



Strategic Planning and Quality Improvement in a Higher Education Institution

AN ACTION RESEARCH ENQUIRY

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By

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ABSTRACT

Strategic planning is an inevitability, not an advantage, for every organisation including higher education institutions; it is also important to recognise quality assurance as a major part of it. In this study I have conducted an in-depth Internal Action Research (IAR) at my workplace in the College in Oman, to find out the process of strategic management in order to achieve sustainable advantages. The study used a systematic approach to investigate the formulation and implementation of strategies in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). In the methodological part of the study, I applied the interpretivist epistemology and ontology and adopted the qualitative research methodology to understand my own and the research participants' perceptions. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with senior directors who play an essential role in strategic management. A review of existing literature and a number of internal organisational documents formed the basis for the empirical analyses. In addition, the study used the template analysis method of King (2004) for the data analysis, which led to the identification of 14 elements influencing the strategic management of the College, which resulted in constructing a one-page Balanced Scorecard (BSC) integrated framework for the process. This study provided valuable and interesting insights on the topic and the knowledge gained will help the College and other higher education institutions in a similar situation in the proper management of their strategic plans.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

IAR	Internal Action Research
HEI	Higher Education Institution
HEIs	Higher Education Institutions
BSC	Balanced Score Card
MSP	Management of Strategic Planning
QAP	Quality Assurance Processes
QAS	Quality Assurance Standards
PAR	Participatory Action Research
OAAA	Oman Academic Accreditation Authority
PESTEL	Political, Economic, Social, Technological, Environmental and Legal
SWOT	Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threat

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION TO THE THESIS

1.0 OVERVIEW AND INTRODUCTION

Strategic management is recognised to be one of the essential areas of research and management practices (Teulier & Rouleau, 2013; Smith et al., 1989), although other authors (David, 2013; Alashloo et al., 2005; Porter, 1980) have argued that the area is mainly fragmented and that there is always a debate on fundamental theoretical measurements or the methodological approaches used. However, despite the complexity of strategy, strategic management is absorbed as an inevitability, not an advantage, for modern organisations. It is appreciated that firms which would like not only to survive but also to gain sustainable competitive advantages in the contemporary world are required to think strategically and embrace strategic management processes. Thus, strategic management is an essential activity for all organisations, whether operating in public or private sectors around the world, including higher education institutions (HEIs), where quality assurance standards (QAS) also form an integrated part of it. This study was conducted to consider the management of the Strategic Plan (MSP), which includes the formulation, implementation and evaluation of the plan and, for the purpose of the study, also the integration of Quality Assurance Processes (QAP) within it, besides exploring the factors affecting these processes. To achieve this, I have conducted participatory Internal Action Research (PAR) at my workplace, in the College in Oman. Methodology, methods, Philosophy, and approaches in the study have hardly been applied before in studies in Oman. Thus, the study can also help in the development of strategies and philosophy of PAR in Omani HEIs.

The interest of this study was initiated by the accreditation requirement concept that was introduced by the Oman Academic Accreditation Authority (OAAA). Since the establishment of the OAAA, it has clearly emphasised the formulation and implementation of the strategic plan in HEIs, in which the QAS are the central part for accreditation purposes. The interaction between the quality assurance and institutional management, including strategic management, has attracted a considerable amount of interest. Without the implementation of a comprehensive quality management system, it will not be possible for higher education institutions to evaluate their performance; therefore, all activities including the management of the institution should be a part of a quality assurance system (Beckford, 2002).

The College realised the importance of these matters and was quick to absorb the emerging opportunity. It decided to undertake a voluntary scanning of its entire activities and operations and formulate and implement a new strategic plan, which contained the quality assurance standards established by the OAAA as a core part of it to achieve sustainable advantages. However, the main issues that arose during the strategic management process were the challenges faced by the College members to implement the strategic plan; the inability of the available strategic planning models to assist in this regard; and the ambiguity about how to properly integrate the quality assurance processes within the College's strategic plan. Such issues were causing real concern to the higher management on a large scale. Moreover, because of my intense involvement in the implementation processes as a part of my job description to help others in the process of strategic management, I was able to observe that the majority of members were also not sure about the College's strategy formulation processes, particularly regarding the environmental scanning.

Similarly, on many occasions and during the various workshops and seminars I attended, the OAAA and other higher education institutions also expressed their concerns about the strategy formulation and implementation processes in higher education institutions. These concerns confirm that proper formulation of strategy will lead to appropriate implementation as well (Bryson, 2011; Hinton, 2012; Paris, 2003). Accordingly, I decided to take up the opportunity and conduct my DBA programme's final stage IAR study in the field, according to the notion of a 'living educational theory' approach to improving what I am doing through what I am learning, as was described by Whitehead (1989, 2008) and McNiff and Whitehead (2011).

The scope of this study is to promote the effectiveness of managing the College by examining the processes of strategic management implemented in other business sectors. At the same time, it should be perceived that this study is not intended to introduce the concept of corporate governance in the College. Alternately, this study is centred on the process of strategic management that is part of the control of corporate governance. This objective was achieved by studying issues during the process of managing the College's strategy. In other words, this study presents the perspective of the effectiveness aspect of the strategic management process, including the College's quality assurance processes. However, I also believe that the development of the strategic plan is not just to support the status quo, because it will also lead to certain types of change in the institution, and, accordingly, planning at the departmental or divisional levels should be directly linked to the strategic plan of the institution.

Therefore, this research should lead to increasing the understanding of strategy formulation and its management, especially about the creation of rigorous theoretical knowledge and its relevant application in practice.

Moreover, there is an important contextual factor about the main question and objectives of the research. The higher education sector in Oman can be considered an exceptional situation regarding the management of the strategic plan because there is no specific literature review that mainly addresses the subject in this discrete context. In this sense, this study will assess how to formulate and implement a strategic plan, where quality standards comprise a core part of it, which will assist in enhancing the effectiveness of the College.

1.1 JUSTIFICATION FOR THE RESEARCH

The results of this study will support higher education institutions operating in Oman in general and, in particular, they will help the College to promote the formulation and implementation of its strategic plan, including quality assurance standards, especially in its next phase. The process will depend significantly on building a comprehensive understanding of the environment within which the College and its various activities operate. Typically, environmental scanning is conducted collectively by the participants during the strategic planning process workshop, usually at the initial stage of the workshop. However, in the case of the College, this was not possible, as the environmental scanning was not conducted during the strategic planning process workshop for the reasons explained below in section (5.2.4). This shortcoming of the strategic planning process workshop presented a very challenging situation for me during conducting this study. Nevertheless, this part of the research process was undertaken with great care by explicitly addressing the matter, during the data collection and analysis, interviews with managerial groups and other College members, especially those who were directly involved in the development of its planning and organisational effectiveness, which resulted in assessing the environmental impact and conducting a PESTEL/SWOT analysis. In addition, implementation of a strategic plan and quality improvement processes in a higher education institution has an impact on all the activities and operations of that institution. The processes of strategic management in HEIs are extremely complicated and highly interdependent (they are not linear), by inserting a little variation in a single activity might lead in substantial variations in different activities (Stacey, 2011). This process represents a significant challenge for the management of a HEI during the implementation of a strategic plan.

However, it can be identified from the literature that the central issue in strategic management relates to the achievement of organisational objectives linked to the mechanisms of implementation processes. Schaap (2012) and Floyd and Wooldridge (2000) contended that most of the literature on strategy is concerned with the formulation part, whereas the implementation part is barely examined. Often failure to achieve planned activities occurs, due to the absence of proper implementation. David (2013) has suggested that the main reason for the inability to implement strategies is because implementation is less glamorous than formulation. In addition, people believe that either implementation of the strategy is too tricky or anyone can do it, and accordingly they ignore it.

Moreover, the lack of conceptual models for implementing strategy has also contributed to escalating the problem. Thus, the issues facing the College in the implementation of the strategic plan require the creation of an integrated system of strategic management, which links the formulation and implementation processes. Moreover, integration of quality assurance processes within the strategic plan and absorbing them within the strategic management of the College is essential, because quality assurance processes are recognised as a form of strategic change process (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991).

As is clear from the above statements, strategic management can be assessed as an active area of research and management practices, despite the argument that the field is unusually ambiguous and that there are no proper theoretical dimensions or methodological procedure that can apply (Teulier & Rouleau, 2013). Porter (1980) also argued that there is no apparent agreement on what the institutional strategy is, and especially how it should be formulated, stating that different strategic terms can be combined and can be referred to indiscriminately in various practical situations. Nevertheless, Porter agreed that strategic management is necessary for the modern organisation to attain advantages. The globalisation of the business environment necessitates organisations to strategically plan and manage not only to survive but also to avail themselves of any possible opportunity. Thus, strategic management is an essential component of all kinds of organisations, including HEIs.

Finally, to make this study more feasible, distinctive and unique, I have decided to explore and apply alternative approaches of strategy formulation and implementation processes from the literature review and to explain how the practice of these approaches can yield effective practical solutions for the College. This approach will be different from the others, in that it will focus on the realities of management in the organisation. In this way, it will be possible for emerging issues to assist in building the future through

strategic facts rather than focusing on theories. These alternative approaches to strategy formulation and implementation can be used to identify various strategic issues, which can help to formulate and implement an effective strategy for the College. The primary strategic planning task is not only to develop strategic concepts that are worth implementing but also to ensure that they can be implemented (Bryson, 2011). These approaches were also selected here because they have not been undertaken before in Oman on a comprehensive basis and in this discrete context, but instead may have been implemented in part and in general. In this way, this research project should also be recognised as a genuine and distinctive activity.

This research aims to produce an integrative strategic management structure which can successfully work in the College in particular and in HEIs in Oman in general.

1.2 REASON FOR SELECTING IAR AS A MODE OF STUDY

The IAR paradigm was selected for the study because IAR is not only related to the application of social scientific knowledge, but is also perceived as and in addition to a body of knowledge. This concept will help, especially in situations of strategy formulation and its implementation, as it has always been observed that there is a lack of applying theory in practice in this regard (Johnson et al., 2008; Cassidy 2006; Bryson, 2011). The College has recently developed its strategic plan and is seeking best practices for its implementation. At the same time, it is experiencing a situation of inability in applying theoretical knowledge in practice. To overcome this issue, I conducted IAR, because IAR aims at solving existing practical problems of the organisation while generating practical knowledge (Baskerville and Myers, 2004).

Moreover, the IAR paradigm can be applied in modern educational institutions as a useful tool for the evaluation of different programmes and the implementation of necessary changes (Lockhart and Stablein, 2002). The formulation and implementation of strategy and adoption of quality assurance standards by the College are considered as a strategic change process. Adler and Shani (2001) suggested that IAR can be assessed as an essential instrument for the involvement of key stakeholders in the change process through monitoring every stage of the research cycle and promoting their interaction, reflection to generate actionable knowledge, and commitment to targeted goals of the institution. In the same vein, Coughlan (2007) expressed that having a participatory model contributed to creating positive staff morale, encouraged communication, reduced staff turnover, led to solving problems collectively and improved

the achievement of goals. Accordingly, IAR should provide members of the College with a sense of ownership of the strategic plan, and thus it should be an effective method to reduce their resistance to essential and crucial organisational change in various educational settings. Senior College executives continually emphasise the need for ownership and a positive approach towards implementation of the strategic plan in order to achieve its goals.

One of the main criteria for accreditation in higher education is the ability of HEIs to demonstrate that evaluation results are used continuously for improving their performance (Schuh and Upcraft, 2001). Therefore, it is crucial for the College members to pose critical questions about programme effectiveness, ascertain relevant responses and enhance processes according to the evaluation results. The IAR model is a suitable method to encourage collaboration, communication and shared analysis between academicians, administrative staff and governing councils to achieve quality standards of education.

It is further necessary to understand how the IAR projects of individual managers assist in the continuous learning of both the research-manager's organisation and the scholars' committee. What leads to the quality of useful knowledge is the process of reflection on reflection (Argyris, 2003) or meta-learning (Coghlan and Brannick, 2010), which is one of the fundamental features of AR. However, Zuber-Skerritt and Perry (2002) make a useful difference between a major AR project and an AR project of a thesis. The study of the major AR project includes organisational activities on which the research-manager works with his/her fellow members of the organisation to find the expected solution for the problem or successful implementation of change. The AR project of a thesis, including a doctoral level of investigation in an organisational study, may or may not result in being successful in the terms defined by the main project. The AR project of the thesis at doctoral level emphasises the expansion of theory through 'research in action' within the framework of the organisation of which the student-researcher is a member. What this means is that, simultaneously, when researchers in an AR project participate in core AR cycles, they are required to diagnose, plan, take action and evaluate how the AR project is evolving and what they are learning from it. They must continuously study each of the four main stages (planning, acting, observing and reflecting), asking how these steps are carried out and how they are consistent with each other, and thus how the next actions will be implemented.

Unlike other research paradigms in which the researcher explores organisational phenomena, but does not necessarily change them, the researcher in IAR is interested in effecting organisational change and

simultaneously studying the situation (Adler, Shani (Rami), and Styhre, 2004). This research study should lead to organisational learning, where IAR is intensely focused on cooperation and changes related to both the researcher and the research subject. However, it is instead an iterative process, which provides learning to both the researcher and the institution in the context of social systems of the institution, which should result in strategic learning and strategic thinking that allow for collective action towards achieving strategic management processes of the organisation (the College). It is a clinical approach that will help me as a researcher, and also the executives of the College and other higher education institutions in Oman in formulation and management of strategy including quality assurance processes from the real-life practical situations.

1.3 MY OWN POSITION AS A RESEARCHER

I decided to study this topic because I have an academic interest in the leadership and strategic planning field. I obtained my MBA, which was also very much within the same lines of my interest, from the University of Strathclyde in 2007. I am also an experienced manager in the higher education sector with more than 20 years of experience. I have participated in many strategic changes, and in the development of at least three strategic plans, two in the higher education sector and one in the production industry sector, and was also efficiently involved in the first stage quality audit of the College.

When I started this research project, I was working as the Director of Accounting and Finance, and assistant lecturer in Cost and Management Accounting, where I often interacted with other senior executives and faculty members, and I was able to access different types of information. However, since undertaking this research project, my professional position has been changed, and I have been designated as an adviser to the Dean with particular reference to the development and implementation of the College's strategic plan. My primary responsibilities consist of developing action plans for the assigned projects/tasks and providing feedback regarding operations; ensuring that guidance is standardised and the College's quality expectations are met; assisting with supervision and direction of the College's daily activities; assisting with implementation of strategies and ensuring their consistency with the College's vision and mission; and establishing a two-way channel of communication between staff and higher management with regard to strategic and quality issues.

This work has helped me to enhance what I am performing and has also presented me with an opportunity where other members of the College can approach me to direct them about how to perform their tasks

within the quality assurance processes and to achieve the overall goals established within the College's strategic plan.

1.4 FEASIBILITY OF THE STUDY

One of the primary aims of participatory research projects and this study is to identify alternative actionable knowledge from literature and to apply this knowledge in practice to help managers (scholars and practitioners) to cope with the new situation efficiently or perform their activities more efficiently. Therefore, application of this study for the practitioners will be determined according to the notions of rigour and relevance, where rigour is usually identified as an essential factor for the quality of knowledge, and its relevance as a justification for the practical applications of this knowledge (Stokes, 1997). The integration of these notions is known as 'management or actionable knowledge', while it can also be appreciated, in a sense, that the quality of this knowledge may sometimes vary from other perspectives' for the creation of common knowledge. The idea underlying these descriptions is that practice is based on theoretical knowledge applications. From the standpoint of management, processes are determined through the implementation of theoretical knowledge and standards. Accordingly, studies of a rigorous nature are normally conducted in the context of identifying the actual standards of knowledge, which are then usually reflected in the performance and behaviour of managers. As such, the relevance of this study consists in translating these standards of knowledge, which are described clearly for the managers' use. By realising rigour and relevance in such a manner, this study aims to be realistic and have practical significance. By producing complex theories, researchers are trying to influence the actions and behaviour of managers (scholars and practitioners). Nevertheless, it is expected that managers will be the rational decision-makers during the implementation of theories. However, it is also anticipated that managers would implement standards more competently when they become familiar with the appropriate theoretical frameworks and, as such, these managers will be able to improve the standards to work with them accordingly.

1.5 PROBLEM STATEMENT AND MAIN QUESTION OF THE STUDY

The study investigates the formulation and implementation of strategies in higher education institutions in which quality assurance standards are a core part. The strategy part will be assessed by considering how to formulate and implement a strategy in private sector institutions. Although the flow of research on strategic decision-making is well developed, there is limited empirical research on the implementation of the strategy. Moreover, a comprehensive review of the literature on the implementation of the strategy also showed that very few studies have studied the relationship between application of the strategy and organisational effectiveness (Hickson, et.al, 2003). Accordingly, this study will also attempt to shed light on this relationship.

The purpose of the thesis is to answer the following fundamental research question (Q): How can the College best formulate and implement its strategy and integrate quality assurance standards within it to achieve sustainable competitive advantages?

For a strategic management study it is crucial to address the issues related to the achievement of results, and also why specific results were achieved (Sminia, 2009). Sminia (2009) described merely the concepts of 'how' and 'why' within the question as a critical element; the 'how' concerns how to establish the practical path of the research process. The 'how' question led to the perspective of a process study, which required me as a researcher to develop the events and establish their connections with the theory developed, whereas the question of 'why' related to the establishment of what led to what, as a form of causal relationship in the process of events.

The thesis aimed to process the core question of the research (Q) through constructing an integrative structure of the strategic management. To this end, the investigation was framed to attain the overarching objectives:

- 1) To explore the formulation, implementation and evaluation of College's strategy and quality assurance process implementation.
- 2) To investigate why the existing strategic models were unable to help in the College's strategic management process.
- 3) To integrate the quality assurance standards within the College's strategic plan.

Objective 1 was designed to apprehend and consider the processes that usually occur in the context of strategy formulation and implementation and quality assurance standards within HEIs, concerning theory and literature to find out why the College members were not sure how to implement the strategic plan. Objectives 2 and 3 were developed to reinforce the awareness of processes identified in objective 1 to assess why the available strategic planning models were not helpful in this regard, and how the proper formulation and implementation of the strategic plan and integration of quality assurance processes within it will result in achieving sustainable competitive advantages for the College, which should lead to realising a broader knowledge of the main research question.

1.6 METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

This study will follow the pragmatism approach, which is similar to the participatory approach, as it also focuses on action and not the pursuit of truth but instead the pursuit of what works in practice. Accordingly, the knowledge creation process in IAR occurs within an interpretive and not a positivist epistemology, as the realisation of the useful knowledge did not arise from positivism, the enquiry from outside (Evered and Louis, 1981). Moreover, IAR fits within the pragmatic paradigm, especially where pragmatic institutional change (not emancipation per se) is the focus, as is the situation with this case study, because the formulation and implementation of a strategic plan and integration of quality assurance standards within it are recognised as a rational form of the strategic change process. Moreover, an AR study follows the interpretivism methodology, which inclines towards the qualitative method of research. This study is a qualitative study of the College's strategic management processes; that is, formulating, implementing and evaluating a strategy, and adopting quality assurance processes. This study highlights the experience from multiple perspectives in the College. Accordingly, 14 semi-structured interviews were conducted for this purpose with three categories of stakeholders. Each group represented a form of action research cycle (planning, acting, observing and reflecting). Each cycle contributed to enhancing the following cycle of the study.

Moreover, the template analysis technique of King (2004) was used for data analysis purposes, as explained in detail in chapters three and four of the study. In addition, the results were discussed with two of the College's higher management staff. Semi-structured interviews allowed participants to share their experiences and talk and reflect in detail about the process of managing the College's strategy. This situation contributed to a broader understanding of the strategy in the context of this case study. Thus,

this study is based on an inductive approach. The inductive method allowed me to identify the results of the study without a predefined conceptual framework. This study is consistent with the proposal made by Liedtka (2000), which states that it is necessary to conduct a research study to understand the full vision of strategic management. According to Liedtka (2000), comprehensive research on political and cultural interventions is necessary to ensure a holistic approach to strategic management. This study provides a full review of strategic management that studied through the experience of the participants. This process reflects the perspective of participation adopted in the study.

1.7 STRUCTURE OF THE STUDY

The study comprises six chapters, together with the introductory chapter, which outlines the structure of the study.

Chapter 2 will offer a critical analysis of past knowledge on this subject. It contains a description and analysis of theories, and various strategic management and quality assurance concepts. The review includes analyses of books and peer-reviewed journals, conference reports, case studies and other published resources and materials. The review discusses the historical perspectives of strategy and quality assurance and their related areas, current developments, issues to be tackled, and research in the field of strategic and quality management. Based on the results of data analysis that will be obtained and the existing literature reviewed, the strategic formulation and implementation structure and adoption of quality assurance processes will be proposed.

Chapter 3 will provide an elaborated discussion about epistemological and ontological engagements for the study. It will also describe approaches which I have selected to conduct the study. As part of the methodology, I will even justify my choice of the methodology by presenting a critical analysis for all the methodological techniques that can found in strategic management literature. To complete this chapter, I will also assess the qualitative reflexivity of the study.

Chapter 4 will describe the process of data analysis in my thesis; it will mainly show how it was categorised and organised, and how themes or issues in the data were integrated and synthesised, and how the work of King (2004) using a template analysis approach helped in this regard.

Chapter 5 will present the results of the study. It will include the analysis of the effects of data collected from case studies, where I will investigate the themes identified in King's (2004) template analysis

approach. Depending on the results of the research, an inclusive structure of strategy formulation and implementation and integration of quality assurance processes within it for the College will be constructed.

Chapter 6 will summarise the findings of the study with a critical discussion of the study's implications and consequences. This chapter will be devoted to providing answers to the central research question (Q) that arose from the very beginning. In this chapter, I will construct the primary outcomes of the study, which can help the College to implement its strategic plan and quality assurance processes successfully. Moreover, this chapter will also consider my development as a scholar/practitioner and how this can help the emergence of the action from the study.

1.8 KEY FINDINGS AND CONTRIBUTION OF THE STUDY

This study will assist the College (my workplace), and other HEIs, in overcoming the strategic management challenges to achieve their purpose by contributing to the formation of actionable knowledge through:

- 1) Identifying critical success factors for formulating and implementing a strategy in the context of HEIs (the College), thereby helping the policymakers in the College and maybe other HEIs in a similar situation in this regard.
- 2) Developing an integrative framework for formulating and implementing a strategy in the College, and a form of transformational knowledge which can be adopted by the College and other HEIs.
- 3) Verifying the interrelations between the different components of formulation and implementation of the strategy, and confirming the importance of their effectiveness in achieving organisational goals of the College.
- 4) Integrating quality assurance standards within the strategic plan and managing the plan's processes through the strategic management of the College.

Despite the complexity inherent in HEIs, this study has made it possible to understand the process of strategic management and its impact in the context.

1.9 SUMMARY

This chapter has presented a focused idea of the study. It began with the definition of strategic management and the integration of quality assurance standards within it as an area of research and strategic management processes assistance towards an organisation's successful performance and gaining of sustainable advantages. The chapter went on to discuss the reason for selecting action research as a mode of study, the status of the researcher, and how it fits within the study, and its support in providing reflections on and insights into the research processes. The chapter then described the rationale of the study. This was followed by an analysis of the problems faced by the College, which resulted in identifying the statement for the main study question and establishing the research objectives, followed by theoretical and practical contributions to the body of knowledge. This chapter continued by highlighting the action research methodology as a mode for the study. Finally, the chapter provided a summary of the other thesis chapters.

CHAPTER 2

THE LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 INTRODUCTION

This chapter starts with a review of the main content of the current literature to adopt a strategic management practice (formulation, implementation, and evaluation of strategy) and to integrate accreditation quality standards within it in HEIs to achieve sustainable competitive advantages. It addresses the particular aspects concerning the procedural development of the strategic management and quality assurance fields and produces an understanding of the complexity surrounding these fields, which is corresponding to the aim of this study. These aspects form the basis for this research project and realise the actionable knowledge available in the existing body of literature. The chapter starts by examining the strategy classifications and quality assurance notions in HEIs. It examines strategy-related processes, current developments, challenges and constraints associated with, research trends and other significant concepts on the topic of strategic management, its evaluation and, finally, the integration of quality assurance standards within it, which are then applied to the context of this case study and the particular challenges it faces. It explains which factors are particularly relevant or salient for the research problem and how they provide support to explain the essence of the problem, and in what ways might they help to focus attention on critical areas for taking action.

Moreover, the intention of this literature review is also to undertake a critical review of the existing literature on various theories, concepts and structures related to the subject. A critical review requires a critical evaluation of the literature while connecting and determining different perspectives. The objectives of the chapter, besides a critical review of the literature, include the development of a theoretical framework for the study based on empirical research and insights available in the current literature on the topic. To achieve this, in addition to the existing research available on the strategic management in HEIs, the available existing research on strategic management in other business sector organisations has been applied to the context of HEIs. Finally, the critical review of the literature in the strategic management and quality assurance fields should result in achieving the objectives of the study and in informing the main question of the research identified in Chapter one.

2.1 DEFINING THE STRATEGY

Most scholars, practitioners and strategy learners alike confuse the definitions of strategic planning and strategic management; moreover, they also interchange them with the definitions of strategy and strategic thinking, while these terms actually have different meanings. This study defines strategic planning as the process of organising the process of developing a plan or direction and making decisions about the allocation of resources to implement the strategy. According to Lynch (2006), during the strategic planning process, different methods for the institutional environment analysis can be adopted, such as PESTEL acronym (political, economic, social, technological, environmental and legal analysis) and SWOT analysis (strengths and weaknesses, opportunities and threats).

On the other hand, for the purpose of this study, strategic management is determined from the point of view presented by Sullivan and Richardson (2011), who suggested an inclusive paradigm focused at introducing strategic planning in all HEIs, which proposes that strategic plan should be supported through the integration of strategic planning with daily activities and continued evaluations. It is suggested that such practice must include the link between the goals of the departments and the institutional strategic plans, which requires specifying steps of actions, designating members' responsibility, establishing measureable outcomes, and evaluating members' performance (Sullivan and Richardson, 2011). This model is designed to link strategic planning with daily processes and the evaluation. The College is trying to adopt a very similar model to the one suggested by Sullivan and Richardson (2011), the Dean has instructed all the departments' directors that whenever the major decision is concern or new project is proposed, they should submit an integrated framework along with their proposal to the Dean explaining the action steps, who will be the responsible for implementing the process, and how the new decision or new project will contribute towards the achievement of the College's KPIs mentioned in the strategic plan i.e. linking the College's strategic plan with process and assessments in order to obtain the Dean's approval for accomplishment of the major decision or new project. Moreover, the College strategic plan integrates the quality assurance standards as a core part of it where the strategic goals KPIs are matched with the OAAA quality standard KPIs (Appendix 9). The above definition conclude that strategic management of the College is a process that includes the formulation, implementation and evaluation of its strategy and integration of quality assurance standards within it.

Lynch (2006) distinguishes between strategic planning and strategic management and suggests that strategic planning does not replace strategic management; strategic planning simply reinforces the strategic process in the organisation. Stacey (2011) opposes the views of Lynch (2006), as well as the view of Johnson et al. (2008), contending that a strategy is rarely a intended group of measures, but instead, it could be ascertained as a structured method needed for strategic management, when a short term change is concerned.

Moreover, organisations need to cope with their continually changing business environment, to remain competitive in the market. It requires them to adopt dynamic processes of strategic management and continuous strategic thinking, learning and adapting to realise the emerging opportunities. Thus, strategic thinking is considered to be a crucial competency for managers and leaders responsible for the development and implementation of strategies. Therefore, strategic thinking should be at the core of the entire process of strategic management, continuously reviewing and revising available business models. From the above explanations, we can presume that the four (strategy, strategic planning, and strategic management and strategic thinking) are not the same, but are interrelated; the strategic planning process is a means of developing strategy and leads to proper strategic management and engagement in strategic thinking, which is the whole process of development and implementation of the strategy to help organisations improve their functions. Thus, it is essential to understand the relationship between strategy, strategic planning, and strategic management and strategic thinking to achieve the College's objectives, in terms of competitive advantages.

The primary goal of studying different definitions of the strategy is to establish a variety of factors that influence the strategy and complexity associated with encompassing the notion into a single definition. Because of this complexity, the process of developing a strategy is also viewed as a complex matter, and such complexity also gives rise to further difficulties. Organisations today, including HEIs (the College), face many challenges, which require managers to deal with them continually at every level. Various scholars including Porter (1980), Mintzberg et al. (1998), Lynch (2006), Grant (2003), Johnson et al. (2008), Schaap (2012), Bryson (2011), David (2013) and Teulier and Rouleau (2013) have stated that public, as well as private organisations, are required to deal with these challenges efficiently, and suggested further that the capacity of such challenges facing organisations is expected to grow more in the future. This situation can arise due to the increasing amalgamation of social, economic, political, demographical and technological challenges. The nature of these problems suggests that the vast majority of them are

beyond the abilities of individual College managers to monitor, which increases the importance of the need to ensure that the College is operating efficiently and effectively, and accordingly can achieve its purpose as prescribed. The College's application of the strategic management concept should result in improving productivity, which suggests that strategic planning is important and should be deliberate and not ignored.

2.2 STRATEGIC PLANNING VERSUS STRATEGIC THINKING

Mintzberg (1994) explains that strategic planning and strategic thinking are not the same, but instead two different things. He argues that strategic planning implicates simplifying the goal into stages, developing ways to implement the stages and assessing the expected significance of each stage. Strategic planning is a field that can involve innovative concepts, but it is mainly concerned with the notion of rigour about how to proceed from one situation to another without failing. However, Mintzberg defines strategic thinking as a synthesis process, which assists in formulating the vision of the institution by using intuition and creativity. It is the ability to think systematically while taking into account the whole system, which typically surpasses what is currently being done by the College. Mintzberg (1994, 1981) agrees that, although strategic planning and strategic thinking are connected, they do not overlap. Mintzberg suggests integrating the results of strategic thinking into the strategic plan. The College is required to cope with its continually changing business environment, to remain competitive in the market. This situation needs to adopt the dynamic processes of strategic management and constant strategic thinking, learning and adapting to realise the emerging opportunities. Thus, strategic thinking is a crucial competence for managers and leaders responsible for the development and implementation of strategies (Verweire, 2014). Therefore, strategic thinking should be at the heart of the entire strategic management process of the College, which requires continuously reviewing available business models.

2.3 STRATEGIC TECHNIQUES AND APPROACHES

There are many techniques and approaches identified in the literature on strategy which can assist the management of the College to formulate the strategy. Knott (2006) argued that techniques and approaches cover the whole spectrum of models, concepts, techniques and methods which build or inspire the activity of the strategy. In particular, strategic techniques and approaches are those concepts that managers use in the decision-making process (Bryson, 2011). The use of strategy techniques and approaches can assist in drawing attention to more practical forms that contribute to the development of

more effective strategies that can be formulated and realised (Hutchinson and Purcell, 2007). According to Johnson et al., (2008, 2011) some of the most commonly used strategy management techniques and approaches include the Five Force Model and Generic Strategy Model of Porter, scenario planning, core competencies, SWOT analysis, the value chain, and the 7S systems of McKinsey. The other strategic management techniques and approaches include PESTEL Analysis, Balanced Scorecard, BCG Matrix, and stakeholder analysis. Different strategy techniques and approaches can be applied in different strategic situations, where the College's management can adapt them according to the tasks that need to be accomplished. However, most practitioners believe that most of the strategy techniques and approaches offer more promise than they deliver.

Moreover, each strategic technique and approach has its advantages and disadvantages. The sought outcome can only be achieved by selecting a range of correct techniques and approaches to deal with the prevailing situation (Rigby, 2005). Rigby also stresses that, if practitioners have to use these techniques and approaches, they are required to have a broader knowledge of them and how to apply them during the institution's strategy development process.

Hutchinson and Purcell (2007) argues that to know which technique to use and when to apply it is more useful than just applying different techniques and approaches. Thus, it can be argued that, although the use of the strategy techniques and approaches can bring beneficial results to the College, failure to accurately assess the effects of the used strategic techniques and approaches in a given situation may lead to adverse consequences. Hutchinson and Purcell argues further that the cognitive abilities of managers is having an essential role in accurately selecting and using the strategy techniques and approaches. According to Mintzberg (1994) some of the shortcomings and constraints of these techniques and approaches can be the results of the short-sightedness of these managers applying these techniques or approaches rather than the shortcomings of the techniques and approaches themselves. Therefore, it is crucial that the management of the College participating in strategic planning should understand the various strategy techniques and approaches available in the strategic management field, since this will affect the overall performance; accordingly, it requires a strong, inventing type of leadership to design the process to develop techniques and a framework that can continue to be used to create knowledge which can be applied to formulate and implement strategies. This study considers the role of leadership as one of the leading essential success factors in strategic management, which will be explained further in the coming sections.

2.4 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

According to Bryson (2011), it is important to develop a framework for strategic management. This is because it is a highly complicated collection of tasks and those responsible for their management processes are required to understand accurately what they need to accomplish, what will be the outcome of their actions, and why such steps are important. Bryson (2011) assumes that the existence of a strategic management framework in hand is like a roadmap of a foreign region. In addition, it is clear that managers will continue managing strategies despite the absence of a framework. They will be doing this thinking that they are, as individual people believe, important, which leads to disparate and contradictory actions. On the other hand, the framework will reasonably work as an example for guiding the managers at different levels, distributed across various practice areas within the College. The following theoretical framework has been developed for the study:

The inadequacy of the available strategic models in this regard.

- Rational versus Emergent Strategy Formulation and Implementation
- Top-Down versus Bottom-up Strategy Formulation and Implementation
- The Dichotomy of Strategy Formulation and Implementation.

The Goal of the Study (G)

- Development of integrative framework for formulation and implementation of strategy including the quality assurance processes for the College.

Research question (Q)

- How best can the College formulate and implement its strategy and integrate quality improvement standards within it to achieve sustainable competitive advantages?

Research sub-questions

- What are the main factors affecting the strategic management in the College?
- How can a strategy be formulated and implemented in the College?

- How can quality assurance standards be integrated into the College's strategic plan?
- What is the concept of strategic management evaluation?

This framework has been used as a method of understanding about what has been deduced, and to present the results in an organised way. Moreover, to strengthen this framework, appropriate research methods were explored and applied to collect empirical data. In the next chapter, an evaluation discussion of the method selected for data collection for this study will be conducted, and appropriate justifications will be provided.

At present, no published studies have been conducted which provides apparent understanding about how to formulate and implement strategy in HEIs in Oman or the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) region. It is worth mentioning here that this investigation will provide knowledge to the management of the College, and probably also to other higher education managers, about how to manage the processes of formulating and implementing strategies including quality assurance standards in higher education institutions (the College) in Oman to achieve sustainable advantages. Finally, according to Thompson and Strickland (2003), sustainability (achieving sustainable advantages) should be absorbed as an essential part of the strategic plan of HEIs.

2.5 STRATEGY FORMULATION

Strategy formulation can be defined as the process by which the strategy of the organisation will be formulated (Grant, 2003). It includes describing the College's vision, mission and goals, identifying feasible objectives, formulating strategies and establishing policy guidelines, where each of these components can be designed for a particular task and represent tools for the management, which can be applied either individually or collectively for the planning purpose, but their expansion is essential for the planning process (Paris, 2003, 2004; Kouzes & Posner, 2008; Bryson, 2011; Hinton, 2012). Current strategic plans should provide detailed explanations about the expansion of the strategic plan components (Weick & Sutcliffe, 2007). This study takes the approach of Mintzberg et al. (1998), which discusses the development of a strategy from the viewpoint of approach and process of strategy formulation.

2.5.1 STRATEGY FORMULATION APPROACH

The approach of strategy formulation is further divided into two discrete streams: the rational approach and the emergent approach (Grant, 2003; Mintzberg et al., 1998). The rational approach suggests that the College should adapt to change in its environments through rational decisions and options, assuming the predictability of the settings and the fact that the activities of the College are closely related so that all decisions can be implemented by following the top-down approach throughout the institution (College) (Chaffee, 1985). However, this approach contrasts with the dynamic nature of the environmental approach explained by Lynch (2006), which suggests that the higher education environment is in constant change and is continuously affecting the content of higher education and, vice versa, higher education is also affecting its environment constantly, which requires continuous monitoring from higher education, as shown in Figure 2.1 below:

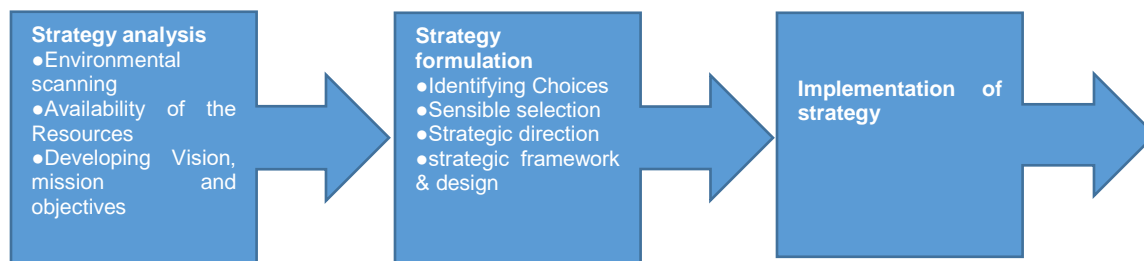


Figure 2.1: the rational strategy process adapted from Lynch (2000).

The emerging approach is founded on the reality that institutions are always responding and adapting to change, just as living organisms react to changes in their environment. According to Stacey (2011) this reaction constitute an adaptive model of strategic plan in which an ongoing adjustment process occurs within an institution that could be proactive or reactive strived to aligning between the environment and the institution. Johnson et al. (2008, and 2012) agree with Stacy's concept and refer to it as logical incrementalism. This approach ascertains the formulation of the strategy as a result of the day-to-day procedures; this supports the argument that managers rely on the culture, policies and sub-programmes of the institution to make decisions on actions and processes rather than on a rational analysis and selection process.

2.5.2 DELIBERATE AND REALISED STRATEGY

Mintzberg (1994) argues that strategy can be deliberate, and its implementation is also intentional in order to become realised (see Figure 2.2 below). The deliberate strategy, which is not implemented (realised), is therefore discarded. It is not possible to implement the entire planned strategy in the organisation, and consequently the realised strategy usually differs to a greater or lesser degree from the planned strategies (Pun, 2004). In addition, in some situations, organisations do not have any planned strategy. Thus, the realised strategy is the product of incremental decisions taken by the management over a period of time. Accordingly, the strategy can be unintentional or arise; that is, it merely develops out of the organisation's activities (Maloney, 1997; Johnson et al., 2008; Bryson, 2011), as explained in Figure 2.2 below:

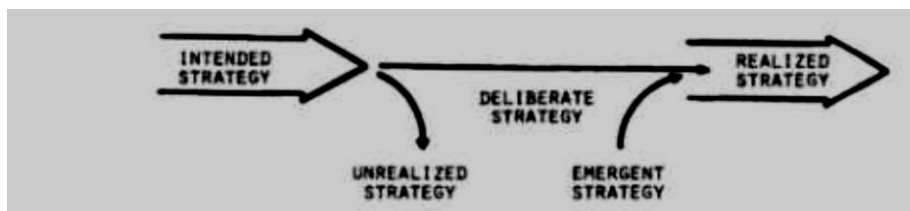


Figure 2.2: Intended and Realised strategy. Mintzberg and Waters (1985, p 258)

However, it is contextual that strategy formulation will vary over time (Johnson et al., 2008, 2012). These authors, noted further that organisations' processes directly depend on the different contexts they use. For instance, some practitioners believe that the formulation of strategy is intended rather than emergent, whereas practitioners in the public sector are inclined to perceive strategy as being externally imposed. These different views between practitioners further contribute to the complexity of the strategic management field.

2.5.3 EXTERNALLY IMPOSED STRATEGY

However, I consider that it is necessary to mention here also the concept of Externally Imposed Strategy because it is the core phenomenon which led to this study being conducted. The enforced choice strategy development process is an approach enforced upon institutions that operate in dynamic environments; the name refers to the dimension of enforced choice (Bailey and Johnson, 1995; Johnson et al., 2008,

2012). According to these authors, then, the College is required to align its activities to fit with the configurations expected within its surrounding environment. For this kind of strategy development, reliable evaluation of the College's external environment is necessary, and the adoption of alternative strategies is required to firmly align the strategy with the College's influential external stakeholder(s), such as the government or accrediting bodies (OAAA). The capacity of the College to match the interests of these influential stakeholders can result in the College realising competitive advantages, especially if the imposed options and the existing political conditions are in line with each other (Gunby Jr, 2009).

With regard to the Omani higher education institutions, the OAAA, as an accreditation agency, has explicitly emphasised the formation of strategic plans for the HEIs operating in the country. Also, institutions must identify clear quality improvement processes and incorporate them into the framework of their operations.

2.5.4 STRATEGY FORMULATION PROCESSES

Various authors have proposed different interpretations of the strategy formulation process. Strategy formulation process is a method and practice used by the organisation to perceive opportunities and challenges it faces and to make decisions for the optimal utilisation of skills and resources. However, the two main factors influencing the College's strategy formulation process are the environmental and internal resources factors. This concept describes a simplified view that the formulation of a strategy is a simple process, especially when the different phases of the process are explicitly articulated. Verweire (2014) suggested similar steps for the strategy formulation process.

Different authors have proposed different ways of formulating a strategy. For example, Mintzberg et al. (1998) developed 10 categories of strategy formulation process, which they referred to as 10 schools of the strategy formulation: Planning, Designing, Positioning, Learning, Entrepreneurial, Cultural, Political, Power, Environmental and Configuration. Each of the 10 schools critically looks at how strategy is formulated. Johnson et al. (2008) identified seven lenses for the development of the strategy in the organisation: Design, Experience, Idealistic, Logical Incremental, Culture, Political and Visionary. However, they also caution managers not to consider developing a strategy from the prospect of one lens, since this can lead to the inability to see the problems caused by other lenses. However, Mintzberg et al. (1998) agree with assertions mentioned above and do not recommend any of the methods described by their 10 schools of formulating a strategy as the mainly preferred one. Hart (1992) invented a process consisting

of five factors: Symbolic, Command, Systematic, Generative and Rational. Hart assessed the different functions of top executives and managers of the organisation and how they are using them to produce a consolidated structure. Moreover, Harts agrees that under comparatively normal conditions two of his factors (Rational and Command), which he compares with the Prescriptive schools of Mintzberg et al., can function better. Veetil (2008) points out that there is still a possibility to conduct a thorough study to determine if diverse schools signify diverse processes for forming a strategy or different parts of the process itself.

Although Mintzberg et al. (1998) agree that there is no particularly favourable school, which they recommend from 10 schools, but for the purposes of the study I chose the 'planning' school, because it considers the spirit of the HEI. Moreover, planning school considers strategic plan as a direction for a course of action, a course from the existing situation to the anticipated subsequent situation. Planning is important in organisations because it contributes to the allocation of resources and results in different choices for making a decision. Planning involves deciding about the future, but, in order to determine the future strategy as a plan, it is also necessary to look at past behaviour and the current position of the College. For example, two task forces were convened to assess the College's past and present position. The task forces focused on determining Institutional Effectiveness (the IET) and the Strategic Plan Review (the SPRT). In addition, the College conducted a strategic marketing plan. The market study provided a comprehensive assessment and recommendations on the College's strategic position in the external higher education environment in Oman. The market study also comments on the progress made since the 2011 Quality Audit Report. The College created a strategic plan using the data collected from the internal task forces and the external market study – a total of 19 preliminary observations and recommendations for the College's strategic direction in preparation for conducting a strategic planning workshop were recommended. The outputs from the workshop were the College's current strategic plan report. Johnson et al. (2011) confirm that strategic planning (school of planning) usually leads to an increase in the level of alignment and cost-effectiveness, in comparison to adopting trial and error methods. Thus, application of the Balanced Scorecard (BSC) technique of Kaplan and Norton (1996b), Kaplan and Norton (2007) and Kaplan (2010) can be useful for the 'planning' purpose of the study. According to Atkinson et al. (2012), full implementation of the Balanced Scorecard will result in active involvement of management in the evaluation process of the strategic plan and accordingly avoid costly planning errors and prevent misunderstandings. However, this can be perceived as a means of transportation, through which the entire organisation can move onwards. The BSC technique will transfer the strategy to reach members at

all levels by communicating the strategy to the entire population of the organisation in a terminology that is understandable by everybody. When a strategy is articulated regarding dimensions and objectives, members can associate it with what is to happen, which will result in a better implementation process. The BSC does not only transform how the strategic plan is articulated; it also links strategic and operational objectives together. It establishes the causes and effects relationship or pulls all aspects together. Thus, the BSC can be applied as a system of strategic planning and management for aligning organisational activities with a vision and strategy for organising and monitoring the performance of the organisation concerning strategic objectives (Kassahun, 2010). To promote the use of the BSC as a strategic management technique, Kaplan and Norton (2004) presented an innovative structure, which they referred to as the 'Strategic Map', which is an all-inclusive structural design for explaining the strategy over a succession of cross-functional causal effects. The Strategic Map provides a visual representation of the strategy and a one-page view of how the goals in the four perspectives (strategy formulation, implementation, integration of AQP, and evaluation) (Appendix 10), are integrated and assimilated to explain the strategy, and this undoubtedly emphasises that the strategic map is an intermediary technique that embodies the strategy.

2.6 STRATEGY IMPLEMENTATION

In the previous section, various concepts of strategy formulation were considered. This section will define and discuss the implementation of the strategy. Implementation of strategy is a process by which organisations translate the formulated strategies into an action, which should be sensibly implemented to achieve the intended results concerning the strategic notion (Pearce and Robinson, 2011; Bourgeois, 1980). The strategy implementation process is a critical standard factor which should link the formulation of strategy and the outstanding performance of the organisation (the College) (Paroutis et al., 2013). According to Schaap (2012) and Cocks (2010), the implementation of the strategy presents a critical new stage in strategic management to transfer strategic thinking to strategic actions.

Even though the implementation of the strategy is equally as important as strategy formulation to attain excellent organisation effectiveness, the literature review suggests that strategy implementation has not only been neglected but is also an uneasy task (Okumus, 2003; Alexander, 1985). Dandira (2011) and Flood et al. (2000) argued that the most significant issues in strategic management are not connected to formulation but instead to the implementation of the strategy, and agreed that strategies often fail

because of inadequate implementation and not because of insufficient formulation. Although strategy formulation is usually founded on rational objective facts and analysis, implementation normally refers to organisational members and members are not entirely logical, therefore the scope of implementation differs from the field of formulation (Sadler, 1998). Several studies show that implementing a strategy is not an easy job, because no one knows the correct level of implementation. However, the difficulties in successful implementation of new strategies have long been acknowledged by organisations, where all of the practitioners, similarly also the College managers, consider that implementation of the strategy is more difficult than formulation (Dandira, 2011 referring to Candido and Santos, 2008).

The key aim of this study is to study the problems related to strategic management in the College by examining the impact of formulating and implementing the strategy to achieve the College's goals. Accordingly, this case study research project will focus on the formulation and implementation, including evaluation, of the College strategy. The knowledge obtained can be transferred to other HEIs in general to improve the activities of strategic management.

2.6.1 ROLE OF LEADERSHIP

The institutional leadership not only observe and monitor changing external factors but also introduce strategic measures to prepare and strengthen the related functional units in the face of change (Shamsuddin et al., 2012). However, according to Bijandi et al. (2012), little is known about the influence of leadership on the effectiveness of HEIs. Moreover, other authors, such as Montez et al. (2003) and Jackson and Lund (2000), grounded on their research, stated that it is difficult to describe the leadership of HEIs, as it exceeds the traditional inference of everyday practice. However, other studies have recognised that, where the good HEIs are found, competent leaders will also be found (Dinham, 2005; Nahavandi, 2009).

Strong leadership is needed to champion the overall planning process because strong leadership will not be fearful of relinquishing control of the process by involving other members of the organisation. It is the transformative leadership quality which is required for the success of the strategic plan. Paris (2003) suggested that it is the responsibility of the leaders to effectively plan and produce a planning framework for active participation in the process. How to design or structure the sequences of transformation during the different stages of the strategic plan is a significant leadership task in any strategic planning process (Hrebiniak, 2005). This is especially so with the transition from strategic plan decision-making process to

strategic plan implementation processes, because a significant part of the strategic thinking will arise as a result of the discussion and reflection that took place during the strategic planning process by the institution's key decision-makers (Pettigrew, 2012). Once such discussions and reflections have been finalised and agreed upon, the leadership can design and transform the implementation processes in such a way that can reflect the strategic planning process and lead to constructive work by the institution's members (Watson, 2013). Senge (1990) portrays leaders (hip) as the designers of an ocean liner, rather than its navigators or captains. Senge also suggested that the primary task of the leadership in the planning process is the designing of the process of learning, which should allow the members of the institution to find practical solutions for the critical issues and develop skills in the required areas. Senge argues that "This is new work for most experienced managers, many of whom rose to the top because of their decision-making and problem-solving skills, not their skills in mentoring, coaching and helping others learn" (p. 345).

2.7 SIGNIFICANCE OF STRATEGY IN HEIs

Proper strategic management (formulation, implementation and evaluation of strategy, including the integration of accreditation quality standards within it) is essential for HEIs to achieve sustainable competitive advantages. Meyer et al. (2002) and West (2008) argued that, in the higher education sector, it is recognised that strategic management is essential to sustain its sustainability in a continually changing environment. Education is constantly evolving, it is influenced by the rapid changes in its external environment, and, vice versa, changes in education strongly affect its environment and needs (Saginova and Balyansky, 2008, p. 341). Leadership is also an essential factor to consider for successful strategic management processes including the quality assurance processes. According to Power (2007), what is required is the need for a smart professional leadership that can provide a clear vision, strategic guidelines, and strong actions and practices in the field of education. Strong leadership will depend on the application of innovative methods in solving the problems of education and social policies that the institution encounters by adopting different strategic directions and taking active positions in a continually changing world. It is the transformative leadership quality which is required for the success of the strategic plan (Paris, 2003).

Different authors have revealed that there is a strong association between strategic planning and quality functions in HEIs and, as such, it is a prime responsibility of higher management to adopt rational

processes of strategic management and quality approaches (Mellat-Parast and Digman, 2007). According to Gibson (1994), quality assurance processes focus on the core processes of the institution, which are undertaken on a regular basis. Thus, it focuses on the operational end of the planning model, by using the available quality techniques and approaches to improve the institutional quality processes and sub-processes, while the strategic planning process focuses on the entire efforts of the institution and, as such, provides a framework for the implementation of quality processes. This concept can be realised by adopting quality assurance standards as the central part of the strategic plan since quality assurance will enhance the value of all types of activities, which should lead to constant improvement of programmes and services. Therefore, all activities including the management of the institution should be a part of the quality assurance system (Fitzgerald, 2012). Without the implementation of a comprehensive quality management system, it will not be possible for HEIs to evaluate their performances (Beckford, 2002). One of the main criteria for accreditation in higher education is the ability of HEIs to demonstrate that evaluation results are used continuously for improving the performance of the institution (Schuh and Upcraft, 2001).

2.8 STRATEGIC AND QUALITY MANAGEMENT IN HEIs

The study centres on the motivations and advantages of developing strategic management in higher education systems. Alashloo et al. (2005), argued that, in the HE sector, strategic management can be recognised as an essential to sustain the sustainability in a surroundings in which the environment is changing continually. The growing importance of strategic planning in Omani HEIs is a result of the fulfilment of the OAAA requirement to attain accreditation status. The aforementioned was required mainly due to the increased competition between the HEIs and growth in the variety of the affiliated qualifications, changes in technology, changes in the demographic trends, and increase in costs and reduction in funding. All of these factors have required institutions to establish accountability and provide assurance to the higher education seekers in the country.

However, according to Bryson (2011), Duncan (1990) and Wilson (1990), although most of the authors on the subject of strategy and management are from the academic field, being from various HEIs and particularly the public ones, there has been no real in-depth research carried out on strategic management in public institutions. Accordingly, it can be noticed throughout this study that, in addition to the existing research available on the strategic management in HEIs, the available current research on

strategic management in private sector organisations was utilised in the context of HEIs. Such adaptation supports the fact that public institutions, such as HEIs, in a sense are like private sector institutions, having similar objectives to achieve in order to sustain and prosper in competitive situations, which necessitates them to participate in strategic management (Joseph et al., 2012).

According to Wheelen and Hunger (2002, 2010), Cassidy (2006) and Johnson et al. (2006, 2008), strategic management processes in institutions (including HEIs) comprise the formulation, implementation and evaluation of the strategic plan. Moreover, for this study, it should always be taken into consideration that the concept of strategic management in higher education institutions also includes the process of quality management. The adoption of a quality assurance process should constitute a core part of the strategic plan in HEIs. It is considered as a form of the strategic change process, as it is related to identifying and establishing better ways for institutional re-engineering and overall swift implementation of the proposed changes (Gioia and Chittipeddi, 1991). Moreover, such change processes are also considered to be crucial because they involve the participation of all organisational members; the whole institutional community must follow approaches identified by the management for the successful implementation of the proposed change programme (Bartunek, 1984; Ranson et al., 1980). In the process of strategic change, the College's management is also able to change and modify the conventional functions, goals structures and culture of the institution. Such change processes are considered to be crucial because they require the participation of all the College members.

Literature suggests that effective strategic management requires an active process and procedure to implement the plan effectively. According to Alfred (2006), Tromp and Rubin (2004), and Rowley and Sherman (2001), active processes of strategic management in higher education (the College) can be implemented through the introduction of realistic procedures, which should be flexible enough to direct the implementation, evaluation and adjustment of the programme whenever necessary. In addition, management of quality in HEIs is recognised to be an essential part of the strategic management process. Adrarrakah (2006) argued that the strategy of quality management in HEIs is a process of managing the long-term objectives of quality through its redetermination. What this definition suggests is that the strategy of quality management is mainly concerned with avoiding weaknesses and understanding the reasons behind the failure of efforts in educational institutions, since all higher education services have a value attached to them, and accordingly it is important to identify the processes which support each activity at each stage. Integration of quality standards within the College activities will add value to each

educational process. Meyer et al. (2002) and West (2008) argued that, in the higher education sector, it is recognised that strategic management is essential to sustain its sustainability in a continually changing environment.

In addition, at each stage of a successful strategic planning process and implementation, the adoption of both top-down and bottom-up forms of communication is essential to keep all parties thoroughly informed (Rapert et al., 2002; Forman and Argenti, 2005). A good communication strategy will include the articulation of the purpose and scope of the planning process, explanation of the members' role individually and collectively during and after the planning process, detail the timeframe for the planning and implementation process, and finally provide provision for feedback on the progress of the planning and implementation process. Accordingly, to ensure the effective implementation of any wide change process in the institution, it is essential for the top management to convene a high-performance team of enablers, such as a Strategic Planning Committee (SPC), as a multifunctional committee (Eisenhardt and Martin, 2000). This is because a multifunctional committee (a coaching committee) will be able to practise an effective mode of communication more freely and will be able to allocate responsibilities and share the concept of the collective form of leadership among the members to resolve any conflict in a productive manner (Raelin, 2003, 2010).

Further essential factors for the development of a well-structured planning process are the appropriate allocation of necessary time, workforce and especially the financial resources to optimise its benefit. Shortfalls in any of these three crucial resources will detrimentally undermine the process. However, critics suggest that HEIs are continuously required to analyse and consider the reality of their significant value and cost drivers. This process needs higher education management to possess a thorough understanding of calculating and weighing the costs and value of each programme, each course, each discipline, each separate research study, each student, and each separate service provided to each external related party and the community as a whole. However, it will be time-consuming and not an easy task, because it also requires knowledge and understanding of the relationship between costs and revenue for each cost item in order to underpin the correct strategic decisions (Jarrar et al., 2007).

However, there is no best way for the implementation of the prescribed planning process, including the quality assurance process. Every institution is required to develop its specific planning process, with its unique characteristics tailored to fit the prevailing situation and conditions to elevate the understanding

of its members and increase the overall participation in the strategy process across the institution (Lorange and Vancil, 1976).

The literature review specifies that there are almost no real in-depth publications on the topic of strategic management which also embeds the quality assurance standards within it in higher education in Oman. Accordingly, the existing literature on strategic management and quality assurance standards available at the international level will be adapted to the context of Oman. The lack of publications on the subject was an important incentive for carrying out this study.

2.9 STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT CHALLENGES IN HEIs

Strategic management is recognised to be a complex issue. Similarly, in the College such complexity arises due to a variety of internal and external factors, including but not limited to cultural, leadership, human resources, political and power, and structural (Mintzberg, 1978, Mintzberg et.al.,1998). The political element is concerned with negotiation and compromising of power and authority among internal and external stakeholders of the institution (Porter, 2011). The political and power element requires the College members to appreciate better the formal and informal role of the managers in the process of forming or reforming activities. Bolman and Deal (1997) argued that the notion of politics and power is used to discuss the impact of influence and negotiation of transactions for the limited and scarce resources at the higher education institution among the management, academicians and students, and also outside the institution between the management and stakeholders. Therefore, politics and power play a significant role in the formulation and implementation of strategies in the College. In addition, different policies of the College can also encourage change and help in reducing resistance to implementing the change decisions.

Targeted Training is also considered to be an essential feature of change in the organisation. According to Hinton (2012), the creation of standardised procedures of implementation and the development of training practices for communications about the active processes should result in enhanced implementation. Hinton further observed that having no proper training or by following poor training modes for strategic plan implementation (the same applies for the quality improvement) processes would result in poor internal communications modes, which can prove to be a major obstacle for the successful operation of the quality assurance programme implementation. In particular, poorly defined strategic and quality improvement implementation procedures may create a roadblock. For example, when a member

of staff has completed a particular task, it should be clear to him/her what they should do next, such as following up with other sections, documenting the action, or passing the information to other members (Hinton, 2012). Clarification of operational procedures will assist in avoiding functional stagnation, especially after the approval of the plan. Moreover, according to Wilton (2011) and Porter (2011), over the years, human resources management (HRM) was developed in one of the prime causes of sustainable advantage for organisations; accordingly, HRM is recognised as one of the essential components of successful strategic management.

However, the PESTEL analysis (political, economic, social, technological, environmental, and legal) can be applied to outline external challenges affecting the College strategic management processes. Appendix 8 summarizes the six factors with examples.

According to Johnson et al. (2011), though many PESTEL factors are autonomous, but in reality related. For instance, technology and cyber development, such as commercial dealings B2B (buying and selling), financial dealings (bank transfers) through the internet, and use of Intelligence communication devices, email, and WhatsApp have changed the way of the people life, their living standard, and the way of their work. Thus, any change in these factors, will affects the competitive environment of the organisation. Therefore, it is important for the leaders in HEIs to realise the main driving forces of change and how such change can affect the organization.

2.10 INADEQUACY OF THE AVAILABLE STRATEGIC MODELS IN THIS REGARD

The review of the literature considered two forms of approach to strategic management: the deliberate (rational) approach and the emergent approach. According to the reviewed literature and framework, it is the higher management's responsibility to formulate the strategy by adopting deliberate processes and ensuring the implementation of the formulated strategy using the deliberate methods (Mintzberg et al., 1998). Yet, Mintzberg et al. (1998) as well as Andersen (2000) and Johnson et al. (2009) criticised the deliberate method of strategic management, because this approach supposes that everything remains constant during the process of strategic management, and there are no external issues influencing the process (Johnson et al., 2009). However, the formulation and implementation of strategies in organisations are not always intentional or formal, or deliberate (Stacy, 2012; Johnson et al., 2007). Instead, strategies can emerge as a result of the daily procedures and decision-making processes. Accordingly, the deliberate and emergent approaches to strategy formulation and implementation lead

to limitations, which require consideration. In addition, Floyd and Woodridge (2000) argue that a deliberate method to the strategic approaches, where there are differences between the formulation and implementation of a strategy, is continues to be the central perception of strategic management. According to Hrebiniak and Joyce (2005), strategy implementation mainly occurs with predetermined intents, a concept which is also strongly supported by Mintzberg et al. (1998). This question of intentionality and emergence continued to be unsettled and underscores the need for a more contextual approach to research on the implementation of the strategy (De Wit and Meyer, 2010).

In addition, one of the critical understandings in formulating and implementing a strategy is to consider the formulation of the strategy and its implementation as a formal process from top-down with the use of different sets of monitoring mechanisms (Mintzberg et al., 1998; Van der Maas, 2008). By applying this method, those responsible for the formulation of strategy delegate the implementation process functions in turn to the other members of the organisation. Thus, the senior managers develop a strategic plan and they impose its implementation on the rest of the organisation (Van der Maas, 2008; Dandira, 2011; Andersen, 2000). However, the strategy can also be formulated by applying the bottom-up method (Dandira, 2012). Moreover, Dandira argued that the strategy often arises from initiatives adopted from the middle-level management and its operations in the organisation; in addition, strategic management is more successful when middle-level management and staff are actively involved. Therefore, successful formulation and implementation of the strategic plan should aim at providing support for and invoking enthusiasm from the members all over the institution. This perception can be realised by including those members of the institution who are expected to take part in the strategy implementation process, to actively participate in the formulation process of the strategy (Piderit, 2000; Dandira, 2012). For instance, in HEIs, the strategy formulation is customarily carried-out by top management, such as the council members, Dean, assistants to the Dean, different directors, registrars, department heads, and in some cases also the key stakeholders, whereas rarely do faculty members (lecturers) and academicians (not in management) participate in this process (Hinton, 2012; Paris, 2003).

Moreover, strategic management can be looked at as two ends of the continuum. One end represents the formulation of the strategy that determines how the organisation's plan can be achieved successfully within a given situation. The other end describes the implementation of a strategy that adopts the strategy formulated as provided and agrees about the achievement of its objectives. The implementation of the strategy examines the question of how to implement the formulated strategy over time, the financial and

human resources of the organisation and its competencies. As a result, these two integrated areas of strategic management are responsible for all the organisation's strategic plans and the ways to implement them (Van der Maas, 2008). Van der Maas further stated that there is an intense debate in the literature on strategic management of whether to consider the formulation and implementation of the strategy as related or discrete processes. Various researchers are of the view that the implementation of the strategy is a distinct process after the formulation of the strategy process (Johnson et al., 2009, 2011). According to David (2013), there are extensively supported attitudes towards the overall management mission that splits strategic management into the formulation and implementation of a strategy. This means that overall management starts with the formulation of the strategy by applying sensible processes and then constructing an organisational structure, and designing the different management processes to identify the conduct of the organisation necessary for the realisation of the planned strategy.

2.11 ROLE AND PURPOSE OF QUALITY ASSURANCE IN A HEI

The quality assurance programme is considered as a core part of the strategic management in HEIs. Quality assurance measures can assist in achieving two main resolutions: accountability and improvement. There is an unstable balance between the two recommendations, which often leads to the issue of incompatibility (Campbell & Rozsnyai, 2002; Grifoll & Hopbach, 2012).

Accountability is a summative method. It is one of the central aspects of control, and it takes into account what has been accomplished from the objectives that were identified; accordingly, accountability is associated with information, suitability, security or standards that relate to the level of satisfaction achieved (Middlehurst & Woodhouse, 1995). Accountability procedures are based on criteria established by external bodies (accreditation bodies) and authorities. It is aimed at reinforcing external understanding and control and the prospect of taking external remedial measures if required. Accordingly, quality assurance for accountability means using a summative method. In cases where this approach prevails, the reports contain specific data on the results and are published (Billing, 2004). The aim of making them known is to draw the public's attention to the activities of HEIs (Middlehurst & Woodhouse, 1995). This method is standard in countries like the UK, where there is significant institutional autonomy (Billing, 2004).

An improvement is a formative approach. The improvement procedures relating to quality are aimed at endorsing future results, instead of incurring judgements on previous results. The standards and measures

adopted are designed to reinforce the situations, and to develop the quality improvement process information in HEIs. Improvement actions lead to achieving goals that are primarily in the benefit of the HEI, and also to the definition of quality in accordance with goals and standards that are internal or which can be produced internally (Thune, 1996; Wiklund et al., 2003). Accordingly, quality assurance for improvement entails a formative approach, where controlling is not the primary purpose. Instead, it is the quality improvement. When such a method is applied, the reports aim at an academic audience and centre on making recommendations. This method is mostly implemented in countries where there is substantial state regulation, such as the Ministry of Higher Education and other accreditation bodies (Billing, 2004).

However, most of the literature in the field of quality assurance evaluates the association between the above two quality assurance main objectives of accountability and improvement, regardless of whether they are inconsistent or how they can be balanced. According to Thun (1996), it is always said that accountability and improvement are mutually exclusive, as there is a conflict between the two methods. Nevertheless, there are also other voices which state that accountability and quality improvement can be integrated into a balanced strategy (Thun, 1996; Boyd and Fresen, 2004). According to Middlehurst and Woodhouse (1995) and Harvey (2007), improvement and accountability can be integrated in specific areas, whereas in other cases they can be treated independently of each other. The areas in which they can be related include guidelines that can provide guidance for relevant procedures and practices related to accountability requirements; performance indicators associated with the comparison of best practices between institutions; departments or programs; and research evidence that indicates shortcomings in practice which results to recommendations for improvement. The areas in which improvement can be treated separately from accountability include experimental research; training; and staff development.

Sustainable improvement depends on internal participation. For improvement, it is necessary to explain to the beneficiaries that it is essential to improve and understand the proper application of improvement and to know how to achieve the goals of improvement and appreciate the advantages that will be realised (Middlehurst and Woodhouse, 1995; Wiklund et al., 2003). What this means is that the improvement depends on the individual or collective participation with the anticipated goals and commitment to achieve them. It is assumed that, without a significant motivation for improving quality, the best that can be attained is compliance with external requirements. However, according to Middlehurst and Woodhouse (1995), there is a considerable possibility that compliance can be adopted for the short-term

improvement, but immediately the need for compliance is finished, the desire for improvement diminishes, and most probably old habits are likely to reappear again.

2.12 INTEGRATION OF QUALITY ASSURANCE STANDARDS WITHIN THE HEI's STRATEGIC PLAN

Commonly, institutions develop the processes of strategic management and quality improvement independently, but usually simultaneously, because the processes of strategic management and the processes of quality assurance overlap. Accordingly, the integration of both these administrative processes is crucial (Porter, 1980). Integration of quality assurance into the planning framework occurs from the earliest stages of the planning concept with the broad objective of minimal but effective centralised coordination (Weeks-Kaye, 2004). The framework is a picture of a 'broader situation', rather than a chronological process. In addition to the integration of planning and quality assurance control, the framework emphasises the guiding principles of strategic leadership and providing better prospects for clients.

The integration of quality assurance processes within the strategic management processes is a critical factor in developing a thriving culture of quality. This procedure also requires a continuous assessment of the quality assurance process because of the changing nature of the operations. The integration of quality assurance processes with the strategic management of the institution can be achieved by integrating quality assurance standards within the institution's strategic plans; this is referred to as the institutionalisation of quality assurance processes, and it involves frequent assessments to review the institutional objectives. For institutionalisation of quality assurance processes, higher education institutions need either to adjust the quality assurance standards to match them with their operations (strategic objectives) or to adjust their operations to align them with their quality assurance standards. This process is achieved by integrating quality assurance targets with the College's Key Performance Indicators (KPIs). It should reflect the alignment of the goals, objectives and KPIs with the quality assurance standards set by the College or by aligning the quality assurance standards with the goals, objectives and KPIs established in the College's strategic plan document. According to Drazin and van de Ven (1985), Burton and Obel (2004) and Burton et al. (2008), what this means is that organisations are required to adjust to their direct operational frameworks (contexts). These organisations need to understand the relationship between the subsystems, as well as between the organisation and its

environments. This centres on how organisations can work in different circumstances and the particular conditions to achieve the notion of appropriateness (fit) with the relevant framework (context).

The aim here is to obtain the accreditation status for the higher education institution and its programmes. According to Fitzgerald (2012), securing accreditation will emphasise successful management of the strategic plan. This is because accreditation authorities will ensure that quality assurance standards are applied to all activities and processes of higher education, including strategic planning management activities and operations, and this can only be achieved by adequately embedding quality assurance standards within the institution's strategic plan.

2.13 THE CONCEPT OF EVALUATION

The final stage in the process of strategic management is the evaluation of the strategy. Management should evaluate the strategy, effectiveness and progress of the organisation. The responsibility of management is to preserve and maintain the interests of the stakeholders, determine and control the internal situation, and carefully monitor the external events. Evaluation is an approach for consolidation of learning processes, and a method of compiling previous knowledge (Mark, 2005). Evaluation is an essential concept in the strategic management process; it assesses whether the budget and financial resources were appropriately allocated to the activities and programmes of the organisation (i.e., the higher education institution) to ensure efficiency and effectiveness (Smith, 2006). Therefore, evaluation has become an imperious need because of the growing demand to check the results of the strategy, including the standards of the quality assurance implementation processes.

The principal activities for the evaluation of strategy consist of the assessment of internal and external factors which form the basis of the currently applied strategy, measurement of performance through the use of Performance Indicators (PIs), and implementing remedial actions if required. Moreover, through proper evaluation, it is possible for the institution's management to conclude whether the application of strategy and the processes of its implementation have resulted in the attainment of the objectives which have been set by the institution (Johnson and Scholes, 1998). Typically, a successful evaluation starts by describing the parameters which should be measured, because these standards need to be aligned with the objectives identified in the formulation of strategy and with its implementation processes (Senge, 2006; Scharmer, 2009 cited in Bryson, 2011). Most institutions apply a selected group of key performance indicators (KPIs) (like the institution focused on in this study); such indicators measure whether the

adopted activities resulted in the expected outcomes. Performance indicators usually follow the critical factors of implementation, which include determining the required time for the implementation of the strategy, adequacy of institutional structure, appropriateness of institutional culture, planning of resources, and competency of leadership. In addition, a comprehensive evaluation of the external environmental factors that impact on the institution is needed; moreover, it is also recommended that both qualitative and quantitative indicators are applied (Johnson and Scholes, 1998). Comprehensive knowledge of critical factors should lead to the adoption of multiple indicators, which can be perceived as essential for monitoring and improving the related activities of the strategy, and as important for its effective implementation (Gates, 2010; Bryson, 2011).

However, managers sometimes find the development process and organisation of useful PIs of the organisation to be a difficult task; this is often because the PIs provide a useful but rather limited indication of the overall view of the organisation's performance. Some of the performance indicators are of a quantitative nature. Quantitative indicators are more common and more accessible to develop and use compared with qualitative indicators. They are defined by their association with the quantitative measures and expressed in terms of numerical values. However, numerical values are usually related to the financial aspects of the organisation and, for evaluation purposes, require financial details of the numerous activities, some of which may be inaccessible (Burke, 2002 cited in Chalmers, 2008).

The other performance indicators are classified as a qualitative. Qualitative PIs are linked with the description based on observation, instead of association with selected numerical measures or values. Moreover, qualitative measures also include the indicators of outcomes and processes. These performance indicators usually do not lead to data that can be compared over time or between similar situations; instead, they measure the complex processes and outcomes in terms of quality and effect, and accordingly they may prove to be more suitable for the evaluation purpose (Warglien & Savoia, 2006 cited in Chalmers, 2008). A combination method of quantitative and qualitative KPIs can also be implemented by the use of the Balanced Scorecard (BSC) approach through the application of the weighted average method (Kaplan and Norton, 1996b; Kaplan and Norton, 2007; Kaplan, 2010).

Evaluation is an essential activity because the managers should be sure that their strategic plan is applied efficiently and it is achieving the intended purpose. It also allows strategy leaders to communicate better so that organisational issues/challenges can be resolved before a crisis arises (Dalrymple, 2007).

Therefore, for the evaluation to be operative, it is required to be embedded in the planning processes. Rapid changes in the organisational environment require continuous improvement in the strategic control aspects (Baron, 2012). This process is in line with the quality improvement concept, which suggests the continuation of quality improvement, which allows organisations to respond more actively and promptly to rapid changes in areas that affect the success of their business. Through the evaluation process, the management of the organisation can make decisions about whether to alter or carry on with the vision, goals, objectives (aspirations of the organisation) and implementation methods of the strategy adopted by the organisation (Bryson, 2011). Strategic management is a continuous practice, and not a start and stop event, which, once achieved, can be securely postponed for some time. Therefore, the producers of the strategic plan are invariably responsible for identifying when those activities require strategic responses. Their tasks are to monitor the progression, detect issues and problems at the initial stages, scan the organisation's environments and, if necessary, make alteration or termination decisions (Teece et al., 1997).

A simplified approach to quality valuation is to concisely explain the standards of the quality, establish specific criteria that can be evaluated (KPIs), compare them against the work performed (objective achieved) in the institution and conclude on the achievement of quality for the institution concerned. Unluckily, quality of higher education, as well as the definition of the measurement method, is not a simple task; moreover, the complexity of the process increases, because the range of measured attributes of quality and relative weight is not fixed, but differed depending on the various stakeholders' perceptions, including evaluators (Parri, 2006). Similarly, the evaluation result of the strategic plan may require the adjustment of strategic goals, objectives and KPIs, which in turn may be reflected in the alignments of the quality assurance standards, which may also need in turn to be adjusted. In addition, this will also result in losing the comparability and compatibility of quality assurance standards institutionalised with KPIs through the various phases of the strategic plan. Parri (2006) further argued that in such a situation, the focus will be on the exchange dependencies, but explanations for the alleged causes will be lacking.

2.14 SUMMARY

In this chapter, a critical review of the literature for the study has been provided. It presented an overview of strategic management, including quality assurance, along with the analysis of terms and concepts related to strategy. Conceptual designs of strategic management in the higher education context were obtained from the literature review. Moreover, integration of quality assurance standards within the strategic management processes has been specified from the literature review as well and was discussed in depth.

A thorough investigation of the existing models, concepts and structure of strategic management has revealed the necessity to create a broad and all-inclusive framework for strategic management in HEIs. The literature review informed the study by suggesting that the College is trying to adopt strategic management inclusive paradigm as was determined by Sullivan and Richardson (2011), which focuses on introducing the strategic planning in HEIs and suggests supporting the strategic plan by integrating it with daily activities of the College and continued evaluations. This process is significant for the College, because according to this proposal, it can be recognised that the strategic management of the College is a process that comprises the formulation, implementation and evaluation of the strategy and the integration of quality assurance standards within it

The literature also agrees that the leadership component is essential to the success of planning initiatives. The organisation is more likely to be effectively committed to strategic planning if its leader is effectively committed to strategic planning. The literature review informed the study by suggesting that the leadership or the driving force as described by Mintzberg (1978, Mintzberg et.al.,1998), attempts to achieve a balance between the internal and external environment forces by maintaining the stability of the organisation's operational system and at the same time securing its adaptation to environmental changes. This concept is significant for the College, because as suggested in chapter 1, there is an inappropriateness between the strategic planning process and environment scanning of the College, which can be resolved by a capable smart leadership, the driving force.

Literature also cautions that organisations should not rely on any specific planning process as it may result in missed opportunities. Moreover, Mintzberg (1978) suggested that not all strategies were deliberate; instead, some emerged through a decision-making process, which brought change in the organisation. Accordingly, strategy planners should be aware of the emerging strategies and should be willing to accept

the challenges in planning a strategy and be able to assess the opportunities and threats that may arise, even if they had not been anticipated during the deliberate strategic planning process. Moreover, there is an intense debate in the literature of whether to treat the formulation and implementation of the strategy as a continuous or discrete process (Van der Maas, 2008). In the case of the College, the literature review informed the study that the formulation and implementation of the strategy, including the emerged strategies, should be considered as a continuous process. This process is significant for the College because the dichotomy between the formulation and implementation of the strategy is proving to be the major challenge that the College members are facing in the implementation process of its strategic plan.

Most of the strategy literature confirms that constant changes in organisations' environments have encouraged them to consider the environmental scanning process as a significant component of their strategic planning processes. The literature review informed the study by suggesting to assess the College's internal environmental scanning by considering cultural, leadership, political, structural and HR factors, and the external environmental challenges through the consideration of SWOT analysis and the PESTEL acronym.

The literature also suggests that the integration of quality assurance into the planning framework occurs from the earliest stages of the planning concept with the broad objective and the effective centralised coordination (Weeks-Kaye, 2004). The quality assurance programme is a crucial part of HEIs strategic management and is a form of the strategic change process (Gioia and Chittipeddi, 1991). Moreover, the literature review informed the study, which proposes that the integration of quality assurance processes into the College's Strategic Plan can be achieved, by aligning strategic objectives and performance indicators (PIs) with the quality standards of the accreditation body. This process is also referred to as the institutionalisation of quality assurance objectives. Such integration is significant for the College, because the OAAA, as an accreditation agency, has explicitly emphasised the formulation of strategic plans for the HEIs operating in the country, in which quality improvement processes must be clearly identified and incorporated into the framework of their operations.

The evaluation is an essential activity, because managers must be confident that their strategic plan is being applied effectively and that it is achieving its goal. It also allows strategy leaders to communicate better to resolve challenges before a crisis occurs (Dalrymple, 2007). Thus, for the evaluation to be

operational, it is significant for the College to include it in the planning process. Rapid changes in the organisational environment require continuous improvement in aspects of strategic control (Baron, 2012). Literature review informed the study in a sense that this process is consistent with the concept of continuous quality improvement, which is significant for the College to respond more actively and promptly to rapid changes in areas that affect the success of its business. Moreover, this concept informs the use of the Balanced Scorecard (BSC) approach as a useful tool for the strategic evaluation (Kaplan and Norton, 1996b; Kaplan and Norton, 2007; Kaplan, 2010).

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

3.0 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the adopted methodology of the research enquiry. According to Saunders et al. (2007, p. 602), a methodology is “The theory of how research should be undertaken, including the theoretical and philosophical assumptions upon which research is based and the implications of these for the method or methods adopted”. This study followed the AR methodology in a HEI. AR in education is considered to be a favourable choice for all stakeholders in the field of education and training including the academicians and administrators (Mills, 2011). In particular, the study of action research in higher education is a process of studying a situation that can help to appreciate and enhance the quality of the educational process (Johnson, 2012; McTaggart, 1997). AR is used as a tool for the enhancement of professional activities (Johnson, 2012). To achieve this, for example, in this study at the initial stage of investigation I used the methodological and theoretical components underlying the practice of AR to help me as a practitioner to understand and observe what is happening in the College regarding strategic planning management processes. Action research has also encouraged me to become an incessant learner to improve my professional level in the field (Mills, 2011).

This chapter starts by discussing the research perspectives and philosophy of the study. It is followed by the research design, which explains the plan for data collection in this study. Also included in this chapter is a discussion about the process involved in data collection as to precisely how participants were selected, and on what basis, in addition to the issues of validity, reliability, rigour, generalisability, ethical issues, and the template analysis method which I applied to the research data. The process involved in the data collection and data analysis is continued and further explained in detail in the next chapter, which analyses the data collected.

3.1 POSITIONING THE RESEARCH ENQUIRY METHOD

According to Coughlan and Coughlan (2002), there are different research study methods – including the action research study method – in social science that provide a powerful device for the analysis of social theory. However, action research studies differ from other forms of research studies when dealing with the improvement of an organisational system and its processes. Quoss et al. (2000, p. 51) describe AR as

a "post-modern method of investigation", and Grbich (1999, p. 211) describes the type of "post-modern action research" that will stress the search for truth, but seeks for methods through which knowledge can be produced by groups possessing power, from which it benefits. Consequently, inherent power structures within and between groups and organisations can be considered and identified for their restructuring and transformation. The primary goal of this action-based research is to lead to a change in particular circumstances, in local systems and in real conditions intending to solve a real problem (the main question of the study (Q)). Per se, it is connected with the context that those within the boundaries participate and cooperate, which demonstrates the critical distinction with post-modernism and traditional research.

According to Whitehead (1989, 2011), the study of AR comprises self-study, because the researcher-practitioner studies his/her practice. Whitehead believes in an AR approach, which he refers to as 'a living educational theory' approach. Whitehead views education as a valuable activity and suggests that values represent those qualities that provide sense and persistence to our personal and professional life. He recommends that by asking such questions as "How can I improve what I do?" practitioners can develop their own theory, which embodies their scholastic standards in their action. Accordingly, applying a 'living educational theory' approach in action research helped me as a researcher to improve what I am doing, and to explain my own learning and my influences on the learning of social formations (the College members).

3.2 POSITIONING THE RESEARCHER

To produce local theories for action, I believe that ontology and epistemology are very closely tied up in the self-study type of research. The study can be viewed not as an abstract, but as interaction with others. As a scholar and practitioner in higher education, I believe that the research participants and I combine knowledge, and this is the process of creating knowledge (i.e., producing local theories) (Schön, 1983 cited in Etherington, 2004). For studying different reality concepts, I believe that reality is built in cooperation with my research participants and that I set up values in association with others. This concept is essential for the methodology of this study because I do not perceive knowledge as a static quantum but as a continuous action. In other words, social reality is built by interacting with others, and therefore the exchange of the observer with the observed, and broader results of these exchanges over these links are an essential element in this type of study. Bertrand (1998) claims that uncertainty and enquiry are the

primary sources that lead to knowledge: "Knowledge is an awareness, a sensitivity to life, to things that cannot be known, to uncertainty" (p. 117). Bertrand considers that we should depend on our imagination otherwise we would risk observing the real world as it is presented to us by outside sources, like textual and visual media. I believe that educational studies lead to enhancing education activities and simultaneously promoting knowledge. My view on educational research is that it is about improving education and, at the same time, promoting knowledge. Instead of working with the notion of a generalisation of theory, I try to implement the notion of a theory that works in practice, and it explains and activates the exchanges between people in the transformation of social contexts.

However, to consider how I can improve my practice, I need to review my assumptions concerning the nature of the world or reality. This study has taken an epistemological position which is based on an 'interpretive paradigm'. This epistemological stance corresponds with the aims of the study, which explores the strategic management process of the College based on the experience of its members. The understanding of the strategic management process of this study is achieved by exploring the perspectives of the participants in the study. It is essential that the subjective reality of the participants is understood to make sense of their behaviour, motives, actions and intentions in a meaningful way.

3.3 THE INTERPRETIVIST PERSPECTIVE

In interpretive studies, one can oppose positivist enquiries; interpretive studies do not apply standardised research methodologies. Interpretative research covers such areas as phenomenology, ethnography and hermeneutics (Lor, 2011). The assumption underlying the epistemology corresponding to this type of research school is that every action of a human being is meaningful and should be interpreted and assumed in the context of social practices (Usher, 1996). To understand the meaning of the social world, I need to comprehend the implications that are formed by interactive social behaviour. Human action can be elucidated by purpose through an interpretive framework. Within the interpretive structure, the researcher attempts to understand what he/she is exploring. Such process is referred to as 'double hermeneutic' in that, when carrying out social studies, both the subject (researcher) and the object (participants of the study) have the same characteristics as interpretivists or searchers for meaning. Accordingly, the ontological prerequisites of interpretivism lie in the fact that social reality is viewed by several people, and these plural people interpret events in different ways, leading to various perspectives of the incident. Cohen et al. (2007) argued that the excelling action of the practitioners in the interpretivist

paradigm lies in understanding, explaining and demystifying social realism from the point of view of different participants. Researchers in the interpretivist paradigm tend towards understanding, not explaining. Overall, this suggests that interpretive studies are not looking for scientific verification procedures, and consequently it may not be possible to generalise the outcomes of the research in other situations.

It can be noticed from the above that the interpretive perspective generally matches the AR studies attitude because interpretism continues to maintain a subjective position and its paradigm methodologies interfere with research settings deliberately to effect change or improvement, as its goal is to produce local theories for action, not necessarily generalised results. Accordingly, I collectively discussed with the participants of the study how problems can be problematised and solved in a collective productive manner and why and how their actions, genuine participation, will help to achieve the overall purpose of the study. Therefore, the resolution of the main question (Q) can be reached from the multiple participants' perspectives, which will help to produce transformational knowledge.

3.4 A CASE FOR REFLEXIVITY

The work of reflexivity is carried out through observation and reflection, as well as through collaboration with colleagues (Bridges, 2014). We are observing in and on the action; we retreat to ponder, and we again come to the action. This notion is a basic form of reflexivity, which is considered to be useful. Reflection in standard terms indicates the thinking about the circumstances of what the research is trying to accomplish; it is an investigation about the methods through which the theoretical, cultural and political perspective of individual participation and logical perspective influences the interaction with what is being explored (Alvesson and Skoldberg, 2000). According to Symon and Cassell (2004), a qualitative study approach can be enhanced through the application of a reflexivity process, which can be achieved by evaluating the methodological process in a critical manner, recognising and reflecting on our epistemological obligations, and acknowledging the impact of our experience on our understanding which we are trying to develop. This process defines the idea, assuming that we are incessantly building concepts when interrelating in a social context (Cunliffe, 2003). The concepts of ontology and epistemology are closely related, where it is not possible to overlook the cultural or disregard our past knowledge that shapes our action.

As can be seen, through this study I am conducting an IAR. To establish academic rigour, when one investigates one's own backyard this creates its own specific opportunities and challenges (Alvesson, 2003; Brannick & Coughlan, 2007). For instance, according to Cooper and Rogers (2014, paragraph 2.1) in a sociological concept, the role of the 'insider' is an influential reflective position, which can be applied to achieve better understanding of and deeply engage with the participants' experiences as a natural part of qualitative research, although Cooper and Rogers accept that 'making the private-public' can sometimes lead to a certain amount of disorder and uneasiness (paragraph 2.5). Nevertheless, I can respond to these challenges and opportunities through the reflection of my experience in the field. I first considered the impact on the design of the study to position myself as a researcher (prospective reflexivity). For that, I discussed the influence of factors such as my professional history, mutual relations and the desire to determine the sustainable competitive advantages for the College in choosing a subject. The resultant outcomes of such considerations have led to the formulation of the research question, the development of a research project, the choice of methods for data collection, and selecting the suitable way of presenting my research and reporting my findings. Moreover, I considered the meaning of the mutual relationship between the research and the researcher and between the researcher and the participants of the research, which is particularly essential to the process of study in determining measures of confidence in realistic studies; such procedures "can come close to the rigour that is required of good qualitative research" (Etherington, 2004, p. 32). Accordingly, I was able to assess the subject of research rigorously from all aspects, which has resulted in closing the gap between myself, as a researcher, and the subject of the research, as well as between the knowledgeable and known. After that, I focused on fieldwork with its built-in processes of attempts and experiences and examining the results for myself. I was able to step back to reflect and to step forward to become more active in the persistent transformation processes, thus personifying the approach of the researcher. During these persistent stages of attempts and experiencing, I never reverted to the same point. Instead, such actions added new meaning to the field events and helped me delve deeper into my growing research practice (retrospective reflexivity). This ability to act reflexively has allowed me to develop the theory of my practice. Schon (1983 cited in Etherington, 2004) in his study 'Reflexive Practitioner' argued that we construct theories when we reflect on our practice founded on knowledge derived from our prior action and our earlier experience. For that, we need to appreciate the internal and external powers that lead us to the actions that we adopt, and how we understand such expertise.

According to Etherington (2004), to improve the reliability of the study's results, it is essential that our interpretations are well appreciated and validated by readers who have been informed about the position we take in connection with the study and context, because reflexivity can add credibility and rigour to our research by giving information on the context in which the data is located.

3.5 QUALITATIVE RESEARCH METHOD

According to Flick (2014), to produce a thick texture and to have a thorough insight and understanding of the social phenomenon or events, social sciences research, especially the case study, generally follows the qualitative research method approach. In particular, if the research project is conducted with the aim of understanding a concept or phenomenon on which little information exists, then the research study will suit the qualitative research approach (Creswell, 2009). Accordingly, this research project fits more with the qualitative method approach, because I was interested in capturing, assessing and becoming acquainted with the feelings and experiences of the participants. Moreover, as was mentioned in the introductory chapter, very little research has been conducted on strategy and quality improvement in higher education in Oman and the Gulf States in general and specifically with regard to matching the fit between the quality standards of the accreditation authority and the environmental variables (such as goals, objectives and PIs) of the environment (the College) in which these standards are to be implemented. In addition, exploring the how, what and why of the strategic plan and quality improvement applications also justifies a qualitative method approach.

Qualitative data collects information in the form of written or visual images and reports the results in the way of words. Thus, qualitative data collection is not just conversations, records or observations. Strict collection and analysis of words and figures collected as evidence on the topic strengthens the position of higher education researchers in creating convincing knowledge of how to improve the practice of education. Qualitative data, when carefully analysed, assisted me as a researcher to discover, expose and take into account the complexities that may arise in the researched study. Qualitative data can be extracted in depth, and it complements the conclusions made by the AR practitioners. Data collection and analysis tools are applied when practitioners attempt to deeply understand the circumstances and recognise the human motivations associated with them. This data is especially informative for answering questions of:

The meaning of situations, as different people have different perceptions of the concept of meaning, as it is subjective and different, contingent on their knowledge about the circumstances. The question of meaning is related to the fact that most types of enquiries will lead to biases of both the people who ask questions and those who answer;

Context as it influences understanding. For the personal meaning, I try to understand things like cultural background, gender and age or, for the community context, I try to understand things such as changing demographics and changing economic conditions;

Consideration of the process: for the AR conclusions to be transferred to other contexts, it was necessary to understand and report on the background as well as actions that led to the situation.

Moreover, reporting on the success or failure of the programme in the College requires an understanding of both stages of the planning and the implementation of the study;

The cause-effect relationships, where understanding complex situations that motivate people to act is crucial to understand the cultural and social mechanisms that shape the fabric of life in society or the College. The study of cause-effect relationships involves a strong chain of reasoning with a broad variety of views, collected and analysed for each relation in the chain (Maxwell, 1996).

However, the collection of qualitative evidence is subject to the biases of the persons concerned, both in collecting and in the provision of evidence. Researchers may have a preliminary idea of the evidence that they can obtain. But, unconsciously they may impose questions formulated in such a way as to increase the probabilities to respond to them as projected. Similarly, a respondent also can have a bias against researchers or their subject matter, and may not wish to disclose personal thoughts or emotions. This situation can arise when it comes to problems of power, especially when sensitive feelings or cultural values related to the topic under study are discussed. Accordingly, researchers in AR should seek to overcome such biases. As was suggested earlier, the collection of qualitative data goes beyond simple conversation, recording or observation. Similarly, the understanding that can be obtained from the collected data goes beyond simple thinking. Qualitative analysis of the data requires the separation of data (words or images) in a way that every part can be analysed and rearranged, where subsequently, by sufficiently accumulating these parts, a different and better understanding may arise.

3.6 ACTION RESEARCH AS A METHOD OF ENQUIRY

Various courses of action for the study of AR are accessible to higher education professionals who desire to undertake this type of the study methodology. For example, the study of AR has been described as a 'spiral', a cyclic process (Lewin, 1952; Kemmis, 1988), as a 'cycle' of research (Calhoun, 1994; Wells, 1994) and as a twirl or helix consisting of 'observation, action, and thinking' stages (Stringer, 2004). However, for this study, my presentation of action research will be based on Zuber-Skerritt and Perry's (2002, p. 175) approach, because my research is involving both core and a thesis AR cycle, as shown in Figure 3.1 below.

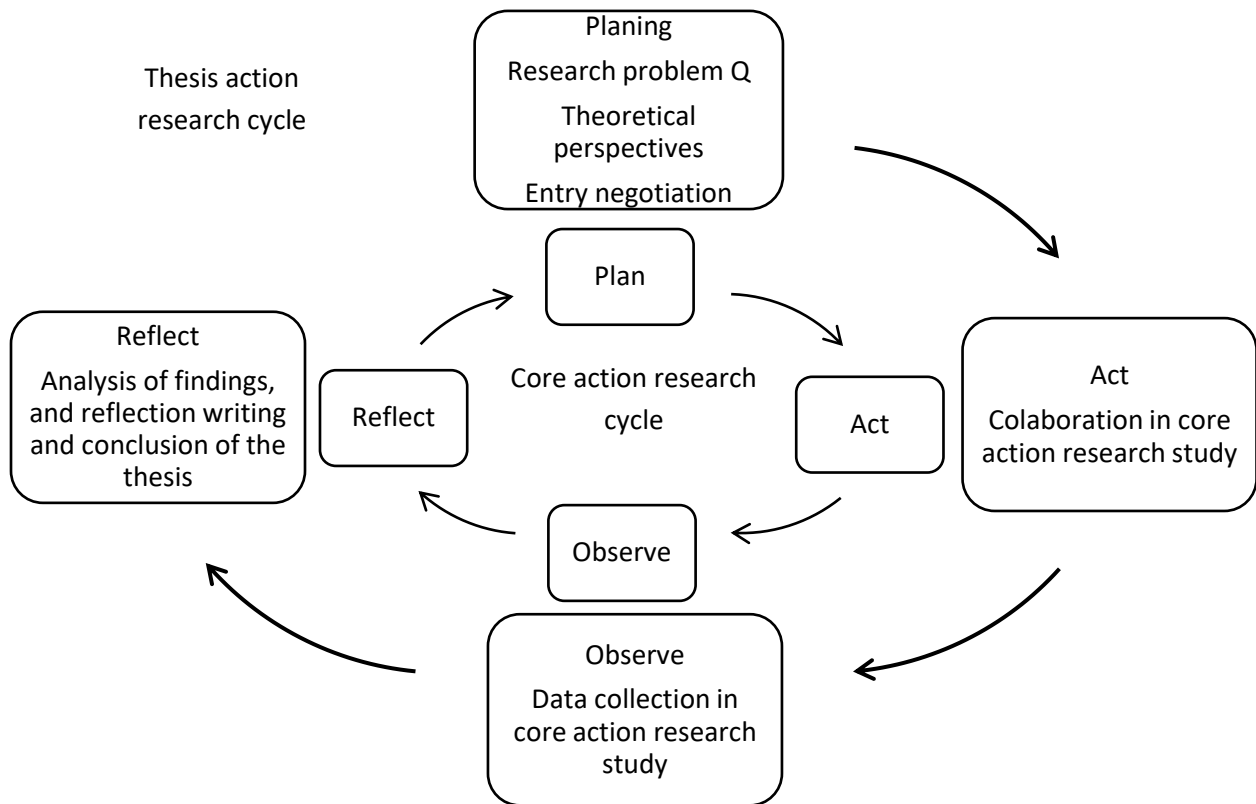


Figure 3.1 Action research project for a thesis or dissertation. Source: Zuber-Skerritt and Perry (2002, p. 175)

In the planning stage, a kind of action plan was formulated to resolve the main research question (Q); theoretical perspectives were also considered, and, by assessing social relationships and deciding on the practices to be used, a collaborative relationship was negotiated with the participants. In the planning stage, it was crucial for me first to precisely determine what I would like to study. During my dealings with the process of strategic management on a daily basis, it has become apparent to me that strategic planning is an organisational change process and to facilitate this change specific practices needed to be improved (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003). To conduct an AR study, I approached the higher management of the College for approval, which was granted. Moreover, before undertaking this research study, I reviewed the literature on strategic planning and quality assurance. The final step in the planning stage was to identify the main research question (Q), which this AR study will attempt to answer; accordingly, every part of this AR study will be facilitated to find an answer to this main question of the research (Mertler & Charles, 2011).

In the action stage, the plan was implemented by exercising flexibility and discernment practice to allow for collaboration. However, sometimes a return to the planning stage may be required if it is not possible to implement the planned actions as proposed. For the action stage, I have developed an action plan for the specific approach that I have pursued. An action plan is a form of proposed strategy to conduct a prospective study, which must be monitored, assessed and revised; thus, preserving the cyclical way of action research (Creswell, 2005). In addition, I gathered as much information on the topic as possible; I thoroughly studied the College's general strategic plan and strategic marketing plan to look for concepts and suggestions that may inform the topic. This process has necessitated reflecting on my own beliefs to achieve a better appreciation of the nature and context of the research's main question (Q). Researchers in AR are strongly advised not to rely on their collective memory for immediate application of results (Mills, 2011).

Inspection and observation of the results supplemented the action. A number of data collection techniques were applied, such as collecting documents, observations, keeping diaries and using interviews, as well as collecting secondary data. Zuber-Skerritt, Kearney and Fletcher (2015) argued that observing the participants means that the researcher is not objective, like an external observer (with a set of pre-defined interview questions), but openly participates in the social world in which s/he participated, though s/he is led by a theoretical basis (framework), but the research itself is open and flexible. Values and interpretations develop through the perceptions of the stakeholders in the institutional setting. For

this study, observation of the participants may be classified as one-to-one observation and one-to-many observation. One-to-one or individual observation relates to the precise observation of one individual. One-to-many observation relates to the general observation of more than one individual at the same time. The understanding gained from the observation of participants was supported and accompanied by discussions with participants, individual interviews and the search for feedback from the participants, where the illuminative assessment was conducted. According to Zuber-Skerritt (2011), the illumination evaluation attempts to describe, interpret, inform and illuminate, rather than measure and predict, and tries to establish a link between the learning environment and the intellectual experience of the participants. The insight obtained from the above methodologies was evaluated continuously and used as a final evaluation in the study process. Observation has formed the basis for the reflection stage of the AR cycle.

The final phase of the AR cycle is a reflection, where the researcher (and participants) will analyse, synthesise, interpret, explain and draw conclusions on the work that has been accomplished so far and decide on the possible way forward (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988). In the process of data collection and data analysis, I have maintained a reflective diary consisting of my previous personal views and insights, separated by topics. Topics (in the diary) were then scrutinised based on the outcomes projected to arise from the template analysis. Following such an activity has assisted me to confirm that evidence is not acquired from biased questioning or misinterpretation of the information context. In addition, when outcomes and analysis were included in the expected conclusions, I reflected on each of these outcomes, and linked them with the topics in the reflexive diary. Further consideration was given to outcomes similar to those indicated in the diary. Such a process has helped me to confirm that these are not my preconceived interpretations and were the interviewees' perspectives. Based on the achieved results, another cycle of planning, action, observation and reflection was activated. Template analysis coding is included in the data analysis and discussion in Chapter 4.

3.7 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS AND ACTION RESEARCH

Action research inclines more towards systematic data collection, self-reflection and documentation as it presents its results to the broader audience (cooperation, reporting and presentation). It is this last factor, presentation to the more general audience, which quite often results in researchers facing ethical issues, because, in action research, we work in collaboration rather than working in isolation. This concept results

in the work being shared with other colleagues, which in turn leads to raising the issue of ownership and responsibility; therefore, ethical considerations must be strictly applied in the practice of participatory action research studies.

The main ethical principles of higher education institutions' ethics policy in research are the beneficial influence and recognition and non-ignorance (Doyle, Mullins, and Cunningham, 2010). As described in section 1.1, this study targets the scholars and practitioners in the College who can benefit from its processes and results, particularly the participants of the research. Therefore, efforts have also been made to avoid any possible harmful actions towards the participants, such as declaration about the interviewees' identity or bargaining with them to reveal sensitive institutional information, which they do not want to disclose. All data collected has been treated anonymously and confidentially. It was strictly adhered to that the research participants should not be harmed by the research in any way. This situation was a major reason in deciding to abandon the more common longitudinal research method. Their full right to personal autonomy was also clarified to the interviewees, and their prior consent to the interview was obtained. Participants were told very clearly before the interviews were conducted, and also they were reminded after the interviews were finished, that they can refrain from engaging in any part or process of the study if they so wish. Each interviewee was provided with a transcript of their interview to make any changes before all the transcripts were codified, to respect their interests, feelings and dignity. However, I do recognise that it is impossible to ascertain all possible ethical issues or to judge the correct behaviour of the research (Cohen et al., 2000). Therefore, it was important to continually check the code of practice with my feeling of rightness. In addition, researchers should be particularly sensitive in the study of action research (Cohen et al., 2000). Accordingly, I have attempted to develop a spontaneous sensitivity during the process of the study, particularly during the observation and communication with the participants. Though I provided the participants with the ethical consideration sheet, I also explicitly discussed with them about my dual role in the research process, of my being both a researcher and in charge of the College's strategic planning implementation, and that such a position does not impose any obligation on them towards or from the College. Moreover, they were treated as co-producers of the study, which in turn will help us to improve the College's strategic management processes collectively.

3.8 THE VALIDITY OF THE STUDY

As far as this study is concerned, approval for the use of data concerning the strategic planning and quality assurance and interviews with the senior management members was obtained from the higher management of the College, and the interview questions were validated by the quality assurance unit. This process also enhances the validity of the study. As a matter of fact, educational research always faces the problem of validity, which is usually viewed from the point of view of internal validity and external validity. The study has internal validity if the result of the investigation is a function of the programme or approach being tested, rather than the result of other purposes not systematically considered during the research process, whereas the study also has external validity if the outcomes of the research can also be applied in similar situations and conditions in other institutions (Tuckman, 1978). McMillan and Schumacher (2001) indicate that validity relates to the extent to which clarifications of events correspond to the realities of the setting and that the validity concept in qualitative research is concerned with both internal 'accidental conclusions' and external 'generalisability' validity, as well as subjects of objectivity and reliability. In addition, McMillan and Schumacher note that the validity of qualitative projects relies on the extent to which participants and the researcher have reciprocal meanings of interpretations and concepts of the research. They added further that statements about validity in qualitative research are based on data collection and analysis methods; moreover, qualitative researchers apply combinations of strategies to improve validity. Strategies to enhance design validity in the present study were achieved through prolonged and persistent fieldwork through the interviews' data analysis, which was performed during each of the action research cycles.

Moreover, I also used different methods during data analysis to improve the validity of the study results. Cohen et al. (2000), MacMillan and Schumacher (2001), and Yin (2009) and other authors have suggested applying triangulation during data analysis as a strategy to increase the trustworthiness and validity of study results. In this study, data triangulation was achieved by collecting data at different times and from various sources in the same study (Patton, 2002). In this case, the data was collected from individual respondents at different times: first from top management, then from the senior executives, and then from the primary stakeholders and, finally, there was a further reiterative cycle of data collection from the top management through the discussion of the prior three cycles of the data collection and analysis. The data was also collected from different sources through interviews, using a reflective diary and archival documents. All interview records were carefully reviewed to ensure the capture of all essential data. Consultations were conducted after the interviews, where interviewees were contacted for further clarification or additional information. This process provided an increased level of accuracy for the

collected data. Nevertheless, it should be borne in mind that this study follows the interpretivist perspective, which is not necessarily aiming to generalise the study results.

3.9 SUMMARY

AR is one of the forms of research for practitioners in which there is a professional intention to intervene to enhance practices by rational, fair and concrete values of the situation, and not mainly to generate knowledge. The generation and use of knowledge are subject to this conditional goal (Eliot, 1991, p. 49). Zuber-Skeret (2011) notes that AR provides an approach to expanding knowledge and a method to enhance the teaching and learning process in HEIs. Whitehead (2011) suggests that AR includes self-study because the researcher is also a practitioner who studies his/her practice. However, he does not believe that self-study on its own essentially includes procedural research. You can learn on your own without aiming on the improvement of your practice. The focus of this study is on self-learning and improving my practice as part of an action research method, which follows the interpretive research approach. Interpretive research covers areas such as phenomena, ethnography and interpretation. The proposition underlying the epistemology related to this school of research is that all actions emitted by humankind are meaningful and should be interpreted and comprehended in the context of social applications (Osher, 1996). The interpretive research approach inclines towards the qualitative research method. A common characteristic of qualitative research is its ability to produce data which is often rich and extensive. The way a researcher proceeds from this bulk of data to understand the experience of the participants in the study depends on the choice of the method of data analysis. In qualitative studies, there is not one 'best' method for analysing data, and the choice concerning analysis is determined by the broad theoretical assumptions underlying the work and the very issue of the study. The method selected for data analysis in the study was through the use of template analysis. In general, the template analysis method provides a distinct, systematic and flexible style for analysing data in a qualitative study. Data collection and data analysis – template analysis are thoroughly explained in the next chapter 4. The coding structure in template analysis is also known to be flexible, which helps the researcher to explore the richest aspects of data at real depth, which requires him/her to adopt a reflexivity practice throughout the process of the research. Reflexivity of the researcher is the ability to recognise that their experience and contexts (which can be subject to constant change) are in-line with processes and the results of the research. Through the use of reflexivity, researchers can bridge the gap between the researcher and the subject of the research, as well as between the knowledgeable and known (Etherington, 2004).

CHAPTER 4

DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSES

4.0 INTRODUCTION

In an action research study, data collection and analysis forms a vital factor in the realisation of the study objectives. This chapter offers detailed analysis and discussion of qualitative data collected from documents and archival reports, interviews, and my observation and reflections during the process of the research in order to answer the main study question (Q): How can the College best formulate and implement its strategy and integrate quality assurance standards within it to achieve sustainable competitive advantages? Additionally, to boost the reliability, transparency and integrity of results and interpretations and conclusions, a discussion of the results is also presented. A broadly bounded question can form the source for preliminary and evolving sub-questions. This main question (Q) of the study allowed me as a researcher to grasp the main objectives of the study in one major question (Janesick, 2000). A well-defined overarching question helped me in the design of the study and collection of data and offered the possibility of new, more defined questions arising during collection and analysis of data. Moreover, this overarching question has also helped me to develop the theoretical framework that frames the study.

The chapter will begin by outlining to the reader how data sets were developed and how I approached each category's interview process for data collection. For the data analysis purpose, I will explain the use of the thematic template analysis of King's (2004) approach and how it helped me to structure and present the findings from the collected data. In this chapter, I will also outline the themes that were developed from the interviews. The themes were set up into four main areas in the following order: the formulation of the College strategy, implementation of the College strategy, integration of quality assurance processes within the strategic plan of the College, and evaluation of the College strategy.

4.1 BACKGROUND OF THE CASE INSTITUTION

Originally, the College was established as a higher education institution. It originated as a training institute that focused only on finance; its prime role was the enhancement of the participation of Omani nationals in the financial sector as a profession and this has allowed it to diversify into the different areas of financial services including the training. This diversification has resulted in a focus on efforts to improve the quality

of its offerings through the development of international affiliations to offer diverse academic and professional qualifications and executive training programmes to satisfy the market needs. In order to launch itself to the next level of growth trajectory, the Institute was converted to its current status as the College. The College has a long history of over 35 years during which it elevated itself from a training institute with limited scope to become a well-established academic institution offering well-established and internationally recognised programmes. The College has expanded its programme portfolio and its student intake capacity; including the executive training programmes, there were approximately 4,000 students in the College during the year 2017, with a strong presence in professional studies, undergraduate and postgraduate degree programmes. The College's long-term strategy is to become a leading institution of Financial Studies in the region. However, challenges have been experienced, which were limiting the scope of the implementation of its newly formulated strategic plan, and which were causing concern to the higher management.

Moreover, for the enhancement of the quality of their programmes and improved educational effectiveness, the College, like any other higher educational institution in the country, is required to identify its educational processes by the current established quality standards set out by the Oman Academic Accreditation Authority (OAAA). The OAAA divides the process of accreditation for HEIs into two levels. Level one mainly involves the process of quality audit, which emphasises the assessment of the formative processes that are related to quality improvement standards and internal practices implemented by HEIs. The second level of the accreditation process is principally associated with the operation of summative assessment and generally occurs four years from the formative assessment process related to the quality audit process. The summative assessment process assesses the higher education institution's performance in relation to the standards established by the OAAA for educational quality to confirm their implementation as prescribed.

Accordingly, to align its educational processes with the OAAA quality audit (formative process) standards, and to improve the quality practices, the College was required to implement the common standards identified by the OAAA in accordance with its mission and vision as defined in its strategic plan and in the context of its adopted rules and prevailing legal regulations. Therefore, it has been one of the main reasons why the College now places considerable importance on strategic planning. The OAAA, as an accreditation agency, has clear perceptions and specific standards about strategic planning. Accordingly, HEIs are required to review and update their strategic plans, and to implement and monitor such plans

accurately. Thus, the College was required to define more precisely the different measures about strategic plans and quality improvement indicators, rather than merely attempting to attach values to the strategies to obtain accreditation. For the development of a quality assurance programme, its implementation and its assessment were perceived by the College as a prime objective while working towards the implementation of its strategy to obtain the accredited status. Therefore, it was expected that the College would develop appropriate implementation processes, which should allow it to convert strategy into tactical and operational plans throughout its campus. For a proper implementation process, the College is also required to make sure that a systematic and frequent evaluation of its strategic plans takes place in order to assess its practices against the objectives that have been identified in advance. The final strategy documents should also contain information on the alignment of the institution's objectives and identified KPIs with the activity fields defined by the OAAA. In addition, subsequent amendments to the plan can be made whenever necessary to ensure the sustainability of the College. To this end, the College was also required to identify clear quality improvement processes and to incorporate them within the framework of its operations. However, the College was faced with some difficult challenges in general during the strategic management process, and this is causing real concern to the management on a large scale. Therefore, it was hoped that this study would result in providing actionable knowledge for overcoming these challenges and achieving competitive, sustainable advantages for the College.

4.2 ACTION RESEARCH AS A PROCESS OF DEVELOPING CHANGE

It can be claimed that action research shares various aspects of postmodernism in its fundamental principles, as its methods exceed the limits of the traditional research paradigm (Rolfe, 1996). Action researchers act for a specific purpose, aimed at promoting democracy and emancipation, acknowledging that there is an imbalanced dissemination of power and wealth in general (Brown and Jones, 2001). Berg (2001, p. 281) argues that in the "later modernism" historical era, action research may perhaps be a suitable means of increasing social integrity in local conditions. This action research study is not trying to discover the common laws through which I can measure human behaviour. Instead, it tries to stress raising awareness, empowering, working collaboratively for myself as a practitioner, and becoming an action researcher (Hart and Bond, 1995, p. 21). This study also adopts a qualitative research methodology.

Qualitative data analysis can be described as a process that allows participants to understand the interpretations, views and circumstances consistent with the templates, themes, classifications and

regular resemblances (Cohen et al., 2007). Researchers in qualitative research use the data collected to build an interpretive narrative and attempt to acquaint themselves with the complexity of the phenomenon under study. Scott and Asher (2011) argue that a typical qualitative analytical approach can include structuring and coding data. The structuring and coding of data underlies the key research results and can be used to generate data for testing, clarifying or confirming the established theories, applying the theories in different situations or using data to create new theories or models, or, as is the case in this study, development of a suitable measuring tool like template analysis. During the coding, data composition is distributed into sections, and these sections are allotted codes that relate to the analytical topics that have been established and which are consistently applied during the analysis period and the data range. The initial coding performed represents an initial step of data analysis, which is useful in and of itself, and it serves the preliminary stage in the data analysis process to conduct further progressive analysis at advanced levels (Punch, 2009).

Therefore, it can be concluded that structuring and coding mean the analytical process for developing of data; for example, data acquired from semi-structured interviews on related topics can be based on codes and structures to form a logical basis. Moreover, they can also be derived from the participants' language. The synthesis of discipline and rigour of qualitative analysis is contingent on the presentation of concrete descriptive data in such a manner that others who read the outcome of the study are able to comprehend it and form their own interpretations. The process of coding for this study was through the use of King's (2004) template analysis tool. Moreover, to collect essential themes that arose from the data, a line-by-line text analysis was performed. Consideration of this kind is crucial to obtain rich perceptions from the participants (Charmaz, 1990). Themes in the study were developed in accordance with the research questions. Accordingly, I was selective in their development, since not all the data collected responded to the main research question (Q). However, in this study, to improve the themes, I selected data that can provide a rich and broad explanations and allow to use the keywords within their appropriate context. Qualitative data were collected over four phases or cycles of the study, as explained below.

Accordingly, I collectively discussed with the participants of the study how problems could be problematised and solved in a collective productive manner. Moreover, I also consulted with them about why and how their actual, genuine participation would help to achieve the overall purpose of the study, so the resolution of the main research question (Q) can be reached from multiple participant perspectives, which will help to produce transformational knowledge.

4.3 STUDY CYCLE

In this study, the main research question (Q) and sub-questions in the theoretical framework section of the literature review in Chapter 2 were applied as directories for recording the codes, as they arose from different analytical refinements of the data (Krippendorff and Bock, 2008). In the analysis of qualitative data, coding is considered to be an essential aspect, as it assists in visualising data in meaningful topics and sub-topics. The coding process consisted of constant comparison and a theoretical sample for the analyses of the relevant data, emergence of new theoretical structures and achievement saturation of coding and classification. This process has resulted in the development of an initial template consisting of 19 codes identified under five main headings, as presented in Appendix 3.

Within the framework of the second phase of this work, the template analysis was used to clarify the specific components of strategic plan management and quality assurance that were of intellectual and practical significance for participants. At this point of the study, semi-structured interviews were held (the first cycle of the study) with three participants (members of the College's higher management), who had all taken part in the strategic planning formulation process. The detail and depth of the collected data gave a wealthy and sophisticated second version of the template, which reflected the experience of the participants based on their direct involvement in the strategic management process of the College in a regular manner. The method of coding (the second cycle of the study) proceeded with constant attention to detect the sense-making and dissimilarities within the codes.

Based on the semi-structured interviews (the second cycle of the study) held with eight other participants (directors of the various departments of the College), who had all participated in the strategic planning formulation process and whose decisions are vital for the strategy implementation process. The detail and depth of the collected data also resulted in providing rich and complex knowledge, which reflected the understanding and experience of the participants on the subject of the strategic management process. This broad knowledge resulted in the development of the third version of the template analysis format, which required the addition, deletion, merging and rearranging of the hierarchical order of the codes, which resulted in identifying 24 aspects, as presented in Appendix 4.

The fourth stage in this qualitative study approach (the third cycle of the study) was also the interviewing of three major stakeholders of the College (the College Advisory Panel (CAP) members). All of the three interviewees had actively participated in the College's strategic planning process workshop and were also

involved in the implementation of the plan on an executive participation basis through participating in periodic meetings of the College Advisory Panel (CAP). This third cycle resulted in the development of the fourth version of the template analysis format, which required further additions, deletions, merging and rearrangements of the hierarchical order of the codes, which resulted in merging some of the identified aspects in the second cycle of the study and reducing them from 24 to 17 aspects, as presented in Appendix 5.

However, the above process necessitated a further discussion with two of the higher management, one of whom has the ultimate authority to amend and verify any part of the strategy or any strategic decision, whereas the other one also possesses vast authority in regard to the quality assurance aspect of the College. This resulted in the clarification of various aspects identified by the respondents where the College has implemented some of these actions and is in the process of applying others, which required the removal of certain second-level sub-codes such as Environmental scanning techniques 'SWOT analysis' and 'PESTEL analysis' and 'Accreditation', 'Assessment' and 'Audit'. Further themes also emerged during this discussion, for example, 'Change management' and 'Knowledge management', which required further amendments to the template, which I incorporated within the fifth version of the template analysis – which became the final version as at this point I realised that otherwise there would not be an end to the process. This process resulted in identifying a total of 14 aspects, as presented in Appendix 6.

4.4 DATA DEVELOPMENT – NOTES FROM THE FIELD

Participatory Action Research (PAR) follows the standard of responding to the community in which the researcher is based (Creswell, 2003; Baskerville & Myers 2004). Accordingly, qualitative data collection will be almost the most significant component of data from which a PAR researcher can deduce his/her findings. Qualitative data provides the depth and adds the shape to the conclusions made by a PAR researcher (Cohen et al., 2007).

Usually, the AR cycle starts by collecting information through the qualitative data collection, which can be in the form of images and report results presented in words (Coghlan & Brannick, 2010). However, qualitative data collection is not only conversations, observations or records. It is preferably a rigorous selection and analysis of words and figures gathered as an indication about the subject matter, which strengthen the researcher's position to create convincing knowledge that allows him/her to improve his/her practice (Scott and Usher, 2011). As soon as the PAR researcher has decided on his/her first

research questions and searched previous research for ideas, which leads to an apparent and rational reason for data collection, s/he is ready to begin (Creswell, 2009).

This case study is a PAR qualitative study project. Qualitative research attempts to gain insights into the feelings and thought processes of people which influence their behaviour, which allows the researcher to find out the most suitable approaches to use in the study (Sutton and Austin, 2015). Qualitative research can be undertaken in different contexts. However, trying to access the thoughts and feelings of the participants in the study is not an easy task, because it requires people to exchange information about matters that can be very important to them and they may be not willing to disclose them (Creswell, 2009; Sutton and Austin, 2015). For example, one of the participants requested my assurance during the interview that everyone who participated in the study would remain anonymous. I explained to this participant that the code of conduct was set basically to safeguard the interests of the participants of the study, and if they are not sure, they can withdraw their participation without any obligation from or to the College. Moreover, sometimes the learning experience is fresh in the participant's mind, whereas in other cases remembering and recalling information from the experience can be problematic (Sutton and Austin, 2015). For example, not every participant was open to discuss issues that could lead to a possible negative impression of the College's strategic plan or higher management, despite their anonymity. On occasions, some participants provided only a few guarded responses. As one of the participants suggested, "We formulated our strategic plan... it was not imposed on us by the higher management". The same respondent mentioned on another occasion, "I am sure the higher will not hesitate to provide any support which should facilitate us to achieve our vision; you know, this is also very important for them". Another participant mentioned that "Our strategic plan was formulated very professionally, our higher management and the consultant have directed us to the right path". Though, these were some of guarded responses, but nevertheless, they were considered earnestly during the data analysis stage.

4.5 METHOD OF DATA COLLECTION

Fourteen (14) semi-structured interviews were conducted with senior managers of the College plus two (2) detailed follow-up discussions with two higher management directors; of whom one had overall authority for the College's strategic management and quality assurance practices and the other one was responsible for the College's quality assurance programme. Accordingly, the senior management directly involved in strategic management processes at the College was targeted for interviews.

Semi-structured interviews offer opportunities for reconstructing and better understanding the interviewees' experience of proceedings in which the researcher did not participate, and are particularly helpful in social and political activities. Semi-structured interviews were chosen as the research method. The research schedule in the interview process is used as a guide for the interviewer and encompasses questions and topics that are needed for the study (Schurink & Schurink, 2003). The research schedule does not ensure adherence to issues, sequence, processes, or topics. Alternatively, it is applied as an instrument to cover a research programme or goal of an interview. The research schedule for this study was presented as a practical guide and was not built on theory. Throughout the interviews, the level of control over the data was shallow, because the focus was on mutual understanding, reliability, and participation as procedures for substantiating the study (Babbie & Mouton, 2003).

In IAR, the researcher and the research participants are recognised as co-authors of the study, moreover, research participants perform their role by participating in the interview and providing data through their responses (Coghlan & Brannick, 2010). I as a researcher co-authored the data through summarisation and reflection on what the participants were stating, accordingly, interpreting the meaning given by the participants to their data. This action ensured that the participants' definitions were accurately recorded, which resulted in maintaining the focus of the interview. I also retained my research diary, which contained observational, theoretical and methodological records. The structure of my observational notes was based on the research schedule, and also included information on the configuration of the interview and any thought-provoking facts about the behaviour and actions of the participants (Sutton and Austin, 2015). Secondary data was also used where I compared my findings from the secondary data with the results of the primary data and with notes in my research diary and vice versa, as explained in the subsequent paragraphs.

4.6 DATA COLLECTION

Immediately upon obtaining permission from the higher management to conduct the internal action research at the College, I identified the potential participants for the study and requested the Dean to inform them unofficially through email communication about the matter in order to provide them with reassurance that this research study was being conducted within the consent of higher management, and there was no objection for them to be interviewed, with an explicit mention that their participation was entirely voluntary without any obligations from or towards the College. As can be perceived from the

above, since the sample size was finite, I was able to use the convenience sampling method (the non-probabilities procedure), where all 14 who were subjected to interviews were selected on a preferential basis, based on their direct involvement and contribution to the generation of positive insights with regard to the formulation and implementation of the College's strategic plan and quality assurance programme. The snowball technique was used: The first three participants were from the higher management who were the top-ranking executive officers of the College, whereas the following eight participants were chosen from 14 department directors, as all of the 14 directors have participated in the strategic formulation process, so their selection was on a preferential basis. Accordingly, all five directors of the academic departments were selected, because of their knowledge of the strategic management and quality assurance field, and expectation of their involvement in the implementation processes, besides three directors from the administration departments who also demonstrated their knowledge in the field and have actively participated in the workshop, and who were expected to be involved in the implementation processes. The remaining three were from the CAP members who attended the strategic formulation process workshop of the College. I also contacted the research participants personally at this stage for their consent. Potential participants were provided with the copies of the interview's guiding questions attached to the participant information sheet explaining the research topic and its objectives. It also described the ethical issues of conducting a research investigation and included information on the rights of participants. However, it should also be clear that, during the further enquiries, other members of the College (other than the interviewees) were also involved in the process, where their collective perceptions were seriously considered and included in the research cycles.

For validation, the interview questions were examined by the College's Quality Assurance Unit before being dispatched to each category of participant. Such pre-distribution inspection was deemed necessary and essential as it might reveal potential misunderstandings and a need to improve the interview questions; in addition, it helped me as a researcher to confirm the structure of the interview questions to establish the validity of their design and format (Creswell, 2003).

Next, I appointed dates for the interview sessions with the consent of the participants. One week before the interview date, participants were communicated with to confirm the date and time of the interviews. During this contact, preliminary interview questions were also sent to the participants. This process resulted in providing the participants with a general idea about the issues that would be touched upon during the interview; this also ensured that the participants would be prepared and satisfied with the

questions, even though the questions in the interviews generally changed and were not applied exactly as they had been developed. The objective of this process was to provide some ideas and specific information on what would generally be considered during the interview, and that was to prepare the participants mentally for the interview, where they would be more open about the questions. Also, to make all the participants more comfortable, all the interviews were conducted in their own offices. As stated in above, 14 semi-structured interviews were conducted and recorded by taking handwritten transcripts documenting what was said and accomplished during discussions, which were subsequently provided to the interviewees to make any changes before the transcripts were codified. Most of the interview sessions ranged from 60 to 90 minutes. The interview questions were asked in the English language, and the participants responded in the English language as well.

4.6.1 NATURE OF THE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Specimens of interview questions are provided in Appendices 1. It should be noted that the prepared questions were used for guiding purposes only during the interviews, which provided the participants with some level of freedom to participate freely in the discussion in accordance to their past knowledge and understanding gained from participating in the management of the College's strategic plan. In this connection, Glaser and Strauss (2009) caution about data coercion to preconceived categories, fixing questions that will hinder the development of theory from the data. Consequently, it was vital to ensure that the questions that were used in the interview were flexible, thus granting freedom to the individual participants. However, it was also essential to ensure that the semi-structured interview questions were given maximum attention and high consideration to make sure that they achieved the research objectives. The guiding questions of the interviews were set-out in a way that informs the topics identified in the summary of the literature review, as presented in table 1 below:

Topics identified in the summary of the literature review	Questions asked
1. The College is trying to adopt strategic management inclusive paradigm as determined by Sullivan and Richardson (2011), which focuses on introducing the	In what ways do you think that the strategic plan of the College can be different and unique to the College? For example, how can it meet the needs of the financial sector in Oman?

<p>strategic planning in HEIs and suggests supporting the strategic plan by integrating it with daily activities of the College.</p>	
<p>2. The leadership component is essential to the success of planning initiatives.</p>	<p>Do you think the leadership and executives' interpersonal skills are important for the development and implementation of the strategic plan and quality improvement in the context of HEIs like the College? Can you provide some examples?</p>
<p>3. The literature review informed the study by suggesting assessing the College's internal environmental scanning by considering cultural, leadership, political, structural and HR factors, and the external environmental challenges through the consideration of SWOT analysis and the PESTEL acronym.</p>	<p>Can you identify some of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats which impact the College? Moreover, can you further identify some major competencies and enablers of the College?</p>
<p>4. The integration of quality assurance into the planning framework occurs from the earliest stages of the planning concept with the broad objective and effective centralised coordination (Weeks-Kaye, 2004).</p>	<p>Do you consider the quality of educational services provided by the College can have a major effect on its strategic plan? Can you provide some examples?</p>
<p>5. The evaluation is an essential activity; managers must be confident that their strategic plan is being applied effectively, and it is achieving its goals. It also allows strategy leaders to communicate better to resolve challenges before a crisis occurs (Dalrymple, 2007).</p>	<p>How often would you suggest the College should evaluate its strategic plan? Every year, every three years or every five years? Can you tell us why (can you justify your answer)?</p>

Sources: The author

4.6.2 ANALYSIS OF THE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Each interview started with some general questions about the College's strategy. This method is in accordance with the proposals presented by Charmaz (2014, 2006), where she proposed five configurations when developing interview questions. Charmaz suggests that interview questions should begin with neutral and factual questions and should be restricted to the essential issues. This notion was established from the first question that was asked during the interview with the higher management, i.e., "Do you think strategic planning is important in a higher educational institution?". The second stage of the questions should go to 'information' questions as soon as the information has been obtained from the interviewee (Charmaz, 2014). Charmaz suggests that such questions drag the participants in an interview and establishes a chronology; for instance, such a question as "Can you explain how the strategic plan of the College can be different and unique to the College?" It was suggested to follow up further with questions on the process of the College's strategy and quality. At the next stage of the interview, reflexive-type questions were asked. These types of questions lead to a transition to direct questions about oneself (Charmaz, 2006). According to Charmaz (2006), the researcher can bring a reflexive approach and ask questions about feelings when a rapport develops. "How do you consider the quality of educational services provided by the College can have a major effect on its strategic plan?" is a form of reflexive question that was raised during the interview. Such questions were asked only after the mid-point of the interview (Charmaz, 2006). Delaying these questions allowed a feeling of trust and relaxation to build in the interviews before the participants had to share their knowledge. After the communication was established, questions about personal feelings were raised in the process of the interview, although, this type of question is analogous to a reflexive question, since it often directly causes data about itself. Examples of the type of question applied in the interviews are: "From your personal opinion, what efforts do you think the College needs to exert differently to achieve its strategic plan and quality improvement for its next cycle?" and "What have you learned from the implementation processes of the strategic plan and quality assurance of the College?". Questions about the participants' personal feelings gave them confidence and allowed them to share their personal experience about the College's strategic management processes. The final stage was to conclude the interview. It is always nice to finish interviews on a positive note. Such questions promote interesting data about the symbolic values of the self and serve as a positive way to finish the interview (Charmaz, 2014, 2006). These questions included: "If you

were to improve the strategic and the quality assurance processes of the College, what would be the areas for improvement?" and "Are there any other points that you would like to add or discuss?". This calls on participants to provide interesting personal opinions within the context of the study.

4.6.3 VARIATION OF THE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

The interview questions ranged from one interview to another and reflected the new problems that were revealed in the former interview, therefore, whenever further information was collected from the former interview, the questions that were applied in the following interview were refined. For instance, the initial questions prepared for the executive management gradually changed as the conclusions drawn in previous interviews contributed to changes in the issues, where I was able to include the new issues discovered during the second round of the interviews. I added questions to the initial interview questions, which were the outcome of earlier findings achieved from the interviews conducted with the College's higher management. In this instance, subsequent interviews with other members of the executive management included questions like "What do you think about the support provided by the higher management in implementing the strategy of the College?" and "What do you think about the support provided by the higher management for the implementation of the quality assurance processes?"

4.6.4 OTHER METHODS OF DATA COLLECTION

Moreover, the other methods of data collection that I used consisted of keeping a 'research diary' to supplement the interviews. This helped me as a researcher to support and comment on impressions, environmental contexts, behaviour and non-verbal cues that may not have been sufficiently understood during the interview. For example, I was able to discern when the participants were not happy about the situation under discussion – such as when discussing the environmental scanning and accreditation process approach – but did not want to criticise openly, where they also provided many abbreviated responses which suggested that they were dissatisfied. My research diary also helped me during further investigation of matters which were not sufficiently understood during the interview, for instance, when some participants mentioned during the interview that their department was implementing some strategies regarding the students' academic affairs, which was revealed by discussion with that particular department members and observation of what they were doing, and inspection of the past records, it was observed that they were implementing some 'taken for granted' management decisions, e.g., implementing some emerging strategic plan. This process is further explained in detail with quotations

from the participants in the discussion of findings chapter, Chapter 5. My research diary was handwritten and then typed up on a laptop; I wrote it simultaneously while conducting the interview. My research diary served as an essential context for interpreting interview data and helped me as a researcher to recap the situational factors that can prove to be important in data analysis. Such notes need not necessarily be formal, but they should be supported and protected similarly the transcripts of the interview because they contain confidential and sensitive information and relevant to the organisation and the study.

In addition, I compared my findings from the secondary data analysis with the results of the primary data, which I was able to collect from the semi-structured interviews, and with the records in my research diary and vice versa. Through the analysis of the secondary data, I was able to find out that the system of performance management is important for the performance improvement in HEIs (the College). For example, the data obtained from the interviews confirmed that the application of the Balanced Scorecard as a system of performance management could widely contribute to the measurement of performance, which in turn should lead to the success and improvement of the performance. By contrast, the analysis of the secondary data suggested that the absence or inadequacy of formally defined performance management systems will result in not achieving the required level of performance. Likewise, on the quality assurance side, all interviewees repeatedly mentioned quality assurance standards established by the OAAA, of which I had knowledge through the collection and analysis of secondary data on the OAAA quality assurance requirement policy, which must be achieved by higher education institutions. This knowledge helped me to critically reflect on the interviewees' responses and establish the link between the OAAA established quality assurance standards and the role and purposes of quality assurance as presented in the literature review chapter of this study (accountability, improvement) and encode them accurately in the template analysis. I was seeking to triangulate by drawing initial conclusions from one source and then further exploring them through another.

4.7 DATA ANALYSIS - TEMPLATE ANALYSIS

The initial stage of the data analysis was the designing and allocating of codes to the data. Usually, codes denote labels for sections in qualitative data, for essential notions, phenomena and topics of concern (Bryman, 2008). King and Brooks' (2017) thematic template analysis approach has been used for this purpose. Template analysis is a type of thematic analysis, which is based on the use of hierarchical coding; it focuses on balancing the framework in the process of analysing textual data with the possibility of applying it to the specific requirements of the research under consideration. The central element of this method is about how to develop the coding template, which is normally related to a sub-set of data, and then applied to additional, revised and iterated data. This approach adapts to the template and the template format that being created.

Moreover, template analysis does not require a predetermined coding series like other thematic methods of data coding. Instead, it promotes researchers to create themes more intensely to have a deep insight into data collected regarding the main question of the study. Similarly, template analysis does not make clear distinction between descriptive and interpretive topics in the coding structure. Usually, interview transcripts are the main form of data used in template analysis format; in addition, another kind of data can also be used, such as focus groups (Kirkby-Geddes, King and Bravington, 2013; Brooks, 2014), research diary text (Addington and Fletcher, 2005) and responses to open-ended questions in the written questionnaire (Kent, 2000).

In this method, the researcher creates a list of symbols, 'codes', referred to as templates, signifying specific topics. A template is formed from many changes, revisions, amendments and additions during text reading. King (2004) describes it as a method that is aligned with constructionist epistemology and the theoretical point of view of symbolic interaction. According to King (2004), the initial stage in the template analysis includes encoding the list of symbols (templates) in the topics and identifying the original hierarchy of codes and terms. In many cases, there are many codes which may also be parallel, where a particular section can be explained by more than one code. For example, for this thesis, it is described with two clear predefined codes, 'formation of deliberate strategy' and 'formation of an emergent strategy'. Other predefined codes consist of practices that are associated with the formulation and implementation of the strategic plan and the quality assurance processes in the College. However, it is also possible to create codes through the use of the literature review.

Nevertheless, before developing the template, I forwarded the interview questions in the form of a list of codes under which every interview question was presented and further requested the interviewees to change, merge, delete or insert any new codes about the interview questions as they perceived to be appropriate. After receiving the amended list of codes, a readjustment process of the codes was performed. According to King (2004), the next stage is to develop a template. At this stage, I analysed each interview separately, which permitted the appearance of new codes and concepts. King further explained that once the original template is finalised, it is important to reread the texts, as it is possible for new codes to emerge compared to the original template. Such practice has resulted in adding, deleting, changing the scope, or adjusting the code's hierarchy for the original template. King (2004) added further that it is essential to reread the scripts many times before deciding the ultimate template. In this study, once I thought that saturation had been reached on a particular topic, I stopped asking questions about it.

Moreover, I made all efforts to consult the literature review chapter during the process of rereading the interview scripts, which also resulted in modifying the template (King, 2012). The ideologies of the method can be assimilated without difficulty, and the hierarchical order of template production compels the researcher to apply a systematic and constructive procedure for data processing (Brooks, et.al. 2015). Using an initial template, followed by iterative processes, means that this method often takes less time compared with other qualitative data analysing approaches. Moreover, the iterative process of the model stimulates the researcher to carefully consider how topics are demarcated and how they relate to each other (King, 2004; King and Brooks, 2017).

Nevertheless, there are possible drawbacks to the method that should be recognised. Template analysis typically focuses on the case, and not on the analysis of the case, which leads to the loss of some common understanding of individual codes (King and Brooks, 2017). This drawback represents a challenge to any topical approach to the analysis of qualitative data. Although the flexibility of template analysis is one of the recognised strengths of the method, the transacted process for constructing a template and the structure of the template itself may be less safe for relatively new qualitative researchers than those described in other forms of thematic analysis, which apparently require a transition from descriptive to interpretive and, finally, to comprehensive themes (Brooks et.al., 2015). In the absence of such clear instructions to maintain original coding primarily in narrative form, there is a risk that the researcher may be too hasty in the course of abstraction in the interpretation.

Given my main research question (Q) - How can the College best formulate and implement its strategy and integrate quality assurance standards within it to achieve sustainable competitive advantages? – the template analysis helped me to map out key issues, key ideas, identify best practice, and develop a model for future strategy development and implementation; moreover, because of the hierarchical mapping of the template it also assisted me in a systematic investigation into the problem.

4.8 CREATION OF THE INITIAL TEMPLATE

Template analysis usually begins with a few predefined codes that help guide the analysis. The first question for the researcher is, of course, how inclusive the source template is (King and Brooks, 2017). The preferable beginning stage for creating the initial template is index to the topic of the interview, which usually is achieved through the use and analysis of the secondary data. Predefined codes will depend on the literature review, the personal experience of the researcher, circumstantial and casual indication, and empirical studies. The main questions from the interviews can serve as higher order codes, and sub questions and investigations as probable lower order codes. This method is most effective when the index on this topic is quite significant and (in qualitative terms) structured, and the interviewer pre-determines most of the issues that should be covered, and the following codes may arise in each interview - as was the case in this study : Questions for discussion were identified in advance for each category of interview.

As can be noticed from Appendix 2, the preliminary template consisted of six highest order codes, divided into two, three, or four levels of lower-order codes. (For simplicity, I will indicate to the coding standards in a numerical form, where level-one being the highest order codes and level-four being the lowest). In this initial version of the template analysis all higher-level and lower-order codes were identified from the literature review and my knowledge on the subject as explained below.

The foremost level-one code, which was retrieved from the literature review is “planning aspects”, for which the interview question was pre-determined to cover the four level-two codes, which were also determined from the literature review: “formulating a strategic plan”, “an intentional and new strategic plan”, “functions of a strategic plan” and “implementing a strategic plan”. It would be quite practical to further separate these codes. However, since these level-two codes were unrelated to the main question of the study, no further levels were defined. This area is directly related to the objectives of the study and,

therefore, requires more detailed analysis, therefore, the inclusion of four levels of coding in the original template.

The second level-one code, “the Management aspects”, related to accounts of specific management concepts of the College in the study regarding the strategic management. Therefore, level-two codes reference the particular strategic management issues in question, “the leadership or Authority”, “Trust and Commitment”, and “the Knowledge management”. The third level-one code is “the Role and Purpose of Quality Assurance”, and it also includes the main issues to explore. It has been applied to index the interview part related to the quality assurance process in the College in the study. It encompasses the second-level codes of “Accountability” and “Improvement” of the College’s quality assurance process, mentioned either in the course of describing the strategic management process case or in the more general discussion of issues arising. These second-level codes are of direct relevance to the study’s objective, and thus, needed in-depth analysis, hence the inclusion of two levels of coding on the original template, which are fundamental to satisfy the accreditation process for the College.

The fourth level-one code specifies ‘Strategic plan and quality assurance evaluation aspects’, or strategic management evaluation methods used by the College. The fifth level-one code relates to the element of “Organisation”. It comprises the second level-two codes of “Components of the strategic plan”, “Development of organisational structure”, “Communications” and “Resources allocation” references to the particular strategic management issues in this regard.

Finally, “Human Resources Management” is the sixth level-one code. Although this was a significant element, it was subaltern to the main objectives of the research. Consequently, on the source template, the code was distributed into only two second-order codes, the first recognising “Strategic planning people”, the second covering specifically the “Targeted training” required for the proper implementation of the College’s strategic plan and quality assurance processes (Appendix 2).

Once the initial template was built, I worked systematically through a full set of texts and records, defining different parts of the text that are significant to the goals of the project, and labelling them with one or more suitable code(s) from the source template. In this way, discrepancies in the original template were identified, requiring variations of various types. Through this process, the template was developed to its final shape.

4.8.1 CREATION OF THE SUBSEQUENT TEMPLATES

To create the initial template, I indexed the topic of interviews through the use and analysis of the secondary data, as explained above (section 4.8). The incorporation of the secondary data with the primary data was achieved through the creation of the subsequent templates. After each stage of interviews, the preceding template has served as a base for the development of the subsequent template, e.g. initial template has served as a base for the development of the second version of the template, and second for the third and so on. After each interview, a new data was obtained (primary data), where I encoded each transcript for each interview separately, and then I grouped similar codes in all transcripts together, which were then incorporated with the data available in the preceding template before that stage of interviews. I repeated this process throughout each stage of interviews. This iterative process has resulted in the creation of new topics that appeared in text sections and I adjusted them so that the presented themes in the preceding template were revised to include new materials and thereby resulted in emerging the subsequent template. Thus, I continued until I obtained the ultimate version of the template. Here I used the method of drawing sorting charts with pencil, which made it easier to interchange and regroup themes to adjust and design the new template.

For the development of subsequent templates, I used the initial template constructed from analysis of the index to the topic of the interview. I used first three interviews with the higher management of the College to develop the second version of the template, and then I repeated the same process, where I used the outcome of the interviews with eight directors. This process allowed me to produce the third version of the template, and as an iterative process, I applied it to the remaining four interviews, the third stage of the interviews, with the key stakeholders, where I produced a revised fourth version of the template analysis. This iterative process of testing successive versions of templates, their modifications and retries continued, until the final interpretation of the data and the selection of the final version of the template was achieved.

The re-iterative process of incorporating the secondary data with the primary data also helped me in developing themes. For example, with regard to strategic planning, some of the respondents referred to the "Allocation of adequate or required resources", where I was able to refer them to the literature review and understand that the allocation of required resources can be achieved by budgeting suitably; and reflecting on my previous knowledge in accounting and finance I realised that these excerpts were relating to the specific section of "Budgeting" in the College financial regulation. Thus, to assess how proper

budget distribution can help in accurately achieving the strategic plan. Moreover, some of the respondents also referred to “The College members’ performance evaluation with regard to achieving strategic plan”, where I was also able to relate it to the literature review and the relevant section of the College staff affair regulation manual "Staff performance evaluation", and evaluate how proper performance assessment of staff can lead to the achievement of a strategic plan. Hence, I was able to encode these incorporated primary and secondary data in the template analysis under the theme “Allocation of Resources” and “Performance Measurement”. Here I gave case-to-concept data and relational statements to explain the functions of strategic management.

Similarly, regarding the quality assurance processes some of the respondents referred to the OAAA quality standard of “Academic Support Services” or gave explanations, such as “providing high quality standards of teaching and learning processes”, where I was able to recognise, depending on my knowledge in the subject that these objectives were set by the OAAA, and not by any other government authority, and accordingly, I was able to link them to secondary data, such as the College Quality Assurance Policy document section on “Providing infrastructure to support the high quality of teaching and learning activities”, and then to the literature review and assessment of how quality of teaching and learning infrastructure can help in the implementation of appropriate academic support services, thus the incorporation of these secondary data with the primary data and the development of the theme "Accountability" in the template analysis. In addition, several respondents referred to the OAAA quality standards of “General Support Services and Facilities” and provided explanations, such as “improving students’ achievement and improving students’ employability”, where I was able to relate them to secondary data analysis, like the College Quality Assurance Policy document sections on “Improving achievement of students” and “Improving employability of students by sector”, and in this case also to refer them to the literature review, where I was able to incorporate these secondary data with the primary data to develop the theme of “Improvement” in template analysis. Here I generated topics, referring to the literature review, and defining the main categories representing the main research topics.

4.8.1.1 CREATION OF THE SECOND VERSION OF THE TEMPLATE

To develop a second version of the template, I used the initial template, built from an analysis of the index, on the subject of the interview, to encode each transcript of the interview with three senior managers of the College. The second version of the template was created using the coding process to create new topics that appeared in text sections and I adjusted them so that the presented themes in the initial template

were revised to include new material. For example, I was thinking more about the “Knowledge management” as a high level-one code, as presented in the initial template (Appendix 2). However, while performing and coding the first three interviews, the respondents expressed a different opinion - that the dominant process employed was “Change management” for strategic planning management. Therefore, the “Change management” aspect emerged as a higher-order level code in the second version of the template analysis.

Moreover, all lower level-two codes in the second version of the template analysis are based on the encoding of the first three interviews with the higher management of the College. It was important to insert these new codes, as they covered a set of lower-order level-two codes that were either new or originally appeared somewhere else in the template (Appendix 3). I also gave a few examples of data (participant talk), which illustrated the integration of secondary data with primary data. For example, from the responses of the first stage of interviews with the three of the higher management of the College such as “The strategy planning process”, “We worked on these areas based on our previous decisions” and “Whatever we do, we should reflect on the term “ quality ”, I was able to identify problems in the text, such as “Deliberate and emerging Strategic Plan”, “Strategy management techniques and approaches” and “Critical Aspects of Success for Improving Quality” that were associated with the higher-order level codes of the research, but were not included under any codes in the original template 1 (Appendix 2), as these codes were representing central themes in most of the discussions of the research’s participants (Appendix 3).

4.8.1.2 CREATION OF THE THIRD VERSION OF THE TEMPLATE

The second version of the template was revised and modified into the third version after the second round of interviews with eight directors of the College. During the revision, the researcher may find that the code is either too narrow, or too wide, or not sufficiently different from other codes to be suitable. Therefore, the code must be redefined as a code of a lower or higher level. Consequently, I very often used this form of customisation during the template development process. For example, the aspect “Strategy management techniques and approaches” was not originally defined as code until it was proposed by participants during the second stage of interviews. Instead, it was originally designated narrowly as one of the sub-codes of “Environmental Scanning”, proposed at the first stage of the interviews, which directly affected the process of formulating and implementing the strategic plan. It soon became evident that this question was much more significant for the study. Therefore, I revised the

template to include it as a higher-order level-one code. At the same time, I decided to use the sub-codes "SWOT-analysis" and "PESTEL-analysis" to index the necessary information about the aspect of strategic plan and consequently, reduce it to the level of second-level codes under the "Formulation of the strategic plan", as can be seen in (Appendices 3 and 4).

4.8.1.3 CREATION OF THE FOURTH VERSION OF THE TEMPLATE

As an iterative process, I applied it to the remaining four interviews with key stakeholders, where I prepared a revised fourth version of the template analysis. The researcher may decide that a code classified initially as a sub-code of one higher level code may be better correspond to a sub-category of another higher level code. I used this adjustment in various positions of the research template, often in combination with other forms of changes. I used such form especially when I was creating the fourth version of the template. Here I also gave examples on how the conversations of participants necessitated a revision of the codes and the structure of the template. Moreover, at this stage, a literature review was also used for the coding process (King, 2004). For example, codes like "Environment Scanning techniques-SWOT Analysis and PESTEL Analysis", mentioned by the interviewees were coded under the heading "Strategy management techniques and approaches", and codes such as "Accountability" and "Improvement", were encoded under the heading of "Role and purposes of quality assurance", while codes such as "Accreditation", "Assessment" and "Audit" derived from the literature review chapter and participants explanations were included in the template analysis as second-level codes. Subsequently, I decided that it would be more clear if "Accreditation", "Assessment" and "Audit" had been removed as second-level codes and classified as third-level codes under the second-level code "Integration of Quality Assurance Processes with Strategic Management", as indicated in the literature review chapter, which is under the higher-order level code "Critical success aspects for quality improvement" (Appendix 5).

Table 2 below summarises how the codes/themes created in the template were supported by the data (participants' talk).

Constituent Themes	Substantiating quotes and explanations
1. Strategic plan formulation (A1)	"SWOT-analysis and PESTEL-analysis are the major components of strategic planning [formulation] process" and from the participants'

	<p>explanations, such as “Environmental Scanning is the foremost part of the strategic planning [formulation] process.”</p>
<p>2. Deliberate and emerging Strategic Plan (A2)</p>	<p>“.....<i>undertaking the strategic planning process</i>”, and from the participants’ explanations, such as “we worked on these areas based on our previous decisions” and “whatever we do, we should ensure it reflects on our strategic plan and on the term quality.”</p>
<p>3. Implementation of the strategic plan (A3)</p>	<p>“<i>There should be a committee responsible for the overall implementation process of the strategic plan</i>” and from the participants’ explanations, such as “.....the requirement to communicate the implementation strategy to everybody engaged in the process of implementation.”</p>
<p>4. The leadership (A4)</p>	<p>“<i>Leadership is a core element of the institutional strategic plan</i>” and from the participants’ explanations, such as “the leadership has a very active and overall role to play throughout the strategic planning cycle.”</p>
<p>5. Authority (A5)</p>	<p>“<i>Higher management sometimes need to take some strong actions to get things moving</i>” and from the participants’ explanations, such as “construction of a new organisational structure for the College will establish new lines of authorities.”</p>
<p>6. Trust and Commitment (A6)</p>	<p>“<i>Involvement of members of the institution in the strategic planning process should provide them a sense of ownership</i>” and from the participants’ explanations, such as “the College management should identify those directors who will participate in the strategic planning formulation process and should provide them with the Key Initiatives.”</p>
<p>7. Change management (A7)</p>	<p>“<i>Change management is very often one of the direct result of strategic planning process</i>” and from the participants’ explanations, such as “Where ever there is a new strategic plan, there will be a change management action.”</p>

8. Human Resources Management (A8)	<p><i>“.....for successful strategic management HRM has an important role to play”</i> and from the participants’ explanations, such as <i>“human resources management is a vital element in the successful performance of the College.”</i></p>
9. Development of organisational structure (A9)	<p><i>“All departments’ performance should be measured according to their achievement of the overall goals of the College according to the new organisational structure”</i> and from the participants’ explanations, such as <i>“the new organisational structure should assist in identifying duties, responsibilities, and accountability lines clearly for the members of the College.”</i></p>
10. Communications (A10)	<p><i>“All members of the College should be communicated [at least briefed] about the process of strategic planning and quality assurance, because they are the ones who do the job actually”</i> and from the participants’ explanations, such as <i>“.....adoption of interactive methods rather than direct methods of communication in order to communicate with and receive feedback from all members of the College.”</i></p>
11. Resources allocation (A11)	<p><i>“Appropriately Budgeting the required resources.....”</i> and from the participants’ explanations, such as <i>“Allocation of adequate or required resources is necessary for the successful implementation of the strategic plan.”</i></p>
12. Accountability (A12)	<p><i>“Adopting correct methods of staff performance evaluation can also help to establish accountability procedures”</i> and from the participants’ explanations, such as <i>““.....Accountability can achieved by the College members’ performance evaluation with regard to achieving the strategic plan.”</i></p>
13. Improvement (A13)	<p><i>“Improvement in academic Support Services is very important to achieve the academic quality”, “General Support Services and Facilities are important because they will broaden the student’s realisation about the</i></p>

	<i>extracurricular activities, which will help them later in their practical life"</i> and from the participants' explanations, such as "improving students' achievement and improving students' employability."
14. Critical success aspects for quality improvement (14)	<i>"Everybody should be clear about the role and purpose of quality assurance"</i> and from the participants' explanations, such as "A quality assurance policy should cover all quality measures related to the College including the academic and administrative aspects of the College."
15. Integration of QA processes with strategic management (A15)	<i>"Quality assurance is at the core of the strategic plan; we should ensure the accurate integration of Quality Assurance Processes within the Strategic Management"</i> and from the participants' explanations, such as "we should embed the QAP within our strategic plan....."
16. Duration for strategic plan evaluation (A16)	<i>"We should evaluate our strategic plan at least every five years"</i> and from the participants' explanations, such as ".....I believe every five years should be fine."
17. Balanced Scorecard (A17)	<i>"There are various methods of strategic plan evaluation, off course Balanced Scorecard is one of them, is one of the most famous methods"</i> and from the participants' explanations, such as "the application of the Balanced Scorecard as a system of performance management could widely contribute to the measurement of performance."

Sources: The author

4.8.1.4 THE ULTIMATE TEMPLATE

Developing an analytical template is a continuous process. However, the researcher must decide when the point is reached where s/he can stop the development process. One can continue to modify and refine the definition of codes almost to infinity, but in fact no research will have an indefinite time to create an "ideal" template. The resolution on when the template is complete will depend on the distinctness of the individual studies and the perception of the researcher, although no template can be deemed "good enough" if any part of the text that are comprehensibly related to the study main question remains un-

coded (king, 2004, p 263). In addition, as a rough empirical approach, it is improbable that a template can be deemed final if all data has not been read — and coding has been thoroughly studied — more than once (King and Brooks, 2017).

Usually, most or all of the texts will be read at least three or four times before the researcher feels content with the template. Often, the researcher can make a confident decision about when the point is reached that the template is sufficiently clear and comprehensive (appendix 6).

4.9 SUMMARY

This chapter has presented the process involved in collecting and analysing the research data. It has provided a discussion on data collection and the issues about how data was collected; with an in-depth clarification about the design of interview questions; the interview process; and the sampling method carried out in this study. Also, this chapter included a discussion about the reflexivity and reflection of the study, and an explanation of the important elements of data analysis. This discussion includes how to create a template analysis and how the main themes and sub-themes are developed; the process of coding and categorisation, which contributed to the development of themes and sub-themes; and an explanation of how modifications were made when the template was revised. This chapter concluded with a further explanation of how the various cycles of the study were carried out.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

5.0 INTRODUCTION

The aim of this study mainly focused on strategic management events in the higher education institution context including the integration of quality assurance standards within it in order to satisfy the external requirement of the accreditation authority (OAAA), and internally to plan strategically for the development of quality in the processes of the higher education institution (the College). The primary objective of an action research study is to decide upon methods that will help to improve the situation (Mills, 2011). This study utilised a PAR framework to support the College to define more accurately the different measures about strategic plans and quality improvement indicators while working towards the implementation of its strategy to obtain the accredited status. However, all the College strategic implementation processes, including the quality improvement process, can be described as a form of transformational change that will result in improving the quality of the operations at all functional levels. Moreover, this chapter offers an analysis and discussion of qualitative data collected from documents and archival reports, interviews and the research participants, and my observation and reflections during the process of the research in order to answer the main question of the study (Q): How best can the College formulate and implement its strategy and integrate quality improvement standards within it in order to achieve sustainable competitive advantages? It centres on the challenges encountered by the College to adopt processes, to resolve the main question, specifically, the challenges faced by the College members to implement the strategic plan; the inability of the available strategic planning models to assist in this regard; and the ambiguity about how to properly integrate the quality assurance processes within the College's strategic plan. Accordingly, I explored the (College members) research participants' perceptions and approach towards the strategic management within the framework identified in Chapter 2 (section 1.12), in order to form a comprehensive reply to the main question of the study by how I perceive action developing into practice. Additionally, to boost the reliability, transparency and integrity of results and interpretations and conclusions, a discussion of the results is also presented. A broadly bounded question can form the source for preliminary and evolving sub-questions. The main question (Q) of the study allowed me as a researcher to grasp the main objectives of the study in one major question (Janesick, 2000). Paradigm change should allow for the restructuring of the institutional processes of the College to enhance efficiency, service quality and modification of the organisational structure, and, as a result, it will also assist in making the necessary changes in policies and procedures.

The interview texts were coded and organised, using template analysis into themes and results. This process was achieved through the application of inductive thinking, and the results were matched with my personal biases documented in a reflexive diary. The themes which were compatible with my biases were then confirmed through interview scripts and templates to verify that the themes arose from the interviewees, rather than from biased enquiry or through my interpretation.

5.1 INTEGRATED FRAMEWORK FOR STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT

To appreciate how these themes can be fitted into the bigger picture, the framework of Balanced Scorecard (BSC) mapping was adopted, as was suggested in Chapter 2 (section 2.4.3), as it can form the basis of a strategic management system. The Balanced Scorecard can serve as an instrument to link these themes by establishing a clear link between strategic and operational objectives through explicit identification of performance indicators at all levels of the College and by involving the College members at all levels in discussing strategic priorities. The BSC describes common goals within the institution (Kaplan and Norton 1996b, 2007; Kaplan 2010), as presented below:

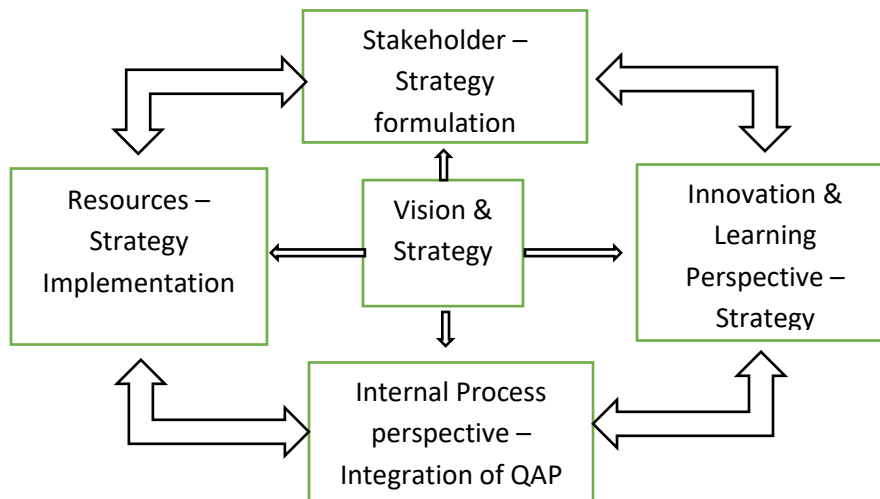


Figure 5.1: BSC framework. Source: Author

The BSC consists of a set of selected key performance indicators and maps showing normal relationships between cause and effect. The indicators are divided into indicators of leads that lead a change, and a lag indicator that measures the results. The choice of indicators leads to a focus on a common understanding in the institution. Revising the initial relationship of cause and effect may be necessary. This relationship forms the basis that can be applied to assess the balance between strategic (long-term success) and

financial control (short-term goals) to achieve the required level of firm productivity (Hitt et al., 2011; Carpenter & Sanders, 2009; Johnson et al., 2008). According to Atkinson et al. (2012), the BSC can be perceived as a means of transportation, through which the entire organisation can move onwards. The framework of Balanced Scorecard (BSC) one-page mapping for strategic management of the College is presented in Appendix 10.

As an action plan, we (participants of the research and I) suggested that the top management of the College apply the Balanced Scorecard, which should assist the College to be in control and focus on critical performance issues. Such an application can help to create actionable knowledge, which can be implemented on a daily basis. In doing so, the College should be able to manage the performance of its members properly and better understand the shortcomings in any part of the strategic management process. Moreover, the BSC connects performance indicators to the organisation's strategy. The BSC requires that each performance indicator be part of a causal link that includes a link from strategy formulation and financial results. Each measure chosen for the BSC should be part of a chain of cause-effect relationships that links the business unit's strategy. The BSC contributes to the dynamic formulation of the organisational strategy, making it very visible due to a combination of performance indicators and business strategy.

Also, to discuss the results of this chapter, I present section headings (themes) and sub-section headings (sub-themes) according to the hierarchy of higher-order codes (section headings) and their pertaining lower-order codes (sub-section headings) presented in the template analysis (Appendix 6), as follows:

5.2 STRATEGIC PLAN FORMULATION (A1)

The study showed that the absence of proper planning is one of the leading causes of the inability to formulate and implement strategic plans in the College. Although a significant part of the available literature on strategic management indicates the role played by senior management (SM) in improving productivity (Mintzberg et al., 2003; Kotter, 1996), most of the participants noted that they had faced some (minor) difficulties while participating in the strategic planning workshop, but encountered more problems during the implementation of the strategic plan.

The study has also highlighted that the leadership and involvement of all staff categories is a critical factor for successful strategy formulation in the College. Moreover, those responsible for strategic management

should adopt the methods and techniques available for strategy formulation and implementation for appropriate strategic plan management. In addition to the involvement of management and all other categories of staff in the strategy formulation process, most participants believed that successful implementation of the strategic plan is more dependent on the success of the strategic planning workshop.

Various scholars (Hrebiniak, 2005; Alexander, 1985; Okumus, 2001) consider that a proper implementation alone cannot overcome the inadequacies of formulating a poor strategy. They emphasised that the strategy formulation process and the actual strategy formulated will impact the implementation results. Alexander (1985) explains that it is important to start with a formulated strategy that includes a good idea or concept in order to facilitate successful implementation. Allio (2005) suggests that a proper implementation, of course, starts with an excellent strategic effort.

In general, planning for the formulation is an essential element for formulating excellent strategic plans based on the critical requirements of the organisation. Higher education institutions should prepare for formulation before the actual process begins. In the case of the College, two internal task forces, the Institutional Effectiveness Team (IET) and the Strategic Plan Review (SPR) taskforce were convened, where I was also a member of the latter, to collect data to facilitate strategic planning workshop to formulate the College's strategy. It was found that the College's strategy was formulated in line with the OAAA directives of strategy formulation requirements (kind of an imposed strategy). Although the participants of the strategic planning workshop may not have noticed at the time, I can retrieve from the workshop notes that during the formulation of strategic goals, it was emphasised by the higher management and the consultant team that, whatever strategic goals the participants formulate, they must align them with the quality standards established by the OAAA. Accordingly, it was apparent in the final strategic planning document that all the College's strategic goals mapped with the quality standards set by the OAAA (Appendix 9).

As a matter of fact, the effort to adhere to the imposed strategy was more apparent during the communication of the College's strategic plan to the members. The following (lower-order codes) themes emerged: 'Emerging and deliberate strategic plan', 'Environmental scanning', 'Participation in the strategic planning process' and 'Engagement of the stakeholders' emerged in the discussions relating to

the College strategy formulations. The following sections will further explain each of the themes discovered in the study.

5.2.1 EMERGING STRATEGIC PLAN

The study has shown that, although the College has followed a formal strategy formulation process, most of the implemented strategies originated from the day-to-day procedures and processes in the College.

The study also discovered that the majority of the respondents were working under the conception of producing results for their respective departments according to a generally accepted strategy or practice (taken for granted) by implementing their daily or periodical procedures in response to the management decisions in these departments.

Various authors, for example, Maloney (1997), Johnson et al. (2008) and Bryson (2011), have argued that, in various situations, organisations do not have any planned strategy. Thus, the realised strategy is the product of incremental decisions taken by the management over a period of time. Accordingly, a strategy can be unintentional or arising; that is, it merely develops out of the organisation's activities.

The majority of the various department directors mentioned that, currently, their departments are following some strategic plan form. One of the participants responded that

We produce results at the end of every term according to the specified strategy of our department. We are reporting these results to the Assistant Dean of academic affairs, who brings them for discussion at the academic committee, so if we achieve our targets then the academic committee will verify the results, and if we do not achieve the targets the academic committee will try to find the reasons for that and rectify the matter accordingly. (SM6)

However, to the best of my knowledge, there has not been any documented strategic plan available before the newly developed one. Moreover, on further enquiry, it was revealed that what was meant here was that the required data for the planning and execution of the strategy at the departmental level was available. Such data was collected on a regular basis for evaluation and reporting to assess whether the department is achieving its approved targets; i.e., these were 'taken for granted' management decisions to meet targets -such as the number of intake students and their pass rate in each course and each subject. Although, during the enquiry, the majority of the respondents also suggested that they were not aware if

there was any documented strategic plan available at the College before the newly developed one, they had been working under the notion of producing results for their respective departments according to a generally accepted strategy or practice (taken for granted) in these departments. Critically reflecting on this, I believe that what was meant here was having some form of emerging strategies, which were the outcomes of incremental decisions and trends which had evolved over time, similar to the description of Johnson et al. (2008).

Moreover, this situation can also be viewed as similar to what is known as a business strategy, which is about the implementation of actions after the formulation of the strategy (Mintzberg and Rose, 2003; De Wit and Meyer, 2004), because the implementation process of the College's newly developed strategic plan was high on the management agenda. This understanding was deduced from one of the directors' remarks

Our current strategic plan is not only to graduate our students to be high-calibre staff in our partner organisations, but also to groom them to occupy higher positions such as specialised or branch managers or even higher positions in financial institutions, maybe within five years after their employment, but we were requested by our partner organisations some time ago to provide the basis for that, and since then we [have been] working on it. (SM 7)

Being myself a member of the strategic planning committee, it is to the best of my knowledge that the above idea was articulated by the higher management during the communication of the newly developed strategic plan to the College members. However, as can be seen from the above excerpt, the idea was there "some time ago", but it was not documented then as a form of strategic plan activity. Nevertheless, both excerpts are essential regarding the overall development of strategy as they suggest that the various departments of the College were also implementing strategic decisions from higher management, and, in the process, these department directors are also creating the relevant data at the College level. Hinton (2012) argued that the availability of consistent and reliable data which can be used for the evaluation of the performance is essential for the rigorous process of planning, the absence of which can be risky and may lead to an incorrect or naïve strategic plan.

Most importantly, these excerpts suggest that the College members can implement the emerging strategic plan processes while integrating them within their normal working activities. The capacity to resolve emerging problems is an essential factor for a successful strategic implementation in public sector

organisations (Perrott, 1996). Emerging strategies help to respond to different perceptions (Ring and Perry, 1985). For instance, studies on higher education in Portugal have shown the adoption of emergent strategies instead of intended strategies in their higher education institutions (Taylor et al., 2008). A similar conclusion was also found in Canadian state universities, where the adoption of ad hoc strategies was suggested (Holdaway and Meekison, 1990). The existence of emerging strategies in higher education reflects the reaction of institutions to the requirement of the external authorities (Taylor et al., 2008).

5.2.2 IMPOSED STRATEGIC PLAN

The study showed that the formulation of the strategic plan in the College is also more influenced by factors external to the organisation. The research also suggests that an externally imposed strategic plan should lead the College to gain competitive advantages.

The literature review suggested that the enforced choice strategy development process is an approach imposed upon institutions that operate in dynamic environments; the name refers to the dimension of constrained choice (Bailey and Johnson, 1995; Johnson et al., 2008). According to these authors, such institutions are required to align their activities to fit with the configurations expected within their surrounding environment. In addition, Gunby Jr (2009) argued that externally imposed strategies by an influential stakeholder like the accreditation authorities should bring competitive advantages to the organisation.

The findings suggest that the College's strategy formulation was based on an imposed strategy notion. This extract has surfaced from an interview with one of the College's higher management

All higher education institutions are required to formulate their strategic plan. Either to formulate an entirely new one or to amend the existing plan if they have one, whatever, it should be in line with the OAAA requirements... what I mean is that every higher education institution must incorporate the nine quality assurance standards of the OAAA as a core part of the strategic plan.
(SM1)

However, most of the other respondents were thinking of another way around; they were thinking about the formation of the College strategy, which relates to the development of the strategy in which quality assurance processes constitute a core part, which mainly depends on the conventional scanning of the College's internal and external environment by applying a SWOT analysis. They were much less aware of

the formulation of strategy and matching or aligning its objectives with the quality assurance standards imposed by the external environment of the institution, i.e., from a powerful external stakeholder like the OAAA. One of the respondents stated that

I don't think the OAAA will assess the strategy of the College... yes, they will look at the quality strategy of the College to assure the students and their parents and to the community as a whole about the quality of education provided by the College. (SM13)

Another participant expressed that

This strategy development process is undertaken voluntarily by the College and enclosing quality elements within it should enhance the overall quality of the College. (SM14)

A further one mentioned that

You know... strategic planning is a higher management function. Only the very major parts, which must be made known to the public, are made known to the general public, like vision and maybe mission. Forget about the discussion; higher management is even not answerable to justify their strategic decisions to the other members of the College, who are not in the executive ranking; they can only pass the message that it is a strategic decision and the others should work for it. (SM12)

Analysis of the above quotes suggests they are only partially true (the last one is talking about a top-down strategy format) because the findings of the secondary data suggest that the OAAA will assess the College's newly developed strategic plan and its alignment with the quality assurance standards established by the OAAA. This concept should be made clear during the strategic planning workshop; though this strategy development process was undertaken voluntarily by the College, its major purpose was to adhere to the external stakeholder requirements which are in this case the quality assurance standards of the OAAA. As an action plan, I have clearly articulated this concept to the study participants, especially to the senior managers during the interviews. Also, as I can recall from my research diary, I have also discussed this point with the College's higher management, where one member articulated it further in one of the quality assurance discussion gatherings with the College's senior managers.

This person mentioned that

The strategic plan of the College was formulated by the OAAA requirement and published quality assurance standards, which were incorporated within the strategic plan of the College. Moreover, these quality assurance standards were aligned with identified goals and can also be evaluated through the same KPIs as well, as is apparent in our strategic plan document. (SM1)

The consent of SM1 was obtained to include this excerpt in the study, which was not said during the interview, but instead during one of the quality assurance discussion gatherings.

Reflecting on the higher management statement, especially on the last sentence of the paragraph, “identified goals... can also be evaluated through the same KPIs as well”, suggests that achieving the quality standards published by the OAAA will result in achieving the College’s strategy goals simultaneously to the level of satisfaction required by the OAAA. Moreover, the study also showed that a strategic plan externally imposed by a powerful stakeholder like the accreditation authorities should lead the College to gain competitive advantages, such as a careful implementation of the quality assurance programme (Gunby Jr, 2009). As one of the respondents mentioned

Integrating quality factors within the strategic plan of the College should result in enhancing the competency of the College staff. (SM6)

Another respondent mentioned that

The OAAA requires formulation of the strategic plan in which quality assurance standards represent as a core part. This requirement is also mentioned in their published directives for the second part of institutional assessment. (SM3)

This study found that, for this kind of strategy development, reliable evaluation of the external institutional environment is necessary, and the adoption of alternative strategies is required for substantial alignment with the requirement of the institution’s influential external stakeholder(s), such as the government or accrediting bodies. The capacity of the institution to match the interests of these influential stakeholders can result in the institution realising competitive advantages, especially if the imposed options and the existing political conditions are in line with each other (Gunby Jr, 2009). As was deduced from the findings of the secondary data about the Omani higher education institutions, the

OAAA, as an accreditation agency, has explicitly emphasised the development of strategic plans for the higher education institutions operating in the country. Also, higher education institutions must identify the quality improvement processes and incorporate them within the framework of their operations, as the OAAA will conduct both parts of the quality audit according to their published quality standards.

From my own experience and background and also consent of the research participants, the above concepts should be articulated to the College stakeholders in an unambiguous manner, during either the strategic planning workshop or the implementation of the plan. Such action should result in an effective formulation and implementation of the strategic plan with adherence to the quality assurance standards, as the adoption of an imposed strategic plan will require deliberation about the strategic plan formulation and will definitely provide a sense of responsibility for successful implementation.

5.2.3 DELIBERATE STRATEGIC PLAN

The study showed that the College needs to tailor its strategy to fit the prevailing situation and conditions as every institution has its own unique circumstances (Bryson, 2011). Usually, a strategic planning process is carried out through a workshop conducted specifically for this purpose. The strategic planning process result is a final strategic plan document. The study also showed that the College is required to develop strategy, with precise specifications of its vision, mission, goals and objectives, and in which the quality improvement standards form a core component of achieve the accreditation status and as well as organisational learning.

Mintzberg (1994) argues that strategy can be deliberate, and its implementation is also deliberate. A deliberate strategy that is not implemented (realised) is therefore discarded. It is not possible to achieve the entire planned strategy in the organisation, and, consequently, the realised approach usually differs to a greater or lesser degree from the scheduled strategies (Pun, 2004).

This study found that the formulation of the strategic plan should be carried out by the members of the institution themselves. In addition, the management of the College may also seek the help of consultants to act as the facilitators or instructors if they desire to do so. An experienced facilitator can help in the implementation of an effective strategic planning process and in the proper documentation of the final strategic plan (Hinton, 2012) (as was the case in the College's situation).

As one of the interview respondents mentioned

Well... I believe we developed the strategic plan of the College, of course, with the help of the consultant... I mean it was not imposed on us by the higher management or the consultant. (SM5)

The same respondent added further

I am sure the higher management will not hesitate to provide us with any support which should facilitate us to achieve our vision, mission and goals. You know this is very important for them and us as this will help the College to obtain the accreditation. (SM5)

Another one mentioned that

Our strategic plan was formulated very professionally; our higher management and the consultant have directed us to the right path. We produced it [referring to the College's strategic plan], so we should also implement it, of course. I mean to implement it accurately... isn't? (SM9)

Another one suggested that

It was interesting, but I will say it was hard work and if we don't get the desired benefit out of it, then it would have been a waste of time, effort and money. (SM8)

The analysis of the personal interviews suggests that the College management should give to those who will be participating in the plan a sense of ownership of it, and seek their willingness to support and actively participate in the strategic planning implementation process. Such commitment should result in identifying existing opportunities, threats and challenges with which the College members are required to deal to achieve the optimal benefit through the implementation of the College strategic plan. Empirical studies have shown that the involvement of members at all levels in strategic planning and the implementation process leads to stronger ownership of the project and results in greater accountability. By contrast, failure to secure the involvement of interested parties will result in reducing the chances of successful completion (Bloom, 1986).

5.2.4 ENVIRONMENTAL SCANNING

The study showed that the environmental scanning forms the most critical element within the strategic plan and that the formulation of all strategic plans will be influenced by the College's current internal and external environments. The study also showed that the College is required to periodically conduct a voluntary scan of its external and internal environments because these are in constant flux, and, accordingly, the College can adjust its strategic and quality improvement processes.

According to Bryson (2011), Trainer (2004), Sevier (2003), Vinzent and Vinzent (1996), Bloom (1986) and Mintzberg (1978), a proper environmental scanning performance can be considered as a significant sign of the organisation's appropriate execution of the strategic planning process. Moreover, it can be observed from the literature that organisational environmental scanning is the most crucial aspect of the process. Every organisation is required to identify, acknowledge and distinguish issues to be tackled in an effective strategic planning process, because, in the case of non-performance or improper performance of environmental scanning, it is likely that the organisation will be unable to implement appropriately its strategic plan, which is evident in the case of this study.

During the interviews, I discussed with the participants what environmental scanning means at the College and how it works in the institution's strategic planning process. All study participants unanimously agreed that environmental scanning forms the essential element within the strategic plan. Moreover, the formulation of all strategic plans should be influenced by the College's current internal and external environments. As one of the respondents suggested

Environmental scanning is one of the important parts of the strategic planning process, and it could be undertaken either at the strategic planning process workshop or before, as was the case in the College's situation. (SM2)

I was able to tell from my experience and the expression of this participant when he mentioned "either at the strategic planning process workshop or before, as was the case in the College's situation" that this person was not happy about the way the concept of the College's environmental scanning was handled. The environmental scanning of the College was undertaken "before" by another consultant with an unknown group of College members and not with the senior managers of the College who participated in

the strategic planning process, who were not happy about this, but they agreed to it because the higher management agreed to it due to time limitation. As one of the respondents mentioned

Well... ideally speaking, we should have had our environmental scanning during the workshop. I mean, from my own experience, it should have been carried it out... you know, then, but our higher management and the consultant may be having different ideas, but I think our strategic planning workshop went well. (SM4)

Another one mentioned that

I don't think if we had performed environmental scanning at that time, it would have made any change to our strategic plan... do you? (SM11)

From the above excerpts and my conversation with other participants as well, I received the message that most of the participants were not happy about the way the concept of the College's environmental scanning was handled during the strategic planning process workshop but they did not want to criticise that openly. This study reveals that this can also be one of the primary reasons hindering the implementation process of the College's strategic plan.

I addressed this matter during the data collection and analysis, interviews with managerial groups and other College members, particularly those who actively participated in the development of the SP and organisational effectiveness, and we all agreed that in addition to, facing the challenge of assessing environmental impact and conducting a SWOT and PESTEL analysis, and mapping the stakeholders and using their feedback to help develop a strategic plan and implement the quality improvement processes should help to define suitable practices to maintain these plans and continuously evaluate them. These processes were representing a significant challenge for the management of the College during the implementation of the SP and QAP because they are also considered to be strategic change processes (Gioia and Chittipeddi, 1991). Accordingly, proper environmental scanning will mainly assist the College in overcoming the strategic management challenges to achieve its purpose.

5.3 IMPLEMENTATION OF THE STRATEGIC PLAN (A)

The study showed that challenges faced during the strategy implementation were partially due to the lack of implementation planning. For the College to implement its strategy more successfully, once the

strategic plans were developed there should have been plans put in place on how to implement the formulated strategies. Inadequate planning for implementation will result in the institution not being able to implement its strategic plan satisfactorily. This study also showed that strategic formulation and implementation are interrelated processes and should be executed consecutively. Moreover, the top-down approach of strategic management is not adequately functional in the higher education institution (i.e., the College).

Implementation of a strategy occurs when an institution adopts procedures and practices which are reconciled with their strategic plan (David, 2013). Implementation of the strategy is the strategic management component, which is most complex and time-consuming, because it involves all aspects of management. It must be initiated from different levels and different parts within the institution (Shah, 2005). The task of implementing the strategy is mainly driven by active operations; it revolves around people management and institutional operations, which requires “performing the tasks with and through others” (Hough, et al. 2008, p. 256). Strategic formulation and implementation are interrelated and cannot be perceived as discrete processes (David, 2013). In their studies, Hinton (2012) and Paris (2003, 2004) strongly opposed the application of a top-down approach in HEIs because of their conservative nature.

In my opinion, and as is apparent from this study, the most inclusive approach to ensuring that a strategic plan directs the processes of the institution is to link the departmental plans with the College’s main strategic plan.

Implementation of the strategy requires answering the question of 'how'. Specific techniques and procedures are necessary for the smooth operation of the strategy and supportive behaviours (Hogg et al., 2008). We all, participants and I, agreed that such techniques provide a road map for the methodological implementation that includes different strategic success factors. In the implementation of the strategy themes (lower-order codes) such as ‘Link the departmental plans with the institutional plan’, ‘the Dichotomy of Strategy Formulation and Implementation’ and ‘the top-down approach’ have emerged in the discussions.

5.3.1 LINKING THE DEPARTMENTAL PLAN WITH THE INSTITUTIONAL PLAN

The study showed that it is essential to link the overall departmental plans with the College's overall strategic plan, as achieving the former will result in achieving the latter.

Since HEIs consist of several academic as well as administrative departments, often occupying a certain autonomy regarding their operations, it is common to formulate a strategic plan for the whole higher education institution, as well as related action plans at the departmental level (Goldstein, 2012). It is at these departments where the College carries out the current work; therefore, these departments must have strategic action plans that determine their input to the College's mission. Usually, the College's strategic plan is formulated on a three-to-five-year cycle, whereas the strategic action plans are usually formulated once a year and are modified throughout the year on the basis of progress achieved or problems faced, while some complex actions can cover a period of more than a year (Taylor, de Lourdes Machado and Peterson, 2008).

For proper and systematic strategic management, the strategic plan can be broken down into a tactical plan consisting of the annual budget and an operational plan for the daily performance activities, where both of these plans should lead to the achievement of the College's strategic plan in the long term. This was explained by one of the respondents

We should have a systematic strategic management process; we should break down our long-term strategic plan into a tactical plan based on the needs of departments, which can be translated into the annual budget, and then this plan can be [broken down] into our operational plan. That is how we process and achieve our routine activities, so overall we will be achieving our long-term strategic plan. (SM2)

Conversion of the goals and objectives into the plan of action is a function of the implementation plan. The implementation of the plan needs guidance, clarity and good documentation, as one of the respondents mentioned

As you are aware, we aligned our department goals with the main goals in the College's approved strategic plan, but this has not reduced our work, neither [did] our [way of] working become more efficient – nor we were expecting that. Rather, our work has increased, especially my work as a director of the department, as I have to make sure that everything functions properly at the department level, which at the end should

align with the overall strategic plan of the College. I also have to remind other members of the department about this every time they produce their work. (SM7)

Once the College's strategic plan was approved by the board, all departmental directors were directed to align their departmental goals with this newly developed strategic plan's goals. Several workshops and briefings and guidance were provided by the College management to assist the members for a successful alignment process. However, from my observation, and reflection on the action of the members, the alignment process should not be the end; members should also be guided and trained on what should be the next step, and how to achieve such alignment during their daily activities and within a prescribed quality assurance manner. As one of the respondents mentioned

Quality assurance auditors will look for the documented evidence for the implementation of the OAAA quality standards in the light of the indicators set by them for each standard... they will look for the plan and results and surely will not accept the wet paint. (SM3)

Reflecting on this comment, in my opinion this is very important, because the implementation of a strategic plan mainly depends on the ability of the institution to transform ideas into strategic operational procedures. In my opinion, and as is apparent from this study, the most inclusive approach to ensuring that a strategic plan directs the processes of the institution is to link the departmental plans with the main strategic plan of the College.

5.3.2 THE DICHOTOMY BETWEEN STRATEGY FORMULATION AND IMPLEMENTATION

The outcome of this study strongly suggests that there should be no dichotomy between strategy formulation and implementation during the strategic planning process, at least not for an institution in the College's situation. Strategic formulation and implementation are interrelated processes and should be executed consecutively. However, as a matter of fact, this dichotomy is proving to be the main obstacle for the proper implementation of the College's newly developed strategic plan.

Mintzberg (1990) referred to the segregation between the formulation and implementation of the strategy as a dichotomy between thought and activity. Dandira (2011) believes that the inclination to view the formulation and implementation of the strategy as two discrete stages is the main reason for strategy drift; which is self-evident in this case. According to the constraints applied by the segregation method of formulation and implementation, combined with empirical studies of strategic management practice,

several authors have contended that the formulation and implementation should be considered as interrelated (e.g., Van der Maas, 2008; Dandira, 2011; Mintzberg, 1990). In addition, Alexander (1985), Kazmi (2008), Noble (1999) and Johnson et al. (2011) note that the formulation and implementation of the strategy are interrelated and that success in both cases is essential for the organisation (the College) to achieve excellent effectiveness.

One of the respondents stated that

Everything is related to each other, especially in higher education institutions; whatever you do, surely it will affect some other processes and activities... even if there are some activities you can carry out in isolation, but even then you will discover they are affecting somewhere and somehow some other activities, and if not so – though I doubt it – you will discover they will be affecting some future activities. (SM5)

Strategic management can be considered as two parts of the continuum. One part is the formulation of a strategy that explains how to successfully implement the organisation's plan in a given situation, whereas the other part is the implementation of a strategy that adopts a strategy formulated as received, and works with the achievement of its objectives. The implementation of the strategy addresses the issue of how to implement the formulated strategy over time, by appropriately allocating financial, human resources, and other competency of the organisation. As a result, these two integrated areas of strategic management are responsible for all the organisation's strategic plans and the ways in which they are implemented (Van der Maas, 2008). Van der Maas further stated that in the literature there are serious discussions on strategic management concerning whether the formulation and implementation of the strategy should be viewed as interactive or separate.

To develop action into practice, we all agreed that strategy formulation and implementation should be a continuous process and accordingly the planning of implementation, including the allocation of required resources also should be based on the final outcome of formulation.

5.3.3 THE TOP-DOWN APPROACH

The findings of the study showed that the model of strategic management adopted by HEIs (the College) differs from the model used by business organisations in various aspects. Given the importance of a collaborative management approach in the management of HEIs (the College), faculty participation and

reaching a consensus from the outset are important for strategic planning management based in the College, as a higher education (the College) faculty cannot be directed in the same way as the members in other commercial organisations.

The literature review suggests that primary understanding of strategy formulation and implementation is a formal process from the top down through application of various forms of controlling techniques (Mintzberg et al., 1998; Van der Maas, 2008). One of the respondents mentioned that:

You know... strategic planning is a higher management function... only the very major parts, which must be made known to the public are made known to the general public, like vision and may be mission... In fact, forget about the discussion, higher management is even not answerable to justify their strategic decisions to the other members of the College, who are not in the executive ranking... they can only pass [on] the message that it is a strategic decision and the others should work for it. (SM12)

However, Hinton (2012) and Paris (2003, 2004) argued that the top-down approach of strategy formulation and implementation rarely works in higher education institutions because of the loose control, freedom of the academicians and conservative nature of these organisations.

The findings of the study also showed that the strategic plan, which was formulated by executive managers without the participation of those members involved in its implementation, is prone to face challenges during the implementation phase. Dandira (2012) argued that the strategy often arises from initiatives adopted from the middle-level management and its operations in the organisation; in addition, strategic management was more successful when middle-level management and staff were actively involved. Therefore, successful formulation and implementation of a strategic plan should aim at providing support for and provoking enthusiasm in staff all over the institution, which can be achieved by involving those members of the institution who are expected to participate in the strategy implementation process to actively participate in the strategy formulation process (Piderit, 2000; Dandira, 2011).

The central power in higher education institutions is not very strong. Higher education management is involved in long-term investment, in education of people, which is totally different from the business approach, which looks for short- and mid-term investment in order to generate higher revenue and

income. Higher education institutions pursue different approaches to strategic planning due to the difference in their value systems, as was the case in the College's situation, where the members are conserving their organisational identity values. As has been suggested in this study, higher education institutions cannot specifically specify their clients, as it is not possible to consider that students are the only clients; the College members, government and the community as a whole can also be considered as clients of the higher education institution. One of the respondents argued that:

Of course, our values are very important; they are the mirror reflecting our image through which outsiders see us... we should maintain our values mentioned in the strategic plan. (SM10)

However, to "...maintain our values mentioned in the strategic plan" will require setting objectives and evaluating effectiveness according to the higher education institution's (the College) mission, which can be challenging, as it is also difficult to accept changes, especially in HEIs, because their nature is inclined towards conservation.

In addition, higher management in HEIs are required to secure the participation of managers and employees at a lower level; executive managers should be able to function on formulation and implementation of a strategy in which the goals of the institution and its members' are aligned as closely as possible (Van der Maas, 2008). Moreover, members of the institution will be more interested in their self-interest, than by the goals of the institution if the two are not in congruence (Pearce and Robinson, 2011). The goals (strategic plan) of the organisation should be in congruence with the **organisational identity of the members** in order to mitigate resistance, where the organisational identity of members involves the alignment of internal organisational regulations with the commitments of its members, constructed over a period of time (Hatch & Schultz, 2002).

One of the respondents suggested that:

Over the years the College has built its own values which people trust in, so if you say 'I am working in the College it gives a different perception to the people and it also gives us privilege to be College members... it also gives privilege to our graduates; therefore, you see, all of our graduates are employed, so we should strongly preserve our values. (SM6)

The organisational identity of the members is fundamentally related to the nature of those aspects which the institution's members perceive as having a direct and important influence on their daily working

(Albert and Whetten, 1985). The personal values (organisational identity) of organisational members help to shape organisational culture (Sagiv & Schwartz, 2007).

We all accept that we should preserve our core organisational value as much as possible, because these are the core values that we have developed over the time and through which people see us.

5.4 ORGANISATIONAL ASPECTS (A3)

The study showed that the method by which the College organises its activities, responsibilities, authority structures and hierarchical coordination system affects the effectiveness of the way in which the College works in order to successfully manage its strategic plan.

The literature review suggested that it is essential for the successful management of the strategic plan that the higher management (of the College) develops a better organisational structure, which allows for the proper development of the strategic plan management (Jonson et. al., 2008). Moreover, it will also result in clearly establishing the responsibilities, accountabilities and efficient working arrangements (Stacy, 2011).

If the formulation of the strategy solves 'what' and 'why' in the organisation's activities, the implementation of the strategy is all about 'how' will the actions be performed, 'who' will perform such actions, 'when' and how often these action will be performed, and 'where' events will be performed (Sminia, 2009). In other words, it is about the organisational aspect of the strategic management. In the organisational process of strategic implementation, themes (lower-order codes) such as 'Planning process structure', 'Strategy communication', 'Resources allocation', have emerged in the discussions:

5.4.1 THE PLANNING PROCESS STRUCTURE

The study showed that, for successful strategic management it is necessary to convert the organizational structure so that it contributes to the strategy implementation. However, among the respondents there were different opinions concerning the kind of structure that might be suitable for the College. A number of respondents suggested having a functional structure, as it will contribute to increased efficiency through specialisation and can demonstrate an improved practical capability. Other respondents proposed that a simple structure will be more appropriate for the College because of the complex nature

of higher education institutions. The outcomes of this study are consistent with studies of organisational structures.

In the existing literature, the importance of the organisational structure of a successful strategic management is clearly recognised. For example, Hrebiniak (2005) argues that for the successful implementation there should be a consistency between the central management authority and the levels of authorities specified in the organisational structure. Other authors have expressed the same idea (Watson, 2013; Pettigrew, 2012). They assume that the centralisation of tasks and powers within the organisational structure is a means of successful implementation.

In addition, through the design of the new organisational structure, different members (agents) will be granted different levels of authority; moreover, these members will interact freely with each other, either individually or collectively, and with institutional systems in part and in total. This will lead to the disappearance of cause and effect concepts, which will result in the emergence of positive feedback. In this kind of situation, any minor change can lead to a large change, which Stacey (2011) described as the evolution of diverse action patterns. One of the respondents mentioned that

Yes... good action in one activity will spread the goodness to other activities, and bad action will spread the badness to other activities. (SM6)

Another respondent suggested that

Yes, it will bring distraction in the short term, but will definitely bring advantages and goodness for the College in the mid and long-term; as you know, higher management sometimes need to take some drastic action to get things moving. (SM7)

This study showed that the majority of the participants suggested that they were not sure if their way of working had changed or it has become more efficient since the introduction of the revised strategic plan of the College.

As one of the respondents mentioned that

As you are aware, we aligned our department goals with the main goals in the College's approved strategic plan, but this has not reduced our work, neither our working had become more efficient,

nor we were expecting that, rather our work has increased, especially my work as a director of the department, as I have to make sure that everything functions properly at the department level, which at the end should aligned with the overall strategic plan of the College. I also have to remind other members of the department about this every time they produce their work. (SM7)

Reflecting on the above result, in my opinion, this is a serious concern. At present, this is not an observable or visible issue, but, within time, it might prove to be a major problem and it might result in not achieving the strategic goals fully or within the specified time frame. In order to overcome this issue, we (the participants and I) suggest the construction of a new organisational structure for the College. The new organisational structure should be appropriately designed in order to allow the processes of strategic planning and quality improvement to develop properly; in addition, the new structure should assist in clearly identifying duties, responsibilities and accountability measures for the members of the College. Organisational structural design can strongly influence the strengths of the College, especially the knowledge management process, as the failure to properly adjust organisational structure can result in the failure of sound strategy implementation (Johnson et al., 2012).

Another respondent mentioned that

All departments' performance should be measured according to their achievement of the overall goals of the College as set in the strategic plan document. (SM4)

This also clearly demonstrates that the senior management of the College is required to revise and re-establish the organisational structure of the College in order to allow for successful development and implementation of the strategic plan and of the quality processes within it.

5.4.2 TARGETED COMMUNICATIONS

Findings of the study suggest that targeted communication modes can serve as a fundamental method for the implementation of the strategic plan and the quality improvement processes, which should be transmitted frequently and precisely in order to allow the proper development and improvement of these processes.

Sutton and Migliore (1988) and Rapert et al. (2002) suggested that the effectiveness of the overall strategic planning process depends largely upon the mode of communications adopted by the

organisation, in addition to the understanding and acceptance of the plan by the members. Various authors in the field of strategy implementation emphasised the significance of having a successful communication strategy (for example, Miller et al., 2001; Beer & Eisenstat, 2000; Noble, 1999; Kotter, 1995; Alexander, 1985, cited in Van Dar Mass 2008). All of these authors explained that successful articulation of the strategies can positively impact on the formulation and implementing of strategy process.

Another essential element that developed from the interview was the requirement to communicate the implementation strategy to everybody engaged in the process of implementation. This reflection is consistent with the strategy implementation literature, which suggests that everybody in the organisation should appreciate the existing strategic situation (for example, Hambrick & Cannella, 1989, Alexander, 1985). Kotter (Kotter, 1996) notes that although a vision could be of a valuable intend if only some top members understand it, the actual influence of the vision is effective only when all members who are participating in the initiative or actions have shared aims in considering to its objectives and tendency.

The majority of the interviewees suggested that the mode of targeted communication has been improved in the College, especially with regard to the quality assurance processes, since the introduction of the revised strategic plan, especially oriented to the senior managers and to those members who are directly involved in the implementation process, but not to the other members of the College for the time being.

One of the directors stated that

Only the directors and heads of department are constantly updated with regard to the strategic plan and upcoming quality audit of the College, but not the other members of the department, not in our department at the moment... yes, I do always brief the members of our department [about] whatever I receive about the process of strategic planning and quality assurance, because they are the ones who do the job actually. (SM 6)

In my opinion, more efforts are required in this regard, especially in relation to targeted communications methods in order to reach the required level and fulfil the perceptions and expectations of the College members, and to avoid stagnation of the strategic plan implementation. Moreover, by critically reflecting on the above excerpt, I support the adoption of targeted communications methods, but we all (the participants and I) suggest adoption of interactive methods rather than direct methods of communication

in order to communicate with and receive feedback from all members of the College. This is because interactive discourses are particularly essential during the period of change (Cohen and Bradford, 1989).

5.4.3 ALLOCATION OF RESOURCES

The study showed that financial resources are the major component for the implementation of the strategy. The college needs to secure that mechanisms are established to ensure the prioritisation of the available resources, as an inadequacy of resources will adversely affect the implementation of the strategy. This is a common issue when organisations do not adopt a methodical procedures to formulate a strategy (Johnson et al., 2009; Okumus, 2011).

The inadequacy of funding in public HEIs encourages them to perceive the resource-based view (RBV) as a basis of sustainable competitive advantage (Mahoney and Pandian, 1992, cited in Hooley and Greenley, 2005; Finney et al., 2005, 2008). As per the resource-based view, if an institution is to realise a sustainable competitive advantage, it is required to obtain and secure valued, exceptional, unique and non-replaceable resources, and ones that are distinct to the institution. In the case of the College, this can be achieved through adoption of quality processes, exceptional programmes that result in creating value, and expansion of exclusive schemes and actions.

Implementation of a strategic plan depends critically upon the allocation of resources. All authors on the subject of strategic plan management have suggested that for the implementation of a well-structured planning process it is necessary to allocate resources accurately, including the necessary time, manpower and financial resources to maximise the benefit of the plan. Shortfalls in any of these vital resources will detrimentally undermine the process.

All participants in the study unanimously suggested that the next College budget should reflect the objectives and goals identified in the revised strategic plan, including the sub-goals and objectives specified by the departments.

During the personal interviews, one of the respondents mentioned that

Well... of course, the next budget should reflect the priorities established in the revised strategic plan of the College. (SM14)

However, my reflection on this is that the planning leaders within HEIs need to appreciate that one of the fundamental objectives of the strategic plan is to be able to allocate resources appropriately for a long period of time in order to achieve the institutional vision. In addition, the basic objective of HEIs is to adequately support their academic activities. As one of the respondents mentioned

The main purpose of a higher education institution is to provide academic services, quality academic services, and any other services are considered as supportive or complementing services.
(SM12)

However, some conditions may require the College to devote resources to activities other than the academic activities, such as upgrading of technology, addressing maintenance issues in regard to the premises, and upholding other activities outside the classroom, as can be noticed all these other activities are pouring into the same stream as the educational activities. When this was missioned in a question mode. The same respondent (SM12) replied

Yes..., but these activities should also be considered as a core part of the academic services, as without these services, upgrading of technology and addressing maintenance issues of the premises... no educational institution will be able to survive or provide even a basic type of academic services nowadays.

In my opinion, such priorities also need to be reflected in the strategic plan, because this does not present a negative sign, especially in the short and medium term, and especially if the resources are used to strengthen the provision of quality services in order to achieve the revised vision of the College in the long run. However, I also suggest that caution should be exercised here, so that arguments for not achieving the strategic goals should not be based on the absence of the required or necessary funds and resources; instead, the goals presented in the College's overall strategic plan can be achieved on the basis of funded priorities. Accordingly, the strategic plan decisions should not be budget-based; instead, the budget should be plan-based. A similar concept was also suggested by Cropper and Cook (2000). Moreover, this concept is linked with the Activity-Based Cost Budgeting method, where activities are listed in their order of priority and the budget is allocated accordingly, and, to be more accurate in the allocation of resources process, Activity-Based Costing Management (ABCM) can be applied in the higher education institutions, as was recommended by the English higher education funding bodies (Cropper and Cook, 2000).

5.5 THE MANAGEMENT ASPECTS (A4)

The study showed that the process of management in the strategic planning is an integral measure of the general managerial responsibility of senior managers. Implementation of the strategic plan is likely to be effective when the process of strategic planning from the outset takes into account the requirements for implementing the strategy. Therefore, the process of management in the strategic planning should be considered as part of the overall responsibility of senior management in the organisation. This is consistent with the literature review, which suggests that management aspects of strategic planning are considered as a major responsibility of the organisation's leadership (Northouse, 2014; Hrebiniak, 2005).

While considering the management aspects during the implementation of the strategy, themes (lower-order codes) such as 'the Leadership', 'Planning process structure' and 'the role of the leadership in the strategic plan in practice', have emerged in the discussions:

5.5.1 THE LEADERSHIP

The study showed that leadership is one of the decisive elements affecting performance in higher education institutions, as in some situations the leadership is required to guide academicians to perform in a certain manner, which is not an easy task at all.

Leadership is broadly described as one of the crucial factors in the effective implementation of the strategy (Northouse, 2014; Pearce & Robinson, 2011; Hrebiniak, 2005; Lynch, 1997; Collins, 2001; Thompson & Strickland, 2003; Freedman & Tregoe, 2003; Kaplan & Norton, 2004). However, the absence of strategic leadership recognised by senior management was recognised as the main obstacle to the active strategy implementation (Hrebiniak, 2005; Kaplan & Norton, 2004). In order for the leadership to 'buy' the thinking and aspirations of the members, there is a necessity for proper communication, trust and commitment development, equity in the allocation of resources and motivation of subordinates. Leadership is recognised as a critical factor in the planning process; leadership with the necessary knowledge, understanding and commitment can represent the balance between internal and external forces affecting the institution (Mintzberg, 1978; Paris, 2003). One of the interview respondents mentioned that

Leadership is a core element of the institutional strategic plan, as he/she is involved from the idea of strategic plan initiation until the successful achievement of the plan in the long term. (SM5)

Analysis of the study identified the leadership as an idealised champion of the College's strategic plan. Hosmer (1982) and Bloom (1986) argued that a committed leadership would be able to obtain the necessary support from their subordinates in order to successfully manage the plan's implementation processes.

5.5.2 THE ROLE OF THE LEADERSHIP IN THE STRATEGIC PLANNING IN PRACTICE

All interview participants agreed that the leadership has a very active and overall role to play throughout the strategic planning cycle: from the initiation of the plan until its successful implementation at the end, leaders should be able to translate plans into action (Cocks, 2010).

The initiation of a strategy implementation process can be achieved through strong actions from senior management of the institution, possibly including the destruction of the existing institutional organisational structure and construction of a new one (the entire Module 4 'Complex adaptive systems'" of the University of Liverpool's DBA programme is about this concept). Through the implementation of such actions, the senior management of an institution should be aiming to cause or create a turbulent situation, which should cause disturbance within the institution, enough to bring the institution to the verge of chaos. A situation of this kind can be reached through the adoption of Nonaka and Takeuchi's (1995) suggestion, as cited in Stacey (2011), that the highest authority of the institution should be able to introduce or inject some particular kind of a '**push**' strategy, which should be adequate to create a turbulent enough situation to cause change in the behaviour and cognitive patterns of the institution's members. This might be achieved through the designing of a new institutional structure. However, chaos in this context does not mean what is meant in everyday language (shambles and disorder); rather, it means to create an eagerness and a conscious situation for the institution's members in order to restore the situation to normal. Here, chaos is created through the implementation of a push strategy by the top management of the institution in order to transform the institution to a new position of equilibrium (Stacy, 2011). One of the respondents suggested that

Like, during the previous quality audit we all were thinking about the quality when we do our job, and we used to judge on our work by the quality terms ... yes, because the situation or climate was as such... we were required to do so... I am hoping the same happened this time as well. (SM4)

I can reflect on this comment as a 'push' strategy to create a turbulent situation to introduce an organisational change process in order to allow the implementation of the College's strategic plan and quality assurance processes, because I was very closely linked to the circulation of such a strategy during the College's previous quality audit. Adoption of such a strategy also confirms Andersen's (2004) conclusion that the concept of active institutions includes those organisations participating in the processes of forming more complex strategies, which combine decentralised institutional structures (organisational leadership chaos) and deliberate planning that can be effectively adopted in the changing environments. In addition, forming the integrative forms of the strategy (formation of a deliberate and emergent strategy) should result in higher productivity due to the better management of the processes. From my experience, both approaches to strategy development (intended and emergent) can be treated as simultaneous and not mutually exclusive; strategy development should be a multi-process approach that can be implemented within the same institution. In addition, the process of strategy development should be consistent with the notion of the general strategic plan which has been planned with very ambitious future prospects. This is because the process of strategy development will vary over time and prevailing conditions, and, as such, different members of the institution will perceive the development process of the strategy in different ways, as one of the respondents emphasised

Every new management [team] will have its own different vision. (SM2)

A very similar view was also presented by Johnson et al. (2008). Moreover, top executives in general will perceive the development of the strategy as more intended rather than emergent. As one of the senior managers put it

We should know what we are doing and not wait for things to happen. (SM1)

A very similar argument was also put forward by Collier et al. (2001). Effective leadership will apply within both of these paradigms (deliberate and emergent), either exclusively or combined, according to the particular outcomes which the leadership wants to achieve during their institution's development process. One of the respondents suggested that

Implementation of the new strategic plan will definitely require some changes to be made in the organisation and sometimes it could be a dramatic change, for which the senior management should assess the situation very carefully. (SM 9)

However, my reflection is that the implementation processes of the strategic plan and quality improvement require continuous improvement, and, accordingly, integrated change (deliberate and emergent strategy as explained above in sub-sections (5.1.1 and 5.1.3) will be more suitable in this situation. Ford (2008) referred to them as planned and emerging change.

5.6 TRUST AND COMMITMENT (A5)

The study showed that the trust and commitment of employees is a crucial element that defines the effectiveness of the organisation. The study showed that trust is an imperative factor of high organisational effectiveness with respect to implementation of the strategy.

This is also confirmed by a critical review of the literature. Although the traditional assessment of the strategy suggests that the formulation of the strategy is the responsibility of senior management (Mintzberg et al., 1998; Andrews, 1967; Chandler, 1962), modern reasoning proposes that strategy formulation should not be the task of the senior management only. Many authors agree that the formulation of the strategy should include all members of the organisation (see, for example, Armstrong and Taylor, 2014; Dandira, 2011; Collier et al., 2001; Beer & Eisenstat, 2000).

For a successful plan implementation process, effective involvement from the members of the College at every stage is very important; the process of strategic planning is not only about development of the plan, but, more importantly, about the implementation of the plan as a form of management tool in order to make better decisions to realise effective operations and run the organisation more efficiently, as one of the respondents explained that

You can only know if your strategic plan is good when it is implemented. (SM9)

Another respondent, while describing a previous quality audit suggested that

It was an ongoing process, in which every staff [member] of the College participated and had a role to play; each member of staff was at least a member in one of the task forces. (SM5)

Involvement of College members in the planning and implementation process is a powerful device for the management to introduce organisational culture change positively without a major threat of resistance (Yow et al., 2000).

When considering the trust and commitment aspects during the implementation of the strategy, one major theme (lower-order codes) such as 'Ownership of the programme' emerged in the discussions. Major theme in a sense that other themes like 'proper implementation of the programme' and 'responsibility of the programme' etc. that were also emerged in the discussions, were considered as within the concept of this major theme:

5.6.1 OWNERSHIP OF THE PROGRAMME

The study showed that joint appreciation and commitment by all members is a major element in the organisation's effectiveness, which should result in successful implementation of the strategic plan, as people are more willing to work with plans in which they have been involved throughout the formulation process as they will be the owners of the process.

According to Kotter (1996), Armstrong and Taylor (2014) and Rapert et al. (2002), joint understanding without commitment can lead to 'opposition' and adversely disturb productivity, whereas ownership can lead to commitment and increase productivity.

One of the respondents suggested that

Involvement of members of the institution in the strategic planning process and in subsequent implementation will provide them with a sense of ownership and [they] will be more willing to work for its success. (SM6)

The empirical research also suggested that members' participation from the early stages of such planning processes should provide them with a sense of ownership, because it has been revealed that members of institutions are more willing to participate in processes and work for their success when they participate in the development of these processes (Armstrong and Taylor, 2014). Accordingly, we (the participants and I) suggest that the management of the College is required to produce the Key Initiatives, which represent important actions aligned with the College's institutional vision, mission, goals and objectives, and this will result in a significant achievement to drive the College forward. For accomplishment of these initiatives the College management should identify those directors who participated in the strategic planning formulation process with the Key Initiatives, where they in turn can authorise their subordinates to jointly accomplish these initiatives with them by providing them with guidance, leadership and supervision, but the ultimate responsibility for the successful completion of the Key Initiatives should

remain with the directors themselves. In this way, the higher management of the College can secure the trust and commitment of the College members.

5.7 CHANGE MANAGEMENT (A6)

The findings of the study suggest that strategic management and quality assurance management are both considered as a form of organisational change management processes as both require scanning and alignments with organisational environments in order to achieve sustainable competitive advantages.

For the purposes of this study, change management is the complete modification of the organisation to bring it into line with its environment (Gouillart & Kelly, 1995, Taffinder, 1998). However, one of the key agreement about the strategic management is the implementation of the mission of the organisation according to its environmental consequences on organisation in order to guide the proper decision-making process (Grunig & Repper, 1992); thus, change management and strategic management can be viewed as a similar process or implementing the similar processes. Both relate to process of changing the behaviour, structure and processes in the organisation to achieve specific goals and objectives (Graetz et al., 2002).

Accordingly, all the College's strategic implementation processes, including the quality improvement process, can be described as a form of transformational change, which should result in improving competitiveness at all functional levels. Paradigm change should allow for restructuring of the College processes in order to enhance efficiency, service quality and change of the organisational structure, and, as a result, it will also assist in making the necessary changes in policies and procedures.

When considering the Change management aspects during the strategic management different themes have emerged in the discussions, however, they were categorised under the two major themes of (lower-order codes) 'Strategic change management' and 'QAP change management' as follows:

5.7.1 STRATEGIC CHANGE MANAGEMENT

This study showed that strategic management should also incorporate change management processes, because strategic implementation processes, including quality assurance processes, are recognised as a

form of strategic change processes that requires appropriate change management for successful implementation.

This study also showed that strategic planning requires identifying goals, scanning the environment and accessing available resources, and then preparing an implementation plan. Thus, the strategy in accordance with this process is the result of cautious and precise investigation and organisation with a clear sequence of changes, which requires good change management.

Strategic change management is an approach of applying change in an organised and deliberate manner to achieve organisational mission, goals and objectives that are determined by scanning of its environment and within the available resources when it is important for the organisation to make the change in order to achieve competitive advantages (Harrison, 2003).

One of the respondents mentioned that

Change management, in the strategic management situation, is concerned with the successful implementation of the strategy formulated so to ensure that the right decisions are made for the future... so good change management will recognise the best strategies that can be adopted for the strategic implementation processes. (SM1)

Another one mentioned that

I think, in general, strategic implementation is about achieving our vision in the long run – I mean the end result – through implementation of our mission, attending to our objective and goals, and I would say not forgetting the allocation of funds, and if we agree that all of these things are forms of organisational change... or, as you suggested, strategic change, then [they] definitely will require specialised change management. (SM4)

Reflecting the above excerpts, strategic change management arises when the formulated strategy is placed in action by implementing a new organisational structure, and allocation of resources and taking action to change processes (Johnson & Scholes, 1999). According to Hill and Jones (2004), this also includes the organisation's performance, management and ethics, as well as the implementation of the strategy. In addition, continuous and unforeseen changes can render any thoughtful plan inadequate;

thus, current approaches to strategic change management have increased the value of being able to react promptly to changes in the organisational environment (Harrison, 2003).

5.7.2 QUALITY ASSURANCE PROCESS CHANGE MANAGEMENT

The findings of this study confirm the empirical studies available on the topic suggest that the implementation of the quality assurance programme in the College should be treated as a strategic change process and it should be managed accordingly.

According to Gioia and Chittipeddi (1991), adoption of quality improvement processes in HEIs is considered to be a process of strategic change, which is normally related to the identification and establishment of better ways for institutional re-engineering and for swift and overall implementation of proposed changes.

One of the respondents mentioned that

Yes. Of course, implementation of a quality assurance programme is also a strategic change... because the implementation of this quality assurance programme will be permanent, and will affect all our major decisions and operational decisions. As a matter of fact, even our new strategy should be implemented in a quality assurance manner... you know. Therefore, in our strategic planning workshop we matched our strategic planning KPIs with the quality standards of the OAAA. (SM6)

Another one mentioned that

Implementation of our strategy will affect the College's processes and so will the adoption of the quality assurance programme processes. (SM5)

In the process of strategic change, management of the institution is also able to change and modify the conventional functions, goals structures and culture of the institution. Such change processes are considered to be crucial because they require the participation of all organisational members. The whole institutional community must follow approaches identified by the management for the successful implementation of the proposed change programme (Bartunek, 1984; Ranson et al., 1980).

However, on further discussion of the topic with some other participants, and on observation of the other members, it was revealed, which I was able to understand also from their explanations, that they were 'on the same page' in relation to their thought process: that the implementation of the quality assurance programme is a form of strategic change process.

As an action plan, I discussed with all participants and also with other members of the College why the quality assurance programme is a strategic change process. I also discussed this point thoroughly during my discussion of the study's finding with the two members of higher management and suggested disseminating this concept as a form of organisation learning process.

5.8 HUMAN RESOURCES MANAGEMENT (HRM) (A8)

This study showed that HRM is an essential aspect determining strategic management in the College. Most respondents suggested that proper human resources management is a vital element in the successful performance of the College. They claimed that virtuous practices and policies of human resources results in the successful formulation and implementation of the strategy.

The literature review also confirms the above finding. It suggest that, over time, the role of people management in the institution has transformed from recruiting and other day-to-day responsibilities to the insertion of HRM as a prime feature for achieving sustainable competitive advantages (Collins & Clark, 2003; Thompson & Strickland, 2003). For the effective strategy implementation, the participation and effectiveness from all members of the College are required.

An organisation's members are regarded as the main element and they cannot be overemphasised for successful performance in HEIs. As Armstrong (2008) stated, organisational members are the most essential resource in organisations, so they should be provided with optimum care and attention.

When considering the Human Resources Management aspects during the strategic management, major themes (lower-order codes) like '*Strategic planning committee*' and '*targeted training*' emerged in the discussions:

5.8.1 STRATEGIC PLANNING COMMITTEE

The study showed that there must be a strategic planning committee and quality improvement committee and the concept of targeted communication, where, in case of any discrepancy, issues or enquires, members of the College know whom to refer to. These committees can also serve as top-down and bottom-up channels of communication, where members of the committees can convey the higher management directives to other members of the College and suggestions of the other members to the higher management.

These results actually correspond with the literature review, as Mintzberg (1978) and Johnson et al. (2008) suggested a very similar approach: they argued that the monitoring and implementation of the strategic plan should be the responsibility of the middle-level managers (i.e., the director and head of department), as this should result in the establishment of further accountability and timely implementation of the plan. In contrast, Paris (2003) argued that such responsibility should be assigned to a planning council (i.e., the committee).

On the same subject, one of the interview respondents suggested that

There should be a committee responsible for the overall implementation process of the strategic plan, which should also be responsible for reporting the feedback to the higher management regularly in order to update them on the implementation process. (SM8)

During the discussion of this point with the higher management, I also mentioned to them that I agreed with the above suggestion, but with the reservation that the responsibility for daily monitoring of the plan should rest with the middle-level managers, as suggested in the literature by Mintzberg (1995) and Johnson et al. (2008). This is because, based on my experience, this will result in the establishment of a better form of accountability. If the committee undertakes the daily monitoring and activation responsibility, this may distort the process of accountability because it will not be possible to hold any particular member of the committee to be responsibility for not achieving the accountability. Nevertheless, I also suggested that the middle-level managers can be members of the strategic committee and at the same time responsible for the daily monitoring and activation of the strategic plan and quality assurance implementation processes, which was also the opinion of the higher management.

Other than *daily monitoring*, for the successful implementation of the strategic plan, I concur with the (SM8) suggestion mentioned above and suggest forming a Strategic Plan and Quality Assurance Committee (SPQAC). This will be a high-performance group of enablers for the initial stages of implementation (Eisenhardt and Martin, 2000). Based on my experience, the membership of the committee can consist of a number of members, other than the head of the committee, equivalent to the number of identified goals in the College's strategic plan, where each member should be responsible for one of the selected goals identified in the strategic plan – the one for which they have close experience and knowledge. This is similar to what Cleveland (2002) referred to as a 'coalition of the willing'; that is, the process needs to have a sponsor, champions or 'point' people who are willing to lead and pursue the implementation. Moreover, reflecting also on the College's previous quality assurance audit, the main function of the SPQAC will be explaining the vision, mission, values and core competencies of the institution to all members in general, and with regard to the quality assurance and improvement processes in particular. In addition, the committee will disseminate the necessary knowledge on the subject of SP and QAP by attending to the enquiries of the College members, resolving conflict issues by following a constructive approach, and communicating with the members through the adoption of open interaction methods. During the implementation processes, College members can either individually or collectively contact members of SPQAC individually or collectively to obtain any necessary clarifications. Throughout the process of implementation, the committee members will also be encouraging other College members to provide suggestions or to propose innovative methods for implementation to the College's higher management. Through the application of a method of interaction of this kind, the committee would be working in both directions: horizontally, by approaching other members and by other members approaching the committee, and vertically, by applying the top-down and bottom-up methods of communication by virtue of being a link between the top management and other members of the College. According to Eisenhardt and Martin (2000), the convening of a high-performance group, like a SPQAC, should lead the institution to adopt modes of effective communication. In a similar vein, Raelin (2010) argued that the establishment of a high-performance group will lead to the adoption of a collective leadership approach, which, in turn, should result in resolving conflicts in a productive manner.

Moreover, since then, I have been participating in the strategic planning implementation process as a part of my work, where I was able to discuss and articulate the strategic planning and quality improvement matters with members of the College. In addition, I was trying to establish a two-way channel of

communication (top down and bottom up), and I was encouraging the other directors of the College to do the same thing in their respective departments.

5.8.2 THE TARGETED TRAINING

The study showed the key role played by staff training and development in the effective formulation and implementation of the strategy. The study showed that the competence of the employee is crucial for the existing and prospective progress and prosperity of the College.

According to Armstrong (2006), Pearce and Robinson (2003) and Argyris (1992), several successful organisations have emphasised the need to train and develop employees by paying attention to training and educating their members in the course of strategic implementation. Moreover, Hinton (2012), argued that creation of standardised procedures of implementation and the development of appropriate training practices with regard to the action processes should result in avoiding stagnation within the strategy process.

One of the interview participants stated that

The College should hold different workshops to provide adequate training to the members [in order for them] to gain knowledge about the strategic plan, and, in addition, to make them practically capable for implementation of their part of the plan accurately. (SM13)

Another one suggested that

Targeted training will motivate the staff and will enhance their competency. (SM11)

In my opinion, the absence of proper training or the presence of inadequate training in the strategic plan implementation processes will result in poor internal communications, which may prove to be a major obstacle during the process of implementation. In particular, with regard to processes of the strategy implementation that have not been broadly defined, inadequacies in staff training may create a 'roadblock'. The creation of standardised procedures of implementation and the development of appropriate training practices with regard to the action processes should result in avoiding stagnation within the strategy process (Hinton, 2012).

5.9 QUALITY ASSURANCE MANAGEMENT ASPECTS (A9)

The study showed that the strategy of quality management is not a substitute for the strategic planning management; instead, it restates the related quality concepts in regard to the rapid institutional environmental changes; it is an integral and important part of the educational programme modernisation and development systems. Moreover, for the implementation of a quality management strategy to be successful, HEI management is required to be inspired, innovative and up to date.

Adrarrakah (2006) argued that the strategy of quality management is a process, which manages the long-term objectives of quality through its redefinition. What this definition suggests is that the strategy of quality management is mainly concerned with avoiding the weakness and the reasons behind the failure of efforts in educational institutions. This is because each unit has a value associated to it, and it is important to specify the various operations connected with and which support the activity of each operation or phase of production. Also, it is the quality managers' task to decide the added value amount which can be added to each process.

For the purpose of the quality assurance management, major themes (lower-order codes) like 'Accountability' and 'Improvement' emerged in the discussions:

5.9.1 ACCOUNTABILITY

The finding of this study suggests that accountability is a major part of the accreditation authority's quality audit of the service users.

Accountability is a commanding method. This is one of the central aspects of control; accountability is usually related to information, suitability, security or a standard that refers to the level of satisfaction (Middlehurst & Woodhouse, 1995). The procedures for ensuring accountability are based on criteria established by external bodies (like accreditation authorities) (Billing, 2004).

Accountability measures are important for both phases of the quality assurance audit which relate to the efficiency of the institutional functions and the evaluation of institutional effectiveness. Both of these processes require the members of the institution to provide tangible evidence which demonstrates the efficiency and effectiveness of the institutional functions are relying on the available infrastructure, and

that the effective organisational learning process has achieved according to set plan. One of the respondents argued that

This is what I mean. We need to have our internal quality assurance policies, then we can implement accountability procedures. Without having our quality assurance policies, how can we hold someone responsible of not performing in the suggested quality manner? (SM3)

However, as far as the planning process is concerned, all members of the College who were interviewed unanimously indicated that they were able to provide evidence that institutional effectiveness (which is the second phase of the quality audit anticipated by the College) had been achieved as set out in the approved plan and defined OAAA standards evaluation document. As one of the respondents indicated

Yes... we can prove our work with the documented evidence as we have been filling in all the required transaction documents; they are in accordance with the rules and regulations of the College. (SM6)

Moreover, the other respondents were also of the same view. However, I would like to emphasise here that there is always some kind of misunderstanding and discrepancy in this regard. The OAAA has been continuously emphasising during their various quality assurance guidance workshops, and so has the quality unit at the College, that all members of the College should properly document the process of their work (they should document what exactly they are doing), because the accreditation authors will not only look for the work transactions, but will rather look for the process of such transactions in order to establish the College's accountability to the service users.

5.9.2 IMPROVEMENT

The study showed that quality assurance standards established by the OAAA are all pertaining to the adoption of accountability and improvement processes in higher education institutions.

Quality improvement procedures are aimed at approving future results, rather than judging preceding results. Actions for improvement lead to the achievement of goals that are primarily relevant to the interests of the higher education institution, as well as to the explanation of quality according to the goals and standards that are internal or can be created internally (Thune, 1996; Wiklund et al., 2003). As one of the respondents observed

Yes, of course, the same applies to the improvement factor. Without having quality assurance policies, how can we improve the quality of our processes, our daily working... the teaching and learning of our students? (SM3)

Sustainable improvement depends on internal participation. To achieve improvement, it is necessary to inform the beneficiaries about the need to improve, understand the correct application of the improvements, to learn how to achieve the improvement goals, and assess the benefits to be realised (Middlehurst and Woodhouse, 1995; Wiclund et al., 2003). This suggests that the improvement depends on individual or joint participation working earnestly to achieve the expected goals, even if it is presumed that, without significant motivation to improve quality, the best achievement can be compliance with external requirements of the accreditation authority and the community as a whole.

5.10 FORMATIVE EVALUATION (A10)

The formative processes involve the quality audit processes that are mainly related to the quality improvement standards and internal practices implemented by HEIs. Moreover, formative evaluation also focuses on the quality standards established by the accreditation authority for the purpose of assessing the processes, approaches and methods which the higher education institution follows across these established standards, aligned with the HEI's mission, vision, goals and objectives identified in the strategic plan and in the context of its specific rules and prevailing legal regulations. Therefore, HEIs are required to accurately integrate their *quality assurance structure and processes* within their strategic plan.

For the purpose of the **Formative** evaluation various themes emerged in the discussions, however, they were categorised under the two major themes of (lower-order codes) '*Quality assurance processes policy*' and '*Integration of QA processes with strategic management*' as follows:

5.10.1 QUALITY ASSURANCE PROCESSES POLICY

The study revealed that the College should have its own quality assurance policy, which should clearly demonstrate how to deal with and take measures to achieve its major activities in a quality manner.

Mintzberg and Rose (2003), De Wit and Meyer (2004), Taylor et al. (2008) and Hinton (2012) argued that, although, the general framework of strategic planning and quality assurance remains the same, nevertheless, every HEI, like any other organisation, has its own discrete features and prevailing

conditions and accordingly each needs to have its own discrete strategic planning (and quality assurance management) processes.

The study also showed that the College's quality assurance policy should not only focus on the College's administrative and teaching and learning activities, but it should also consider, as one of its core functions, the processes related to the students' affairs, like registration, admission, finance, examinations and grievances processes.

In their study, Anderson, Johnson and Milligan (2000) caution that we should not pay too much attention to processes on the account of academic standards and results of the quality assurance plans.

One of the respondents mentioned that

A quality assurance manual will consist of different quality assurance-related policies; it will help us to deal and cope with academic and administrative aspects of the College. It will also tell us how to implement our other policies in a quality manner. (SM3)

All respondents in the personal interviews agreed that the College should have a separate policy for the process of quality improvement, with one of the respondents stating that

We should have a quality assurance policy. I do not think we have one now, but I heard that we are in the process of preparing one. I believe it has been prepared by the quality assurance unit... probably you must be more aware [of this] than I am (SM4)

It was expected that there would be unanimous agreement about having a separate policy for the quality improvement processes; however, it appeared that, unfortunately, most of the participants were actually not sure about what this policy should include. The majority of the respondents mentioned that it should cover all quality measures related to the College, but they were not aware about their role in the application of these quality measures, as one of the interviewees mentioned that

I think the quality assurance policy should consist of all quality matters and how to deal with quality-related issues... you know, it should be like staff-related and financial-related policies that we are having. (SM5)

Another one suggested that

It should cover all quality aspects... that should be defined by the quality assurance unit. (SM11)

In my opinion, this conclusion shows a lack of perception and understanding about the concept of Quality Improvement processes (QIP) in general which could lead towards resistance of the QIP implementation at any stage. Accordingly, this matter was discussed with one of the higher managers who has vast authority regarding the quality assurance aspect of the College, where this member of higher management agreed with the above quotation and mentioned that

I can assure you that we will send the final draft of every quality assurance policy to the members for their input, so it will not be only defined by the quality assurance unit... it will be a collective work... and it should be a collective work. (SM3)

Subsequently, every final draft of the quality assurance policy is now remitted to the members of College for their input.

In addition, I have also advised the concerned higher management to instruct the SP and QIC members to address this issue on a priority basis through the adoption of a targeted interactive communications approach, and recommended the adoption of targeted training in order to promote the knowledge about the quality assurance policy document purpose and content.

5.10.2 INTEGRATION OF QUALITY ASSURANCE PROCESSES WITH STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT

This research study reveals that it is necessary for the College to associate the implementation of the quality assurance process with the process of strategic change management (Gioia and Chittipeddi, 1991). This can be achieved through the integration of quality assurance processes within the College's strategic plan, by aligning strategic goals, objectives and PIs with the quality standards of the accreditation authority. This may also be referred to as the institutionalisation of quality assurance process objectives.

Normally, institutions develop the processes of strategic management and quality assurance independently, but usually simultaneously, because the processes of strategic management and the processes of quality improvement overlap. Accordingly, the integration of these two administrative processes is extremely important (Porter, 1980). Accordingly, higher education institutions need either to

adjust the quality improvement factors in order to match them with their operations (strategic objectives) or to adjust their operations in order to align them with their quality improvement factors.

To align its educational processes with the OAAA quality audit (formative process) standards, and to improve the quality practices, the College attempted to implement the nine fields of common activity identified by the OAAA in accordance with its mission and vision as identified in its strategic plan and in the context of its adopted rules and prevailing legal regulations.

One of the respondents suggested that

We should not only embed the quality measures into the operations and processes of the College, but we should also integrate the auditing procedures within it so we can discover quickly if things are not done in the prescribed or required quality way or manner. (SM1)

Reflecting on SM1's above suggestion and on the College's strategic planning process workshop, I posit that this can be achieved through the integration of quality targets and PIs of the institution, which should reflect the mapping of the goals, objectives and KPIs with the standards set by the accreditation authority (in effect, the OAAA), or by aligning the standards set by the accreditation authority with the strategic objectives of the College.

HEIs are required to promote and apply a system for closing the loop to ensure the embedding of quality assurance standards within the strategic plan, using the evidence-based system in order to diagnose opportunities and address weaknesses, to propose improvements, and to link the strategy and quality at the programme level.

Another respondent mentioned that

The OAAA will be looking for all quality aspects; it will be a comprehensive quality audit of the College. We should be ready for it; the College should satisfy all their requirements.... programmes' accreditation is a core part of the quality audit, because I think this is what the students and parents are looking for. (SM3)

By critically reflecting on the above response that the achievement of the strategic objectives will also mean the achievement of the nine quality standards stated by the OAAA and vice versa, because both of

them will include the same KPIs. Thus, the OAAA will be looking for proof with evidence that all the institutional resources are employed to support the objectives of the College's strategic plan.

5.11 SUMMATIVE EVALUATION (A11)

The summative assessment process assesses the higher education institution's performance with regard to the standards established by the OAAA for educational quality to confirm their implementation as prescribed. Thus, the process of summative assessment is primarily concerned with institutional standards assessment and assessment of programmes, i.e., the teaching and learning activities of the College. For the summative assessment – that is, for the institutional assessment and assessment of the effectiveness of its academic programmes – the College developed a strategic planning and quality improvement model, but it necessitated an adjustment to the roles of the faculty and other managers in the College. Moreover, it also required an adjustment to the College structure in order to focus more on improving faculty qualifications and assessing student learning at the programme level.

For the purpose of the **Summative** evaluation, various themes emerged in the discussions, however, they were categorised under the major theme of (lower-order codes) 'Strategic planning and quality assurance structure and process' as follows:

5.11.1 STRATEGIC PLANNING AND QUALITY ASSURANCE STRUCTURE AND PROCESS

The data collected from the interviews and based on my further discussions and observations has revealed that the College is attempting to inaugurate a particular type of QA structure, and the process methods through which the QA processes are implemented focus mainly on activities of the teaching and learning process.

These results are very much in line with the available literature which suggests that QA processes should be mainly related to teaching and learning activities (Gibson, 2004), and, accordingly, HEIs need to develop alternative structures through which they can implement new QA processes systematically.

All study participants agreed that proper and constructive implementation of the strategic plan processes should lead to improvements in the quality of the services provided by the College.

According to Fitzgerald (2012), obtaining accreditation will emphasise the successful management of the strategic plan; since accreditation bodies will ensure that quality assurance standards are applied to all types of higher education activities and processes, including strategic planning management activities and processes, and this can only be achieved through the proper implementation of quality assurance standards within the institution's strategic plan.

One of the respondents mentioned that

Quality assurance is a major part of the revised strategic plan of the College and it can be achieved through the proper implementation of the strategic plan. (SM8)

Reflecting on my personal experience, proper implementation of the strategic planning processes is in itself a major form of improvement in the quality of services provided by the College, though it was noted that, at present, the QI operations were primarily concerned with the quality of teaching and learning operations provided by the College.

In a similar vein, most of the interviewees indicated that quality improvement processes are also very closely associated with student support services, which are themselves very closely connected with the College's teaching and learning processes.

In spite of the acceptance by the majority of the participants that there are other activities, such as entertainment, sports and knowledge competitions, and other research activities, which should also be included in the quality assurance processes, they also believed that, although the necessary type of Quality Assurance (QA) structure existed in the College to include such activities, nevertheless, it was not sufficient.

One of the respondents argued that

There is a quality assurance structure at the College, which is presented by the quality assurance unit, but now they are more concerned with the quality assurance of the teaching and learning activities of the College, especially after the intensified requirements of the OAAA and of the quality assurance in general, but at present there [aren't many] other activities in the College (SM8)

Another one stated that

The quality assurance unit is working over its limit to prepare everything for our second phase of the quality audit, which is very crucial for us and it is at our doorstep... you know, now there are specialised staff in the student affairs section for other activities, such as recreational activities for our students, and they have been asked to submit an action plan on a regular basis, but you know there are always some quiet periods and this is one of them. As I said, our accreditation audit is at our doorstep and its successfulness should be everybody's main priority. (SM3)

Nevertheless, these results are very much in line with the available literature which suggests that QA processes should be mainly related to teaching and learning activities (Gibson, 2004), and, accordingly, that higher education institutions need to develop alternative structures through which they can implement new (other) quality improvement processes systematically.

For the purpose of this study, the quality management strategy was basically concerned with defining the concept of the quality assurance and quality improvement of the College with regard to the adoption of the quality standards and changes in the College's environments. In addition, the concept has been also observed as an imperative for the achievement of the College's vision of gaining the leading position in the financial sector in the region. However, it should be appreciated that the strategy of quality management is not a substitute for the College's strategic plan, but rather an important and complementary aspect of the improvement of the existing quality assurance system all over the institution. For the successful implementation of the strategic plan, the management of the College is required to be a source of inspiration for innovation and incessant improvement and modernisation.

5.12 EVALUATION OF THE STRATEGIC PLAN (A12)

The analysis of the interviews revealed that the majority of the participants suggested that the College's strategic plan should be reviewed and updated every year, every three years, and every five years.

According to Bryson (2011), the strategic plan is generally assessed to ascertain the allocation of adequate resources. It may be appropriate but may be failing due to the insufficient allocation of resources, or a change in situation, which requires a shift in the political environment of the institution and accordingly results in a shift in the attention of the institution's members. This can also be caused due to a situation where interaction between the policies and strategies becomes difficult and, accordingly, the required

results are not produced, which may require adjustment to the existing strategy or the development of a new strategy.

Personal interviews produced a conclusion, where most of the respondents argued that the management of the College can adopt two periods for the assessment and revision of the College strategy, where some of the items can be revised annually, whereas others which require longer periods of implementation can be revised after every three years. For example, executive training programmes, student intake policy, and administrative and monetary decisions (budgeting) can be reviewed annually, whereas the policies and decisions related to the academic field, like programmes' effectiveness, institutional effectiveness and implementation of the learning processes, can be evaluated every three years, as such activities and processes require longer periods of time to be realised. Moreover, all the interviewees suggested that the College should revise its entire strategic plan at least every five years.

According to Johnson et al. (2008), the strategic plan is essentially a part of the strategic management process; it assists in determining the long-term direction of the institution. However, this long-term direction needs to be assessed periodically to identify if there is any deviation in order to bring the plan back to the corrective path if required (Cassidy, 2006). One of the respondents suggested that

The management of the College must assess the progress made towards the achievement of its vision, mission, values, goals and objectives on a cyclical base of three to five years. (SM4)

Another one mentioned that

The strategic plan is a long-term road map of the institution. In my opinion, 'long term' can be of three years up to five years and [it] depends on the higher management's perception, or it could be even longer; but, for the strategic plan, I think five years will be ideal, as it should be enough for things to mature to assess the strategic plan in order to discover which part of it was successful and which part of it was not so, so that the management can either amend [it] or develop a new strategic plan. (SM11).

Furthermore, one of the College's major stakeholders also suggested that

The College should assess the situation every year to realise what has been achieved to date successfully with regard to the current plan, as this will allow for the effective learning process, which can be used then to adjust the plan if required. (SM12)

Hinton (2012) identified the former one (annual revision) as a tactical plan and the latter one (two and more years' revision) as a strategic plan.

However, I also concur with the suggestion that

If the College wishes, it can follow the continuous cycle of planning or consecutive planning period, where after every year of evaluation a further year can be added to the period of the strategic plan, so that at the beginning of every year there will a consecutive period of five years of the strategic plan, which would result in incessantly keeping the College up to date in its activities, and help to satisfy the requirements of its stakeholders continuously, because they are changing constantly. (SM1)

This is similar to what was suggested by Markides (1999); that is, implementing consecutive strategic management systems. I concur with the suggestion, because I believe this should result in innovation of better quality activities and operations due to constant annual evaluation, which should give the College an edge and keep it always in front position to take the leading role in the financial studies field, and realise its vision of becoming a leading institution for higher education in finance in the region. It is also in a similar context to what Poister and Van Slyke (2002) suggested, specifically that continuous strategic management also refers to the construction and sustainability of the institution, i.e., adopting a system of wide strategic management.

This should provide the management with enough time to realise the plan, and allow them to revise and insert changes to it as deemed necessary; more importantly, it provides them with assurances for acceptance of change by the majority of the College's members, which should allow them to implement the new organisational culture continuously. However, this, in turn, should result in the constant review and re-assessment of strategic objectives, which should lead to amendments and adjustments to the plan if required. As a result of discussion of this point with one of the higher management, this person mentioned that:

Yes... the College should have a pre-revision [scanning] before the year end; revision [its tactical plan] once a year; and detailed revision [of its main strategy] every five years. (SM1)

I concur with this suggestion, as I believe that similar reasoning exists at the College at present, and adopting such a method can be very valuable to the College.

5.13 SUMMARY

In this chapter, the empirical evidence of this study has been presented, based on the application of IAR and qualitative study methods and the use of the template analysis approach. This led to the identification and analysis of various elements affecting strategic management and quality assurance at the College. For each of the 14 identified elements and their pertaining lower-order codes, a thorough discussion and reflection of my own and the study participants' experience, literature review and secondary data was provided. An integrative framework for strategic management including the quality assurance processes was developed (BSC one-page mapping framework, Appendix 10), which will help the College to solve strategic problems using a systematic approach. The requirement for participation and the role of formulating and implementing a strategy to improve the College's effectiveness in order for it to achieve sustainable competitive advantages is an essential function of the management team. In the course of the study, the limitations of the available literature to provide a comprehensive strategic management model for higher education institutions have been revealed, which required the development of a framework for the strategic management of the College. The 14 elements identified in the final template analysis and discussed in this chapter are considered to be critical for the successful strategic management of the College. Therefore, higher management is required to make sure that all 14 elements are considered in any management endeavour. For instance, it has been revealed in the study that the management of the College is required to develop a supportive organisational structure that can help in the implementation process of the newly developed strategic plan (section 5.10.1.1). Moreover, the College is required to adopt some kind of motivation system to encourage its members to implement the change process (section 5.11.1). In addition, the study identifies the need to address procedural issues in the formulation and implementation of the strategy and the quality assurance processes. The study demonstrates, for example, the requirement for detailed analysis of environmental forces (section 5.7.5), and interconnection between the formulation and implementation of the strategic plan (sections 5.7.2 and 5.7.3) and the role of the leadership in this regard (sections 5.10.1 and 5.10.1.1). Moreover, the findings

of the study also show that the lack of participation of operational members in the formulation of the strategy influenced its implementation, since the operational members of the College did not have enough sense of ownership (sections 5.11.1 and 5.12).

Overall, five core categories using the hierarchical format of the template analysis were revealed in the study. The five categories consisted of strategy formulation, strategy implementation, management, quality assurance process, and strategy evaluation.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION AND PERSONAL REFLECTION

6.0 INTRODUCTION

By conducting this AR study at my workplace, the College, the study has benefited from the special opportunity, which has appeared due to the College's adoption of its recently developed strategic plan in which quality assurance standards form a core part in order to fulfil the accreditation requirements of the OAAA. As an accreditation agency, the OAAA has explicitly explained its perceptions about the higher education institutions operating in the country, and clearly emphasised the adoption of a strategic plan in which quality assurance processes form a core part. This study was also conducted in line with my new duty, where my major task was assigned to the strategic management of the College. In the accomplishment of this new task's processes, I noticed that the College's members hesitated to properly implement the newly formulated strategy, and to properly integrate QAP within it as well, which was affecting my professional practice in the field. Moreover, I also realised that the current models of strategic management and quality assurance in higher education institutions were not very helpful in this situation. Therefore, I decided to conduct a PAR study on the topic as a final fulfilment of my self-study DBA programme at the Liverpool University in order to improve what I am doing through what I am learning, as was described by Whitehead (1989, 2011).

This chapter provides concluding remarks, which will form a reply to the objectives that have been charted for the research to resolve the main question (Q) of the study. It also highlights theoretical and practical contributions, which explain practical and managerial implications of the findings. In addition, this chapter will also assess my own development as a scholar/practitioner and suggest how action can emerge from the study. For the purpose of this study, the strategic management process comprises strategy formulation, strategy implementation, strategy evaluation and adoption of quality assurance process as a core part of the strategic plan. The main question of the study (Q) was: ***How can the College best formulate and implement its strategy and integrate quality assurance standards within it to achieve sustainable competitive advantages?*** Accordingly, I will develop points of action to help the College address this main question (Q) of the study in the light of the following objectives of the study:

6.1 CHALLENGES TO IMPLEMENTING THE STRATEGIC PLAN

For effective strategic planning, the identification, acknowledgement and assessment of the internal and external environments within which the College operates and their potential impact for change on the College should be recognised to be the most essential feature of the planning process, as this will help the College to distinguish between strategic planning and other forms of institutional planning. This is because, in the case of non-performance or improper performance of environmental scanning, it is likely that the College will be unable to properly implement its strategic plan, which is evident in the case of this study. Environmental scanning of the College should have been undertaken at the initiation stage of the planning process; this is simply to ensure that the strategic plan is in alignment with day-to-day activities of the organisation and its environment (Trainer, 2004; Sevier, 2003). In addition, strong leadership is also needed to achieve a balance between the external and internal forces of the College, because strong leadership will not be fearful of relinquishing control of the process by involving other members of the organisation, which can be achieved through the construction of a new organisational structure. Careful evaluation of data analysis and findings and critical reflection on them have revealed that there are certain crucial factors for a successful strategy formulation and implementation process. As a matter of fact, the three fundamental forces (environment, operating system and bureaucracy) identified by Mintzberg (1978), which interact to form the basis for the formulation and implementation of strategy in the organisation, were also relevant in the case of this study.

It was evident that all the study participants, including the higher management, emphasised that environmental scanning was a necessary initial step, collecting as much information as possible for the development of an effective strategic planning process. They suggested conducting a SWOT analysis in order to assess and match strengths with weaknesses and opportunities with threats that exist in the College's environment. Similarly, Trainer (2004) also endorsed the use of SWOT analysis and suggested that such analysis resides at the core of a strategic planning process. This suggests that the analysis of opportunities and threats is a very essential component of the strategic planning process and should be identified by those involved with this process'. In addition, it suggests that these external forces form a catalyst for the strategic planning process, because they present motivating factors in the College's environment, which will encourage it to develop and maintain the system of strategic management. Moreover, in order to cope with external challenges, the PESTEL acronym (Political, Economic, Social-cultural and Technological) was also constructed to describe the external factors that influence strategic

management of the College. The outcome of the process summarising the six factors is presented in Appendix 8.

6.2 INADEQUACY OF STRATEGIC PLANNING MODELS IN THIS REGARD

There are many strategic planning models available that can help in the strategic implementation process in an organisation. However, this study has revealed the two major reasons why the available strategic planning models were not helpful in the case of the College, and, accordingly, it is important for the College to initiate action in order to adapt these available models to its requirements to successfully implement the strategic management processes, as explained below.

6.2.1 TOP-DOWN APPROACH

The College needs to involve all categories of its members in the strategic management process; moreover, a democratic approach can prove to be more suitable in the higher educational environment. A strategic plan formulated by executive managers without the participation of those members involved in its implementation is prone to resistance during the implementation phase. Thus, by securing the participation of managers and employees at a lower level, strategy producers should be able to work on the process of formulation and implementation of the strategy in which the goals of the institution and its members' are incongruence at their maximum as possible (Van der Maas, 2008). Moreover, members of the institution will be more interested in their self-interest, than in the goals of the institution if the two are not in congruence (Pierce and Robinson, 2011). The goals (strategic plan) of the organisation should in congruence with the **organisational identity of the members** in order to mitigate resistance (section 4.2.3), where the organisational identity of members involves the alignment of internal organisational regulations with the commitments of its members, constructed over a period of time (Hatch & Schultz, 2002). It is fundamentally related to the nature of those aspects which the institution's members perceive as having a direct and important influence on their daily working (Albert and Whetten, 1985). The personal values (organisational identity) of organisational members help to shape organisational culture (Sagiv & Schwartz, 2007).

The model of strategic management of HEIs (the College) differs from the model of business organisations in various aspects. The strategic management model of business organisations usually follows a top-down approach, although it remains important to obtain the support and participation of the organisation's

members. Given the importance of a cooperative management approach in the management of HEIs (the College), participation of faculty (and other members) and reaching a consensus from the outset is important for strategic planning management based in the College, as higher education faculties cannot be directed in the same way as members in other commercial organisations. In addition, the central power in HEIs is not very strong; accordingly, it is difficult to accept changes, because their nature is inclined towards conservation.

6.2.2 DICHOTOMY BETWEEN STRATEGY FORMULATION AND IMPLEMENTATION

The College needs to consider strategic management as two parts of the continuum. One part is the formulation of a strategy that explains how to successfully formulate the organisation's plan in a given situation, whereas the other part is the implementation of the strategy, by adopting the strategy formulated as received, and working towards achievement of its objectives. The implementation of the strategy addresses the issue of how to implement the formulated strategy over time, and proper utilisation of financial and human resources of the organisation and its competencies. As a result, these two integrated areas of strategic management are responsible for all the organisation's strategic plans and how they are implemented (Van der Maas, 2008). Van der Maas further stated that in the literature there are serious discussions on strategic management, whether the formulation and implementation of the strategy should be viewed as interactive or separate.

Many authors view the implementation of the strategy as a separate process after the strategic planning process (Johnson et al., 2009, 2011). According to David (2013), the direction of a general management function inclined towards dividing strategic management into the formulation and implementation of strategy is receiving wide support, which means that overall administration begins with the formulation of a strategy through the application of rational processes, and then the construction of an organisational structure, and the design of various management processes to determine the organisation's behaviour necessary for the implementation of the planned strategy. This, apparently, is evident in the case of the College. As a matter of fact, this dichotomy is proving to be the main obstacle for the proper implementation of the College's newly developed strategic plan (section 4.2.2). Mintzberg (1990) referred to the segregation between the formulation and implementation of the strategy as a dichotomy between thought and activity.

6.3 INTEGRATION OF QAP WITHIN THE STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT FUNCTIONS OF THE COLLEGE

It is necessary for the College to associate the implementation of the quality assurance standards with the process of strategic change management. This can be achieved through the integration of quality assurance processes within the College's strategic plan, by aligning strategic goals, objectives and PIs with the standards of the accreditation authority (sections 4.10.2 and 4.11), or by aligning the standards set by the accreditation authority (the OAAA) with the strategic objectives of the College as set out in Appendix 8. This may also be referred to as the institutionalisation of quality assurance process objectives. This, in turn, should result in the constant review and re-assessment of strategic objectives, which should lead to amendments and adjustments to the plan if required. Together, the integration process of the strategic plan and QAP with the development of a separate QA policy should strategies the achievement of quality in the College's processes.

6.4 THEORETICAL AND PRACTICAL CONTRIBUTIONS

Many authors (Mintzberg et al., 1998; Porter, 1980) have noted that strategic management as an area of research is a complex phenomenon. This was also noticed during the study. The complexity of the strategy requires the development of a modest and easy-to-apply strategic management structure. One of the reasons for this research was to establish the relationship connecting the strategic management theory with practice. Moreover, this study identified 10 strategic management elements, which were critically assessed against the literature on strategic management. Each of these elements was encoded according to King's (2004) template analysis basis and accordingly discussed in Chapter 4. The discussion in Chapter 5 delivered in-depth understanding on each element and how each could contribute to the successful development of strategic management processes including the QA processes. Based on these 10 Strategic Management elements identified, an integrative strategic management framework was developed for the College based on the **BSC mapping approach** (section 5.1), where the 10 elements were regrouped into five core categories using the hierarchical format of the template analysis in this research study. The five categories consist of strategy formulation, strategy implementation, management, and quality assurance process and strategy evaluation. Accordingly, the outcomes of the study contributed both theoretically and in practice to the subject of strategic management in the College. In addition, for each identified element of strategic management, critical reflection and analysis were provided. These reflections and

analysis helped to improve the College members' theoretical understanding on the subject matter, which enabled us (myself as a researcher and the participants as co-researchers) to formulate action plans.

6.5 MY OWN DEVELOPMENT AS A SCHOLAR/PRACTITIONER AND THE EMERGENCE OF ACTION FROM THE STUDY

One of the major aims of participatory research projects and of this study is to identify alternative actionable knowledge from the literature and to apply this knowledge in practice in order to help managers (scholars and practitioners) to cope with new situations effectively or perform daily activities more efficiently. Knowledge created in the setting of multi-participant groups can go beyond the traditional disciplines working on problems related to real practical situation. Thus, this approach involves both academic rigour and practical significance (Anderson et al., 2001). According to Hodgkinson and Rousseau (2009), collaborative research can be both rigorous and relevant, where the development of collaboration between scholars and practitioners, supported by joint involvement in research methods and creation of theory, will produce results that achieve the dual requirements of high-quality scholarship and social utility.

Accordingly, an AR researcher aims to act and create knowledge or actionable theoretical knowledge (Greenwood & Levin, 1998). The results expected from AR are theoretical and practical results. AR furnishes an easy foundation for the insider research. The intervention of managers and other members of the organisation will additionally lead to the development of knowledge about the role of the managers and internal organisational effectiveness (Coughlan & Brannick, 2005; Coughlan, 2007). Bartunek et al. (2000) discussed that insider AR usually results in deep understanding of the research and comprehensive knowledge of the organisational phenomenon. Application of this study for my own development as a scholar/practitioner and the emergence of action was determined according to the notions of scholar/practitioners proposed by Kram et al. (2012), such as: Connector (e.g., highway interchange), Translator and Cycler. Even though all of these notions are closely connected, subtle differences can be very informative as follows:

The concept of a *Connector* assumes that the notion of scholarship and the notion of practice are discrete and diverse, where channels need to be formed, connections must be created and languages must be interpreted. In the case of this study, for action to emerge, the connector activity, which is the preliminary stage, will be entailed by identifying a common goal. For my organisation (the College) it will be the

adoption and successful management of the strategic plan including the QAP, which was determined as a strategic change programme, and should not only result in the College's obtaining the accreditation status for its programmes and procedures, but also lead the College to achieve competitive advantages in the mid and long term. Connection includes drawing up a general plan and deciding what the initial move (action) will be. In addition, as was suggested by Brannick and Coughlan (2007), throughout the study as an insider action researcher I tried to maintain my credibility as a real force for change and as a perceptive political player. This was achieved through the assessment of power and interests of relevant stakeholders in relation to aspects of the project. As a matter of fact, we (my organisation) went through such a situation in 2009 when we revisited our organisation's strategy, and restated its vision, mission, value and goals, and the graduate attributes. To that end we performed a stakeholders' analysis and thus I believe that, for the action to emerge from the study, the stakeholders' analysis needs to be re-performed.

The concept of a *Translator* assumes that a scholar/practitioner is a person who can simply translate or address consecutively an academic audience with one language and the practitioner's audience with another language. Translation will comprise making that initial move. In this regard, a Virtual Strategic Planning Office was established and it together with the Quality Assurance Unit are the two main bodies responsible for sustaining the strategic planning and quality assurance efforts and encouraging the members to effectively participate in the implementation process. This will be achieved by explaining the initiatives of the strategic planning and QAP and how these will affect them, and seeking their suggestions in regard to the programme's improvement and implementation. Moreover, during the process of implementation, members will also be encouraged to interpret the College's strategic management processes in general terms. In return, we together (myself as a researcher (translator) and them as participants) can advise the management on overall process accordingly, which should result in generating action from the study. Moreover, total employee participation may prove another major factor that has to be implemented in order for action to emerge from the study. In this regard, Bradbury and Mainmelis (2001) argued that ARE provides multiple, simultaneous, and dissenting voices, which are quite often overlooked in normal time. Kleiner and Roth (1997), Roth and Kleiner (2000) and Raelin (2010) demonstrated that framing organisational stories collectively usually results in a structured format of these stories, where (usually dissenting) interpretative voices of participants and report writer's are visible in the context of text narratives. This is very similar to our case, where the College has deliberately issued (in 2009, before the first phase of quality audit) the first version of its quality assurance portfolio. Similarly, the revised edition can be prepared through collective work involving all staff, where members can be

assigned to different target groups for the production of various components of the portfolio. Such action will observably lead to introducing their voices and that of the data collector into the format and text context of the portfolio and to a participatory strategic planning process approach.

The concept of a *Cycler* raises the dynamic process of moving back and forth between the scholarship and practice, with each role being informed by and built on the other. The interplay of scholar and practitioner highlights the complexity of cycling between action and knowledge. Theory construction in AR is based on a cyclical process. In AR, two cycles of research operate in parallel. The initial one contains of building, planning, taking measures and evaluating achievement of the end results of the project, which results in taking further actions, etc. The second one is the reflective cycle, which is the AR cycle of the AR cycle. This is similar to what was suggested by Coghlan and Brannick (2010), 'the Meta cycles', which assess the possibility of the basic AR study adoption and subject the cyclical engagement of action to criticism and learning. This important query relates to the motivation of helpful knowledge or thinking about narratives to build a theory.

In this study, the cyclical reiterations have focused on the process issues by developing my and the College members' appreciation of 'dominant theories', opposing to 'adopted theory', in an attempt to eliminate the defensive procedures and thus to generate single-loop and double-loop learning in order to reconsider the organisational decision-making process (Argyris et al., 1985). Development of my own scholar/practitioner practice in this way helped the emergence of the action from the study. The cyclic reiterations activity included an evaluation of the initial progress and observation of what was completed to develop a foundation for remedial action and additional steps. Moreover, Coghlan and Brannick (2010) expressed how researchers can obtain a sense of the array of possible issues which may be addressed, and suggested that, by using the word 'array', they acknowledged various diversified sets of issues all competing for the researcher's attention. Furthermore, they cited Dutton et al.'s (1983) argument that the processes of identifying issues may be characterised as fluid, dynamic and emergent.

For the action to emerge from the study, as was suggested above, and as I reflect, these processes will be *fluid*, because they will be subject to change as there are no boundaries which contain them, therefore, the College administration requires the formation and establishment of suitable organisational structure to administer these novel operations. At the same time, they are *dynamic*, because, as the management implement these processes, the College members should start to constitute a particular form of

relationship in order to undergo and develop specific knowledge about the implementation of strategic planning and QAP processes. Accordingly, this knowledge can be institutionalised and become the organisational knowledge, and, because one of the main principles of quality is continuous improvement, its objectives (and this knowledge) will be continuously revised. However, these processes are also *emergent*, and need to be tested (i.e., interpreted and re-interpreted) over a period of time for evaluation as participating groups can collaboratively explore their experiences to enhance the situation (Heron & Reason, 2008; Coglen, 2010a). Thus, it will require integrated collaboration and thought-action cycles' reiteration, which is in line with another principle of quality: constant appraisal and evaluation.

Finally, Coghlan and Brannick (2014) argued that AR is deemed to promote the democratic process of performing the study, as the research "subjects" will also be the participants in the study process. In addition, the implementation of the research outcomes will constitute the application of the strategies, and thus the AR will lead to a more democratic procedure.

6.5.1 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE EMERGENCE OF ACTION FROM THE STUDY

The generation of the actionable knowledge that is built on the research and my sensitivity to the organisational context can help in the emergence of action from the study, which can be applied in the College. The practicalities of implementing such knowledge can be assessed from table 3 of recommendations below.

Recommendations for the action to emerge from the study	Time intervals and significance of the implementation process	Specific steps that need to be taken	The consequences
1. To revisit the College's strategy and critically evaluate its vision, mission, goals and values.	It has been agreed by all parties involved in the strategic planning of the College that there should be a comprehensive evaluation of the plan at least every five years, which should take place in this case in 2020.	To revisit the College's strategy and critically evaluate its vision, mission and values requires a very courageous decision from the higher management of the College as it could be	Without conducting a comprehensive periodical evaluation of the plan, it is expected that the looseness between the strategic planning process, strategy implementation, inappropriateness in the process of environmental scanning for the current situation and the

	<p>This concept is significant because strategic plan evaluation is usually carried out to determine the allocation of adequate resources. The strategic plan may be suitable but may be failing due to the insufficient allocation of resources, or a change in the situation, which involves a shift in the political environment of the institution and hence, results in a shift in the attention of the institution's members.</p>	<p>costly but may prove to be necessary.</p>	<p>dichotomy between the strategic planning process and strategic plan implementation will continue.</p>
<p>2. To assess the power and interest of relevant stakeholders and their influence on the decision making process throughout the various phases of the strategic planning project.</p>	<p>Such analysis can be performed on permanent bases by the office of strategic planning and can be described as one of its following functions.</p> <p>Such analysis is significant for the implementation process, because of the entry of new stakeholders and the rise of new circumstances as a result of academic and administrative diversification in the College. Thus, to assess</p>	<p>Initially, this process can be achieved by organising a workshop and inviting different categories of stakeholders to participate according to the power and influence they can exert on the College's decision-making, to inform them and give them a comprehensive picture of the current situation; in order to assist them in protecting their interests accordingly.</p>	<p>Without frequently and adequately analysing the stockholders, miss interpretation of their influence on the organisational strategic decision-making approaches will result, which can lead to hindering the strategic implementation processes.</p>

	<p>the power and influence that each category can exert on the College's strategic change decisions, all major stakeholders should be involved in the process.</p>		
<p>3. All employees' participation to allow emerging of action from the study, as a democratic approach can be more suitable in the higher educational (the College) environment.</p>	<p>Such participation should be on a constant process basis by all levels of the College, particularly by the academicians, as it was proved from the study and other empirical researches that academicians are inclining towards conservatism, but simultaneously they would like to maintain their academic freedom.</p>	<p>Each department should have its own KPIs identifying team to ensure that the KPIs of the department are achieved and are in congruence with the overall KPIs of the College. However, I am aware that only the directors of the departments are involved in such a practice. I discussed this point during my meeting with the two of the higher management of the College, where I was told that "we cannot afford to have the participation of all staff members, especially the academicians, as it will be very costly" (SM1). Nevertheless, I converted my findings to these two of the higher management of the College.</p>	<p>By not securing the participation of managers and employees from a lower level, the goals of the institution and the goals of its members' will not be in congruence at their maximum as possible (Van der Maas, 2008; Pierce and Robinson, 2011). In addition, non-participation of any of the category will also not provide a sense of ownership by that particular category, as organisational members are not prepared to take part in the actions that they have not designed or in which they have not taken active roles. Moreover, the College will continue with the top-down approach of the strategic implementation concept, which proved to be one of the major factors hindering the implementation of the strategic plan in the College.</p>

<p>4. Integration of strategic management, including the QAP within the functional operations of the College's different departments, which can be achieved through the consistency between goals and performance measures.</p>	<p>This integration process should be on a continuous basis, because it is significant to achieve consistency between goals and performance measures, as this consistency will lead to the achievement of the proper implementation of the strategic plan, and this should be one of the main goals from the integration and the management of the strategic and quality program.</p>	<p>This process should be based on an in-depth analysis of the college's performance of functions and the emerging perceptions and actions of its leadership, so that the knowledge gained can be applied to resolve the organisation's persisting problems (Buono & Savall, 2007).</p>	<p>As this process should be on a continuous basis, accordingly, it is also consistent with the essence of quality assurance principles of continuous improvement and constant evaluation. Without implementing such a process, losing these vital essences of the quality assurance principles will result, which will have an adverse effect on the evaluation of the College's strategic plan. Thus, the challenges of QAP integration within the strategic plan of the College and the consequent improper implementation of the plan will persist.</p>
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Table 1 Source: Author

6.6 FUTURE AGENDA

Adoption of scholars and practitioners' philosophy has contributed to the expansion of both my personal and professional identity and allowed me to blur the line between them. Conducting AR in the education field has not only allowed me to improve what I am doing while I am learning, but has also allowed me to become more accurate and transparent in dealing with the College's other members and students, and the educational community as a whole. Understanding that has been achieved from different modules and research work of my DBA programme has combined to form my strong personal belief that I should ensure that educational strategies must serve all stakeholders in the educational field better. According to Spring (2008), education is a tool for enlightenment and a mechanism which can assist in overcoming

authoritarian ascendancy, and education as knowledge can protect individuals from exploitation. With this perception, I started to view every aspect of my life more critically. I began to understand the ideas about those qualities that are associated with the leadership of the scholar-practitioner. I also started to recognise the influence of culture and context on perceptions and identities. The impact of literary efforts with the help of a practitioner lens should provoke and hone my perception, where this knowledge combined with my experience will form my leadership skill; a capability that represents my personality (Greene, 2001). The creation of competent leadership skills should allow me to systematically identify instances of these critical qualities from different kinds of innovative and literary efforts of society that govern my daily practice. Just like artists who try to break out of their selected environments to obtain a new perspective, I should also try to expose my personal understandings and beliefs in order to embark on a new meaning.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW SCHEDULES

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 14 of the College's top executives, including the College Advisory Panel (CAP) members who are directly involved in the formulation of the College's strategic planning and securing of its proper implementation. Eleven executives were selected from the College management including the Dean, assistant deans, and directors; and three executives were selected from the Advisory Panel Committee members on a preferential basis.

The development of the semi-structured interview schedules was directed by the following assumptions:

1. All participating staff should be able to provide adequate information on set research questions.
2. To ask specific questions to the staff members at different levels and departments of the College.
3. To ask some generic questions to all the staff in order to gain some perspectives about their performance with regard to the strategic planning and quality improvement.

The interview was of six to eight questions and sub-questions within a one-hour maximum period of time.

Interviews with Top Executives and Advisory Panel Members

1. Do you think strategic planning is important in a higher educational institution? Why?
2. In what ways do you think that the strategic plan of the College can be different and unique to the College? For example, how it can meet the needs of the financial sector in Oman?
3. Can you identify some of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats which impact the College? Moreover, can you further identify some major competencies and enablers of the College?
4. How do you consider the quality of educational services provided by the College can have a major effect on its strategic plan? Can you provide some examples?
5. How do you think the College can improve the quality of its educational services? Can you provide some examples?
6. What efforts do you think the College should make to develop its staff to achieve its strategic plan and quality improvement for its next cycle? Can you give some examples?

7. Do you think the leadership and executives' interpersonal skills are important for the development and implementation of the strategic plan and quality improvement in the context of HEIs like the College? Can you provide some examples?
8. Are there any other points that you would like to add or discuss?

These interview questions were used to form an outline for the semi-structured interview schedules with different staff categories of the College. Moreover, the interviewees were allowed to ask questions or raise issues about the strategic plan and the College's quality improvement programme.

Appendix 2

TEMPLATE ANALYSIS - 1

Planning aspects

1. Strategic plan formulation (A1)
2. Deliberate and emerging strategic plan (A2)
3. Functions of the strategic plan (A3)
4. Implementation of the strategic plan (A5)

Organisational aspects

1. Components of the strategic plan (A4)
2. Development of organisational structure (A6)
3. Communications (A7)
4. Resources allocation (A8)

Management aspects

1. The leadership (A9)
2. Authority (A10)
3. Trust and Commitment (A11)
4. Knowledge management (A12)

Human Resources Management

1. Strategic planning people (A13)
2. Targeted training (A14)

Role and purpose of quality assurance

1. Accountability (A15)
2. Improvement (A16)

Strategic plan and quality assurance evaluation aspects

1. PIs and KPIs of the College (A17)
2. PIs and KPIs of the staff (A18)
3. Quality assurance standards (A19)

Appendix 3

TEMPLATE ANALYSIS - 2

Planning aspects

1. Strategic plan formulation (A1)
 - 1.1 *Environmental Scanning*
2. Deliberate and emerging strategic plan (A2)
 - 2.1 *Availability of data*
 - 2.2 *Participation in the strategic planning process*
 - 2.3 *Planning staff*
3. Functions of the strategic plan (A3)
 - 3.1 *Engagement of the stakeholders*
4. Implementation of the strategic plan (A5)
 - 4.1 Components of the strategic plan (A4)
 - 4.1.1 *The vision statement*
 - 4.1.2 *The mission statement*
 - 4.1.3 *Goals and objectives*
 - 4.1.4 *The values*
 - 4.1.4.1 *Organisational identity of the members*
 - 4.2 Strategy management techniques and approaches
 - 4.2.1 *SWOT analysis*
 - 4.2.2 *PESTEL analysis*

Management aspects

1. The leadership (A9)
 - 1.1 *The role of the leadership*
2. Authority (A10)
 - 2.1 *Imposed strategic plan*
3. Trust and Commitment (A11)
 - 3.1 *Ownership of the programme*
 - 3.1.1 *Involvement of the members of the institution*
4. Change management (A12)

Organisational aspects

1. Development of organisational structure (A6)
 - 1.1 *The Planning Process structure*
2. Communications (A7)
 - 2.1 *Targeted Communication*
3. Resources allocation (A8)
 - 3.1 *Funding*
 - 3.2 *Funds*
 - 3.3 *Resources*

Human Resources Management

1. Strategic planning people (A13)
2. Targeted training (A14)

Roll and purpose of quality assurance

1. Accountability (A15)
2. Improvement (A16)
3. Accreditation (A17)
4. Assessment (A18)
5. Audit (A19)

Critical success aspects for quality improvement

1. Summative evaluation (A20)
 - 1.1 *Integration of QA processes with strategic management*
2. Formative evaluation (A21)
 - 2.1 *Strategic planning and quality assurance structure and process*
 - 2.2 *QIP as strategic change*

Strategic plan and quality assurance evaluation aspects

1. PIs and KPIs of the College's strategic plan and quality assurance (A22)

Appendix 4

TEMPLATE ANALYSIS – 3

Planning aspects	Organisational aspects
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Strategic plan formulation (A1)<ol style="list-style-type: none">1.1 <i>The duration of the strategic plan</i>1.2 <i>Environmental Scanning</i>2. Strategy management techniques and approaches<ol style="list-style-type: none">2.1 <i>Environmental scanning techniques - SWOT analysis</i>2.2 <i>Environmental scanning techniques - PESTEL analysis</i>3. Deliberate and emerging strategic plan (A2)<ol style="list-style-type: none">3.1 <i>Availability of data</i>3.2 <i>Participation in the strategic planning process</i>3.3 <i>Planning Staff</i>3.4 <i>Incremental decisions</i>4. Functions of the strategic plan (A3)<ol style="list-style-type: none">3.1 <i>Engagement of the stakeholders</i>5. Implementation of a strategic plan (A5)<ol style="list-style-type: none">5.1 Components of the strategic plan (A4)<ol style="list-style-type: none">5.1.1 <i>The vision statement</i>5.1.2 <i>The mission statement</i>5.1.3 <i>Goals and objectives</i>5.1.4 <i>The values</i><ol style="list-style-type: none">5.1.4.1 <i>Organisational identity of the members</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Development of organisational structure (A6)<ol style="list-style-type: none">1.1 <i>The Planning Process structure</i>2. Communications (A7)<ol style="list-style-type: none">2.1 <i>Targeted Communication</i>3. Resources allocation (A8)
	Human Resources Management
	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Strategic planning people (A13)2. Targeted training (A14)
	Role and purpose of quality assurance
	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Accountability (A15)2. Improvement (A16)
	Critical success aspects for quality improvement
	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Summative evaluation (A20)<ol style="list-style-type: none">1.1 <i>Quality improvement processes policy</i>1.2 <i>Integration of QA processes with Strategic management</i><ol style="list-style-type: none">1.2.1 <i>Accreditation</i>1.2.2 <i>Assessments</i>1.2.3 <i>Audit</i>2. Formative evaluation (A21)<ol style="list-style-type: none">2.1 <i>Strategic planning and quality assurance Structure and process</i>2.2 <i>QIP as strategic change</i>2.3 <i>Staff and students</i>
Management aspects	Strategic plan and quality assurance evaluation aspects
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. The leadership (A9)<ol style="list-style-type: none">1.1 <i>The role of the leadership</i>2. Authority (A10)<ol style="list-style-type: none">2.1 Imposed strategic plan<ol style="list-style-type: none">2.1.1 <i>Government strategies influence.</i>3. Trust and Commitment (A11)<ol style="list-style-type: none">3.1 Ownership of the programme<ol style="list-style-type: none">3.1.1 <i>Involvement of the members of the institution</i>3.1.2 <i>Performance targets</i>3.2 Teamwork<ol style="list-style-type: none">3.2.1 <i>QAC</i>3.2.2 <i>Taskforces</i>4. Change management (A12)	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. PIs and KPIs of the College (A22)2. PIs and KPIs of the staff (A23)3. Quality assurance standards (A24)

Appendix 5

TEMPLATE ANALYSIS – 4

Planning aspects

1. Strategic plan formulation (A1)
 - 1.1 *The duration of the strategic plan*
 - 1.2 *Environmental scanning*
 - 1.2.1 *Environmental scanning techniques - SWOT analysis*
 - 1.2.2 *Environmental scanning techniques - PESTEL analysis*
2. Deliberate and emerging strategic plan (A2)
 - 2.1 *Availability of data*
 - 2.2 *Participation in the strategic planning process*
 - 2.3 *Planning staff*
 - 2.4 *Imposed strategic plan*
 - 2.5 *Incremental decisions*
3. Implementation of the strategic plan (A3)
 - 3.1 Link the departmental plans with the institutional plan.
 - 3.2 Exchange of information, motivations and reward

Management aspects

1. The leadership (A4)
 - 1.1 *The role of the leadership*
2. Authority (A5)
3. Trust and Commitment (A6)
 - 3.1 Ownership of the programme
 - 3.1.1 Involvement of the members of the institution
 - 3.2 Teamwork
 - 3.2.1 *Quality Assurance Committee (QAC)*
 - 3.2.2 *Taskforces*
4. Change management (A7)
5. Human Resources Management (A8)
 - 5.1 Strategic planning people
 - 5.2 Targeted training

Organisational aspects

1. Development of organisational structure (A9)
 - 1.1 *The Planning Process structure*
2. Communications (A10)
 - 2.1 *Targeted Communication*
3. Resources allocation (A11)

Role and purpose of quality assurance

1. Accountability (A12)
2. Improvement (A13)

Critical success aspects for quality improvement

1. Summative evaluation (A14)
 - 1.1 *Quality improvement processes policy*
 - 1.2 *Integration of QA processes with strategic management*
 - 1.2.1 *Accreditation*
 - 1.2.2 *Assessments*
 - 1.2.3 *Audit*
2. Formative evaluation (A15)
 - 2.1 *Strategic planning and quality assurance structure and process*
 - 2.2 *QIP as strategic change*
 - 2.3 *Staff and students*

Strategic plan and quality assurance evaluation aspects

1. Duration for strategic plan evaluation (A16)
2. Balanced Scorecard (A17)

Appendix 6

TEMPLATE ANALYSIS – 5

Strategic plan formulation (A1)

- 3.3 Emerging strategic plan
- 3.4 Imposed strategic plan
- 3.5 Deliberate strategic plan
- 3.6 *Environmental Scanning*
 - 3.6.1 *Environmental scanning techniques - SWOT analysis*
 - 3.6.2 *Environmental scanning techniques - PESTEL analysis*

Components of the strategic plan (A2)

- 2.1 *The Vision*
- 2.2 *The Mission*

Implementation of the strategic plan (A3)

- 3.1 Link the departmental plans with the institutional plan
- 3.2 *Strategic planning committee.*

Organisational aspects (A4)

- 4.1 *The Planning Process structure*
- 4.2 *Targeted Communication*
- 4.3 Resources allocation

Management aspects (A5)

- 5.1 The leadership
 - 5.1.1 *The role of the leadership*

Trust and Commitment (A6)

- 6.1 Ownership of the programme
 - 6.1.1 Involvement of the members of the institution
 - 6.1.2 *Task forces*

Change management (A7)

- 7.1 Strategic change management
- 7.2 *QIP as strategic change*

Knowledge management (8)

Human Resources Management (A9)

- 9.1 Strategic planning people
- 9.2 Targeted training

Performance management (A10)

Quality Assurance Management (A11)

- 11.1 Accountability
- 11.2 Improvement

Critical success aspects for quality improvement

Summative evaluation (A12)

- 12.1 *Quality improvement processes policy*
- 12.2 *Integration of QA processes with strategic management*

Formative evaluation (A13)

- 13.1 *Strategic planning and quality assurance structure and process*
- 13.2 *Staff and students*

Strategic plan and quality assurance evaluation aspects (A14)

- 14.1 *Duration for strategic plan evaluation*
- 14.2 *Balanced Scorecard*

Appendix 7

SWOT analysis

Strengths

- Close association with financial sector – helping in financing the College budget
- High standard of internationally affiliated programmes
- Excellent academic quality and other support services
- Excellent branding in the market-financial sector

Weaknesses

- Student drop-out rate
- Inadequate College premises
- Lack of autonomy and freedom in the case of internationally affiliated programmes

Opportunities

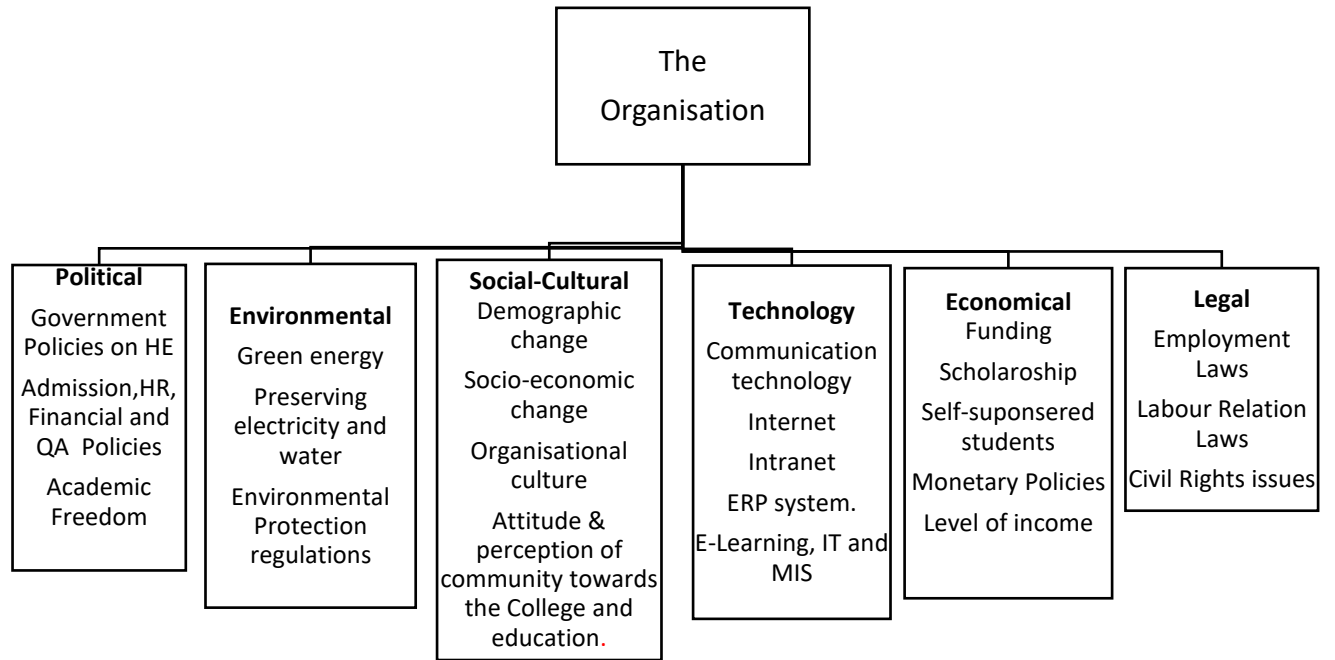
- Diversification of the funding source
- Offering of internally developed programmes
- Introduction of more specialised programmes for the financial sector
- Emergence as Center of Excellence

Threats

- Inadequate financial resources
- Competition from other private colleges
- Inadequate support from international affiliate bodies

Source: Author

Appendix 8



Source: Author

Appendix 9

Goals	OBJECTIVES	Recommended KPIs	Mapping with OAAA Standards
1. To be recognised as a leading institution in Finance in the region.	1.1. Recruitment and retention of high-quality members with an international profile and extensive experience in the industry.	KPI Reputation. KPI National Interest. KPI Internationalisation.	OAAA Standard 1: <i>Governance and Management.</i>
	1.2. Improve the standard of student admissions.	KPI Student Achievement. KPI Community Engagement.	OAAA Standard 2: <i>Student Learning by Coursework Programmes.</i>
	1.3. Improve student achievements.	KPI Teaching Quality.	OAAA Standards 6: <i>Academic Support Services.</i>
	1.4. Improve employability of students by sector.	KPI Community Engagement. KPI Teaching Quality.	OAAA Standards 8: <i>Staff and Staff Support Services.</i>
	1.5. Provide infrastructure to support high-quality teaching and learning activity	KPI Internationalisation.	OAAA Standard 9: <i>General Support Services and Facilities.</i>

The College Goals, Objectives and PIs mapping to OAAA Standards

Appendix 10

Balanced Scorecard one-page mapping framework. Source: Author

