2000). She scheduled the workshop at a time when she thought staff would be more likely to attend; “This date allowed staff to go on leave and come back from the festive season” (Case 3, SR). She made the decision to involve a facilitator who had the necessary skills to engage staff fully in interrogating the PR. She also played an active role in driving some of the changes emerging from the review process. However, her efforts were curtailed when broader institutional priorities took precedence over school level concerns. She reported that the focus on other priorities such as institutional re-organisation meant that demands on the school were different. Without external monitoring the school lost momentum on many of the changes that had begun. So the review process was constrained by institutional-wide events and a lack of monitoring by and accountability as well as the failure of school to sustain engagement with the process.

7.3.2 Programme co-ordinators

In this school the programme co-ordinators played a significant role in the “co-ordination, review and development of teaching and learning” (Case 3, SER). The school had its roots in a governance and academic structure at the level of the

discipline and programme, and it continued to operate in programme teams with a programme co-ordinator over-seeing academic matters at a programme level even after the merger changed the ways of working in many other schools. Whilst their structural location was weak (they received no payment and had no line management authority), programme coordinators exercised their agency to take on responsibility and largely gained the co-operation of other staff members who exercised individual and collective agency to either cooperate or resist. The data suggests that disciplinary values of care and disciplinary norms of collaboration played a significant role in framing their behavior. Teaching has competed with research for recognition in higher education where the purpose of institutions has traditionally been the creation of new knowledge (Boughey, 2011), considering this as problematic, the panel proposed the establishment of a Teaching and Learning Quality committee which would provide them with “structural power” within which they could exercise agency and “accountability” (Case 3, PR). Nonetheless, the potential clash of situational logics between the values and priorities that the school places on teaching and that which the institution placed on research might constrain the potential of such a structure to prioritise teaching and learning.

The programme co-ordinators played an important part in the preparation of the SER. They were actively involved in the process and compiled reports. Whilst it is possible to establish from the data that they were willing to take on the extra work without reward and recognition, it is not possible to establish the basis upon which they have made this choice to exercise their agency. It is possible to infer that one of the factors may be a discipline-specific culture discussed in the previous section where professional practice is grounded in values informed by a willingness to "serve" and compliance with authority.

7.3.3 Staff

As discussed above, the panel raised concerns about the impact of the current staffing shortage and workloads on staff and the threat to the collegial culture that it commended (Case 3, PR). The panel agreed with the school representation of itself as overloaded and that this was a threat to quality. As discussed above the disciplinary identity and values of working together and in partnership saw staff taking on extra loads. However, the panel operating with the assumption that there is unlikely to be

changes to workload and increasing research productivity demands advised the school to “exercise caution in how much involvement it can responsibly manage in partnership programmes” as it impacted on “workloads with a staff which is already under pressure to maintain its normal teaching responsibilities” (Case 3, PR). The staffing arrangements were significant because it impacted on how staff worked together and the choices they made when exercising agency to get involved (or not) in activities within the school. As argued throughout the analysis of this case, the disciplinary culture supported whole school participation and engagement. It is possible that the collegiality prized by the school and commended by the panel, and some of the recommendations made the panel resulted in a situational logic in which there was conflict between ways of working in the school and the structures and ways of working recommended by the panel. And hence, change would be constrained if both the recommendations and the response to recommendations failed to engage the cultural domain and the dominant discourses that gave rise to and sustain the way in which the school operates (Quinn & Boughey, 2009).

The panel noted that there were few senior staff members and a consequent lack of leadership, expertise and support for junior and inexperienced staff members to build capacity (Case 3, PR). In common with Case Study 1, the issue of juniorisation has had an effect. The panel commented that “There is an intention to appoint a Deputy Head of School, but none of the eligible staff applied for the position when it was advertised. There were valid personal reasons for this, to do with family commitments in some cases, and with the fact that the University rewards research rather than contributions to management, and that no teaching relief was offered” (Case 3, PR). What was rewarded by the institution in both the structural and cultural domains, which in this institution was seen to be research, constrained experienced individuals from taking on leadership roles.

The lack of time and support constrained the exercise of agency or the willingness by staff to engage in self-evaluative practices. As discussed in Chapter Two and Three, the changing role of HE institutions within society has increased the demand on academics to be productive in very particular ways (Giroux, 2002; Kraak, 2004; Shore, 2010; Shore & Wright 1999). It also undermines a culture of collegiality when staff members experience a pressure to compete in a context of overload and performativity

(where output is measured). This then acts to enable or constrain the School Reviews process and quality improvement.

The informal way in which the school tended to operate and its reliance on trust and collegiality also impacted the exercise of agency in that staff members were not held accountable for their decisions. The panel flagged this as a potential challenge for the HoS and indicated a need for more formal structures which would frame the exercise of agency by staff members and hold them more accountable (Case 3, PR). As discussed above professional values of service and care and a sense of accountability to the profession may account for participation in the process.

In this case there was evidence of the involvement of a key agent in the School Reviews process who drew on her personal emergent properties (PEPs) and acted to enable the process. It is not possible to know from the data what motivated her but it possible that her background and training/expertise plus the disciplinary values informed her willingness to participate in the process. She played a significant role in the way in which the School Response was developed and the form that it took. She brought her considerable experience in school, faculty, national and international level engagement with curriculum, teaching and learning in the profession to the process. She facilitated the workshop and based on her reading of the PR ensured that the school engagement went beyond the recommendations to address other issues raised in the PR.

7.3.4 Institutional management

The review process and consequently, quality improvement within the institution is impacted on by management which has the ability to exercise agency both directly and indirectly to enable or constrain the process.

In this case the policy which required that the Panel Report serve at the Faculty Board and College Quality Committee was implemented by the Dean and College DVC who were responsible “for following through on recommendations and implementing them as they believe possible and appropriate” (UKZN, n.d.-b p. 3). In this case the Dean exercised her agency to prepare a report detailing a response to recommendations which relied on faculty level intervention. Whilst the DVC as Chair of the CQC ensured that the school was required to submit a report a year later in order to monitor the

implementation of actions detailed in the SR report there was no evidence that this had happened. There was no evidence that the Dean responsible for this school discussed the matter with the HoS or acted on the School Reviews policy which locates responsibility with her to follow through on recommendations as she believes both possible and appropriate. This lack of action (along with the structural constraints of the committees) constrained the review process.

Responsibility rested with the Dean within a governance structure in which he/she can exercise agency to either implement decisions, monitor requirements and ensure compliance or not. Whilst institutional management exercised agency in how it responded to the PR, it was also constrained in how it responded, for example, those aspects which required resources. So, a structure in the form of a policy and a committee set up to manage the review process was countered by the exercise (or not) of agency.

7.3.5 Students

In this case there was evidence that there was some commitment to the idea that students should play a role in school governance and the review process. As discussed above the school worked within a set of explicit values and an approach to teaching that they indicated was “student-centred”. Student representatives were invited to attend the programme self-evaluation workshops that were held to prepare for the review. However, it is not clear what input was made by the students. They did not participate in the preparation of the SR. There were a number of issues raised by the students with the panel that had not been raised in the SER suggesting that students were not present or that their input was curtailed. Consequently, the panel identified some issues relating to students that needed to be addressed.

Even though students were invited to attend weekly staff meetings the panel was not confident that it would ensure student participation in school governance. The panel commented that “a) students are likely to be intimidated; b) much of the agenda will be irrelevant to them; and c) certain matters pertaining especially to individual students cannot be discussed in front of other students” (Case 3, PR). The school in its SR noted the need to “ensure student participation or sharing of information” and indicated that it would “invite a student representative to meetings” and “disseminate meeting deliberations through e-mails and OLS (Website)” (Case 3, SR). There was no

evidence that the review process resulted in consideration of a transformational view of quality and how students can be empowered to participate in governance or the teaching/learning process (Harvey, 2007). The panel did not direct the school to consider the underlying cultural (and structural) factors that would enable or constrain student participation and consequently, the School Reviews process was constrained.

7.4 Conclusion

In this case quality improvement was enabled by the school's full engagement in the process and the CQC as structure had a clear understanding of its role in ensuring that changes took place. The process was enabled by the way in which the HoS exercised her agency within the social role as HoS and played an active role in driving some of the changes emerging from the review process. The process was also enabled when a key agent in the School Reviews process drew on her personal emergent properties to facilitate the process.

The working practice of consultation and teamwork in this school was a cultural mechanism that gave rise to a culture of engagement. The harmonious relationships within the school as well as the commitment of staff members to their profession and students created a culture of engagement and willingness which enabled the review process. The existence of formal and informal structures and opportunities for ongoing consultation and engagement enabled the review process. These were seen to emerge in large part to the shared focus across the school on a particular profession which had fairly well-established boundaries and area of work (albeit perhaps not yet as established as those Muller notes as being centuries old).

In this case, the issues of resources, staffing and workload presented as emerging challenges within the school which if not addressed would interact to constrain the school's capacity to function effectively. These issues all had the potential to impact on the time that staff had available to engage in gathering, analysis and reflection on data as well as the implementation of new ways of working.

The school had made a deliberate effort to align itself with the institutional strategic vision and ensured that its activities met outputs as required by broader university policy and procedures. However, limited capacity in the school due to staff shortages

and increased work load, acted to constrain the sustainability and impact of the process.

The process was enabled when the school engaged fully with the PR to both decide on actions required and to begin to implement changes. Conditions in the domain of culture interacted with other activities and processes and impacted on their potential to produce events and experiences at the level of the Actual and the Empirical. The process was enabled by an existing commitment to institutional values and mission and vision, a space where staff members were open to innovation and new ways of teaching and successful research tradition.

The process was further enabled by the ongoing external accreditation processes as regular monitoring of the programme, preparation of reports and accreditation visits were well integrated into the school structures and a set of values and a culture of self-regulation which resonated with audit culture and the discourse of self-evaluation ensured that the school participated in the process.

The process was also enabled by a commitment to the idea that students should play a role in school governance and the review process, however it was not clear what input was made by the students. The process was constrained when broader institutional priorities took precedence over school level concerns. When no formal report was submitted after a year, the lack of external monitoring constrained the process when the impetus to make changes was not sustained by school.

The next chapter is the last of four data analysis chapters in which I use the same analytical approach to consider another review in another school in a different college in the institution.

Chapter 8
Discussion of findings: Case 4

This is the fourth and final case study of an internal quality improvement process at a university in South Africa. In the previous three chapters I considered the way in which the School Reviews process governed by the same policies and taking place in similar structures was implemented in three different colleges. In seeking to understand how the policies and procedures which were centrally developed played themselves out in the context of each school and why, I examined the interplay between organisational structures and cultures and how this was mediated by agents. I now begin to repeat this process through an analysis of the documentation pertaining to the fourth and final case.

8.1 Structure

The School Reviews process like all quality processes in the institution was managed through various structures such as policies, committees, units, guidelines and reports. The School Reviews policy (n.d.-b) set out the procedure that should be followed during a review and the various functions that must be carried out by different committees or portfolios in the institution. The policy as a structure functioned to frame the review process and its impact on quality improvement. The extent to which this was effective depended on the implementation of the policy. As discussed in Chapter Two, the key steps in the process included the preparation of the Self-Evaluation Report (SER), the panel visit, and the response by the school and institution to the panel report and recommendations.

8.1.1 Institutional level structures

As explained in Chapter Two, it was expected practice that the school outlined in its SER the way in which the report was prepared. In this case there was no description of the preparation of the report in the SER or comment on the purpose of the review. The school's view of and approach to the review were therefore not explicitly stated and had to be established by the panel. The panel did this during the interview process

and in doing so commented that the review was a “formative process” to “improve quality” (Case 4, PR). The panel confirmed that the review was carried out by the school in terms of the School Reviews policy and all procedures (as set out in Chapter Two) were followed. So the policy as a university-wide structure operated effectively in this case to frame what was required and the school complied with it and hence, it operated to enable the process followed at the school-level.

The policy which was put in place to enable the School Reviews process by ensuring that the school engaged with the report and that panel recommendations were addressed was constrained when procedures at the institutional level were not followed as required by the policy. Whilst a number of reviews of other schools in this college had been carried out no review report had actually yet been discussed or approved by the College level structure responsible for the monitoring of reviews (UKZN, 2010b). The delay in reports serving on the relevant structures may well have been because of the review of the institution’s college model of governance that took place in 2010 as part of a scheduled review of governance structures and a Senate recommendation, arising from concerns about the model, to “…conduct an external review of the functionality of the College Model, focusing on structural re-alignment and roles & responsibilities” (UKZN, 2009c, p. 74). In the report on the review of the College structure it was reported that views were expressed that there was overlap of roles and duplication of structures; “the relationship between AAQBs and Faculty Boards is not clear and that AAQBs have “usurped the role of Faculty Boards” (External Review of the College Model, 2010, p. 15). “Many of the criticisms of AAQBs regarding overlap and duplication and usurping the role of Faculty Boards stem from a misunderstanding of the role of AAQBs, and this misunderstanding needs to be clarified once and for all. AAQBS are the college equivalent of Senex. They perform functions on behalf of Senate.” (External Review of the College Model, 2010, p. 31). These institutional level processes not only account for the delays in reviews being processes, which would have assisted in developing QA capacity across the faculty, they also indicate the degree of uncertainty about structures within the university at the time of this case.

The potential for recommendations to lead to change and possible quality improvement was constrained when the report did not serve at the necessary structures. In response to the Panel Report, and as required by the School Reviews

policy, the school submitted a written response to the Dean based on deliberations in a School Board meeting in which the PR was considered. This was in the form of comments as opposed to a full report. This response from the school did not serve at the necessary structures, and so the school was not held accountable for responding to recommendations in the required format and in those instances where the panel had made a recommendation that needed to be dealt with at a level beyond the school the recommendations remained unaddressed. The policy as structure did not function to ensure that there was the necessary response by the school when it was constrained by broader institutional and college discourses around governance. The data suggests that in this case both a lack of leadership and lack of buy-in to the School Reviews process meant that as soon as there was no monitoring and accountability then the process was abandoned.

Institutional level developments curtailed the potential impact of the review process. It was reported that the review was 'dumped' in the context of the school reconfiguration exercise which unfolded in 2011 as the school ceased to exist and the comments on the review report submitted by the HoS did not serve before any faculty or college level committees (personal communication, 02-05-2012).

The merger which gave birth to the institution brought with it upheaval, uncertainty and change, and this case study clearly demonstrates how this impacted on quality activities which require stability for implementation, time to develop the necessary systems and procedures which frame them and an institutional culture which supports them. Weir, Webbstock and Dixon (2003) reported that during the merger “Schools have had little time to consider reviews where they are busy disestablishing current formations and amalgamating with other groupings in new ones. At a very basic level, with structures changing, many recommendations made in a review would be quickly made irrelevant – to whom do they pertain?” (para. 18). The cycle of reviews had been re-established post-merger and the college review resulted in changes which again appeared to undermine ongoing review processes.

Whilst the existence of structural constraints at the institutional level would have impacted on the school capacity to respond to the recommendations, the data suggests that the school had the capacity to engage with the review. The relationship between the school and faculty/university was one in which the school could exercise

autonomy in many key areas of its functioning and whilst it was constrained in some aspects this did not hamper or limit the functioning of the school in any significant way. The school was compliant with a number of institutional level structures within this general autonomy. It stated that it had ensured that it "has translated" university-wide policies and procedures "into School context" and that there are standard operating principles consistent with Faculty rules and procedures (Case 4, SER).

The school was well staffed and had sufficient resources to function effectively. There were no immediate challenges with workload. The school was able to exercise a degree of autonomy in the way in which it operated as it had the necessary financial resources raised by members of the school from both research contracts and fundraising activities. This enabled the school to pay for additional teaching staff and to employ contract research staff as well as to provide salary subventions for staff who met university equity targets. The school had also raised funds to mentor and build capacity for disadvantaged students and PhD students, for community-based activities and programmes projects. In all of these ways, the structure of the school as having the capacity to raise significant third-stream income provided it with both resources and with autonomy to resist aspects of quality processes.

The school had worked hard towards institutional level priorities such as equity in its staffing profile and research productivity. "[D]espite difficulties in labour market…," it was able to attract and retain qualified staff who meet the equity profile (Case 4, SER). The intellectual focus of the school on issues related to social justice made it especially committed to ensuring broad representivity in its staffing and its activities. The school considered the Senate approved productivity benchmarks for research achievable and proposed that they should be considered over a period with an emphasis on both the quality and quantity of publications (Case 4, SER). So, overall, it can be said that there was a close alignment between the goals and values of the school and those of the institution and hence, a situational logic of concomitant complementarity and common ideas and practices were reinforced (Archer, 1995, p. 179).

Nonetheless there were some key institutional processes which the school had not addressed. The panel noted the "absence of a comprehensive School constitution" and recommended that it be produced (Case 4, PR). Whilst there was regular informal review and planning meetings with and mentoring of staff members, there was no

formal performance management and professional development in the school and the panel commented that “the School would be well-advised to formalise performance management and professional development plans using the University-wide on-line Performance Management System”. (Case 4, PR). There was no evidence that the implementation of this system was being enforced or monitored and indeed it was contradictory to the cultural values of the discipline as will be discussed later. The panel did not explore the reasons that the school had not implemented the university system. However, given that it was a regular part of the way in which the school functioned, it is possible that the school was resisting the centrally driven systems that monitor staff and have the potential to curtail their carefully guarded autonomy.

The school responded to the School Reviews policy in the same way. It fulfilled its requirements for as long as it understood that it was required to do so and abandoned the process when institutional priorities shifted the focus away from the process. This suggests that the much maligned centrally driven quality policies have a key role to play in ensuring compliance but that for genuine accountability they are not particularly effective.

The extent to which the school was operating with autonomy is evident in the school and panel comments about the wider changes within the institution and the potential impact of this on its “current independence” (Case 4, PR). At the time of the review, the institution had embarked on a review of its governance structures and this was viewed as a potential threat to the school. The perceived impact of the planned restructuring/college reorganisation (external review of College model) and doing away with faculties and the creation of larger schools it was argued would lead to a loss of this "current independence" and the resultant loss of staff (Case 4, SER). The panel concurred with the school when it noted that "the wider university environment within which staff work is extremely important" and the risk that university may lose "highly qualified research productive staff" as restructuring is not "viewed as advantageous for academics’ concerns" (Case 4, PR).

The proposed changes in institutional governance structures would bring centralisation of decision-making and shifts in power away from shared governance and therefore represented a threat to the autonomy of academics and disciplinary independence. The relationship between autonomy and compliance is a complex one.

Increasing accountability within higher education in the form of regulation, monitoring and measurement of academic work has been experienced as bureaucratic burden, control and challenge to academic autonomy and less about opportunity for improvement (Lomas, 2007; Newton, 2008; Watty, 2006). In most instances internal quality systems “are viewed by academics as alien, as internal-external requirements that demand compliance rather than encourage engagement” (Harvey, 2009, p. 2). This is particularly the case when the particular forms of quality processes being required are not integrated into the ongoing activities of the institution and supported by a culture of continuous improvement. Even so the data suggests that given competing demands and priorities, follow-up and monitoring of quality processes is necessary.

The school was only based on one campus hence there were no geographical spread of governance and leadership.

8.1.2 School level Structures

The school did not have a constitution or a strategic plan which framed the ongoing activities within the school. However, the panel reported that there was an implicit set of strategies and responsibilities to advance the objectives of the school vision and mission, and that the school had "submitted a number of plans: a Business Plan, an Equity plan, a Research plan and a Transformation plan" to university management and commented that the strategic plan of the school was assumed to be understood and shared and evident in allocation of responsibilities (Case 4, PR). The Head of School reported that "it exists without being on paper..." (Case 4, PR).

It is important to note that the disciplines represented in this school were established regions (Bernstein, 2000). Regions are fields of study that draw from multiple disciplines for both what counts as the knowledge of the field and what counts as appropriate methods by which to build such knowledge. Regions also face the world outside beyond the disciplines of academia. This case study was a fairly well-established region in that it drew from strong disciplines and it had a very strong axiological drive towards engagement with the real world, with a focus on social justice issues in particular. Unlike Case Study 3, which served a particular profession, this case study as a field attended to a range of careers, particularly in the non-governmental organization (NGO) and non-profit organization (NPO) sector. While

they did not have the bounded professional identity of Case Study 3, they shared a value-system which may have enabled fairly coherent approaches despite having "little down on paper".

Social practices of those involved in these quality activities influence the way in which they are implemented. The data shows that there were frequent opportunities to meet in Board meetings and weekly staff meetings, and staff interacted frequently in scholarly endeavours including workshops, inter-disciplinary seminars and informally in the tearoom. The literature suggests that team work and open discussion which involves both staff and students should take place on a regular basis (Bamber, 2011; Kleijnen et al., 2014) with frequent opportunities to meet and quality activities must be integrated into the daily life of the school. This school was well-run and there were structures in place to enable engagement and consultation – a necessary condition for quality improvement. However, this engagement took place more usually in relation to research and less frequently about teaching and curriculum matters. The research culture within the school dominated and the structures to manage teaching and learning within the school were weak and therefore, teaching and learning matters were not prioritised. The privileging of a research culture underpinned by traditional values of academic autonomy and collegiality can be seen to construct and sustain a reluctance to manage teaching and learning (Boughey, 2011). Academics as experts in their disciplines are trusted to ensure that quality is maintained and hence, there is a "hands off approach" to teaching and learning (Boughey & McKenna, 2014, p. 10). This was very evident within this case study where the nature of the field entailed a strong sense among staff that they held the expertise, as will be discussed later.

During the interview process, the panel enquired about the review process and reported on in it in the PR. The preparation of the SER process was inserted into the regular activity of the school. The HoS took primary responsibility and gathered the information from existing sources. The panel reported that, while the HoS played the most active part in the drafting of the SER, all members of the school played a role in the document and "were positively engaged with the review process" (Case 4, PR). The panel also noted that "The School's Reference Group assured QPA that all members of staff had seen the SER" (Case 4, PR). The Panel commented that the school "prepared very thoroughly for the review, and the self-evaluation report is detailed and informative" and commended the school for the "most professionally

presented report" (Case 4, PR). In addition to the SER, the school provided evidence in files and information on its website.

The school was well-run and resourced and had the capacity to engage fully with the review process with minimum disruption and burden on academic staff. Many of the factors considered an essential part of a quality culture were evident in the school and included regular opportunities for engagement, collegiality, administrative support and resources, leadership. Nonetheless as soon as there was no external impetus it did not comply with the School Reviews process. This suggests that the school engagement with the particular framing of this review process was a compliance exercise and that the necessary buy-in from staff (Harvey & Knight, 1996) to follow the full process was missing.

The Panel Report begins with a number of commendations of what the panel describes as the school's "positive attributes". These cover a wide range of issues and provide a perspective of a school that has clear vision, is well recognised globally, well managed, has impressive quality and quantity research outputs, and strong community links. The panel was particularly affirming of a happy, supportive, and nurturing environment. It was evident that the shared commitment to the research-community engagement nexus was a strength in this department. Their research was underpinned by a strong social justice approach and they were able to couple their work within various community initiatives with research outputs.

The panel made recommendations about the vision and mission, management and administration, research, staffing, the academic programme, students and community engagement. However, the majority of the recommendations dealt with staffing matters, the programme and student concerns. An analysis of the recommendations shows that the majority of the recommendations dealt directly with structural issues and whilst the panel did not explicitly direct the school to interrogate or reconsider underlying ideas, beliefs and values informing its activities and goals, in a number of recommendations it directed the school to "consider", "give attention to", "address" and "review" particular practices which would require the school to work at the level of culture in order to do so. Whilst a large number of recommendations dealt with the implementation of issues at the structural level, an interrogation of the underlying beliefs and ideas would be necessary to ensure their implementation would lead to

meaningful change because changes in structure alone will not lead to quality enhancement if the concomitant culture is not scrutinised and challenged. This depends on the extent to which the process moves beyond what Luckett (2007, p. 7) describes as the "flat ontology" of the audit methodology "to understand the causal mechanisms that give rise to the empirical conditions and events that are identified by the audit panel and that need to be addressed by recommendations made in the audit report" (Quinn & Boughey, 2009, p. 265).

In this case the school was aware of the requirements of the policy and reported to the Dean in the form of "comments on the review report", no response was received from the Dean (email communication, 01-31-2011) and there is no record that a School Report was written or served along with the PR at the committees as required by policy (UKZN, 2010b). As discussed above this suggests that to some extent this was a compliance exercise with limited buy-in by the school. The report was discussed by the School Board and minutes indicate that the School Board members were very pleased with the outcome of the review. It accepted the findings of the review. It was reported that the school was able to attend to some recommendations, which were those related to research and which the school had already identified and had been addressing. So where the recommendations resonated with the current focus within the school they served to encourage further change but without monitoring and follow-up other recommendations where not addressed.

Despite the positive response by the school and an enabling environment within the school to take the recommendations forward, university level developments constrained the process. It was reported that Board members "strongly feel that there seems little point in doing more in a context where the School will cease to exist on 31 December 2011" (email communication, 01-26-2011). Despite guidance provided by the QPA consultant that the school could deal with issues that did not involve the school as a structure, "those that could be realistically addressed" such as those identified by the School and "the structure of the programmes/qualifications" (email communication, 01-31-2011). The response by the school was to focus on research issues despite the fact that the curriculum issues and supervision issues were related to the programme.

8.1.3 Quality structures

In this school there was ongoing and detailed analysis of research output as evidence of the success of the school. This included research published per capita, citation index ratings, international academic contacts per capita, paper presentations at international conference and Senate productivity benchmarks (Case 4, SER). On the other hand, the review and analysis of teaching and learning was neither systematic nor comprehensive. Whilst the panel noted that courses were evaluated each year and that there was a comprehensive and well maintained student database for recording and monitoring student progress, the panel concluded that there were no holistic planned and deliberate quality-related evaluations and interventions such as student evaluations, peer evaluations, content review, external examiner and moderator reviews, graduate and employer opinion surveys, pass rate and through-put trends analysis to inform quality improvements (Case 4, PR). The panel also noted that there did not appear to be impetus to align programmes with external requirements and that there was no regular review of modules. The panel commented that whilst course packs and teaching material were revised regularly, the process was not holistic and did not consider broader programme purpose and alignment between content, pedagogy, assessments and outcomes (Case 4, PR).

The nature and extent of the evidence that the school gathered reflects the uneven relationship between research and teaching both within the school, the institution and higher education in general (Boughey, 2011; Fanghanel, & Trowler, 2008; Henkel, 2005). Whilst the management of research is institutionalised and consists of more easily measurable outputs, the management of the more complex teaching and learning processes is not, and thus, despite the policy as structure requiring the school to interrogate all its activities, the process did not move beyond the “surface level of observation and experience” to “penetrate the real (structural level), in order to identify causal mechanisms and the conditions that trigger them” (Luckett, 2010, p. 75).

The nature of the fields within the school enhanced the nexus between research and community engagement and allowed for what the literature refers to as ‘engaged research’. This research not only ensured that the school met the metrics around research publication set by the university, but it also enabled the school to bring in third stream income which built capacity within the school. The nexus between

research and teaching and learning, however, was not as strong given that teaching was not extensively foregrounded in the quality processes reported on in the school's SER. It is important to note that the school's teaching was only at postgraduate level. The literature on postgraduate education suggests that it is often considered to be an extension of research, rather than as a particular form of pedagogy (Green & Lee, 1995; Green et al., 2012). Indeed, the Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework (HEQSF, 2013) indicates that one of the outcomes of a doctorate is the ability to supervise postgraduate research up to doctoral level. It is thus perhaps unsurprising that, with a strong shared research identity and in the absence of any undergraduate teaching, this school had not put in place extensive quality assurance processes for their teaching.

In effect the process did not directly challenge the status quo. The panel itself is part of the academy and participates in these discourses and so it too would be likely to privilege research over teaching and learning. Unless the process forces re-examination or the panel comes with intention to do so, it is unlikely that change will happen. Panel members are peers selected on the basis of their status in the discipline and are likely to draw on the very discourses and criteria that may need to be challenged. In this case study, the process did not ensure that staff members explored the cultural realities underlying experiences and observations (Luckett, 2007, p. 2010) and so the gaps regarding quality improvement processes in teaching and learning were not attended to in much detail in the SER or in the panel's visit and report. The changes in the institutional structure which prevented the whole process coming to completion in this school allowed the school to attend to recommendations related to research, which were complimentary to their culture, and to largely ignore those related to teaching and learning, such as the few recommendations about curriculum and pedagogy.

8.2 Culture

In this section, I consider what beliefs and ideas the school has about itself and its purpose, understandings about quality and how these frame relationships in the school and between the school and the institution. I then examine the discourses at school level and that of the institution to understand how this informs the review process. In examining these I develop an understanding of how staff members have engaged with

the School Reviews process and consequently, what in the domain of culture may have constrained or enabled the process.

8.2.1 Relationships between people

The literature highlights a number of cultural mechanisms that interact to make change possible in quality review processes such as the School Reviews process. These include the way in which staff members view and participate in the review process, the leadership and relationships within the unit, the extent to which staff members trust one another, and the nature of the self-reflection process (Barnett 1994; Gosling & D'Andrea, 2005; Harvey, 2009; Harvey & Knight 1996; Kleijnen et al., 2014; Yorke, 2000). The day-to-day context within the school in this case provided many opportunities for interaction between staff members. There was a culture of open dialogue and engagement in the school with strong collegial governance and leadership. The panel commented that collegiality "pervades the School" and that there was transparency in the management and administration of the school as staff members were included in governance matters via discussion and were informed about university matters in meetings (Case 4, PR). Decision-making was consultative and participative and support staff had a say on relevant matters. There was clear delegation of responsibility to staff. This provided a context within which open and honest self-reflection, a necessary condition for quality improvement processes, is possible.

Change processes require leadership which is willing to "listen carefully to supporters and critics and to foster experimentation and evaluation, and facilitate purposeful diversity" (Gordon, 2002, p. 105). The HoS must ensure that the policy is implemented and that evidence is gathered and analysed, and that staff members are actively involved in the process (UKZN, n.d.-c). This requires that staff members and management trust the process and one another (Bamber, 2011; Harvey, 2010). In this school the staff-management relationships were strong and positive and hence, would enable the type of engagement necessary for quality enhancement activities to be implemented and sustained. Staff were happy to belong to the school, that there was evident "pride in being part of the School" (Case 4, PR). The panel reported that the school had "excellent leadership" both "currently and in the recent past", the leadership

met with staff and staff were mentored by senior staff with respect to research, credentials, and writing grants (Case 4, PR).

An intellectual climate was actively fostered and participated in by staff and students. There was an “exciting and scholarly environment" and space for engagement between established and younger scholars, and space for students to engage with staff (Case 4, PR). There were well-organised and well-planned inter-disciplinary seminars which included leading local, SA and international scholars as a "critical intellectual component in research and graduate teaching programmes" (Case 4, SER). The school commented in the SER that it "does not have the burden of large class sizes or heavy marking loads experienced in so many other Schools" (Case 4, SER). Whilst the level of support to students was high this was not perceived as a burden but participation in a "vibrant and active community of PhD scholars" building a new generation of scholars (Case 4, SER).

The positive relationships within the school created an environment within which staff members were able and willing to co-operate with the HoS and to comply with external demands when necessary. The same ways of working in the school which ensured that the review process was implemented as per requirements also informed the way in which the school dealt with the response to the review. The School Reviews process was enabled by the relationships within the school, they got on and compiled the report, and contributed during interviews but as soon as external impetus to complete the review process was removed, this particular institutional structure of reviews was abandoned.

In this case there is evidence of elements of a “reproductive quality culture” (Harvey & Stensaker, 2008). One in which existing norms and goals are deeply ingrained, quality processes assumed to be effective and effective practices as part of ongoing activities are well-established. This was particularly the case in terms of the focus on research and the shared agreement as to what constituted quality in research – that is research which served a social justice agenda and research which was published in high quality journals. Resistance to reflection and reconceptualization of goals comes mainly from a belief that there is “no need for it” (Harvey & Stensaker, 2008) and this was likely the case here as there were gaps in the quality assurance of teaching and learning and an absence of engagement with those recommendations related to teaching and

learning. Whilst the response to quality activities differs across institutions and between disciplines, the research suggests a certain degree of resilience by academics who seek to accommodate, defend their values and sustain the status quo within their academic communities (Becher, 1981; Henkel, 2005).

8.2.2 School identity and purpose/mission

The way in which the school understood its purpose and mission impacted on its approach to students, teaching and research, and institutional and external demands and hence, how it responded to the review process. The school had a clear identity and a shared set of norms, values and discourses which informed how it operated, and these emerged from their strongly shared focus as a field on research with a strongly theorised social justice framing. The school taught at postgraduate level and staff members were active researchers. The school mission and vision stated its purpose was to play a "building" and "supporting" role for scholarship through research and teaching "global and African scholarship" in the field and to fulfil the institutional mandate of "academic excellence, innovation in research and critical engagement with society" (Case 4, SER). In this case there is strong alignment between the mission and vision of the school and that of the institution. The school served the institutional goal to increase postgraduate students and research output. The goals relating to scholarship and research were shared and there was congruence between the core values of the institution and its vision and those of the school. Hence, a situation of protection and reproduction prevailed, concomitant complementarity existed, and ideas and practices were reinforced (Archer, 1995, p. 179).

The school also had a strong externally driven purpose. It stated in its SER that it dealt with "critical issues to the transformation and development of both SA and Africa", aimed to build capacity to deal with local…problems (through PG research programmes), support government and support sector institutions (policy formulation and implementation) and provide support at community level and learning from communities (Case 4, SER). The school described itself as responsive to "human capacity needs of our country" and had well established links with academic institutions, government departments, private sector institutions and communities, national and local and staff members carry out research for policymakers, actors and intellectual community (Case 4, SER). Everywhere in its discursive construction of

itself was a valuing of research production and contribution to the development of communities and nations.

Discourses that privilege “traditional” academic values based on trust and autonomy frequently underpin quality management systems that are less prescriptive, in this case this was particularly evident with respect to teaching and learning where academics were left to make decisions regarding how they supervised their postgraduate students (Boughey & McKenna, 2014). The school had a strong sense of its location locally and globally and made strong claims of international and peer recognition and described itself as being "held in high esteem" and a "world leader" in the field with research being published in "top-rated and accredited journals" (Case 4, SER). A “critical intellectual component" of its teaching programmes was the participation of "leading international experts" and was "well subscribed locally and internationally" (Case 4, SER). This discourse constructed staff as scholars who occupied a space that privileges their autonomy as academics and who should be trusted to decide what is quality and how it should be achieved. In addition, the school had a very clear identity and purpose. There was a strong sense of the discipline and its location in the institution. The discipline and the department (along with academic freedom) were core to the formation of academic identity and “what gives meaning and self-esteem” (Henkel, 2005, p. 173). The school did not perceive the school review process to be a challenge to its identity and the discipline as there was generally clear alignment between its vision and mission and management imperatives.

8.2.3 Views of teaching and research

Given the research focused nature of the school there was a strong discourse which positioned supervision as part of the larger endeavour of producing research, rather than as teaching as such. Research was an integral part of scholarly life and the identity of the school for which there was recognition and status. It was not experienced as a burden or target set by management that obstructed other activities but as fundamental to the identities of all.

The "vibrant and active community of PhD scholars" and the development of “emerging scholars” in an "exciting scholarly environment" (Case 4, SER) indicates the extent to which there was positive overlap between the research focus and the postgraduate teaching focus, though the teaching was framed more as an extension

of the research than as teaching and learning. The data indicated that the role of staff was to build the capacity of students and provide the space for engagement between established and younger scholars. The panel described "a vibrant postgraduate culture" based on a regular formal seminar programme "to generate an exciting and scholarly environment" which includes interaction with leading international experts, policy makers and activists (Case 4, PR). The panel was supportive of this approach and commented that it "applauds" the well subscribed programme and "conscientious PhD supervision" which it noted was "highly appreciated by students" (Case 4, PR).

Teaching took place in "interactive, student-led seminars", with few formal lectures. Staff members facilitated readings and discussion and students were encouraged to liaise with and consult experts in research (Case 4, SER). Teaching was not problematised and the SER did not identify any challenges and concerns in this regard.

The panel, however, raised concerns which it identified during the interview sessions and study of the supporting documentation. It commented that the students entering programmes come from "diverse academic backgrounds" and that there are "gaps in knowledge" and a "lack of sound grounding in discipline, statistical and numeracy skills" (Case 4, PR). The panel also raised questions about the quality of programme design and concerns about alignment between the programmes as well as the internal coherence of the programme between outcomes, content, pedagogy, and assessment (Case 4, PR).

Whilst the panel identified aspects pertaining to teaching and learning that needed to be addressed, it did not challenge the school to examine the way in which the ideas, beliefs and ideologies and values that underpinned their research focus could result in a lack of attention to teaching and curriculum matters which needed to be examined if change is to take place (Quinn & Boughey, 2009). The review did not engage the school in a re-examination of its approach to teaching, and the possible implication of the strong research emphasis for teaching and curriculum development. The review did not result in attention to recommendations about teaching and did not lead to engagement with competing ideas and the structural consequences thereof.

8.2.4 Quality discourses

The dominant discourse in this school was that of quality as knowledge generation and intellectual engagement. The SER provided detailed information about staff outputs and academic status and included research output and social relevance, area of research and links to industry/community/NGOs/unions, national and international. These linkages were presented as evidence for the credibility of the discipline and thereby for its quality.

Claims about quality were also made on the basis of “reputation" and "recognition", the school asserted that it was "one of the oldest institutions" and that it offered programmes "with rigour, flexibility and currency matching any comparable programme" and that it is "leading" "in the world" with research in "top-rated and accredited journals" (Case 4, SER). The panel described the school as “an internationally recognised centre of excellence” which was "held in high esteem" and that it is "without a doubt a globally-recognised centre of academic excellence" (Case 4, PR). This reputation was affirmed by recognized international experts who provided testimonials to this effect (Case 4, SER).

The notion of quality as fitness of purpose is also evident in the data. The school provided evidence that its graduates were employed in "senior and influential positions in private and state sector, ngos [*sic*] in SA and world" (Case 4, SER). It also had strong links with academic institutions, government departments, private sector institutions and local communities.

Alongside this is a discourse about quality as a set of standards that are being maintained, the SER asserted that the school was ensuring standards when it set entrance requirements and a "rigorous application process" to ensure the "quality" of students who are accepted into the programmes offered by the school (Case 4, SER). However, the standards were not defined and the criteria to measure them assumed to be understood and shared.

A discourse about quality as staff expertise dominated the SER as high standards are guaranteed by the quality of staff members. The school had a number of senior academic staff with high research output, strong publication records and who generated external funds for research projects. Research expertise was critical to staff

scholarly identity in this case and meeting the institutional goals was not seen as a burden or target that was being imposed upon them. The dominance of the discourse of research excellence resonates with that of the institution which gave rise to a situational logic of concomitant complementarity in which common ideas and practices were reinforced (Archer, 1995, p. 179).

8.3 Agency

In this final section of this chapter I examine the way in which people engage in the review process. When they interact with and on the structural and cultural domains they exercise agency in the way in which they respond and this influences the review process.

8.3.1 Head of School

As discussed above the panel ascribed, within the SER and panel interviews, the collegial, supportive and nurturing academic environment in large part to the current and previous leadership in the school. Whilst the role the HoS occupied required him to manage academic work and academic staff, the school was operating within the more traditional role of academics working together as peers led by a peer rather than a manager. The HoS, in his role as manager of the school, ensured that the necessary structures were in place to run the school and he implemented and monitored the necessary operating procedures. His particular management style, however, was interactive and he met regularly with individual staff members and ensured that junior staff members were mentored by senior staff members.

The HoS approached the review in the same efficient and interactive manner. He ensured that the SER was based on consultation with staff members and took responsibility for the writing the final report (Case 4, PR). He complied with the requirements of the School Reviews policy and he ensured that the PR served at the appropriate school structures for deliberation by the members of the school.

However, whilst he provided a response to the Dean based on these deliberations he did not ensure that the school compiled a comprehensive SR as per the policy (UKZN, n.d.-b). As discussed above the School Board made the decision that institutional-wide developments superseded the review process and the HoS exercised agency within his position to defer to the Board, as a structure, and curtail the process. As

pointed out in the other cases it is not possible to know what motivated the HoS however email communication indicates that he exercised agency to prioritise other tasks and at the same time his agency was curtailed by the demands of institutional-level priorities (email communication, 01-26-2011).

There was no evidence other than a stated intention by the HoS to address some of the recommendations (email communication, 01-26-2011) that the review resulted in changes in practices within the school. Whilst the school complied with policy and compiled a SER there was no evidence in that report or in the PR that the school had implemented any changes based on the insights gained from this self-evaluation process. The self-evaluation process therefore appears to be a compliance exercise in which the school reported as required by policy, and not one they would continue to follow in the absence of it being a requirement.

The strong disciplinary identity and collegial working environment within the school and the management style of the HoS created an environment conducive to the review process. The panel commented that the management "provides the academic staff, researchers and students with a positive, supportive and nurturing work environment" and reported that the "HoS engages with each staff member individually during March to ascertain and facilitate annual performance goals in terms of credentialing and research output, and then again in November to assess progress in achieving outcomes" (Case 4, PR).

As discussed above the review process was constrained by the Board decision that institutional-wide events had overtaken the review process and that responding to the recommendations was not valuable. The lack of monitoring by and accountability to other corporate agents and structures created the conditions where the HoS thought there was no point in following through. This indicates that the HoS completed the process in compliance with the policy, and the process was seen to be one which validated the school's culture of a strong and coherent research identity, but once it was possible to set the process aside and return to a reliance on the collegial model as the mode of quality assurance, the HoS did so.

8.3.2 Staff members

Many of the staff members were highly respected internationally-renowned academics with significant research output. Each staff member was named through-out the report and hence, had an individual identity and status (Case 4, SER). These staff generated funds to support research which gave them autonomy to operate as individual scholars. They gained recognition and this enabled them to participate in particular ways in the review process.

Staff members enjoyed a well-resourced, efficient and enabling environment within which to work as the school was well organised, the HoS was organised and supportive, support staff provided administrative support, and the HoS and PhD coordinator provided general administrative and intellectual support to both staff and students (Case 4, PR). In the context of authority and autonomy – being a research productive school, with additional resources – staff co-operated and hence, the data suggests they did not perceive the review to be a threat. They did not however engage in any great detail with aspects of the review focused on teaching and learning. It would seem that their identities as productive researchers enabled them to enact agency to validate their impressive research output and to some extent set aside issues pertaining to teaching and learning.

8.3.3 Institutional Management

The School Reviews policy located the responsibility with the Dean and DVC of the College for ensuring that the school responds to the recommendations made by the panel. The potential for change is enabled or constrained by the way in which the panel recommendations are dealt with. In this case the HoS did not ensure that a School Response report was submitted to the Dean and the CQAAB as required by policy, and there is no evidence that the Dean took responsibility, as delegated to him by the policy, to ensure that the recommendations were addressed.

A report prepared by the QPA showed that a number of reviews had been conducted in that college but none of the School Reviews reports had served at the college level structure as required by policy (UKZN, 2010b). As discussed above the tension between the college and faculty impacted on the way the university operated and the

DVC and Dean were constrained at both the structural and cultural level by this institutional level contestation.

8.3.4 Students

Whilst the environment within the school for students was positive and there was evidence that students participated in the school governance structures, there was limited evidence upon which to draw any conclusions about the extent of student involvement in the review process. A key condition for quality improvement is team work and open discussion which involves both staff and students on a regular basis (Bamber, 2011; Elassy, 2013) In this case, PhD students were included in parts of the board meetings but it was not clear what input they made into the deliberations about the review, if they participated in the self-evaluation process or made any input into the SER. Harvey (2007) argues that students should be involved as partners in establishing a quality culture however there is no evidence that the panel considered the student role in governance and the teaching/learning process.

The data suggests that students enjoyed a positive and engaged position within the school as a whole and benefited from the research-rich environment (Case 4, SER). The shared value system within the department enabled students to participate in meaningful ways but also made it less likely that formal quality structures were in place to monitor the student experience.

8.4 Conclusion

The data in this case, as in the other three cases, suggests that quality improvement processes such as the School Reviews process are enabled when the necessary policies, structures and portfolios are in place to frame and monitor what is required. However, other mechanisms such as broader institutional and college discourses around governance can operate to constrain the process. The data suggests that both a lack of institutional leadership and lack of buy-in to the School Reviews process means that as soon as there was no monitoring and accountability then the process was abandoned and the school no doubt reverted to their informal quality processes. In this case there were frequent opportunities for engagement and discussions about quality matters and there was no evidence that staff resisted or challenged the process, staff co-operated and leadership was provided by the HoS.

The review was therefore enabled by the school capacity to engage with the review and an intellectual culture which would facilitate the type of engagement necessary for quality enhancement activities to be implemented and sustained. The process was further enabled when the staff co-operated with the HoS to participate in the review process.

There was no evidence that the review resulted in changes in practices within the school. The process was constrained when the majority of the recommendations dealt directly with structural issues. Whilst the panel did not explicitly direct the school to interrogate or reconsider underlying ideas, beliefs and values informing its activities and goals, an interrogation of the underlying beliefs and ideas would be necessary to ensure their implementation would lead to meaningful change.

The process was constrained when the review did not engage the school in a re-examination of its approach to teaching, did not result in attention to recommendations about teaching and did not lead to engagement with competing ideas and the structural consequences thereof. The process was constrained when the review did not challenge views of quality and the role it should play in an institution underpinned both the form of quality procedures and structures take in an institution and the way in which people engage with them.

Where the recommendations were complementary to the current research focus within the school it served to encourage further development in the direction of the school's existing plans but without monitoring and follow-up other matters were not addressed. The response by the school was to focus on particular issues despite the fact that the curriculum issues and supervision issues were related to the programme and not the "disciplines" location within university structures.

The process was constrained when a School Response report was not written, and the recommendations were thus not addressed, at least not through the formal processes. The HoS exercised agency to prioritise tasks and at the same time his agency was curtailed by the demands of institutional-level priorities.

Despite the positive response by the school and an enabling environment within the school to take the recommendations forward, university level developments acted to constrain the process. The process was enabled when the HoS ensured that the

review was implemented as per the policy but it was constrained when he did not ensure that the school compiled a comprehensive SR. Institution-wide developments superseded the review process and the Head of School exercised agency within his position to defer to the Board, as a structure, and curtail the process. The lack of monitoring by and accountability to other corporate agents and structures created the conditions where the HoS did not consider it necessary to continue to implement the policy.

This chapter was the last of four chapters each discussing the findings for a particular case which have possible significance for other contexts and for the way in which we understand quality. In the next chapter I consider the findings across all the cases in Chapters Five to Eight and attempt to cumulatively identify the material, ideational and agential conditions that may enable or constrain the emergence of quality improvement in the Higher Education context.

Chapter 9
Conclusion

The focus of this study was motivated by a keen interest in understanding the effectiveness of School Reviews as a quality improvement process in the institution in which I worked. Observation of and reflection on my experience of the review process (in the domain of the Empirical) led me to conclude that the way in which the School Reviews as an event (the Actual) took place was uneven across the schools and that it was the particular contexts and cultures of each school that had resulted in this unevenness. I wanted to better understand the interplay of mechanisms at the level of the Real which gave rise to the way in which the review process took place in each school. I selected the four reviews, one review from each of the four colleges that constituted the governance structure of the institution, in order to have a rich range of contexts and cultures and causal configurations.

This study examined the emergent mechanisms that impacted on both the way in which the School Reviews process was implemented and the potential to bring about change. It identified those mechanisms which based on the empirical evidence had the "strongest explanatory power" (Bygstad & Munkvold, 2011, p. 7). The different departmental contexts impact on how mechanisms are activated. Each school context shapes the way in which people engage with the review process and consequently, processes and procedures are mediated in each context; a mechanism that acts as a constraint in one context may be an enablement in another. This research therefore adds to the understanding of the way in which reviews take place at a micro-level within an institutional context and informs the approach to quality improvement more broadly, nationally and internationally.

My perspective was as a practitioner responsible for facilitating quality processes in the institution at a time of significant change at both the institutional and national higher education level. Given that the form the reviews take is not unique to the institution but a common form of both internal and external quality processes, insights into what conditions were enabling or constraining the School Reviews process would not only be valuable for the institution but for the field more broadly. This research is significant too for the latest developments nationally in South Africa (SA) with the implementation

of the Quality Assurance Framework which will be considering the robustness of internal quality assurance and peer evaluation in order to grant some institutions self-accreditation status (CHE, 2020).

Whilst a decade has passed since the data was created it remains relevant and valuable in that it provides rich depictions of an internal quality process during a particular time period in the institution's history. At both the institutional and national level, such quality processes have followed a similar framework and consequently, this research allows for reflection on findings and implications for quality processes more specifically and for the HE sector broadly.

The literature that provided the ontological, theoretical and analytical foundations for this research was discussed in Chapters Three and Four. The literature on higher education quality provided the theoretical basis for what we know contributes to the way in which quality assurance and improvement is implemented and its impact on the higher education context. Critical Realism provided the ontological framework and conceptual tools to understand and explore the complex social world within which the School Reviews process took place. The literature on the morphogenetic approach provided the analytical framework for the data analysis and findings.

In order to answer the research question - What agential, structural and cultural mechanisms enable/constrain emergence of quality improvement through the School Reviews process in a university in the South African higher education setting? - I explored the structural, cultural and agential constraints and enablements on quality improvement in four cases and developed an understanding of the mechanisms that enable or constrain quality improvement in HE and the complex interaction of structure, culture and agency and its implication for quality improvement.

In this chapter I consider the findings across the four cases and discuss the most significant mechanisms that constrain and enable the School Reviews process. I consider the implications of these findings for the field of quality and higher education institutions and consider factors (mechanisms) which if in place in quality improvement processes will increase the potential for change and which can be used by academics and quality assurance practitioners to inform quality improvement processes. Lastly, I also consider the limitations of this research and also suggest further research that could be carried out.

9.1 Discussion of key findings

9.1.1 The policy and procedures

In all cases the existence of an institutional policy and procedures was an important mechanism which enabled the review process. The data in all cases showed that the occurrence of the School Reviews were enabled by the policy which also framed the process. Structures in the form of policy, portfolios and committees are drawn on to give effect to some form of emergence and associated change but are constrained by the exercise (or not) of agency.

Weir, Dixon and Webbstock (2003) reflecting on the review process at the then University of Natal argued that there is a need for proper central coordination of the process which results in a tension between ownership and efficacy and devolution and control. “It’s a constant dilemma – left to themselves, as Schools were in the self-evaluation part of the first reviews, they are either done badly, or in a non-inclusive way, or, helped along with the process by the QPU, in a way that is indeed perceived to be ‘professional’, Schools’ sense of ownership lessens.” (Weir et al. 2003. p. 9). This remains true almost two decades later. This tension between centralised co-ordination and decentralised control can be overcome through schools carrying out their own self-evaluation processes. However, they cannot rely on collegiality and self-monitoring to effect change. This study shows that where there is no systemic accountability there is likely to be reproduction/morphostatis.

The analysis of the cases shows that whilst the School Reviews process allowed to some extent for flexibility in the way in which it was implemented, it was interpreted and engaged with in different contexts and cultures. The implementation of a policy generated internally and managed centrally cannot be left to chance because it depends on agents and hence, how to proceed needs to be carefully considered for each context.

As discussed in Chapter Three, increasing monitoring and accountability has been criticised for the negative impact it has had on academic work and institutional structures and goals, however this study indicates that there needs to be an external driver, in the form of policy and procedures, to ensure that quality assurance and improvement is addressed. As will be discussed below, the data also suggests that

even where a school has an intrinsic drive to improve quality there is a need for extrinsic monitoring and accountability. Quality assurance and improvement procedures compete with a range of demands and whilst quality improvement is enabled when there is internal impetus to engage with quality processes, this is not enough.

9.1.2 Monitoring and follow-up/Accountability

The data suggests that a system without effective structures in place for monitoring and accountability is unlikely to lead to systematic and reported change. Even where there is a culture of reflection and collegiality, academics have the agency to subvert, facilitate or disrupt quality processes and procedures and hence, undermine some/much of what are intended outcomes and can lead limited or short-term changes/improvement in quality. In addition, the potential impact of a review process is curtailed when the quality cycle is not complete and timely for any impact to occur.

In all cases the process was constrained when the key agents did not follow the policy, did not monitor the process or hold the relevant agents accountable for the lack of action at some stage in the School Reviews process. In Case 1 and 4 the reports did not serve at the relevant committees in the institution and so corporate agents were not held accountable to ensure the recommendations were considered and addressed. In Case 2, there was monitoring by a senior member of management at the relevant committee and the review process, whilst lengthy, was implemented. It was only in Case 3 where the process was driven by the relevant line managers and served at all the relevant committees.

In both Case 3 and Case 4 the process was halted as soon as other institutional level developments were prioritised and this constrained the potential impact of the review process. I will discuss this further in section 9.1.11.

9.1.3 Effective management

This study shows that the role of institutional managers/corporate agents in change is significant at all levels. In all cases a member of management (Dean, HoS or DVC) played a key role in enabling the process. In three cases the HoS as a social actor exercised agency to enable the process by creating an environment conducive to the engagement required to facilitate the review and drive some of the changes emerging

from the review process. In these three cases, however, each HoS exercised their agency in their own way which had implications for the extent to which others in the department engaged with the process. In the one case where the HoS did not manage the process in a way that involved all staff and facilitated reflection, the DVC exercised the authority invested in the role he occupied to ensure that the policy was followed.

Where the member of management as a social actor takes the lead in the self-evaluation process, enabling mechanisms such as collegial engagement are activated. As corporate agents they use their structural power and agency (personal beliefs and goals) to facilitate the process and exercise corporate agency to comply or resist and to negate or support particular discourses and processes. This is evident in Case 1 for example, where instability in management as a result of the merger process resulted in the Dean's failure to assume responsibility for ensuring that the Quality Assurance policy and the School Reviews process was implemented. There was also a failure of the governance structure to ensure that reports served at relevant committees

The way in which a corporate agent exercises agency can be both enabled or constrained by the exercise of agency by another corporate agent. As in Case 2 where the failure by the HoS to follow the process as set out in the policy was counteracted by the exercise of authority invested in the portfolio of the DVC and the committee structure.

9.1.4 Academic, professional and disciplinary identity

In all cases, this study showed how disciplinary cultures and knowledge structures had implications for the ways in which quality improvement was approached. Quality processes take place in a particular context and one of the key mechanisms is the nature of the field which impacts on the department structures and cultures and thus how review processes are implemented. Disciplinary cultures and knowledge structures have an effect on the extent to which there can be a readily shared understanding of quality and an approach to improvement. Review processes that do not take these into account will lead to resentment or resistance or compliance. Though the policies in the case of this study referred expressly to being flexible and the review was based on an evaluation by the school itself, there was no clear articulation of this understanding that the nature of the discipline or field has effects on

how academic activities occur. It is doubtful that the academics would have access to such a language or understandings and the review process did not enable them to access it.

In three of the cases the review was enabled by evident collegiality which the literature, suggests is because there is more that is common across the structure of their particular knowledge fields (for example, shared research approaches etc.) and shared norms, values and processes and hence, less space for contention and argument (Becher & Trowler, 2001; Henkel, 2005). So, in those schools where there are shared norms, values and discourses of the discipline (in the domain of culture) there is likely to be greater collegiality and less contestation.

In Case 1, the School was made up of fairly traditional disciplines with strong boundaries and strong and well-established regions which shared an understanding about the nature of knowledge, research and curriculum, and consequently, all those in the School were able to work together during the review process. This was also evident in Case 3 and Case 4. In Case 3, there was a strong professional identity and strongly articulated value system emergent from its disciplinary knowledge base as a well-established region with commitment to its field of work and society. In Case 3 the existence of strong professional knowledge and identity was conducive to the emergence of events. The idea of quality and the need for quality assurance is part of what Archer (1996, p. 105) calls the “propositional register” of the professional body which emerges in discourses that the professionals draw upon when engaging with quality improvement activities within the school. So, in Case 3 where the school espoused a strong disciplinary and professional identity, there was a clearly articulated and shared purpose and values. In Case 4, the disciplines represented were established regions with a strong engagement with social justice issues in the real world. Here the identity was not a professional one as such so much as an ideological commitment.

In contrast to these three, Case 2 was formed of disparate disciplines brought together without much by way of shared academic identity, research trajectory or perspective of its target market. It is clear from the study, that where the academic identities of the staff are less settled they may lead to feelings of being threatened by quality

improvement processes, in which case they may resist or undertake superficial compliance as was the situation in Case 2.

Review processes need to be designed to acknowledge the nature of the discipline and its cultural effects. An examination of this mechanism will develop awareness and enable reflexivity about what it may mean for how the school works and assures its quality. So quality improvement processes have to work closely with academics to ensure that the processes are adapted in ways that legitimate and acknowledge such identities. A review process must not only acknowledge this mechanism but make those involved in the review aware of its implications.

9.1.5 Collegiality and working together

Collegiality and trust, which emerges at least in part from the nature of the discipline (as discussed above), and the actions of key agents can enable shared commitment to academic endeavours but can conversely constrain accountability.

In three of the four cases the review process was enabled by the cultural milieu within which the school operated. Opportunities for ongoing consultation and the working practice of engagement, and teamwork was a cultural mechanism that gave rise to a culture of engagement. In Case 1 and 4 this was fostered by the management style of the HoS and in Cases 1 and 3 the shared norms, values and discourses of the discipline (in the domain of culture) and commitment to the academic project enabled the quality process.

Whilst collegiality and trust as emergent from the nature of the discipline and further fostered by the management style can enable shared commitment to academic endeavours it can conversely constrain accountability. In Case 3, the need for more formal structures was recommended by the panel. The informal way in which the school was managed relied on trust and collegiality inherent in the professional values of the discipline but lacked the formal structures to ensure that staff were held accountable. This was particularly the case in relation to teaching and learning.

As was discussed in more detail in Chapter Three, quality improvement relies on levels of collegiality and collaboration to facilitate ongoing engagement and reflection. Encouraging staff to be open and honest about their own practices, achievements and weaknesses is an ongoing challenge that is dependent on a reflective and supportive

culture (Bamber, 2011; Blackmur, 2010; Kleijnen et al., 2014; Newton, 2010). This impacts on the extent to which the panel can craft recommendations that will be of any value to higher education institutions.

Even where levels of collegiality and collaboration may exist the review process is constrained by other mechanisms. In both Case 1 and 2, the geographical distance between staff members spread over multiple campuses constrained the extent to which they could work together and hence, the lack of opportunities for staff to work together can also be seen to be a constraint on quality improvement. As institutions across the world grow in complexity increasing in size and geographical distribution, with some now multinationals, the way in which disparate groups of staff can work together to maintain quality is a growing challenge.

9.1.6 Involvement of stakeholders

The research suggests that structural and cultural systems at different levels in an institution will condition the way in which agents interact. Even where the policies and procedures are designed to ensure the involvement of all stakeholders, their engagement will depend on the way in which they mobilise their causal powers to bring about change.

The reflexivity of human agents has generative power, so they can make their own decisions and choices (Archer, 2003). Culture is so ephemeral that it cannot be pinned down in a written document or dictated. So, the ways in which the process is implemented will vary significantly depending on the culture and agency. Case 2 is a good example where the cultural domain being drawn upon by the agency of the HoS brought different effects. The HoS did not follow the School Reviews process as outlined in policy and guidelines. Consequently, not all staff members were included in the self-evaluation. The potential of the review for quality improvement was constrained as the "methodology is incapable of managing agential responses that may prompt or constrain change" (Quinn & Boughey, 2009, p. 270).

This study highlighted the need for structural mechanisms for all stakeholders including students, that facilitate opportunities for interaction. In all cases students were not involved or involved in a very limited way. The ongoing student protests in

South Africa about a range of matters including fees and decolonisation foregrounds the importance of including students in quality improvement processes.

Agency is restricted by cultural and structural conditions (but not determined by it). Staff draw on personal emergent powers and properties in deciding how to exercise their agency (Archer, 1996). It is the exercise of PEPs in the domains of culture and structure that gives rise to the emergence of events at the level of the Actual and experiences and observations at the level of the Empirical.

So, whilst the existence of certain discourses within a school may provide enabling conditions for the emergence of quality improvement, there is evidence of the privileging of autonomy at the level of culture allowing for the choice to resist or participate. It was only in Cases 1 and 3 that there was clear evidence of consultation and full participation.

These processes are also premised on assumption that agents within the school have the necessary power to makes the changes suggested in the recommendations; that is that the social world is entirely a product of human activity. This was repeatedly shown to be problematic as Schools were unable to implement certain recommendations, often due to staffing or other resource constraints. This is an example of upwards conflation in the review process whereby agency is presumed to have “causal efficacy” over structure (Archer, 1995). The provision of a set of recommendations to the School, many of which may be beyond the powers of the agents within the School, emerges from this conflation of all activities to the realm of agency, absenting the effects of structure and culture. For Archer (1995), the interplay between structure, culture and agency is key to understanding the social world. Events and experiences emerge from multiple mechanisms, many beyond the influence of agents within the school.

A key finding is that while centralised policy spoke to issues of flexibility and allowed schools to develop their own SER etc, it didn’t necessarily serve to explicate the mechanisms at play in the quality processes of each school. Many of the findings offered in this study were not articulated (or possibly even noticed) by agents either in the schools or in the central QA body. This is because the review process works off a somewhat flat ontology (Luckett, 2007, 2010, 2012) and does not activate an analysis

of the underlying mechanisms from which their current experiences and activities emerge.

Self-evaluation processes must therefore be facilitated to engage staff to examine underlying mechanisms rather than reporting what is in place; this is necessary if the process is to move beyond description of experiences (what we know and observe) to the level of the real (structures and causal powers of material or social objects). If staff are not challenged to engage at a socio-cultural level then the likely outcome is morphostasis.

9.1.7 Resources/capacity to respond

Quality assurance and promotion processes are premised on the argument that the individual and school should be accountable by the institution through its structures and "corporate agents" for quality. In three of the cases structural constraints in terms of staff capacity and resources to respond to recommendations or to make the changes suggested by the review panel were evident. So, there was a rub between the enabling mechanisms (policy, collegiality, leadership) and the way in which the institution was prioritising resources. Failure by the institution to address these issues is a constraint on quality improvement.

Interaction in the socio-cultural context influence decision and action (agency). So, for example, the institution's research agenda results in a decision to prioritise resources in ways that impact staffing for teaching in Case 1 or pressure on staff in Case 2 to increase research output.

Staff must have the time or resources to realise the project and for the events that lead to improvement to take place. A lack of resources impacts on staff capacity at the Empirical level to engage meaningfully with the School Reviews process and impacts on their capacity to implement changes at the level of the Actual.

9.1.8 Quality as a concept (meaning not explicit and shared)

The discussion of the literature on quality in Chapter Three explored a number of definitions of quality and argued that national bodies and institutions often use definitions which are seldom defined and shared. This was evident in all the cases

that were the focus of this research. The school and panel reports did not overtly explore the notions of quality that were informing practices and recommendations.

A lack of a shared understanding constrains the emergence of quality improvement/change needed to achieve quality however defined. For events that give rise to improvement to take place conditions in the domain of culture (such as discourses about quality) must enable structural mechanisms (Boughey & McKenna, 2015). The implementation of policies and procedures are constrained by the existence of multiple meanings. Staff members will respond to the implementation of quality related activities differently. Review processes must explicitly engage staff and panel members in an interrogation of notions of quality and its implication for the activities being examined in the review process. Whilst the analysis of the data identified the tensions between different understandings of and approaches to quality, the review process itself did not enable it to be brought to the fore.

9.1.9 Quality as an embedded and continuous process

Archer (1995, p. 77) states that "all structures manifest temporal resistance," so those schools that have procedures in place for regular gathering and analysis of data will be readier for the SER process. As it takes both time and effort to gather the data and analyse it, staff may resist this as too much work especially if other mechanisms such as understaffing or heavy workload or demand to produce research or deal with needy students interact with it. Hence, they will need more support and engagement to prepare them for the review.

In all cases there were few formal quality assurance processes particularly relating to teaching and learning and the information for the self-evaluation reports generally had to gathered specifically for the review. This is time consuming to gather, analyse and reflect on especially in the context of the constraining mechanisms of a lack of resources and time to do so.

In Case 3, the review drew on evidence gathered over time and produced for professional body accreditation. Nonetheless there were limited formal quality assurance procedures in place relating to teaching and learning. This suggests that despite providing evidence for these formal reviews, it was gathered for that purpose each time rather than being generated in a continuous quality cycle.

In Case 3 and Case 4, there was evidence of comprehensive monitoring and reporting on research. This was a result of the requirement of formal reporting at an institutional level from research-active schools. As McKenna and Boughey (2014) point out accountability for research is grounded in a national system which quantifies research output and upon which internal monitoring systems are framed. They go on to conclude that "…discursive construction of research along with discourses constructing staff as needing to be free to pursue it resulted in a lack of attention being paid to teaching (McKenna & Boughey, 2014, p. 5-6). The nature of research makes tracking and monitoring easier than for teaching and learning, community engagement and other academic tasks.

The establishment of ongoing procedures that integrate the gathering and reflection on processes within institutions is essential if quality processes are to be effective.

9.1.10 Asking the why and how questions

In all cases the panel recommendations focused largely on changes at a structural level. Recommendations were framed mostly at the level of structure even though they would require interrogation of underlying values, views, etc. at the level of culture to make new structures both possible and successful. An interrogation of the underlying beliefs and ideas would be necessary to ensure that their implementation would lead to meaningful change, but the review process is generally silent on this. Even within the domain of structure, the review process restrains itself to calls for small scale structural change and does not engage with deliberations on the enabling or constraining effects of larger institution-wide structures. For example, in Case 1 the recommendations did not lead to re-examination of the role of the discipline within the institutional context and the underlying beliefs and ideas that gave rise to the resultant tension between the disciplinary priorities and those at the institutional level. In Case 2, the panel did not challenge the school to explore issues in the domain of culture and to develop new understandings about the way in which the school was being managed and could be managed. The panels did not consistently and explicitly challenge the schools to examine the cultural domain and the dominant discourses that gave rise to and sustains policies, practices and events constraining meaningful change. In most cases, the assumptions underpinning the review were at the Actual

and Empirical levels and the process failed to engage with the effects of mechanisms at the level of the Real.

In all cases the panel recommendations did not challenge views of quality and interrogate how it underpins both the form quality procedures and structures take in an institution and the way in which people engage with them.

In all cases the reports focused on changes that should be made at a structural level; panels are inclined to make recommendations at a structural level because such changes are easier to articulate. But findings across all four cases indicate that the situational logics in the realm of culture act as a significant mechanism in the constraint of quality improvement. Recommendations in the structural domain would be dependent on changes in the domain of culture.

Once the school received the panel report, the focus shifts to the panel report as "authoritative value" (Hulpiau & Waeytens, 2003) and on the recommendations. The process does not lead to change when there is an absence of events at the level of the Actual. The panel report and its recommendations are intended to lead to a planned action as an event intended to bring about some form of change and consequent improvement of quality. So quality processes are constrained when there is no action in response to the report/recommendations.

9.1.11 The broader institutional context

Mergers, restructuring and rapid growth are common characteristics across HE institutions globally in this era of shifting HE institutional roles. It is this context that brings about contradictions in situational logics. This is evident in Case 2 for example where the panel indicated the challenge it faced in conducting a review of the school independently of the “turbulence’ and “upheaval” of the merger.

In a large and complex institution such as the merged multi-campus university where this study took place, there are going to be tensions between institutional level vision and mission and that of the faculty or school which can constrain sense of belonging, commitment, value, legitimacy etc. The policies and structures have structural emergent powers and properties but are dependent on the way in which individuals draw on these powers. When there isn't a shared understanding and the resources to do so, these powers are not realised. Consequently, academic staff find themselves

in a situation of constraining contradictions. They are expected to participate in quality processes and contribute to quality improvement but do not have the resources to do so and have to juggle competing demands and experience the pressure of the value placed on research output at the cost of other activities. So even when committed they are unable to realise the intention of the quality processes.

As was evident in Case 1, there was tension between a collegial model of trust of the research university with high academic autonomy on the one hand, as evident in three of the four cases, and a more hierarchical, process focused corporate model on the other, as evident in the drive to implement centrally managed quality policies and procedures. The school culture about teaching and learning and the way in which it was functioning was in conflict with institutional level discourses about research and postgraduate students.

In Case 2, there was a complementarity between institutional culture and espoused school culture, but a contradiction between this and actual school practices and culture (and structural conditions). A contradictory set of discourses within the school were at play. The SER espoused a particular research culture (set of discourses etc.) aligned to that at an institutional level; there wasn't a shared understanding or practice within the school.

Another evident contradiction was between the light touch which is possible (and even necessary) where academics share a commitment to the project and where the institution is fairly egalitarian – but which is impossible if the institution is framed as a business in which the workers need to be monitored for efficiency. This was evident in Case 3 where a "hands off" approach to teaching was evident in the school and the management of teaching and learning was not institutionalised and academics were trusted to ensure the quality of teaching and learning.

Shifting purposes of universities, student protests and upheaval such as that brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic mean that quality assurance systems must be flexible and responsive to ongoing change. But, as was evident in Case 4, as soon as the institution underwent large structural shifts, the School Reviews process was not completed. Complex processes such as the School Reviews process need to be designed to inform current practices within the institution and the school and they need to be adapted as the context shifts.

A major finding is that the use of a one-size-fits-all policy for quality assurance and the unit of focus of quality reviews needs to be revisited. The implementation of policies as structure plays out differently and it has different effects in the different contexts even within one institution. National level processes where the differences across institutions is significant need to especially take this into account. The impact of shifts in the institution brings into stark relief the need for QA to be a culture rather than a process – institutional shifts over the period of data collection and changes in key agents meant that in some cases the process didn't roll out exactly step by step as indicated in the policy. Massive changes at a global scale make it very evident at the time of writing that we will need to radically rethink QA processes.

9.2 Implications of the findings

Although the research was conducted in a specific context, during a disruptive phase of both the institution's and the South African higher education sector's development, the findings are relevant to the national and international higher education quality community. The quality improvement process of self-evaluation and review that were the focus of this research are practiced in many higher education quality regimes nationally and internationally. The research is particularly valuable for quality and education development practitioners to frame a critique of their own practice and to inform new ways of engaging in this important work.

I set out to identify possible mechanisms that would function to either enable or constrain the School Reviews process. By taking an ontological position from a critical realist perspective and using a social realist methodology I looked at the four case studies in order to see how these mechanisms intersected to give rise to potential quality improvement.

In some cases, mechanisms were activated and impacted on the review process, in other contexts they may not have been activated because of the contingent nature of causal mechanisms. If we recognise that the unique combinations of mechanisms will be activated in each context then this research has highlighted that quality improvement processes have to be flexible and responsive. The study also highlights that quality reviews need to move beyond identifying and describing events and experiences, with its dominant focus on such events and experiences in the structural domain, and instead the review process needs to enable engagement with the

mechanisms from which such events and experiences emerge. It is only by becoming aware of the interplay of cultural and structural mechanisms than agents can clearly reflect upon and change the quality of a school, department or other social unit.

What is needed in higher education is "…to understand how 'efficiency' can mean the set of arrangements that best stimulates and coordinates human energies, and this will vary from activity to activity, from organization to organization" (Collini, 2012, p. 136). A number of key factors (mechanisms) emerged from the study which enable effective self-evaluation and institution-led review, and consequently are more likely to lead to quality improvement. They need to be considered carefully in the planning and implementation of quality improvement processes.

9.3 Limitations

One of the key arguments underpinning this research and informing the findings is that the way in which quality improvement emerges is context specific (they take place in an “open system”) and that the mechanisms interact to create emergent capacities that adapt to the conditions in each context. This provides the basis for one of the challenges faced in this research. If a mechanism is specific to a particular context it is only my analysis based on the literature and my experience that informs the extent to which it has explanatory powers. In addition, there are other mechanisms that the data would not have identified or have not focused on, for example gender.

The research would have been richer and the potential to identify different mechanisms stronger if more cases were investigated. The study was limited to four case studies carried out over a particular period of time in one institutional context. As explained in Chapter Four, this study is not an evaluation of quality per se or the institution itself but was carried out with the intention to examine the interplay between mechanisms and the way in which they act as constraints and enablements in quality improvement processes.

Given the lengthy time period since the School Reviews took place a possible limitation could be the dated data. As discussed at different points in the research, the methodology followed in the School Reviews process is a common practice in the institutional, national and international quality regimes and hence, the findings remain significant.

One of the strengths of document analysis is that documents are stable and unreactive and therefore remain unchanged by the process of analysis (Bowen, 2009, p. 31). However, one of the limitations is that it is not possible to know that which is not reported on paper (Westerheijden, Hulpiau & Waeytens, 2006). As discussed in Chapter 3 the process of retroduction makes it possible to explain events by identifying mechanisms. However, it is not possible to explain why people act as they do. In other words, the use of documentary analysis means that what people did can be described and an inference can be made as to the motivation for their actions but not from their perspective to explain why. It is possible to draw on theory and the analysis of data to infer what informed their actions.

9.4 The way forward – future research

During my research journey I left the public higher education sector to join a private higher education institution and have moved out of being a practitioner responsible for the implementation of quality improvement processes into an academic management role in a rapidly growing private higher education institution. There is no doubt that these findings are of relevance to other institutions and countries. Whilst this research focused on the public sector, the private higher education sector has grown in the last decade and is emerging as a significant role player in the broader higher education landscape.

It is clear that there is a need for more research into the efficacy of quality improvement processes involving self-evaluation and review. As discussed earlier the institution-owned review processes are a key strategy in the CHE next cycle of institutional audits due to begin in 2021 and establishing such processes at institutional-level is imperative. As is the case in this research, most research on existing processes tends to be retrospective and summative; after the processes have been completed. Research which documents and engages during the review processes will provide an understanding from the perspective of those involved.

There is scope for research which considers the work of Basil Bernstein and its implications for the way in which quality processes are managed in different disciplinary contexts. As discussed above the research suggests that disciplinary cultures and knowledge structures have a great effect on the extent to which there can be a readily shared understanding of quality and an approach to improvement.

This research also has implications for practitioners in the field and the need to research their own practice. Many quality processes are driven by policies, procedures, criteria and outputs at the structural level of institutions. The social and cultural issues must be addressed as they have the power to constrain even the most well-planned and organised quality activities and over time structural and cultural morphostasis will be the result. If change is to take place, then it is essential that the key factors identified above are implemented at every level and that further research is carried out to establish deeper understanding of them as constraints and enablements in quality improvement in higher education.

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