

# **Universities are What Academics Make of Them: A Case Study of Individual Actors Shaping Their Institution**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This study seeks to deepen understanding of how individual actors within an organisation can contribute to shaping the organisation. Focusing on the micro-organisational level, it examines how ground-level academics in one higher education institution interpret the complexities of their institutional context, how they respond to this context in their everyday actions, and to what extent these actions may in turn affect the institution. In order to gain deeper insight into the experiences and practices of these individuals, a qualitative case study was conducted of the case institution. The analysis, which was multi-level and multi-perspective in approach, drew on data gathered from documents and semi-structured interviews with university academics and managers.

The results illustrate that the extent and nature of the coupling between everyday practice and institutional context varies from academic to academic, with examples being identified of tight coupling as well as strategic and superficial coupling. The large number of potentially relevant categories were condensed down to a manageable level and structured into a typology to give a useful interpretive framework for understanding individual actors' role in creating, maintaining and transforming institutions. This typology, which links academics' interpretation of and responses to the institutional context, identifies three categories of academic: operationalisers, mediators and opposers.

The typology perspective highlights that individual actors are agentic beings whose practices are based not just on what the institutional context espouses, but also on what they as professionals and social beings need and want. Since it is their actions that create the outcomes that allow the institution to move forward, individual actors have the power to impose their own rules and institutional agenda and to play a role in how the organisation functions.

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## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

EU	European Union
EUA	European University Association
FTE	Full-time equivalent
HE	Higher Education
HEI	Higher Education Institution
MOSTA	Research and Higher Education Monitoring and Analysis Centre (Lithuania)
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
PhD	Doctor of Philosophy degree
RAE	Research Assessment Exercise
SSF	State Studies Foundation (Lithuania)
TEF	Teaching Excellence Framework
UK	United Kingdom

This thesis is dedicated to my family

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**CHAPTER 1:**  
**INTRODUCTION**

*For the future to be open, space must be open too.*<sup>1</sup>

## **1.0. Background to the study**

Society undergoes multifaceted change on a constant basis and not always is it easy to understand. For organisations in general, it means responding to turbulent economic conditions and rapid technological development at all stages of their lifespan, but for higher education institutions, it also means dealing with growing economic, regulatory and social pressures. Today's global economy demands that HEIs develop the management capabilities and innovation strategies to respond to a highly competitive and ever-expanding international market that is in a constant state of flux, but higher education transformation is also being driven at national level by government policy and local market demands. Governments are influencing how higher education institutions operate by reducing their funding and pressing for greater transfer of knowledge from university to the market, while the business community is demanding more from higher education institutions in terms of the supply of appropriately educated graduates, applied research, consultancy services and continuing professional development. In addition, local communities are also becoming stakeholders in universities and demanding programmes and courses that serve their needs. Having in the past been able to position themselves solely as the providers of education and knowledge, universities in Europe are now under political and economic pressure to become global institutions and to extend their focus from the scholarly to the entrepreneurial (Douglas, 2016). They have responded by reorganising their processes, with the result that they are increasingly likely to have diverse funding sources, strong internal management, highly developed peripheral areas and an entrepreneurial culture (Clark, 1998).

The development of the market has prompted many European universities to

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<sup>1</sup>Massey (2005, p.12)

reconsider how they operate internally, how they engage with other institutions and organisations, and how they interact with wider society. Kohler (2006) shows that some universities have dramatically reduced the number of faculties and set up larger departments on the grounds that interdisciplinary cooperation creates synergies in processes and stimulates the production of new knowledge and the application of existing knowledge to solve practical problems. Other universities have chosen the opposite path, splitting and diversifying faculties into smaller units in the belief that these are more flexible, easier to control, and are therefore the best option for maximising performance. Whatever the approach, however, universities and their organisational actors are confronting the same dilemma of how to achieve tangible results without undermining quality – that is, how to establish an institutional culture that maximises utility and expediency without compromising academic freedom and values and the pursuit of excellence.

Universities are increasingly concerned that if they do not adapt to this changing environment, they will be at risk. To transform themselves, they need to create an inclusive structure with engaged actors, and governance powerful enough to ensure these actors operate in line with the institution's aims and identity. However, higher education institutions in transition countries are finding that their efforts at reconfiguration have not resulted in significant changes at ground level. Organisational change may be an ever-present feature of organisational life (Burnes, 2004, cited in By, 2005, p.369), but according to Boonstra: *"More than 70 percent of the change programmes in organisations either stall prematurely or fail to achieve their intended result"* (2004, p.10). In the educational sector also, the literature suggests that most change initiatives fail (Balogun and Hope Hailey, 2004). An example may be drawn from Lithuania's own higher education sector, which in 2010 saw its biggest merger so far when three institutions were combined to create one major research centre. An umbrella organisation was created and a new top administration set in place, but the anticipated benefits of bringing all these resources and expertise together were not fully realised; business

continued as usual in the three merged institutions, with managers and academics remaining in post and research programmes being unaffected.

One reason why most change initiatives fail is that scholars have not yet explored the full range of actors who have the potential to affect organisational change. Most institutional theorists have focused on the institutional level, conceptualising the institution as a set of unified beliefs and assuming that the actors within the institution universally embody these beliefs in their daily work. Consequently, they have explored the effect of macro or environmental factors on the change process (e.g. Rajagopalan and Spreiter, 1997) while largely ignoring the role played by individual actors' "*scripts, values and beliefs*" and the "*power relations between various groups*" (Santiago and Carvalho, 2016, p.247; Lounsbury and Ventresca, 2003). In the educational sector, this means that research on the transformation of higher education has so far focused on policy (Fumasoli and Stensaker, 2013) rather than the perspectives of the academics who are directly affected by reform.

Only in recent decades have institutionalists started to realise that an organisation's ability to survive depends on much more than just its ability to adapt at the institutional level to changes in the external environment (Greenwood et al., 2011; Scott, 2001; Oliver, 1991). This has led some to call for greater consideration to be given to organisations' internal change processes (Johnson, Melin and Whittington, 2003; Reay, Golden-Biddle and Germann, 2006) so that we might better understand how change unfolds on the ground. Indeed, some (e.g. Senge, 1990; Hiatt and Creasey, 2003) have gone so far as to conceptualise change as being built from the ground up, as a process that begins with individuals, then groups and only then the organisation as a whole.

### **1.1. Lithuania context**

Recent decades have seen Lithuania's HE sector undergo significant change, triggered first by a shifting political landscape and now by the new trends of



marketisation and westernisation. As a result, Lithuania's universities, like those in other transition countries, face a particularly complex set of challenges. It therefore seems appropriate to outline at this point the historical developments and political and economic considerations that have shaped/are shaping the sector and the case study university.

### ***1.1.1. Historical context of higher education in Lithuania***

#### *1.1.1.1. Before independence*

Following Lithuania's annexation and incorporation into the Soviet Union after World War II, the country's higher education system was rearranged to follow the Soviet model (Ivanauskas, 2006; Želvys, 2000). It remained practically unchanged for decades until the very end of the 1980s. A single university in the capital and a number of specialised institutes, mainly concentrated in Lithuania's two major cities, trained specialists in accordance with the unified programme designed and approved by Moscow. Academic freedom was nominal only, ideological pressure was strong and the system of governance was highly centralised. Lithuania's universities were directly under the authority of the Soviet Union's Ministry of Higher Education, which closely regulated everything from the curriculum and student numbers to the selection of faculty staff. Senior appointments (e.g. rectors and departmental chairs) were the responsibility of the People's Commissar of Education. All teaching staff had to attend compulsory lectures on Marxism, Leninism and dialectical materialism, and all course content was monitored and discussed at multiple party meetings.

The Soviet system appears to have left no room for institutional autonomy and given staff no role in shaping their institution, but Sovietologists have since observed that it was open to manipulation, especially at institutional and ministry level (Ivanauskas, 2006). HE managers could choose to respond only symbolically to central planning, enacting formal behaviours that demonstrated compliance with the rules, while allowing individuals to pursue informal behaviours of their own. Thus, the system was one in which form took precedence over content, and no one expected their needs to be taken

into account by the bureaucratic machine (Želvys, 2000). One of the assumptions of this thesis is that this historical pattern of symbolic action continues to influence attitudes within Lithuania's higher education institutions.

#### *1.1.1.2. Post-independence*

Twenty-five years have passed since the fall of the communist regime in Lithuania and other Central and Eastern European countries. The model of governance which has emerged during the years of post-communist transformation has been influenced by both the previous totalitarian experience and contemporary global trends (Leisyte, 2013; Puraite, 2011; Želvys, 2005). Lithuania's higher education sector faces two kinds of challenges: those related to the inheritance of the Soviet past, and those arising from the ongoing expansion of higher education.

Following independence in 1990, Lithuania began reforming its education system to bring the HE sector into line with Western European practice (Puraite, 2011). In 1991, the Science and Education Law legally enshrined the principle of academic autonomy, though subsequent efforts to promote academic self-governance were criticised as hasty and ill-considered. In truth, defining the limits of institutional and academic autonomy has been one of the biggest challenges in Lithuania's higher education reform. It was not until the Higher Education Act, passed in 2000, that the boundary between institutional autonomy and State regulation was finally established (Želvys, 2005). The Act revoked the old ideologically driven, centralised governance system and gave universities the right to determine their structure and internal procedures, to be self-governing and to manage their own assets. In the years since, the sector has expanded, from fifteen universities in 1999 to 22 in 2008 and 48 in 2016 (Statistics Lithuania, 2015). At the time of writing there were 144,000 university students in Lithuania (MOSTA, 2016a).

#### *1.1.2. Current system*

The previously unitary higher education sector was replaced in 2000 with a binary model in order to meet EU higher education standards (OECD, 2016).

This binary system consists of a university sector (universities, academies and seminaries) and a non-university sector (colleges of applied science) (Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education, 2016). Responsibility for regulating these institutions lies with the Higher Education Council, the Lithuanian Research and Higher Education Monitoring and Analysis Centre (MOSTA) and the State Studies Foundation (SSF). Each of these covers a different area of regulation, with the Higher Education Council being responsible for the provision of HE-related information to the government, MOSTA acting as the monitoring agency for HE and the SSF being responsible for funding students.

The main currency within the Lithuanian HE market is student vouchers, which are given to students who graduate from school with high grades (MOSTA, 2016b). The number of vouchers to be awarded nationally is set by the Ministry of Education and Science each year, and the Ministry also determines their distribution, based on its assessment of national needs. This means that students end up competing for vouchers based on their grades. Those students who are not awarded vouchers may still go to university if they pay fees. These fees are based on the level of study and type of degree, and are determined by how expensive the course is to teach, with degrees in medicine, natural sciences and engineering being the most expensive and social sciences and humanities being cheaper. Students have the option of moving from a fee-based to a voucher-based study place mid-degree if they are able to produce high grades.

In the current market, universities receive around the same income from the vouchers and fee-paying students, though they appear to prefer voucher-based students as these enter with a proven track record of academic ability and are therefore perceived to have a higher chance of gaining a good degree and successfully entering the job market or pursuing their studies to a higher level. These returns are valued in the market because they burnish the university's reputation and lead to higher student enrolment in the future (MOSTA, 2016b).

The Law on Higher Education and Research, introduced in 2009, enshrined the principle of competition as the main force driving progress in Lithuania's HE sector – a principle further facilitated by the introduction of student vouchers as the principle form of financing. This law remains the primary document governing how universities operate in the country, but the State's expectations of the HE sector are also apparent in its inclusion within broader policies to promote R&D and social development. The Lithuanian Smart strategy, for example, lists higher education as not only fostering technological development and scientific endeavour but also as facilitating a more creative and inclusive society, while the Lithuanian Innovation Development Programme 2014-2020 envisages higher education as a tool for developing the creativity, entrepreneurship, skills and qualifications the country needs to respond to market demands. The latter programme creates a direct link between universities and the market, positioning the educational activities carried out within universities as subservient to the market.

#### *1.1.2.1. Competition for resources*

While on the surface it would appear that the main competition universities face is for government funding, they also face a more fundamental struggle to attract the “best” students. Between 2006 and 2016, the number of state-funded students dropped from 93037 to 64785 (MOSTA, 2016a). As discussed in the previous section, universities perceive voucher-based students as having a higher rate of return than fee-paying students. Thus, the competition for these students follows an almost circular logic where to attract the best students the university has to graduate the best students, and to graduate the best students the university has to enrol the best. The ability to attract the highest number of “perfect-scoring” school graduates is perceived as an important status symbol and a valuable marketing tool.

The competition is made all the more fierce because the sector is witnessing a decline in overall student numbers (OECD, 2016). While lecture halls filled with 200 plus students were common a decade ago, Lithuania's changing demographic situation has severely diminished student enrolment, forcing

universities to compete to attract both voucher-based students (to receive government appropriations) and fee-paying students (to cover the costs the government cannot). Universities may want to attract the brightest and best, but they are reluctant to set higher entry standards because the view is that this will do nothing to increase the number of voucher-based students, but may drive away fee-paying students to institutions with lower entry requirements.

As supply in the HE sector increasingly outstrips demand, the government's talk of possible mergers is another driver pushing universities to demonstrate that they are still able to attract students and the funding they need to survive into another year.

## **1.2. Rationale of the study**

The choice of topic in this case is inspired by my concerns that institutional initiatives aimed at modernising universities too often have no effect on practice and are therefore ending in failure (Pinheiro et al., 2012). Higher education institutions in Lithuania have undergone a number of reforms, but at the time of writing, many of the country's universities are far from achieving the changes they need to position themselves strategically in the face of global competition. This raises the question of why these universities are failing to achieve their stated goals. Having spent ten years as an educational consultant and education projects coordinator and four years as a lecturer, my main aim is to arrive at a better understanding of the setting in which I work.

Universities are highly institutionalised environments in which strategic change requires the close alignment of a wide range of actors. This is because while the top management (rector, council) holds most of the decision-making power, it has very little to do with execution. Instead, this is the job of academics, who have little power to influence the decisions and directions of the institution but who are crucial in ensuring these decisions are

implemented successfully (Sauder and Espeland, 2009). In the course of my career, I have seen academic staff react to change in a variety of ways, from acceptance of its importance, to scepticism and even fear, but while the university and its leadership have been the focus of much HE research at the organisational level, academics have been mostly overlooked, or addressed only indirectly. This neglect of the role played by individuals is surprising given that: “*it is these very actors who will reproduce, transform or create institutions*” (Battilana, 2007, p.3).

This study responds to Powell and Colyvas’ (2008) call for empirical investigation of the diverse ways in which ground-level organisational actors engage with their institutional context. It seeks to analyse the powers that these ground-level actors have within their institution and to show how institutional pressures may trigger a range of responses (Bromley, Hwang and Powell, 2012; Powell and Colyvas, 2008). It posits that even significant institutional transformation unfolds incrementally – often by means of very small changes in practice – and that individual actors play a major role in determining whether these changes become a routine part of organisational life or remain largely symbolic. By investigating the individual actors’ perspective, the study may help open the “*black box*” (Maassen and Stensaker, 2005) of the university as an organisation and provide insight into how this institutional context is interpreted and its main activities – teaching, research and administrative tasks – are eventually carried out. This is becoming even more important given the competition universities are in for financial income, students, staff and reputation.

### **1.3. Purpose of the study**

The study contends that in the absence of an inclusive structure that allows academics de facto participation in decision-making, the extent to which an individual academic will support university goals is mainly determined by his/her personal characteristics and interests. To understand why some universities do not change despite their efforts at reform, it is therefore

necessary to focus on “*people, their work activities, social interactions, and meaning-making processes, all of which used to be obscured by the macro-gaze common in contemporary neo-institutionalism*” (Hallet, 2010, p.53). Neo-institutional theory suggests that individual actors have very limited freedom to maintain, create or change an institution (Scott, 2013, p.92); they enact the institutional context through the process of isomorphic conformity and are only able to express their individuality by diverging from this conformity (Suddaby, 2010). By ascribing such deviations to intersubjectivity (DiMaggio and Powell, 1991), neo-institutionalists emphasise collective cognition and action and leave individual subjectivity out of the picture. In contrast, March and Olsen (1976, p.63) suggest: “*Despite ambiguity and uncertainty, organisational participants interpret and try to make sense of their lives. They try to find meaning in happenings and provide or invent explanations.*” Accordingly, this study focuses on exploring academics’ interpretations of the institutional context and the extent to which they align their actions with this environment.

The study focuses primarily on the individual perspective, adopting the individual academic as the unit of analysis in the case study university, though these findings are situated within the meso-level context of the university. It assumes that individual actors interact with the institutional context in a range of ways and aims to shed more light on the relationship between institution, actors and agency.

#### **1.4. Research objectives and questions**

The central research question of the thesis is: *How do individual actors contribute to shaping their institution?* This was addressed by exploring the following three sub-questions:

1. How do academics interpret the institutional context in which they are embedded?
2. How do academics respond to the institutional context and university

governance in their daily practices?

3. To what extent do academics' interpretations and practices affect their institution?

### **1.5. Methodological approach**

The overriding issue when selecting a methodology was that it should allow for the gathering and analysis of sufficiently comprehensive data to draw meaningful findings within a limited timeframe. Consequently, a single, qualitative case study was conducted to collect empirical data which was then used to develop theoretical explanations. The specific focus of investigation was on how individual actors contribute to shape the case institution. By constraining the study to a single case and limiting the research site to one faculty within the chosen university, the number of potential categories was reduced, allowing for a deeper immersion into the phenomenon.

A total of eleven semi-structured interviews were conducted with nine academics from the selected faculty, one representative from the university's senior management team and one middle manager. These interviews were approximately one to three hours in duration. The length of the interviews, and the semi-structured format, facilitated more detailed discussions and the gathering of richer data. This data was supplemented with data from documentary sources within the case university.

Lithuania was chosen for the research primarily because it is a country in transition; it faces the twin challenges of dealing with the inheritance of its Soviet past and accommodating the ongoing expansion of higher education. The country has implemented various HE reforms in an effort to catch up with its western counterparts, but it still lags far behind. Its efforts to promote innovation, for example, are hampered by a range of problems including poor resource usage, fragmentation, duplication, and an emphasis on research quantity over quality. Lithuania currently has 48 HEIs, or 14.5 HEIs per million of the population, compared to the Europe-wide ratio of 4.6



universities per million (MOSTA, 2016a). Collectively, these 48 higher education institutions offered 1187 study programmes in 2016. This makes for fierce competition between universities, which does little to foster quality. Kwiek (2001) argues that higher education in transition countries is doubly affected by local, post-1989 transformations and by deeper, long-term global transformations, and to neglect either of these is to misunderstand a decade of failed attempts to reform higher education systems in the region. Lithuania is an interesting transition country for investigating the impact of these local and global tides of change.

### **1.6. Outcomes of this study**

At the micro level, the findings may enable the respondents to reflect on the nature of their professional involvement in the university, while at the meso level, they may be useful to those engaged in strategic planning at either departmental or institutional levels. More broadly, however, the aim is to contribute to the body of empirical work on the role played by individual actors in the development and success of HEIs and to reflect upon and expand current theory. While the study's main outcomes are likely to be practical, its chief aim is to contribute to the overall development of knowledge in the field of institutional theory. The theoretical and practical implications of the study are addressed in detail in Chapter 7.

### **1.7. Outline of the thesis**

The thesis has seven chapters including this introductory chapter. This chapter discusses the rationale and purpose of the study before presenting the research objectives and questions and outlining the main features of the methodology.

Chapters 2 and 3 present a detailed review of the literature on organisational change in higher education and outline the theoretical framework of the study.

Chapter 4 discusses the research design. It explains why an interpretive

framework and qualitative methodology were selected and describes in detail the various methods of data collection that were employed. The steps taken to ensure the trustworthiness and transferability of the results, and that data collection and analysis were conducted in an ethical manner, are also addressed in this chapter.

Chapter 5 presents the findings gathered through the interviews and document review. The chapter outlines the general tensions experienced by academics and how they perceived and responded to the institutional context (focusing particularly on their responses to the university's strategic planning initiative) before discussing how these interpretations affected their daily teaching, research and evaluation activities.

Chapters 6 and 7 interpret the outcomes of the case study and reflect on the findings of the study as a whole. Chapter 7 discusses the major outcomes of the study in terms of how they address the research questions set out in Chapter 1. It then considers the practical and theoretical implications of the findings before acknowledging the limitations of the study and offering suggestions for further avenues of research.

**CHAPTER 2:**  
**LITERATURE REVIEW**

## **2.0. Introduction**

This chapter aims to position the current research within the literature on organisational change in higher education. It discusses how the university's role in society has evolved before going on to examine the context in which universities and academics are now embedded and highlighting the external and internal pressure they are under to modernise, and the impact this is having on academics. The chapter considers how the dynamics of organisational change are affecting university academics, arguing that these academics can in turn both facilitate and hinder change at the organisational level. Lastly, it identifies gaps in the research regarding how academics' practices and behaviours shape the university.

## **2.1. Understanding HEIs**

The idea of the university can be tracked back to medieval times. The first universities, such as Bologna University (founded in 1088), the University of Paris (1231) and Charles University (1347), were originally simply communities of scholars seeking knowledge and self-improvement. Only after a while did these communities transform into organisations with an academic structure. Whether this structure was led by students or teachers, the prime emphasis was on preserving its independence from external controls and restrictions imposed by the church or monarchs, and thereby guaranteeing freedom of thought. The central importance of this freedom was reiterated in Newman's (1852) assertion in *The Idea of the University* that universities must provide a broad and liberal education that encourages the acquisition of knowledge and "*enlarge[s] and enlighten[s] the mind*" (p.99). It was asserted again by von Humboldt when he called for the integration of

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<sup>2</sup> Birnbaum (2001, p.215)

teaching and research (Bommel, 2015, p.2), and by Jaspers (1959) when he argued that universities should have the academic freedom and institutional autonomy to concentrate on specialist research, without interference from the state (Gonzales, 2011, p.46). However, the classical view of universities as academic institutions existing outside the demands of industrial society has increasingly been challenged in recent decades by those who argue that universities' role in and relationship to society have changed (Nowotny et al., 2004). In other words, how we understand HEIs depends to some extent on whether we still regard them as venerable bastions of tradition, or see them as modern organisations whose job it is to generate knowledge for the twenty-first century world (Amaral et al., 2012).

Critics of the classical model claim that reforms, inspired by the twin forces of globalisation and managerialism, are creating ever more complex relationships between managers, academics and civic and business groups, while the emergence of competing values and principles is arguably leading to confusion and weakening systems. However, describing the tension that exists between what might be called “academic” and “market” values, Kerr et al. (1994) suggest that in fact, universities have always served the market:

*“The cherished view of some academics that higher education started out on the acropolis of scholarship and was desecrated by descent into the agora of materialistic pursuits led by ungodly commercial interests, scheming public officials, and venal academic leaders is just not true for the university systems that have developed at least since A.D. 1200. If anything, higher education started in the Agora, the marketplace, at the bottom of the hill...One of the great tensions in higher education today in many nations is the conflict between what some academics think should happen on the top of the hill and what actually goes on in response to the marketplace down*

*below*” (Kerr et al., 1994, p.56).

Winston (1997) echoes Kerr in suggesting that universities should function in the marketplace, though notes that they should seek to produce value rather than profit. Felt (2003), meanwhile, argues that the concept of the knowledge-based society challenges the social contract under which universities have operated since the 1970s, and that it is up to the university community actively to participate in the formation of a new contract. The problem, however, is that since the 1990s, advancing managerialism and entrepreneurialism in higher education have combined to give the balance of power to administrators, with the result that academics are too often expected to comply with initiatives they have had no part in making (de Boer and File, 2009).

The challenges surrounding university governance in the twenty-first century are closely linked to the continuous societal pressure to adapt to a different mindset. These challenges are causing universities to radically shift their priorities and driving governing bodies to introduce organisation-wide changes in how they operate. Universities are thus going through a period of dramatic organisational change, but as Maassen (2012, p.2) asserts, higher education is *“capable of significant adaptation, otherwise it would not have survived in a largely similar form the political, social, economic and cultural changes that took place since its inception”*.

## **2.2. HE institutional context change and the implications for academics**

The transformation of Europe’s higher education sector has been stimulated by the rise of a global, knowledge-based economy which places high value on research and innovation; by the growth of competition between higher education institutions; and by the Bologna curriculum reform. Universities have been encouraged to become more open to the public, and cooperation between university researchers and industry is now a key component of many EU funding programmes. Governments take into account the level of

cooperation with industry when assessing university activities (such collaboration is often a determining factor in funding decisions). Private enterprises are encouraged through tax cuts to partner up with higher education institutions to establish joint institutions or departments, and university researchers are encouraged to register patents, benefiting both themselves and the university. But cooperation with the business sector is not just providing additional sources of funding for universities, it is also reconfiguring some of their core values. Terms like entrepreneurship, market, profitable operation and competition have become part of the official discourse and are gradually conditioning faculty members to accept the move towards the private sector, where academic staff play an advisory role and students are treated as consumers (Kohler, 2006).

Scholars studying change at the organisational level have done so using a range of dimensions (De Boer et al., 2010), including state authority (Clark, 1979), leadership (Clark, 1998) and institutional environment (Williamson, 2000). The current study seeks to explore the effect of changes that are “*both externally (state) and internally (central administration) led, with the ultimate goal of ‘modernising universities’*” (Pineiro et al., 2012, p.7). These organisational changes are a good starting point to understand how universities are practically affected by developments in their environment. Accordingly, the following sub-sections discuss how universities have responded to drivers such as the shifting of authority from state to university, the growing competition for financial resources and the move towards managerialism.

### ***2.2.1. Externally led changes in the higher education institutional context***

#### *2.2.1.1. Shift of authority from the state to universities*

Universities may have their own long-standing values, but they are also “*embedded in a national political, regulative system*” (Vaira, 2004, p.485) that impacts upon their organisational development. Traditionally, states have influenced how universities are governed (Ferlie et al., 2008), regulating key

aspects of university activities such as employment, budget and finance, organisational structures and the number of students admitted to individual faculties and to the institution as a whole. Although the autonomy of universities has always been important to the academic community, external political and economic considerations have often left them dependent on government decision makers. Up until the mid-twentieth century, universities' activities and governance were based on the understanding that the state was the legal governor and controller of the sector with the power to use universities as it saw fit. However, at the end of the twentieth century, this relationship began to change as HEIs across Europe moved from the state control to the state supervision model (Clark, 1983; Kwiek, 2006; Olsen, 2007; Scott, 2006).

Peters (2000) explains that state power has been diffused or shifted in three ways. The first of these is what Peters calls forward-facing shift; power has been handed to supranational institutions and organisations such as the EU, which play a significant role in the governance of higher education, especially in terms of strategic decision-making. This has facilitated the internationalisation of the sector. Second, higher operational autonomy has been granted to local governments, provinces and higher education institutions, leaving the state to play a supervisory role only (facing-down shift). This has led to the emergence of new governance mechanisms such as multi-annual contracts with individual institutions. Universities have been encouraged to be autonomous and assume responsibility for the governance of their internal processes. Finally, tasks traditionally fulfilled by the state have been transferred to other organisations, such as quality/accreditation agencies, or even privatised (external shift).

At the supranational level, one major international reform that has driven change in universities is the Bologna Process. Scholars have variously focused on deconstructing the Bologna Process (Maassen, 2012, p.8) and on general developments that have happened since its inception (Tomusk, 2011). Critics of the process include Stensaker et al. (2014a), who argue that it has



done little to rebuild deteriorated HE systems or modernise HEIs, and Pabian (2008), who sees it as merely an example of the rhetoric of Europeanisation.

At the national level, power has been devolved from state authorities to “*various actors at various system levels*” (De Boer, Enders and Schimank, 2007, p.35) and “*alternative modes of governance*” (Enders, de Boer and Leisyte, 2008, p.113). The move from state regulation has led to the introduction of new governmental tools to steer universities (OECD, 2015), such as a more competitive resource allocation process. Rather than being allocated funds according to budget lines, universities are given a single grant, which they may distribute internally as they wish (Jongbloed, 2010). In Lithuania, this has led to a decline in public funding for higher education institutions – in the period 2008 to 2015, funding was reduced by 23%<sup>3</sup> (EUA Public Funding Observatory, 2016). This reduction in state support has forced universities to search for alternative sources of funding and, hence, led to greater cooperation with business. Teixeira and Koryakina (2016) suggest that the change in funding model and the demand that universities display “*pro-efficient behaviour*” have changed the relationship between the state and the HE sector and helped drive universities’ organisational evolution, but the growing focus on market-related policies (Teixeira et al., 2004) and the imperative to aim for more efficient “*use of taxpayers’ resources*” (Weisbrod et al., 2008) are forcing HEIs to behave like business and pursue a level of productivity which may be incompatible with their academic and research aims (Archibald and Feldman, 2010).

Those who support financial diversification argue that it helps universities to protect their core mission from external influences (Clark, 2002), though they acknowledge that diversification into commercial activities does pose a risk; Newman and Courturier (2001) caution that institutions must not forget their academic values while they look for market opportunities. Indeed, diversification strategies that ignore academic values are likely to meet significant resistance at university level (Teixeira and Koryakina, 2016; Bok,

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<sup>3</sup>Change in state subsidies provided to public universities excluding EU structural funds

2003). Traditionalists, however, insist that business-related activities pose a threat to universities' core values and mission (Newman, 2000; Bok, 2003; Teixeira and Koryakina 2016). Teixeira et al. (2014, p.400) suggest that revenue diversification has challenged the traditional autonomy of academics as *"the key legitimate foundation for academic management decisions"*, while others argue that intense resource hunting risks creating internal competition which can threaten the cohesion of the institution (Teixeira and Koryakina, 2016; Bok, 2003). Whitley and Glaser (2016) argue that the changes which follow a reduction in public financial support are likely to lead to:

*"...an increase in competitive relationships between universities as employment organisations, whether for 'excellence' (Weingart & Maasen, 2007) or for contributing to state public policy goals, and their concomitant development of separate collective identities as competing, quasi-corporate entities"*  
(Whitley and Glaser, 2014, p.35).

Particularly worrying for some is the growing influence of external funding bodies over universities' research programmes (Whitley, 2010), with the consequence that academics are increasingly affected by external funders' priorities (Laudel and Glaser, 2014) in their choice of research topics and content (Wang and Hicks, 2013; Heinze et al., 2009).

Lane (2007, p.615) characterises the state-university relationship as a *"clumsy dance"* between partners with conflicting needs (autonomy versus accountability), but those universities looking instead to private partners also need to realise that the more dependent they are on external funders, the more they place at stake their own and their academics' autonomy, and the less authority they will have over academics' choices and how they contribute to university success (Whitley and Glaser, 2016). Vaira (2004, p.498) takes an optimistic view of the challenges facing university leaders, drawing on the concept of organisational allomorphism to explain that rather than competing

against each other, these various pressures actually complement each other and positively influence HEIs. The reality is much more complicated, however, and as yet, researchers have barely scratched the surface in terms of exploring how universities should implement the organisational change they need to respond to this new environment.

#### *2.2.1.2. Marketisation*

The effects of marketisation are an example of macro-level influences entering the university institutional context. The marketisation of university education has variously been referred to as an “*epidemic*” (Natale and Doran, 2012, cited in Judson and Taylor, 2014, p.52) and as a “*paradigm shift*” (Newman and Jahdi, 2009, cited in Judson and Taylor, 2014, p.52) in the debate surrounding the delivery of university education throughout the western world. This paradigm shift impacts academics in a most profound way, forcing them to move from a purely academic understanding of education to seeing it as an economic good.

*“Marketisation necessarily turns higher education into an economic good, and this in itself is inimical to the broader liberal notion of higher education being about the intellectual (and moral) development of the individual that many in higher education still cling to”*  
(Brown, 2015, p.7).

The advance of marketisation presents an opportunity for the researcher to reflect on how the macro level is influencing the institutional context and how individual academics are responding. As universities become more goal-oriented, their operational practices are increasingly being linked to strategic plans and student enrolment in an attempt to “quantify” outcomes. Molesworth et al. (2011) note that: “*Mission statements for universities were almost unknown until the late 1980s, but are near universal in 2010*” (p.75). Arguing that mission statements and strategic plans are an emergent sign of market sensibilities entering the discourse of higher education, they conclude that: “*in their haste to construct a unique appeal, universities have attempted*

*to express their claims to purpose and distinctiveness through these documents” (p.75).* But while university leaders embrace these expressions of marketisation, *“academic staff...are often alienated by both the discourse and ethos of marketisation” (ibid).* These academics are faced with the task of reconciling their perception of the institutional context (the classical view of education as a public good) with the realities of the marketised environment (education as an economic good).

This marketisation was evident in the strategic plan of the case study university investigated in this research. The plan, which covers 2013 to 2020, sets out a series of strategic goals or directions for development that are designed to help the university fulfil its vision of becoming one of the region’s leading research universities. As part of this, the plan emphasises the importance of establishing partnerships with the private sector (the expectation being that these will benefit both research and teaching) and improving the university’s strategic management system. The fact that the latter goal is to be achieved by reviewing processes, resources, pricing, marketing and other management tools – as it would be in a private sector, for-profit organisation – implies that the university sees itself as being subject to market disciplines (Brown and Carasso, 2013) and, by extension, that it accepts the view of education as an economic good. In my investigation of the relationship between faculty members and their institutional context, part of my aim is to understand how academics operating at the micro level perceive and respond to a context which is under this kind of marketisation pressure.

### ***2.2.2. Internally led changes in the higher education institutional context: embracing managerialism***

As far back as 1963, Professor Kerr of Harvard University observed that universities should actually be renamed *“multiversities”*, because they are

continuously being pulled in different – often opposite – directions by their various stakeholders:

*“The ‘idea of a Multiversity’ is a city of infinite variety. Some get lost in the city; some rise to the top within it; most fashion their lives within one of its many subcultures. There is less sense of community than in the village but also less sense of confinement. There is less sense of purpose than within the town but there are more ways to excel....Life has changed also for the faculty member....Many faculty members, with their research assistants and teaching assistants, their departments and institutes, have become administrators. A professor’s life has become, it is said, ‘a rat race of business and activity, managing contracts and projects, guiding teams and assistants...to keep the whole frenetic business from collapse’” (Kerr 1963, p.43).*

Kerr’s analysis recognises the difficulties of evolving into a modern university and remains relevant today. It serves as proof that HEIs have spent the last 50 years in a constant state of flux as they attempt to strike a balance between two competing imperatives – the pursuit of knowledge and marketisation.

The advance of the managerialist perspective has had a significant impact on the university environment, bringing *“major reforms and changes, which have entailed a major shift in the logic, understanding and practice of what [universities] do”* (Howells et al., 2014, p.252). According to Etzkowitz et al. (2000), while the first academic revolution saw the introduction of research as universities’ second mission, the arrival of entrepreneurial sensibilities constitutes a second academic revolution – one which has inspired universities to pursue a third mission of economic and social development. Higher education institutions have embraced the change from collegial to

managerial governance, but the conflicting demands of “*governmental regulation and market forces*” (Jongbloed, 2015, p.212) have forced them to rework their academic mission, role and governing structure into new hybrid forms (Marginson, 2000). This has not been an easy task. Reed (2002) makes the important point that:

*“While much of the current writing on higher education assumes a movement away from traditional models of governance (themselves varied and complex),...the direction of this movement is far from clear and varies considerably in both content and intensity from country to country and over time. In the increasingly complex and turbulent environments in which higher education institutions must operate, a single definition of higher education governance cannot prevail”* (Reed et al., 2002, p.xxvii).

Scholars have now identified the emergence of new kinds of university, variously described as entrepreneurial (Pinheiro and Stensaker, 2014), hybrid (Jongbloed, 2015), corporate (Prince and Stewart, 2002) or even hyper university (Raschke, 2003). Kohler (2009) describes how universities have sought to maximise performance either by dramatically reducing the number of faculties (thereby facilitating interdisciplinary cooperation, encouraging process synergies and stimulating the production of new knowledge) or, conversely, by expanding the number of services and breaking faculties into smaller groups (which are more flexible and easier to manage).

The organisational changes have divided the academic community into two camps, with administrators on one hand and academics on the other (Gumport, 2000). There is tension between these two groups, with academics being highly critical of the move to make higher education institutions profit-oriented and to organise their internal governance according to business principles (Kerr, 1987). Critics of the managerialism-based model, although recognising the need to improve performance, doubt its effectiveness within

the academic environment (Zipin and Brennan, 2003; Deem, 1998). They argue that study and research are essentially creative pursuits and cannot be subject to quantitative performance indicators (Olsen et al., 2004). Effectiveness in research can only partly be measured by profitability – indeed, many key areas of scientific interest have no short-term business applications. These critics argue that the education process must not be equated with the services provided by for-profit organisations and that universities cannot be run as business enterprises (Naidoo and Jamieson, 2005).

But while conservative collegialism may seek to resist or even block an institution's trajectory towards new forms of organisation (Bryson, 2004; Clark, 1998), it may ultimately be no match for the corporate-inspired principles of managerialism (Santiago and Carvalho, 2012). Howells et al. (2014, p.254) argue that: "*shifts of institutional logics from 'bureaucratic' to 'new managerialism'*" are fragmenting and decentralising the higher education arena and placing universities under greater institutional pressure. This is leading to growing tension between university leaders and the academic community. Universities have traditionally been loosely coupled organisations, often characterised by weak leadership and strong, autonomous units able to adapt to shifting societal demands in their own time, but as these loosely coupled systems begin to decouple, university leaders are now having to play a much stronger role. Focusing on the role leaders play in ensuring successful institutional change, Howells et al. (2014) identify four key dimensions "*...that characterise leadership agency in the rapidly changing contemporary field of higher education: vision, alignment, strategic collaboration and innovation*" (p.267). These qualities must be combined to arrive at a new management approach which encompasses both top-down and bottom-up decision-making. What is crucial is that the quest to become a modern university does not end up as a "*zero-sum game*" (Marini and Reale, 2015, p.2) in which the advantage of one camp inevitably damages all the others. On a more positive note, some scholars have suggested that traditional academic power can in fact function alongside managerialism "*rather than*

*disappearing in a pitched battle against managerialism*” (Marini and Reale, 2015, p.2; Meek et al.,2010).

The empirical literature (see below) confirms that realigning universities towards new forms ultimately means a shift (often dramatic) in organisational structure and values (Marginson, 2000), with inevitable consequences for academics and their work (Naidoo and Jamieson, 2005, p.279; Deem, 2004, p.110). The questions then become: to what extent do academics play a role in this reshaping, how does it affect them, and how can the university and its people work together to build a modern institution that preserves academic values while pursuing efficiency and the market? Gregorian (2005) calls university staff the *“heart and soul, the bone marrow and blood of universities”* (p. 92), but while the drive towards change is often presented to academics framed in optimistic rhetoric, these same academics are invariably left behind. Yet they are central to any university’s ability to modernise and to find new revenue without compromising its core values. It is therefore crucial to explore and better understand their experiences and perceptions if a balance is to be struck between universities and their people.

### **2.3. Academics’ perceptions and responses to the changing higher education institutional context**

In this section, the research lens is focused to look more closely at the impacts governance shifts are having on academics’ working environment and practice. The section reviews various empirical and theoretical works that consider how academics perceive HEIs, and how they are responding to their changing institutional context. It will aid in responding to the first research question: How do academics interpret the institutional context in which they are embedded?

The role played by academics in times of turbulence has been the focus of many researchers. Topics considered include academics’ role in changing internal governance structures (Middlehurst, 2004), factors affecting working



conditions and performance (Naylor, 2001), the distribution of authority (Whitchurch, 2006; Meister-Scheytt, 2007), workplace democracy (Larsen, 2007), the clash of academic and corporate values (Marginson, 2000), and the introduction of quality-measuring tools that have redrawn the boundaries and roles of academic units (Hare and Hare, 2002). Most of this research has focused on the negative aspects of recent change; Locke and Bennion (2010), for example, find that it has led to academics becoming largely disengaged from “*governance and management of their institutions and alienated from their leadership*”. Others have identified adverse effects on the content and direction of academic research (Deem, 2008). When Teelken (2015) interviewed 100 academics to explore the relationship between individual professionals’ performance and the managerial measures imposed upon them, she found that there was “*more focus on output, and a less explicit relationship with the actual quality*” (p.312). In other words, the pressure to achieve publishing targets has superseded the obligation to strive for research and teaching excellence enshrined in the Bologna Process (Leuven/Louvain-la-Neuve Communiqué, 2009).

The advance of managerialism and the corporate-style approach have strengthened institutional management and seen more academic departments combined into fewer, larger schools, significantly undermining academic self-governance, while the introduction of external stakeholders from the business sector has weakened collegialism by interfering with the tradition of shared decision-making between academics and other stakeholders (Marini and Reale, 2015; de Boer et al., 2010). Not surprisingly, academics have reacted to these changes in a wide range of ways. Many have felt marginalised and sought to defend themselves (Teelken, 2015) by opposing the reforms (Stensaker et al., 2014a), others have adapted “*in order to reconcile their preconceptions of academia with their experience of working in a corporatized university*” (Locke and Bennion, 2010, p.37), while some have engaged willingly with the changes (Deem, 2008). Whether their response is one of compromise or confrontation, academic staff are finding their academic values and identities increasingly under attack; according to

Marginson, to the point that:

*“...[the] university may lose distinctive aspects of its mission—the primary orientation to the production, circulation and transmission of knowledge.... It is in danger of cannibalising its own professional academic cultures on which so much else depends”*  
(Marginson, 2000, p.32).

As academics’ engagement with their institutions becomes increasingly problematic, the need grows for further exploration into the discourse of academic proletarianisation, industrialisation and disengagement. I argue that more nuanced research is necessary to investigate how to avoid this alienation and build academic-institution relationships which allow change while preserving academics’ traditional values and working practices. To quote Altbach et al. (2009): *“The challenge is to ensure that the academic profession is again seen by policymakers and the public as central to the success of higher education”* (p.95).

University actors adapt to change by means of collectivist meaning-making, during which process they interpret organisational change and create meaning at the micro (i.e. individual) level. Barnett’s (2005) underscores the importance of the leadership in this process, noting that universities that are successful in managing organisational change have one thing in common: *“the core strategies...[provide] a means to help people on campus think differently about their institutions”* (Barnett, 2005, p.35). The remark highlights the central importance of clear communication; if new policies are introduced without proper communication, the meaning-making is left to individual actors.

Fumasoli and Stensaker (2013) present a rich history of research showcasing the power relationships of actors in higher education and how their interaction has impacted organisational change in universities.

*“Much of this research has focused on the mutual relationships between academics, managers and administrators, with an underlying assumption that on-going change was negatively affecting academic work, for instance by limiting academic freedom. In sum, research had tackled on one side the relationships among state, management and academics, on the other side the emerging patterns of coexistence between institutional leadership, administrators and academics within the university. Normative stances have often shaped the debate by contrasting managerialism and academic freedom, competition and cooperation, market vs academic values, or, more in general, the characterization of the nature of the university within society, as an instrument to achieve broader societal objectives”*  
(Fumasoli and Stensaker, 2013, p.481).

The changing dynamic between academics and managers has also caused a shift in how research into university organisational change is conducted, with the primary sponsors/recipients being policy makers rather than universities. As is discussed in section 2.5, this has led Fumasoli and Stensaker to consider how the intended audience is affecting the nature and agenda of research into organisational change. One result is that there are gaps in the academic literature in terms of what is being discussed.

Lane (2007) argues that academics resist organisational change because they are accustomed to being rewarded for isolationism and having autonomy in terms of what is taught and researched. This is in stark contrast to the entrepreneurial university, where managers are likely to be involved in setting the curriculum. If, as Vaira (2004) argues, the entrepreneurial university concept also represents a move towards uniformity across the HE sector (at least to some degree), this may be seen as a further threat to academics’

institutional identity. They may thus see organisational change as a challenge to both their competence and their identity as scholars. Lane further proposes that the conservative nature of most university faculties stems from the academic need for hard data and evidence to support change. Consequently, many faculties have adopted a “*wait and see*” attitude until more evidence emerges or others have set the standard for best practice (Lane, 2007, p.87).

#### **2.4. Researchers’ response to HEI reform in transition countries**

This section focuses particularly on the literature pertaining to the challenges faced by HEIs in transition countries such as Lithuania (which displayed its entrepreneurial spirit by being the first country to break away from the Soviet Union).

Kwiek (2001) argues that any attempt to understand why efforts at HE reform have largely failed in Eastern Europe must take into account the impact of local, post-1989 shifts as much as long-term global trends. However, there is little literature on HEIs in the context of transition countries between 1990 and 2000. More research exists on the challenges of HE reform in Eastern Europe in the 2000s (Cerych, 2002; Kwiek, 2001; Tomusk, 2001; 2003), but much of it is very general; for example, no attempts have been made to compare the experiences of transition countries. Instead, the focus has generally been on the progress of reform, related policy and factors that contribute to successful implementation (Ketevan, 2012). Despite the fact that post-communist reforms have been largely organisational (Scott, 2002), there is little research evidence to explain change processes at the institutional and micro levels. International researchers, meanwhile, have mainly concentrated on Russia, Ukraine and Central Asia and largely ignored Eastern European countries altogether.

Scott (2002, p.138) suggests that the substantial structural changes effected in higher education since 1989 can be understood as transition countries’ attempts to catch up with a West which they see as a role model:

*“When the ‘Iron Curtain’ was removed, it was natural that this longing for the West should be expressed through admiration and imitation of its values. Second, more concretely, the West provided examples of free institutions, which actually operated, including, of course, universities. So it was equally natural that these institutions would provide templates for the reform of the totalitarian structures inherited from the communist period”* (Scott, 2002, p.147).

However, opinions are divided on whether these reforms have been successful. While researchers such as Tomusk (2004) and Kwiek (2001) suggest that HE reforms have failed in the region, Scott (2002) counters that higher education in transition countries is still in the normalisation stage, and that in fact, as HE systems across Europe – East and West – are evolving in terms of funding, institutional governance and teaching, it is not only Eastern Europe’s *“higher education that is in transition; it is all higher education”* (Scott, 2002, p.151). There is therefore no blueprint for good practice that the East can simply import from the West. Rather, the quest to build modern HEIs should be rooted in each country’s own national setting, needs and values.

In Lithuania, as elsewhere, research on university organisational change is primarily directed towards policy makers rather than universities themselves, with academics generally aiming to advise policy makers particularly at times of national strategic reform. In Lithuania, this reform began in 2008. Puskorius (2008) responded to the 2008 reform of higher education by challenging the government’s expectations that it would achieve excellent results in what he felt was an unreasonable amount of time. His paper gives a brief overview, rather than an in-depth analysis, of the HEI governance models of other countries as the basis for a discussion of how organisational change should be handled in Lithuanian universities. The paper then calls for further research, arguing that this is crucial to the government’s ability to

make decisions about HEI governance and handle organisational change in the sector. Puskorius' paper is noteworthy first, because it calls attention to the lack of Lithuania-based research at the national level and second, because it addresses not the universities' need for such research but that of the government. The implication is that the prime purpose of university organisational change research should be to enhance the decision-making of policy makers rather than the quality of university leadership.

However, following Puskorius' article, a number of academics emphasised the need to inform not just policy makers but also universities themselves on how to manage organisational change. Bartkute (2008) approaches this by examining how other European universities are handling reform: although Bartkute's professed aim is primarily to expand the knowledge base of Lithuanian universities, by choosing to focus particularly on those reforms that are designed to move universities towards entrepreneurship, and on the effects management theories are having on their organisational environment, she is essentially exploring the impacts of government policy. While her choice of emphasis is understandable, given that the paper was written at a time of major reform in the (partly public) Lithuanian HE sector, it nevertheless highlights that even those studies that are ostensibly aimed at universities are unable to avoid discussing policy, with the result that many investigate organisational change at the macro rather than the micro level.

Serafinas and Ruzevicius (2009) are among the few researchers to have oriented their work specifically towards university leaders. These two authors focus specifically on quality management in HEIs. While their research is driven by the external demand for the implementation of quality standards in HE (at the micro level by national government, society and industry leaders, and at the macro level by European standard-setting bodies), they differ from previous researchers in that they explore the practical aspects of implementing quality management in universities. For example, they compare best practice in other European universities with practice in Lithuanian HEIs. Their work, while driven by the needs of external

stakeholders, is aimed not at policy makers but at university managers, and puts the case for why organisational change has to happen to raise quality. Though not initiated by HEIs, it positions HEIs as organisations with the power to implement organisational change for themselves, something prior research, which had cast policy makers as the sole drivers of organisational change in universities, had failed to do.

Similarly, Silinskyte and Vismeryte (2014) make little mention of policy makers, opting instead to focus on the societal challenges HEIs face and on real-life cases of technology being a strategic driver for organisational change. Like Marshall (2010) and Havlicek and Pelikan (2013), they see the introduction of new technologies as driving organisational change through their transformative effect on the curriculum, which forces the organisation as a whole to adapt accordingly. Acknowledging the role played by societal demand in driving the introduction of technological change, they link this development strongly with the shift towards entrepreneurialism.

These authors are the exceptions, however. As indicated above, the vast majority of research in this area has been aimed at policy makers rather than universities. Most studies only touch the surface of university organisational change, with many offering only brief reviews of best practice in other European universities, while others restrict themselves to examining a key strategic area or strategic problem rather than institution-wide change (Fumasoli and Stensaker, 2013). The problem is that despite their limited scope and/or lack of depth, many of these studies carry recommendations for policy makers that can materially affect how organisational change happens in universities. In other words, such research is in the strange position of not directly addressing organisational change and yet directly influencing it. That these studies are mainly aimed at policy makers rather than HEI leaders implies an underlying assumption among many Lithuanian academics that it is not the universities but the government that directly influences organisational change in the sector. Interestingly, those studies that are oriented more towards providing HEIs with useful information, such as that

by Silinskyte and Vismeryte, also tend to address organisational change only indirectly, for example by focusing on a particular action or initiative which, should it be implemented, would result in organisational change.

## **2.5. Emerging issues and literature gaps**

While this literature review is too limited to allow one to draw general conclusions concerning organisational change in higher education, it does offer some valuable insights into what is missing in terms of the organisational perspective. Much of the existing research focuses on how universities react to specific external or internal pressures, but these studies tend to treat universities as “*black boxes*” (Maassen and Stensaker, 2005); there appears to be little recognition that these institutions are made up of people who can either contribute to or hinder organisational development during times of change. It is my contention that any change that does happen cannot simply be ascribed to the leadership (Frølich et al., 2014) or the state (Mendiola, 2012; Kwiek, 2006), but should be seen as the fruits of the collective effort of a large number of individuals.

Although a number of researchers have investigated how academics react to pressure (Luukkonen and Thomas, 2016; Lichy and Pon, 2015; Teelken, 2015; Stensaker et al., 2014b; Potts, 2000), it is not clear how their findings fit into the broader picture of organisational change. Fumasoli and Stensaker (2013) make the case that university organisational change studies have so far focused primarily on the role played by external forces as drivers for change but ignored individual level actors:

*“...research in higher education has somewhat neglected the complex reality of the university as an organisation possessing its own structures, cultures and practices. This implies that national policy agendas have dominated organisational research in higher education, while the views of practitioners*



*such as institutional managers and administrators have not been sufficiently addressed” (Fumasoli and Stensaker, 2013, p.479).*

By extension, therefore, the interplay between the meso (university) and micro (academics) levels has also been largely ignored. Arguably, this is because the current literature follows two distinct and divergent paths. On the one hand is a body of literature focusing on changes at university level and how these changes contribute towards modernisation, and on the other is a literature concerned with academics and how they are affected by institutional context changes. Although each is interesting in its own right, viewed holistically, gaps become apparent. The institutional perspective ignores the organisational complexity associated with multiple actors, while the academic actors’ perspective takes no account of the organisational level in which individuals are embedded. The net result is that the dependency between universities and their actors, and how this relationship helps generate change at the organisational level, remain obscure.

Analysing articles published in the *Higher Education Policy* journal over a 25-year period, Fumasoli and Stensaker (2013) found that the majority of studies focused on the relationship between state and higher education institutions and the evolution of university governance models. As such, the studies tended to focus on the impact of policy reform across the sector as a whole, rather than its effect on individual universities. They argue that because the primary users of research into university governance are government-sponsored funding agencies, researchers tend to focus on how different policies affect universities or why they fail. Crucially, the lack of research into individual cases means there are few resources available to universities to provide empiric evidence of the pitfalls of organisational change. Kotter (1995) argued that the three most common reasons why universities failed to cope with change in the twentieth century were: “1) *failure to establish a sense of urgency*, 2) *failure to form a group with the power to support a collaborative change effort*, and 3) *failure to form a*

*strategic vision and steer the change effort*” (Kotter, 1995, pp.61-63). However, Fumasoli and Stensaker’s (2013) findings imply that another key factor is the lack of academic research to guide university leaders on how best to manage organisational change at all structural levels.

Armstrong (2014) highlights the unique nature of the challenges facing HE and calls for organisational change studies that are tailored to academics. For example, the fact that leadership roles are filled by academics may effectively block the power of curriculum change to drive organisational change, especially where there is a lack of knowledge or understanding. Nicol and Draper’s (2009) finding that university academics often do not know how to translate their knowledge into a new curriculum is further evidence of the need for research that addresses the effects of change on individuals, as university leaders need to look into methods to facilitate this process. The complexities surrounding organisational change suggest that there is a market (a term well-suited to the entrepreneurial attitude universities are being pushed to embrace) for research that examines the details of how change affects individual universities internally.

Another scholar attempting to bridge the literature gap is O’Donnell (2016), who combines individual academics’ practice and their inclusion in higher education learning and teaching into one analysis. She argues that if universities are to be helped to develop a more inclusive culture, researchers must explore the complex interplay between individual academics (their practices, experiences), universities (policies, strategies) and the prevailing ecosystems. These are *“removed from the individual, in that they may not participate directly in them, but they may still exert an indirect influence on the individual”* (p.104). Lindholm (2004) also adopts an interactional perspective, concluding that both personal and contextual factors must be taken into account when investigating the relationship between universities and their academics. However, while both authors make the valuable point that academics interpret organisational realities through the lens of their own assumptions, their work lacks a critical understanding of how academics’

practices and behaviours shape the university and thus impact its change process.

## **2.6. Conclusion**

This chapter has focused on individual academics in the changing higher education institutional context and the specific issues that underpin this change. It shows that academics are responding to organisational change in a number of ways, for example by breaking away from traditional teaching and pursuing more research-focused agendas. Scholars have tended to approach this development either from the macro level (e.g. concentrating on policy and fiscal tensions) or the meso level, taking it for granted that individual academics will conform to the demands of their university. However, although these studies get us closer to understanding individual academics and their work, they largely omit the individual perspective. There has been no significant empirical investigation of how individuals help shape their institution through concrete actions. This study aims to address this gap by showing how individuals operate in one organisation, thereby generating evidence that these individuals and the way they work cannot be taken-for-granted. It aims to contribute to our understanding by analysing the heterogeneity of these individuals' activities and interpretations and the impact, if any, these actions have on the organisation. This necessitated the development of a theoretical framework that would allow the analysis of individual practice and agency (the micro level) as a response to the organisational (meso-level) context. The development of this framework is discussed in the next chapter.

**CHAPTER 3:**  
**THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

### 3.0. Introduction

The previous chapter having shown how internal and external developments have made the institutional context more complex, this chapter conceptualises these shifts in relation to micro-level actors. The theoretical perspectives adopted (neo-institutional theory and Bourdieu's framework) were chosen because they allow the investigation of individual (micro-level) perceptions and actions as responses to the institutional (meso) environment, and of how these responses affect the overall institution. The aim of the research is to embed individuals' perceptions and behaviours within a larger, objective reality (Creswell, 2008). In this sense, it is a response to earlier scholars like Mills (1957), who called for researchers to explore how individual actors' problems fit into the larger organisational picture.

### 3.1. Conceptualising agency

As far back as the 1970s, Meyer and Rowan (1977) and Cohen et al. (1972) pointed to the potential impact of individual actors on organisations. DiMaggio (1988) built on this proposition, suggesting that actors can help create new institutions, but it is only recently that researchers have begun to investigate the micro-level processes through which individual actors engage with their institutional environment (Gill, 2014; Hallett, 2010; Powell and Colyvas, 2008).

In the structure-agency debate, determinists argue that individual actors enjoy only limited agency because their responses are heavily conditioned by the institutional environment (Leca, Battilana and Boxenbaum, 2008). However, Battilana and D'Aunno (2009) challenge the view that the institution has a "*totalizing cognitive influence*" (Lawrence et al., 2011, p.54) over individual actors, conceptualising agency as:

*"a temporally embedded process of social engagement, informed by the past (in its habitual aspect), but also oriented towards the future (as a*

*capacity to imagine alternative possibilities) and toward the present (as a capacity to contextualize past habits and future projects within the contingencies of the moment” (p.47).*

This perspective sees individual actors as influenced by the institution, but still capable of acting independently of it. The current study is interested in the visible and invisible actions through which individual actors help to create, maintain or disrupt institutional arrangements (Lawrence et al., 2009). Neo-institutional theory is particularly helpful for capturing these actions.

As highlighted in the previous chapter, the higher education institutional context is constantly changing. This creates the space for human agency, as individual actors must decide which new institutional arrangements they will comply with and to what extent. Whether they decide to comply with or diverge from the institutional context is likely to be affected by their relationship to this environment (Battilana, 2009), and this relationship is likely to be affected by their social position (Bourdieu, 1990).

### **3.2. Conceptualising individual actors’ practices**

Numerous authors have addressed the various causal processes that lead to certain organisational practices becoming institutionalised (Colyvas and Jonsson, 2011; Briscoe and Safford, 2008). However, the fact that these practices are considered “legitimate” does not necessarily mean that they will always dictate what happens at ground level. In the literature, the act of diverging from “*legitimate*” practice is referred to as loose coupling or decoupling (Meyer and Rowan, 1977).

The concept of loose coupling entered educational studies in the seventies. It was popularised by Weick (1976), who was one of the first to look at educational institutions as loosely coupled systems.

*“By loose coupling, the author intends to convey the*

*image that coupled events are responsive, but that each event also preserves its own identity and some evidence of its physical or logical separateness. Thus, in the case of an educational organization, it may be the case that the counsellor's office is loosely coupled to the principal's office. The image is that the principal and the counsellor are somehow attached, but that each retains some identity and separateness” (Weick, 1976, p.3).*

Weick drew on the work of Glassman (1973), who noted that the degree of coupling between different systems can be identified by looking at the activity and variables they have in common; the more variables and activities they share, the stronger the coupling (Glassman, 1973, cited in Weick, 1976, p.3).

Weick applied Glassman's theory to educational institutions, explaining:

*“Applied to the educational situation, if the principal-vice-principal-superintendent is regarded as one system and the teacher-classroom-pupil-parent-curriculum as another system, then by Glassman's argument if we did not find many variables in the teacher's world to be shared in the world of a principal and/or if the variables held in common were unimportant relative to the other variables, then the principal can be regarded as loosely coupled to the teacher” (Weick, 1976, p.3).*

Weick focused on schools, but others have gone on to argue that universities should also be recognised as loosely coupled systems. Investigating the massification of higher education, Clark (1998), for example, argues that universities have been able to respond to changing societal demands and diversify their offerings – both in terms of the education being provided and the research being carried out – because their loosely coupled structure allows for greater responsiveness and adaptability (Clark, 1998). What Clark

described can now be recognised as the dawn of the entrepreneurial university; indeed, researchers (Pinheiro and Stensaker, 2014; Pinheiro, 2012) have argued that this loosely coupled structure was what made the entrepreneurial university possible, since adaptability is a key concept in the entrepreneurial paradigm. Ironically, however, just as entrepreneurial sensibilities have compromised academic freedom, they have also undermined loose coupling as universities moved to becoming strategic organisational actors (Whitley, 2008). The mindset of loose coupling is in fact incompatible with the entrepreneurial university, the operation of which requires institution-wide actions that are supported at every level. The research produced at the end of the twentieth century, when the second revolution was dawning and the entrepreneurial mindset first emerging, was focused on universities which were able to capitalise on their loosely coupled systems to adapt to changing societal needs, but universities today face the much greater challenge of enacting institution-wide organisational change without the support of a loose-coupled structure which recognises the interests of units first and organisation second.

The twenty-first century has seen academics questioning previous methodological approaches to the investigation of coupling in educational institutions. Spillane and Burch (2003), again focusing on schools rather than HE, are critical of how the concept of coupling has been employed by those researching organisational structure in these institutions.

*“The specter of ‘loose coupling’ has had something of a stranglehold on implementation scholarship for the past twenty years or more. Treating instruction as a monolithic or unitary practice, it was relatively easy to conclude that instruction was decoupled or loosely coupled from administration and policy. We showed, however, drawing on recent implementation research, that treating teaching as a unitary practice is problematic in that it glosses over patterns of tight*



*and loose coupling between the institutional environment and instruction. Looking carefully within instructional practice and acknowledging its multiple dimensions is critical to understanding tight and loose coupling in the educational sector”*  
(Spillane and Burch, 2003, p.n/a.).

Observing that previous studies have limited themselves to defining the strength of the coupling between instruction, and educational policy and administration, Spillane and Burch argue that the concept should rather be applied across a broad range of organisational activities. For example, they demonstrate that theorists have failed to acknowledge the role an individual teacher’s subject specialism plays in their willingness (and the willingness of administrators) to implement policy changes.

This example further highlights the need for a more minute examination of the issues surrounding coupling and its impact on organisational change. The problem is that such research is too often intended for policy makers rather than universities, and policy makers are interested in change at the macro level. Where it does have an impact on policy making, the resulting policy is likely to face resistance from universities, who may see institution-wide change as a threat to their loose-coupled structure. Twenty-first century studies on coupling have tended to sidestep the issue by focusing more on the decoupling of policy from practice and analysing the failure of policy to impact on universities.

Since individual actors are exposed to the institutional context under differing circumstances, any change in this environment may be expected to resonate differently with each individual and to produce a different coupling response. By examining individual actors’ practices, this study seeks to illustrate the range of coupling responses exhibited by academics within the case university. It was assumed that the strength of the coupling response would speak to the embeddedness of the individual actor within the institutional context.

### **3.3. Approaches for analysing individual actors' perceptions and practices**

Social researchers suggest that organisations do not exist in a vacuum; they interact with their environment to achieve their objectives and they depend on it for critical resources. Neo-institutional theory argues that every institution is both influenced by the broader environment and has to survive it. In order to do this, it needs to do more than succeed economically; it must establish legitimacy within its own field. In every organisational field there are supposed “best” ways to organise, structure and manage organisations, even though there may be no empirical evidence to support these claims (Meyer and Rowan, 1977). This creates a situation where the evaluation of organisations, and hence their survival, can rest on compliance to formal structures that may or may not actually function, rather than on observed outcomes related to actual task performance. The environment is thus the main source of legitimacy, while legitimacy is the main factor that secures organisational survival. The fact that the pressures for legitimacy and efficiency may be incompatible can lead organisations to seal off their core activities from the institutional context and separate their formal structure from these core activities in an attempt to avoid internal and external conflicts.

By viewing individual actors in relation to their environment, Bourdieu's framework contributes to the development of a relational perspective between organisation and individual (Emirbayer and Mische, 1998, cited in Lawrence et al., 2010). It views individual actors not as solely pursuing institutional lines of conduct, but as embedded in and responding to the context.

#### ***3.3.1. Institutional perspective***

The institutional perspective is a potentially useful instrument for analysing organisational phenomena in higher education as it can be employed to look at the complex relationships between universities and their institutional

contexts. It assumes that an organisation's behaviour is primarily affected by its environment, and focuses on the role played not just by formal rules but also by institutional symbolic resources such as prestige and compliance with prevailing cultural norms. Events and phenomena that would otherwise appear dysfunctional and irrational become meaningful to interpretation through the prism of institutionalism. In other words, institutionalists explore not the psychological states of actors, but the structural factors that determine whether an actor's actions are considered rational and wise (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983).

Over the years, institutional theory has developed in terms of approach. "Old" institutionalists studied the organisation as a single unit of analysis, exploring its values, power and internal environment (Selznick, 1957) but ignoring its interactions with the external context. These researchers saw the interactions between groups and individuals as representing the "totality" of understanding and regarded organisations as "closed-systems" (Selznick, 1948). This narrowness of focus prompted others to develop an alternative institutional perspective – "new" institutionalism – to address the relationship between organisations and their environment. New institutionalism acknowledges that organisations interact with their environment to achieve their objectives and to acquire critical resources (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983). The organisation and its environment are seen as a kind of cultural context; survival depends not only on the organisation's effectiveness but on its ability to adapt to its environment.

New institutionalism started in 1977 with the publication of a series of articles by Meyer and Rowan. They stress that education is a system of institutionalised rituals which transform social roles. So widely held is the belief in the rationality and suitability of these formal structures for controlling organisations, their networks and technical activities, that they attain a kind of mythical status:

*"Powerful institutional rules that function as strong rationalized myths linking certain organisations"*

(Meyer and Rowan, 1977, p.343).

As organisations strive to survive, these rationalised myths become the guides to what constitutes proper behaviour in that environment. For example, Schriewer (2009) noted considerable discrepancies in some countries between “*general political acceptance of the basic Bologna premises and models and their actual translation into practice*” (p.44). Universities, as rational organisations, take those actions which will give the best outcome (Dillard et al., 2004, p. 509). In other words:

*“The statements implying that political rhetoric diverges from practical implementation, that surface acceptance with a view to gaining legitimacy differs from actual structural change, and that ‘talk’ differs from ‘action’”* (Brunsson, 1989, cited in Schriewer, 2009, p.44).

In embracing rationalised myths, organisations obey their institutional environment and demonstrate their conformity to key interest groups. According to neo-institutional theory, this adaptation to and convergence with the institutional environment is an example of isomorphism or the “*adaptation process*” (van Vught, 2008, p.154). Exploring the mechanisms that support institutional isomorphism, DiMaggio and Powell (1983) found that they can be coercive (arising from the regulatory power of the state and the law), normative (associated with the professionalisation process) or mimetic (when the organisation copies and adapts practices from other organisations).

Neo-institutionalist theory deconstructs bureaucratic organisations and introduces a number of new research directions, including legitimacy and the related isomorphic aspect, and a focus on the inconsistency of organisations (Selznick, 1996). Old institutionalism treated institutions as objective structures that operate independently of human will and action, but the new theory sees “*man-made rules and procedures as the basic building blocks of*

*institutions*” (Meyer and Rowan, 2006, p.6). Thus, Meyer and Rowan (2006) define institutions as: “*repositories of taken-for-granted cognitive schemata that shape people’s understandings of the world they live in and provide scripts to guide their action*” (p.6). They argue that more attention should be paid to the actors who are shaped by these institutions, and to the power conflicts that influence their development (Meyer and Rowan, 2006).

While early theory tended to interpret conflict between groups in political terms, neo-institutionalism “*undermines conflicts of interest between and within organisations, or states how the organisation responds to such conflicts by developing a complex administrative structure*” (DiMaggio, 1988, p.12). The two theories also see the surrounding environment in different ways: while old institutionalism assumed that organisations operate mostly in local communities, neo-institutionalism sees the external environment in broader, sectorial terms. Finally, while the early theory treated organisations as organic, whole units, neo-institutionalism divides them into their component elements. The differences between old and new institutionalist theory mean that they offer different starting points from which to investigate organisations and institutions.

The fact that HEIs are subject to the influence of both internal and external actors means they are highly institutionalised environments (Webber, 2012; Tight, 2012) and must deal with the “*inconsistent and fluid participation of actors*” (Yuzhuo and Mehari, 2015, p.10) who may have competing goals. In these circumstances, legitimacy is their best guarantee of sustainability. Legitimacy is a core focus of new institutionalism. It represents social acceptability and credibility; Suchman (1995) defines it as the general understanding that the actions of an entity are desirable, reasonable and conform to socially constructed norms, values and beliefs. As a “*specific condition*” or “*symbolic value*” (Scott, 2001, p.59), legitimacy helps organisations and institutionalised practices to survive.

Organisations consider legitimacy an important element when they are choosing how to respond to institutional pressures; acceptance and

compromise allow the organisation to preserve its social acceptability, while ignoring the authorities can put its legitimacy and credibility at risk. However, Meyer and Rowan (1977) claim that organisations may in fact address legitimacy only symbolically in an effort to defend their internal structures from continuous change. In these circumstances, universities may behave as loosely coupled organisations (Weick, 1976) and give the public only a limited view of their surface performance. For example, an academic researcher who objects to writing an annual report (designed to confirm their legitimacy to stakeholders and demonstrate that they are performing their role properly and providing value) may do no more than provide a superficial evaluation for form's sake (Meyer and Rowan, 1977).

Thus, organisational actions can have both substantive and symbolic elements, and the latter may actually be the more important. HEIs are bounded by external constraints, limited resources and their dependence on powers that contrive to restrict decision-making. In such cases, *“competing environmental demands and associated resource constraints result in situations where it is impossible for the organization to produce outcomes that are desirable to constituents”* (Bastedo, 2005, p.15). This is likely to give rise to symbolic behaviours designed to change the impressions of constituents or to demonstrate apparent compliance with their demands. Engaging in symbolic behaviour helps the institution to maintain legitimacy and satisfy its *“need to maintain resources or values in the face of untenable environmental demands”* (Bastedo, 2005, p.15).

Organisations can choose how to deal with the pressures of the institutional environment. Oliver (1991) identifies five different ways in which they can respond: acceptance, compromise, avoidance, ignorance and manipulation. Acceptance manifests in three ways: habit (unconscious, institutionalised role-playing), imitation or obedience (a deliberate and strategic choice by the organisation). Compromise may be the preferred option when the organisation faces overlapping institutional expectations from different stakeholder groups. In this case, the organisation can balance, negotiate or

reach a consensus. According to Oliver, compromise differs from acceptance as it indicates only partial agreement, and the organisation continues to actively promote its own interests.

Organisations that refuse to conform to institutional expectations may choose avoidance; they may seek to mitigate the institutional pressures by subverting the imposed rules and expectations or decoupling their formal structures from their core activities. The ignoring tactic may be employed where the institutional pressure is not very strong, or where the organisation's internal beliefs are radically different from external expectations. In such a case, the organisation may reject and even aggressively attack the institutionalised values and external actors who express them. Finally, manipulation is the most active strategy; the aim here is to purposefully and opportunistically influence control and evaluation by institutional pressures.

There are a few points that neo-institutional theory fails to address. For example, despite emphasising that organisational members follow institutional norms and rules, it ignores human agency (Stinchcombe, 1997; Lawrence et al., 2009), yet this is a key determinant of the extent to which institutional norms and rules reach the grassroots of the organisation and how they are maintained at the micro level. Neo-institutional theory also falls short in explaining the local dynamics of organisational change because of its strong focus on macro homogeneity (Hirsh and Lounsbury, 1997). This focus is why the theory has mainly been applied to the macro or regional-level analysis of *“governance, structure, system policy, management, leadership and the history and evolution of HEIs”* (Yuzhuo and Mehari, 2015, p.9). However, while it is interesting to understand the changes happening at the institutional level, as Frølich et al. (2013) assert, a micro-level perspective is crucial to explore the processes that lead to change at meso level.

Neo-institutionalism does not explain how certain influences affect individuals, how they make sense of these influences and what behaviours result, despite the fact that the organisation happens for the reason that *“...somebody somewhere really cares to hold an organization to the*

*standards and is often paid to do that”* (Stinchcombe, 1997, p.17). Furthermore, the theory overlooks the right of individuals to choose which social practice they will accept within the organisation in which they are embedded. In other words, it is more interested in how institutions preserve stability during times of change than in exploring the sources of change and the role played by internal actors (Powell and Colyvas, 2008). To fully understand the role individuals play in change dynamics, it is necessary to connect the patterns of their individual actions to the institutional context in which they are embedded.

### **3.3.2. Bourdieu’s framework**

Understanding the multifaceted process of university change requires a holistic, multi-level approach to analysis. This is possible with Bourdieu’s (1977) framework, which offers a model for reconciling the meso-level (institutional) and micro-level (individual) perspectives. Bourdieu’s core goal was to offer an alternative to the perceived dichotomy of objectivism and subjectivism, which he saw as a “*false opposition*”. Subjectivism conventionally posits that all actions are the result of conscious thought, while objectivism counters that these actions are nothing more than mechanically determined practices performed independent of the agent’s mind and will (Bourdieu, 1990, p.34). This dualistic view is evident in higher education research, which generally focuses exclusively on either the objective (the institution and its structures) or the subjective (academics). Bourdieu, however, argued that social reality is best understood by synthesising the two. To reconcile the binary of objectivism and subjectivism, and their attendant sub-dichotomies (e.g. macro/micro), he developed his theory of practice. This addresses the dualism of micro-macro processes in organisations and links them together (Emirbayer and Johnson, 2008) to describe a scenario in which individual actors are exposed to various forces by the institution, which is in turn dependent on these individual actors for its continued reproduction and existence (Bourdieu, 1990).



Bourdieu's framework revolves around the key concepts of field, habitus, practices and capital. Bourdieu breaks society down into different fields, each with its own logic and social relations, where actors, bounded by the capital resources available to them, compete for power and resources. Bourdieu's field concept characterises the social world as a pool of relationships between social agents, whether these are institutions or individuals (Wacquant, 1989, p.38x). He calls this "*thinking relationally*". He suggests the field should be seen as a structured space in which each agent occupies a position and there is a "*network of objective relations between positions*" (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, p.97). These structural arrangements influence the actors' worldview and actions, effectively serving as the arena in which they must use their capital (what Bourdieu calls their stake) to access resources.

Grenfell (2008) suggests that the field concept is best explained using the analogy of the football field; there are clearly defined boundaries, and the players are competing against each another. All players are independent, know their own role and are aware of the position being played by other game participants. The players have to know how to play the game and what the rules are as these determine what they can and cannot do, set their positions in the football field and expectations in terms of their skills and physical preparation. In Bourdieu's words, agents are bound by the "*laws of functioning*" (1990, p.87).

Each social actor in the field takes a different position, which comes with a set of choices. Bourdieu calls this position-taking.

*"A network, or a configuration, of objective relations between positions objectively defined, in their existence and in the determinations they impose upon their occupants, agents or institutions, by their present and potential situation...in the structure of the distribution of power (or capitals) whose possession commands access to the specific profits that are at stake in the field, as well as by their*

*objective relation to other positions”* (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, p.97).

Several positions may be identified in the university field; for example, academics, management and the organisation itself. Bourdieu suggests that:

*“In every field we shall find a struggle, the specific forms of which have to be looked for each time, between the newcomer who tries to break through the entry barrier and the dominant agent who will try to defend the monopoly and keep out competition”*  
(Bourdieu, 1993, p.72).

In this field, the main struggle is likely to be between externally imposed requirements (e.g. the introduction of institutional evaluations) and internal processes (academics may be forced to take on extra administrative duties to produce these evaluations). Bourdieu’s quote seems to frame the struggle as being between newcomer and established agent.

According to Bourdieu, each position in the field has its own *“values [that] correspond to the values of the different pertinent variable”* (Bourdieu, 1992, p.231). These values are considered capital. Bourdieu defines capital as: *“assets of various kinds that are produced, deployed and transformed as actors engage with one another and with social institutions”* (Collyer, 2015, p.323). Capital is unique to each position in the field and only relevant and valuable in that particular field; otherwise, *“every prize can be attained, instantaneously, by everyone, so that at each moment anyone can become anything”* (Bourdieu, 1986, p.15). Jenkins (1992, p.85) suggests that individuals take a dominant, subordinate or equivalent position depending on their capital or stake in the field; those who possess a lot of capital are likely to have a dominant role, whereas those who have little capital will take a follower position.

There are four types of capital: economic (monetary assets), cultural

(educational background), social (relationships with others) and symbolic (individual prestige). Economic capital is considered “*at the root of all the other types of capital*” (Bourdieu, 1986, p.24) because it can be traded for other more valuable forms, for example by being used to pay for a university degree. There are three sub-categories of cultural capital. The first of these is embodied cultural capital (the knowledge and skills accrued through education or socialising processes). This cultural capital cannot be transferred as it is part of an individual’s habitus, acquired over time. The second is objectified cultural capital (tangible assets with economic value), while the third is institutionalised capital. This usually refers to an educational award or diploma, such as serves as a “*certificate of cultural competence which confers on its holder a conventional, constant, legally guaranteed value with respect to culture*” (Bourdieu, 1986, p.20). Once again, the individuals with more cultural capital have more power in the field, and vice versa. Social capital is developed through one’s network of relationships. Bourdieu suggests that this type of capital is actually the greatest source of power. Finally, symbolic capital is unique in that it can only be accrued by being recognised by others. In the university field, academics usually accumulate symbolic capital by associating themselves with high-ranking institutions, by being published in journals and building up a professional reputation over time.

Bourdieu’s framework makes it possible to explore the capitals that academics use to operate within universities, but bringing “*real-life actors back in who had vanished...through being considered as epiphenomena of structures*” (Bourdieu, 1986, cited in Lewandowski, 2000, p.52) also requires investigation of their perspectives and experiences within the university context. This is particularly important in my study, which explores how academics’ pre-existing values, experiences and habits affect their response to changes in university strategy. Bourdieu’s habitus concept is directly relevant here. Habitus refers to an individual’s “*infinite capacity*” (Bourdieu, 1990, p.55) for generating perceptions, meanings and action. This conceptualisation of habitus suggests that academics should be seen not just

as following or resisting change, but as potentially having the ability themselves to effect change in the objective structure. In introducing this concept, Bourdieu aimed to offer an explanation of individual behaviour that was not bounded by the limitations of the subjectivism and objectivism approaches:

*“...the main purpose of [habitus] was initially to account for practice in its humblest forms – rituals, matrimonial choices, the mundane economic conduct of everyday life, etc. – by escaping both the objectivism of action understood as a mechanical reaction ‘without an agent’ and the subjectivism which portrays action as the deliberate pursuit of a conscious intention, the free project of a conscience positing its own ends and maximizing its utility through rational computation” (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, p.121).*

Habitus provides a lens to study how individuals see their social environment and their role therein, and how they act in response. By extension, it can be employed to investigate how the members of an organisation operate in relation to that organisation. According to Bourdieu, the individual constructs his social environment by developing an understanding of it, cultivating an opinion of it and then responding to it in his actions (Bourdieu, 1986). Habitus acts as an independent agency – unconscious and subjective – which structures his preferences when it comes to choosing these actions. The stronger his sense of belonging to the field, the more likely it is he will try to maintain the field’s structure by making choices that are compatible with its expectations. Where this sense of belonging is absent, the more likely he is to struggle to navigate through the field. If the field logic changes, it can become incompatible with his habitus and create rising tensions between the two.

One very important point made by Bourdieu is that individuals are not just silent participants following the rules of the field but continuously interacting

with it, their habitus constantly absorbing new experiences and tacit knowledge upon which they can draw when they make decisions and choices. The habitus thus helps determine whether individuals accept, transform or resist the conditions of the field in which they are operating. Swartz (1997) suggests that it “*orients action according to anticipated consequences*” (p.106); just as the field structures the habitus through its various rules and expectations, the habitus contributes to structuring the field as a “*meaningful world, a world endowed with sense and value, in which it is worth investing one’s energy*” (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, p.127). This is the turning point, where the individual’s role becomes essential in contributing to change in the field.

The three concepts that make up the theory of practice were combined by Bourdieu in the following formula:

$$[(\text{habitus})(\text{capital})] + \text{field} = \text{practice} \text{ (Bourdieu, 1986, p.101)}$$

Bourdieu argues that an infinite number of possible practices (Bourdieu, 1977, p.83; 1990, p.55) can emerge from the intersection between habitus and field, depending on the setting in which an individual operates and for what he struggles. However, while he may choose to reject the organisation’s values, depending on what is at stake, his choice of practices is in fact limited by the field; in what amounts to a kind of censorship (Bourdieu, 1990), it accepts practices that are in line with its logic and sanctions those that are not.

Although Bourdieu’s theory of practice does have some important limitations, it offers a useful lens for investigating why some academics engage more with the institutional context than others. His perspective contends that the field does not mechanically control an actor’s practices, though it will influence them. At the same time, the rules of the field are subject to interpretation and to subjective structures. The fact that individual actors perceive these rules differently means that they will pursue different practices, particularly if their disposition does not align with the field’s logic. Jenkins (1992) notes that usually “*what people do in their lives*” is taken for

granted (p.68). Consequently, to understand individual actors better, it is necessary to explore their routines:

*“In short, I wanted to abandon the cavalier point of view of the anthropologist who draws up plans, maps, diagrams and genealogies. That is all very well, and inevitable, as one moment, that of objectivism.... But you shouldn't forget the other possible relation to the social world; that of agents really engaged in the market.... One must thus draw up a theory of this non-theoretical, partial, somewhat down-to-earth relationship with the social world that is the relation of ordinary experience”* (Bourdieu, 1990, p.20).

Bourdieu's theory of practice has already been applied to the HE sector by researchers such as Collyer (2015), who employed the habitus, field and capital concepts to understand how academics are responding to the growing marketisation of the sector and the associated erosion of autonomy and intensification of monitoring and control. Wilkinson (2010), meanwhile, argued that the theory is an effective lens through which to examine contemporary academic leadership, located as it is between the *“logics of the market, government and academics”* (p.42).

Despite the usefulness of the field and individual perspectives offered by Bourdieu, the theory of practice does have some limitations which affect the extent to which it can be employed to explain micro-level choices and meso-level change processes. First, the theory places greater emphasis on social reproduction than on social change (Di Maggio, 1979; Thomson, 2008). Bourdieu places a strong focus on actor habitus, or the cognitive structures that develop in response to the objective conditions in which the actor is embedded (King, 2000). However, if an actor's practices are indeed formed by these objective structures, change becomes impossible: *“Individuals would act according to the objective structural conditions in which they found*

*themselves, and they would consequently simply reproduce those objective conditions by repeating the same practices*” (King, 2000, p.427). There is only a limited acknowledgement of the possibility of social change in Bourdieu’s description of the struggle between dominant and dominated actors – if the latter start defending their interests against the former, change becomes possible (Bourdieu, 1988). Bourdieu’s contention that actors inhabit objective structures unconsciously has also led to the criticism that the theory sees actors as restricted in their actions, choices and participation, and therefore as little more than passive recipients of field structures (King, 2000).

Finally, it has been argued that Bourdieu’s concepts are confusing (Laberge, 2010). The most contentious of these is habitus (Reay, 2004; Nash, 1999), which has no clear or generally agreed definition. Nor is it clear how this concept should be applied as a research method. Burawoy (2012) calls it “*a fancy name – a concept without content*” (p.204) and suggest that, as it is not able to capture social change, it should be abandoned. In its defence, Silva (2016) suggests that the habitus concept is sufficient to address social change as it provides “*multiple locations to negotiate submission and defiance, adaptability and resistance*” (p.174). Reay (2004) advises using Bourdieu’s concepts as guides only, but Nolan (2012) and Grenfell (2008) argue that they are useful thinking tools and can help reflect the social world and lead education research. Accordingly, this study employs Bourdieu’s concepts to frame, guide, understand and analyse academics’ experiences and trajectories.

### **3.4. Complementarity of the two perspectives for this study**

Neo-institutional theory and Bourdieu’s framework provide the theoretical framework guiding this study. Neo-institutional theory is important here in that it helps to sustain the argument that institutional reform does not necessarily lead to substantive changes in practice (Bidwell, 2001). The concepts of loose coupling and symbolic action might explain how academics are able to engage in the rhetoric of accountability, preserving their

legitimacy in the eyes of their stakeholders, while remaining unchanged in practice. Loose coupling allows individual members to retain a degree of autonomy which makes change very difficult. This is directly relevant to my study, which aims to explore how actors at this micro level perceive and interpret the institutional context, and how these changes are reflected in their daily activities. Neo-institutional theory would suggest that they are isolating their core activities and engaging in the game of “rhetoric versus reality”.

Bourdieu’s framework pictures individuals and their social world as relational entities, making it possible to re-conceptualise university academics as enablers who are contributing to the structuring and restructuring of their institution. This suggests that some individuals might not sync with the changing institutional context and that they might choose to ignore objective changes and refuse to change their practices. This opens up a space for rethinking how modifying forces in the field (e.g. marketisation, governance changes) are affecting academics’ practices, and how meso-level orders are being perceived and implemented at the micro level. It may give important insight into why some academics’ practices remain untouched despite obvious objective changes (Bourdieu, 1990, p.97), and how, when academics do change, they can have a transformative effect on institutions. The question remains how this relational configuration operates in a real university context and what configuration is required to make the game “*a perfect match between objective and subjective structures*” (Bourdieu, 1996, p.21, cited in Reed-Danahay, 2005 p.114).

### **3.5. Conclusion**

This chapter has considered the various ways in which individual actors can be positioned and analysed within their organisation and discussed the theoretical framework that underlies this study. This framework consists of two components: neo-institutionalism and Bourdieu’s framework. Both neo-institutional theory and Bourdieu’s framework point to the interconnection between individual actors and the institutional context in which they operate,



making them particularly relevant to this study. However, they offer complementary perspectives on individual actors and their actions; while neo-institutional theory suggests that actors are bounded by organisational norms and routines (Huisman, 2009), the theory of practice posits that they are free to choose their practices, even if they are continuously guided by these rules and routines. Following the assumption that individual actors respond to institutional arrangements “*locally, creatively, incrementally*” (Lawrence et al., 2011, p.57), this study focuses on the practices of these actors rather than the outcome of these practices. The next chapter describes the design of the research, from the choice of philosophical paradigm to the arrangements for data collection and analysis.

**CHAPTER 4:**  
**METHODOLOGY**

*How often have I said to you that when you have eliminated the impossible, whatever remains, however improbable, must be the truth?*<sup>4</sup>

#### **4.0. Introduction**

Selecting methodology is like choosing a tool from the toolbox; you may be able to accomplish the job with the hammer, but it will not be as efficient if you needed pliers all along. This chapter considers the process by which this research study was conducted. The research questions have been detailed in the Introduction chapter (Chapter 1), but they are repeated here to provide the context for research design discussion. The key research question was:

*How do individual actors contribute to shaping their institution?*

This was broken down into three sub-questions:

1. How do academics interpret the institutional context in which they are embedded?
2. How do academics respond to the institutional context and university governance in their daily practices?
3. To what extent do academics' interpretations and practices affect their institution?

As the choice of methodology is initially determined by the researcher's ontological and epistemological position, the chapter begins by explaining the research philosophy underlying the study. The available paradigms are examined and compared in terms of their assumptions and techniques along with the challenges they pose and their implications for this research. The chapter then discusses the research design and the reasons why a qualitative methodology was selected before outlining the key characteristics of the chosen methodologies and the challenges they pose.

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<sup>4</sup> Doyle (1950, p.19)

#### **4.1. Choosing the research philosophy**

Since as Villiers and Fouche (2015, p.126) note, the complicated choices facing researchers begin with the “*philosophical underpinnings*” of the research, I found it necessary to commence by closely examining the available research paradigms. The paradigm is the “*net*” of ontological, epistemological and methodological beliefs (Denzin and Lincoln, 2008, p.26) that guide the researcher’s assumptions about the nature of what is to be known. There is a wide range of paradigms, each representing a slightly different worldview (McKerchar, 2008) and each with its own set of ontological, epistemological and methodological assumptions. Villiers and Fouche (2015) suggest that positivism and interpretivism are the most frequently discussed paradigms, and that other paradigms such as feminism and critical realism generally fall somewhere on a continuum between these two.

The ontological position of any paradigm depends on the assumptions it makes regarding the nature of reality; that is, how it responds to the core question: “*Is there a ‘real’ world ‘out there’ that is independent of our knowledge of it?*” (Marsh and Furlong, 2010, p.185). Whether or not the researcher believes “*...the world exists independently of your perceptions of it*” (Greener, 2011, p.6) and that reality is external and objective rather than a matter of subjective interpretation will shape their philosophical perspective and thus their methodological choices. They will also be influenced by their epistemological assumptions, or their views on “*how we know what we know*” (Marsh and Furlong, 2010, p.185). As indicated above, positivism and interpretivism are the most frequently discussed paradigms in the literature, and this is also true in education research (Assalahi, 2015). Accordingly, I explore these paradigms in more detail in the following sections.

##### ***4.1.1. Positivistic paradigm***

The ontological assumption of positivism is that reality is objective and

external, and that phenomena can be explained by objective actions and means (Weber, 2004). The positivistic researcher is essentially the witness of an objective reality. Epistemologically speaking, he or she is simply uncovering the absolute truth about this reality. Crotty (1998) explains the positivist epistemological approach thus:

*“A tree in the forest is a tree, regardless of whether anyone is aware of its existence or not. As an object of that kind, it carries the intrinsic meaning of treeness. When human beings recognize it as a tree, they are simply discovering a meaning that has been lying in wait for them all along” (p.8).*

The positivist position is that the object exists independently, unmediated by the meaning-making or perceptions of individual social actors. The positivist researcher seeks to arrive at the truth through deductive reasoning, starting with what is known and moving to what is yet to be known through hypotheses and theory testing. These ontological and epistemological assumptions are most commonly associated with quantitative methodologies. The positivist paradigm can be employed in education research if the main aim is to acquire universal knowledge to explain individual or organisational behaviours – that is, to produce accurate and reliable results that are transferable – but positivists do not engage in the in-depth analysis of individual or group experience, nor do they gather data in natural settings, as this would only introduce additional concepts into the analysis (Bunniss and Kelly, 2010). A purely positivist approach tends to ignore such contextual and human factors, instead focusing on measuring participants or their actions in quantitative terms. However, this risks excluding the very interactions (between individuals and between individuals and organisations) that might lead to a better explanation of the phenomenon being investigated and increase the power of positivism to predict *“human events”* (Kim, 2003, p.12).

#### ***4.1.2. Interpretivist paradigm***

The interpretivist paradigm suggests that the researcher has to “*understand, explain and demystify social reality*” (Cohen et al., 2011, p.19). This has to be accomplished “*through the eyes of the participants, allowing them numerous viewpoints of reality and not only the one reality that the positivist researcher aims to achieve*” (Villiers and Fouche, 2015, p.128). The central tenet of interpretivism is that to acquire knowledge about a phenomenon, the researcher must gather the experiences of those involved and understand the meanings that they assign to the phenomenon. In other words, the ontological position of interpretivism is relativism; reality is seen as finite and subjective (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005) and incapable of being separated from the individual subjective experience (Lincoln and Guba 2005). To relativists, truth is negotiated rather than objective or universal (Guba and Lincoln, 2005), and everyone has their own reality. They see the purpose of science as being to understand these subjective experiences and multiple realities.

The epistemological orientation of interpretivism is therefore inherently subjective; as Crotty (1998) explains:

*“We need to remind ourselves here that it is human beings who have constructed it as a tree, given it the name, and attributed to it the associations we make with trees”* (p.43).

In other words, the tree becomes a tree only when someone calls it one. Individual consciousness is at the core of the explanation of the phenomenon, and the social world can only be studied through the lenses of the individuals embedded in that world (Cohen, 2007). Indeed, Willis (2007) goes so far as to call on researchers to “*eschew the idea that objective research on human behaviour is possible*” (p.111). The interpretivist paradigm thus posits that individuals are embedded in the world and that inquiry should focus on what these individuals know, what meaning they give to the surrounding reality and how they explain it. These ontological and epistemological assumptions

lend themselves to qualitative methodology (Nind and Todd, 2011; Creswell, 2014). Unlike positivists, interpretivists see people not as research objects but rather as research participants. They give preference to qualitative data as they see this as the best able to express the individual perspective, although they

*“...accept empirical data as an important part of science and recognize that empirical results can play an important role in generating social consensus about theories. However, it should be clear that relativistic researchers are much less impressed with empirical data and its role in science” (Peter and Olson, 1989, p.24).*

The interpretivist stance has received criticism mainly from positivist researchers who fear the “wicked troll” of relativism (Hacking, 1999, p.4). Critics point to the subjectivity of interpretivism, arguing that the emphasis on individuals’ meaning-making is unwise as these individuals may be fundamentally wrong or illogical in their beliefs. Thus, Marsh and Furlong (2010) claim that:

*“To positivists, the interpretivist tradition merely offers opinions of subjective judgements about the world. As such, there is no basis on which to judge the validity of their knowledge claims. One person’s view of the world, and of the relationship between social phenomena within it, is as good as another’s view” (p.27).*

In the eyes of critics, this raises questions about the extent to which the results of such research can be verified or generalised. The positivist and interpretivist paradigms thus seem to represent opposing research perspectives. Table 4.1 summarises the key characteristics of the two paradigms.

**Table 4.1: Competing paradigms and their basic assumptions**

	<i>Positivist paradigm</i>	<i>Interpretivist paradigm</i>
<i>Ontology</i> <i>(What is the nature of reality?)</i>	Reality is external and observable	Reality is subjectively constructed
<i>Epistemology</i> <i>(What is the nature of knowledge?)</i>	The researcher and what is being researched are independent from each other; the research can accurately describe the world	Reality does not exist independently of our knowledge; multiple interpretations of reality
<i>Methodology</i> <i>(How is research approached?)</i>	Deductive process, quantitative in nature	Inductive process, qualitative in nature

Adapted from Villiers and Fouche (2015), Bunniss and Kelly (2010)

#### ***4.1.3. Situating the current research in the interpretivist paradigm***

The interpretivist paradigm posits that individuals should be thought of as conscious beings, and that consideration of their perceptions, actions and interactions is likely to give a more holistic understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. In the context of this study, these assumptions lend themselves to the investigation of: the subjective meanings that academics attach to institutional forces; academics' perceptions and experiences as they mediate these institutional forces in their daily activities; and their intentional actions in relation to these institutional forces.

I have conducted the study based on the belief that any change that happens in HEIs (e.g. evaluations, changes in research policy) is an evolving process and that this process is subject to the interpretations of those involved. At the micro level, change depends on the meanings individuals assign to it. For instance, if a university introduces a new research evaluation system in an



attempt to become more accountable and improve its position in the higher education market, some academics may see it as a great opportunity to show their achievements, but others will regard it as at best a waste of time and at worst a cause for worry. How they act will be influenced by their individual interpretation of the new system, and by their personal interests and objectives, rather than by official expectations. Embracing the interpretive approach allows the study to apply the micro-level lens to understand what changing forces mean to academics and their daily practice. It also allows multiple meanings to be ascribed to a single phenomenon, leaving the researcher responsible for uniting these multiple perspectives into a coherent interpretation.

However, since “*practices may make full sense only when seen as part of a larger whole*” (Winch, 2006, p.43), it was essential to locate academics’ perspectives within the broader picture. It was therefore necessary to triangulate the interview data with evidence from official documentary sources expressing the university’s norms, rules and directions (e.g. the strategic plan, and its self-assessment and external evaluation guidelines). Creswell (2009) describes the benefits of this kind of pragmatic approach:

*“Instead of focusing on methods, researchers emphasize the research problem.... It is not based in a duality between reality independent of the mind or within the mind....Pragmatism opens the door to multiple methods, different worldviews, and different assumptions, as well as different forms of data collection and analysis”* (Creswell, 2014, p.10).

The pragmatic researcher acknowledges that the world exists both outside the individual mind and “*lodged in the mind*” (Creswell, 2009, p.11) and uses subjective meaning to arrive at a larger, objective reality.

## 4.2. Research design

As indicated in section 4.1.2, the interpretivist paradigm is generally associated with qualitative methodologies. Supporters of the qualitative approach argue that the most important job of social science research is not to make empirical generalisations, but to interpret the significant features of the social world and thus improve our understanding of the existing social order and why we live the way we live. Thomas (2006) explains that this calls for research that is highly inductive and loosely designed:

*“The primary purpose of the inductive approach is to allow research findings to emerge from the frequent, dominant or significant themes inherent in raw data, without the restraints imposed by structured methodologies” (p.238).*

Mason (2002) suggests that the interpretive approach enables the researcher to capture the reflections of the participants (in this case, their perceptions of and the meanings they attach to change):

*“What is distinctive about interpretive approaches...is that they see people, and their interpretations, perceptions, meanings and understandings, as the primary data sources. Interpretivism does not have to rely on ‘total immersion in a setting’ therefore, and can happily support a study which uses interview methods for example, where the aim is to explore people’s individual and collective understandings, reasoning processes, social norms, and so on” (p.56).*

In this case, it was possible to collect data from multiple informants in order to generate improved understanding of the change process.

Since meaning is best captured by locating it within the context or field (to

use Bourdieu's term) in which it happens – in this case the faculty – it was decided to adopt the case study methodology. This is the prevailing methodology in higher education research (Lane, 2011; Mok, 2005). The case study may focus on people or events, depending on the parameters of the research, and is invaluable for studying a bounded system (Creswell, 2014). It allows the researcher to establish an *“intimate connect with daily institutional life”* (Chaffee and Tierney, 1988, cited in Brown, 2008, p.2) by employing multiple research methods to gather multifaceted interpretations of institutional forces. The case study allows flexibility of focus, enabling the researcher to engage first with the phenomenon in broad terms (in this case, meso-level engagement with change) before homing in on the perceptions of individual actors. As a result, it is able to serve both researcher and reader by providing a *“thick description...for communicating a holistic picture”* (Creswell, 2014, p.200) of a real life situation studied from close proximity.

An additional reason for choosing the case study method is the scope it offers for an iterative research process. A sound theoretical framework is key if the case study is to do more than just serve an illustrative purpose (Thomas and Myers, 2015). Yin advises researchers to start with a theory of *“what is to be explored”* (2009, p.37) and to orient the research accordingly, while Maxwell (2008) suggests a freer approach, using the conceptual framework as:

*“a formulation of what you think is going on with the phenomena you are studying – tentative theory of what is happening and why.... It is a simplification of the world, but a simplification aimed at clarifying and explaining some aspect of how it works”* (pp.222-223).

The case study in this research was guided by a theoretical framework combining neo-institutional theory and Bourdieu's framework. In a theory-guided case study, the existent theory must be continuously compared to the emerging data (Eisenhardt, 1989); the researcher needs to insert the analysis into the subject and tie them together, updating the theory in light of the

empirical data if necessary. Glaser and Strauss (1967) suggest that giving enough time to this process during data gathering and analysis increases the likelihood of unexpected patterns emerging. However, in this study, this process was deferred until insights started to emerge from the participants; only near the end of the data collection did patterns become clear.

Of special interest is the case study's ability to address the particularity and complexity of the phenomenon under investigation. Academics' lived experience of change is delicately balanced and contextualised – the case study approach allows these dynamics to be captured in the multifaceted, usually contextually established, actions and perceptions of individuals. Organisational change at the micro level depends on “*actual 'doing-ness' and happening*” (Miles, 2015, p.312), which is best explored in the real life setting where it occurs. Taylor (2013) describes the case study's ability to capture this

*“...bundle of trajectories...[where] each element of the bundle of trajectories has come from somewhere and will, to a greater or lesser degree, contribute to and undergo change during their coexistence in a particular location” (p.810).*

He compares the case study to a classroom in which pupils and material (non-living) elements interact in a temporally situated context to produce change. Massey (2005, p.12), meanwhile, advises linking trajectories (which she interprets as active social relationships) to “*story*” or contextual factors to understand phenomena. Defining the boundary of the case study is thus a key step in the methodology (Yin, 2009), as is producing a contextual description situating the case in its real life setting.

The case study is also useful in allowing the unit of analysis to be positioned within the wider theoretical landscape (Thomas, 2011). Thomas distinguishes between the case study (the subject of inquiry) and the analytical frame “*within which the study is conducted and which the case illuminates and*

*explicates*” (2011, p.513) (the object). In Thomas’ view, the subject cannot be selected purely for its typicality:

*“Even if we know that a case is typical following some empirical work ...a typical Chicago street, say, in terms of the ethnicity and age distribution of its inhabitants—we cannot draw anything meaningful from this typicality in a case study, for the typicality will begin and end with the dimensions by which typicality is framed. We cannot say from having studied this street that its circumstances will have in any way contributed by their typicality to the particular situation in which it finds itself (whatever that situation, that ‘object’, is ...since the next typical street would...be very different”* (Thomas, 2011, p.514).

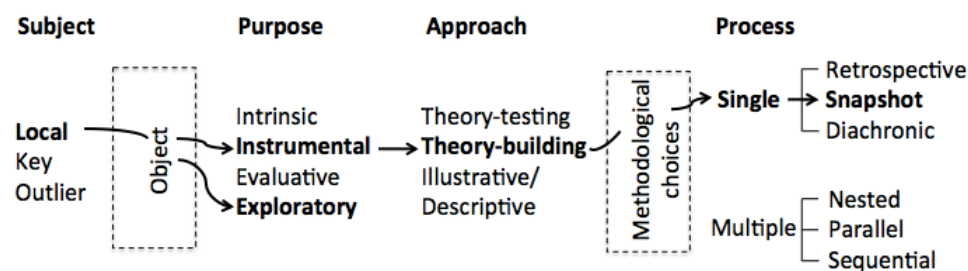
Rather than focusing on the representativeness of the subject, he suggests the case study should be selected for its particular circumstances (e.g. difficulties and pressures). Similarly, he draws attention to the importance of defining the object, suggesting that it should be chosen because it provides explanations, or in Bourdieu’s words *“thinking tools”* to explain the phenomenon (Thomas, 2011). Put simply, the subject is surrounded by context and a theoretical frame (object). Thomas’ argument suggests that the case study benefits if viewed holistically (in terms of both subject and object), not least because this helps to address the question of generalisability. A holistic view is able to take into account findings from outside the studied case in order to *“explicate a wider theme [and] help in our understanding of some theoretical issue”* (Thomas and Myers, 2015, Ch.8, p.n/a).

Finally, the case study allows paradigmatic freedom; the researcher is able to adopt a range of inquiry positions to construct a holistic picture of the phenomenon (Luck et al., 2005). The case study exists independently of the researcher’s intervention and will continue existing after the research is over,

yet at the same time, it is being constructed with the intervention of the researcher. The boundary of the inquiry is clearly delineated, while the paradigmatic flexibility means reality can be explained from a range of standpoints (Miller and Fox, 2004). Thus, in my study, academics’ perceptions and practices could be examined through the interpretivist lens, while the pragmatist paradigm allowed their experiences to be situated in the wider context, facilitating a holistic understanding of the change process.

Although the case study is considered a “*paradigmatic bridge*” (Luck et al., 2006, p.104), it has received the same criticism as the interpretivist paradigm as a whole: that is, that the results lack generalisability, especially if the choice is to study only a single case. Gomm et al. (2000) argue that it must be possible to transfer findings “*from one setting to another*” (p.5). The limitations of the single case study, including the generalisability and transferability of its findings, are discussed in section 4.9.

Figure 4.1 offers a “*flattened-out*” view (Thomas, 2011, p.518) of the research design process as it concerns the case study method, highlighting the path taken in this study.



**Figure 4.1: Case study taxonomy**

Adapted from Thomas and Myers (2015)

In terms of the choice of *subject*, the aim of the study was neither to address an untypical (outlier) case nor to illuminate an exemplary case of academics mediating change, but to focus on a case with which I had a close connection. From a purely pragmatic standpoint, these close connections allowed for

easier access to information. From a methodological standpoint, choosing a case where I had close connections and was a part of the social reality being constructed by the subjects allowed me to better understand this information. Accordingly, the decision was made to conduct a local case study.

Stake (1995) defines the *purpose* of an instrumental case study as being to understand specific matters and/or study a certain pattern of behaviours (as opposed to an intrinsic case study, which seeks to understand the case itself). Since the aim here was to provide insight into the specific matter of how academics navigate their institutional context, this was the approach adopted in this study. The case study was also explanatory in the sense that this knowledge was then used to explain the complexity of institutional change. Although this object theoretically guided the research *approach*, the aim was not to test any theory, but rather to build explanations and extend theory from the emergent results. Finally, in terms of *process*, it was decided to conduct a single case study that would offer a snapshot of academics' perceptions and practices. The research process had to take into account the time needed for data collection and analysis, the resources available and submission date. The research design had to allow the collection of sufficient qualitative data to produce meaningful findings in the context of the research aims.

### **4.3. Case selection and unit of analysis**

Where there are several potential cases available, the researcher must choose whether to conduct a single or multiple case studies. The choice is made more complicated by the fact that the more cases are selected, the less depth is possible in each individual analysis. Furthermore, there is no common agreement on how many cases should be included in a multiple case analysis.

In this research, a single case was regarded as offering sufficient data to give some insight into how institutional context in the HEI are navigated at the micro-organisational level. Full absorption into a single site allows the researcher to gather data representing a range of perspectives (i.e. academics,

management, documents) within that specific context. It is especially suitable where the researcher “*wishes to understand the particular in depth, not to find out what is generally true of many*” (Merriam, 2009, p.224). Investigation of several universities would undoubtedly have allowed triangulation of the findings, but given the numerous categories and linkages to be considered, it was felt to be more important to focus in-depth on a single case.

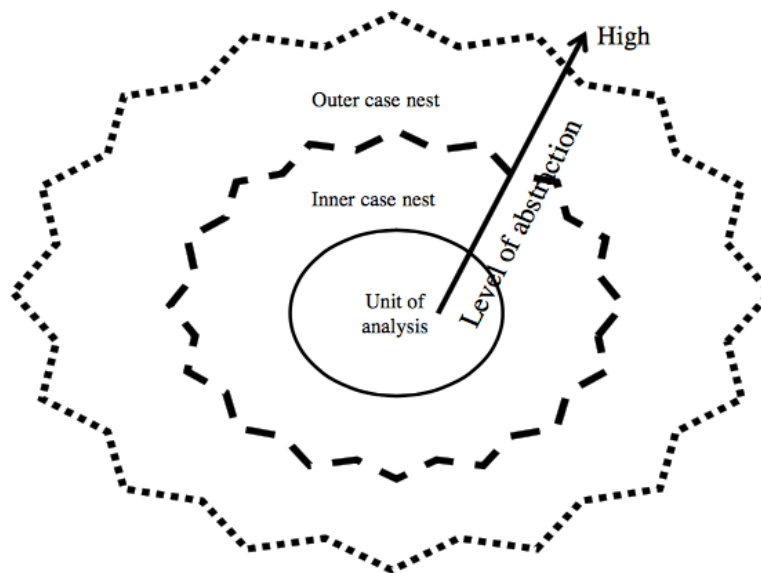
How cases should be selected is a matter of debate among scholars (Keman, 2011; Flyvbjerg, 2006). The question of what constitutes a case is therefore crucial. Stake (2005) suggests that:

*“Not everything is a case. A child [patient] may be a case, easy to specify. A doctor may be a case. But his or her doctoring probably lacks the specificity, the boundedness, to be called a case”* (p.444).

This boundedness is important if the resulting analysis is not to be too broad and lacking in focus; the researcher must choose the bounded system they will study and accept that there might be numerous potentially valuable cases available. In this study, the bounded system under investigation is universities in transition countries, one of which has been chosen as a case. The choice of case study university and some details of the chosen HEI are discussed in the following sub-sections.

There is some ambiguity surrounding the concept of unit of analysis; Grünbaum (2007) points to the difficulty of distinguishing between the unit of analysis and the case itself, while Patton (2002) suggests that unit of analysis and case study are the same thing. Grünbaum (2007) conceptualises the unit of analysis as being on a lower level of abstraction than the case layers (see Figure 4.2).





**Figure 4.2: Conceptualisation of the relationship between unit of analysis and case (Grünbaum, 2007, p.89)**

Grünbaum (2007) suggests considering informants as the unit of analysis as they have the knowledge to “*shed light on the problem at hand*” (p.88). Accordingly, each academic who participated in my research has been identified as the unit of analysis in this study.

#### ***4.3.1. Country selection***

Lithuania was chosen primarily because it is where I work and I am familiar with the higher education context in the country. However, an additional consideration was the fact that Lithuania’s higher education institutions lag behind those in countries such as the UK. Since its accession to the European Union, the Lithuanian higher education system has been influenced by a whole series of international agreements (e.g. Sorbonne, 1998; the Bologna Declaration, 1999; Prague, 2001; Berlin, 2003; Bergen, 2005; London, 2007; New Louvain, 2009; Bucharest, 2012) that are designed to give clear guidance on how higher education systems should function. Collectively, they represent a challenge to Lithuanian higher education institutions to change their profile.

However, the new ideas spreading into Lithuania from Western Europe are

not the only things driving change in the country's higher education system. Up until 1991, Lithuania's HE sector followed the Soviet model (see section 1.1.1), with a Moscow-designed curriculum and highly centralised governance. In the 25 years since the collapse of the communist regimes in Lithuania and other Central and Eastern European countries, a new model of governance has emerged. This has been influenced by both the previous totalitarian experience and contemporary global trends. This "new public management" model has had both positive and negative consequences for Lithuania's HEIs, but, crucially, these results have often been different from those seen in the economically developed West. HEIs around the world are finding it difficult to maintain good governance in a landscape characterised by growing external pressures and limited internal resources, but the specific challenges faced by HEIs in post-communist countries like Lithuania make them especially interesting to the researcher.

#### ***4.3.2. University selection and gaining access***

There were four key considerations when selecting the case study institution:

- The university overall or the selected faculty had to be undergoing strategic change.
- The institution had to be accessible. Having familiarity with the institution and existing connections with its staff would increase the probability of the research being successful.
- The university had to be willing to give me access to informants.
- It had to be within convenient travelling distance from home and work.

The case study university, which is one of Lithuania's largest public HEIs, not only fulfilled the above criteria but also had the most interesting institutional structure and a broad scope of teaching subjects. More detailed information about the university can be found in the following section.

#### **4.4. The case study university**

The case study university offers undergraduate, graduate and postgraduate courses in the humanities, social sciences, physical sciences and technologies. Courses are either degree or non-degree. In 2016, the university had more than 8,000 enrolled students, at least 200 of whom were international students.

The university is governed by the senate, the council and the rector's office. As per the university statute, the council ensures the autonomy of the university and, together with the senate and the rector, bears responsibility for the quality of the university's activities. The council monitors the university's activities and governance and is responsible for electing the rector. The rector represents the top management of the institution and is recognised in the statute as the head of the university. Finally, the senate ensures that the activities of both the council and the rector meet the regulations outlined in the statute. It also monitors and submits proposals made by the university community to the rector.

##### ***4.4.1. The university's strategy***

At the time of the fieldwork, the university was following a two-year strategic plan constructed around five themes:

- Fostering research innovation: the university's goal was to conduct internationally recognised research while developing its educational environment;
- Raising standards to provide high-quality courses that reflect global trends and target the needs both of students and of national and international labour markets (this strategic theme was closely linked to the marketisation of higher education discussed in Chapter 2);
- Pursuing active partnerships to build its reputation as the pre-eminent university in the country;
- Building a strong and confident university community;

- Working towards more effective management by optimising the organisational structure and the work of the central administration and building staff management skills.

#### ***4.4.2. The faculty***

As explained in section 1.5, the decision was made to limit the research site to one faculty within the case study university. The faculty is geographically self-contained. The governance of the faculty is constructed along traditional lines with the dean's office (middle management level in the overall institutional hierarchy) at the top and vice-deans for academic affairs, research affairs, infrastructure and international relations. Each of the faculty's departments is managed by a head of department and an administrator.

Officially, academics who sign a five-year contract with the institution are expected to devote around 60% of their working time to teaching activities (the official handbook for academics suggests the following proportions as suitable for the institution's needs: 60% teaching, 30% research work and 10% administrative work). Evidently, the university and therefore the faculty prioritise teaching and direct contact with students. The Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) (2015), which aims to give stakeholders (e.g. policy makers, the academic community) the most objective picture possible of the competitiveness of Lithuanian research in comparison with global practice (MOSTA, 2015), describes the faculty as well equipped and providing a high quality research and educational environment. It currently runs Bachelor degree programmes and Master's degree programmes in the social sciences, humanities and natural sciences. This lack of academic specialisation (clear evidence that the faculty is being run more like a university than a faculty) is regarded by the faculty itself as a strength as it allows students to draw on a range of academic resources and to enjoy a broader, interdisciplinary educational experience. Internationalisation is mainly addressed in the three Bachelor and one Master's degree programmes that focus on foreign

languages. Beyond this, the faculty receives a low but steady stream of international students via the Erasmus programme, but seems unable to attract them from other quarters. Those international students that do come to the faculty have access to around 60 courses that are taught in English.

#### **4.5. Sample and gaining permission**

##### ***4.5.1. Sample***

The literature review suggested that potential interviewees should include both those representing the institutional view and those at the bottom of the institutional hierarchy. One member of the university's senior management team was contacted and invited to participate in the research, along with one representative from the faculty's management team. Drawing on my own knowledge of the staff, I was able to identify four senior academics as potential interviewees. Five more were selected in consultation with faculty managers, who were especially helpful in identifying academics with divergent views. The academics were selected purposefully in order to ensure a broad spectrum of respondents. Taken into consideration were their status in the faculty (i.e. professor, lecturer, assistant professor, junior lecturer), their length of time with the department and whether they had worked under the Soviet regime (i.e. whether they were born before or after 1982).

Each of the prospective participants was sent an email introducing the research and asking them whether they would be willing to participate in the study and share their insights about the institutional context and their daily work practices. The response was very positive with only two declining on grounds of not having the time to give. The list of interviewees is included in Appendix C.

#### ***4.5.2. Gaining permission***

Gaining permission to access the university was made easier by my eight years' experience of working in the HE sector as a scientific projects coordinator and educational consultant to various universities and governmental bodies. This professional experience has enabled me to develop a wide network of contacts among university rectors, deans and department heads, higher education policymakers and politicians across Lithuania.

In this case, initial contact was made with the rector of the university to gain permission for the study. An email outlining the research aims was sent directly to the rector and received very positive feedback and confirmation that I could proceed. A similar request was then sent to the faculty managers. When their agreement had been secured, academics were then contacted by email and asked to participate in the research.

Given the sensitivity of the topic, it was crucial to gain the trust of the research participants. The fact that I had already worked with the institution in my capacity as an HE consultant made it easier to engage with the participants, but it also meant that I had a closer personal relationship with them than an outsider researcher would have done. The risk associated with this is discussed in more detail in section 4.8.

#### **4.6. Research methods**

The decision to employ the case study methodology suggests the use of qualitative research methods. Stake (2005) suggests:

*“We take a particular case and come to know it well, not primarily as to how it is different from others but what it is, what it does. There is emphasis on uniqueness, and that implies knowledge of others that the case is different from, but the first emphasis is on understanding the case itself” (p.8).*

Such in-depth analysis may necessitate the use of a range of instruments. In this case, interviews were combined with a review of documentary sources to get a holistic picture of how micro-level actors in the case study university navigate their institutional context.

#### ***4.6.1. Interviews***

The type of interview employed in a study depends on the degree of expansiveness and freedom of expression required in the responses. Semi-structured interviews allowed me to develop a list of questions and ensure respondents stayed focused on the topic, while still giving them the freedom to explore in-depth any points that they felt required further expansion. For these reasons, this was the format chosen for my study, rather than structured or unstructured interviews.

These interviews were the primary method for gathering information about how micro-level university actors interpret and respond to their institutional context. As Yin (2009) notes, exploring cross-level effects may yield additional information about how the system operates as a whole and help further explain the choices and actions of individuals at one particular hierarchical level. Accordingly, a multi-level approach was adopted, with a total of eleven interviews being conducted at three levels of the hierarchy – top management, middle management and nine ground floor academics (see section 4.5.1). The interviews took place between September 2015 and May 2016, with each lasting between 60 and 180 minutes.

The first interview was with a representative from the university's senior management team, who gave an initial picture of the management perspective and a baseline of the institutional context as it is understood by those with policy-enacting power. The interview with the middle manager, which I conducted soon after, gave additional insight into the institutional context, but was also important in identifying other potential interviewees.

A pre-composed interview questionnaire (please see Appendix B) formed the

guiding frame for all of the interviews (ensuring that the interviewees stayed on topic and that the gathered data was relevant to the research aims), though the questions were revised over the interview period as some became redundant. Stake (1995) points out that as more data is collected, “*issues grow, emerge and die*” (p.21), and it was apparent after the first three interviews which were the most relevant and productive questions.

Interviews were arranged well in advance by email and confirmed a few days before the meeting. Some of the interviews took place in the institution in the private office of the respondent, but other interviewees preferred to be interviewed outside the university where they thought there would be less chance of interruptions or being overheard. Half of the academic respondents had no professional or personal connection with me, but I attempted to put all interviewees at ease by assuring them of the anonymity of the study (not even the institution would be identified) and reminding them that they could withdraw from the study at any time. Field notes were taken during the interviews and afterwards to record my impressions of the conversation and setting. Six of the eleven interviewees agreed to be recorded, but the remaining academics were concerned about confidentiality and felt uncomfortable putting their views on tape (Yin, 2009). Extensive written notes were therefore taken (typed) during these unrecorded interviews.

#### *4.6.1.1. Transcription and translation of the interviews*

The interview tapes were transcribed verbatim and they and the notes were coded for relevant concepts. The coding (like the interviews) was done in Lithuanian, in line with Strauss and Corbin’s (1998) advice to translate as little material as possible. The decision to translate only the key parts of the text allowed me to avoid “*second hand*” analysis (Temple et al., 2006, p.n/a) and preserve social reality in terms of those cultural, social and political nuances that might be lost in translation. A key problem of cross-language qualitative research is the potential language barrier between researcher and participants (Temple, 2002; Temple and Young, 2004), but this was not an



issue here as both they and I are native Lithuanian speakers.

There were two steps to the translation process. Following Temple et al.'s (2006) advice, the first step focused on semantic and content equivalence, with English terms being selected that most closely reproduced the sense of the Lithuanian original. This was then followed by forward-backward translation to check that the meaning had been accurately reproduced. As this process is tedious, it was applied only to randomly selected quotes (see Appendix H).

There was an issue with some words/phrases that do not have an exact equivalent in English. For example, one of the respondents, describing the faculty's previous "golden days", used the phrase "melžiama karvė". Translated literally, this means "the cow that is being milked". It was therefore necessary to employ a more loose transliteration (that is, "replac[ing] or complement[ing] the words of meaning" (Regmi, Naidoo and Pilkington, 2010, p.18)) to arrive at the phrase "cash cow". Appendix D contains sample extracts from interviews with one manager and one academic, giving the Lithuanian original and the English translation.

#### *4.6.1.2. Limitations of the interview method*

The main limitations of qualitative interviews are the danger that the researcher will misinterpret the respondent's answers, and respondent bias. The first of these I addressed by asking interviewees to elaborate on their answers and provide examples where possible (Huber and Power, 1985). Questions such as: "Could you elaborate on that with an example?" and "Could you explain what you mean by that?" encouraged interviewees to give detailed and comprehensive answers.

Interviewees can provide biased data for two reasons: a) if they feel that their responses might affect their career at the university; and b) if they are seeking social approval. The second of these may lead them to present their achievements and actions in a much more positive light than they deserve.

The socially dependent response (SDR), characterised by Holden and Passey (2010) as a proxy for faking, is best avoided by preserving interviewee anonymity:

*“...because in this [i.e. an anonymous] setting there is no chance of receiving social approval from biasing one's statements”* (Börger, 2013, p.156).

Even so, it was prudent to treat the interviewees' facts and stories with some degree of caution.

#### **4.6.2.Documentary sources**

Secondary evidence was collected from documentary sources to complement the primary data collected by other methods. Bowen (2009) suggests that in this way, the researcher can *“corroborate findings across data sets and thus reduce the impact of potential biases that can exist in a single study”* (p.28). The pragmatic paradigm assumes that documents present an objective, pre-given reality – in this case, a picture of the institutional context as it wants to be. However, the interpretivist paradigm posits that the individuals within this institution have their own subjective interpretations of this reality, which may or may not match the proposed objective reality described in the documents.

Three types of documentary evidence were collected in this study: the university's official strategic plan, one department's self-assessment of one of its study programmes, and an externally produced evaluation. The university's strategic plan structures the actions of all those operating within its boundaries, bringing change in all areas, from teaching and research to human resources. From my point of view, it was the reference point for comparing the university's official rules and guidance with academics' actual practice. Self-assessments produced at the micro level represented another opportunity to compare how academics portrayed their actions in a formal context with their actual practice, while the Research Assessment Exercise

(RAE) evaluation allowed academics' actions and performance to be viewed within the context of the university as a whole.

These documents, which are publically available online, were studied in their original language (Lithuanian) to avoid the risk of anything being compromised in translation. They were collected during the initial stages of data gathering, in August-September 2015, and analysed prior to the development of the interview questions. Generally, the data collected from the documents enriched the enquiry and corroborated the interview findings.

#### **4.7. Data analysis**

Patton (1990) explains that the researcher faced with massive amounts of qualitative data must:

*“...reduce the volume of information, identify significant patterns, and construct a framework for communicating the essence of what the data reveal”*  
(p.371).

Creswell (2014) calls for researchers to approach their data flexibly; accordingly, the data was first uploaded into a single database, without any pre-organised categories, to facilitate a holistic exploration and develop familiarity. The subsequent coding process was inductive, with codes emerging from the data rather than from the literature. This process began with open coding, which is the *“process through which concepts are identified and their properties and dimensions are discovered in data”* (Strauss and Corbin, 1998, p.101). Later, broad emerging concepts were divided into sub-categories – Goulding (1998, p.52) calls these *“distinct units of meaning which are labelled to generate concepts”*. Table 4.2 shows an example of how data from the interviews was coded and collated into themes. A detailed coding extract is included in Appendix G.

**Table 4.2. Example of coding process**

<b>Thematic field</b>	<b>First order code</b>	<b>Second order code</b>	<b>Aggregated conceptual themes</b>
Tensions in institutional context	<i>“Years ago, I could be relaxed because I knew we would have students whatever happened”</i>	Competing for students	Competition concerns
	<i>“Academics used to have everything set and thus lived in a non-competitive environment”</i>	Increasing standards for academics	
	<i>“No students, no academics”</i>	Market game	
	<i>“You have to please the student”</i>	Academics as service providers	
	<i>“The institution actively works against academics”</i>	Reduction of workload	Employment concerns

	<i>having full-time positions”</i>		
	<i>“If you are a professor then you are expensive”</i>	Cost-effective hiring	
	<i>“Decreasing number of students means we earn less”</i>	Work remuneration	
	<i>“People only seem to start caring when the five-year contract is about to end”</i>	Contract	

Second order coding was based on the topics that had emerged naturally (i.e. without any direction from the researcher) in the semi-structured interviews. These were: 1) perceptions of governance, strategic planning and participation in the decision-making process; 2) daily routines in teaching; 3) daily routines in research; and 4) daily routines in evaluation. The interviewees’ responses were grouped into sub-categories, which were then aggregated into conceptual themes. This kind of inductive approach was necessary to build a baseline understanding for this theoretically underdeveloped topic.

The next stage of data analysis involved combining the interview and document data to make sense and meaning from the aggregated themes. This required the careful scrutiny of the actors' *“symbolic language of practices*

*and positions within their social space*” (Muzzioli, 2013, p.169). Bourdieu calls for subjects to be studied in context because:

*“[...] the position occupied in social space, that is, in the structure of the distribution of the different species of capital, which are also weapons, governs the representations of this space and the stances adopted in the struggles to conserve or transform it”*  
(Bourdieu, 1994, p.28, cited in Wacquant, 2013, p.4).

Bourdieu’s concepts of *field* and *practice* were employed to illuminate how academics interact with their social space, reconstructing and transforming it.

#### **4.8. My role in the research**

In qualitative research, the researcher is also a data collection instrument (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005); they are a mediator between the researched object and their informants. Greenbank (2003) suggests that the researcher should identify at the outset any assumptions or experiences they have that might affect their interpretation of the data. Since my personal experience meant that I saw situations in a certain way (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005), it is crucial to clarify my role in this research in order to make my findings as credible as possible.

As discussed earlier, as a consultant in the HE sector, I have been able to work with most of Lithuania’s universities on their organisational restructuring and improving efficiency. This meant that within my research setting, I was unavoidably cast in two roles simultaneously. The fact that I had previously worked with the case study university in my capacity as a consultant meant that I was an insider, but in all other respects, I was an outsider as I have no other link with the institution. It was difficult to define my position as a researcher, because I did not fit neatly into the insider-researcher or outsider-researcher roles; instead, I experienced role duality (Breen, 2007).

Bonner and Tolhurst (2002) suggest that the insider-researcher has a better understanding of the topic being studied and an established familiarity that will help them judge the truth and produce a valuable research perspective. Others have pointed to the insider-researcher's familiarity with the formal and informal power structures, their access to files, and the fact that they are likely to share the same language and values as their informants (Coghlan, 2003). On the other hand, critics have argued, they may not be able to take an objective view of situations.

For the purpose of my research, I considered the insider role to be more important, as I was addressing quite sensitive topics which required me to be familiar with the politics of the institution and how it really works. However, this familiarity itself raised the problems of how to avoid starting the research with preconceived assumptions, and how to avoid bias in the data collection and analysis process (DeLyser, 2001). As an insider, the sensitivity of the data I was handling posed another problem; to protect the trustworthiness of the research, it was vital to protect the participants' anonymity and keep all privileged information confidential.

My research data was collected from within, but I was at no time an integral part of the university. I had no administrative power or authority over the informants that might have affected the collected data (Smyth and Holian, 2008).

#### **4.9. Trustworthiness and transferability**

The trustworthiness of quantitative research is usually judged in terms of its reliability and validity; however, Stenbacka (2001) argues that: *“if a qualitative study is discussed with reliability as a criterion, the consequence is rather that the study is no good”* (p.552). The researcher is left seeking to convince their audience that the study is *“worth paying attention to”* (Lincoln and Guba, 1985, cited in Elo et al., 2014, p.2). Qualitative researchers are therefore advised to redefine the *“positivistic terms of validity, reliability and*

*generalisability*” (Loh, 2013, p.4) “*to fit the realities of qualitative research*” (Corbin and Strauss, 1990, p.4). Numerous scholars have sought to show how this might be done, for example highlighting the importance of data triangulation, the choice of paradigm, member checks, dense descriptions, and reflexivity between researcher and data (i.e. any assumptions, bias and other issues that might influence the data analysis must be noted) (see Thomas, 2011; Stake, 2005; Cohen et al., 2011; Onwuegbuzie and Leech, 2007; Bowen, 2009; Carlson, 2010).

The trustworthiness of an interpretivist study lies in the researcher’s ability to reconstruct a reliable and valid reality. As previously discussed, the issue of reliability was addressed by triangulating the data collected from the interviews with that collected from the document review to ensure consistency. Although the member check technique was considered as a potential quality control mechanism, it was not implemented for fear that the respondents might retract their statements if the findings revealed their actions to be not in line with the organisation’s guidance and rules. Finally, the readers of my thesis are provided with a thorough description of the research methodology and the techniques employed for data gathering so that they can understand the context thoroughly. Bogdan and Biklen (2007) suggest that once these steps have been taken, it is up to the reader to decide whether the study has produced reliable knowledge and value.

It should be noted here that while my experience in the higher education field was invaluable when selecting a study site, it was necessary to be alert to any impact my own preconceptions might have on how I asked questions and analysed data (e.g. it might have led me to give greater weight to resistance-driven actions than to acceptance-driven actions). To minimise this risk, I kept a reflective research diary, in which I made notes after each of the interviews. This diary helped to bracket my personal perspective and preconceptions during the analysis and served as a basis for the initial coding. My post-interview reflection-guiding questions and an extract from the diary are included in Appendixes E and F.



The subjectivity of the data and specificity of context associated with the case study method also raise questions about the transferability of the findings (Lincoln and Guba, 2000). But while some consider the single case study something of a “*weak sibling*” (Yin, 2003, p.xiii) because of its potential lack of generalisability, others counter that the context-dependent knowledge it generates offers an example from which we can learn (Miles, 2015). These scholars argue that criticism of the lack of generalisability of case study research is misguided since the very concept of generalisability is “*problematic and unattainable*” in social science (Thomas, 2010, p.577). Furthermore, it undermines the purpose and value of the case study, which is to build on voices, actions and other elements in situ to enable understanding of practice (Flyvbjerg, 2006).

Stake’s (1978) concept of naturalistic generalisation posits that a case study based on thick description should provide a sufficiently rich experiential account to enable the reader to understand a new setting. If it is “*in harmony with the reader’s experience*”, it will be “*to that person a natural basis for generalization*” (p.5), implying that perceived generalisability is a product of experience or tacit knowledge. Following this argument, I frame my case study with subjective bias inherent in the study’s design, but also follow Lincoln and Guba’s (2000) perspective to provide the transferability of knowledge from one situation to another. The findings of this single case may be transferred to institutions in other transition economy countries, all of whom are experiencing very similar contextual challenges to Lithuania and the case study university.

#### **4.10. Ethical concerns**

Consideration had to be given to a range of ethical issues, specifically how the research might impact upon the reputation of the institution and the professional and personal welfare of the participants from whom I gathered data.

To avoid any confusion, participants were given explicit information about the nature and focus of the research in my initial email. In this initial contact I explained that I am a Doctor of Education student working on my final thesis at the University of East Anglia and that I am focusing on higher education institutions in Lithuania, particularly on how academics are responding to their institutional context. Prospective participants were informed that the research was qualitative in nature and that it would involve semi-structured interviews. They were also informed that they could see copies of the interview questions prior to our meeting if they preferred (no one took up this offer). They were assured that all data would be treated as confidential, that I would personally transcribe the recordings of the interviews, and that they could withdraw from the study at any time. Throughout, it was stressed that this was not an evaluation on behalf of the institution, or an evaluation of the institution, and that no information would be used to judge participants' work or performance in any way.

A key ethical question was whether to reveal to ground-level actors that the research was being supported by the top managers of the university (who was the first person to be interviewed). On the one hand, they might have needed confirmation that senior management agreed with the research before disclosing any revealing information, but on the other, they might have been less open and frank if they thought that the rector was interested in the outcomes. Although a guarantee of confidentiality is theoretically the solution to such reticence, the evidence suggests that in practice, it does little to reassure potential participants, with the result that they do not disclose all the information they might have otherwise. Accordingly, this information was not disclosed.

The identity of the institution and the participants has remained confidential. All identifiable information on files and notes was removed to protect the participants' anonymity. This included all references to names, gender, faculty, institution and other sensitive demographic and professional information that might be traced back to them. Interviews were coded, with a

different letter being assigned to each participant. I was the only person with access to these codes. The removal of demographic and professional information, while reassuring to interviewees, made it more difficult to get the full benefit from using Bourdieu's framework, as the more personal categories are entered, the better understanding of the phenomenon it is possible to get. In the end, only those personal categories that still preserved confidentiality were used.

A number of interviewees were worried about being recorded, so extensive notes were taken instead. This, together with the measures described above, was sufficient to reassure respondents, who were generally happy to be interviewed. All participants gave their consent in writing before their interview. Finally, an undertaking was given to embargo the thesis for a minimum of two years while the institution is undergoing change.

These measures were put in place to ensure that no one was put in a difficult position as a result of the research, and that there would be no damage to the reputation of the institution. This was especially important, given that there was a potential risk of academics being critical of their faculty or institution, or revealing sensitive information about their practices that did not comply with university expectations.

#### **4.11. Conclusion**

This chapter has discussed and justified in detail the choice of research paradigm and design for this study. An in-depth qualitative approach was employed, which called for the use of a range of instruments to produce the necessary data. Hence, interviews with faculty members were combined with a review of documentary sources to get a holistic picture of the phenomenon. The deployment of several research methods also allowed the triangulation of data, increasing the trustworthiness of the study. Although defined in advance, the research process evolved during the course of the study; thus, interview questions were adapted in light of previous interviews, and

additional documentary evidence was gathered as new information emerged.  
The collected data is presented and discussed in the following chapters.

**CHAPTER 5:**  
**FINDINGS**

## **5.0. Introduction**

This chapter presents the results of the investigation into how academics in the case study university perceive their institutional context and respond to it in their everyday practice. The chapter is divided into two parts: the first discusses what academics in this university perceive as the main tensions within their institutional context, paying special attention to how they locate themselves within the strategic governance process. The second part of the chapter focuses on how the academics respond to the institutional context in terms of their teaching and research practice and the evaluation structures.

### **5.1. Key tensions in the institutional context**

#### ***5.1.1. Competition concerns***

The interviewees identified the increasingly competitive nature of HE as one of the main tensions affecting their practice. As Academic A explained: *“The faculty situation has changed, and everyone has started to compete. It has become a market game, impacted by a fierce demographic situation.”*

The use of the term *“market”* reflects how increasing numbers of academics see their external institutional context. The interviewees saw student demography as one of the main drivers of this marketisation. From earlier times of high enrolment (*“In 2002 we had student groups larger than 100 students, it was a peak, many study courses, many additional courses, faculty was a cash cow”*, Academic C), they described how a steady decline in student numbers has changed the environment to one where students have become *“clients”* (introducing the language of business into academic

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<sup>5</sup> William Shakespeare, *Much Ado About Nothing* (Act 2, Sc. 1.) <http://www.folgerdigitaltexts.org/download/pdf/Ado.pdf> (accessed 19 May 2016)

discourse), higher education has become a market and universities have become competitors. Opinions were split, however, on whether this marketisation has been a positive force. Junior academics in the sample in particular argued that it has driven universities to innovate, tackle stagnation and seek new opportunities:

*“Academics used to have everything set and thus lived in a non-competitive environment. Finally, the time has come to change and invest some effort in it”*  
(Academic N).

Others, however, saw it as undermining the perceived value of academic education and academic work, with academics being reduced in the eyes of students from researchers and intellectuals to service providers. Both sides believed that market forces now determine the academic-student-university relationship; as Academic F put it: *“In this case, the market decides – no students, no academics”*. As they saw it, the financial health of the faculty directly depends on student numbers; put simply, fewer students means less funding both for overall spending and for remunerating academics. This was a source of stress to the interviewees, with a number expressing concern at the impact reduced timetables have had on their salary, and some describing how they have been forced to take on positions in multiple universities to be able to make a living.

The significance of students as a source of funding was most apparent when academics directly linked their enrolment numbers to the faculty’s capability to function: *“We know that we need enrolled students in order to survive”* (Academic F). This high reliance on students for funding also leads to pressure from the administration to make sure numbers are maintained; for example, academics explained that they are under pressure to relax marking standards if necessary to prevent students from dropping out. This reduction of students to little more than a source of funding may be linked to the perception that the quality of students is declining, as the university is forced to accept entrants who may not necessarily be equipped to handle the pressure

of university education. The result is that these ground-level academics end up having to choose whether or not they will conform to the expectations of the institutional context and compromise their own standards to ensure students do not drop out.

Others explained that these financial pressures have led to more intense internal competition as academics have been forced to compete against department colleagues for more teaching hours, making it harder for them to focus on providing high quality teaching for the students they already have. Arguably, lecturers who are no longer tied to a single university are more likely to experience a reduced sense of organisational identity and find it easier to detach from its long-term strategy, but in this kind of environment, even those working in only one institution are likely to become increasingly indifferent towards the future of their students as the university becomes just another workplace. The interviewees also highlighted competitive pressures at faculty level, with faculties being forced to compete for approval for their study programmes (some interviewees went so far as to accuse other faculties of stealing their study programme proposals).

### ***5.1.2. Employment conditions***

Teaching hours were a major source of internal tension for the interviewed academics. Contracts with the university are usually for five years, but it has now become standard practice for the university to reduce academics' working hours when renewing contracts as a way of saving money. Academic B explained:

*“Most people work 0.25 FTE or 0.5 FTE, and there are not many who work full-time. When you work part-time, what do you want to give to the institution? Nothing. You give the lecture and go home. That’s why academics work in other institutions, maybe*



*privately. It has been several years since academics have been taken on to work full-time here.”*

According to Academic B, this results in academics working in more than one institution, which impacts their teaching and their desire to strive for quality. His perception was that the institution actively works against academics having full-time positions or being able to fully concentrate on their activities in the faculty. However, others were more inclined to see some positives in the reduction of workload; Academic C, for example, saw it as an opportunity to engage in other work outside the university. Some academics went further, arguing that it is impossible to engage in international projects in a meaningful and satisfying way while working full-time in a university.

This question of whether academics should “*diversify*” beyond the confines of the university was another point of disagreement, with interviewees such as Academic C warning that to be too insular is to risk stagnating or being left behind in the national and international research environment. Acknowledging the marketisation of the higher education sector, Academic C noted that while some academics have managed to adapt to the new reality of how teaching has to be funded and conducted, others are stuck in their ways:

*“There are those that live just by carrying out their research and the problem is that they are far removed from real life. They are like the businessman who thinks he has a good idea, but when he comes to the bank for a loan he talks ‘hot air’.”*

The hiring of new lecturers was another source of tension among interviewees. Academic A described how new staff are increasingly being taken on for a trial period (“*If a new person comes, we try him for one semester*”) but rarely kept on beyond this period. The reasons for this are partly financial; Academic B explained that it is much more cost effective to

hire these “*trial lecturers*” because they cost less than professors and, once a course syllabus has been established and the materials prepared by experienced staff, they can teach it just as easily:

*“Nowadays, everyone can be a lecturer. If you are a professor then you are expensive, thus it is better to take a person from the street and let him lecture.”*

Such attitudes are fostering distrust in the relationships not only between academics and the dean’s office but also between academics. Ground level staff are being pushed by middle managers for detailed course syllabuses and teaching materials, but not only is the work that goes into preparing these unremunerated, those doing it know that it is helping facilitate the rise of trial lecturers. Indeed, the question of who owns the fruits of all this preparation is contentious; as Academic C observed, academics consider the documents they create for students their intellectual property: *“Another important aspect is that academics keep all the teaching material as private property and do not want to share.”*

The “*old guard*” have very little incentive to share the work they have done with new lecturers who might be replacing them, and no reason to foster relationships with what are likely to be – one way or another – short-term colleagues. The result is a divide in the internal environment between senior academics and new lecturers. These senior academics know that when their five-year contract with the faculty ends, the quality of their work might be irrelevant to the decision of whether it is extended. Hence, the closer they come to the end of this contract, the less secure they feel and consequently, the less willing they are to express dissent.

### ***5.1.3. Concerns about governance***

The leadership of the case study institution has initiated a strategic planning process designed to make the university more competitive and turn it into a research leader. At the centre of this is the strategic planning committee,

which is led by the rector. External consultants have been hired to help the university clarify its strategic direction, and there have been consultations with faculty deans and an online platform has been set up for academics to offer their suggestions. There have also been occasional meetings within faculties to discuss the improvement of governance and performance, and visits to other institutions to observe examples of best practice. The resultant plan highlights five key strategic paths the university must follow if it is to compete in the HE market: produce more innovative research, pursue international recognition, cultivate and maintain partnerships, foster a more open and responsible community, and ensure it has effective management.

#### *5.1.3.1. Perceptions of the institution's directions and strategies*

Staff at all levels acknowledged the need for strategic change. This is fortunate, given that the support of all hierarchical levels is necessary if the strategy is to be implemented successfully. The top manager considered strategic change crucial for the institution if it is to compete in the current market:

*“One of the most important things is strategic management. [...] I emphasised the implementation of strategic management. And today we have a strategy.”*

There was also a general consensus among interviewees at the bottom of the hierarchy that strategic and administrative change is needed both for the university as a whole and at faculty level. Academic J asserted:

*“...university structure, especially in the central administration is quite old and also the management style is quite old, and communication also. Accordingly, the faculty also needs to make some changes to adapt to the market challenges.”*

Senior academics, on the other hand, were split between those who saw change as a positive development for the institution (Academic A) and those who feared it would threaten their position within the faculty (Academic B). Furthermore, even those who fully endorsed the idea of strategic change had some doubts about how the university administration would implement it in practice. For example, Academic A noted that the university's proclaimed intention to become a research university is viewed with scepticism by many academics, given that it is increasingly reliant on students, rather than research, for its income:

*"...the university wants to be a research university, wants to be similar to Tartu University, oriented to MA studies, but we live on the student tuition fee money, not from research."*

The administration is driving hard to achieve a place in the world's top 500 universities. The importance of these rankings was evident in the top manager's assertion that they are a measure of international success for which the university must strive: *"We have a vision, it is clearly formulated – in other words, it is to become one of the leading universities"*. However, the other interviewees were very dismissive of this goal, arguing that it has less to do with being recognised for achieving excellence than it does with the competition for students. They saw it as being driven not by internal processes and genuine academic ambition but by external pressures to measure up to other recognised universities and increase student numbers. Academic A reasoned: *"I can't say that we shouldn't aim to be like Tartu University... But why Tartu, if their quality is lower than ours is now?"* In fact, this interviewee expressed a low opinion of the academic quality of some international universities that are commonly held up as examples of good practice. He was quite unequivocal that his faculty displays higher academic standards than some of the examples the university desires to imitate:

*"I know people who work in the management department, and they have such low standards and*

*few resources, only a couple of old women. I meet them in the conferences and I know these people, and there is no point in comparing ourselves to Tartu University. As a faculty we are a head higher than them” (Academic A).*

Academics such as A thus find themselves at odds with the university over this strategic goal because they see the pursuit of international recognition as actually representing a lowering of the standards by which they work. Academic N also questioned the need to imitate international examples, asserting:

*“It is really hard to understand why our university doesn’t have its own brains but is constantly trying to catch up with the West that are irrelevant in some way and stopping the university from achieving its own potential.”*

That there has historically been a gap between the administration’s espoused direction and academics’ practice was made very clear in the inability of the interviewed academics to accurately describe the university’s mission and vision. Many joked that they did not know what these were, though they generally had a better understanding of the more recent strategic goals. The implication is not just that academics have not in the past consciously worked towards achieving the university’s mission or vision, but that they have been largely disconnected from the university, which has failed to communicate its goals in a meaningful way. All of the interviewees saw the ongoing strategic planning process as a much needed drive to reverse past stagnation and revitalise the institution. Academic M confirmed that: *“Becoming a strong research university really motivates me as it will set the foundation for my career to be in one of the best universities in the region”*. Similarly, Academic D confirmed that as universities become increasingly competitive, *“these changes will bring good things”*.

### 5.1.3.2. Academic involvement in decision-making and strategic planning

The view was strongly expressed by some interviewees that individual academics are not included in the decision-making process and have little power over it. Academic B, for example, argued that the decision-making process is restricted to the administration and does not reach the academic community:

*“They purposely didn’t ask for our opinion – at administration level maybe somebody asked, or at senate level, but it was all just hypothetical.”*

Academic C agreed, explaining that academics have not been involved in discussions about the strategic direction of the university, or even the faculty, but are left merely to implement the results in their daily work. Among others, the sense of being outside the decision-making process was equally evident, if less forcefully expressed. Academic F, for example, initially asserted that: *“They have always sought dialogue between the management and academics”*, but went on to say:

*“...if I had any ideas, I don’t think they would be heard. As I see it, ground-level academics can contribute formally, but there’s no point in raising issues to those higher up the hierarchy as nothing is going to change.”*

The discussion of how involved academics are in decision-making in the university yielded clear evidence that staff can interpret the same events in very different ways. One interviewee claimed that everyone in the faculty was given the opportunity to attend a strategy meeting with the rector:

*“Everyone who wanted to could participate in the meeting. Representatives from the administration were there. It was a double invitation: one from the head of the department and another directly to all*

*academics. You didn't have to register. You could just turn up. Everyone who wanted to come, came"* (Academic C).

In contrast, a second interviewee asserted that only selected academics were invited:

*"The dean I guess was responsible for the invitation of academics. It was a physical meeting. There were 30 people in the focus group, a rather limited group for a strategic session. The participants were those who, according to the dean, are more active and are more worried about the faculty"* (Academic F).

And yet another interviewee thought only twenty academics had been personally invited by the dean:

*"Only twenty people could participate from the faculty. The selection was made by the dean and his office. People like me certainly weren't invited"* (Academic B).

Similarly, while the representative from the senior management team asserted that middle managers are heavily involved in strategy formulation:

*"Strategy was formed firstly with the leaders of the faculties in a two-day strategic session which was moderated. This allowed various ideas to be offered, considered and selected, depending on whether they were in line with our vision."*

One middle manager interviewee complained that he had had only limited involvement in the strategic process and had been unable to contribute to any of the visions. Although the chain between top management and middle managers is not the focus of this study, this might suggest that decoupling

begins at the middle level. If mid-level staff are already decoupled from the top level, it is very likely that ground-level academics will be entirely decoupled from processes happening at the highest level of the administration.

The academics were divided between those who felt they are being involved in the decision-making process and those who felt excluded. It is worth noting that both groups were essentially passive and expected the university to actively solicit their participation. Several academics displayed little confidence in the measures being employed to gather input from academics in regard to strategic planning. Academic B was especially vocal on the subject:

*“If you want, you can look at what they want to do, but you do not have any influence over it. Here, everything is done very slowly, they decide, then decide again; another leader comes in and they decide again.”*

Similarly, Academic A recounted an incident where the suggestions he had made on the official university website mysteriously disappeared:

*“There was a new section in the intranet: ‘The university is changing – find out about it!’ for employees about what is happening, what deadlines, how you could make suggestions for changes. I wrote one suggestion, but it disappeared. I probably suggested something too difficult...but I made the effort in the hope that at least something would change.”*

In contrast, Academics C and D argued that those who want to have an input have all the tools they need to do this. According to Academic C, *“Those who wanted could be included. So if you had an idea, for sure you could submit*



it”, while Academic D recounted his involvement in numerous meetings with the university’s administration over the course of the strategy-planning process, noting that the university actively gathers academics’ input:

*“The aim was always to have a dialogue. There was lots of information; on the university website, clear information was provided on all the priority areas.”*

He saw the impetus for this as coming first from the highest levels of the university administration and then being passed on through the faculty administration:

*“First, there was a big invitation from the faculty administration to get acquainted with it and actively participate in the discussion and also provide some suggestions for improving the university.”*

In stark contrast, however, others expressed the understanding that their input is unwanted by either the rector’s or the dean’s office:

*“Everything is created by the faculty administration, as always. They’re not interested in public opinion. Academics are not taking part. When it comes to the faculty’s future, only the dean’s thoughts matter; the opinions of academics are not important” (Academic B).*

Even those who felt that they have had the opportunity to be actively involved in strategy formulation saw that it has come with conditions attached. Academic F noted that academics invited to provide their input are actually being expected to represent their faculty and department rather than simply to give their personal views:

*“Behind all this it is felt that the faculty has its position and it wants those who go to these meetings to represent that position.”*

This expectation could actually distance them further from the institution as they are being forced to subordinate their own views, which may be very different, to the official faculty line. Obligated to become the passive recipients of institutional decision-making, they are much more likely to reduce the extent to which they couple with the institutional context through their practice.

During the interviews, it emerged that the academics generally expected their input to have noticeable consequences, though some did acknowledge that they have a narrow view of the university and should not expect all of their suggestions (or indeed any) to be implemented purely because they have made them:

*“You see, all ideas are accepted, but not all are implemented. You see, I can submit my idea, but I see only a narrow view whereas the administration sees the wide view” (Academic C).*

They all saw that it takes time to see any changes; Academic D noted:

*“You can feel that our university is like a huge torque, and for it to move somewhere requires lots of time, also some structures are too big. But I do what I am supposed to and hope to see some changes.”*

Even so, this is another factor that could lead to decoupling as academics' expectations of change are frustrated by a reality in which strategic change is a long process and implementing it takes even longer. Thus, Academic A admitted that:

*“I just get involved in my own tasks and leave the rest for others to sort out. I know what I need to do and I know my goals. I can’t wait for ages.”*

There was a similar pessimism among some regarding the university’s reliance on external experts to help it shape strategy. Although these interviewees were ostensibly questioning the value of “*standard recommendations*” provided by retired consultants brought in from abroad, the underlying criticism was that the university would rather hire outsiders than rely on inside input. The senior manager, however, while noting academics’ concerns, argued that:

*“[Ideas] are filtered by the hired external specialist; we think that if it’s been vetted by outsiders, we are of the opinion that the strategy should be understandable to all community members.”*

He saw it as the job of the administration and external consultants to prepare the plan and then to hand it over to academics for implementation. Although external agents help to draft the strategic plan, in his words: “*There will be lots of changes, but academics will have to implement it themselves*”. This would seem to be in line with the university’s core principle that:

*“The University community shall exercise its self-governance and manage the affairs of the University through the bodies of governance of the University and its internal organisational structures formed by the University community.”<sup>6</sup>*

However, the interviews suggest that the degree of academic involvement implied here may not be happening. Although occupying a key role in the university, academics are playing only a limited role in shaping the organisation and in its decision-making. There is also a fundamental

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<sup>6</sup>Statute of the University

mismatch between the perceptions of academics, who see change as coming from the top down, and the top administration, which expects change to happen from the ground up. This incompatibility is reflected in the academics' views on the strategic change process. This process is creating a situation in which academics are expected to deliver work outputs in support of the university's strategic plan, without having any real say in shaping the direction of this plan.

#### 5.1.3.3. *Uncertainty*

One interviewee noted that some of the tensions academics feel regarding strategic planning are caused by lack of certainty about the changes in the university's governance:

*“Firstly, there are tensions because people need information. The dean tried to solve this by organising a couple of public meetings, but as he said himself, what can you share with the community when the rector doesn't confirm the meeting with him or repeatedly postpones it? That's why the tensions are mainly due not to the strategic changes, but to the fact that one side decides for the other side” (Academic F).*

This lack of certainty was a common theme, with Academic A noting that the only certainty with strategic change is that everything is uncertain:

*“In all cases there is uncertainty, plus, as there are considerably fewer students, academics have seen their teaching hours reduced. So this is the uncertainty for me.”*

Academic D claimed that he was waiting for the uncertainty to be clarified by the management, but *“in the meantime, I am just lecturing, helping with*

*projects and carrying out the work that I am supposed to do*". Some academics claimed that the uncertainty is affecting their faculty's ability to operate. Academic N, for example, explained that uncertainty about how strategic change will affect the future is destabilising the administration of his faculty. He asked: *"Without exact guidelines, how can we know which way the university is going so we can also go in the same direction?"* Although keen to see the faculty get involved in the change process, he was being frustrated by the slow pace of change. Another senior Academic J was even more concerned that how the university is being managed may put the very future of the faculty in doubt. He suggested that: *"They feel that we are a spin off faculty. If we don't have a dean and other managers, they will want to disappear us"*. These concerns are a growing source of tension as the university's top administration has done little to clarify the vision they have for the faculty.

This lack of certainty is creating a sense that academics at the university are simply trying to survive – indeed, the word was repeatedly used by academics, whether they were speaking about strategic planning or research and teaching. It suggests a stagnant environment in which faculties are simply trying to hang on and academics feel unsupported by the university. Academic B summed up the situation thus:

*"In the current institutional environment the only thing we feel is uncertainty. We don't know how it's going to be, what will be, how it will be, what strategy, where we're going, what we need to do. That's why we do what we think best."*

Academic F echoed this opinion, commenting that in an environment focused only on survival, academics lose motivation and become merely passive players in the university game: *"The lack of motivation is very destructive thing. I think that even in central administration and other faculties there is lots of confusion"*. It is interesting that while expressing very different

attitudes towards their institutional context, both Academics B and F identified uncertainty as a source of tension.

*5.1.3.4. Emerging perspectives on the institutional context and the strategic planning process*

The interviews highlighted the range of ways in which academics interpret the institutional context in the case university. Table 5.1 summarises these perceptions and shows how the findings were coded to arrive at aggregated themes.

**Table 5.1: Perceptions of the institutional context – coding of findings for RQ1**

<b>Thematic field</b>	<b>First order code</b>	<b>Second order code</b>	<b>Aggregated conceptual themes</b>
Perception of institutional context (tensions, governance and strategic planning)	needed change; just do my work; vision to become research university;	appropriate	Realisation (2/9 respondents, 22%): institutional context as a space to perform
	Personal objectives; start caring when the five-year contract is about to end; need to survive; fear of losing	specific objective	Instrumental (6/9 respondents, 67%): in order to solve pressing needs or challenges

job; administration planning;		
no infrastructure; academic is on his own; distrust of management; blocked from participating in decision- making; passive player; don't care about their [management's] vision	inappropriate	Coercive (1/9 respondents, 11%)

Academics in the **realisation category** (2 out of 9 respondents, or 22%) expressed a generally positive attitude towards the strategy and its implementation. On the whole, they are coupled with institutional context change and are active supporters of the strategic shift, even though they know that it might result in the closure of their faculty. They see change as a necessary process and praised the efforts of top management to gather input from faculties and academics. However, the university has not rewarded their support with any sort of clarification of its plans. Furthermore, doubts are beginning to creep in concerning the behaviour of middle managers. They see their power to influence change as having been transferred to the middle managers, who are there to represent the academic community, but academics

in this group are beginning to question how involved these middle managers actually are. This is leading to a growing sense of disempowerment.

Academics in the **instrumental category** have a particular need or challenge they want to see resolved by the institutional context. This was the biggest group of respondents (6 out of 9 respondents, or 67%). Academics in this category were focused on specific objectives, whether this was survival (i.e. keeping their job) or meeting personal objectives. Although all academics in this group acknowledged that change is needed in the institutional context, none were able to define the mission of the university. The group was split between those who feel the need to be involved in decision-making and those have no interest in governance or decision-making.

Those wanting to be involved were most influenced by the way in which the university has addressed academic involvement in decision-making and strategy preparation. On both accounts, they saw themselves as having a valuable contribution to make to the discussion, but felt that the university has either not engaged with them in a meaningful way, or that the tools provided for this engagement were superficial.

The second group displayed what might be described as a neutral or even apathetic attitude. Although they acknowledged the potential benefits of strategic change and dismissed some of the other academics' concerns as meaningless, they saw themselves as a passive element in the change process. In fact, they felt the management should be left to its own devices since it has a broader understanding of institutional issues. In their view, academics have had ample opportunity to be involved in the change process, but simply lack the motivation to engage with it (a position perfectly demonstrated by Academic C). Rather than regarding passiveness as the default position of academics still waiting to be courted by the university, they saw it as a deliberate choice to avoid direct involvement in the change process.

Least common was the **coercive category** (1 out of 9 respondents, or 11%). This academic was openly opposed to the new strategy, its potential



implementation and overall institutional context. He was less critical of the top management than academics from the **instrumental category** but much more critical of the middle management of the university, accusing it of not involving academics in the strategic process. In his view, the strategy is doomed to fail because academics have been blocked from having a meaningful input. This frustration arises from a strong sense of intellectual superiority on his part.

## **5.2. How academics in the case study university respond to the institutional context in their everyday teaching practice**

Having examined how academics in the case study university perceive their institutional context, the second part of the chapter discusses how they respond to this context in their everyday practice. It begins by focusing specifically on teaching as one of the key academic functions in the university.

### ***5.2.1. Teaching quality***

The strategic plan of the university stipulates that teaching should be high quality, reflect international developments in the HE sector and prepare students for both national and international markets. Although the strategic document delegates the task of monitoring teaching quality to the faculty administration, the interviewed academics said it was largely a matter of personal conscience and that organisational quality practices are almost entirely disconnected from teaching practice.

The concept of quality seemed more important to the junior academics than those with long (more than seven years) teaching experience. One senior Academic (R) argued the need for careful preparation because: *“If you are well prepared, it is likely that you will create and add value for the students”*. In contrast, senior Academic C acknowledged that: *“When I started I was more responsible, spent more time on preparation”*. This interviewee

explained that his choice of teaching methods is these days influenced not just by considerations of quality but by how convenient they are to use: *“I try to do not only what is new, but also what is convenient”*. As Academic J observed, the choice of tools is to some degree determined by the students’ abilities, which can sabotage even the most conscientious attempts at preparation: *“Some students just don’t cope, so you just lower the standard”*.

Declining student enrolment numbers have affected the internal institutional context and therefore academics and their practices. Academic A described the pressure from the institution to *“secure”* students so they don’t drop out:

*“Students are also changing. There are still those that want challenges, and you are happy that there are such students so you make the tasks a bit more difficult to demand more from them. But generally, you give easy tasks so they can manage it. Otherwise no students, no academics.”*

This pressure forces not just individual academics but whole departments into survival mode, with the result that academics tend to eschew challenging, even if potentially more satisfying, work. In such an environment, even senior academics feel the tension of uncertainty and will conform in an effort to maintain their place in the department.

Although Academic F noted an increase in the monitoring of academics’ teaching work (*“On the other hand, there is intensive monitoring of lectures”*), he explained that ultimately, this has little effect:

*“It’s an absolute mess, because you can do what you want. If you don’t want to do something, you are not forced even if it’s in the best interests of the department.”*

Similarly, Academic B explained that although the faculty has nominally introduced a requirement that staff submit (and adhere to) course outlines

each year, “...you teach what you want. Everything depends on the academic”. Indeed, the consensus among academics was that they are free to take lectures in whatever direction they desire – Academic A, for example, asserted that he teaches what he wants. Like all the interviewed academics, he valued this independence and freedom from management interference, but as Academic M pointed out, this can leave junior staff feeling unsupported: “Faculty management do nothing at all – when I began to work in this university, there were no guidelines for new staff at all”. This interviewee went on to explain that: “now, there are special introduction courses for new teaching staff in the faculty and across the university”, but it remains to be seen whether this improves matters, given that other attempts to raise teaching quality seem not to have been followed through. The 2015-2017 Strategic Plan is another example; it commits to improving course content and administration and offering more courses in English, but according to the interviewees, little or nothing has been done to enforce this. This suggests that either the interviewed academics are allowing themselves to ignore the institutional context, or the proposed changes have not reached staff on the ground. In either case, it raises the question of how, in the absence of close monitoring by management, academics are held accountable for their teaching performance. Interestingly, most of the interviewees did not know how to answer this question. Academic N felt that staff are simply judged in terms of their students’ results, while (junior) Academic M acknowledged that although “formally, I am accountable to the head of department and vice-dean of the faculty..., in practice, I do not have to make any reports to them”, suggesting very little accountability.

The top management of the university argues that there is a strong symbiosis between teaching and research, with each informing and supporting the other (“There are academics who only teach and do not do any research work. That’s why we don’t have results”, Senior Manager), but this was strongly disputed by Academic F:

*“For me the quality of the teaching is the symbiosis of theory and practice, so I think it’s a very important aspect. I think that teaching can easily be done without any research. And actually these things should be separated. The requirement that academics should also do research adversely influences the quality of teaching in Lithuania. People end up re-publishing previous articles, plagiarising others, basing their work on students’ work. There is no depth in this.”*

In this case, the university’s insistence that academics should combine research and teaching for the benefit of the institution has the opposite effect, simply driving Academic F to ignore the research mission altogether because he sees it as detrimental to his personal objective of pursuing teaching quality.

Academic D observed that some academics have chosen to adopt a very narrow specialisation to become experts in a particular field. However, this runs counter to the university’s avowed aim of moving towards internationalisation and multi-disciplinary education – in this environment, such narrow specialism is of less value. Academic D also saw this approach as undesirable in modern academia, arguing that individuals should dedicate their efforts to perfecting the quality of their teaching rather than pursuing a personal research interest. However, while broadly supporting the institution’s efforts to improve teaching quality, he was frustrated by continual demands for updated quality measures: *“Do you know how many programme outlines there are? A pile. And you have to redo everything on new forms”*.

### **5.2.2. Teaching internationalisation**

One of the university’s core strategic aims is to make its teaching more international in orientation. The interviews demonstrated that

internationalisation is more evident in the practices of academics who are active at the international level or who have worked in foreign universities and are more willing to teach in foreign languages. On the other hand, there was strong opposition to internationalisation from some of the older academics, who either refuse to adopt new teaching practices or cannot (or do not want to) overcome the language barrier. This was particularly evident in Academic C, who explained: *“I experience difficulties teaching in English”*.

Academic A saw international universities as a benchmark of quality (*“When I see in Finland how Erasmus students are being integrated, I try to improve my work too”*). This interviewee went into some detail about best practices in other international universities and how the case study institution lags behind these universities in terms of its attitude towards foreign students: *“...if you have Erasmus students, it means your own free time to work with them”*. Academic F expanded on this, explaining that academics are required to work with international students, but that they are not remunerated for the extra work involved: *“In the faculty there is lots of coercion; for example, we have to teach Erasmus courses in English without being paid any extra for it”*. He was highly critical of the administration for giving academics additional work but not the incentives to do it, arguing that it disempowers academics.

Academic N was more open to the benefits of teaching international students, citing the increased opportunities to study or teach abroad, though even he added the caveat:

*“I only teach if this creates some added value; otherwise, it’s just a waste of time, for which I don’t have time. The administration can go and teach themselves.”*

Academic C also noted the time pressure, observing that senior academics can ill afford the time it takes to build up international links:

*“I am simply too busy with my own business, so it is difficult to find time to devote to university business. In this sense, other academics are more equipped to help the university with its internationalisation.”*

Among those in favour of internationalisation, Academic D saw working with foreign universities as a way of making courses more enjoyable and valuable for students. In explicitly identifying it as one of his priorities, he showed himself to be closely aligned with the strategy and expectations of the university (*“The university consistently mentions that we need to increase our internationalisation, so that is one of the priorities for me”*). In contrast, Academic M demonstrated little understanding of the benefits of internationalisation, or indeed what it involves, beyond teaching courses in English. However, his observation that: *“If the university says we have to have more internationalisation, than we will have more”* suggests that he, like Academic D, is tightly coupled with the institutional context and its demands. It is reasonable to assume, therefore, that given clearer direction by the university (the Middle Manager indicated that the faculty currently has no internationalisation guidelines apart from the main strategic plan), he would be able to contribute to the production of internationalisation-related outputs.

Academic’s J exposure to western and Scandinavian teaching practices (*“I travel abroad to the UK, Scandinavia and other countries for various scientific conferences, research projects and academic staff mobility at least six times a year”*) means that he has a much clearer understanding of what these outputs are. He understands that in practical terms, internationalisation involves engaging with international universities, lecturers and students, sharing and adopting practices and producing lecture materials in other languages, and he was at pains to point out that he incorporates international good practice into his teaching repertoire. He is highly engaged, not least because he finds it personally and professionally rewarding: *“I am so active because I get my own personal and professional benefits from this”*. Academics A and F are also familiar with foreign institutions and, as senior

academics, are well placed to introduce international teaching practices into the university. Academic A gave just one example of the differences between the case university and US institutions:

*“If I compare myself to international lecturers with whom I am acquainted, they have more freedom in how they teach and present the material; Americans in particular can present things visually. It is a challenge to achieve maximum quality in terms of both visual and oral presentation.”*

However, such enthusiasm for new ideas is not without risk. The lack of management control sometimes leads to academics in the case university adopting examples of international good practice regardless of whether they are aligned with the institutional expectations. Academic J, for example, was proud of having set up an international project without any approval and input from the administration:

*“I chose the outline of my course, I decided how and what I would teach, I chose the universities with whom to cooperate and exchange students. I coordinated a large project which contributed significantly to the internationalising of the course. The faculty is the beneficiary of my work.”*

Academic A, meanwhile, shared that he personally leans towards opening up relationships with western and Scandinavian universities, despite the administration’s lack of support. (According to the Middle Manager, the university would rather focus on eastern partnerships.)

At the opposite extreme, Academic B chooses to ignore the move towards teaching internationalisation altogether, despite its central strategic importance to the university. Although acknowledging that: *“Internationalisation has to be delivered”*, he was otherwise dismissive,

seeing it as irrelevant to his work. However, his next comment – “*there is no financing for that*” – suggests that his attitude may indicate more than just a lack of interest in improving teaching quality. He may also be concerned about remuneration.

### **5.2.3. E-studies**

The institution is pushing strongly for academics to incorporate ICT into their daily practice, but with little effect. Indeed, there was some confusion about the current state of affairs, with Academic B asserting that the previous dean made the Moodle system (Open Source Learning Platform) obligatory, and Academic F claiming that: “*It’s not a compulsory requirement, but there might be a time when it will be enforced*”. In either case, the interviewed academics characterised themselves and their colleagues as slow and unwilling to adopt ICT because of the institutional context. Generally, it was noted that there are no financial incentives to adopt ICT in their daily practice, while Academic C expressed the opinion that it is just seen as extra work (“*...it is a huge additional workload, especially if you don’t know anything about it*”), while Academic A complained that although it might make work easier in the long run, “*...it takes lots of time*”. The strongest opposition came from older academics, who tended to have less experience of working with ICT in general, but even the junior academics (M, N) admitted that they have never used any of the e-platforms for teaching. None of these junior academics were aware of any obligation to use e-technologies, nor have they received any request from managers to use them.

This resistance to ICT has been a long-standing problem. Explaining that previous attempts to force academics to use the university’s ICT tools in their work have been largely ignored in practice, Academic C remarked that academics respond to such pressures with symbolic gestures only: “*University academics are proof tested, so you do something, but nothing as substantive as taking action*”. This indicates a perceived ability to disregard the institutional context in their daily practice and present a “window dressed”



version of their actions. Where academics do employ ICT, this is not in response to institutional pressures but rather as a way of making life easier for themselves; they understand that a short-term time investment will yield long-term benefits. The decision is motivated by personal interest rather than the desire to act in the interests of the institution.

### **5.3. How academics in the case study university respond to the institutional context in their research practice**

The strategic plan for the institution identifies high quality research as a key strategic target. The management's goal that the university should become the top research university in the region is reflected in the changes it has already implemented, such as the appointment of a new vice-rector for research and the establishment of a new office to supervise research projects.

The Research Assessment Exercise (2015) describes the faculty's main research focus as being on basic research, but notes that the faculty is aware of how important it is to extend its research activities to encompass practically applicable research, particularly at national level. The RAE (2015) also points out that the faculty's investment in digital technologies means that staff have access to high-quality databases to support their research activities, especially in the fields of social and economic research. Although complimentary about the quality of the faculty's published research, the RAE observes that at the moment, most of this appears in a single scientific journal. While the quality of the journal is not in question, this concentration on one publishing platform severely limits the international outreach of research performed at the faculty. Consequently, although a satisfactory national player, the faculty has only a few international links. The RAE concludes that the research culture in the faculty is more oriented towards national than international research, even though its work in the areas of sustainable development, IT-based entrepreneurship development and the eco-dimensions of cultural and creative industries has the potential to significantly raise its international profile.

### ***5.3.1. Research environment and regulation***

The interviewed academics expected more from the faculty when it came to facilitating their research than they did from the university, but while welcoming its financial support, they were inclined to ignore its attempts to monitor their research activities. In fact, the data suggests that faculty-level attempts to exercise control have been largely unsuccessful. For example, there are regulations requiring academics to align their research with the strategic direction of the faculty, but the interviewees noted that this shifts so frequently as to render the regulations pointless. According to Academic B:

*“For the research problem selection you have to keep in line with the faculty direction. It is not a clear system and the requirements are constantly changing so it’s not at all clear what is required. When it is not clear, you go your own way.”*

Another attempt at control was the introduction by middle managers of a requirement that a management representative should be involved in each research project. This prompted a rebellion among the academics, as described by Academic F:

*“There was an attempt two or three years back and for example everyone was told to include someone from the administration. But what if that person doesn’t match the specification of the project? Then we got really angry and told them we would not write any more proposals.”*

Ultimately, the administration had to back down from its proposal. The result of all this is that faculties appear to have very little control over the research being done. Academic B argued that although the administration theoretically would like to take control over academics’ research activities, it has done little towards this in practice:

*“Proposal preparation and whether it goes ahead depends totally on the academic. You don’t need permission from anyone. The administration would like to dominate, review what you are submitting, but they usually don’t do this.”*

Although the majority were opposed to tight control, a few academics were willing to accept it if the incentives for conducting research were adequate. The data showed that this was especially true of those who complained that they have to spend a disproportionate amount of time on other institutional practices, leaving less time for research (*“I sacrificed my weekends to produce something valuable”*, Academic M). Others, however, were not so willing to compromise their academic autonomy in this way. For them, this autonomy is not just an ideal, it is also a practical way of distancing themselves from an institution they feel is inept at facilitating the development of quality research. These academics have adopted a pick-and-choose approach, taking advantage of institutional resources, while dismissing institutional control:

*“It’s good to have a good institution behind your back when you do your research. Then any research idea can attract funding more easily because the university has a good track record. For the rest, I just need the faculty management to sign off my projects. Sometimes I ask their view about the scope of the research or the idea, but I don’t rely on their input”*  
(Academic J).

This senior academic’s description suggests that the faculty monitors his research activities only superficially, but while the Middle Manager confirmed that the faculty does not direct research in any way, he went on to note that: *“You have to play the right game, finance and quality wise”*. In other words, the freedom enjoyed by Academic J is less likely to be challenged as long as he is assumed to be broadly aligned with the

expectations of the institutional context (even though he may be driven primarily by his own curiosity and professional ambitions). Academic J seemed aware of this, acknowledging that the researcher must calculate the potential risks and benefits of pursuing research that is not in line with institutional expectations:

*“My research topics are not aligned with the faculty direction. But you still follow your interest, because it demonstrates your academic work is worthy. [To the institution] you have to prove that you published something, so you play a double-game.”*

While Academic J may still align himself to some degree with the research environment, Academic B felt no such alignment, expressing open opposition to the research environment in the faculty:

*“...generally there is no support from the faculty, and I have no way of suggesting changes. Research is not rewarding and there is no infrastructure to do research here.”*

But even he acknowledged the need to “*play the game*”, admitting:

*“I tick the boxes that are required to play it safe. You must do some research, otherwise some young, unskilled lecturer from the street will replace you.”*

### **5.3.2. Research quality vs quantity**

It is worth noting here that a number of academics complained about the pointlessness of much of the research being carried out in the university; with minimal incentives on offer, and rewards aimed at quantity rather than quality, more and more academics are producing research merely to fulfil their contracts with little regard for research quality or innovation. The research that results is of questionable value, both in academic terms and in

terms of the institution's reputation. The relatively low priority given to research was revealed by Academic C, who admitted that it occupies only 3-10% of his time (*"I simply have other things to do, so usually I collaborate with students and have my name on the article"*), and by Academic M, who explained: *"I don't feel that I am doing sufficiently deep research because of all the administrative tasks that also need to be completed, which require lots of time, but I do my best"*. Similarly, Academic D observed:

*"I have noticed that I can dedicate only so much time to research and teaching quality, because all the time that I could use for research and teaching goes to administrative tasks."*

This diversion of personal resources towards administrative tasks has reduced academics' capacity to perform research, leaving them feeling vulnerable because, as Academic D explained, they feel they have to prove their worth as researchers to the institution to maintain their academic position: *"You waste lots of effort for the battle, maybe that's too harsh, but you always have to prove that you are as good as the others."*

On the other hand, according to Academic A: *"...the standards for academic accreditation are comparatively low"*. This opinion was echoed by Academic F, who described research requirements at the university as minimal:

*"Maybe it is sufficient, but sometimes it seems that the requirements are too low. They are so low that you only have to produce two articles in four or five years. Brutally low."*

Academic J, meanwhile, expressed the view that the institution regulates the quantity of research but not the quality – a surprising observation, given that it is the university's stated strategic goal to become a research leader. In fact, the interviewed academics argued for greater support to be shown for

research, proposing that staff should be allowed to split their time equally between the teaching and research functions.

Academic M highlighted the difficulty of finding time in the current institutional context to work on research projects on top of his normal workload. He described how he had been obliged to give up evenings and weekends to work on a study as part of an international H2020 project. Although pleased with the resulting article, he questioned whether it was worth the price he had paid: *“Sure, you can produce good articles when you sacrifice all summer, weekends and work like a horse. But does it have to be at such a price?”* Academics like M want to perform high quality research in line with the institution’s research direction, but they realise that the institution makes no distinction between them and those like Academic B, who do the minimum necessary to meet the established quota (*“In order to publish in time and to meet quotas sometimes you reproduce articles. You have to be creative around what you write”*). Such concerns indicate a general lack of belief in the university’s research strategy, or at least, that this strategy is being implemented effectively.

### **5.3.3. Research partnerships/projects**

The academics explained that they are responsible for attracting international research partners. In the absence of any explicit administrative guidelines in this regard, these external partners are usually identified and recruited through academics’ personal networks. Academic A explained:

*“Everything comes through personal contacts. If you consider the projects which made the biggest added value in terms of research outputs, it was just because I knew people personally and we had a good relationship.”*

As the quote indicates, the choice of partners is also based on the expected level of productivity and the potential quality of research outputs. As

Academic A noted, these personal relationships are then translated into institutional relationships which hopefully persist even if the individual academic leaves the university (“*Now I tried, in case I disappear, so at least the contact remains in the institution*”). Thus, the individual academic can have a profound influence on the faculty’s external network. However, it seems that faculties do little to help them attract these partners; indeed, Academic A noted they demonstrate an alarming willingness to exploit the goodwill of academics by making them directly responsible for managing all relationships with partners, not just those related to research:

*“There are regularly discussions about sustainable development programmes or other catchy programmes they want to launch. So I said, ‘Look, I have a contact, someone who works on a master’s programme in responsible business. Let’s do this, that person will come for a visit here.’ .. And later, I hear that there are some whispers that they will ask me to arrange something.”*

While the academics generally enjoyed their autonomy in this regard, they expressed frustration at the inaction of faculties and their reliance on individual academics to maintain partnerships that ultimately benefit the faculty as a whole. Academic B was especially angry:

*“Imagine what kind of understanding exists in the institution, academics are simply slaves, and so long as this is how top management sees us, nothing will change.”*

More positively, the academics saw international projects as a way of generating tangible benefits for the university, which was a point of pride for them; Academic D, for example, asserted: “*Of course, you have to invest lots of time. But out of the project you write a wonderful monograph*”. Academic M, meanwhile, pointed to the opportunities for travel. Such benefits, along

with the personal satisfaction that comes from working with like-minded partners, were seen as outweighing the time investment required.

The interviewees were ambivalent about EU projects, however. Academic C was sceptical of their value, though he expressed some happiness that a recent EU project has attracted more international students to the faculty. Academic B, however, was most concerned about the perceived inequality in how project partners are remunerated. He complained that:

*“When our salaries are so low - Lithuania is the lowest in the EU - your daily rates are accordingly very low. I try to participate in EU projects, but the remuneration for partners is calculated at the UK salary rate, and thus they get ten times more, although we do the same work.”*

#### **5.3.4. Research outputs and funding**

All of the academics saw journal publications as the most important research output. Academics were divided between those who prefer to spend most of their time teaching and those who prefer research. According to the interviewees, the decline in student numbers is putting increasing pressure on staff to raise teaching performance, at a time when the university is also pressuring them to publish in order to further its aim of becoming a leading research university. Academic R summed up his dilemma thus:

*“The teaching workload disrupts my research activities, and research is essential for my reputation and building my career. So I don’t want to spend loads of time for teaching when I need to produce the research outputs.”*

As this academic noted, publishing helps to build the individual researcher’s credibility and strengthens their position in the academic field, but the knock-



on effect for the institution (itself subject to environmental pressure from external evaluators such as the RAE) is also significant. Consequently, academics in the university are expected to publish at least two articles in the ISI journals in the course of each five-year contract.

All the academics were mindful of this obligation and well aware of the citation index and impact factors, but they differed on what and where to publish. Those academics who were more focused on research than teaching were generally concerned by what they perceived as the poor quality of national academic journals and the unreliability of the scientific ranking system. Senior Academic A, although acknowledging that there are high-quality journals in Lithuania, openly questioned whether the peer review process is rendering the ranking system untrustworthy by artificially inflating the standard of work so that S5 level papers (published in other peer-reviewed journals) are making it into S1 level (published in the ISI journals) journals:

*“...so here you are, a high level researcher, because you have something in an S1 level publication. But when you look into the peer review process, how much they helped to retouch your idea, revise it, what kind of input you have made to the scientific discourse, it is a zero value paper generally, only S5 level at best.”*

These concerns about quality discouraged some of the sample academics from publishing nationally, which is both counterproductive to the goals of the university and potentially damaging to their individual careers; as Academic J explained, academics are under pressure to publish a quota of papers in these peer-reviewed journals, whatever their reservations about the ranking system.

*“Over the five years, three articles are required. Articles are categorised after you register them into the library so they are assigned a specific publication*

*level. So if you have ambitions you will aim for the highest impact.”*

The importance of being published in the highest ranked journals was echoed by Academic A, who explained that the perceived quality of Lithuania’s national journals is such that publication in these journals might actually work against anyone wanting to work abroad:

*“I always consider, if I decided to work for a university abroad, how my CV would look, and my publications in national journals would be very funny.”*

Thus, those with high ambitions realise they must publish in internationally, rather than nationally, ranked journals.

In terms of the quality of the research itself, there were complaints that the institutional context encourages stagnation and prioritises quantity over quality. Academic D observed that the way academics are classified, someone who produces ten publications on the same research topic is valued above an academic who performs innovative research and produces fewer papers:

*“The easiest way is to defend your thesis and then for years to work on the same topic from different angles. Then you have a long list of publications. While others go deep and deep into the subject over the years, produce a brand new publication and publish in a not very prestigious journal which is only worth 0.2 points, but this latter article is more valuable in terms of innovation and new knowledge.”*

The lack of regard for quality was also highlighted by one junior academic (M), who admitted that: *“I have a mentor – a senior academic – who suggested I window dress the publication; it seems the quality doesn’t matter as long as it gets published”*. One possible explanation for this attitude was

offered by Academic R, who explained that academics' teaching load leaves them no time to concentrate on research or producing high quality publications. However, Academic F suggested that the problem might be more fundamental than this:

*“You think you have prepared a really excellent article, but when you send it to the journal and you receive 98 points out of 100, and others 100 points, and then you resend again and again and each time the article is refused, you simply give up. We don't know how to do high quality research.”*

The way research is being funded was also described as flawed, with Academic C noting that it takes two years for research funding to reach the university from the Ministry of Education. This delay fosters tensions in the institutional context as academics do not know how much they will receive or even if their research will be funded at all. The result is that rather than increasing the amount of research being done, the current system disincentivises them from pursuing research activities.

Academics B and C also noted the inconsistency of the university's position in this regard – that it is pushing an institutional agenda that prioritises research, but is failing to provide proper incentives to engage academics. Academic D explicitly linked the lack of funding to research outputs, claiming that the newly developed strategy does not offer incentives to produce more research than the minimum quota set by the institution; once the minimum number of publications has been reached, academics are more likely to pursue more lucrative research opportunities within industry. Academic B explained that this is his approach:

*“I count how many articles I need to pass the minimum criteria. I write those articles and one more, just in case, because sometimes the requirements*

*change and sometimes they are even applied retrospectively. And I don't do anything else."*

Academic D understood those of his colleagues who only perform to minimum standards, noting that research has to be fostered with incentives to achieve more, instead of less: *"The best incentive is finance. People count what is worthwhile to them and what is not"*.

The perceived failings in the funding system are an additional frustration for those academics who want to perform research as they are forced to seek outside funding sources. Academic M explained that this can affect the choice of research area, forcing the academic to pursue a fashionable topic in order to increase the probability of funding from external bodies: *"I look for proposals and it doesn't matter if I am interested in the topic; the most important thing is to attract external funding for the institution"*.

The responsibility for attracting external funding lies solely with the academic, and the writing of project proposals is something they do on top of their usual workload. Thus, Academic D revealed that: *"You sit in the evenings or nights and write proposals or reports in order to bring more money into the department"*. However, Academic R noted that much of this work is barely worth the effort: *"Project work is a funny thing – you can't earn from it"*.

#### **5.4. Evaluations: excessive burden or useful monitoring tool?**

##### ***5.4.1. Institutional and study programmes evaluation***

Prior to 2011, universities in Lithuania were only required to have their study programmes reviewed by the Education Ministry's Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education. Since 2011, however, they have also been required to participate in regular institution-wide reviews<sup>7</sup>. The study

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<sup>7</sup> Institutional Review in Lithuania. <http://www.skvc.lt/default/en/quality-assurance/institutional-review>

programme evaluation was last conducted at the case university in 2016 (after a gap of more than a decade), while the most recent institutional review was completed in 2015.

For both reviews, academics were required to produce a self-evaluation report. The interviews revealed that the production of this report was a source of tension and frustration among academics, with some feeling it should have been handled by managers, who have more ready access to the required data, and others simply resenting it as a waste of time. Academic B was particularly critical, dismissing it as: “*Copy, paste and that’s it; it is a very time-consuming process for which nobody pays*”. The use of the phrase “*copy and paste*” implies that the evaluations were only being done superficially. Similarly, Academic F also criticised it as “*completely meaningless, absurd, nonsense work*” and was resentful of the extra burden: “*We academics work, teach and do research – yet we still need to write the self-assessment. It’s cruel*”. The fact that this academic nevertheless volunteered to be responsible for some parts of the analysis signals a high level of coupling with the institutional context:

*“For example, we had to describe the material resources that are available for the study programme, including computer programs and their brands. We also had to list changes in the staff list and student dropouts, listing why each dropout occurred. I was already swamped by the workload, so in order to prepare one or two sections I had to allocate lots of time for this as I didn’t know the data.”* (Academic F).

Academic R also expressed frustration at having to spend time gathering peripheral data on the exact numbers of students and teaching materials, but he displayed a lower level of coupling than Academic F, admitting: “*I fill in as I have to, but they can check it themselves if they want to*”.

Academic D's main objection was that the self-evaluation procedure takes up time that could instead be invested in teaching or research (*"I have noticed that academics cannot devote so much time to research and the quality of teaching"*), but he also raised concerns about who should review the finished document, arguing that international experts are less likely than national committees to be biased and therefore more likely to give an honest review: *"Foreign experts carry out assessments, and they have no prior prejudices...we prefer to have unprejudiced experts from abroad, because Lithuania is too small."*

Apart from being perceived as an additional burden that interferes with teaching and research work, the assessment process was also seen as creating friction between colleagues:

*"I was writing an article which had a near deadline so I focused on it and missed the deadline to prepare my part of the self-assessment. Of course you agree inside, but still you put the department and your colleagues into a bad position, where they have to wait for your input. So tensions emerge when somebody doesn't do something"* (Academic A).

These tensions are further increased when there is an apparent disparity in the work-cultures of those performing the self-evaluation; for example, when some academics meticulously check their input and others are less careful or even fake the data. Academic A, describing how one colleague falsified data, forcing the others to rework that part of the report, acknowledged: *"this again causes some tensions, dissatisfaction with one another"*. Thus, an already tense process (no one knows what kind of information and knowledge will emerge) is made even more difficult when academics know that other faculty members might have deliberately falsified information for the evaluation. The net result is that, ironically, the intended long-term effect of this institutional change – raising faculty quality – is being thwarted by the short-term impacts of internal tension and deteriorating working relationships.

#### **5.4.2. Students' role in evaluations**

As part of its efforts to improve the quality of the education on offer, the university has started seeking feedback from students. Informal evaluations are conducted in meetings with department staff, while at central level, students complete formal questionnaires to evaluate teaching quality. These are then made available to the administration. Academic C noted that student evaluations are a major source of information for determining the quality and effectiveness of an individual academic's work. He explained: *"For me student opinion is very important, because through the large number of students you can get a very good sense about teaching quality"*. Pointing out that student evaluations are scrutinised and verified in discussions with the academic concerned, he saw them as a useful tool and a critical component in helping maintain teaching quality within the faculty.

Such support for the evaluation process was not widely shared, however. The Middle Manager reported that there have been instances of academics falsifying evaluations:

*"The study quality committees were delegated to make a survey in order to evaluate the quality of their respective programmes. They started doing it, gathered data, processed the data and were supposed to give the results to me. I received the reports and agreed with the study quality committees that they would think about how they could improve and what resources they would need, but it was all left until the last minute (although there was no official deadline). I went through the results from the students about the study programmes. One of the master's programmes didn't receive a single positive evaluation. I got in touch with one department asking what they were doing in terms of our agreement. They answered that they were working on improvements. Then I called*

*one of the students and said that I had received the study quality committee's report with students' feedback in the autumn. Then the students sent their real feedback to me. The report submitted by the study quality committee was totally different from the students' feedback."*

The example illustrates that some academics in the case university who are not delivering the expected quality of teaching try to preserve their legitimacy – and their autonomy – by “polishing” their evaluations. This suggests that these academics are engaging with the quality assessment process only symbolically. Indeed, several of the interviewed academics expressed scepticism about the evaluation process, suggesting that evaluations are rarely verified by department managers. Others went further, arguing that even bad evaluations are ignored altogether where it suits faculty managers. According to Academic A:

*“Our department administration issued individual questionnaires to the students, and if something was wrong, acted. But other departments have consistently bad feedback from year to year. And this is due to the thinking of the senior academics or someone else that the academics in their department are doing a great teaching job and these academics are wonderful. It's very likely that those academics were their PhD students some years ago, that's why they are so wonderful. So they have two students in the class.”*

Academic F also highlighted the presence of favouritism and power politics within the university. Discussing the likelihood that the impending strategic changes will inevitably lead to a restructuring of the faculty and redundancies, he expressed regret that the decisions about who stays and who goes may be influenced less by the quality of the individual's work than by the quality of



their relationship with the management. He asked: *“What decides which one? I guess not the personality. But personal interests, contacts, politics”*. As a firm believer in the institution’s quality standards, this realisation was one more reason why Academic F has become less inclined to align his practices with the institutional context.

Academic A expressed the somewhat cynical perspective that the institution rewards popularity with students rather than quality of teaching:

*“There is always a risk that you will only start to be oriented towards popularity in an attempt to receive only good feedback, so you will try to make your slides more visual or set more practical tasks.”*

However, Academic B pointed out the dangers of giving too much credence to student evaluations, arguing that it may in fact negatively impact the quality of academics’ work. The logic behind this argument is that students will give worse evaluations to lecturers who present them with more challenging tasks or more difficult material. Academic A agreed:

*“Everything depends on the students and their feedback. But the feedback doesn’t show anything. When you give them [students] difficult tasks, they scream that they are too difficult.”*

This presents the problem that within this institutional context, the perception of academics is that they will be rewarded (receive better evaluations, boosting their credibility within the department) for fostering a better image of themselves rather than for fostering quality. The result is that the evaluation structures, which were designed to improve teaching quality, have instead led some academics to decouple from the monitoring process altogether:

*“I teach in a way that I wouldn’t change even if I was allowed to. I teach the best way I know how, so I do that and it’s not really important whether they*

*[administration] try to control it, or check up on me; to tell the truth, I am not afraid” (Academic A).*

Disincentivised to provide challenging learning content, some have even started questioning whether the quality of their teaching matters.

Opinions were divided on the importance of student evaluations, with Academic C regarding them as a major source of (largely reliable) information on the quality and effectiveness of an individual academic’s work, and Academic B being quick to dismiss them as having little actual impact on teaching quality (*“If you want to start thinking about quality, then you have to think about the incentive system”*). Academic A was also sceptical, but for different reasons; he suggested that student feedback has little impact in the face of established favouritism: *“Feedback is collected and if the administration sees that something is wrong, they do something. However, some departments haven’t performed well in years”*.

This perceived inconsistency led most academics in the sample to dismiss student evaluations as more of a hindrance than a facilitator for improvement. Most cynical was the view expressed by Academic A that student evaluations help the internal environment to reward popularity rather than an academic’s ability to inculcate the capacity for critical thought, but the dysfunctional nature of the student evaluation process was also evident in Academic C’s observation that while individual departments may choose not to respond to student feedback, the dean’s office can (and has) interfered on occasion when contacted directly by students. He explained that: *“Students can approach the dean and complain if something is wrong”*. This indicates a skewed power structure in which students can bypass official channels and address the faculty’s leadership directly.

Most of the interviewed academics did not recognise the student evaluations as having much bearing on their work, preferring instead to rely on their own judgement: *“I listen to others, but I do things my way” (Academic N)*. This discourse of independence indicates an institutional context in which at least

some of the academics (A, J and C) feel entitled to ignore structures designed to change their conduct (indeed, Academic A even argued that this lack of accountability allows him to achieve better teaching results). However, while the academics might dismiss student evaluations of teaching and course quality as irrelevant or counterproductive, they are highly important to faculty leaders, who regard them as a counterbalance to departmental self-assessments (especially as the two often yield very different results in regards to course quality).

### 5.5. Conclusion

Table 5.2 summarises how academics in the case university are responding to the institutional context in terms of their teaching, research and evaluation practices. In each case, the response is coded and illustrated with a quotation from the interviews. The aggregated conceptual themes are briefly discussed thereafter.

**Table 5.2: Overview of code construction for answering RQ2**

<b>Thematic field</b>	<b>First order code</b>	<b>Second order code</b>	<b>Aggregated conceptual themes</b>
Teaching	Displays good knowledge of the teaching practices that the top management want to introduce university-wide and is actively working towards promoting these practices / ( <i>“Creating high quality course is a priority.”</i> )	Tight coupling with the action	Routinising the action
	Institutional practices are integrated with personal	Strategic coupling	Rationalising the action

	views on how to ensure teaching quality, personal objectives / ( <i>“I was teaching the course in Lithuanian and English, but I decided to optimise the teaching and teach only in English.”</i> )		
	Adopts a position of independence and superiority over the institution – their personal knowledge is enough to ensure the quality of teaching. Sceptical about strategic initiatives / ( <i>“The revised programme outline, teaching materials and plan are totally stupid and I refused them. I will supply something for the administration and hope they will be happy with that.”</i> )	Coupling is only symbolic window dressing	Symbolic adoption of the action only
Research	Compliant with institutional context, incorporating practices into personal routine / ( <i>“You sit in the evenings or nights and write proposals or reports in</i>	Tight coupling with the action	Routinising the action

	<i>order to bring more money into the department.”)</i>		
	Selects the most convenient alternatives to achieve specific goals and personal objectives / ( <i>“When you don’t have time, you choose the easiest way to make the quota, for example taking a master’s student’s work and co-authoring with him for publication.”</i> )	Strategic coupling	Rationalising the action
	Complete mistrust of the environment; perceives more institutional control than there actually is. Leads the academic to completely decouple their practice from the strategy / ( <i>“You don’t need anyone’s permission. Faculty administration would like to dominate, revise the proposal, but usually they don’t do it.”</i> )	Symbolic coupling	Symbolic adoption of the action only
Evaluation	Couples practices with evaluation processes because they have a strong trust in the institutional body / ( <i>“They have been going to close us down for the last 50</i>	Tight coupling with the action	Routinising the action

	<i>years. But you still tear yourself apart in terms of workload. And for what, if they still plan to close us down? But you just do your work.”)</i>		
	Self-reliant; sees assessment as a sign of mistrust or a tool to assess popularity; no inclination to change / ( <i>“I teach in the way that I would like to be taught, I do what I think is best and I don’t really care if I am monitored and I am not really scared.”)</i> )	Strategic coupling	Rationalising the action
	Weighs the benefits, aim to justify the existence, manipulation / ( <i>“This is work just for the sake of work. All self-assessments you just do copy-paste.”)</i> )	Symbolic coupling	Symbolic adoption of the action only

The interviewed academics may be divided into three groups.

**Routinising the action** (Academic D, Academic M). These academics are strongly supportive of the administration and the institutional practices it has introduced to improve teaching quality. They are better informed about institutional practices than the other groups and more willing to implement them in their teaching, though it should be noted that their proactive attitude

may be attributable to more than just tight coupling with the institutional context.

Academic D expressed a desire to work towards research quality and displayed a high level of coupling with institutional demands, but was dismayed that academics (including himself) are being rewarded for doing less. Academic M is even trying to challenge the institution in the hope that it might accept his views on how research should be conducted, incentivised and rewarded.

**Rationalising the action** (Academic A, Academic J, Academic C, Academic F, Academic N, Academic R). These academics are indifferent towards institutional expectations and consider themselves beyond its control in terms of their teaching practice. They seem to see themselves as superior to the institution – their personal knowledge is enough to guarantee the quality of the education, while the institution is unable to do the same – and are self-reliant in terms of their teaching practice. These academics align their teaching with the institutional context only so far as it suits them; for example, only employing institutional tools and practices which they find convenient. They appear to be more interested in being liked by students than in providing quality education and do not feel accountable to the institution. Nor do they feel obliged to follow its expectations in terms of teaching practices; where they are aware of regulations, they will only comply with these if they accord with their own goals and vision of teaching. Academic F in particular admitted to a growing sense of paranoia as he becomes increasingly aware of how actively the institution wants to involve itself in his teaching. Although likely to remain officially compliant, his faith in academics' professional expertise and integrity, along with his knowledge of how the actions of lower managers work against quality, make Academic F highly susceptible to loose coupling, should the institution press its demands for academics to incorporate institutional practices into their teaching work.

The academics in this group resist all forms of control over research, while embracing any attempts by the faculty to facilitate it. Their response towards

the institution's research strategy rests solely on the perceived degree of facilitation vs. degree of control; coupling is reserved for facilitating actions that take away administrative or financial burdens, but measures of control are actively and consciously ignored. In the case of Academic J, institutional research policies are met with suspicion and potential hostility. His actions imply that he questions the competence of the administration. Academic C, meanwhile, is content to spend only 10% of his time on research. He has decoupled from the institutional emphasis on research, citing lack of time and financial incentives, and while admiring of his colleagues who perform high quality research, he shows no inclination to change. Since research is not his priority, he is content to be in an environment where he is required to produce relatively little research and has a lighter workload.

**Symbolically implementing the action** (Academic B). This academic is strongly critical of the institution's teaching initiatives, the dean's office and the middle management. This antagonistic relationship has fuelled his loose coupling with the institutional context. Academic B was entirely dismissive of middle managers' attempts to monitor or enforce teaching practices, instead suggesting (in an aggressive fashion) that the administration should be more concerned with attracting students for academics to teach, and less preoccupied with micromanaging processes that have nothing to do with teaching quality. Dissatisfied with the institutional context, he "goes through the motions" to preserve legitimacy in the eyes of the administration, but his core activities remain the same. Thus, he is generally acting outside of the boundaries drawn by the institutional context.

Much like the rationalising group, Academic B dismissed both the self-evaluation and student evaluation processes as something to be completed only to keep managers happy. This academic sees these processes as being of no benefit to academics; not only do they take up valuable time, but in the case of the departmental self-evaluation, they have created tensions within the faculty. The student evaluations were dismissed as having no actual impact on his conduct. His main objection to the self-evaluation process is



that it requires academics to gather minute details which he perceives as irrelevant to the judgement of teaching/research performance. This has led him to decouple from a process which he sees as questioning his competence as an academic. To Academic B, the self-evaluation is symptomatic of a mistrustful environment in which academics have to prove their worth as teachers and researchers.

The three categories highlight the variety of ways in which academics in this university respond to their institutional context. The findings contribute to our knowledge about the extent and nature of the coupling process, showing how it reshapes the way in which the institutional context is enacted at ground level. This may in turn influence and possibly change the institution itself. This contention – that academics shape their institution rather than the other way around – is discussed further in the following chapter.

**CHAPTER 6:**  
**DISCUSSION**

## **6.0. Introduction**

This chapter summarises the central findings and discusses them in light of the theoretical and practical perspectives in order to answer the overall research question: *How do individual actors contribute to shaping their institution?*

### **6.1. Discussion of the findings**

The theoretical objective of this study is to deepen understanding of how individual actors contribute to shape their institution. The first of its three core findings is that the academics in the case study university engaged with the institutional context each in their own way. Previous studies have investigated a number of enabling conditions that allow actors to diverge from the institutional template, such as regulatory changes, technological disruption and resource scarcity (e.g. Durand and McGuire, 2005; Greenwood et al., 2002). Others have characterised institutions as loose systems around which actors improvise (Crawford and Ostrom, 1995). This study expands on the literature by suggesting that it is not sufficient just to identify the conditions which enable divergent actions (Battilana et al., 2009), but that it is also necessary to understand the personal motivations that drive these improvised actions.

Furthermore, the enabling conditions that might play a role in an actor's decision to decouple their actions from institutional norms have mainly been considered from the meso-level or institutional perspective, largely ignoring the micro-organisational actor perspective. This study suggests that another way of gaining insight into the institutional context is to look at how it is interpreted by actors at the micro-organisational level. The academics in this sample interpreted their institutional context in one of three ways: 1) those in the rational group had internalised and supported the institutional context (e.g. Academic M: *“Becoming a strong research university really motivates me as it will set the foundation for my career to be in one of the best*

*universities in the region*”); 2) those in the instrumental group saw the institutional context as an instrument to address their specific pressing need or challenge, whether this be professional or personal (“*It is difficult to find a job, so you follow the rules so as not to lose yours*”, Academic R; “*I made the effort in the hope that at least something would change*”, Academic A; “*I have time only for some tasks, such as teaching, it is usually those that I enjoy most [laughing] as I have my own business*”, Academic C); and 3) those in the coercion group had completely detached themselves and their everyday practice from the institutional context (“*In the current institutional environment the only thing we feel is uncertainty...That’s why I do what I have to only to survive*”, Academic B).

The second core finding is that although all the micro-level actors in the sample were embedded in the same field, their varying interpretations of the institutional context meant that they behaved differently in terms of their daily work. The extent and nature of the coupling between everyday practice and institutional context varied from academic to academic – from tight coupling to alternative forms such as strategic and symbolic coupling. Academic D’s comment: “*You sit in the evenings or nights and write proposals or reports in order to bring more money into the department*” illustrates how some academics in the faculty were tightly coupled with their institutional context. Others, on the other hand, aligned their practices with the institutional context only so far as it suited them; for example, only employing institutional tools and practices which they found convenient. This strategic coupling was exemplified by Academic N: “*I am the one who decides the direction of my research, not them*”. The same academic also observed: “*Teaching visits are a great chance to travel; I always take this opportunity even if I have to give a few lectures*”. The best example of symbolic coupling with the institutional context was Academic B: “*I tick the boxes that are required to play it safe. You must do some research, otherwise some young, unskilled lecturer from the street will replace you*”.

The third core finding is that there was a link between how academics in the

sample interpreted their institutional context and how they enacted it in their daily practices. How they interpreted their institutional context tended to depend on social or hierarchical position (Bourdieu, 1988) and time within the institution. The results show that different combinations of interpretations and social position led to diverging outcomes in terms of the sample academics' everyday practice. Table 6.1 presents the typology linking these academics' interpretation of and responses to the institutional context. It identifies three categories of academic: operationalisers, mediators and opposers.

**Table 6.1: Summary of emerging categories from the findings**

	<b>Category I – Operationalisers (Academics D and M)</b>	<b>Category II – Mediators (Academics A, C, F, J, N and R)</b>	<b>Category III – Opposers (Academic B)</b>
<i>Involvement in:</i>			
Strategic planning	no	no	no
<i>Interpretation of institutional context:</i>			
Rational	+		
Instrumental		+	
Coercion			+
<i>Practice:</i>			
Routinising action	+		
Rationalising action		+	
Symbolic implementation			+
<i>Social position:</i>			
Hierarchy	Senior (1) /Junior (1)	Senior (5) /Junior (1)	Senior (1)

Age (range)	30-40	30-70	50-70
Time with institution (average)	4	10	15+

Each of these categories is discussed below.

## 6.2. Operationalisers

Operationalisers in the sample either saw the institution's interests as being in line with their own career expectations or were prepared to subordinate their own interests for the sake of the organisation. Their diligence in conforming to the rules and routines earned them credibility with the administration and put them in a more powerful bargaining position. Willing to comply with the institution's increasing work demands and the needs of the environment, they were prepared to spend evenings and weekends keeping up with the growing burden of administrative work so that their research and teaching work would remain unaffected. Generally, these operationalisers prioritised teaching over research. They were less ambitious to publish in high impact journals than mediators, preferring instead to concentrate on research projects that would diversify the flow of funding into the institution and lead to rapid publication. This suggests that these operationalisers prioritised the securing of legitimacy over research quality and ambition. Consequently, they may have less credibility as researchers and be more dependent on their resource providers.

Operationalisers saw the financial consequences of declining student numbers and actively sought external funding, even being prepared to consider research topics that were not directly related to their own interest if this would enable the institution to diversify its funding sources. Unlike mediators, operationalisers had not noticed increased oversight from the administration. As Academic M put it: *"You just do what you are told to"*.

This group was made up of a senior academic with a relatively short service time (more than 3 years in the institution) and a junior academic working on a PhD. This junior academic showed that he was already institutionalised and well aware of the institution's expectations. He was driven to seek external funding himself and content to collaborate with senior academics.

That these academics have chosen to enact the dominant institutional norms will not be surprising to neo-institutionalists, who argue that organisational members tend to mimic those behaviours that are widely accepted and considered prestigious. As discussed in Chapter 2.5, various researchers have argued that this is a common strategy among those struggling to survive within their institutional field (Sauder et al., 2007; Powell, 1991), though the phenomenon of isomorphism has been little explored (indeed, the process of institutionalisation was not addressed in detail until Powell and Colyvas (2008)). My study brings us closer to the actual lived experiences of academics by offering an example of what appears to be isomorphism in practice.

### **6.3. Mediators**

There were six mediators in the sample. These academics had worked in the institution for an average of ten years. Three of the six had previously held senior positions within the university but were no longer part of the administration or management; consequently, they had not participated in the strategic planning process.

These mediators were essentially opportunistic in their response to the institutional context. They were only partially aligned with the university, seeing it purely as a provider of resources and infrastructure and responding to its demands only where these suited their personal interest and commitments, career goals and institutional logics (Thornton et al., 2012). However, while not actively coupling their practice with institutional expectations, they were not simply going through the motions (as suggested

by Di Maggio and Powell (1983)). Refuting the notion that academics window dress their actions simply to meet the evaluation criteria, Academic A asserted: *“I really do like the Scandinavian culture’s emphasis on trust, so you can’t lie. What would happen if we all lied?”* Instead, they appeared to engage with the institutional context through strategic coupling, choosing to couple with it for some activities and to loose-couple for others where they perceived uncertainty or a threat to their own interests. In this way, they reaffirmed their personal agency.

One mediator insisted that:

*“I teach in a way that I wouldn’t change even if I was allowed to. I teach the best way I know how, so I do that and it’s not really important whether they [administration] try to control it, or check up on me; to tell the truth, I am not afraid”* (Academic A).

The comment shows how academics in this group navigated their institutional context, ignoring some of its requirements and pursuing their own interests. The university has a top-bottom power structure, leading Academic J to complain that academics had not been included in the strategy planning process and that their actions were being dictated by the administration: *“We are only important as de facto but not de jure. All is set for us, so they leave us no space to manoeuvre”*. Their desire to control the strategic planning process came out of their wish not to have their fate imposed upon them in this way. Far from ensuring the implementation of the strategic plan, the way the process has been handled seems to have led these academics to distance themselves from the administration’s social world and to ignore the latter’s injunctions to implement this plan in their daily practice:

*“Let them plan! But please let me do my job also. They would like to be involved, but generally, I am the one who decides the direction of my research, not them”* (Academic N).



This perspective was echoed by other informants – these academics had developed a personal understanding of their relationships with the various institutional actors, particularly the administration. However, whatever the nature of these relationships, the mediators in the sample appeared to be active participants in university life. They were active in publishing articles and monographs and in attracting a more diverse funding base for the university. This enhanced their credibility and strengthened their position in the institution, which in turn gave them even more freedom to decide when and how to couple.

The data shows that the decision to align personal practice with the institutional context tended to be driven either by uncertainty or by self-interest. It was thus possible to divide the mediators in the sample into “passive” and “active” groups. Passive mediators had generally been with the institution for a fairly long time and were nationally active (e.g. participating in local conferences, publishing in local journals), while active mediators had even longer relationships with the university and had developed larger, more international professional networks. The passive mediators in the group were especially sensitive to uncertainty; this, rather than concerns about legitimacy (Powell and Colyvas, 2008), influenced how they negotiated the institutional context in their actions. The active mediators, on the other hand, tended to rationalise their actions (e.g. whether to seek publication or promotion) on the basis of self interest, only coupling with the institutional context when they saw its practices and logic as being of professional benefit (they placed high value on personal growth). In practice, this tended to mean incorporating some institutional demands into their routine while ensuring that their core activities served their own interests (Bennich-Bjorkman, 2007). The active mediators in the sample were highly critical of what they saw as the unprofessional underpinnings of senior, middle and faculty logic and retained a strong belief in their own professional integrity.

Though less obviously confrontational than opposers, both active and passive mediators, by choosing to couple strategically, were also institutionalising (as

opposed to being institutionalised by) the university. By adopting this strategy, individual actors were able to gain some degree of control over their work. Stensaker (2009) notes that chronic resistance is demoralising, but the mediators in the sample were not so much resisting the institution's expectations as simply imposing their own. Although this may help to neutralise institutional pressures to some degree, as Besharov and Smith (2013) suggest, if the institution and its actors have expectations that are incompatible, conflict is inevitable. In the case of these academics, it might be argued, it is only a short step from strategic coupling to falling out of step with the institutional context entirely – especially if the majority of their interpretations and actions diverge from the official guidelines and norms.

There was a fairly fundamental mismatch, for example, between the university's increasing emphasis on research and the determination of some in the passive mediator group to focus mainly on teaching. Academic F, for example, described teaching as at the heart of his practice, claimed to have no affinity for research and was very reluctant to reprioritise research at the expense of teaching time. He was not, however, prepared to risk his job, and the financial stability it offers, by openly opposing the university. In other words, his decision to adopt a mediator role was influenced to some degree by his personal role as the family breadwinner.

The active mediators were much more supportive of the university's research ambitions as these align closely with their own hopes; in fact, most saw teaching as a relatively marginal activity. In most cases, their habitus had been formed by long residence at the university and extensive international experience, making them more outward looking. Academic A was perhaps the most interesting example from this group because his responses were illustrative of the active mediator's tendency to take a broader (i.e. beyond the merely institutional) perspective. Asked what he thought of the university's drive towards modernisation, he noted that:

*“...the university wants to be a research university,  
wants to be similar to Tartu University...But for me*

*Tartu is no example. I know people who work in the management department, and they have such low standards and few resources, only a couple of old women. ...I know these people...As a faculty we are a head higher than them.”*

Academic A's comment suggests that he was comparing his understanding with that of others. This awareness of a wider audience led him to question, even to ridicule, the university's modernisation drive: *“I always consider, if I decided to work for a university abroad, how my CV would look, and my publications in national journals would be very funny”*. His desire to establish research credentials beyond the university may have been partly motivated by the fact that this made it easier for him to negotiate his own role within the university.

The data shows that whether mediators in the sample considered teaching or research marginal depended on their personal – not institutional – priorities. Simply put, these were activities they had to do in order to follow their own agendas. While the operationalisers in the sample were willing to contribute to the institutional context and help make the university a modern institution, the mediators were unwilling to completely sacrifice their commitments for what they thought was a poorly designed strategy. As a result, they mediated the institutional context with their habitus, capital and knowledge, strategising their own actions and tempering the context with their own personal worldview.

As discussed in Chapter 3.3.2, habitus provides a lens to study how individuals see their social environment and their role therein, and how they act. The mediators in this sample were bounded up in their social environment through their understanding of the environment, building a taste of it and responding to it with certain actions and strategies (Bourdieu, 1986). They were more likely than either the operationalisers or the opposers to cite their own experience and ideas to justify their criticism of the university's context and their evaluation of the benefits and risks associated with the changes in

institutional context. Their reactions seem to support Bourdieu's (1994) suggestion that changes in the field logic can create tensions with field members' habitus even to the point of incompatibility. Both practically and personally, the mediators in the sample were embedded in multidimensional worlds – not just the single one-dimensional world imposed by the university.

#### **6.4. Opposers**

The opposers category, which comprised just one member (Academic B), interpreted the university context as essentially coercive. Throughout his interview, this academic repeatedly expressed scepticism about the university governance, but as a long-standing member of staff and a career researcher, he was keen to preserve his legitimacy within the university. Acutely aware of being monitored, Academic B engaged in symbolic coupling to maintain this legitimacy, but was willing to decouple if he felt he could get away with it. He wanted to understand the overall institutional logic so that he could make informed decisions about coupling, but his limited trust in the institutional power structures meant that in practice, he tended to lean towards loose or symbolic coupling. It is important to point out that Academic B began his HE career more than fifteen years ago – that is, in the early post-Soviet era. Since it was widely acceptable in this period to respond to tight monitoring and control with symbolic actions only, it might be argued that his own history had reinforced his tendency towards decoupling. I intend to explore this line of inquiry in future research.

Academic B saw the faculty governance as weak, and this had led him to decouple his personal conduct from the institutional context. Staff in the case study university are obliged to achieve good evaluations to remain in their positions or to move up the academic career ladder to associate professor or full professor, but anything beyond this is voluntary and adds no value for the academic. This encouraged tight coupling with the institutional context as far as the evaluations are concerned, but loose coupling after that:

*“As an academic I need to follow the faculty line. It’s an unfair system. Academics are in such a caste system; you’re elected every five years, so you have to do everything [they want] so you get the contract for five years, and after the five years are up you may still lose your job. All the evaluations and self-assessments are just work for work’s sake. You just copy and paste from document to document. Then the commission comes and mostly it’s just retired pensioners from abroad who just give standard recommendations. I don’t know if we need this; it’s worth totally zero. It certainly doesn’t give any benefits. And what can you evaluate? It’s the same with the teaching quality, what can you evaluate there? It all depends on the students and their evaluation. But their evaluation doesn’t show anything.”*

Faced with the growing intensity of formal assessment, this academic felt he had to continuously justify his existence, but this is made more difficult by lack of funding: *“You have to do research. You have to build international networks. But nobody gives money for that”*. In terms of research, opposers may respond to this dilemma by compromising their choice of research problem and hunting for more fundable topics. Academic B saw his institutional context as characterised by high uncertainty and low professionalism, ascribing internal problems to the *“stupidity”* of the administration, especially at faculty level. He complained:

*“The central administration makes me so angry, it is constantly expanding. Even so, it would be OK if the faculty administration were normal and did not interrupt our work, but just helped and motivated.”*

Unlike the operationalisers in the sample, who demonstrated tight coupling by sacrificing their own interests and time to ensure outputs met the required standards, this opposer responded to the institutional context by reducing the quality of his outputs, his level of involvement and thus his general credibility in the eyes of the university and senior management. He coupled superficially with the institutional context, but would not change his core activities. In other words, his loose coupling served as a tool for manipulating the context.

Like the mediators in the sample, this opposer's habitus had been shaped by the knowledge he had acquired in his years at the university, including his memories of how the university used to be and how he as an academic used to operate within it. This familiarity with the university field gave him the inside knowledge to be able to complete institutional evaluations without providing genuine information and to co-opt students to perform his research duties. However, his publications appeared to be of local importance only and were not considered prestigious by university standards, arguably making him of marginal importance within the institution (if we accept Bourdieu's contention that academia is defined by prestige and status). Yet despite this marginal position, he still held agency; through his comments about his colleagues and even through his symbolic practice and inaction, he could potentially impact the trajectory of the university.

Academic B's choice to perform symbolically may have been a response to the fact that his core activities are no longer valued so highly by the university; having built his habitus within a very different institutional context, he was in the position of having to carve out a new space for himself within the faculty and re-establish the legitimacy of his work. This was evidently important to Academic B, not least because he was sceptical about whether the university administration would validate his work if he did not find a way to fit in. Towards the end of the interview, he proudly announced that he had recently published a book, but also claimed that nobody needs this book because it's "*not even in English*". This illustrates that he was still eager

to contribute to the educational endeavour, but unwilling to engage with change.

Bourdieu (1991) suggests that there is often a struggle in the field between the old and the young individuals. This opposer – the old – had chosen to say no to the university’s demands. At the time of the interview, it appeared that he was no longer an integral part of the university: there was “them” and him alone. As the university field that he used to understand had changed, he had increasingly turned away from it – again illustrating the truth of Bourdieu’s (1993) point that changing field logic can create rising tensions with the habitus. He finished the interview acknowledging the division between his work life and personal life: *“Apart from the university, life is beautiful. Such a beautiful autumn outside.”*

### **6.5. Academic agency and its impact on institutional context**

The conceptual framework employed in this study allows the academics in the sample to be positioned as agents capable of navigating their organisational context (Bourdieu, 1993). Bourdieu’s framework, together with neo-institutional theory, help to illustrate how mediators and opposers navigate university rules and ideas, while operationalisers enact these rules. This section discusses what the typology presented above means to the university and what effect it may have on it.

The university has set its own direction in the form of a strategic plan, which it intends should be the *“common language”* of the university (Svenningsen and Boxenbaum, 2015, p.15). However, although the administration expects all academics to function as operationalisers and maintain the institutional context, those in the study appeared to internalise this context in different ways. Norms are being set at the institutional level in the expectation that they will be enacted at the ground level by academics, but this is not always working, as seen from my data, which shows that the sample academics often bypassed the official university template, interpreting and reacting to the

institutional context in a range of ways. This agency was expressed in three ways: operationalising, mediating and opposing. Only the first of these responses indicated agreement with the university's strategic governance. The data suggests that the mediators and opposer were not "*cultural dopes*", "*institutional heroes*" (Powell and Colyvas, 2008, p.16) or absolute hostages of the university, but that they performed their daily practices in ways that were most practical and sensible to them.

Bourdieu's theory of practice suggests that my sample academics were able to choose from a range of strategic actions, depending on their position in the social structure. Unlike neo-institutional theory, Bourdieu's theory sees the institution as nothing but a system of dispositions; it can only "*become enacted and active*" if it "*like a garment or a house, finds someone who finds an interest in it, feels sufficiently at home in it to take it on*" (Bourdieu, 1981, p.309, cited in DiMaggio and Powell, 1991, p.26). It is therefore reasonable to argue that these three agentic responses grew out of the academics' world understanding and habitus, themselves formulated over their time with the university.

The mediators in the sample adopted a subtle agentic response: that is, not accepting the university context in its entirety but picking what was useful to or necessary for them. Rather than following institutional measures designed to raise teaching quality, the mediators drew on their own experience and judgement to decide which practices were worth adopting.

*"It is not always the case that the management knows best how teaching should be conducted. It is more about how much practice and exposure you have in different countries. I have had some experience in the UK and Norway, and this makes a big difference in how I teach. If those in the administration only look to the immediate environment, they are hardly in a position to raise teaching quality and to tell those who have travelled further than Lithuania's borders how*



*to teach. So it really depends on what the management comes up with and whether I am willing to use it in my teaching” (Academic N).*

These mediators were motivated to teach well not so much by the need for institutional acceptance as by a desire to meet their own high standards; in other words, they linked their teaching performance to their sense of self-worth (“*It is important to me what students think about me*”, Academic C). Unlike the opposers in the sample, who felt no strong need to produce any outputs at all, the mediators required their outputs to meet their own high standards. Where these outputs were accomplished in defiance of the institutional context, they felt further empowered and justified in elevating their own judgement and practices above those of the institution.

I would argue that although these mediators were challenging the university by not allowing themselves to become fully institutionalised, they were nevertheless highly useful in helping it “calibrate” its performance. For example, they were more protective of the quality of their research outputs than the operationalisers (who, in their concern to satisfy institutional requirements, tended to be willing to sacrifice quality for quantity). On the other hand, they were also more likely to ignore the institution’s research direction in favour of their own research interests and to mislead external funders (“*Any research interest can be tailored to suit the external funder’s priorities*”, Academic R) into resourcing their work. Those academics with a high level of credibility and a strong track record were particularly likely to take the initiative in this way, while those with low credibility (e.g. operationaliser Academic M) tended to follow the prescribed research agenda. These more assertive mediators could therefore have a potentially dramatic impact on the institution’s research direction, while giving little thought to how their own research might affect the institution as a whole. The findings extend neo-institutional theory by placing individual actors’ interests and practices at the heart of organisational life (rather than seeing them as taken-for-granted). In the case of mediators, they suggest that these

academics not only have sufficient social capital and power to negotiate institutional demands, but that some may even be able to introduce new norms and values.

The extent to which academics can affect an institution through their choice of action becomes especially clear when one looks at the case university's attempts to control and measure teaching and research quality. One reason why these attempts have largely failed is that when the control mechanisms were implemented, academics simply responded by decoupling their substantive work from the institution and reporting only those outcomes that aligned with its norms and logic. Any practices that were not aligned with the institutional context could go unnoticed, making it extremely difficult for the university to standardise activities according to pre-defined and commonly accepted parameters. This is part of the reason why neither the introduction of the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) (imported from the UK and designed to raise teaching quality) nor the 2015 RAE have produced the institution-wide push for excellence the management was hoping for.

Instead, mediators were left questioning the transparency (*"Not clear how transparent this evaluation process is"*, Academic N) and truthfulness (*"...this is the show-off time to put down everything you can think of about performance. Some things just have to be polished to look better than they actually are"*, Academic J) of evaluations, while opposers dismissed them outright as meaningless and without consequence (*"You just copy and paste from document to document"*, Academic B). Even operationalisers, the most supportive of the institutional context, questioned whether the evaluation and monitoring mechanisms encourage more in the academic community to pursue research and teaching excellence:

*"There are not many like me who do the job out of idealism; academics are interested only in their own purposes. Why reach for excellence in research and publish more quality articles, if others can only publish a few medium-level articles and still get to*

*spend the summer on a study visit in Australia?"*  
(Academic D)

It is interesting that evaluations were one of the few instances where operationalisers measured themselves against their academic colleagues. Arguably, the realisation that they might be the only group bothering to pursue teaching or research excellence could lead these operationalisers to reconsider their decision to routinise their actions in line with the institutional context.

Thus, there appeared to be a basic inconsistency between how the administration viewed its attempts to monitor, direct and evaluate academics (Bergeron et al., 2013), and how these attempts were regarded by academics themselves. Control and monitoring systems were behaviour-based (e.g. punctuality for lectures) and outcome-based (e.g. lecture quality, as evaluated by students), but the findings suggest that while the top management saw itself as giving a high level of guidance and running clear and objective evaluation processes, the academics saw the whole system as chaotic. The formal annual evaluation, which was supposed to cover academics' achievements, was considered sufficient to capture the extent to which the institution's logic was being enacted at ground level, but as the discussion above shows, they were easily subverted by academics, who could simply focus on those activities that best satisfied the administration's requirements. Bastedo (2005) argues that in order to make an effective strategic choice, one needs to have sufficient power. In this case, mediators used their agency to preserve their own autonomy while still meeting the university's expectations. It is ironic that despite being the cornerstone of the institution's strategic plan to raise teaching and research quality, the academics in my sample remained largely unaccountable. The institution controlled teaching quality only in the most superficial manner (judging it mainly from the course outline) and allowed symbolic accountability to take the place of true accountability.

The study results show that the case university's context (e.g. strategic plan,

policies) was not necessarily reflected in the actions and interpretations of the single opposer identified in the sample. This interviewee clearly illustrated how little actors in the faculty had to report to preserve a façade of legitimacy (MacLean and Behnam, 2010), and thus how difficult it was for the institution to be sure that change was happening at ground level. Bourdieu's (1988) observation that actors are surrounded by multi-dimensional struggles for legitimacy is particularly relevant in the university context, where individual academics must constantly strive for legitimacy (the view expressed by opposer Academic B), but my sample group was also concerned to maintain credibility and prestige (e.g. mediators such as Academic A, who used his power to outplay university norms).

The strategic plan was intended to convince academics to engage with the transition process, but most of the mediators in the sample questioned it as unrealistic and the opposer rejected it entirely. Only the operationalisers sought to engage with the university to make the transition successful. This particular agentic response should not be confused with blind obedience, however. My data suggests that these operationalisers may have been more predisposed than the other groups to adapt to the changes in institutional context because these changes aligned with their own orientation and career hopes – in other words, because of their habitus (*“Becoming a strong research university really motivates me as it will set the foundation for my career to be in one of the best universities in the region”*, Academic M).

Neo-institutionalists have made numerous pessimistic predictions regarding the effects of organisational change on academics in the HE sector, including loss of autonomy (Hunter, 2006) and the centralisation of power (Carvalho and Santiago, 2014). However, the findings illustrate that individual actors in the case study university were neither passive recipients nor active resisters of their changing institutional context. Their range of responses extended beyond a simple choice between ignorance, decoupling or compliance (Degn, 2016); rather, they were consciously translating and re-establishing the institutional context to suit their own agendas and goals. Their strategic

decisions to alter the rules of the institutional context were affecting the extent to which the university's expectations and norms were becoming institutionalised at ground level and allowing academics at this level to impose their own institutional agenda and to gain a hegemonic role in the organisation's functioning. This was evident in Academic A's assertion that he would not teach in Lithuanian, even though pressure was mounting on him to do so. The findings thus offer evidence to support Nettle's view that individual actors are "*agentic beings*" (Nettle, 2015, p. 15) whose practices are based not just on what the institutional context espouses, but also on what they as professionals and social beings require and want. They also support Reay's (2006) argument that individuals affect institutions through their purposeful actions. The central irony in this situation is that the success of any top-led attempt to change the institutional context ultimately depends not on the senior administration but on whether ground-level academics choose to support it; academics may have lost power over institutional decision-making, but my data illustrates that they still hold bottom-up power over how the system functions. In the case university, the decoupling exhibited by many academics suggests that it may struggle to achieve its professed aim of transforming itself into a leading research institution.

Institutions have to be understood in an actor-centred way. The institution must enforce its rules against divergent practices, but at the same time, it should not take its actors for granted. They must be well socialised into the institution, otherwise their experimentation with practices across institutional boundaries will speed up de-institutionalisation and contribute to the recreation of the institution from within. Since the findings indicate that funding/remuneration and self-esteem/reputation are key considerations for academics, it is reasonable to assume that university policies that address these two issues might succeed in making the difference. The challenge is to design motivating systems and tools that will encourage mediators and opposers to change their practices.

## 6.6. Using the typology

A major contribution of this research is the production of a typology linking academics' interpretation of and responses to the institutional context in which they are embedded. The aim of this typology, which was developed from interviews with academics in a public university, is not merely to ascribe labels to individual academics within this university, but to identify categories which might be generally applied to academics in different institutional contexts and personal circumstances.

Operationalisers are a key group in that they enact the institutional context in their daily practice. They may be in the early years of their career, or just starting as lecturers while completing their PhDs. They institutionalise the norms and rules espoused by the institution and carry out their work accordingly.

Mediators draw on their worldview to navigate through the institutional context and construct their role within it. At the field level, they may appear to be following institutionally imposed rules and norms to secure legitimacy, though closer inspection may reveal that this is not actually the case. Academic N, for example, explained that: *“The requirement to outline your teaching course is just annoying. I list random information which has nothing to do with what I actually teach in the classroom”*. They may even hold back in terms of practice if they see no benefit to be gained by aligning themselves with the institutional context. Mediators tend to have a long history with the institution and to be in a position of seniority, so are comfortable navigating the institutional field for themselves and testing new ideas. Their social position gives them the confidence to follow their own preferences in terms of research, and to justify the importance and plausibility of this research to others. Keenly individualistic, they rarely look to the field to understand what their daily practices look like from outside.

Finally, opposers diverge from the institutional norms in their daily work not because they are naturally contrary but because they feel disengaged from the

institution – they neither expect anything from it nor want to give anything in return. This disengagement most often manifests as superficial coupling with the institutional context. This was clearly illustrated by Academic B's assertion that he completes his evaluation simply by copy-pasting material from elsewhere. Opposers preserve their legitimacy by doing just enough to "tick the boxes", as explained by Academic B: "*I count how many articles I need to pass the minimum criteria. I write those articles and one more, just in case*".

Theoretically, this typology serves as a heuristic tool to explain how academics interpret and react within a complex environment. It condenses the large number of potentially relevant categories down to a manageable level and structures them to give a useful interpretive framework for understanding micro-organisational actors' role in creating, maintaining and transforming institutions. Chapter 5 discusses how academics in the case study university aligned their interpretations and daily practices with the institutional context, but viewed through the lens of the typology, it is clear that most of these academics were setting the agenda for their institution, rather than the other way around. In other words, they were generally ambitious individuals who expected the institutional context in which they were operating to align itself with their personal and/or professional interests.

The typology perspective highlights that how academics interpret the institutional context depends not only on exogenous elements but also their own social position within it. The typology serves to explain variation within institutions and may thus inform future studies in similar contexts. It may also be useful for management to see the range of ways in which a single academic can engage with a changing institution.

The typology is not without limitations, however. One critical limitation is its limited scope – the consequence of having only a relatively small number of interviewees. Furthermore, the limited sample also means that the opposers category has only one member. Consequently, the findings for this category should be treated with caution. Further research to explore this category in

more detail and test its validity would be valuable. Another shortcoming is the mutual exclusivity of the categories. A larger sample would probably exhibit greater diversity across the sample as a whole and within categories.

## **6.7. Conclusion**

The findings here suggest that we should be cautious of interpreting academics' perceptions and actions from the institutional perspective as these academics may in fact only be appearing to adapt to maintain legitimacy while having decoupled their actual practices. In such circumstances, no amount of monitoring or control mechanisms will be able to force substantive change at ground level. The findings arguably place a question mark over the conclusion drawn by previous organisational change researchers that academics are adapting to changes in their institutional context (Carvalho and Santiago, 2016). This insight advances our theoretical and empirical understanding of the interplay between individual actors and institution and of how academics contribute to shaping their institution. The next chapter concludes the dissertation by drawing all the findings together to address the research questions posed in Chapter 1.



**CHAPTER 7:**  
**CONCLUSION**

## **7.0. Introduction**

This final chapter aims at presenting the findings from this research and showing how they address the research aims and contribute to the growing body of knowledge in this area. It also reflects upon the implications of these findings for some of their potential users before finally summarising the study's limitations and suggesting further avenues for research.

### **7.1. Concluding discussion**

Ongoing shifts in the internal and external institutional contexts are making institutional change ever more necessary, but too often, attempts at reformation produce little in the way of actual alteration. Recognising that institutional change is a complex process, this study seeks to draw particular attention to the role played by micro-organisational actors and to show that not only does the university influence academics on the ground, but that these academics may in turn influence and even help transform their university. The role played by micro-level actors in the institutionalisation process has received scant attention in the literature, and none at all in the literature on transition countries, making this discussion of individual actors' practices and their potential effect on institutional change particularly important. In order to fulfil its aim of understanding how individual academics help contribute to shape the institutional context in which they operate, the study investigated a single case university, drawing on documentary evidence and semi-structured interviews with individual academics and senior members of the management. This data was then used to construct a typology offering a tentative illustration of how academic interpret and respond to their institutional context. Throughout, the study has been guided by the key research question: *How do individual actors contribute to shaping their institution?* This was broken down into three sub-questions:

1. How do academics interpret the institutional context in which they are embedded?

2. How do academics respond to the institutional context and university governance in their daily practices?
3. To what extent do academics' interpretations and practices affect their institution?

With regard to the first research question (*How do academics interpret the institutional context in which they are embedded?*) the findings suggest that the chief factor influencing academics' perceptions in the case university was the level of institutional tension they were experiencing. This tension had two key sources: concerns over competition and concerns over employment conditions. From the interviews it became apparent that academics were split between those who accepted the shift towards managerialism and its expectation of flexibility, and those who refused to adapt to the changing reality of the HE sector in general and the case institution in particular. The latter had developed an old versus new viewpoint in which the past institutional context was remembered as offering a high degree of job security, while the current environment was perceived as offering a consistent threat to their position as academics. Thus, the degree of institutional tension experienced seemed to depend on whether they saw the marketisation of higher education as an opportunity or a challenge. Furthermore, this tension directly influenced their sense of institutional identity. With the marketisation of higher education, academics are no longer tied to a single institution. This may reduce their sense of organisational identity and increase the likelihood of their being detached from its long-term strategy – this applies both to those who are already teaching in more than one university and those working in only one institution. The likelihood is that these academics will become increasingly indifferent towards their institution.

The academics in this sample interpreted their institutional context in one of three ways: *realisation* (they saw the institutional context as a space in which to perform), *instrumental* (they saw it as existing to solve pressing needs or challenges), or *coercive* (they saw the institutional context as counterproductive to good academic performance). Those in the realisation

group had internalised and supported the institutional norms, those in the instrumental group followed these norms only where they addressed their specific need or challenge (institutional or personal), and the single interviewee in the coercive group had completely detached himself and his everyday practice from the institutional context.

Academics in the realisation category displayed positive attitudes towards the university's strategic plan and its implementation. These academics were active supporters of the strategic shift and understood the necessity of change and the shift towards managerialism. However, they also saw themselves as having negligible power to influence this change. This was leading to a growing sense of disempowerment as they saw the institution as failing to collect their input on changes which will have profound implications for their institutional practices.

Academics in the instrumental category had a particular need or challenge (either institutional or personal) they wanted to see resolved by the institutional context. However, although they acknowledged the necessity of change in the institutional context, this did not necessarily translate into a perceived obligation to be involved in the decision-making process. Those who did express a willingness (and/or need) to be involved perceived themselves as having a valuable contribution to make to the overall institutional strategy. However, they were aware that the university will only engage with them in a limited manner.

The last category was the coercive category. This academic was openly opposed to the new strategy, its potential implementation and the overall institutional context. He exhibited a strong sense of intellectual superiority over the management of the institution and was openly decoupling from the new practices being imposed on him. This academic was also attempting to discourage other academics from engaging with a consultation process that he condemned as superficial and a waste of time. While possessing a sense of camaraderie with the academic community, this academic was a destructive force threatening the implementation of the new strategies.

The results highlight the complexity of a context in which academics may each have their own agenda, whether it be to pursue their own goals or to show loyalty and dedication by following the institution's script. They also lend empirical support to the argument that while managerialism and its associated logic and practices doubtless shape the institutional context (Etzkowitz et al., 2000; Marginson, 2000; Howells et al., 2014; Jongbloed, 2015), so too do individual actors.

With regard to the second research question (*How do academics respond to the institutional context and university governance in their daily practices?*), the findings suggest that academics' daily practices may not be as coherent as has been argued by organisational theorists (Pache and Santos, 2013). The study illustrates that even when micro-level actors are embedded in the same field, their varying interpretations of the institutional context mean that they behave differently in terms of their daily work. In this university, the extent and nature of the coupling between everyday practice and institutional context varied from academic to academic – from loose coupling to tight coupling and also alternative forms such as strategic and superficial coupling. Three types of response were identified: *routinising*, *rationalising* and *symbolic adoption*. Routinisers tightly coupled their actions with the expectations of the institutional context, whereas rationalisers were essentially opportunistic in their response. They were only partially aligned with the university, seeing it purely as a provider of resources and infrastructure and responding to its demands only where these suited their personal interest and commitments. This led to strategic coupling. Lastly, at the other end of the continuum, symbolic adopters chose to loosely couple with the institutional context, saying one thing and doing another (symbolic coupling).

The findings suggest that there is a link between how academics interpret the institutional context and how they enact it. By also factoring in personal characteristics such as hierarchical position, age and time within the institution, it was possible to develop a three-category typology

(*operationalisers, mediators and opposers*) to describe how academics interpret and react to the institutional context.

Operationalisers in the case study university were tightly coupled with their institutional context, displaying a routinising view towards institutional practices. They were highly supportive of management and the practices it has introduced and were generally better informed about and more willing to implement these practices in their teaching than the other groups. Active supporters of the strategic shift, they saw change as a necessary process in an environment of marketisation, though it may be that their willingness to follow the institutional logic was actually borne out of fears over job security rather than ideological commitment. In either case, the institution has shown little inclination to reward their support, and they were beginning to question how much influence middle managers – whom they saw as their representatives in the change process – actually have. This was leading to a growing sense of disempowerment and increasing the risk that they will reduce their coupling or even decouple entirely as time goes by.

Mediators were essentially opportunistic in their response to the institutional context. They were only partially aligned with the university, seeing it purely as a provider of resources and infrastructure and responding to its demands only where these suited their personal interest and commitments, career goals and institutional logics. Bourdieu's habitus is of essential importance here as their relationship with the institutional hierarchy depended on a mixture of personal experiences, expectations and selective compliances with the power structure. While operationalisers were guided by a genuine outward motivation towards the betterment of the institution as a whole, mediators were guided by an inward motivation to strengthen their position in the institution, which in turn gave them even more freedom to decide when and how to couple with it. The mediators rationalised how they would respond to the institutional context, coupling strategically with practices they considered beneficial and ignoring those they perceived as invasive to their work. They were indifferent towards institutional expectations and considered themselves

beyond its control in terms of their practice; the interviewed academics noted that senior management was too remote and unable to enforce correct behaviour even from department managers. Mediators did not just place themselves outside the institutional context, they saw themselves as superior to it – their personal knowledge was enough to guarantee the quality of the work, while the institution was unable to do the same.

The single opposer was critical of his institutional context, particularly governance, to the point that he positioned himself as its opponent. This antagonistic relationship fuelled his loose coupling. This interviewee was entirely dismissive of middle managers' attempts to monitor or enforce teaching practices and regarded research control measures as practically non-existent. The evaluation procedures, meanwhile, were perceived as being of no benefit to academics, only serving to take up time while having no actual impact on conduct. He was the most resistant to enacting the institutional context, with his strongest criticism being reserved for practices he saw as mere box-ticking exercises. Since he was highly vocal in his disagreement with the administration and the institutional context, there is a risk that he may end up persuading other academics to share his views.

In posing the last research question (*To what extent do academics' interpretations and practices affect their institution?*), this study breaks new ground by putting individual actors at the centre of institutional theory. In the case study university, although the university's senior management held the decision-making power, it was the micro-level actors who were the most crucial in ensuring that the university's objectives were implemented successfully.

The operationalisers appeared to have the most obvious effect through their active support for the institution's formal and informal demands and their willingness to introduce new institutional practices into the academic community. Their actions were directly linked to the administration's success indicators. The agency of this group thus appeared to be instrumental to the preservation of the university's institutional structures and norms and its

ability to implement out its formal strategic initiatives.

The mediators were similarly active agents in that they chose their own strategies for when and how to engage with their institutional context, though the extent to which they affected this context largely depended on how far it aligned with their personal interests; where the institution aligned closely with the mediator's research and teaching interests, it was more likely to experience direct benefit from their practices, while conversely, if there was little overlap, the mediator was more likely to influence the institution from the bottom up by their divergent actions (e.g. Academic F's choice to give priority to teaching over research despite the university's strategy to base teaching on research). More positively, the data suggests that although opportunistic, mediators with high credibility and extensive professional networks can bring new opportunities into their institution, though they are just as likely to withdraw their support and impede policy implementation if the institutional context and governance do not match their own interests.

Like the mediators in the sample, the opposer was willing to subvert the rules and "*intentionally have an effect on the social world*" (Batilana, 2006, p.657), in this case by engaging in symbolic coupling. He was also an active agent in that he had made the choice to disengage from the institutional context and perform symbolic actions designed to maintain his legitimacy within the faculty while leaving his actual practice largely unchanged. This kind of agency has the potential to affect the institutional context in the sense that it can become very difficult to distinguish genuine practices from symbolic ones. It might also pose a risk if the opposer puts more energy into swaying other academics towards his worldview than in engaging with the institutional context. This is in direct contrast to operationalisers, who tend to want to tighten the coupling of other academics.

The findings thus suggest that individual actors have the potential to affect HEIs by deciding for themselves the extent to which they couple with the institutional context. Their strategic decisions to alter the rules of this context may influence the extent to which these rules and norms become



institutionalised at ground level. Where academics choose not to couple with this environment, they may create new practices (reproducing the environment in their own way), or they may maintain surface legitimacy while decoupling their core practices entirely. Both forms of mediating and opposing agency translate institutional regulations and rules into elements reproduced by academics. In this way, those at the micro level can gain the power to impose their own rules and institutional agenda on the institutional context.

The findings of this research support the idea that the various institutional pressures existing in the university environment provide space for a wide range of responses by micro-level actors (Bromley, Hwang and Powell, 2012; Powell and Colyvas, 2008). Most important to this research's aims, the findings suggest that individual actors actively choose the extent and nature of their coupling, and that micro-processes play a major role in determining whether a practice becomes a routine part of organisational life or remains largely window-dressing. The finding that these individual responses can affect how practices are enacted within the organisation implies that institutions are built from the ground level up, through daily actions and strategising, rather than from the top down, as held by neo-institutional theory (though it is beyond the scope of this study to understand the consequences of these actions).

This emphasis on the role played by individual actors in institutional construction is especially important for HEIs in transition countries that are facing the twin challenges of keeping up with the market and playing catch-up with the West. Universities keen to innovate and reform must not overlook the central role academics play in the modernisation game, or forget that these academics look to institutional strategies for support and direction. The findings suggest that academics can, by choosing to engage in symbolic or strategic coupling, potentially influence or even modify institutional practice, and that only operationalisers follow the managerial script out of institutional loyalty. Furthermore, those academics who do not completely fall into line

with the institutional logic may be having an important (and overlooked) effect on change processes. Their action or inaction in certain areas of institutional life can have impacts which reverberate upwards through the institutional hierarchy, profoundly affecting the extent to which the management perceives its strategies as successful.

## **7.2. Impact**

### ***7.2.1. Contribution to knowledge***

This research is important because it adds to our knowledge of institutional change, giving a better understanding of how individual academics might be consciously deciding the extent to which they will maintain (operationalisers) or disrupt (mediators and opposers) the institutional context.

From a theoretical perspective, the findings highlight the importance of the micro level, not just for institutionalists and organisational change scholars, but for higher education management teams considering embarking on a programme of institutional change. They demonstrate the need to understand the role played by academics inside the university, and the challenge facing organisations wishing to impose top-down change; that is, that while the top administration may set the official standards and direction for the institution, the institutionalisation process is likely to be shaped unofficially by academics. Furthermore, the extent to which these academics are willing to couple with the institutional context may depend on factors such as their sense of autonomy, how they perceive power relations within the university and their place in the hierarchy.

In hypothesising that academics' decoupling affects institutions from the bottom up through its impact on institutional practice, the study places individual actors at the centre of institutional change. While previous literature on institutional change has concentrated on the roles and actions of institutional leaders as individuals, or the managerial staff as a whole (Naylor, 2001; Whitchurch, 2006; Meister-Scheytt, 2007; Larsen, 2007; Marginson,

2000), the role of individual actors at the bottom level of the institution has been neglected. Instead, academics have been relegated to passive roles and the focus has been on their attitudes towards change (Locke and Bennion, 2010), the effects of change on the content and direction of academic research (Deem, 2008) and the relationship between managerial input and academic output (Teelken, 2015).

### ***7.2.2. Practical implications***

Although this research provides explanations of top-bottom relationships within only one institution, this institution is in a context – Lithuania – about which little is known. It provides an interesting contrast to the findings from other western countries, such as Denmark, where university transformation has been more successful, and adds to our understanding of how individual actors influence HEI change processes in different settings.

Although the findings are specific to one institution, they nevertheless highlight universally important issues. By sharing the perceptions and experiences of academics seeking ways to navigate the institutional context and translate institutional policies and guidance into daily practice, the study contributes to our understanding of the challenges facing all HEIs and may help drive the change agenda forward. It echoes Etzion and Ferraro (2010) in suggesting that academics' sense of disconnection from the institutional context can only be addressed by creating an inclusive structure and encouraging their *de facto* participation. University and faculty administrations have to be more careful in how they treat and involve academics, as these academics appear to be actively constructing their own space within the institution and deciding what kind of university they want it to be, what kind of work they want to do and if they want to engage in research at all. The findings suggest that these decisions are not only personal, but that they may be deeply connected to the larger institutional agenda.

### 7.3. Limitations

Since the aim of the investigation was to explore in-depth academics' perceptions and daily activities as a response to the institutional context (and time and resources were limited), the single case study was the chosen methodology. While this allowed full immersion into a single institution, including interviews with respondents from all levels of the hierarchy, the analysis focuses primarily on micro-level interpretations and actions; meso-level results are included only to support these findings. This undeniably limits the generalisability of the results, both for higher education institutions in general and even for Lithuania in particular. However, Merriam (2009) suggests that:

*“Every study, every case, every situation is theoretically an example of something else. The general lies in the particular; that is, what we learn in a particular situation we can transfer or generalize to similar situations subsequently encountered”* (p.225).

In Lithuania, similar reactions might be expected from academics in all the major and minor higher education providers, so the results from this single case may indeed be useful to other institutions with similar characteristics or in similar contexts.

There are some methodological limitations to the study, the first being the sample size. Having said this, reliability was strengthened by the fact that fully half of the staff in the chosen department were interviewed. Moreover, the complexities of the phenomena being studied (e.g. detecting the difference between symbolic and substantive actions) made an in-depth investigation, and detailed interviews, essential. A larger sample would have rendered this level of data-gathering impossible in the available time. Second, as highlighted above, the study focuses mainly on the micro level, with the institutional level only being used to situate individual actors' responses in the holistic institutional picture.

The lack of space given to the top management perspective may have limited the insights possible in the analysis. If time had allowed, it would have been useful to also include senate members to get a more comprehensive picture of the top management in the institution; instead, documentary analysis was employed to strengthen the institutional perspective (see Chapter 4 for Methodology).

The qualitative nature of the research may also be seen as another limitation. The study relies on the subjective interpretations and meanings constructed by individual respondents – and their truthfulness in the interviews. As detailed in the Methodology chapter, some steps were taken to confirm the trustworthiness of the data; for example, the inclusion of respondents from the same department allowed some data to be cross-checked. However, this was only really possible for events or facts, not for individual perceptions and practices. Finally, the research may have been influenced by the mindset of the respondents. The topic of institutional change produced strong emotional reactions on the issues which were important to them, but this actually made it easier to identify the areas where strategic coupling is taking or has taken root, since high emotion made them more inclined to be open about their actions.

#### **7.4. Future research avenues**

Notwithstanding these limitations, this research is particularly relevant for higher education governance in general and universities undergoing strategic change processes in particular. A top-down approach is widely considered to be a pre-condition for successful transformation, with the result that the role played by ground-level organisational actors is severely underestimated. This study's results make a valuable contribution to this debate, but there is scope for further investigation in a number of areas, including meso-level perspectives.

From the theoretical and empirical findings it is clear that further investigation is required into how the micro-macro intersection shapes the

institutional field. Future multi-case studies might not only shed more light on the institutional factors affecting academics' decisions to translate, maintain or disrupt the institution on the ground level (and what combination of factors lead to specific outcomes in terms of their daily practices), but also allow more detailed investigation of the perspectives of department heads, administrative staff and top management. Although the study involved analysis of documentary sources and a few interviews with members of the university management, further explanation is required of how the management influences academics' everyday practices.

Future studies could also attempt to further differentiate the three developed categories of operationalisers, mediators and opposers. While these categories are broadly indicative of how academics perceive and respond to the institutional context, the typology should be tested in other institutions, both public and private. Similarly, future research could expand on the role age, length of service and academic focus play in influencing how academics enact the institutional context. Although these factors are taken into consideration in this study, a broader sample is needed to identify any clear trends or correlations between certain factors and certain categories that could be developed in the future.

This study does not seek to explore what actual outcomes result from the divergent actions of academics. It would be interesting to trace how each of these actions ratchet up through the institution and to compare what micro-level actors actually do with what the administration of the university believes they do. Finally, it would also be interesting to follow up on the case study university to discover how it is progressing with its new strategic plan and whether academics are still responding to it in the same way – that is, whether they are coupling with the institutional context to a greater or lesser degree than they were when the fieldwork for this study was being conducted.

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix A: Ethical clearance and consent forms

#### *A1: Participant information form*

Dear .....

I am contacting you to ask if you would consider taking part in my research. I am currently studying for a Doctorate in Education (EdD) at the University of East Anglia. The focus of my study is on how senior managers and academics are responding to the changing educational and organisational environment. I hope to explore how you, as an academic or senior manager, have adapted to that change. I am interested in understanding how you make sense of and are dealing with the various new policies and institutional governance changes. Participation may provide an opportunity for you to reflect on your own practices and the principles, beliefs and habits that guide your actions.

As part of my research, I would like to interview you. The interview will last no longer than one hour and you are welcome to see the interview questions beforehand if you wish. With your consent, I will tape the interview so that I may listen to what you are telling me rather than be distracted by taking notes. I will personally transcribe the interview recording and no one else will have access to the data. Should you wish, a transcript of your interview will be made available to you prior to analysis and your right to amend it will be respected. If you are uncomfortable with any of the information from your interview being used in the research, I will do my best to address your concerns. Participation is entirely voluntary and you may withdraw from the research at any time.

Please be assured that all the data collected in this study will remain confidential. The institutions and individuals involved will remain

anonymous and all data will be stored in a secure, password-protected file. My research has gone through the University of East Anglia's ethical approval procedure for doctoral research. I would like to stress that this is not an evaluation of you or your institution and that no information will be used to judge your work or your performance in any way. In the unlikely event that you have any complaint in relation to this study, please feel free to contact Professor Terry Haydn, Deputy Head of the School of Education and Lifelong Learning at the University of East Anglia (t.haydn@uea.ac.uk).

I would greatly value your contribution to my research. If you are willing to participate, or would like any further information, please reply to me at reda.nausedaite@uea.ac.uk. I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

Reda Nausedaite

Research Student

University of East Anglia

***A2: Participant information form***

**Full title of project:** Institutional Governance: The Causes and Consequences of Educational and Organisational Change

**Name, position and contact address of researcher:**

Reda Nausedaite (researcher)

School of Education and Lifelong Learning

University of East Anglia

Norwich Research Park

Norwich NR47TJ

United Kingdom

[reda.nausedaite@uea.ac.uk](mailto:reda.nausedaite@uea.ac.uk)

Please initial box

I confirm that I have read and understood the information sheet for the  
above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to  
withdraw at any time, without giving a reason.

I agree to take part in the above study.

I agree to the use of anonymised quotes in publications.

I agree to the interview being audio recorded.

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Name of Participant  
Signature

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Date

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Name of Researcher  
Signature

---

Date

If you agree to participate in this study, please complete and return the form by email to the researcher, Reda Nausedaite, at [reda.nausedaite@uea.ac.uk](mailto:reda.nausedaite@uea.ac.uk).

If you have any complaint in relation to this study, please contact Dr Nalini Boodhoo, Head of the School of Education and Lifelong Learning at the University of East Anglia, at [N.Boodhoo@uea.ac.uk](mailto:N.Boodhoo@uea.ac.uk).

## **Appendix B: Examples of interview guide**

### ***B1: Interview guide for managers (university level)***

#### **Theme: General**

1. How long have you been a member of this institution?
2. How would you characterise this university? How does this university profile itself? (probe: research, comprehensive)
3. What is (your reading of) the university's vision? What are the most striking strategic goals of this university?

The next set of questions concern university transition and academics' role within it.

#### **Theme: Strategic plan**

1. What are the main changes the university has experienced over the last few years?
2. Why is the university setting a new strategic plan?
3. How does the university define its own strategic priorities? Who is involved in this process?
4. How can you as the institutional leader/manager influence policies, priorities, strategies?
5. Can academics of this university influence university policies and strategy? How?
6. Do you feel the policies and strategies are having an impact in the university? Are they making a difference at ground level?

7. What kinds of initiatives or instruments do you use in this university to achieve the goals in the strategic plan?

[Probe:

- Change in policies
- Creating specific research conditions for certain groups
- Rewarding certain kinds of research outputs
- Using performance-based contracts (with faculties, research groups or institutes)
- Monitoring]

8. How have you involved faculties and individual academics in the discussion of the new strategic plan? Are you aware of any discussion among academics?

9. How have individual academics reacted to the new strategic plan?

10. How do you evaluate the extent to which a specific element from the strategic plan has been implemented or achieved the expected effect at ground level?

11. What are the biggest challenges at faculty level to making changes happen?

12. How would you like to see the new strategic plan change the university and faculty?

The next set of questions shift the focus more specifically onto research, teaching and evaluation policies and practices at faculty and academic levels.

**Theme: Research**

1. How do the university and faculty guide academics' research activities and what are the expectations, rules and procedures in terms of:
- Research quality
  - Publishing requirements
  - Research internationalisation
  - Research projects?

[probe: documents, rules, policies)

2. How do academics go about implementing these regulations in their daily practice?
  - Research quality
  - Publishing requirements
  - Research internationalisation
  - Research projects
  
3. How do you evaluate and monitor whether academics are meeting faculty/university expectations in terms of:
  - Research quality
  - Publishing requirements
  - Research internationalisation
  - Research projects?

**Theme: Teaching**

1. How do the university and faculty regulate academics' teaching activities and what are the expectations, rules and procedures in terms of:
  - Workload
  - Teaching internationalisation
  - Teaching quality
  - E-studies? [probe: documents, rules, policies)
  
2. How do academics go about implementing these regulations in their daily practice?
  - Workload
  - Teaching internationalisation
  - Teaching quality
  - E-studies
  
3. How do you evaluate and monitor whether academics are meeting faculty/university expectations in terms of:
  - Workload
  - Teaching internationalisation
  - Teaching quality
  - E-studies?

**Theme: Evaluation**

1. How does the faculty and/or university evaluate and monitor academics' performance? What are the strengths and weaknesses of the current mechanism?
2. How do you inform academics about the evaluation process? [probe: official guidelines, documents, etc.]
3. What are the most challenging aspects of the evaluation process? Can you please give an example?
4. Have you experienced any tensions in regard to the evaluation process?
5. In your opinion, do these reports always contain genuine information? [probe: can you please give an example?]
6. How does the faculty/university use the provided data? Does the faculty cross-check that the information provided is genuine?

Thank you for this interview!

***B2: Interview guide for academics (individual level)*****General questions:**

1. How long have you worked in academia?
2. How long have you been at this faculty and university? Full-time/Part-time?
3. What are your major responsibilities in the faculty?
4. Can you split your work among teaching, research and administrative tasks in %?
5. What major changes have happened in your working environment/faculty [probe: policies, rules] since you have been working here?
6. What is your opinion about those changes – were they all necessary? [probe: ask to elaborate with examples why yes or no?]



7. What implications have these changes had for you and your work?

I would like to ask you to reflect on the university's transition (e.g. launch of new strategic plan) and how your work has been affected and changed due to this transition.

**Theme: Strategic plan changes**

1. Tell me about the new strategic plan of the university: how did you learn about it?
2. Why do you think the university wants to make a strategic move?
3. Have you been involved in any consultation about the strategic plan? Do you know if there has been any discussion about it amongst the faculty?
4. What is (your reading of) the university's vision? [probe: to become a world leading university among QS500]
5. What does the implementation of this vision mean to you and your work? [probe: longer working hours, resistance, creativity]
6. What are some of the challenges associated with this transition, for you as an academic? Have you had to change how you carry out your work?
7. How are faculty managers facilitating this change? [probe: communication, clear guidance] Do you feel supported?
8. How are you managing your work as a faculty member during the transition? (probe: strategies; efficiency, harder, faster...)
9. Do you feel that faculty members such as yourself have a particular role to play in this transition? Does anyone else?
10. Have you seen or experienced any tensions arising from the university's transition? (e.g. faculty vs. admin)

I would like to ask you to consider your institution's context and consider its consequences for your teaching, research and evaluation activities.

**Theme: Teaching**

1. How does the institution guide your teaching activities in terms of :
  - Workload
  - Teaching internationalisation
  - Teaching quality
  - E-studies?
  
2. How do you see these regulations?  
 [probe: additional administrative burden, restricted activities]
  
3. How have the regulations changed since you started working?
  
4. Could you please share examples of how you go about meeting these regulations and expectations in your daily teaching activities in terms of [probe: accept, change, refuse?]
  - Workload
  - Teaching internationalisation
  - Teaching quality
  - E-studies?
  
5. What does the management expect from you in terms of teaching?  
 How does management guide your teaching activities? [probe: recent management request to report on what you teach and provide slides]  
 How do you respond to this in your work?
  
6. What is the biggest challenge in your teaching in terms of
  - Workload
  - Teaching internationalisation
  - Teaching quality
  - E-studies?
 Could you please give examples of these challenges and how you respond to them?
  
7. Is the teaching work that you are expected to do different from what you would like to do if allowed? [probe: what would you do differently?] Why?
  
8. Do you feel that as an academic you have a particular role to play in shaping the institution's direction in terms of teaching? [probe: active community, shared decision making, participating in committee meetings] Why?
  
9. Have you seen or experienced any tensions arising from the institution's rules on teaching? (e.g. faculty vs. admin)

10. To whom are you accountable for your teaching activities and achievements? How do you report these?

**Theme: Research**

1. How does the institution guide your research activities in terms of
  - Research quality
  - Research publishing
  - Research internationalisation
  - Research projects?
2. How do you see these regulations?  
[probe: additional administrative burden, restricted activities]
3. How have the regulations changed since you started working?
4. Could you please share examples of how you go about meeting these regulations and expectations in your daily research activities in terms of [probe: accept, change, refuse?]
  - Research quality
  - Research publishing
  - Research internationalisation
  - Research projects?
5. What does the management expect from you in terms of research?  
How does management guide your research? [probe: recent management request to report on what your research and provide slides]  
How do you respond to this in your work?
6. What is the biggest challenge for you in terms of
  - Research quality
  - Research publishing
  - Research internationalisation
  - Research projects?Could you please give an example of the challenges and how you respond to it?
7. Is the research that you are expected to do different from what you would like to do if allowed? [probe: what would you do differently?]  
Why?
8. Do you feel that as an academic you have a particular role to play in

shaping the institution's context in terms of research? [probe: active community, shared decision making, participating in committee meetings] Why?

9. Have you seen or experienced any tensions arising from the institution's rules on research activities? (e.g. faculty vs. admin)
10. To whom are you accountable for your research activities and achievements? How do you report these?

**Theme: Evaluation**

1. How does the faculty and/or university monitor and evaluate your performance? What are the strengths and weaknesses of the current mechanism?
2. How are you informed about this evaluation process? [probe: official guidelines, documents, etc.]
3. What is the most challenging aspect of these evaluations? Can you please give an example?
4. Have you experienced any tensions in regard to the evaluation process?
5. In your opinion, do the reports always contain genuine information? [probe: can you please give an example?]
6. How does the faculty/university use the provided data? Does it cross-check that the information provided is genuine?

Thank you for this interview!

**Appendix C: List of interviewees**

<b>Identification</b>	<b>Position</b>	<b>Seniority</b>	<b>Time with institution (range)*</b>	<b>Age (range)*</b>
Senior Manager	Management	Senior	15-20	50-70
Middle Manager	Management	Senior	10-15	40-50
Academic A	Academic	Senior	10-15	30-40
Academic B	Academic	Senior	15-20	50-70
Academic C	Academic	Senior	5-10	30-40
Academic D	Academic	Senior	1-5	30-40
Academic F	Academic	Senior	5-10	40-50
Academic J	Academic	Senior	10-15	50-70
Academic M	Academic	Junior	1-5	30-40
Academic N	Academic	Junior	1-5	30-40
Academic R	Academic	Senior	15-20	50-70

\* To protect the anonymity of respondents, age and time with the institution are given as ranges rather than exact numbers

## Appendix D: Extracts from interview transcripts

This appendix provides extracts from the interview transcripts. The first interview was with a manager, while the second was with an academic.

### D1. Extract from interview with manager

Lithuanian	English
<p><i>Kokie yra pagrindiniai pokyčiai, kuriuos Universitetas patyrė per pastaruosius metus?</i></p> <p>Pagrindinės kryptys liko, kurios buvo prieš tris metus, gal kažkiek pakito. Tai yra novatoriškas mokslas išliko esminis. Mokslas kaip kurių akademikų daromas, kad užimt pareigas. Antra, lanksčios ir tarptautinės studijos, taip pat partnerystė ir įvaizdis. Daugelyje universitetų yra tik užsienio partnerysčių atsakingi žmonės, o Universitetas turės ir vidaus prorektorių partnerystėms. Pasirašinėjam sutartis su verslo konfederacijom. Po to yra stiprinama bendruomenės bendra kryptis – aktyvi ir atsakinga bendruomenė. Strateginiuose padaliniuose vyksta masė renginių. Tai pat universitetas neturėjo personalo vadybos, neturim rekrutavimo sistemos. Ir efektyvus valdymas susijęs su organizacijos higienos dalykais, kaip viešieji pirkimai ir panašiai. Tampa svarbu demotyvuojančių veiksnių šalinimas. Finansu valdymo daug darbų. Skausmingiausia yra akademinėi bendruomenei struktūros keitimas. Struktūra nepritaikyta strateginiam valdymui. Reikia sumažinti padalinių skaičių, nes dabar yra 16, o turėtų būti apie 7, nes neįmanoma sinchronizuoti visų veiklų dabar. Vyksta svarstymai: pasamdyti ekspertai iš užsienio vystyti veiklas ir efektyvinti universitetą (vienas iš</p>	<p><i>What are the main changes the university has experienced over the last few years?</i></p> <p>The main direction has remained the same as it was three years ago, with perhaps slight changes. That is, innovative research has remained the focal point. Some academics do research mainly as a means to sustain their job position. Second, flexible and international studies, also partnerships and image. Many universities have people who are responsible only for international partnerships, but our university will have a vice-rector for internal partnerships. We are signing contracts with business groups. After that, there is the general mission to strengthen the university community – make it an active and responsible community. There is a massive amount of events happening in our strategic teams right now. The university in the past lacked human resource management; we currently do not have a recruitment system. And effective management is related to organisational wellbeing; for example, public procurements and the like. Eliminating de-motivating factors is important. A lot of work has been put into finance management. The most painful aspect for the academic community is the change in the university's structure. Our structure is not designed for strategic management. We have to reduce the number of units, because currently we have</p>

rektorių, konsultuojančių, kuris vakarino rytų Vokietijos universitetą). Ataskaita prieinama online. Kitą savaitę turim pokyčių portfolio specialistą iš Vokietijos. Siekiam mažiau resursų, bet didesnio rezultato. Vyksta dabar pats strategavimas. Matysim, koks bus rezultatas. Vyksta strategijos konkretinimas ir įgyvendinimas. Taryba nori strategijos įgyveninimo plano su rodikliais, ko mes neturėjom, su atsakingais asmenim ir vadybine schema.

*Kodėl universitetas ruošia naują strateginį planą?*

Universitetas yra comprehensive universitetas. Pagal visus kanonus ir misiją atitinka Magna carta Bolonijos deklaraciją. Misija yra ruošti mąstančius žmones, jie turi būti susipažinę su mokslu ir atsakomybe visuomenei ne tik esamai, bet ir ateities. Todel neišvengiamai žmonės studijų metu turi turėt sąlytį su mokslu, nes tik tokie žmonės ateityje galės tuos iššūkius atremti, kurių nežinom dar. Turim rengti ne tik, kad šios dienos poreikius tenkintų, bet ir priimtų iššūkius apie kuriuos nežinom. Dėl to turi būti minties įvairovė. Nežinom, kokiom kategorijom mąstysim už 20 metų. Tas mąstymas turi būti įvairus, ne tik technologinis, reikia ir humanitarinio, ir socialinio ir bio medicininio. Ta laisvė labai svarbi prieš visą biurokratiją. Laisvai mąstančio

sixteen and we should have around seven, because right now it is impossible to synchronise all the activities between units. We are undergoing discussions: we have hired international experts whose job it is to develop plans to increase the effectiveness of the university (one of the consultants is a rector who helped westernise an East German university). The experts' report is available online. A German expert on change will be arriving next week. We are aiming to get bigger results with fewer resources. Right now, we are strategising. We will see what the result will be. Making the strategy more concrete and implementing it. The council wants a plan for implementing the strategy with indicators, which we previously did not have, with people appointed to positions of responsibility and a management scheme.

*Why is the university setting a new strategic plan?*

The university is a comprehensive university. Its mission and principles are in accordance with the Magna Carta of the Bologna Declaration. The mission is to prepare thinking people; they have to be knowledgeable in science and have social responsibility not just for current, but also for future society. That is why during their studies, they will come into contact with research, because only then will they be able to meet the challenges of the future – challenges we are not even aware of yet. We have to prepare them so that they are able to meet the demands of today and able to tackle the issues we have not foreseen. That is why there has to be a diversity of thought. We do not know how we will think in 20 years. The way in which we think has to be diverse, not just technological, but we have to have humanities and social, bio- and medical

<p>žmogaus parengimas, kad galėtų veikti ateityje sąlygose, kurių mes dar nežinome.</p> <p>Vienas svarbiausių dalykų yra strateginis valdymas. Turim tarybą, kuri sukurta pagal strateginio valdymo kanonus. T.y. vaudojantis interesų dalininkų analize buvo identifikuoti išoriniai ir vidiniai interesai. Buvo atskiras rinkimas žmonių, identifikuojamų pagal atskirus požymius. Akcentavau strateginio valdymo nuoseklų įvedimą. Ir mes šiandien turim strategiją, kuri buvo prieš 3 metus, kuri dabar tikslinama ir rengiamas įgyvendinimas. Viziją mes turim, ji aiškiai suformuluota – t.y. stoti į vieną gretą su pirmaujančiais universitetais. Vizija turi ‘vežti’. Tai mes ją turim. O misija suformuluota statute, aš tiksliai nepamenu, galima pasiskaityt.</p> <p><i>Kaip universitetas apibrėžia savo strateginius prioritetus? Kas įtrauktas į šį procesą?</i></p> <p>Strategija buvo formuojama pirmiausiai su vadovais - padalinių vadais (dekanais), daroma 2 dienų sesija, moderuojamas renginys. Ir būtent siūlomos idėjos, jos dėliojamos, atrenkamos pagal tai, ar tai tiesiogiai veda į mūsų viziją. Yra filtruojama pasamdytų specialistų ir taip konsensuso būdu laikomės nuomonės, kad strategija turi būti suprantama bendruomenės nariams. Antras etapas – vyksta padaliniuose. Jie turi sukurti savo planus, kur dekanas pagrindinis darbas tampa strategijos įgyvendinimas.</p>	<p>sciences. This freedom is very important against all the bureaucracy. The preparation of free-thinking individuals who will be able to work under conditions we can't anticipate.</p> <p>One of the most important things is strategic management. We have the council, which was established under the principles of strategic management. That is, by analysing the interests of stakeholders we were able to identify internal and external interests. We chose people based on the different criteria we identified. I emphasised the implementation of strategic management. And today we have a strategy, which was established three years ago and is currently undergoing revision and we are preparing to implement it. We have a vision, it is clearly formulated – in other words, it is to become one of the leading universities. The vision has to “drive” the university. We have that. And the mission is formulated in the statute. I don't recall it fully, you can look it up.</p> <p><i>How does the university define its own strategic priorities? Who is involved in this process?</i></p> <p>The strategy was formed firstly by the leaders of the faculties (deans) in a two-day strategic session which was moderated. This allowed various ideas to be offered, considered and selected, depending on whether they were in line with our vision. We have hired specialists to filter these ideas, and we are striving for a consensus, so that the strategy is understood by all members of the community. The second stage happens inside the units. They have to prepare their own plans, and the main objective for the dean is to implement the strategy.</p> <p>The council has to keep track of the dean's progress and provide its conclusions to the</p>
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<p>Taryba dekanı veiklą turi sekti, teikt išvadą rektoriui. Įvedam labai griežtą gaujos ar piramidinės valdymo sistemos įgyvendinimą.</p> <p>Dekanas pavaldus rektoriui strateginiu požiūriu.</p> <p>Visa schema atsakomybių išdėliojimo strateginio įgyvendinimo lygmenyje. Kiekvienas narys turėtų turėti savo įsipareigojimus. Bendruomenės prorektorius dirba nuolatos, nes būtent be bedruomenės įtraukimo įsakymais nesidaro is viršaus tokie dalykai. Išspaudžiama iš žmonių, kas norima, bet jie ima suprast, kad jie turi tai daryt, nes kitaip neįmanoma.</p> <p><i>Ar gali akademikai daryti įtaką universiteto politikai ir strategijai? Kaip?</i></p> <p>Nėra vidinės komunikacijos. Įkūrėm tinklalapį su skiltim Universitetas keičiasi, ir bendruomenės narys mato, kas vyksta pokyčių srityje ir gali tiekti siūlymus. Bet čia yra kultūriniai akmenys, lietuvis yra įlindęs į uždara ratą, mano, kad valdžia turi padaryt, tačiau kita vertus jis skeptiškai nusiteikęs valdžios atžvilgiu. Jie turi daryt – aš čia ne prie ko. O jie neįgalūs ir nieko nepadarys. Ir traukt galima tik pozityviom injekcijom, kad tikrai galima padaryt kažką. Tada ir aš įsitrauksiu. Dabar ruošiam sesijas strategines, kas labai pasiteisina. O tie pletkai ir nuogirdos sumažėja. Suformulavom jiems dvi žinias, vieną gerą, kitą- blogą. Bus daug pokyčių, bet reikės patiems daryt. Šį rudenį 70 žmonių – 5 delegacijos po 12-15 žmonių važiuoja į vakarų universitetus modernių studijų organizavimo sistemos, universiteto valdymo pasimokyti. Siunčiam skautus 5 maršrutais po 5</p>	<p>rector. We are implementing a strict pyramid management system.</p> <p>From a strategic perspective, the dean is subordinate to the rector.</p> <p>The scheme for responsibilities is reflected on the strategic implementation level. Every member has to have their responsibilities. The vice-rector is working on community inclusiveness, because without the inclusion of the community these things can't happen through the normal method of passing orders in a top-down manner. We squeeze everything out of people, but they start to understand that they have to do it, because otherwise this would be impossible.</p> <p><i>Can academics of this university influence university policies and strategy? How?</i></p> <p>There is no internal communication. We have provided a section on the website "University changes" where members of the community can see what is happening in terms of change and they can provide their suggestions. But there are these cultural obstacles, because Lithuanians are stuck in a closed loop – they think that the leadership is responsible for doing everything, but they are sceptical about the leadership's actions. They think, "They have to do it – I am not responsible for this." They think they have no power and cannot achieve anything. And you can only change this mentality through positive injections, by proving that they can achieve something. Then they get involved. Now we are preparing for strategic sessions, which have proven to be very effective. And as a result, the gossip and rumours are reduced. We have given them good news and bad news: there will be a lot of change, but they will have to do it by themselves. This autumn, 70 people, five delegations each consisting of twelve to fifteen people, will be going to western</p>
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universitetus. Įvesim akademinę paramą mokslo daktarų. Atlyginimas yra toks, kad paskolų gauti negali. Mes negalim padidint algų, nes valstybė neindeksavo krepšelio. Bet sugalvota paramos sistema, kuri ir skatintų turėti papildomas pajamas. Ir bus viešinima, jei priartės universitetas prie 500 geriausių, mokės bonusus. Ir valstybė įsirašius tikslą turėti universiteta 500, ir vis tiek mes vos galim išlaikyt. Ir tada galės žiūrėt, ar mėtų pinigų mirštantiems universitetam. Mokslo sistema yra fikcija. Be jokios metodikos ir kur visi verkia. Kai kurie universitetai gauna iki 80% iš valstybės lėšų.

*Ar politika ir strategijos turi poveikį universiteto mastu? Ar tai veikia žemiausiame lygmenyje?*

Yra daug simuliacijos. Yra daug dubliažo. Yra išsismulkinę ir dėsto tą patį dalyką mažam skaičiui studentų, galima tą būtų apjungt, bet bijo prarast kruvį.

Yra didžiulė bėda su krūvio apskaita. Yra nekontroliuojamas dalykas, tai, kas surašoma į vertinimo lenteles ir nežiūrima, bet padedama į arhcyvą. Yra daug profesorių be pedagoginio krūvio, ir mokslininkų, kurie daug dėsto, bet jokio mokslinio darbo nedirba. Todėl nėra rezultatų. Yra nemažai akių dūmimo. Nėra informacinės sistemos, krūvio apskaitos normalios, dėl to mes atimam visas

universities to learn about modern ways to organise courses and govern universities. We are sending scouts in five directions to five universities. We will introduce support measures for PhDs. The remuneration is such that they cannot receive personal loans. We cannot increase their salaries, because of what's in the government basket. But we have a support system which would provide additional income. And we will be telling them that if the university comes close to the top 500 university rating, they will receive bonuses. The government has declared its objective to have a university among the top 500 and yet we can barely support our researchers. Then they can decide whether to keep throwing money away on dying universities. The research system is a work of fiction; no methodological approach at all and everyone complaining. Some universities receive up to 80% of their budgets in government subsidies.

*Do you feel the policies and strategies are having an impact in the university? Are they making a difference at ground level?*

There is a lot of duplication. A lot of overlap of academics and their work. They are very fragmented and the same thing is being taught to a small number of students, when in fact their programmes could be merged. But lecturers are afraid to reduce their workload.

There is a big problem in how the workload is accounted. There is no control over what is being presented in the evaluation tables and instead of checking, things are just sent straight to the archives. There are academics who only teach and do not do any research work. And there are a lot of researchers who are doing a lot of teaching and barely any research. That's why we don't have results. There is a lot of surface polishing. There is no

<p>administracines studijų organizavimo galias iš katedrų ir pagal siūlomus nuostatus koncentruojamos dekanato ofisui. Smulkumas katedrų leidžia tą akių dūmimą, o kai dekanui reikės mokėti pašalpas iš savo pinigų, jis pradės taisyti, ar tikrai visi dirba. Ir reikės pradėti mokėti pašalpas. Dekanas turės susikrapštyti, kad visi realiai dirbtų. Ir jei yra akių dūmimas, jam bus užduota plane dėl pašalpų. Yra daug visokių svertų.</p>	<p>system for providing this information, no normal management of the workloads. This is why we are taking all the course-related administrative work away from departments and concentrating it in the dean's office. Having a lot of departments facilitates this surface polishing, but when the deans are responsible for paying from their own pockets, they will start to correct this and make sure everyone is actually working. The deans will be responsible for making sure everyone is actually working. And if these problems continue, they will have their funding reduced. We will have leverage.</p>
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**D2. Extract from interview with academic**

<b>Lithuanian</b>	<b>English</b>
<p><i>Kokie pagrindiniai pokyčiai įvyko darbo/fakulteto aplinkoj nuo to laiko, kai čia dirbate?</i></p> <p>Lūžis buvo per visa laikotarpį, kai buvo dekanas Arūnas [pastaba: vardas pakeistas dėl anonimiškumo], jie kūrė projektų grupę, susikūrė komandą kad būtų ir infrastruktūrą projektams, administracija padarė pokyčius, kad būtų kažkas atsakingas už papildomų lėšų pritraukimus, nes anksčiau tai bet kas rūpindavosi, vienam žmogui tiek rūpintis, tai šiaip sau, o dabar išskirstė, aišku, kaip tie žmonės atliko savo pareigas ir kaip ten kas ką paskyrė –tai čia jau kitas klausimas, bet struktūriškai padarė pokytį iš studentišku krepšelių pinigų negyventumėm, o padarė dirvą pritraukti kitokio pobūdžio finansavimą.</p> <p>Taisyklės ir tvarkos nuolat keitimo procese, dabar dar neįjungta reform, apart kad girdim. Idėja gera, o kur tu dėsi tuos žmones, kai pradės dubliuotis kažkokie dalykai.</p> <p>Darbo užmokesčio svarstymai buvo prie seno rektoriaus, peržiūrėt darbo krūvį, kad nemokėt tik už auditorines valandas, žmonės laksto per kelias darbo vietas, nėra jokio lojalumo, bet nėra struktūriškai paskatintas. Vėl bus projektas pristatomas, kaip mano darbo užmokesčių iš naujo siūlys skaičiuoti. Buvusi komanda daug dirbo ir labai gaila, kad vėl viskas iš naujo.</p> <p>Projektinės paraiškos rašymas niekaip nesiskaito kaip darbas, jei kažką rašau tai yra tik poreikis ir motyvacija užsidirbti daugiau.</p>	<p><i>What major changes have happened in your working environment/faculty since you have been working here?</i></p> <p>The turning point was when Dean Arunas arrived [note: the name has been changed to preserve anonymity]. He formed a dedicated projects administration team and took care that infrastructure would be in place to support project development. The administration made changes and appointed someone to be responsible for additional fundraising; before this, everyone was responsible for everything. Of course, how these people carried out their duties and how they were appointed is another question, but the top administration made a structural change so we no longer had to survive only from the student basket and fees, and they laid the foundation to attract other types of funding.</p> <p>Rules and procedures are constantly changing – I do not feel the reform apart from when I hear about it. The idea is good, but how can you keep all these people who are doing the same thing?</p> <p>The wage policy was already being looked at by the old rector – he aimed to revise workload and not just pay for classroom hours. Now, we do a number of different jobs, so there is no loyalty or loyalty value, and also it is not structurally encouraged. There is a plan to recalculate our salaries again. The previous team worked hard on this and it's very unfortunate that it's all being done again.</p> <p>I don't count writing project proposals as part of my work. If I write something, it is only because I want to earn more.</p>

*Kokia jūsų nuomonė dėl pokyčių – ar jie visi reikalingi? Kaip atsiliepė šie pokyčiai jums ir jūsų darbui?*

Visa universiteto sąranga tokia, kur viską gali daryt jei tik turi iniciatyvos ir motyvacijos. Ji išvirto. Pradėjai bėgioti per paraiškų rašymus, ir nelieka, kas daro tiesioginį darbą. Techniškai, tau reikia pradėtą paraišką prisiduot, ir nelieka tavo jokių resursų katedrai padėti. Arba tą darai per nalgium iki 3 nakties.

*Papasakokite apie naują strateginį planą: kaip apie tai sužinojote?*

Pirmiausia buvo vienas dalykas: buvo pradeta kalbėti mūsų administracijos lygmeny, kad bus pokyčių, bet neaišku, kokių tiksliai, ir atvažiuos rektorius. Ir nuo rektoriaus atvažiavimo lyg prasidėjo. Pasakė, kad jis viską audituos ir viską peržiūrės, kaip kas veikia.

Kai rinko rektorių ir kandidatai prisistatinėjo, ir Petras [pastaba:vardas pakeistas] įsidėmėjau, kad reikia konsultacinės įmonės, kad mus peržiūrėtų, kad vadybą patobulintu, nuimt administracinę našta nuo akademikų, įvest korteles svečiams, ir kai jį išrinko, jo vizija jau buvo pažįstama. Buvo padaryta nauja rubrika intranete “Universitetas keičiasi – domėkis” darbuotojams pateikdavo informaciją, kas vyksta, kokiais terminais, kaip galėjai komentarus rašyti pokyčiams.

*Ar naudojotės?*

Vieną rašiau, bet dingo...mmm...matyt pasiūliau kažką labai sudėtingo... bet įdėjau pastangas, kad bent kažkas keistųsi.

O paskui buvo rektoriaus atvažiavimas. Iš pradžių rektorius norėjo darbinio susitikimo, neva, padaryt, ten klausimas kiek norėjo atsižvelgti į mūsų nuomonę ir

*What is your opinion about those changes – were they all necessary? What implications have these changes had for you and your work?*

The whole university structure only makes you do things if you have enough initiative and motivation. It has expanded. We are all running from one project application to another, and there are no longer what makes the direct work. Technically, you are supposed to finalise a project proposal once you have started it, but then I don't have any energy to work in my department. Others are working until three in the morning.

*Tell me about the new strategic plan of the university: how did you learn about it?*

First, there was talk at our management level that there would be changes, but it was unclear what exactly, and that a new rector would arrive. When the new rector arrived, everything started. It was said that he would audit everything and review how things work.

When the candidates for the rector's job introduced themselves, Petras [note:name anonymised] talked of the need for a consulting firm to be brought into the university so they could review us, improve the management, take the burden off academics, have credit cards for visiting guests, so when he was elected, his vision was already familiar. There was a new section on the intranet: “The university is changing – find out about it!” for employees to learn about what is happening, what deadlines, how you could make suggestions for changes.

*Have you used it?*

I wrote one suggestion, but it disappeared...mmm... I probably suggested something too difficult...but I made the effort in the hope that at least something would change.

pasiūlymus, bet buvo konsultantas, kuris viską moderavo. Dekanas turbūt buvo atsakingas už žmonių pakvietimą. Tai buvo fizinis susitikimas. Tai buvo 30 žmonių-focus grupė, kad būtų ribota grupė strateginėj sesijoj. Tie dalyvavo, kurie, dekanu nuomone, yra aktyvesni, kuriems fakultetas rūpi.

Dar buvo ir metinis atsiskaitymas – dekanu metinė ataskaita, atvažiavo ir rektorius, aišku, komentavo, kad visas metinių ataskaitų pobūdis keisis, dekanas parodys kokius strateginius tikslus ir tada atsiskaityt pagal juos, o ne tik pasakoti, kad “tą ir tą padarėm”.

*Kodėl manote universitetas nori daryti strateginį žingsnį?*

Rinka pasikeitė visiškai, jei, kai aš dirbau galėjai sėdėt atsiputęs, žmonės ėjo šiaip ar taip studijuot, ir dekanu Jonaičio laikais, grupės buvo šimtinės, buvo bumas nepriklausomybės vaikų, visokių papildomų studijų pilna, fakultetas buvo kaip melžiama karvė. Bet fakulteto situacija pasikeitė, ir pradėjo visi konkuruoti. Pasidarė rinkos žaidimas paveiktas demografinės situacijos. Tai dėl rinkos pokyčių daugiau, manau.

*Ar buvot įtraukta į kokią konsultaciją dėl strateginio plano? Ar žinote esant kažkokių diskusijų fakultete apie tai?*

Specialiai neklausė nuomonės, gal Jūs čia pareikškit, bet aš manau administracijos lygmeny, galbūt, gal senatas pasisakė, bet viskas galbūt lygmeny. Įdomi situacija, nes nori būti mokslo universitetas, orientuotas į magistrantūras, ir nori lygiuotis į Tartu universitetą, bet mes gyvenam iš studentišku pinigų, o ne per mokslą. Todėl mokslininkai tik de jure svarbūs. Ta pati faktinė situacija, kad iš tikrųjų administracija sprendžia, pasako, kaip

And then the rector arrived. Initially, it was supposedly the rector who wanted a meeting, but it's questionable how much he actually wanted to take into account our opinions and suggestions. There was also a consultant who moderated everything. The dean was probably responsible for inviting people. It was a physical meeting. It was limited to 30 people for the focus group, so that they could have a strategic session. The people there were those who, in the dean's opinion, were more active and more concerned about the faculty.

Also there used to be annual reporting – the dean's annual report – but when the rector arrived, he of course wanted that to change. The dean sets out the strategic objectives and then everyone is responsible for meeting them rather than just saying, “I did this and that”.

*Why do you think the university wants to make a strategic move?*

The market has changed completely. When I started working, you could be laid back – people came to study anyway, and during the years of Dean Jonaitis, we used to have student groups of more than a hundred. It was a boom time; they were the children of the independence generation. They were offered all kinds of additional studies, and the faculty was like a cash cow. Now, it has become a market game, impacted by a fierce demographic situation. Anyway, this is all due to the market changes, I think.

*Have you been involved in any consultation about the strategic plan? Do you know if there has been any discussion about it amongst the faculty?*

They haven't asked my opinion on purpose “Please, let's have your opinion”, but I think it has happened more at the administration level. Perhaps the Senate expressed their opinions, but everything only at the hypothetical level. It is an interesting situation, because the university wants to be a research university, wants to be similar to

dirbsim, kaip mokslininkas gali pateikti pasiūlymus svetainėj portale pasiūlymus pateikt, ir gali tikėtis, kad konsultantai gal ir išanalizavo tavo pasiūlymą. Bet nėra, kad mes čia aktyviai dalyvautumėm..visiškai ne... Buvo pora iniciatyvų – susirinkit, pasvarstykit. Bet kiek svarbios tai irgi klausimas, tai yra daugiau pseudo dalyvavimas.

*Kokia yra universiteto vizija (jūsų supratimu)?*

Amm..Palauk, stalčiuje pasikuisiu..[juokiasi]. Vizija sekti pažangiausiais EU universitetais, ir tos kelionės kur buvo į Delfo universitetą, Belgijos, Olandijos vizitai, Tartu universitetas rodomas, kaip pavyzdys, bet man Tartu nėra joks pavyzdys, nes jie gali orientuotis į visumą. Aš žinau, kas dirba vadybos katedroj ir ten toks žemas lygis, ir tokie maži resursai, kelios nusenusias moteriškės, aš pati buvau konferencijoje, ir pažįstu tuos žmones, tai nėra į ką lygiuotis, kaip fakultetas esam visa galva aukščiau.

Aš negaliu sakyti, kad nesilygiuokim į Tartu, nes jie nori lygiuotis į Tartu ir būti tarp 200-300 geriausių. Bet kodėl į Tartu, jei jų kokybė žemesnė nei mūsų? Pagal reitingus jie nori orientuotis į Tartu. Nori jie į tuos šimtukus. Bet jei taip žiūrėt, gal britai ir amerikiečiai pritrauks azijiečių studentų, bet mes, manau kad ne. Nes orientuojamės į vidutinį arba žemą sluoksnį studentų. Iš viso orientuojamės į Afriką. Vizija duoti kokybiškas studijas, stiprų bendruomeniškumą, stiprinti tarptautiškumą ir dar būti geru darbdaviu. Siekis gražus, bet norėtusi realių pokyčių.

Tartu University, oriented to MA studies, but we live on the student tuition fee money, not from research. Therefore, the academics are only important de jure. The fact is that the administration decides and tells me how I as a scientist will work. An academic can express his opinion online on the dedicated platform and may submit proposals, and the consultants might analyse your proposal. But it is not the case that we are actively involved... not at all. There were a couple of initiatives – “let’s meet, let’s discuss”. But how important these meetings were is also the question, this is more a pseudo participation.

*What is (your reading of) the university’s vision?* Umm...Wait, I’ll check in the drawer...[laughs]. The vision is to follow the most advanced universities in the EU, and there were the trips to Delfo University, visits to Belgium and The Netherlands. The University of Tartu is shown as an example, but for me Tartu is no example because they can focus on the whole. I know people who work in the management department, and they have such low standards and few resources, only a couple of old women. I was at a conference and know these people, and there is no point in comparing ourselves to Tartu University. As a faculty, we are a head higher than them.

I can’t say that we shouldn’t aim to be like Tartu University, because they want to align with Tartu and to be among the top 200-300. But why Tartu, if their quality is lower than ours is now? According to the ratings, they want to be oriented to Tartu. They want to be in the top hundreds. But if you see this, maybe the British and the Americans will attract Asian students, but we – I don’t think so. Because our focus is on medium- or low-layer students. In general, we focus on Africa. The vision is to offer high-quality courses, have a strong community, strengthen internationalism and still be a good employer. The vision is nice, but I would like to see the actual changes.

## **Appendix E: Post-interview reflection-guiding questions**

Did the interviewee express his thoughts freely/quite guardedly/very guardedly?

What did he/she think of the institutional context?

What was the most unexpected thing he/she said in the interview?

What were the key points made during the interview?

Did the interviewee say anything different from the other interviewees?

What did the interviewee say that was the same as other interviewees? Are there any patterns?



## **Appendix F: Reflective diary extract**

### Interview with academic

- Relaxed behaviour and open responses
- Supports structural changes but sceptical about genuineness of university's intent to transition
- Focused on infrastructure and capacity issues
- Much talk about own work and constantly comparing to peers in the institution
- Concerned with the quality of the teaching and research outputs
- Talks in actively personal way, focusing on "I" and refers to all others as "they"
- Sees own work as a priority and feels it is his most important task within the institution. Sees a distinction between self-interest and university expectations.
- Exhibits closer alignment with institution's expectations in areas not related to own work.

## Appendix G: Coding extract – themes, codes and utterances

Thematic field	First order code	Second order code	Utterances	Aggregated conceptual themes
<b>Operationalisers</b>				
Institutional context	Needed change; just do my work; vision to become research university	Appropriate	<p><b>Academic D:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>These changes will bring good things, it is a necessary process; University management put a lot of effort into making change happen;</i></li> <li>- <i>Maybe it helps that I love the faculty, and thus I do my best. We are very small compared to other faculties, we have to invest five times more energy to survive;</i></li> <li>- <i>Management is very supportive, and our dean sees how much we try; Every little helps; It is natural that every change brings some uncertainty;</i></li> <li>- <i>You can feel that our university is like a huge torque, and for it to move somewhere requires lots of time, also some structures are too big. But I do what I am supposed to and hope to see some changes; in the meantime, I am just lecturing, helping with projects and carrying out the work that I am supposed to do.</i></li> </ul> <p><b>Academic M:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>Becoming a strong research university really motivates me as it will set the foundation for my career to be in one of the best universities in the region;</i></li> <li>- <i>You just do what you are told to.</i></li> </ul>	Realisation
Teaching	Displays good knowledge of the teaching practices that the top	Tight coupling with the action	<p><b>Academic D:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>The university consistently mentions that we need to increase our internationalisation, so that</i></li> </ul>	Routinising the action

	management want to introduce university-wide and is actively working towards promoting these practices		<p><i>is one of the priorities for me;</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>Creating high quality courses is a priority;</i></li> <li>- <i>Do you know how many programme outlines there are? A pile. And you have to redo everything on new forms;</i></li> <li>- <i>There are not many like me who do the job out of idealism; academics are interested only in their own purposes. Why reach for excellence in research and publish more quality articles, if others can only publish a few medium-level articles and still get to spend the summer on a study visit in Australia?</i></li> </ul> <p><b>Academic M:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>If the university says we have to have more internationalisation, than we will have more;</i></li> <li>- <i>Formally, I am accountable to the head of department and vice-dean of the faculty..., in practice, I do not have to make any reports to them.</i></li> </ul>	
Research	Compliant with institutional context, incorporating practices into personal routine, supportive	Tight coupling with the action	<p><b>Academic D:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>I have noticed that I can dedicate only so much time to research and teaching quality, because all the time that I could use for research and teaching goes to administrative tasks;</i></li> <li>- <i>You waste lots of effort for the battle, maybe that's too harsh, but you always have to prove that you are as good as the others;</i></li> <li>- <i>You sit in the evenings or nights and write proposals or reports in order to bring more money into the department.</i></li> </ul> <p><b>Academic M:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>I sacrificed my weekends to produce something valuable;</i></li> </ul>	Routinising the action

			<p>- I don't feel that I am doing sufficiently deep research because of all the administrative tasks that also need to be completed, which require lots of time, but I do my best;</p> <p>- I gave up evenings and weekends to work on a study as part of an international H2020 project;</p> <p>- Sure, you can produce good articles when you sacrifice all summer, weekends and work like a horse. But does it have to be at such a price?</p> <p>- Great opportunities for travel and working with like-minded partners, it outweighs the time investment required;</p> <p>- I have a mentor – a senior academic – who suggested I window dress the publication; the quality doesn't matter as long as it gets published;</p> <p>- I look for proposals and it doesn't matter if I am interested in the topic; the most important thing is to attract external funding for the institution.</p>	
Evaluation	Couples practices with evaluation processes because they have a strong trust in the institutional body	Tight coupling with the action	<p><b>Academic D:</b></p> <p>- Foreign experts carry out assessments, and they have no prior prejudices [...] we prefer to have unprejudiced experts from abroad, because Lithuania is too small;</p> <p>- They have been going to close us down for the last 50 years. But you still tear yourself apart in terms of workload. And for what, if they still plan to close us down? But you just do your work.</p> <p><b>Academic M:</b></p> <p>- Faculty collects the feedback from students after every semester. Also there is a special procedure once every five years (I guess, I</p>	Routinising the action

			<p><i>am not sure) for full-time employees. I just get the report of the survey.</i></p> <p><i>- Anyway if you are a full-time employee, then you will be invited to the official meeting with the administration and there you will get the guidelines and insights about the evaluation process and results. But I still do not know this process that well.</i></p>	
<b>Mediators</b>				
Institutional context	<p>Personal objectives; start caring when the five-year contract is about to end; need to survive; fear of losing job; administration planning</p>	specific objective	<p><b>Academic A:</b></p> <p><i>- The faculty situation has changed, and everyone has started to compete. It has become a market game, impacted by a fierce demographic situation;</i></p> <p><i>- I wrote one suggestion, but it disappeared. I probably suggested something too difficult...but I made the effort in the hope that at least something would change;</i></p> <p><i>- I just get involved in my own tasks and leave the rest for others to sort out. I know what I need to do and I know my goals. I can't wait for ages.</i></p> <p><b>Academic C:</b></p> <p><i>- I have time only for some tasks, such as teaching, it is usually those that I enjoy most [laughing] as I have my own business;</i></p> <p><i>- When I teach I am very easy going, usually students like me.</i></p> <p><b>Academic F:</b></p> <p><i>- We have an absolute freedom in the faculty, nobody cares what you do so actually I don't feel any changes. I like this liberal freedom where everything depends on your motivation;</i></p> <p><i>- The biggest concern is regarding the survival of</i></p>	Instrumental

			<p><i>our department and my work place;</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>We know that we need enrolled students in order to survive;</i></li> <li>- <i>If I had any ideas, I don't think they would be heard. As I see it, ground-level academics can contribute formally, but there's no point in raising issues to those higher up the hierarchy as nothing is going to change.</i></li> </ul> <p><b>Academic J:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>University structure, especially in the central administration, is quite old and also the management style is quite old, and communication also. Accordingly, the faculty also needs to make some changes to adapt to the market challenges;</i></li> <li>- <i>During the years of service I made many connections;</i></li> <li>- <i>The university is a gateway to network around the world;</i></li> <li>- <i>I am proud of this university as it adds to my reputation and prestige and helps to realise my goals.</i></li> </ul> <p><b>Academic N:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>I was not involved in any consultations but I'm not sure I would like to be, I mean, I don't feel very involved in all of this at all and their decisions are not really important;</i></li> <li>- <i>It will take time to transform from the organisation with the post-soviet heritage into something more modern.</i></li> </ul> <p><b>Academic R:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>University is changing;</i></li> <li>- <i>I know as much as others - there are lots of things going on, and actually this is all I need to know to do my job;</i></li> </ul>	
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			<p>- It is difficult to find a job, so you follow the rules so as not to lose yours.</p>	
Teaching	<p>Institutional practices are integrated with personal views on how to ensure teaching quality; personal objectives</p>	Strategic coupling	<p><b>Academic A:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Students are also changing. There are still those that want challenges, and you are happy that there are such students so you make the tasks a bit more difficult to demand more from them. But generally, you give easy tasks so they can manage it. Otherwise no students, no academics;</li> <li>- When I see in Finland how Erasmus students are being integrated, I try to improve my work too;</li> <li>- I was teaching the course in Lithuanian and English, but I decided to optimise the teaching and teach only in English;</li> <li>- But when you look into the peer review process, how much they helped to retouch your idea, revise it, what kind of input you have made to the scientific discourse, it is a zero value paper generally, only S5 level at best;</li> <li>- I always consider, if I decided to work for a university abroad, how my CV would look, and my publications in national journals would be very funny.</li> </ul> <p><b>Academic C:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- When I started I was more responsible, spent more time on preparation. I try to do not only what is new, but also what is convenient;</li> <li>- I experience difficulties teaching in English;</li> <li>- I am simply too busy with my own business, so it is difficult to find time to devote to university business.</li> </ul>	Rationalising the action

		<p><b>Academic F:</b></p> <p>- For me the quality of the teaching is the symbiosis of theory and practice, so I think it's a very important aspect. I think that teaching can easily be done without any research. And actually these things should be separated. The requirement that academics should also do research adversely influences the quality of teaching in Lithuania. People end up re-publishing previous articles, plagiarising others, basing their work on students' work. There is no depth in this.</p> <p>- In the faculty there is lots of coercion; for example, we have to teach Erasmus courses in English without being paid any extra for it;</p> <p>- I am seriously burned out after doing nothing else but write projects.</p> <p><b>Academic J:</b></p> <p>- Some students just don't cope, so you just lower the standard;</p> <p>- I am so active because I get my own personal and professional benefits from this;</p> <p>- I chose the outline of my course, I decided how and what I would teach, I chose the universities with whom to cooperate and exchange students. I coordinated a large project which contributed significantly to the internationalising of the course. The faculty is the beneficiary of my work.</p> <p><b>Academic N:</b></p> <p>- I only teach if this creates some added value; otherwise, it's just a waste of time, for which I don't have time. The administration can go and teach themselves;</p>	
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			<p>- Teaching visits are a great chance to travel;  - I always take this opportunity even if I have to give a few lectures;  - The requirement to outline your teaching course is just annoying. I list random information which has nothing to do with what I actually teach in the classroom;  - It is not always the case that the management knows the best answers of how the teaching should be conducted. It is more about how much practice and exposure you have in different countries. I have had some experience in the UK, Norway and this makes a big difference in how I teach. If those in the administration only look to the immediate environment, they are hardly in a position to raise teaching quality and to tell those who have travelled further than Lithuania's borders how to teach. So it really depends on what the management comes up with and whether I am willing to use it in my teaching;  - We are simply judged in terms of our students' results.</p> <p><b>Academic R:</b>  - I might teach six different subjects this year. Like everyone else I do care about the remuneration. For our foreign partners it is nearly impossible to have so many modules, for them it is difficult to understand;  - I receive good financial incentives from the international projects, but it takes lots of time to coordinate everything, often you must be quite creative with that and I admit it may not be good practice.</p>	
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Research	Selects the most convenient alternatives to achieve specific goals, personal objectives	Strategic coupling	<p><b>Academic A:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>Everything comes through personal contacts. If you consider the projects which made the biggest added value in terms of research outputs, it was just because I knew people personally and we had a good relationship;</i></li> <li>- <i>In case I disappear, so at least the contact remains in the institution;</i></li> </ul> <p><b>Academic C:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>I simply have other things to do, so usually I collaborate with students and have my name on the article.</i></li> </ul> <p><b>Academic F:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>Of course, you have to invest lots of time. But out of the project you write a wonderful monograph.</i></li> <li>- <i>Maybe it is sufficient, but sometimes it seems that the requirements are too low. They are so low that you only have to produce two articles in four or five years. Brutally low.</i></li> <li>- <i>When you don't have time, you choose the easiest way to make the quota, for example taking a master's student's work and co-authoring with him for publication.</i></li> </ul> <p><b>Academic J:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>It's good to have a good institution behind your back when you do your research. Then any research idea can attract funding more easily because the university has a good track record. For the rest, I just need the faculty management to sign off my projects. Sometimes I ask their view about the scope of the research or the idea, but I don't rely on their input; You have to play the right game, finance and quality wise;</i></li> </ul>	Rationalising the action
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			<p>- My research topics are not aligned with the faculty direction. But you still follow your interest, because it demonstrates your academic work is worthy. [To the institution] you have to prove that you published something, so you play a double-game;</p> <p>- We are only important as de facto but not de jure. All is set for us, so they leave us no space to manoeuvre.</p> <p><b>Academic N:</b></p> <p>- Let them plan! But please let me do my job also. They would like to be involved, but generally, I am the one who decides the direction of my research, not them.</p> <p><b>Academic R:</b></p> <p>- The teaching workload disrupts my research activities, and research is essential for my reputation and building my career. So I don't want to spend loads of time on teaching when I need to produce research outputs;</p> <p>- Publishing helps to build my credibility and strengthens my position in the academic field;</p> <p>- Project work is a funny thing – you can't earn from it.</p> <p>- Any research interest can be tailored to suit the external funder's priorities.</p>	
Evaluation	Self-reliant; assessment as sign of mistrust; tool to assess popularity; no inclination to change	Strategic coupling	<p><b>Academic A:</b></p> <p>- I teach in a way that I wouldn't change even if I was allowed to. I teach the best way I know how, so I do that and it's not really important whether they [administration] try to control it, or check up on me, to tell the truth, I am not afraid;</p> <p>- I was writing an article which had a near deadline so I focused on it and missed the deadline to</p>	Rationalising the action

		<p><i>prepare my part of the self-assessment. Of course you agree inside, but still you put the department and your colleagues into a bad position, where they have to wait for your input. So tensions emerge when somebody doesn't do something;</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>One colleague falsified data; this again caused some tension.</i></li> </ul> <p><b>Academic C:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>For me student opinion is very important, because through the large number of students you can get a very good sense about teaching quality;</i></li> <li>- <i>It is important to me what students think about me.</i></li> </ul> <p><b>Academic F:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>Completely meaningless, absurd, nonsense work. We academics work, teach and do research – yet we still need to write the self-assessment. It's cruel.</i></li> <li>- <i>I was already swamped by the work load, so in order to prepare one or two sections I had to allocate lots of time for this as I didn't know the data.</i></li> </ul> <p><b>Academic J:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>This is the show-off time to put all you can think of about the performance and some things just have to be polished to look better than they actually are.</i></li> </ul> <p><b>Academic N:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>I listen to others, but I do things my way;</i></li> <li>- <i>Not clear how transparent this evaluation process is;</i></li> <li>- <i>Senior academics influence a lot.</i></li> </ul> <p><b>Academic R:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>I fill in as I have to, but they can check it themselves if they want to.</i></li> </ul>	
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<b>Opposers</b>				
Institutional context	no infrastructure; academic is on his own; distrust of management; blocked from participating in decision-making; passive player; don't care about their [management's] vision	Inappropriate	<b>Academic B:</b> - <i>In the current institutional environment the only thing we feel is uncertainty... That's why I do only what I have to to survive</i>	Coercive
Teaching	Adopts a position of independence and superiority over the institution – their personal knowledge is enough to ensure the quality of teaching. Sceptical about strategic initiatives	Coupling is only symbolic window dressing	<b>Academic B:</b> - <i>You teach what you want. Everything depends on the academic;</i> - <i>University academics are proof tested, so you do something, but nothing as substantive as taking action;</i> - <i>Teaching quality is miserable, but why bother?</i> - <i>The revised programme outline, teaching materials and plan are totally stupid and I refused them. I will supply something for the administration and hope they will be happy with that.</i>	Symbolic adoption of the action only
Research	Complete mistrust of the environment; perceives more institutional control than there actually is. Leads the academic to completely decouple their practice from the strategy	Symbolic coupling	<b>Academic B:</b> - <i>For the research problem selection you have to keep in line with the faculty direction. It is not a clear system and the requirements are constantly changing so it's not at all clear what is required. When it is not clear, you go your own way;</i> - <i>...generally there is no support from the faculty, and I have no way of suggesting changes. Research is not rewarding and there is no infrastructure to do research here, I tick the boxes that are required to play it safe. You must do some research, otherwise some young, unskilled</i>	Symbolic adoption of the action only

			<p><i>lecturer from the street will replace you;</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>In order to publish in time and to meet quotas sometimes you reproduce articles. You have to be creative around what you write;</i></li> <li>- <i>Imagine what kind of understanding exists in the institution, academics are simply slaves, and so long as this is how top management sees us, nothing will change;</i></li> <li>- <i>I count how many articles I need to pass the minimum criteria. I write those articles and one more, just in case, because sometimes the requirements change and sometimes they are even applied retrospectively.</i></li> </ul>	
Evaluation	Weighted benefits, aim to justify the existence, manipulation	Symbolic coupling	<p><b>Academic B:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>You aim to show good results in order to remain in your position;</i></li> <li>- <i>Copy, paste and that's it;</i></li> <li>- <i>It is a very time-consuming process for which nobody pays;</i></li> <li>- <i>If you want to start thinking about quality, then you have to think about the incentive system.</i></li> </ul>	Symbolic adoption of the action only

**Appendix H: Sample of quotes used in the thesis in the original language**

<b>Original quote in Lithuanian</b>	<b>Quote in English</b>	<b>Respondent code</b>	<b>Page number in the thesis</b>
<i>Renkantis mokslinę tematiką turi laikytis fakulteto kryptių. Yra neaiški sistema ir reikalavimai nuolatos keičiasi, todėl visiškai neaišku, ko reikia. Kada neaišku, tu darai savaip.</i>	<i>For the research problem selection, you have to keep in line with the faculty direction. It is not a clear system and the requirements are constantly changing so it's not at all clear what is required. When it is not clear, you go your own way</i>	Academic B	p.138
<i>Aš pastebėjau, kad negaliu skirti tiek daug laiko mokslo ir dėstyimo kokybei, nes visas laikas, kurį galėčiau naudoti mokslui ir dėstyimui, atitenka administracinėms užduotims</i>	<i>I have noticed that I can dedicate only so much time to research and teaching quality, because all the time that I could use for research and teaching goes to administrative tasks</i>	Academic D	p. 141
<i>Pavyzdžiui, mes turėjom aprašyti materialinius išteklius, kurie prieinami studijų programai iki kompiuterinių programų ir kompiuterių markės. Taip pat turėjom išrašyti dėstytojų kaitą ir studentų nubyreėjimus, nubaškininant kiekvieno nubyreėjimo priežastis. Aš kaip dėstytojas ir taip apkrautas, ir dabar,</i>	<i>For example, we had to describe the material resources that are available for the study programme, including computer programs and their brands. We also had to list changes in the staff list and student dropouts, listing why each dropout occurred. I was already swamped by the workload, so in order to prepare one or two sections</i>	Academic F	p. 149

<i>kad aprašytum vieną ar du skyrius, aš nežinau tų duomenų, aš turėjau skirti daug laiko.</i>	<i>I had to allocate lots of time for this as I didn't know the data.</i>		
<i>Visada yra rizika, kad pradėsi orientuotis į populiarumą, norėdamas susilaukti tik teigiamų atsiliepimų, todėl pradėsi daryti skaidres labiau vizualias arba duosi daugiau praktinių užduočių.</i>	<i>There is always a risk that you will only start to be oriented towards popularity in an attempt to receive only good feedback, so you will try to make your slides more visual or set more practical tasks</i>	Academic A	p.153
<i>Leiskit jiems planuoti! Bet prašau leisti man daryti mano darbą taip pat. Jie norėtų būti įsitraukę, bet bendrai, aš viena nusprendžiu savo mokslinės veiklos kryptį, ne jie.</i>	<i>Let them plan! But please let me do my job also. They would like to be involved, but generally, I am the one who decides the direction of my research, not them</i>	Academic N	p. 168
<i>Centrinė administracinė pykdo mane, ji nuolat plečiasi. Net ir tai būtų gerai, jei fakulteto administracija būtų normali ir netrukdytų mūsų darbo, o padėtų ir motyvuotų</i>	<i>The central administration makes me so angry, it is constantly expanding. Even so, it would be OK if the faculty administration were normal and did not interrupt our work, but just helped and motivated</i>	Academic B	p. 171
<i>Nes visi žmonės dirba idealizmo vedini; akademikai domisi tik savais interesais. Kam siekti mokslo kokybės ir spausdinti daugiau striapsnių, jei kiti gali tik publikuoti</i>	<i>There are not many like me who do the job out of idealism; academics are interested only in their own purposes. Why reach for excellence in</i>	Academic D	p. 176



<i>kelis vidutinio lygio straipsnius ir vis tiek vasarą važiuoti studijų vizito į Australiją?</i>	<i>research and publish more quality articles, if others can only publish a few medium-level articles and still get to spend the summer on a study visit in Australia?</i>		
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