

Aligning governmental and organizational missions: building a model of FE organizations in Malta

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Abstract

Purpose: This thesis proposes a first conceptual model using data gathered in 2012, to delineate the assessed alignment between the Maltese government's policy for the further education sector (FE) and FE organizations' missions. Although alignment models exist, no research has been published detailing the FE sector and the usefulness of such models in small island states.

Methodology: Since alignment is multifaceted, a complementarity blended approach was used to help uncover its complexities. Data were collected from seven FE vocational and academic organizations via questionnaires to academic staff; interviews with principals and other internal and external stakeholders; content analysis of mission statements.

Findings: Assessing alignment to create the conceptual model showed that there is only moderate alignment between organizational mission and government policy while organizational missions in practice differ significantly from organizational mission statements. Due to their brevity, mission statements can only capture a part of such organization mission. There may be occasions where organizational realities exceed the expectations of a mission statement thus turning conventional wisdom on its head.

Significance: By utilizing systems theory a new conceptual model based on inputs, outputs, organizational processes and feedback is proposed together with a new metaphor of an operating theatre to add to existing metaphorical explanations of the field. Such an alignment model explains the FE sector in the small island state of Malta. The use of a complementarity blended method may be useful to explain educational alignment in other small states.

Key words: alignment models; further education; mixed method; systems theory; small island states; Malta.

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Glossary

AIO	Advanced, intermediate, ordinary
BSC	Balanced scorecard
CPD	Continuous professional development
EQM	External quality monitoring
ERDF	European Regional Development Fund
ETC	Employment Training Centre
EUPA	European Union Programmes Agency
FE	Further education
GDP	Gross domestic product
HE	Higher education
IEN	Individual educational needs
KPI	Key performance indicator
LSA	Learning support assistant
MIS	Management information system
MTA	Malta Tourism Authority
MUT	Malta Union of Teachers
NCF	National curriculum framework
NCHE	National Commission for Further and Higher Education
NQC	National Qualifications Council
PR	Public relations
QA	Quality assurance
RBV	Resource-based view

SMT	Senior management team
SWOT	Strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats

Maltese FE organizations

DLS	De La Salle College
GCHSS	Giovanni Curmi Higher Secondary School
ITS	Institute of Tourism Studies
JC	Junior College, University of Malta
MCAST	Malta College for Art, Science and Technology
SAC	St. Aloysius College
SEC	St. Edward's College
SMC	St. Martin's College
SMAR	Sir M.A. Refalo for Further Studies

Chapter One – Introduction: why alignment is important

Introduction

This thesis aims to assess the alignment that currently exists between the Maltese government's policy for the further education sector (FE) and FE organizations' missions by building a conceptual model of the Maltese post-secondary educational sector (excluding university). This systems oriented model will be developed from explorations of strategic theory, stakeholder theory, the resource-based view of organizations (RBV), performance measurement, and alignment theory. The model plans to ascertain and elucidate links amongst the possible stakeholders in the Maltese FE sector and analyse how these impact on government policy for the sector.

Various alignment models exist (Vandal, 2009; Caldwell, 2007; Kaplan and Norton, 2006; Duffy, 2004; Labovitz and Rosansky, 1997), but such models appear based on the premise of competition among different organizations (not the situation that appertains amongst Maltese FE organizations) or are designed for large countries. To date the author has not encountered an alignment model catering for the FE sector in small states. Such a model might be useful in uncovering the workings of Maltese FE organizations, within the political milieu of Maltese government policies, in the hope of contributing towards FE students' well-being and to Malta's economic development. The proposed model may be perceived as an assessment illuminating the successes and problems of the Maltese FE system. Such organizational diagnosis relies on viewing the system holistically (Katz and Kahn, 1978) and includes inputs, internal processes, outputs, and feedback mechanisms.

The rationale for this thesis commences this chapter, followed by defining and critiquing the concept of alignment. Furthermore the theoretical background for the thesis is established, based on stakeholder theory, strategic theory and mission, RBV, and performance measurement. A brief comparative description of the Maltese FE sector with the FE sectors in the UK, Australia and the USA illustrate the specific characteristics of an FE sector in a small island state. These points lead directly to the research questions and the conclusion, where a detailed summary of the thesis is given.

Rationale

While education is understood to be a public good (Holstrom, 2000; Grace, 1994), neoliberal education may be conceptualized as a commodity placed in the private sphere. The Maltese educational system is currently perceived to be strongly influenced by the EU's neoliberal agenda (Zahra, 2013; Kuhn and Sultana, 2006). An analysis of the present Maltese curriculum requirements for the FE sector suggests that the national cultural, social and political objectives of education have become adulterated with economic ones (Zahra, 2013). It seems that the main aim of education is that of preparing human capital, as demanded in various EU documents (European Union, 2010; European Council, 2008), thus creating the manipulatable man (Olssen, Codd, and O'Neil, 2004).

Such a manipulatable man is one who can process information in order to develop skills required by the market, get employment, and earn wages with which to purchase goods and services. Furthermore, such skills are subject to change, hence the accent on lifelong learning locally and internationally (Kuhn and Sultana, 2006). However, Malta is deemed to lack an appropriately skilled workforce both nationally and internationally (National Commission for Higher Education [NCHE], 2009; United Nations International Centre for Technical and Vocational Education and Training [UNEVOC], 2006). Alignment between government

policies for the FE sector and FE organizations' missions may help develop such a skilled workforce (Vandal, 2009).

The role and strength of the state, in achieving the above, is disputed. It has been advocated that neoliberalism manifests itself by a competitive market based on the beliefs in 'the individual; freedom of choice; market security; laissez faire, and minimal government' (Larner, 2000, 7). Conversely, Olssen, Codd, and O'Neil, (2004) propose that neoliberalism needs a strong state, whose function is not to enrich social justice, but to generate an environment favorable to an enterprise culture. The enterprise culture is explained as one where all commodities are freely marketed (Fitzsimons, 2000). This means that the task of the state is in building a technically skilled workforce (Hill 2006), and to assist the unemployed to gain the means to partake in consumption (Fitzsimmons, 2000). Both of these divergent views of neoliberalism appear to require organizational alignment with state objectives.

Such a neoliberal agenda for alignment can be perceived in a 2010 speech, when the then Maltese Prime Minister, the Hon Lawrence Gonzi, identified further and higher education and the skills gained therein as the cornerstones for the government's vision for the country in a document known as Vision 2015 (Gonzi, 2010). He noted that lifelong learning and skill flexibility are necessary for enhanced output and a thriving knowledge-driven economy (*ibid.*). To attain this vision, a need has been identified to align educational organizations to government policy, to ensure quality education (DeGiovanni, 2002). Furthermore, improved retention and completion with the right knowledge and skills are important government policies for this sector (National Commission for Higher Education, 2009), and it is imperative to see whether government policy on this is recognized and implemented in organizational policies.

While such neoliberal concepts have been criticized (see below, Chapter 2, p. 31), such critique, may, at times, not be ubiquitous, since different countries may operate in different contexts. For example, research on the educational system in Saudi Arabia has revealed a slow shift from a theocratic educational regime to one based on glocal neoliberalism that is characterized by both global and local considerations (Elyas and Picard, 2013).

Alignment is perceived as important in organizations, since it may enhance performance by creating more educational benefits to students, lowering costs whilst enhancing the organization's reputation (Kaplan and Norton, 2006; Khosrow-Pour, 2006; Luftman *et al.*, 2004; Luftman, 1996; Chorn, 1991). Some researchers claim that alignment may lead to transformation, defined as 'significant, systematic and sustained success for all students in all settings' (Caldwell, 2008, 1), and is an approach whereby government policies may bolster each other, resulting in a positive impact on student outcomes (Watterston and Caldwell, 2011). Furthermore, alignment may simplify educational pathways, leading to more consistency and may facilitate trailing student progress (Vandal, 2009). Lack of alignment is perceived to be hard to justify in a world where efficiency, effectiveness, responsiveness, transparency, and accountability are becoming ever more important (OECD, 2006). Situations may also arise whereby FE organizations align themselves to government policies, in order to achieve grants, as in the US Race to Top fund (Kolbe and Rice, 2012).

Besides the utilitarian value noted above, this work will also contribute academically in a number of ways. While there are many studies on the international FE sector, there are very few publications on the Maltese FE sector. Furthermore, the few papers published on the Maltese FE sector are not based on data (Caruana, 2005; Edwards, 2005). This work will contribute to this gap by building a data-based model. Furthermore, while alignment in business organizations has been addressed since the mid-eighties (Porter, 1985), its

application to the education sector has only come to the fore in the last ten years (Achieve, 2008; Smekar and Sims, 2006), maybe due to school and educational leaders who take a piecemeal rather than a systemic approach (*ibid.*). As a result:

1. There are few academic articles on alignment in education internationally and none locally.
2. The concept of alignment in management has been poorly defined.

Alignment definition and theory of small states are also examined in this thesis by contributing to the scant data available on small states. This may be deemed important since educational systems in small states may be susceptible to the manipulation of international agendas and unquestioned policy transfer (Crossley and Holmes, 2001). Such unquestioned adoption of western models may result in poor performance in schools and place pressure on principals (Pansiri, 2011). This vulnerability might be due to limitations in human and material resources and economies that rely on international markets (Bray and Kwo, 2002). Small states are not perceived to be simply scaled-down versions of larger states (Baldacchino and Bertram, 2009), and have their own unique history, culture, and values that have to be confronted in an increasingly global world. Thus capacity building and human resource development are crucial and not doing so may lead to quality assurance problems (Bray and Kwo, 2002). Small states have strategies to try and keep the best people in an era when such people may be enticed to leave their country and enjoy better financial prospects elsewhere (Crossley and Holmes, 2001).

This may put pressure on small EU states since they have to know what they want and to be able to communicate effectively to their representatives in the EU (Panke, 2010). The quicker and clearer the response, the more likely would the representative(s) be in a position to bargain effectively (Crossley, 2008). It seems that some small states in the EU have

difficulties in this regard (Kutys, 2009) but it may be possible that small islands adapt to the ever changing economic, social and political environment (Baldacchino and Bertram, 2009). This should not be viewed as a moth learning how to fly at 100mph but as a moth that learns how to swiftly change direction when attacked by a bat. Thus citizens of small states tend to be flexible and fill many roles thus providing an example of economy of scope rather than scale (*ibid.*).

Theoretical background

As well as appreciating the researcher's rationale, it is also beneficial for the reader to comprehend the theoretical background of the research in question. This section explains the substantive theories that have assisted the researcher locate the framework for this thesis.

Current alignment theories are eclectic, with different researchers displaying a wide variety of foci as outlined in Table 1.1 (Vandal, 2009; Caldwell, 2007; Kaplan and Norton, 2006; Duffy, 2004; Labovitz and Rosansky, 1996). These models are based on different sources of data: Kaplan and Norton's model on quantitative data from an online questionnaire, but with no details as to the number of organizations surveyed; Labovitz and Rosansky's model on client conferences periodically held by Organizational Dynamics, Inc., but with no details regarding data type, that is, quantitative or qualitative; Duffy's model on qualitative data with education leaders, policymakers, practitioners, and researchers in the USA; Caldwell's model on case studies (49), master classes (4), and workshops (60) in Australia, Croatia, England, New Zealand, Malaysia, Mauritius, Netherlands, Philippines, Singapore, and Wales; Vandal's model on qualitative data gathered from eighty-seven educational leaders during two online polilogues. It seems that Caldwell's model involved the greatest amount and variety of data, but data from small states is lacking in all alignment models since, from the countries mentioned in this paragraph, only Malaysia and Singapore are defined as small

states (Bacchus, 2010). There is therefore the need to address this deficiency by delineating an alignment model based on data gathered from a small island state.

Table 1.1: Comparative summary of organizational alignment models

Sources	Focus	Attributes			
Kaplan and Norton, 1996	Strategy	Learning and growth (staff)	Financial	Internal processes	Client (student)
Labovitz and Rosansky, 1997	Mission	Strategy	People (staff)	Internal processes	Client (student)
Duffy, 2004	Whole school system	Horizontal alignment among schools	Horizontal alignment among school services	Vertical alignment among district authorities, schools and support services	
Caldwell, 2007	Student	Intellectual capital	Financial capital	Social capital	Spiritual capital
Vandal, 2009	Educonomy	Situated perspective	Education institutions are viewed as the arbiter of student supply and workforce demand	Requires a P-20 approach	

Source: Author

The terms ‘people’ (used by Labovitz and Rosansky), ‘learning and growth’, and ‘intellectual capital’ (mentioned by Kaplan and Norton and Caldwell respectively) allude to staff. Intellectual capital relates to the knowledge and skill competences of those who work in organizations within a system that is constructed to convey the best teaching to students (Caldwell, 2007). Kaplan and Norton (1996, 8) explain that ‘front-line employees must understand the financial consequences of their decisions and actions; senior executives must understand the drivers of long-term financial success’. By focusing on what members of staff at different levels actually carry out, and linking those activities to organizational mission, alignment may be attained within the organization (*ibid.*), leading to an improvement in the quality of degree programs, student achievement and educational innovation, increasing

student learning by using the right pedagogy, attracting talented faculty, and increasing staff development that may lead to learning and growth (Storey, 2002; O’Neil *et al.*, 1999). The latter might mean that organizations need the right internal processes (Labovitz and Rosansky, 1997; Kaplan and Norton, 1996a).

Duffy’s model is partly based on Labovitz and Rosansky’s model. However, Duffy describes a whole school system, rather than individual organizations. While conceding that systemic improvement begins at school level, the school-based improvement model is termed ‘insufficient’ as it may lead to inequality among different schools in a district (Duffy, 2004, 5). The basis of Vandal’s model rests upon using the concept of educonomy, that is, the intersection between education and the economy whereby educational organizations shape students to fit economic interests (Fitzsimmons, 2009), to untangle the complicated pathways available to students in the American post-secondary arena. Both authors acknowledge that there are many alignment barriers, such as uncoordinated federal programs, partisanship, lack of trust, and the absence of standardized data systems (Vandal, 2009; Duffy, 2004).

A **systems-focused** definition of alignment based on ‘recognizing and exploiting knowledge about an institution’s strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats’ (Rowley, Lujan, and Dolence, 1997, 14) and a shared satisfying relationship between an organization and its key stakeholders, which enables such organization to meet its objectives and fulfil its mission (Van Riel, 2012) based on strategic planning (Harrington and Voehl, 2012; Kaplan and Norton, 2006) were chosen as they helped uncover the terminology underpinning this thesis. Alignment may thus be described as an organizational capability (Franco-Santos, Lucianetti, and Bourne, 2012). In this study a distinction was made between:

1. Actors with whom one negotiates alignment. A vocational FE organization may want to align itself with industry partners; an academic FE organization may want to align itself with university.
2. Set laws and policies that have (or should) be followed. In Malta, such policies were published in ‘Further and Higher Education Strategy 2020’ by the Maltese Government in 2009 through the NCHE.

In spite of the existing literature, the level of alignment may be low due to scarce financial, temporal and human resources, changing plans, weak implementation, wrong training, inaccurate estimates, self-serving people, and lack of communication with stakeholders (Fogg, 2009; Kaplan and Norton, 2006; Labovitz and Rosansky, 1997). In educational organizations this may arise from lack of resources, inappropriate school design (echoing 19th- and early 20th-century industrial values), imbalances between leadership and management, decision-making limitations, and time management (e.g. lack of time devoted to teacher training) (Caldwell, 2007). In Australia, school principals cite lack of time for planning mission, vision, and strategy and their subsequent alignment to each other and government policy as some of the major issues they face (*ibid.*).

For the purposes of this work, alignment refers to the regulation of resources and processes at the disposal of FE organizations and how these resources and processes are strategically allied with key stakeholders, taking into account government policy for the FE sector. Investigating such perceptions will give an indication of stakeholders’ understanding and satisfaction (if any) vis-à-vis FE organizations/government policy alignment.

This thesis will therefore collect data regarding such perception(s). Such an approach seems to be the standard way of assessing organizational alignment (Vandal, 2009; Kaplan and

Norton, 2006; Duffy, 2004; Rieley, 2001; Labovitz and Rosansky, 1997). The latter may be analysed in terms of strategy via stakeholders' perceptions of:

1. Strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats faced by FE organizations;
2. FE organizations' mission statements;
3. Resources available to FE organizations;
4. Processes used by FE organizations.

A critique of alignment

Despite the positive rhetoric quoted above, alignment has been severely criticized on theoretical and pragmatic levels. Theoretically, alignment research may be mechanical and possibly fail to imitate real life (Ciborra, 1997), because alignment is unlikely where organizational strategy is unknown or in flux (Chan and Reich, 2007). It may be that the alignment literature fails to capture important phenomena such as context and the roles of different actors (Brown and Magill, 1998), indicating that alignment may not always be desirable. Alignment research has therefore been criticized, since researchers have generally continued using bivariate studies at the overall organization level, with a focus on structural variables to the detriment of strategy variables; researchers have overlooked capability factors such as management knowledge on the part of business managers; researchers have disregarded contingency context factors, such as competitive strategy; researchers have failed to identify the best decision-making solution when organizational-level and department-level contingency factors are in conflict. (*ibid.*).

Pragmatically, the tightly coupled arrangements which alignment favours can have negative outcomes, especially when organizations have to adapt to new realities, that is, if the external and/or the internal environment changes, organizations may struggle to adapt to their new contexts (Avison, Powell, and Wilson, 2004). For example, since most governments operate

on a four to five year mandate, educational organizations align their strategies to capture this cycle, even though some policies may need a longer time for implementation (Sultana, 2008). This potential clash between colleges trying to align with government, while also meeting internal needs, is compounded by the additional voices demanding to be heard in FE policy making such as employers. For example, employers have been found to prefer a just-in-time system which is rapidly adjustable to external and internal environment changes (Sheldon and Thornthwaite, 2005). To facilitate such rapid responses by the FE system, employers may put forward a variety of strategies, including tighter links between training providers and the workplace (Van Buren, 2003). However, such micro-alignment strategies have been criticized as serving industry rather than students (*ibid.*).

Further pragmatic challenges to alignment focus on possible increased costs and worker dissatisfaction, where there are inconsistencies between organizational strategies, internal processes and procedures, and external stakeholders (Sauer and Burn, 1997). Such inconsistencies may arise when organizational strategy is imposed in a top-down fashion without any consideration for its effects on employees and external stakeholders (Mintzberg, 1994). Empirical research on organizations in the knowledge economy seems to legitimize an agent-based approach, where employees lower down the organizational ladder make their own decisions, which are then aggregated by top management (Brady and Walsh, 2008). This is opposed to the traditional textbook approach emphasizing a top-down procedure, which therefore omits the diversity of stakeholders and plurality of the institutions involved. (Thompson, Strickland, and Gamble, 2007).

Stakeholders as actors within the educational system may understand alignment in different ways (Maes *et al.*, 2000), leading to confusion both on the level of policy formulation and interpretation (Earley, 2005). For example, research into the rapport between state and local

reading standards in four US states indicated that alignment had ‘different utility to districts, ranging from helpful to benign to nuisance’ (Dutro and Valencia, 2004, 31).

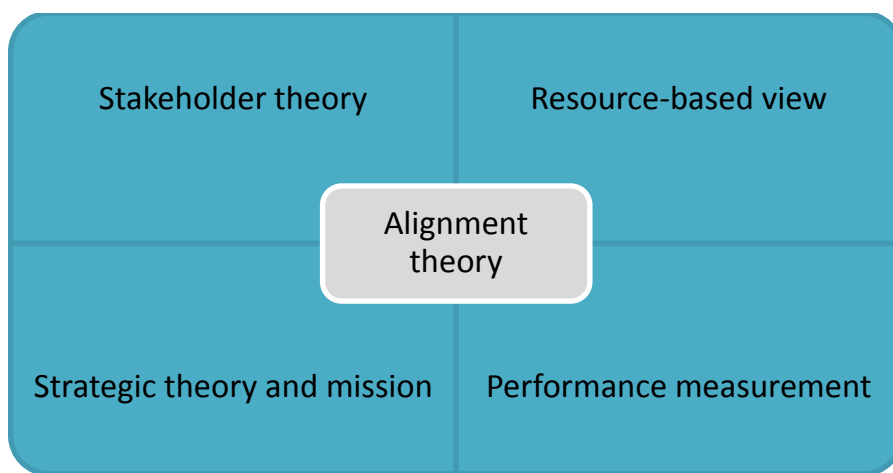
In another study, a micro-level analysis of the highly contested Individual Learning Plans (ILPs) in the UK was conducted via institutional ethnography to explore the alignment between government policy and school practices (Hamilton, 2009). ILPs are presently part of a system of performance measurement, based on assessable indicators of teaching and learning. These are used for various purposes such as quality assurance, and while practitioners note the value of ILPs for documentation purposes, they may be difficult to administer. Such alignment may lead to ‘perverse and unpredicted outcomes’ (*ibid.*, 240), since ILPs tend to focus on hard rather than soft measures, suggesting that there are preferred types of learning. It might be that, notwithstanding the broad acceptance of alignment, the nature of alignment is substantially contested in the literature (Avison, Powell, and Wilson, 2004).

This may be due to the diverse range of alignment definitions encountered in the literature (Maes *et al.*, 2000; Rowley, Lujan, and Dolence, 1997). Alignment, for example, may be understood in cognitive terms as ‘a state of being and a set of actions’, thus being used as a noun and an adjective (Labovitz and Rosansky, 1997, 5). Another way whereby alignment is discussed in the literature is based on communication, that is: the way that leaders’ propagate information to middle managers and staff (O’Reilly *et al.*, 2010; Crotts, Dickson, and Ford, 2005). Further definitions focus on short term responsiveness/flexibility and long-term strategy, formal organization/informal structure, and internal/external alignment (Penuel *et al.*, 2010; Dimmick and Walker, 2004; Semler, 2000). Given that alignment is a controversial and contested concept, the author took a neutral stance as to whether alignment is indeed useful in the context of the Maltese FE sector.

Basis of literature review

The various alignment models thus exhibit the following leading attributes: strategy and mission, a variety of stakeholders, internal and external systems and resources. The literature review is based on these attributes as outlined in Figure 1.1 and applied to the Maltese context. The next section will outline such a context and compare it to FE contexts in the UK, USA, and Australia.

Figure 1.1: Theoretical foundations of this thesis



Source: Author

Defining the Maltese FE sector: a comparative analysis

In this thesis the Maltese post-secondary educational sector (excluding university) will be referred to as the FE sector, following the definition stated by the NCHE whereby FE is defined as ‘all formal education of persons above the compulsory school age, leading to qualifications classified at NQF [National Qualifications Level] levels 1 to 5’ (NCHE, 2009, 11). Table 1.2 delineates the nine major providers of FE in Malta, as listed on the NCHE and Maltese Department of Education’s websites. There are also two very minor providers that are not included in this thesis and are neither listed on the NCHE nor the Department of Education’s websites.

Table 1.2: Malta FE organizations, 2011/2012

Name	Location	Type	Funding sources	Governance	No. of students	No. of teachers	No. of departments/faculties
Malta College for Science, Arts and Technology	Paola ¹	Vocational	Government	Independent board	c. 6000	380	10
Institute of Tourism Studies	St Julian's ²	Vocational	Government	Independent board	c. 1000	31	8
Junior College	Msida	Academic	Government	University of Malta	c. 3000	198	26
Giovanni Curmi Higher Secondary School	Naxxar	Academic	Government	Government	c. 1900	197	None
Sir M. A. Refalo Centre for Further Studies	Rabat, Gozo	Academic	Government	Government	c. 550	70	None
De La Salle College	Bormla	Academic	Gov/private	Church	c. 300	31	None
St. Aloysius College	B'Kara	Academic	Gov/private	Church	c. 400	39	None
St. Martin's College	Msida	Academic	Private	Independent board	c. 250	39	None
St. Edward's College	Birgu	Academic	Private	Independent board	c. 60	17	None

Source: FE organizations' responses to researcher's enquiries

Most FE organizations are academic in nature (seven out of nine [77%]). The largest FE organization, MCAST, however, eclipses all other organizations in terms of student and teacher numbers thus lowering the percentage of academic students (47%). Since the early 1990's there have been significant shifts in the Maltese educational system, with the FE sector in particular, being deemed necessary in the light of the country's continual economic and industrial expansion in both manufacturing and service industries. This expansion has resulted in a more complex FE system which may justify more effort on the part of stakeholders to ensure that alignment ensues. As a result, the number and range of FE

¹ Another centre in Gozo offers a limited number of courses.

² Another centre in Gozo offers a limited number of courses.

organizations started increasing and diversifying in the 1990s (Xerri, 1990). This was driven by policies which encouraged post-secondary education, an example being more flexibility for students who wished to switch from one FE organization to another, and for students to enter University via vocational organizations, rather than the more traditional sixth forms (Education Department, 1988).

Maltese government policy for the FE sector is partly dictated by the EU. Since EU policy regulations impinge on FE organizations *through* the government, it is being assumed here that the term ‘government policy’ refers to both local initiatives as well as any EU regulations for the FE sector. In the following paragraphs the local FE sector is compared to the FE sector in Australia, the UK, and the USA, demonstrating the similarities and dissimilarities that currently exist and their impact on alignment. This discussion will focus on the nebulous use of terminology in the FE sector, the variety of courses offered, FE’s links with higher education (HE), FE partnerships with industry, and the role of lecturing staff in FE.

The number of different terms applicable to FE in England shows that this sector is in a continuous state of flux (Avis, 2009) and compounded by the range of titles FE teachers may have (e.g. tutor, work-based assessor, progress tutor, lecturer, advanced practitioner) (Gleeson, Davies, and Wheeler, 2005). Also the Australian Department of Education refers to VET as an educational sector and Technical and Further Education organizations (TAFE) as actual colleges/institutes/institutes of technology (Australian Dept. of Education, 2009). Thus researchers use the terms interchangeably. Students are, at times, not aware of the terminology used in the course they enrol in – in other words the acronym VET may be new to them (Dalley-Trim, Alloway, and Walker, 2008).

FE sectors in different countries may vary. In the UK, FE organizations offer courses on a full- or part-time basis to students aged 14 and over, while in Malta, Australia and the USA courses are offered to 16+ students. Furthermore the research emphasis in the UK and Australia is on VET organizations while in the USA such emphasis is on community colleges (Boggs, 2007). All three countries are alike in terms of rationale, e.g. the VET sector has 'its roles of an industry skills trainer, the major adult education provider, a post-school education provider and a provider to school age students' (Keating, 2006, 68), while community colleges are perceived as drivers of economic growth in rural areas (Rephann, 2007) by serving five curricular purposes: academic transfer preparation, vocational-technical education, developmental education, continuing education, and community service (Warren, 2006).

In the UK and Australia, technical, vocational, and A-level educational courses are all offered by an organization itself or in partnership with other organizations and colleges (Muijs *et al.*, 2006). There are also increasing numbers of part-time students at UK FE colleges corresponding to government policy on lifelong learning and the knowledge economy (Gallacher, 2006). This policy is referred to as the 'third way' policy of New Labour based on the principles of inclusion, participation, and collaboration (Hyland and Merrill, 2001) and might go some way in establishing alignment between policy and FE colleges' missions in that country. FE organizations in Malta, however, offer either vocational or A-level courses (Caruana, 2005; Edwards, 2005), the exception being GCHSS which offers a range of academic courses at both O- and A-level. Vocational curricula are set by vocational organizations (i.e. MCAST and ITS), while academic curricula are set by the Matriculation and Secondary Certificate Board (Matsec). In all cases, FE curricula are dominated by the acquisition of skills and knowledge, thus supposedly following government educational policy (Edwards, 2005; Mifsud, 2005).

The above contrasts with the English scenario, where a system is in place allowing students to opt for applied A-levels. These are vocational coursework-based courses and have been perceived by students, parents and teachers as being more relaxed than the traditional academic A-levels (Wallenborn and Heyneman 2009). However research on 666 students at a large mixed gender sixth form in the UK, while demonstrating that students taking such applied A-levels fared worse than those students studying academic A-levels, discovered that applied A-level students 'were generally well motivated and hardworking' (Wilkins and Walker, 2011, 461). This may mean that UK universities may be 'misguided in assuming that applied courses do not develop in students the skills that they need to be successful in higher education' (*ibid.*, 461).

In Malta as well as the UK, FE organizations are not only viewed as feeder colleges but also partake of the HE sector. MCAST in Malta now offers Bachelor degrees, while students at ITS may continue their tourism studies at the University of Malta (Edwards, 2005; Mifsud, 2005). In this way FE organizations can be strategically linked to HE organizations, the major problems being the prevalent school culture, staff who resist such a move, and the lack of time for scholarly research (Harwood and Harwood, 2004). The link between FE and HE organizations is, however, blurred in the UK with many students following higher education courses at FE institutes (Gallacher, 2006). Lecturers in HE in FE contexts utilize a different approach towards teaching strategy and see themselves as teachers rather than lecturers (Burkill, Dyer, and Stone, 2008). The latter has been perceived as positive, especially if done to improve teacher quality (Cunningham and Doncaster, 2002).

The right implementation of the above strategy results in greater inclusiveness within the FE sector (Craig, 2009) and is also one of the Maltese government's policy for the sector (NCHE, 2009) and perceived as being in line with EU policy, specifically, the Lisbon

objectives (Caruana, 2005). Consequently, the overlap between VET and HE is slowly increasing with students moving from one educational sector to another for a number of reasons, such as getting a broad education, a more prestigious qualification, and updating qualifications (Harris, 2008). Understanding the nature of this traffic is difficult since a university student may undertake a VET course while still an undergraduate, rather than wait till graduation to enrol on a course (Keating, 2006). Apart from student traffic between different sectors, some FE organizations are merging with universities to provide seamlessness between one sector and another (Garrod and Macfarlane, 2007).

Partnerships with local business are also deemed important since such connections may help students adapt to the place of work (Warren, 2006). This, again, is one of the Maltese government's policies (NCHE, 2009) and is emphasized at both MCAST and ITS (Edwards, 2005; Mifsud, 2005). Such a strategy must be implemented with caution, e.g. in Australia, TAFE colleges are 'oriented towards short-term strategic planning that was client sensitive, where the client was increasingly becoming industry and not the individual' (Blackmore and Sachs, 2003, 483). Private providers of VET thus rely on strong relationships with industry to maximize funding (Guthrie, 2008). The monopolization of VET by private industry may result in high non-completion rates by students, selectivity of training skills and the lack of skill transferability (Snell and Hart, 2007). It has also been determined that VET is not used by small and medium enterprises in Australia (Jones, 2006).

Teachers in the vocational FE sector in the UK come from a wide variety of backgrounds, this being a reflection of the variety of courses on offer and may not have teaching qualifications in class and hardly any teaching experience at all (Rothwell, 2002). This is compounded by the rise in part-time teachers in FE education, a factor which may contribute to a fall in standards (Rothwell, 2002; Hill, 2000; Husbands and Davies, 2000) which may be

lessened by including mentoring in FE organizations (Cunningham, 2007). The latter was initiated by the UK government by trying to equip teachers in FE organizations with the right skills and knowledge to act as school transformers (Browne, Kelly, and Sargent, 2008). These initiatives may be stifled by the juggling between FE colleges and private industry creating a ‘third space’ (Harris and Simons, 2006). It may be that the ‘third space’ creates a sense of ambiguity where teachers and managers have to wear different ‘hats’ depending where they are and whom they are speaking to (*ibid.*). On the other hand, Maltese regulations stipulate that teachers at Government, Independent, and Church-run organizations have a warrant granted by the Ministry of Education. Such regulations do not apply to MCAST, ITS, and JC.

Research questions

The above introduction led the researcher to propose a number of research questions aimed at uncovering the relationship between stakeholders and alignment using a complementarity blended methods approach based on pragmatism (Greene, 2007; Maxcy, 2003; Greene, Caracelli, and Graham, 1987). Such an approach is deemed useful since the study of alignment is perceived as multidimensional (Kaplan and Norton, 2006; Labovitz and Rosansky, 1997).

The aim of this thesis is to create an analytical model of the Maltese FE sector, showing how internal and external stakeholders impact alignment between government and organizational policies. To fulfil this aim, the following research questions are asked (Table 1.3). By evaluating different stakeholders’ perceptions regarding alignment, a link between internal and external alignment may be established.

Table 1.3: Research questions delineated by government and other stakeholders

Research questions	
Government policy alignment	<p>How does the content of FE organizations' mission statements compare with statutory and advisory government policy for the sector?</p> <p>In what ways, and with what perceived success, are national quality assurance procedures intended for, and used to, ensure policy alignment to state goals?</p>
Other stakeholders' alignment	<p>What are stakeholders' roles in working towards mission alignment with government policy?</p> <p>How do stakeholders perceive the effectiveness of FE organizations' efforts to align resources, strategic planning and quality assurance (QA) procedures to organizational mission?</p>

Conclusion

This chapter, an outline of the research, aimed to give a summary of the investigation and help the reader comprehend how this study has been approached from a theoretical perspective. The objectives of Chapter 2 and 3 are threefold: the first is to review the most significant extant literature on stakeholder theory, government policy, and RBV (Chapter 2); strategic theory, organizational mission and performance measurement (Chapter 3), and classify it in a way that offers a valuable understanding of the advancement of each of the topic areas. The specific prominence of the literature review is on the central theoretical and empirical contributions relating to each of these areas.

The objective of Chapter 4 is to discuss and develop the methodological approach used to investigate the various research questions. The chapter begins with a review of the ontological and epistemological underpinnings of blended methodology and uses this discussion to put forward the research method applied. Ethical guidelines conclude this chapter.

Data gathered for this thesis is displayed and merged in Chapter 5. Since a blended methodology is used, qualitative and quantitative data emanating from each FE organization is displayed separately in relation to each research question. Chapter 6 discusses these results in light of current knowledge while recommendations and the systems theory and data-driven FE model is presented in Chapter 7.

Chapter Two – Literature Review: stakeholder theory, government policies, and the resource-based view of organizations

Introduction

As beneficiaries of public funding, FE organizations must account for their actions and accomplishments to government and the wider society. More than ever they are required to exhibit wider benefits arising from their activities in line with ‘value for money’ requirements, such as alignment with government policy (Benneworth and Jongbloed, 2010). FE organizations, like other social institutions, are thus made accountable to a number of stakeholders ‘through the delivery of improved public goods’ (*ibid*, 569).

Taking note of the above, this chapter starts by analysing the theoretical foundations of stakeholder theory and is followed by the government’s role as a major stakeholder in policy-making and implementation. Next comes a discussion of the resource-based view, since in Malta government is responsible for most of the funding attributable to FE. The approach taken here incorporates elements of the alignment models discussed in Chapter 1 throughout the literature review, thus demonstrating the link and limitations between such models and theory.

International literature on FE was more forthcoming than that on alignment. In the search for applicable literature, alignment studies in the higher education sector (HE) in the USA, UK, and Australia were consulted. This approach may be considered valid owing to the overlap that exists between the two sectors (FE and HE) and is supported by researchers who have followed such a strategy (Feather, 2012). Academic articles address a wide range of issues. In this thesis the important topics with respect to FE were policy formulation and implementation, organizational mission, strategic management, stakeholder theory, and

performance measurement. While academic literature on the Maltese FE sector is scarce, this was enriched with work done in other small states.

Stakeholder theory

Stakeholder theory was put forward by Freeman (1984) as a suggestion for the strategic management of organizations. Over time, this theory has increased in standing, with significant works by Clarkson (1995), Mitchell, Agle, and Wood (1997), Rowley (1997), and Frooman (1999) permitting both greater theoretical depth and development. From a primarily strategic viewpoint, the theory progressed and was espoused as a means of management by many market-based organizations (Mitchell, Agle, and Wood, 1997) with its movement into educational studies as market orientation grew from the 1980s.

There are two main reasons for considering the inclusion of stakeholder view in this research. First, organizational success may not be simply a matter of increasing wealth since other criteria, such as disclosure of strategic direction and internal processes to both internal and external stakeholders, may have a positive effect on how the organization is perceived (Kaplan and Norton, 2006). Secondly, for organizational alignment to be present, organizations might have to meet or exceed stakeholders' expectations (Duffy, 2004) so long as these expectations lead to alignment. It has been argued that organizational alignment will ensue when stakeholder perspectives are aligned leading to organizational goal achievement (Fleming, 2012). To achieve this, open communication based on trust is perceived as imperative (Caldwell, 2008) and may lead to stakeholder alignment – a state where all relevant educational stakeholders are involved in problem-solving (Ortiz, 2008). This may safeguard the long-term feasibility of organizations and policies (Bryson, 2004). Yet, empirical evidence from the HE sector in the USA demonstrates that such alignment based on shared vision may be unfeasible (Barnett, 2011). It may be better to 'embrace the

multiplicity of meanings inherent to change and strive to conjoin divergent perspectives’ (*ibid.*, 139) rather than ‘try to convince them to change their minds’ (Duffy, 2004, 181).

Stakeholder theory looks at who (or what) the stakeholders of an organization are, and to whom (or what) organizations should take note, a notion introduced into the mainstream of strategic theory by Freeman (Freeman, 1984). Table 2.1 delineates different positions taken by leading researchers in this field. These definitions span different contexts such as Grimble and Wellard’s focus on organized or unorganized groups (1997) which contrasts with Clarkson’s attention to time (1995), not only meaning that stakeholders might change, but also that they might change their attitudes towards the organization in question (Billgren and Holmen, 2008). It is, however, generally thought that only organized groups are perceived as stakeholders (*ibid.*).

Table 2.1: Definitions of stakeholders, 1984 – 2004

Source	Definition
Buanes <i>et al.</i>, 2004, 211	Any group or individual who may directly or indirectly affect – or be affected.
Varvasovszky and Brugha, 2000, 341	Actors who have an interest in the issue under consideration, who are affected by the issue, or who – because of their position – have or could have an active or passive influence on the decision-making and implementation process.
Gass, Biggs and Kelly, 1997, 122	Any individual, group, and institution who/which would potentially be affected, whether positively or negatively, by a specified event, process, or change.
Grimble and Wellard, 1997, 175	Any group of people, organized or unorganized, who share a common interest or stake in a particular issue or system.
Clarkson, 1995, 106	Persons or groups that have, or claim, ownership, rights, or interests in a corporation and its activities, past, present, or future.
Bowie, 1988, 112	[Persons or groups] without whose support the organization would cease to exist.
Freeman, 1984, 46	[A person or group] who can affect or is affected by the achievement of the organization’s objectives.

Source: Author

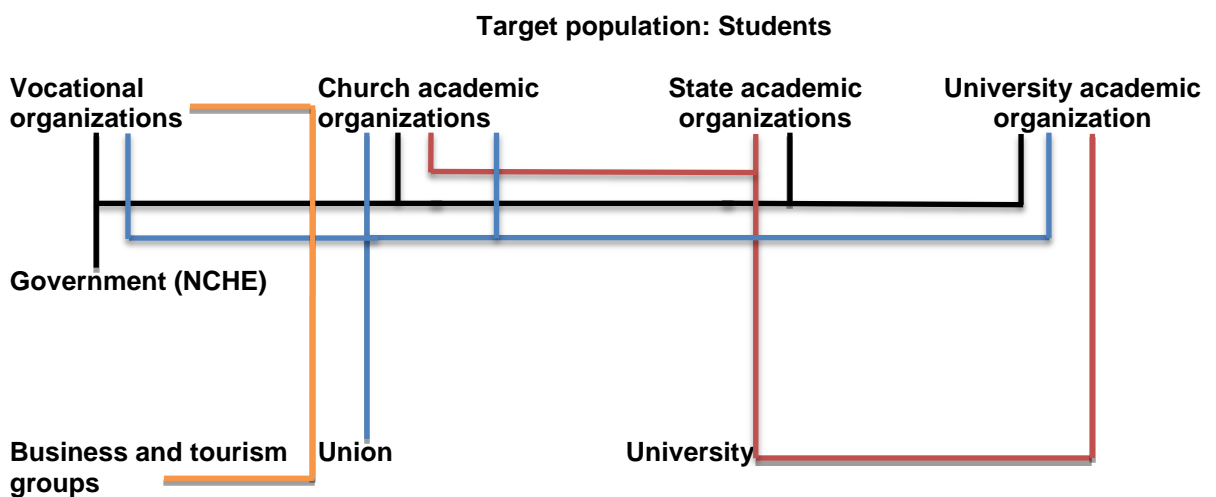
Initial research on stakeholder theory determined that stakeholders can be divided into two categories: primary and secondary (Nutt and Backo, 1992). Primary stakeholders are thought to be crucial to the organization's existence and their elimination would have negative consequences for the organization (Clarkson, 1995). In FE, primary stakeholders might include unions, academic and management staff, and government. Primary stakeholders have also been termed strategic or critical stakeholders. Secondary stakeholders are those 'who can influence or affect, or are influenced or affected by, the actions of the organization' (Kamal, Weerakkody, and Irani, 2011, 202). This contrasts with the categories established by Pelle Culpin (1998) [cited in Pesqueux and Damak-Ayadi, 2005] who distinguished among institutional stakeholders (e.g. governments who set laws and policies), educational stakeholders (e.g. other organizations in FE), and ethical stakeholders (e.g. political pressure groups). A more complex typology based on primary data collected through interviews and questionnaires in eleven Portuguese universities identifies stakeholders under the labels regulator, controller, partner, passive, dependent, and non-stakeholder (Mainardes, Alves, and Raposo, 2012). Another framework involves identifying stakeholders based on moral legitimacy, the power to sway the organization in question, and the urgency of the stakeholder's assertion (Mitchell, Agle, and Wood, 1997). These authors classify stakeholders with one attribute as being latent, with two attributes as expectant, and with all three attributes as definitive.

In this last stakeholder typology, power is defined as the ability of a stakeholder to force another stakeholder to engage in a specific behaviour and might be akin to the primary stakeholder category in the previous paragraph (Kamal, Weerakkody, and Irani, 2011; Mitchell, Agle, and Wood, 1997). Legitimacy is a widespread opinion that the behaviour of a stakeholder is fitting within some socially constructed scheme of norms and beliefs (Lim, Ahn, and Lee, 2005). Urgency is the point to which stakeholder entitlements call for instant

consideration (*ibid*; Mitchell, Agle, and Wood, 1997). Typically, stakeholders are likely to require different degrees and types of attention depending on their power, legitimacy, and urgency and can differ across time frames.

In FE such stakeholders may include government, FE organizations' administration, academic staff, unions, and external partners, such as businesses (Burrows, 1999). Students are usually omitted in alignment and policy studies (Vandal, 2009; Duffy, 2004) since the majority are 'minors who legally lack significant power to influence policy' (Ortiz, 2008, 16). For this reason, the researcher felt that it was not appropriate to include students in this thesis. Following the above stakeholder typology, government is perceived to be a definitive stakeholder due to its power, legitimacy, and urgency all of which are consistent over time (Benneworth and Jongbloed, 2010). Other stakeholders may not have all these characteristics all of the time and may be labelled latent or expectant (*ibid.*). Following Ortiz (2008), the researcher outlined a stakeholder map for the Maltese FE sector (Figure 2.1).

Figure 2.1: Stakeholder map for the Maltese FE sector, 2012



Source: Author

The FE organizations in Figure 2.1 may respond in different ways to contradictory stakeholders' claims. Table 2.2 displays researchers' responses to such claims. Strategies based on a reactive, defensive, accommodative, or proactive response are ubiquitous in academic literature, probably owing to the underlying empirical evidence supporting such a claim. A reactive response is passive and signifies a denial of responsibility coupled with behaviours which result in doing less than required; a defensive approach focuses on regulatory compliance and denotes the admittance of responsibility but demonstrating resistance resulting in doing the least that is required; an accommodative response indicates admittance of responsibility as an organizational norm and doing all that is required; proactivity means that the organization forestalls responsibility and does more than is required (Fang, Huang, and Huang, 2010; Peng, 2009).

Table 2.2: Classifications of organizational strategies to stakeholder claims, 1991-2002

Author	Strategies	Evidence	Stakeholders
Bunn, Savage, and Holloway, 2002	Lead Collaborate Involve Defend Educate Monitor	Feasibility study of an integrated traffic management and emergency response system in Alabama	Emergency responders Medical care providers Transportation agencies The community
Clarkson, 1995 Wartick and Cochran, 1985	Reactive Defensive Accommodative Proactive	Evidence gathered from 400 corporations	Business executives Company directors Unions Employees
Frooman, 1999	Direct withholding Direct usage Indirect withholding Indirect usage	Secondary data such as case studies	Business executives Consumers Environmental organizations
Oliver, 1991	Acquiesce Compromise Avoid Defy Manipulate	Theoretical approach	Not applicable
Savage et al., 1991	Collaborate Involve Defend Monitor	Case study on an 1989 strike at Eastern Airlines	Business executives Unions Employees Passengers

Source: Author

Although finding variations in the strategies employed to ensure alignment, alignment itself was deemed vital in all the above studies since ‘all individuals, teams, schools, and clusters must be moving upward together toward higher levels of organizational performance’ (Duffy, 2004, xii). It might be that alignment can occur through communication with all stakeholders. In this way the FE organization may legitimize its strategies and goals by earning the trust of academic staff, government, business, tourism, union, and university officials (van Riel, 2012). However, such stakeholder alignment assumes that stakeholders have a defined managerial role (Briggs, 2007; Farrugia, 2002).

Utilizing an interpretative approach (grounded theory), research in four FE colleges in the UK (East Midlands and London) revealed that middle managers, as stakeholders in these colleges, may have up to five different roles: corporate agent, implementer, staff manager, liaison, and leader (Briggs, 2007). As corporate agents, middle managers holistically comprehended their work at the organization by demonstrating an awareness of organizational values. The implementer feature involved the execution of college policy, with an emphasis on the effective organization of departmental undertakings. Staff management emphasized the management of the various needs of staff and students. Liaison was a way of implementing the corporate role of large FE organizations and encompassed an understanding of the organization’s hierarchy and the skill set needed to negotiate with groups and individuals. The term leader seemed to be the most contested, since the large size of the FE organizations under investigation in this study engaged a system of dispersed leadership. It may therefore seem that, from a practical viewpoint, stakeholder alignment may be very difficult to achieve (*ibid.*).

One way to mitigate the effects of dispersed multiple roles is to ensure trust, connections, and shared organizational goals among stakeholders (Nahapiet and Ghoshal, 1998), a situation

which is somewhat tautological, since the researchers were seeking alignment to achieve alignment. However the objectives of the research could amend this seeming conundrum since trust, connections, and shared organizational roles are perceived as instrumental towards building social and spiritual capital (Caldwell, 2007, 2008; Nahapiet and Ghoshal, 1998). Lack of trust may result in more time and money spent on some organizational activities individuals and organizations engage in (Covey, 2006; Fukuyama, 1995), a situation made more problematic if organizational leadership is concentrated within the organization's SMT (Briggs, 2007). However, recurring, successful two-way connections may lead to enhanced organizational performance (Miller, 1992), as shared organizational goals are perceived beneficial since resources may be used effectively and efficiently (Thompson, Strickland, and Gamble, 2007).

The attributes mentioned in the preceding paragraph have been operationalized as 'the connections held by top managers' (Leana and Pil, 2006, 355). In the educational context, this translates to school principals but may be helpfully extended by considering the liaison role of middle managers in FE organizations (Briggs, 2007). Indeed, evidence from Australian, UK, and Chinese school principals identified the alignment between stakeholder expectations and organizational mission as one of the principal indicators of organizational social capital (Caldwell and Harris, 2008). Empirical studies using multivariate statistical analysis illustrate that organizational social capital and organizational performance are positively correlated (Andrews, 2010; Leana and Pil, 2006; Langbein and Jorstad, 2004). Thus the relations between urban school principals and external stakeholders might predict student achievement in reading (Leana and Pil, 2006). However, this relationship has not been fully explored thus necessitating one of the questions for this research, 'what are stakeholders' roles in working towards mission alignment with government policy?'

In ascertaining these roles, it is acknowledged that government is both a stakeholder itself and the body that establishes the objective of alignment. The next section will discuss and examine government's role in FE. Such a role is explained in terms of policy-making and implementation in relation to contemporary alignment theories, keeping in mind that FE organizations may have to be aware 'of developments in beliefs about issues that might impact them' (van Riel, 2012, 97) if alignment is to be attained, assuming that alignment is beneficial, an assumption which will not be taken here.

Government and EU policies for the FE sector

Government (public) policy definitions are multifaceted embracing activities, outputs, outcomes, theories, and processes (Hogwood and Gunn, 1984). Thus public policy may be viewed as text and discourse involving the representation of thoughts within a socio-political framework (Bell and Stevenson, 2006; Ball, 1994; Cohen, 1990) and is, at times, equated with legislation interacting with other texts such as policy documents published by various governmental agencies (Spillane, 2008). Such government documents are generally viewed as stemming from political agendas perceived as important by the political party in power (Yeatman, 1990). However, (public) policy has also been described in terms of what a government does not do (Newton and van Deth, 2005; Dye, 1992), while a more economic approach views policy as the action a government follows to advance a society's wellbeing, given limited resources (Alcock, 2003; Taylor, Lingard, and Henry, 1997).

Inasmuch as it works within a complex social environment, policy may be important since it is one of society's shapers and is considered influential (Woolhouse and Cochrane, 2009). Thus public policy in one area usually impacts other areas (Taylor, Lingard, and Henry, 1997). For example, the abolition of unemployment benefits in Australia aimed at 16 – 17 year-olds in the 1980s had the effect of raising the school leaving age (*ibid.*), whilst the

introduction of an educational quasi-market in the same period in the UK resulted in greater inequality, since bright students from poorer backgrounds suffered (Machin and Vignoles, 2006). In light of these examples FE policy may be linked to other policy areas (e.g. economic development), thus providing consistency (Maclean and Pavlova, 2010).

On both national and international scales such consistency is sought by ensuring that FE policies are determined by the twin concepts of neoliberalism and globalization (Nairn and Higgins, 2011; Juul, 2010; Mitchell, 2006; Bonal, 2004). Historically, neoliberalism is perceived as a response to the crisis that Keynesian economics faced in the 1970s: the oil crisis; large annual public deficits; inflation and globalization leading to deindustrialization as multinationals moved elsewhere (Basu, 2004). Neoliberal policy may also be perceived as commodifying political, social, and economic decisions (Huang, 2012). In the educational context, this has translated into a greater say for private industry in educational organizations and the ‘promotion of values of enterprise and entrepreneurship’ (McCafferty, 2010, 541).

Neoliberal policies have been extensively criticized by researchers in many disciplines, since they lead to the accumulation of capital by the few, thus promoting inequality (Sneigocki, 2008). Such criticism is leveled at the way UK policy texts are written (Mulderigg, 2011), the theoretical underpinnings of neoliberal thought within the Australian VET sector and the USA (Fitzsimmons, 2009; Sheldon and Thornthwaite, 2005), and its implementation in English FE organizations (Mather, Worrall, and Seifert, 2007). These are dealt with in the next three paragraphs.

It has been claimed that UK policy texts have tended to become more personalized (for example, by using the pronoun ‘we’) and managerial, keeping in mind that such texts do not exist in a social vacuum but have a multifaceted, historical, and dynamic association with society (Mulderigg, 2011). By employing corpus-based critical discourse analysis to UK

policy texts written between 1972 and 2005, the author declared that, over time, such texts may be a way whereby government coerced educational organizations and staff by textually engineering consensus over its (government) policy choices. In this way the UK government may have managed to ‘construe educational roles, relations and responsibilities not only for itself, but also for other educational actors and wider society’ (*ibid.*, 562), and may act to lower the freedom of such educational actors (Torres, 2011). This may be perceived in the ambivalent way the pronoun ‘we’ is utilized in UK policy texts, where, for example, it may mean ‘government’, ‘government and citizens’, and ‘government and educational organizations’ (Mulderrig, 2011).

The theoretical foundation on which neoliberalism rests has been criticized as being socially unjust and may lead to a democratic deficit (Torres, 2011; Sheldon and Thornthwaite, 2005). For example, in Australia, neoliberalism has been attacked by academics since employers strive to control the FE system with the least possible financial outlay, human resource input, and responsibility (Sheldon and Thornthwaite, 2005; van Buren, 2003). Employers are progressively expecting workers to be accountable for their own human capital (*ibid.*), which may lead to motivational problems in the workplace (Cappelli, 1999). It has been argued from a moral perspective, that by lessening employment security, employers should be accountable for providing employability competences to workers (van Buren, 2003). In the same spirit, Vandal’s concept of educonomy has also been criticized for its commodifying effect as well as normalizing students (thus stifling diversity and student engagement) (Fitzsimmons, 2009). It seems, therefore, that the main focus of education has become the economy rather than the student.

Neoliberalism has been linked to work intensification for FE lecturers and deskilling, coupled with a transfer of work control to management (Mather, Worrall, and Seifert, 2007).

Fieldwork, utilizing blended methods, was conducted in the UK on three case study colleges of similar size and operating within similar socio-economic circumstances in the English West Midlands in 2002 (*ibid.*). Work intensification led to collective demoralization and passive resistance from FE lecturers. Such resistance was exemplified by lack of lesson preparation and just doing what was necessary to get by in the place of work, leading to a restructuring of work practices similar to ‘a factory system of production where standardization in the form of modularization has taken place’ (*ibid.*, 122). Additionally, this study indicated that FE organizations’ managers perceived the difficulty as one related to the rigidity inherent in FE lecturers’ contracts. This apparent power shift from lecturers’ professionalism to a managerial mindset in the UK FE sector may be perceived as a shift towards neoliberal values (Randle and Brady, 1997). This shift may be less than expected since it may be that principals in English FE colleges are there to serve students (Lumby and Tomlinson, 2000), and the re-professionalization of FE lecturers (Gleeson, 2001).

Managerialism in the UK FE context, as mentioned in the previous paragraph, is perceived to be based on accountability, standards, testing, diversification of revenue sources, the implementation of cost-recovery policies, and privatization (Huang, 2012; Colclough, 1996) all of which supposedly maintain alignment (Duffy, 2004). In many cases, the rationale for such policies has been market efficiency with the introduction of incorporation in the FE sector in many countries (Mather, Worrall, and Seifert, 2007; Keating, 2006). This was done to increase parental choice, based on information such as school league tables, and to help FE organizations focus on utilitarianism (Dalley-Trim, Alloway, and Walker, 2008; Colclough, 1996). Such utilitarianism is discursively expressed in terms of skills, qualifications, mobility, and knowledge, attributes all seemingly important in the modern, globalized knowledge-based economy, grounded in a flexible workforce (Nairn and Higgins, 2011; Juul, 2010; Avis and Bathmaker, 2004).

The managerialism that is seen as one of the outcomes of neoliberal attitudes in UK politics has been intensified through incorporation (Rothwell, 2002; Husbands and Davies, 2000). Incorporation led to industrial action in the nineties, as FE organizations have become more managerialistic, tied with distrust, insecurity, and a lack of openness. The factors which contributed to industrial action included job losses, wage conditions, and employment procedures (Hill, 2000). There has also been a rise in part time teachers in FE education, a factor which may contribute to a fall in standards due to lack of qualifications, professional development, and service delivery (Rothwell, 2002; Hill, 2000; Husbands and Davies, 2000).

In a parallel situation to the UK, the FE sector in Australia began the process of incorporation in the late eighties and continued throughout the nineties. Reform was brought about by the Federal Labour Government, due to unsustainable youth unemployment in the late seventies and financial collapse in the eighties (Keating, 2006). The FE sector was closely, and still is, closely linked with industry (*ibid.*). In many cases, it may be that the managerial team consisted of a core of professional male managers who set policy, surrounded by female middle managers with a teaching background (Blackmore and Sachs, 2003). It was found that in this scenario, decision making in FE organizations was becoming centralized towards top management, thus omitting other stakeholders, while the VET sector was going through decentralization as a whole (*ibid.*).

The discussion on FE educational reform may indicate that neoliberal educational policies could also be viewed within a globalized context (Juul, 2010; Klees, 2002). Globalization may be defined as a trend driven by economic realities such as international trade and development models which result in changes in politics, and decision-making on the national and international level (Sykes, 2003; White, 2000). This is augmented by a world that is 'shrinking in space and time' (Slaus, Slaus-Kokotovic, and Morovic, 2004, 492) and coupled

with the existence of institutions such as the UN, EU, and the World Bank which facilitate and accommodate such trends. This manifests itself in the numerous neoliberal educational policies advocated by these institutions (Mitchell, 2006; Bonal, 2004), thus displaying an international hegemonic control at the expense of other stakeholders, such as lecturers and students (Pansiri, 2011). In the EU this is subject to the principle of subsidiarity with individual states partaking in decision-making (Johnson, 2003). The following paragraph focuses on how the EU has implemented such a neoliberal regime.

The Lisbon Agenda and the Bologna Process (signed in 1998 and 2002 respectively) tabled a common framework of qualifications including the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) and curricula styled on learning outcomes (European Union, 2010; European Council, 2000). Learning outcomes are defined as ‘statements of what a learner knows, understands and is able to do on completion of a learning process’ (Azevedo, Apfelthaler, and Hurst, 2012). The Copenhagen Declaration continued the neoliberal dialogue with the introduction of transparency and the Europass. The latter is a document similar to a CV indicating the work history and qualifications of vocational workers (European Commission, 2008; Ertl, 2006). The Bologna and Copenhagen processes reflect a model that is eclectic, borrowing from different aspects of VET policy from ‘highly influential countries’ (Powell, Bernard, and Graf, 2012, 255) including the USA, UK, and Germany. These policies indicate that Maltese FE policies are partly dictated by EU as well as local needs based on the acquisition of skills, knowledge, competences, and qualifications and located within a curriculum (Barslund, 2012; European Commission, 2008). Yet small states such as Malta may ‘identify and prioritize more pressing national objectives’ than those of their European counterparts (Crossley, Bray, and Packer, 2011, 11) which may lead to ‘a complex process of negotiation and compromise’ (Hantrais, 2003, 237).

Therefore despite the effect(s) of globalization, policies are subject to local contexts and realities (Huang, 2012; Yi, 2011; Sykes, 2003) resulting in ambiguous and conflicting messages (Tan, 2008). Furthermore, small states have limited financial and human resources, meaning that the linkage between utilitarian educational courses and industry may be vital (Alcindor, 2002), a lack of which may lead to the social rejection of the course (White, 2002) since it may take a long time for fresh graduates to find a job, as in the case of St Kitts and Nevis (Crossley, Bray, and Packer, 2011). The problem is magnified since small states have a limited industrial base, which may lead to complications of scale factors (Farrugia, 2002) and the marginalization of humanistic education (Kent, 2012; Wain, 2005).

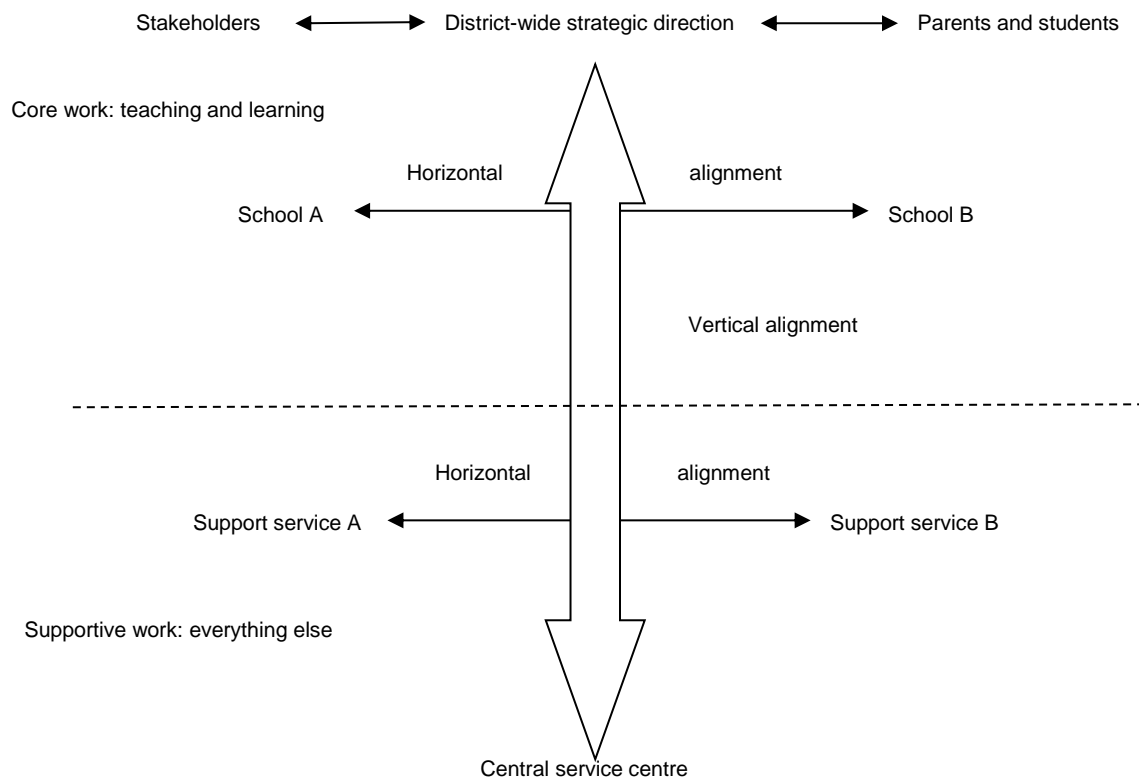
In Malta, such realities may be observed in the way local FE organizations implement one of the Lisbon objectives: increasing participation. At MCAST, such a policy has been translated in a number of ways, such as appropriate career guidance and advice, organizational responsiveness, learner support, curriculum structure, relevance and delivery, award recognition, and stakeholder engagement (Edwards, 2005). At ITS, a holistic approach based on the delivery of local and foreign work experiences for students and a broad array of skills coupled with perceiving ITS as a catalyst in VET are seen as important ways to attract students (Mifsud, 2005). Giving another chance by providing students with a wide range of educational pathways geared towards students who want to continue their studies at other academic or vocational organizations is GCHSS's way of encouraging students to remain in the educational system (Caruana, 2005).

The above demonstrates that policy-making is subject to negotiation by various parties. The main stakeholders in the policy-making process are national governments, students, teachers, school SMTs, teachers' unions, pressure groups, NGOs, QUANGOS, and supranational organizations working together and against each other as each group puts forward its agenda

based on its interests (MacLean and Pavlova, 2010; Hill, 2003; Klees, 2002; Colclough, 1996). Clearly some organizations wield more power than others and may act forcibly to side-line other stakeholders (Bonal, 2004), financial and legal autonomy playing important roles (Jaramillo, 2012). For example, the European Commission has binding regulative powers in the field of vocational education given to it by the European Court of Justice (ECJ) in a series of rulings during the 1980s and 1990s (Suoto-Otero, Fleckenstein, and Dacombe, 2008).

Furthermore, such educational policies may follow what is known as the median-voter model, whereby politicians may put pressure on other stakeholders to choose policies ‘that most closely align with the interests of the median voter’ (Dar, 2012, 771). It may be argued that such policies have a dual function: that of redistributing wealth from the general population to a smaller section of society and increasing the public good. The latter means that ‘politicians take into consideration that the transfer of resources from taxpayers to higher education produces benefits for the whole population through positive externalities and other collective benefits.’ (*ibid.*, 780). Figure 2.2 displays how such stakeholders are connected in Duffy’s alignment model.

Figure 2.2: School system alignment as applied to an American school district



Source: Duffy, 2004, 199

In a top-down fashion Duffy contends that strategies and policies be derived at the district level following consultation with stakeholders (Duffy, 2009). Such strategies/policies are then cascaded downwards to individual schools. At the school level, policy and strategy implementation may be cascaded horizontally to other schools in terms of best practice(s). To achieve this, it is necessary to have the right support from the central service centre (formerly district central administration office) (*ibid.*).

Stakeholder consultation in the above model (Duffy, 2004) may be perceived as some form of pluralism (Newton and van Deth, 2005), generally expressed in the form of complex policy networks (Holloway, 2009). Networks are webs comprising individuals conversant with some policy issues and reveal actors' attitudes and behaviours (Song and Miskel, 2005) resulting in bricolage-style policy-crafting where different ideas and concepts are put together, in the hope that something positive will emerge (Hoppers, 2009). Even though some

actors may be more powerful, marginalized actors may, in certain cases, be able to marshal enough resources to effect policy changes (Grossman, 2010). In Malta, our understanding of the roles played by different policy actors in the FE sector is poor and maybe more difficult since actors may have multiple roles (Farrugia, 1991). This work will help uncover how different actors see themselves and others with respect to Maltese FE policy.

Policies are only effective if implemented well. Policy implementation is a process that should have some desirable and measurable effect on a specific problem that the policy addresses (Howlett and Ramesh, 2003; O'Toole, 1995; Pressman and Wildavsky, 1984). It consists of a series of tasks related to carrying out the intent of the law (Spillane, 2008). Within the educational context, policy implementation may be defined as a process of 'transforming educational policy into practice' (Hope, 2002, 40). The state may use instrumental, strategic, and symbolic structures, to implement policy (Louis and Corwin, 1984).

Instrumental structures connect materials, resources, and services to desired goals (Louis and Corwin, 1984). These structures tend to be logical and are clearly connected to the formal organizational aims. One is able to establish the effectiveness of such structures due to this clear connection. Examples of instrumental structures include teacher-training programs and university accreditation. Strategic structures signify the strategies that are used by the state to supply and distribute resources to FE organizations (*ibid.*). Such structures exhibit greater suppleness than instrumental structures, since the former focus on linkages between the organization and the state rather than on written documentation. Examples of strategic structures include technical support and communication methods used by the state in order to help schools. Alternatively, symbolic structures delineate the rituals, ideologies, and ceremonies that the state and individual FE organization may use to emphasize dedication

towards organizational aims. Unfortunately, this does not automatically involve the implementation of actual plans and strategies (*ibid.*).

Governments' F.E. policy implementation varies. For example, USA federal intervention has been perceived to increase since the 1960s and now includes curriculum, pedagogy and results' benchmarking (McLendon, Heller, and Lee, 2009; Spillane, 2008). Such intervention may be necessary to align high-schools' output, workplace needs, and university places (Achieve, 2008) but variations occur as policy application is left to individual states (Spillane, 2008; Akiba, LeTrende, and Scribner, 2007). Similarly, the UK's four states may interpret national policies differently (McTavish, 2006). There seems congruent acceptance, however, across all four, of national FE policy including parents and central inspectors as stakeholders (Lumby, 2007; Plowright, 2007). This study investigates variations like these in a small state, generally regarded as much more centralized than either the USA or the UK (Farrugia, 2002).

Those EU countries which traditionally stressed FE in their educational set-up are now challenged to change, meaning that contextual issues may have to be taken into account during implementation (Balzer and Rusconi, 2007). Implementation procedures range from a single element (e.g. legislation) to whole-scale educational transformations (Maclean and Pavlova, 2010; Dunkel, 2009; Kamarainen, 2006). In Norway the implementation of quality reform in FE and HE may be perceived as an example of a single-element transformation (Dunkel, 2008). Alternatively, reform in the Danish FE sector was perceived to be much more comprehensive impacting on various elements, such as policy formulation, funding, quality standards, and feedback mechanisms (OECD, 2008). Locally the setting up of the Malta Qualifications Council is perceived as a direct result of the Bologna Process (Gatt, 2009). Furthermore, HE and the VET component of FE may compete for students, funding,

and status as is happening in Germany, France, and Holland leading to the hybridization of organizations: VET organizations which offer bachelor degree courses (e.g. MCAST in Malta) and universities which offer vocationalized courses (Powell and Solga, 2010; Dunkel, 2009).

The above considerations mean that alignment between government policy and FE organizations has been linked to the concept of ‘high-skills’ whereby economic growth is directly linked to the educational system available (Brown, Green, and Lauder, 2001). On the other hand, skills may be firm-specific, industry-specific, or general (Estevez-Albe, Iversen and Sockice 2001). While government policy reports exist relating to skills and workforce needs, there is no existing local academic work related to the afore-mentioned criteria. Thus this research will contribute to partly filling this gap.

The above may be important in the USA and the UK since poor alignment is perceived between post-secondary education and the competences needed in many jobs (Wolf, 2011; British Higher Education Forum [BHEF], 2010). In the UK, such poor alignment is perceived between some FE provision and the labour market and progression requirements (Wolf, 2011). To counter poor alignment,

Regional economic improvement occurs when business and higher education leaders are equipped with high-leverage strategies and tools that can help them provide the sustained leadership that is necessary to achieve systemic improvement throughout the education pipeline (BHEF, 2010, 4).

The practical application of such a philosophy may be seen in Louisville. Business, educational, and civic leaders worked together to improve educational outcomes. Business leadership, accountability, performance measurement, and alignment were perceived as being key issues to ensure that such educational outcomes actually improved (*ibid.*).

While there are many studies evaluating alignment between high-school and post-secondary education (ACT, 2007), there is less research regarding alignment between post-secondary mission and university (Jenkins, 2011). This may be due to the nature of the educational system itself and the way organizations prioritize their concerns regarding education (*ibid.*).

The perception of alignment between FE organizations' mission statements and government policies raises the possibility that mission alignment has an external focus, for example, between the organization and external stakeholders (Berg, Csikszentmihalyi, and Nakamura, 2003). In the USA and Canada, FE colleges have aligned their mission to mirror local government policy, secondary education, and workforce needs (California Post-secondary Education Commission, 2008; Good and Kochan, 2008; State Council for Higher Education in Virginia, 2006; Levin, 1999). Besides, such alignment is explained by some of the models put forward in Chapter one, e.g. vertical alignment in Duffy's model and Vandal's educonomy which both stress the importance of such congruence.

These considerations of mission alignment mean that a policy-practice gap may be present between governmental policies and strategies on one side and organizational mission/strategies on the other (Honig and Hatch, 2004). Given a dynamic environment, mission alignment may involve a continual negotiation between different parties in order to bridge policy gaps. Studies have also shown that teachers may lack knowledge and understanding of government policy in further education (Akinyemi, 1987). Moreover teacher training has been criticized for its learner-centeredness and its lack of alignment with government policy since faculty professors and policy-makers may have different agendas (Stone, 2001). This may be helpfully lessened by the provision of information and evolving a positive mind-set (van Riel, 2012).

As an important stakeholder, the Maltese government is also responsible for ensuring that resources are available to FE organizations since alignment may be achieved in such a scenario (Vandal, 2009; Thompson, Strickland, and Gamble, 2007; Kaplan and Norton, 2006; Duffy, 2004). The four major resources are perceived to be effective teachers, infrastructure, funding, and curriculum, keeping in mind that subsequent interview data may furnish other resources (Cinar, Dongel, and Sogutli, 2009). Social and spiritual capital will also be explained in this section as these attributes form an integral part of Caldwell's alignment model. These resources may be examined within the resource-based view (RBV) of organizations.

Resource-based view

A resource-based view (RBV) of organizations may help uncover some of the different factors mentioned in the previous paragraph since FE organizations have to use these resources to implement government policy requiring the research question, 'how do stakeholders perceive the effectiveness of FE organizations' efforts to align resources, strategic planning, and QA procedures to organizational mission?' The main thesis of RBV is that organizations are a collection of unique resources which form a base for the accumulation of wealth (Barney, 1991; Wernerfelt, 1984). A resource may be defined as 'an elementary entity which the firm controls in order to best organize its production process' and may include both tangible and intangible assets (Moingeon *et al.*, 1998, 298).

In an educational setting, tangible and intangible assets are features which enhance learning experiences of value to students and perceived as educational inputs (Chang, 2008). As mentioned earlier the core resources are effective teachers, funding, curriculum, and infrastructure. Classic studies on the influence of resources and infrastructure determined that supplementary resources do not necessarily improve educational outcomes (Hanushek, 1989,

1986). These studies have been sharply criticized from a methodological viewpoint (Levacic, 2007; Verstegen and King, 1998). An exhaustive study using a 4-level multilevel model applied to data gathered by UNESCO in 15 Latin American countries demonstrate that quality resources and infrastructure have a positive impact on student achievement in these countries but also show that the relative weightings vary from country to country (Murillo and Roman, 2011). Thus empirical data of these latter studies possibly demonstrates the justification of resources as an attribute in the afore-mentioned alignment models (Chapter one) without necessarily stating that all resources are equally important.

In fact the quality of teachers may be the most important input factor (Cinar, Dongel, and Sogutli, 2009; Caldwell and Harris, 2008; Caldwell, 2007), accounting for about 30% of the variance in students' learning outcomes (Hattie, 2003). Teacher quality is labelled intellectual capital in Caldwell's alignment model. Caldwell and Harris continue,

Intellectual capital refers to the level of knowledge and skill of all of those who work in and for the school. We believe that intellectual capital is the chief driving force for creating the best schools (Caldwell and Harris, 2008, 37).

The above quotation justifies why the EU might embark on a policy stipulating FE teachers' competencies and professional attributes (Carioca *et al.*, 2009) and may be criticized as another instance of neoliberal policy which might not be taking into account the local context (Nagasawa and Swadener, 2013). International research has shown that effective teachers have certain qualities which may be individual or organizational. Individual attributes include teaching style, good cognitive skills, the right personal characteristics, pedagogical knowledge, and proficient classroom management (Bruijn and Leeman, 2011; Ng, Nicholas, and Williams, 2010; Erisen *et al.*, 2009; Zhang, 2007). Other personal characteristics may include a reflexive attitude and a proactive stance towards research (Carioca *et al.*, 2009; Erisen *et al.*, 2009). Such teacher qualities may also have a positive influence on the

performance of school systems (Caldwell and Harris, 2008). Organizational characteristics include harmonization of FE teacher training by legislative practices which should be based on a pedagogical and scientific basis within a milieu of life-long learning (Orr and Simmons, 2011; Ilieva and Terzieva, 2000; Lynch, 1997). The latter may lead to academic staff/organizational mission alignment (Duffy, 2004; Labovitz and Rosansky, 1997). The latter may be deemed important, since if employee qualities are not in synch with organizational processes, it may be difficult to achieve organizational/government policy alignment irrespective of whether such alignment is beneficial (Kaplan and Norton, 2006; Duffy, 2004; Labovitz and Rosansky, 1997).

Data from the International Project to Frame the Transformation of Schools which included the USA, UK, China, Finland, and Australia, indicate that to achieve such alignment educational organizations may have to be given certain opportunities (Caldwell and Harris, 2008). These are the right to employ staff members according to requirements; the inclusion of mentoring and induction programmes for new staff members; a solid emphasis on continuous professional development for academic staff and the sharing of research and skills; the use of data to support academic staff monitoring and evaluation; and the use of networking and skills sharing outside the organization (*ibid.*).

The importance of employees as stakeholders in ensuring alignment is perceived as being vital to excellence (Integro, 2004). Such excellence may be brought about by aligning the internal processes of an organization (e.g. policies, strategies, and systems) with its mission statement whereby employees' behaviour guarantee excellence (Dickson, Ford, and Upchurch, 2006; Ford *et al.*, 2006) and nourishing a sense of 'shared purpose' (Labovitz and Rosansky, 1997, xiii). Such strategies have, however, been challenged since attempts at alignment may force employees to bend their personal morals to identify with the

organization, implying a reduction of values diversity (Morsing, 2006). Besides, conflicts may exist between individual values learned from elsewhere (e.g. family and religion) and the values the organization advocates through strategic documents, policies, and practices (Maynard-Moody and Musheno, 2003).

The second resource mentioned is funding. Funding is needed for salaries, maintenance, educational material, construction of new facilities, and library additions (Padover and Elder, 2007) and is generally raised from a combination of stakeholders, such as the state (local and central), students, employers, and donors (Scott, 2010; Mullin and Honeyman, 2007). The relationship amongst state, students, and donors is complex and may be used to direct new policies to ensure equity and transparency whilst enjoying the capacity to deal with future demands (*ibid.*). For example, in Australia both public and Church schools receive public funding on a needs basis (Pitman, 2012). Such regimes have an effect on curricula, qualifications, students, FE organizations, and employers and in the UK are dependent on the college's strategic plan (Felstead and Unwin, 2001). In many countries like the USA, UK, and the Netherlands, funding is subject to a number of attributes which are factored in different formulae (Levacic, 2008; Mullin and Honeyman, 2007; Karsten and Meijer, 1999).

Over the last three decades, the most important attribute when calculating funding was student success (Jaquette, 2009; West, 2006) which marks an important watershed when compared to a system based on the size of individual organizations (Mullin and Honeyman, 2007). Formulae were introduced in the USA, owing to student diversity and different course offerings, but a great diversity exists worldwide ranging from no formula used to responsive and functional formulae (*ibid.*). Such funding may be perceived as a way of controlling government expenditure (Karsten and Meijer, 1999) by creating a quasi-market whereby 'the principal (central government) pays the agent (individual colleges) to perform pre-specified

services' (Jaquette, 2009, 59). Such a system may be perceived as a tool whereby government ensures that educational organizations are aligned to the former's policy and may be criticized as another form of government hegemony (Hill, 2006).

Government hegemony may be perceived in various ways. In the UK, liberal education in HE is seen as being under attack by the introduction of accountability and managerialism in HE organizations (Lomas, 1997). A key argument in the attack on liberal education is the perception of loss of autonomy experienced by academic staff in the UK since the 1970s (Mulderrig, 2011) coupled with a preference for ideological uniformity as might be the case in the HE sector in South Africa (Pretorius, 2006). Furthermore, students may be regarded as being much more utilitarian, basing their choice of subject to study on how it will contribute to their future employment opportunities, rather than what was intrinsically interesting (Tapper and Salter, 1995).

In the USA, government hegemony may be perceived in policy borrowing and funding (Olaniran and Agnello, 2008). The Washington Consensus may be seen as the basis of such policy borrowing and reflects how neoliberal values infiltrate other countries (developed and less developed), irrespective of whether such policies conflict with societal values (Jones, 2004). In the area of funding, a much quoted statistic involved the link between funding and the improvement of students' test scores in the state of Texas, whilst George W. Bush was governor (Goldstein, 2004). Empirical research seemed to indicate that while test scores improved dramatically, there was no effect on learning, since the latter is measured independently and may go some way to demonstrate the dangers of linking educational results with funding (Bernal, 2005).

The impact of FE funding in the UK has put pressure on colleges to decrease taught hours whilst maintaining quality and quantity, leading to resource-based learning via on-line

learning, coupled with increased class sizes putting limits on practical sessions (McDonald and Lucas, 2001). Besides, student success should not be the only funding driver, since it may lead to a lessening of academic standards and limited admission of low achievers (Jaquette, 2009). Partial achievement is not recognized by the funding formula, since achievement is measured in terms of qualifications (McDonald and Lucas, 2001). Furthermore, an analysis of education cost functions in the USA has demonstrated that federal funding is not sufficient to support the required standards, leading to lawsuits filed by certain states against the federal government (Duncombe, Lukemeyer, and Yinger, 2008).

One may possibly surmount the problems mentioned above by using a mission-based resource allocation. Mission-based resource allocation supposedly aligns funding to mission (Ridley, Skochelak, and Farrel, 2002) and consists of ‘identifying revenue streams to fund each of the institution’s missions, evaluating each faculty member’s productivity with regard to each mission, and aligning funding source with faculty effort’ (Stites *et al.*, 2005, 60). Funds may be used in various ways, the important point being that all these activities are linked to strategic priorities rather than historic conventions (Kaplan and Norton, 2006; Ridley, Skochelak, and Farrel, 2002). In this scenario a funds-flow analysis ensures that funds are aligned to an organization’s mission (Howell, Green, and Anders, 2003). The result of such resource allocation has led to increased productivity in terms of research and teaching (Ridley, Skochelak, and Farrel, 2002) since there is increased congruence of a lecturer’s expected educational effort with salary and accountability (Stites *et al.*, 2005).

The third resource addressed here is curriculum. Curriculum may be defined as ‘the pathway to the development of professional knowledge and skills which facilitate the flow from theory to practice’ (Mouzakitis, 2010, 3916). Following this trend, the EU, through the Bologna Process, has prescribed an outcome-based FE curriculum comprising competences

(skills, responsibilities, attitudes, and knowledge) (Pobirchenko, 2011; Kennedy, Hyland, and Ryan, 2009). Such curricula are also present in other countries (Yek and Penney, 2006). Outcome-based curricula are premised on what students should be able to do by the end of a course rather than teacher-based objectives (Berlach and O’Niell, 2008; Tillema, Kessels, and Meijers, 2000). Such a prescribed curriculum may, however, differ from the enacted curriculum, the latter being illustrated by ‘people, spaces, and artefacts’ and may depend on individual and organizational factors (Miller, Edwards, and Priestley, 2010, 226). Furthermore curriculum-driven educational alignment needs to be addressed early on in the system (Lee, 2012). For example, if one of the government’s aims is to increase the number of students in FE, then it may be incumbent on government to ensure that students are academically prepared for such organizations (it is deemed that in the USA up to 66% of these students are not academically ready for this educational level [Porter and Polikoff, 2012]). This may entail that secondary school curricula are aligned with the prospectuses of FE organizations.

There is still some confusion relating to outcomes and competences and their relationship to each other (Johnson, 2008; Adam, 2004). While some authors specifically group outcomes and competences together (Munar and Montano, 2009; Tillema, Kessels, and Meijer, 2000), this is not ubiquitous. Furthermore, competences were never explicitly mentioned in the official Bologna Process document (Schaeper, 2008). This confusion is not lessened by authors using the term ‘competences’ and ‘competencies’, with some authors using both (Abreu and Oliveira, 2007). Other criticisms include the time-consuming nature of assessment, the fact that very little learning takes place and also a slant towards courses at the expense of other courses (Canning, 2000). This is not helped by the view that competences are derived from behaviourism and are not context-specific (Thompson, 2009).

Nevertheless, the use of competences within FE curricula is driven by employers' needs and the development of a flexible dynamic within a globalized context (Mouzakitis, 2010; Drage, 2009) and may be criticized as another aspect of neoliberal policy. Academic education is deemed too abstract to meet the demands of the market place and to create knowledge societies (Mouzakitis, 2010). This shift from the academic to the utilitarian is also seen in other continents such as Asia and America (Yuan and Huang, 2006; Yek and Penney, 2006). As a result, FE curricula have been perceived as being reductionist and atomized in nature (Thompson, 2009; Yek and Penney, 2006) which, however, may be mitigated by collaboration between different faculties and departments within organizations (Briggs, 2007).

Furthermore, rather than being weak and passive within FE educational systems, students engage with the curriculum and may be perceived as having created changes in the UK FE system (Fowler, 2008). Conducting research in four UK FE organizations, the author utilized an innovative methodology including one-to-one and group interviews with students and academic staff, as well as the use of disposable cameras for students to photograph the types of writing and reading they engaged in. The photographs were used as 'stimuli within interviews with those students' (*ibid.*, 427). It may be that students effectively manage the literacy difficulties of the UK FE context by utilizing a mix of choice and ability. Such an understanding may not be reducible to the students' detached skills in understanding texts to evoke meaning, but better recognized as a partnership 'in the literacy practices of FE' (*ibid.*, 438).

Qualitative research within the UK automotive industry demonstrated that different stakeholders (FE lecturers, students, assembly workers, and employers) perceived skills listed in the curriculum in dissimilar ways (Saunders, Skinner, and Beresford, 2005). Whilst

lecturers perceived the ability of key skill transfer as being the most important skill, students perceived technical skill as the most important attribute, employers believed that both key and technical skills were important, while assembly workers felt that health and safety was the most important attribute. The authors used the term ‘mismatch’ (*ibid.*, 380) to describe their findings. However, such diversity of stakeholder views may be useful, inasmuch as alignment considers all stakeholders (Duffy, 2006). Besides, alignment considers all stages of a student’s development (Caldwell, 2008), meaning that alignment may involve more than just being aligned with government policies, as outlined by Vandal (2009).

Infrastructure as a resource includes basic services (e.g. water, sewage, maintenance, and electricity), deferred maintenance, new construction, renovation, retrofitting and additions to existing buildings, as well as didactic services such as IT and library facilities (Murillo and Roman, 2011; Crampton, Thompson, and Vesely, 2001). The importance of a good infrastructure is shown in research conducted in various countries and contexts. Thus, in India, the lack of a good school infrastructure has resulted in parents sending their children to private lessons (Saha and Saha, 2009). The latter has become an important part of education and is evidenced also in Malta (Bray, 1999). Similarly, a quantitative analysis of Texan schools indicated that the quality of school infrastructure had an effect on student attendance (Branham, 2004). In this case quality was assessed using the presence, or otherwise, of temporary buildings, structural repair, square feet per custodian, and square feet per student. Schools in a bad state of disrepair or with few custodians per square foot are more likely to witness skiving and drop outs. On the other hand, square feet per student demonstrated no impact on school attendance. The effect of quality infrastructure may operate beyond the school itself. Research in two US universities demonstrated that ‘attending a high-school with ample resources had a significant positive effect on first year grades in college’ (Wolniak and Engberg, 2010, 461).

Infrastructure should, however, be aligned with industrial and students' needs and is one of the key features of Vandal's educonomy alignment model (Yasin *et al.*, 2010; Isgoren *et al.*, 2009; Vandal, 2009). The changes driven by globalization may be reflected in vocational organizations as they try to align their courses and infrastructure with industry's needs (Isgoren *et al.*, 2009). Such alignment is beneficial to industry as vocational organizations may be regarded as sites for product innovation as well as training provision. On the other hand, vocational organizations may benefit from industry since the latter may provide money and technology with less red tape than government provision and may also offer students exposure to the world of work. Infrastructure should also reflect students' needs (Yasin *et al.*, 2010). Thus the integration of special needs' students with normal students may mean upgrading facilities if these (special needs') students are to have the same present and future opportunities as other students. Wheel-chair access, comfort, and safety are perceived as being fundamentally important (Crozier and Sileo, 2005).

The last two resources that need mentioning are social and spiritual capital, both forming part of Caldwell's alignment model. Organizational social capital is an intangible resource (Kiechel, 2000), referring to 'the strength of formal and informal partnerships and networks involving the school and all individuals, agencies, organizations, and institutions that have the potential to support and be supported by the school' (Caldwell and Harris, 2008, 59). This definition might indicate that organizational social capital may be based on mutuality amongst different stakeholders and is further supported by Bourdieu's conceptualization whereby such capital may be adapted to other resources (Cederberg, 2012).

Organizational social capital is viewed as advantageous since organizations may enhance performance by engaging within social networks and may lessen external shocks (Buren and Hood, 2011; Andrews, 2010; Leana and Pil, 2006). Even though Putman's and Bourdieu's

concepts of organizational social capital differ in terms of the concerned attributes (Cederberg, 2012), such differences are not important here, since all types of organizational social capital are deemed important (Caldwell and Harris, 2008). Such organizational social capital may also be built at the classroom level between teachers and students, as has been demonstrated in English secondary schools (Pedder and McIntyre, 2006).

Spiritual capital is also an intangible resource referring to ‘the strength of moral purpose and the degree of coherence among values, beliefs, and attitudes about life and learning’ (Caldwell and Harris, 2008, 83) and may have a religious underpinning linked with spiritual assets (Chu, 2007). However, such spiritual capital has also been defined in Zen Buddhist terms: the sense of holism in Japanese culture when undertaking any activity, be it calligraphy or Kendo (McDonald and Hallinan, 2005). As such spiritual capital overlaps with organizational social capital (Chu, 2007), since there is an emphasis on the link between organizations and relevant stakeholders (Caldwell and Harris, 2008). In FE organizations spiritual capital may be used to align organizational values with student welfare and needs (*ibid.*), with the consequence that spiritual alignment is, at times, denounced as being part of neoliberal discourse as it emphasizes the self (Erjavec and Volcic, 2009) leading to increased inequity in faith-based schools (Tough and Brooks, 2007). This thesis will help illuminate whether this is the case in the Maltese FE system, given the fact that Church FE organizations are held in high esteem. Evidence from Australian, UK, and Chinese school principals identified the following indicators as being relevant to spiritual capital: organizational values are entrenched in its mission, processes, and curriculum; the organization clearly states its values and beliefs in publications; the values and beliefs of the organization are reflected in student and staff behaviours (Caldwell, 2007).

The different organizational resources outlined above should be aligned with environmental opportunities and threats which may lead to optimized performance in face of contingences (Ford *et al.*, 2006). To accomplish this, a SWOT analysis (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats), which is considered as being an integral part of strategic planning may be carried out (Thompson, Strickland, and Gamble, 2007). Such an analysis may be used to align external factors with the internal resources of an organization (Koo *et al.*, 2011). The presence or absence of internal resources is delineated as strengths and weaknesses, while the external forces affecting the organization are opportunities and strengths. While internal capabilities may be controlled by management practices, external factors are much more difficult to control in Malta, where education policy is dictated in a top-down fashion within a centralized system (Farrugia, 2002).

SWOT analyses' results differ. VET organizations and systems in developing countries in Africa and Asia cite enthusiasm in staff and students, low tuition fees, good reputation, diversity within student population, high political will, and international funding as strengths (Adepoju and Famade, 2010; Hung, 2010; Rwanda Ministry of Education, 2008; Sikwibele, 2007). Developed countries such as the USA, Greece, and Spain are more likely to cite organizational competences such as change management (Balamururalikrishna and Dugger, 1995), EU-wide qualification recognition (Xabec, 2011), and top facilities (Valkanos, Anastasiou, and Androutsou, 2009). Typical weaknesses present across most countries and continents were over-bureaucratic educational systems, different internal demands, and poor alignment with employers' needs (Rwanda Ministry of Education, 2008; Balamururalikrishna and Dugger, 1995). Developing countries may also suffer from poor facilities and under-qualified staff (Adepoju and Famade, 2010; Rwanda Ministry of Education, 2008). Most authors cited increased industry needs, links with industry (Adepoju and Famade, 2010; Balamururalikrishna and Dugger, 1995), the use of IT in program delivery (Xabec, 2011),

and lifelong learning (Hung, 2010) as important opportunities. In many cases threats amounted to competition from rival countries and colleges, the negative image of VET and an increasing number of students opting for academic rather than vocational pathways (Xabec, 2010; Valkanos, Anastasiou, and Androutsou, 2009; Rwanda Ministry of Education, 2008; Balamururalikrishna and Dugger, 1995).

Conclusion

The chapter commenced with stakeholder theory in an effort to delineate primary and secondary stakeholders. The primary stakeholder is the government which directs policy and furnishes funds and other resources which are consumed by FE organizations. Such resources were explained by using the RBV of organizations. Furthermore, the RBV was used to explain employee alignment and resource alignment, the latter being explicitly framed within SWOT analysis. The following chapter delineates the importance of strategic theory, organizational mission, and performance measurement as systems which are important to alignment but also as systems which are connected to one another since both organizational mission and performance measurement are perceived to be part of the strategic process.

Chapter Three – Strategic theory, organizational mission, and performance measurement

Introduction

This chapter deals with the importance of strategic theory, organizational mission, and performance measurement (PM) within contemporary alignment theories. Indeed, all three attributes may be conceptualized as being connected, since organizational mission and PM are perceived as being an integral part of the strategic process (Thompson, Strickland, and Gamble, 2007; Hellriegel, Jackson, and Slocum, 2005). If government policy is being properly implemented in FE organizations, such implementation should be done holistically, rather than *ad hoc*. Strategic theory is hereby investigated to uncover how such policies may be implemented in FE organizations.

The chapter commences with a description of the different theoretical approaches accounting for strategic theory, ranging from linear to organic modelling. This is followed by a discussion on organizational mission and the importance of mission statements. Lastly, PM as both an internal and external feedback mechanism is explained. In all cases the link between these attributes and alignment theory will be highlighted.

Strategic theory

Etymologically the word ‘strategy’ derives from the Classical Greek word *strategoi* meaning ‘general’ (Bury and Meiggs, 1978). In modern times, the word strategy has come to refer to a ‘game plan’ with some kind of future intent. Since the knowledge of future conditions may rarely be completely known, it follows that any strategy should exhibit flexibility. Thus, strategy is a means whereby an organization’s operations are aligned to its mission (Eacott,

2008) and is deemed necessary since strategy establishes priorities, and increases staff confidence (Sallis, 1990).

Strategy has also been defined pragmatically as ‘management’s action plan for running the business and conducting operations’ (Thompson, Strickland, and Gamble, 2007, 3) and similarly as ‘major courses of action (choices) selected and implemented to achieve one or more goals’ (Hellriegel, Jackson, and Slocum, 2005, 182). Real strategic management is proactive rather than reactive in nature (Middlewood, 1998). Such practicality is one of the managerialist criticisms of 21st-century organizational leadership but this is helpfully lessened by those who envisage an ethical dimension added to strategy (Holme 2008; Tran, 2008; Parsons, 2007). In a world where the only certainty is change, strategic formulation and implementation have a central place in theoretical and practical management. This is witnessed in both business and education. Reviewing the literature, education has borrowed heavily from business management (Davies, 2004; Fidler, 2002; Gibbs and Knapp, 2002; Bush and Coleman, 2000). However, strategic planning should encompass the specificities of educational organizations, namely, that they deal with

various interests and values, determined by educational policies; where there are power plays and where strategy is the result of compromises negotiated between educational actors; in which strategic choices are constrained by the bureaucratic burden of a centralized administration; in which the objectives are sometimes subject to ambiguous formulations and, therefore, that cannot be quantified and controlled numerically (Pereira and Melão, 2012, 921).

Strategic planning may be visualized in diverse ways. While linear (Thompson, Strickland, and Gamble, 2007; Olsen, West and Ching Yick Tse, 1998) and cyclical (Davies, 2004) models have been proposed, strategic planning may also be perceived as a way of enhancing institutional effectiveness with strategic alignment being part of such planning (Offenstein and Shulock, 2010; Kaplan and Norton, 2006) given ever restricted budgets (Fathi and Wilson, 2009). In this scenario, strategic planning is considered in terms of policy alignment

(Skolits and Graybeal, 2007). Alignment between a school district's strategy and budgeting may lead to better outcomes whereby money is spent according to the goals detailed in the strategic plan (Kettunen, 2011; Israel and Kihl, 2005). Such planning is subject to differing power relations amongst different stakeholders resulting in 'suppression or promotion of different interests within the organization' (Spee and Jarzabkowski, 2011, 1218) illustrating how communication is important during and after planning. Lack of alignment between an organization's strategic plan and government policy may have negative effects, as in the case of South African vocational organizations, stemming from conflicting governmental policies, cultural values, and lack of financial and structural support (Lumby, 2006).

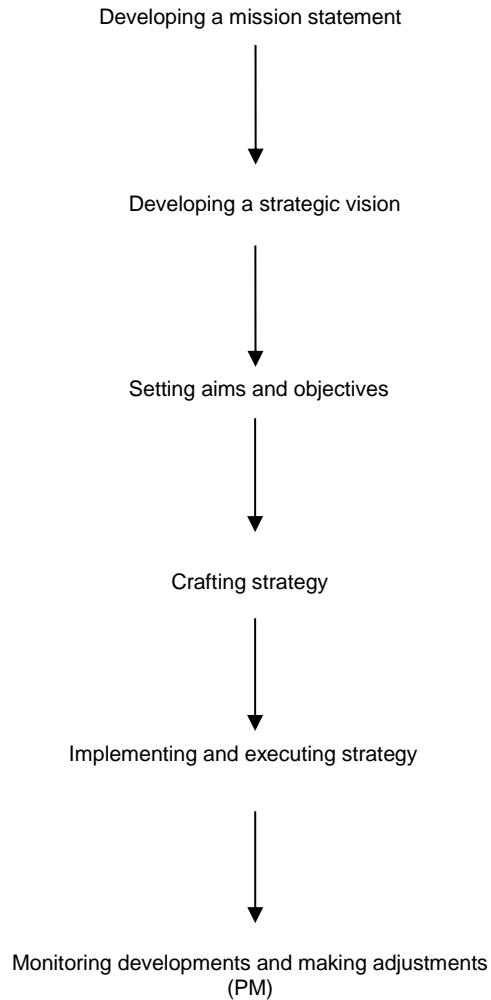
However, linear and cyclical modelling may seem too simplistic at a time where the external environment may have a huge influence on managers' behavioural range leading to irrationality (Keung Pang and Pisapia, 2012; Hargreaves, 2003; Bell, 2002). Furthermore, strategic planning is also a political process where the power of influential groups may eclipse other groups (Thomas, 1996). Besides, the Maltese context presents constraints attributable to small nation states: close-knit communities where everyone knows everyone, lack of financial and human resources, diseconomies of scale, and a continual perception that outside sources of knowledge are inherently better than local ones (Bacchus, 2010; Crossley, 2010; Farrugia, 2002). Additionally, most models are formalized and omit the subconscious which may be important for 'insight, creativity and synthesis' (Mintzberg, 1994, 227) leading to other methods of visualizing strategic planning such as grounded theory (MacIntosh and Beech, 2011).

This may bring about a shift from strategic planning to strategic thinking (Keung Pang and Pisapia, 2012) eventually leading to strategic alignment (Duffy, 2004). Such strategic thinking is premised on the concepts of systems thinking (viewing the system holistically),

reflection (the use of rationality leading to prospective actions), and reframing (interchanging across various viewpoints) (Pisapia, Reyes-Guerra, and Coukos-Semel, 2005) and is very similar to the leap in thinking proposed by Mintzberg (1994). Empirical data demonstrates that school principals in Hong Kong were more likely to use systems thinking and reflection (Keung Pang and Pisapia, 2012). There is also a positive correlation with school size: principals in larger schools (thus operating in a more complex environment) tended to practise reframing skills (*ibid.*).

In spite of the above criticisms, a strategic planning process scheme is outlined in Figure 3.1, and generally consists of a number of distinct steps. These steps are replicated by many researchers in educational management who advise the use of such a linear approach, even though the order in which they appear may differ (McDevitt, Giapponi, and Solomon, 2008; Brown, 2004), while some authors warn against this mechanistic view of strategic planning (Eacott, 2008). Unfortunately, different authors seem to invent their own jargon, making it difficult to understand the basic issues involved. Terms like ‘strategic revitalization’ (McDevitt, Giapponi, and Solomon, 2008), ‘strategic management development’ (Brown, 2004), and ‘strategic programming’ (Fathi and Wilson, 2009) may confuse readers, especially if other terms might be better.

Figure 3.1: Seminal model of the strategic process



Source: Thompson, Strickland, and Gamble, 2007, 20

Such a strategic process is perceived as a way whereby resource allocation is efficiently done, especially in a climate of increased student numbers and declined funding (Benjamin and Carroll, 1998). Following such a process provides a structure that helps organizations achieve their desired future by setting priorities (Hitt, Ireland, and Hoskinsson, 2011), allows stakeholders to partake in goal achievement (Thompson, Strickland, and Gamble, 2007; Duffy, 2004), encourages reflection (Hax and Majluf, 1996), fosters dialogue and strategic plan ownership (Dess *et al.*, 2011); and helps align the organization to external

considerations and stakeholders (Watterston and Caldwell, 2011; Kaplan and Norton, 2006; Duffy, 2004; Labovitz and Rosansky, 1997). The published plan should include a list of measurable objectives, organizational mission, targeted student numbers, and delineate any changes which the FE organization may undertake (Sallis, 1990). Mission statements should be an integral part of the strategic process, by developing strategic objectives (Khalifa, 2011; Thompson, Strickland, and Gamble, 2007; Kenny, 2005; Kaplan and Norton, 1996; Kaplan and Norton, 1996a; Drucker, 1974) but items that bolster the reputation of an FE organization may not be strategic or operational in nature (Morphew and Hartley, 2006).

Strategic planning has been specifically linked to alignment (Kaplan and Norton, 2006; Olsen, West, and Ching Yick Tse, 1998), established in the co-alignment principle whereby,

If the firm is able to identify the opportunities that exist in the forces driving change, invest in competitive methods that take advantage of these opportunities and allocate resources to those which create the greatest value, the financial results desired by owners and investors have a much better chance of being achieved (Olsen, West, and Ching Yick Tse, 1998, 2).

Thus, strategic planning aligns organizations with the external environment (Rowley, Lujan, and Dolence, 1997). In the case of educational organizations the external environment is dominated by stakeholders (Duffy, 2004). This is how SWOT analysis and stakeholder alignment impinge on strategy. Furthermore, strategy is not a compilation of individual units, but requires careful construction (Collis and Montgomery, 1997). Just as a house is not a heap of stones, then strategy is not a pile of ideas but a carefully co-ordinated set of implemented concepts, which concepts should be aligned to one another (*ibid.*). Thus, functional strategies (e.g. in the human resources department) may be aligned with organizational goals, to illustrate a proactive, rather than reactive, approach towards management (Brennan, Felekis, and Goldring, 2003). For example, in some Californian community colleges, basic skills have been centrally rather than peripherally organized,

leading to better academic results (Levin *et. al*, 2010). This alignment is compelled by the organization's resources in terms of finance, skills, and competences (Kaplan and Norton, 2006).

Strategic planning should involve as many stakeholders as possible (Whitney, 2010; McDevitt, Giapponi, and Solomon 2008). New perspectives, research interests, expert knowledge, and fresh motivation may enhance planning and implementing FE organizations' strategic plans (Brown, 2004). It may also be perceived as a response to decreased funding, increasing the organization's reputation, and student retention (Whitney, 2010). The inclusion of faculty may help develop a richer strategic plan rooted in organizational mission (Aleong and Aleong, 2011). The organization's management should be aware that academics are involved in scholarship, teaching, and service to the community (Whitney, 2010). This may help build communication between management and academics to enhance strategic efforts (Brown, 2004).

The implementation of strategy is generally perceived as the key to organizational success (Fogg, 2009; Thompson, Strickland, and Gamble, 2007), since it aligns resources and people with the strategies in question (Kaplan and Norton, 2006; Duffy, 2004, Labovitz and Rosansky, 1997). While strategy may be viewed as 'doing the right things', implementation is seen as 'doing things right' (Collis, 2005). The concept of ownership and responsibility for strategy execution, by middle management and employees, is deemed imperative (Fogg, 2009; Collis, 2005; Herman, 1990). Resources for strategy execution would typically include teaching staff, technology, classrooms, support from non-academic staff, time, and training (Duffy, 2004). Different departments within an organization, and amongst different organizations, may depend on each other to successfully implement the strategic plan (Fogg, 2009). For example. at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, implementation included

student advisory services, creating learning communities, and new learning opportunities (Paris, 2004).

In spite of the various models presented above, many British FE colleges and HE organizations in the 1990s up till the present have found it very difficult to build coherent strategic plans and implement them (Jiang and Carpenter, 2013; Lumby, 1998). Some of these difficulties stemmed from a lack of experience on the part of management, a lack of ownership of the strategic plan by staff, the climate whereby FE colleges had to orchestrate and implement strategic plans, the lack of hierarchical objectives within strategic plans, and a lack of awareness regarding the difficulties in implementation (*ibid.*). In the case of UK universities resource allocation, operational processes, lack of cooperation and student support, organizational culture, and the external environment were cited as problems in implementing internationalization strategic plans at a UK university (Jiang and Carpenter, 2013). Lack of ownership of the strategic plan, extremely detailed strategic plans, and lack of formal approval mechanisms for the endorsement of school-development plans, were cited as problems within strategic planning and implementation at a UK university (Pidcock, 2001) and which may be worsened by ambiguous missions (Machado and Taylor, 2010).

The problems mentioned in the previous paragraph may be due to the role of individual organizations. While, in Vandal's alignment model, organizations are perceived as the 'arbiter of student supply and workforce demand' (Vandal, 2009, 9), Duffy's model minimizes the importance of such organizations stating that they are non-strategic in intent (Duffy, 2004). This is corroborated by evidence which may demonstrate that educational organizations including colleges and universities have a low internal locus of control (Rowley, Lujan, and Dolence, 1997,) owing to these organizations' reliance on external funds, accreditation, and links with business (*ibid.*).

Other problems related to strategy may exist in small states (Atchoarena, 1993), since the small number of post-secondary students may be ‘incompatible with the creation of a university’ (*ibid.*, 31–2) and the complexity of strategic management, coupled with a central policy-making regime, may lead to ambiguities, contradictions and unintended outcomes. In Malta, for example, ministers may have a direct say in the way policies are implemented (Azzopardi, 2011). Moreover, such intrusions may be perceived as ‘patronage and nepotism’, and this is evident in other small Commonwealth states (*ibid.*, 7). To partly counter these problems, small states generally employ streamlined governance (Atchoarena, 1993).

Until now, no work has been done detailing the kinds of strategic plans and processes of Maltese FE organizations and the types of strategies employed to achieve organizational goals. While micro-data on FE organizations have been collected by the NCHE, this is not publicly available. Therefore such information has to be collected, given the focus of this thesis.

Organizational mission

A clear mission is considered an integral part of the strategic process (Thompson, Strickland, and Gamble, 2007); it is the central focus of Labovitz and Rosansky’s model, and an important factor in Kaplan and Norton’s model. Organizational mission may be viewed as a means whereby FE organizations’ resources may be aligned to government policies for the sector (Ridley, Skochelak, and Farrell, 2002; Ireland and Hitt, 1992). In this context ‘organizational mission’ may not explicitly refer to mission statements, since organizations may have a mission without a written mission statement (Khalifa, 2012). Possibly, there is a requisite for such an inclusive document, or a system of directional documents. In such a scenario, a mission statement becomes one constituent among others and may include a

vision statement, a value statement, and a strategy statement, all of which should be consistent and related to one another in a meaningful way (*ibid.*).

A conceptual framework has been established explaining how researchers studied and continue to study mission statements (Khalifa, 2012). Within this framework, the first group is termed 'checklist type' whereby researchers collated a spectrum of attributes that should be found in all mission statements, irrespective of whether such attributes are important or not to the organization in question. The second group falls under 'structural logic'. This group of researchers justifies its position by using mission statement attributes which 'makes a strong case for the necessity and coherence of the items which constitute a model or a framework' (*ibid.*, 238). However, even within this framework there is confusion as to what these attributes should be, their relative importance, and whether mission statements should reflect present or future intent.

Mission statements may be a statement of purpose or philosophy (Beech and Chadwick, 2004; Hill and Jones, 1997; Piercy and Morgan, 1994; Viljoen, 1994; David, 1989), shared values (Beech and Chadwick, 2004; Campbell and Yeung, 1991), uniqueness (Cochran, David, and Gibson, 2008; Davies and Glaister, 1997; Pearce and Robinson, 1991), and behavioural standards (Hill and Jones, 1997; Campbell and Yeung, 1991). Some authors also insist that mission statements should also declare critical success factors and strategic intent (Piercy and Morgan, 1994; Hax and Majluf, 1986) thus positioning mission statements within the realm of strategic management (Thompson, Strickland, and Gamble, 2007; Drucker, 1974). Recently, a new definition of organizational mission incorporates a determined pledge to mirror the written mission, a noteworthy cause that is challenging and that employees are willing to work for (Khalifa, 2012). A mission statement is therefore 'a declaration of a resolute commitment to create a significant value in service of a worthy cause' (*ibid.*, 243).

There are no studies linking government/EU policy to FE organizations' mission statements thus necessitating the use of international (e.g. UK, USA, and Australia) academic material, relating to HE rather than FE. The use of HE literature is justified since: FE and HE are linked with many FE organizations offering HE programmes (Gallacher, 2006); the lack of age differentiation in FE (Brooks, 2005); the link between FE/HE and the knowledge economy (Gallacher, 2006); and the rise of managerialism in the international FE sector following incorporation (e.g. UK and Australia) (Blackmore and Sachs, 2003; Kerfoot and Whitehead, 2000). The discussion on organizational mission will focus on how the state influences FE organizations' mission statements, mission statement impact, mission complexity, and mission alignment.

The way the state influences FE organizations' mission statements is deemed important since it informs organizations and governments how such external [governmental] factors impinge on organizational variety and national strategic aims (James and Huisman, 2009). Some studies in the USA allude to the link between organizational (community colleges) mission and state policy (Mullin, 2010; Vaughan, 1997). The attributes inherent in FE organizations' missions may be divided into core attributes, which specify the connections between the organization and students, and peripheral attributes, specifying associations between the organization and the community (Vaughan, 1997). The link between core and peripheral attributes is dynamic, meaning attributes may shift from core to peripheral or vice-versa, depending on current social needs (*ibid.*), thus endorsing a dedication to receptiveness (Levin, 2000).

Some of these core attributes may also be related to state policy (Mullin, 2010). In the USA, such educational policy is determined by economic factors, namely, that community colleges should prepare students for the place of work and/or university within a globalized context,

course completion, and ensure a climate of quality (Mullin, 2010; Levin, 2000). Such policy factors are termed external drivers since they may influence the crafting of FE organizations' mission statements (James and Huisman, 2009).

In the UK, the Foster Report (2005) proposed that FE organizations' missions should be constricted and skill-focused. However, such a policy is perceived as unrealistic, given the range of learners, disadvantaged students, adults who have very different learning pathways, and the provision of HE in FE organizations (Brown and Pollard, 2006). Such a limiting approach towards mission statements contrasts with a Welsh study demonstrating that high alignment between HE organizational mission statements and government policy occurs in four areas: excellence, national commitment, high quality research, and economic contribution; medium alignment exists in the areas of education, learning, access, bilingualism, and mission diversity; low alignment was observed in environmental sustainability, workforce development, financial sustainability, and people sustainability (James and Huisman, 2009). There seems to be very little evidence 'of government pressures to limit diversifications of missions' (*ibid.*, 33). However, the great diversity within US business schools' mission statements may be a result of external accreditation pressures forcing business schools to craft mission statements which veer towards teaching or research (Palmer and Short, 2006). This view has been challenged by research demonstrating that such diversity has decreased, as federal and state policies hold FE organizations accountable for ensuring students' desire to enter HE (Domina and Ruzek, 2012). In Malta, there may a need to fill such knowledge gaps within the realm of FE, thus necessitating the research question, 'How does the content of FE organizations' mission statements compare with statutory and advisory government policy for the sector?'

The ambiguity regarding mission statements is also reflected in the literature on mission statement impact. Some authors state, in no uncertain terms, that mission statements are primarily used to enhance public relations and that they are the result of institutional pressures (Desmidt and Heene, 2007; Barktus, Glassman, and McAfee, 2000) and the need to ‘convince the audience’ (Lapowsky, 2012, 28). It is then no surprise that different stakeholders perceive mission statements in very different ways, leading to greater ambiguity and loss of clarity (Barktus and Glassman, 2007; Wright, 2002). Whether mission statements deal with the present or future status of an organization is an example of such ambiguity (Khalifa, 2011; Beagrie, 2005; Matejka, Kurke, and Gregory, 1993) Many researchers working on college mission statements report that they are vague and generic in nature, and therefore do not offer focal points around which employees and management can order their affairs (Morphew and Hartley, 2006), since it is virtually impossible to contain all the factors an organization does (Green, 2012). Thus, Labovitz and Rosansky’s focus on mission as a central tenet of alignment may be misplaced. This is not to say that mission alignment is unimportant, the key word in the previous sentence being focus.

Other researchers paint a rosy picture of mission statements, equating them with inspiration, optimism, certainty, responsible citizenship, motivation, teamwork, and emotional commitment (Cochran, David, and Gibson, 2008; Iseri-Say, Toker, and Kantur, 2008; Mullane, 2002; Middlewood, 1998; Lancioni, 1992). A case study of one Catholic university showed that vice-presidents and deans perceived their organizational mission positively (Velcoff and Ferrari, 2006). However, some authors may seem to place too much emphasis on mission statements, to the point that an organization without a mission statement is at ‘the mercy of events’ (Drucker, 1974, 75) whilst dismissing opposing views (Darbi, 2012). The financial crisis over the last few years has shown that organizations *are* at the mercy of external events in spite of their explicitly stated mission statements.

Such conflicting evidence as outlined in the above three paragraphs has to be tempered by the conflicting ways whereby practitioners operationalize their research, making it very difficult to actually compare results in a meaningful way (Desmidt, Prinzie, and Decramer, 2011). In the USA, FE organizations' mission statements convey a number of attributes: access; leadership, citizenship; formal education; specified service area; quality assurance; student services; continuing education; community services; student diversity; economic development (Wang *et al.*, 2007; Ayers, 2002; Shearon and Tollefson, 1989). These particular studies were conducted using quantitative thematic analysis on US community colleges' mission statements. The attributes stated depend on three factors: geography, size of organization and courses offered. Highlands College's (Jersey, UK) mission statement stresses inclusion, as it is the only FE provider on the island offering courses from entry level to MBA (Howard, 2009). This contrasts with Oxford and Cherwell Valley College's mission which is 'to foster a love for learning' and serves Oxford city and works in tandem with a number of universities (*ibid.*, 64). However, in most cases in the UK, FE organizations' missions reflect students' choices, labour market changes, and socio-demographics (*ibid.*). Furthermore, mission statements may be distinguished from organizational mission – the latter usually being much more complex than a written statement (Green, 2012).

A study of Welsh HE organizations illustrates such mission complexity. The attributes most likely to be mentioned were teaching and learning, people sustainability, and nature of market interaction (e.g. supply-led, market-led, and responsive) (James and Huisman, 2009). Employability and financial stability were the least mentioned. The authors managed to group HE organizations together depending on the mission statement attribute (see Table 3.1).

Table 3.1: Relationship between Welsh HE organizations and mission statement attributes, 2009

HE organization type	Mission statement attribute
Large	Research
Medium sized	Mixed
Small and regional	Widening access

Source: Data from James and Huisman, 2009

Different FE organization types display significant mission statement differences, e.g. in the USA two-year college mission statements are perceived as being more complex, less clear and less compelling than four-year colleges, maybe demonstrating that two-year colleges employ an ‘open door philosophy’ (Abelman and Dalessandro, 2008, 321). Post-secondary colleges may even have two mission statements: one that is posted on their website and one given to the U.S. News and World Report – this latter mission statement being an ‘attempt to communicate with [the] prospective students’ (Taylor and Morpew, 2010, 485). Mission statements may also differ in terms in ethical content, with a positive correlation established between the presence of explicit ethical content in mission statements and character traits reinforced by the organization (Davis *et al.*, 2007). Furthermore, in the USA, colleges and universities need to have a mission statement if they are to be accredited (Davis *et al.*, 2007; Morpew and Hartley, 2006; Palmer and Short, 2006). In a study on engineering colleges in the USA, such organizations had two or fewer attributes specified by the accreditation board (Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology), the authors recommending that the accreditation board should take account of organizational mission statements, rather than the other way round (Creamer and Ghoston, 2013).

The above contrasts with the view that US universities’ mission statements seem to be reflections, rather than drivers, of organizational processes (Morpew and Hartley, 2006;

Palmer and Short, 2006). It may be that they include items that their stakeholders (parents, students, government, teachers, and union) value, meaning that US universities and colleges understand who their prospective students and related stakeholders are and communicate specific information that appeals to them. However, historical and geographical antecedents may also account for mission statement formulation and the same item found in two different mission statements may not necessarily mean the same thing (Morphew and Hartley, 2006). Conversely, FE organizations' mission statements may be ambiguous, e.g. there may be a crisis in the workforce development mission of US community colleges due to changing employer needs (e.g. cost-cutting by businesses and the demand for degrees rather than just training), changing state support (e.g. policies aimed at promoting bachelor's degrees) and the rise of new competitors (e.g. for-profit organizations) (Jacobs and Dougherty, 2006).

This suggests that organizational missions may be connected to alignment. Such mission alignment is viewed as a key element of leadership leading to the right sourcing of funds, known as mission consistency (Cowan, George, and Pinheiro-Torres, 2004; Fjortoft and Smart, 1994). This is also observed by some authors who are advocating a paradigm shift from the leaders/followers/shared goals leadership theory to direction/alignment/commitment theory (D'Amato and Roome, 2009; Drath *et al.*, 2008).

Organizational mission should also be aligned to curriculum (California Post-secondary Education Commission, 2008; State Council for Higher Education in Virginia, 2006; Bragg, 2001). Curriculum alignment may be internal or external. Internal alignment is concerned with whether there is conformity of content standards and the way those standards are measured (Sundari and Juwah, 2011; Case, 2005). Table 3.2 delineates the major operational attributes of internal curriculum alignment.

Table 3.2: Internal curriculum alignment attributes

Attribute	Meaning
Content	Topic, scope, and concepts
Object	Unproblematic, required instruction time and grade level
Validity	Accuracy of the information provided
Situational match	Appropriateness of the materials for a given task
Cognitive match	Does the teacher understand the material?
Affective match	Emotional response to the material such as appeal and suitability to teaching style
Belief match	Teachers' credence given to materials

Source: Reitsma, Marshall, and Zarske, 2010, 366

External curricular alignment concerns the expectations of external stakeholders vis-à-vis FE organizations' curricular content (Peterson, 2010). Such alignment is deemed important, since it affects industry's capacity to innovate and compete globally, ultimately affecting shareholder value (Peterson, 2010), and ensuring that students study the right subjects at FE before entering university (Hyland, 2011). External alignment may be impeded by lack of funds, inefficient staff, and FE organizational culture (Walsh, 2009). In some cases such alignment is perceived as lacking: policymakers and teachers in the Qatari post-secondary system perceive very low alignment between curriculum and what is needed at the place of work (Augustine and Krop, 2010); students in Ireland may opt for those subjects that guarantee a high grade, rather than subjects which may be needed at university (Hyland, 2011); niche companies which make speciality products may find it difficult to recruit employees with the necessary skills (Peterson, 2010).

One way to overcome the lack of external alignment, is by developing a data set which gathers information from online ads regarding skills and knowledge needed for jobs (Altstadt, 2011; Vandal, 2009). Such data will recognize, gauge, and endorse those competences in demand in the workforce and help close the external alignment gap (Wolf,

2011; Vandal, 2009). The right data systems may be used to conduct comprehensive analysis of FE productivity and workforce inclinations and movements and should be constantly updated (Wolf, 2011; Vandal, 2009). Attaining alignment calls for input by all stakeholders, as in the case of the mathematics curriculum in American high-schools (Achieve, 2008). In this case several states in the USA sought help from the business community to define what level of mathematics was needed to succeed at the place of work (Jehl, 2007). This seems to indicate that some kind of feedback mechanism is necessary to ensure mission alignment. Performance measurement is one way whereby such feedback may be organized.

Performance measurement

A feedback mechanism may be necessary to ensure that specified educational aims are met by FE organizations. Feedback may be conceptualized as a single loop between outputs and pre-set goals (Pitkanen and Lukka, 2011) and is perceived as important, since it keeps track of certain indicators which may be used to correct policy problems in the short and long term, providing such measures are within the organization's control (van Riel, 2012). Failure to do so may lead to staff demotivation (*ibid.*). Delivering this information in a timely manner to the right people within an organization may lead to better decision-making if it is complete, methodical, objective, periodic, and trustworthy (Shannak, 2009; Parmenter, 2007; Hardie, 1998). This does not mean that educational organizations should be treated in a Taylorist manner whereby scientific management comes to the fore (Cooper and Taylor, 2000), since such an approach arises from 'a misunderstanding of (or an unwillingness to understand) how non-machine forms of organizations must function' (Mintzberg, 1994, 405).

Such a Taylorist approach using hard data as performance measurement (PM) indicators (e.g. financial results extracted from accounting statements and accounting management systems) has been criticized: it is seen as being historical, narrow in scope, based on a number of

assumptions and estimates, and having no strategic focus or basis for continuous improvement (Dyson, 2004; Pike and Neale, 2003; Drury, 2001; Hayes and Garvin, 1996; Johnson and Kaplan, 1987). Such approaches are therefore ‘tantamount to driving a car by the rear view mirror’ (Niven, 2005). In spite of this, some authors still insist on the overriding importance of financials in HE, even if empirical evidence for this emanates from just from one American university (Schobel and Scholey, 2012). The feedback mechanism should thus engage staff, and be analytical and reflective, while being accurate and easily accessible (Wolf, 2011; Hardie, 1998). Ideally, performance indicators from all stakeholders should be considered, but time and financial constraints may not allow this in smaller organizations (Kenny, 2005; Hardie, 1998). In the UK, the wrong performance measures may be leading vocational colleges to offer courses with little or no employment value (Wolf, 2011).

Processes and goal quantification, as well as features and roles, are used to define PM (USGAO, 2010; Tasmania Dept. of Treasury and Finance, 2010; Franco-Santos *et al.*, 2007). Some definitions include ‘the process of quantifying the efficiency and effectiveness of action’ (Pinheiro de Lima, de Costa, and Angelis, 2008, 41). However, the authors fail to mention what should be quantified. The mention of indicators and indicator type is prevalent in other definitions. Thus indicators may be ‘inputs, processes of delivery of activities and services outputs and outcomes’ (Standing Committee on Evaluation and Accountability, 2001). Other definitions are more precise, calling for ‘systematic tracking’ and the need for fixed targets (USGAO, 2010), as well as ‘a special type of organizational surveillance aimed at revealing the extent to which an employee’s performance diverges from managers’ expectations’ (Sewell, Barker, and Nyberg, 2012, 190).

There has also been a historical divide between official performance data, gathered from within organizations, and data gathered from stakeholders outside organizations, the former

being perceived as objectively gathered data and the latter as subjective (Stipak, 1980; Brown and Coulter, 1983). This view has been radically revised, since new evidence indicates that there is no guarantee that official performance data is truly objective and that the overlap between official and stakeholder performance data is large (Charbonneau and van Ryzin, 2012).

Irrespective of data provenance outlined above, PM in education may be justified in light of QA and evaluation, as well as EU educational policy based on ‘the strengthening of Europe as a knowledge economy as mandated by the Lisbon declaration and a single market’ (Grek *et al.*, 2009, 124). PM is also justified in terms of policy alignment, since such a system may have the capability to keep track of students’ progress (Achieve, 2009) while enabling organizations to keep in line with government policies (Duffy, 2004; Labovitz and Rosansky, 1997). Furthermore, the right PM systems may be used to conduct comprehensive analysis of FE productivity and workforce inclinations and movements (Wolf, 2011; Vandal, 2009). Hence, PM may be evaluated within the general policy of the EU, that is, comparing, benchmarking, and indicators. These are not only linked to the knowledge economy but to EU policy on gender equity, standardized qualifications, and policy impact assessment (Rees, 1998; Atkinson *et al.*, 2003). PM in education may be operationalized as quality assurance (QA) programmes requiring the research question, ‘in what ways, and with what perceived success, are national QA procedures intended for, and used to, ensure policy alignment to state goals?’

QA is perceived as a student right (but not exclusively) on a worldwide basis (Akhter, 2008; Kistan, 1999) and may be used by politicians keen to demonstrate that public funds are used effectively and efficiently (Mariada Conceição da Costa, 2009; Zarkesh and Beas, 2004). While some authors refuse to define quality (Pirsig, 1974), such an approach has been largely

discredited. The variety of QA definitions reflects the large number of stakeholders involved with terms like effectiveness, efficiency, equity, equality and quality being used interchangeably (Akhter, 2008). In Ireland, for example, a common QA framework driven by the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) involves programme validation, communication, equality, staff recruitment, access, learner protection, learner assessment, and standard determination (Tierney and Clarke, 2007). In education, a QA typology has been proposed (Table 3.3) (Harvey and Green, 1993) and seems to be seminal in nature (Law, 2010; Lomas, 2007; Kistan, 1999).

Table 3.3: Quality assurance typology in HE

QA type	Description
Excellence	Flawless service
Fitness for purpose	Service executes students' needs and wants
Value for money	Service as accountability due to limited resources
Transformation	Improved service leading to learning enhancement

Source: Data from Harvey and Green, 1993

Perceptions of QA seem to gravitate towards the 'fitness of purpose' definition (Lomas, 2007; McNay, 2006). Studies in the UK illustrate that university academics perceive quality to be related to such a definition, to the detriment of quality enhancement, with many interviewees remarking on the loss of personal autonomy, the accent on processes rather than content, a drive towards conformity, the rise of managerialism, and a lack of flexibility (Lomas, 2007; McNay, 2006). Some lecturers did, however, note the advantages of QA – clear metrics, indicators which may be used for course planning, and cost efficiency (Lomas, 2007; McNay, 2006). The 'fitness of purpose' definition may also tie with aligning students' needs and wants to the core process of education (learning situations).

There are three main ways whereby QA is achieved: total quality management (TQM) – now discredited as an quality instrument in education; performance indicators, which are very much in use around the world, and external quality monitoring (EQM) with a shift from quantitative to qualitative appraisals (Law, 2010). Incorporation of the UK FE sector has led to such an EQM regime, with middle managers being employed for this purpose (Briggs, 2005; Leader, 2004). EQM is thus associated with accountability, assessment, and audit (Elton, 1992), leading to a paradox, since QA is perceived as a tool strongly coupled to accountability, rather than effective teaching leading to less innovative teaching (Law, 2010; Lomas, 2007; McNay, 2006). To overcome this, QA may be aligned to strategic targets, be few in number, and be the product of consultation within the organization (Allio, 2012; Pedder and MacBeath, 2006). This may lead to PM not only becoming ‘a learning tool that triggers strategic dialogue’ (Allio, 2012, 28), but also a system based on double-loop learning, thereby encouraging FE organizations to develop into learning organizations (Pedder and MacBeath, 2008).

In this way QA procedures may lead to better policy alignment, by virtue of enhanced organizational processes linked to educational goals (Achieve, 2009; Pedder and MacBeath, 2006; Labovitz and Rosansky, 1997). Thus, these procedures could be aligned with the policies and strategies of the FE sector (Spiers, Kiel, and Hohenrink, 2008), and with organizational mission, and may be a means whereby funds are generated, the proviso being that community colleges have clear missions (Outcalt and Rabin, 1998; Strauss, 2001). To achieve this end, educational goals may have to be clear for staff with the public and policy-makers forcing colleges to focus on their students’ needs (Outcalt and Rabin, 1998).

QA has been extensively criticized. First, different actors in FE may have different perceptions of QA, its implementation, and its usefulness. QA may be perceived as taking

into account the products and services offered, as opposed to the knowledge, comprehension, and the bond between learners and lecturers (Jung, 2012). This may result in a distinction between QA as an outcome of alignment and alignment as a way of establishing QA. The meaning of quality is, therefore, ambiguous (Harvey and Green, 1993), contentious, and controlled by stakeholder perceptions (Saarinen, 2008).

Such ambiguity may be observed in the perception of QA implementation in the Nigerian and UK HE sectors (Olufemi, 2013; Oldfield and Baron, 2000). The QA regime in Nigeria is based on continuous assessment as prescribed by the state. A study was conducted using a closed questionnaire with Likert scale items administered to 250 respondents (academic staff and students) in four Nigerian universities (Olufemi, 2013). The results of this study displayed that there was no significant difference between academic staff and students regarding the implementation of continuous assessment as a form of QA. This might be due to students' attitudes and values which are influenced by, and consequently mirror, their teachers and parents' attitudes and values and therefore display a reduction in value diversity (*ibid.*).

In the UK a principal components factor analysis was performed on data collected from a SERVQUAL-based survey which sampled 333 undergraduate students at a UK university (Oldfield and Baron, 2000). The results suggest that students perceived QA as having three dimensions: requisite elements, acceptable elements and functional elements (*ibid.*). Requisite elements' were perceived to be vital to enable students to achieve their study obligations; acceptable elements, were perceived to be desirable but not essential; and functional elements, were perceived to be utilitarian in nature. The differences in students' perceptions of QA may indicate that acceptable elements have increased importance, as students advance in their studies (*ibid.*).

Research conducted in two Canadian universities demonstrated that students' perceptions about teaching quality were primarily related to learning and organizational reputation rather than other factors, such as organizational size and location (Dahl and Smimou, 2011). Data was collected via questionnaires with a mix of both open- and close-ended questions. The universities chosen varied in size, one having a population of 5600 and the other 44,900. The authors concluded that university administrators should try to understand the association between student perceptions of teaching quality and their degree of motivation, to further develop and employ an improved QA educational system (*ibid.*).

There are other worrying trends emerging in QA: the quality of training in vocational organizations that is increasingly becoming subject to private interests (Snell and Hart, 2007) and uncritical policy borrowing (Kennedy, 2011). Research based on focus groups and in depth interviews with 98 respondents, involving a wide spectrum of stakeholders in the Australian FE sector demonstrated that lack of QA might be linked to the high student non-completion rates encountered therein (Snell and Hart, 2007). The authors noted, 'concerns about the quality of training centred predominately around three issues – a perceived shift away from off-the-job training towards fully on-the-job training, the narrowing of skills and the loss of transferable skills and a general lack of training taking place' and attributed these problems to privatization and deregulation in the sector (*ibid.*, 504).

The discourse of QA in the UK is moulded on the precept of neoliberalism (Olssen, Codd, and O'Neil, 2004), accompanied by a shift from professionalism to performativity (Ball, 2003). While it is more likely that UK sixth forms are subject to industrial style QA procedures than was the case in the early nineties, such QA regimes are not deemed to be on a par with industrial QA systems (Stoten, 2012). This could be due to the variation found

across such colleges, seemingly indicating that internal QA systems are still in a development phase (*ibid.*). To work efficiently, a QA system rests on choosing the right indicators for the organization concerned.

Such indicators are Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) (Parmenter, 2007) and are perceived necessary to ensure alignment (van Riel, 2012). Such contemporary KPIs (Franco-Santos, Lucianetti, and Bourne, 2012) may be defined in a number of ways, the key components being data measures which are forward-looking as well as being significant for the present and future success of an organization (Shannak, 2009; Parmenter, 2007; Sugarman and Watkins, 2004; Cox, Issa and Ahrens, 2003). Such measures are perceived to be ‘organizationally relevant and operationally complete’ (Ives, 2007, 2), and might have to be collected at regular intervals (Fitz-Gibbon, 1996). Such a system of measures may not only illustrate where an organization is in terms of strategic goals but assists alignment to achieve the organization’s mission (Ives, 2007).

KPIs have six basic characteristics: they are non-financial in nature; they are measured frequently; they are acted on by the senior management team; staff should understand the KPI and the corrective action that needs to be done; KPIs tie responsibility to the individual or team; KPIs have a significant and positive impact (Parmenter, 2007). However, KPIs have certain drawbacks: the fact that many community colleges have multiple missions means that some indicators may contradict each other (Cohen and Brawer, 2003), the increase in bureaucracy and disregarding those indicators which are difficult to measure (Ewell, 1999), not having the right mix of hard and soft measures (Klenowski, 2009), and wrong implementation (Mariada Conceição da Costa, 2009).

There are three consequences of contemporary KPI systems: employees’ behaviours, organizational competences, and performance consequences (Franco-Santos, Lucianetti and

Bourne, 2012). The class covering people's behaviour denotes consequences linked to the behaviour of employees and their underlying mental mechanisms. The second category, organizational capabilities, discusses consequences related with definite procedures, activities, or abilities that enable the organization to accomplish and achieve its strategic targets (e.g. alignment). The last category, performance, encompasses the diverse effects that KPI systems can have at all organizational levels (*ibid.*).

KPIs may be used to hold organizations accountable for what they accomplish (Wolf, 2011). Since attendance and graduation rates are not deemed sufficiently vital as KPIs (Wolf, 2011; Achieve, 2009), there may be the need for a P-20 (post-20-years-old) longitudinal data system with the ability to locate student progress through post-secondary education, with data able to flow bidirectionally through the system (Achieve, 2009). This way, universities and employers would have the right information at hand to take those decisions which are deemed necessary. In the same way, information from universities and employers ought to find its way to post-secondary organizations to better prepare students (Achieve, 2009). In Florida, such a system 'includes employment data, providing a body of data linking success in school to success in the workplace' (Achieve, 2007, 20). Different KPIs at different levels with harder measures may be used at higher organizational levels (e.g. student completion rates), whilst softer measures used at the lower rungs of the organization, e.g. students' perceptions of teaching quality (Law, 2010a).

In light of the above, KPIs that may be used in education differ. Some authors (Zarkesh and Beas, 2003; Education Commission for the States, 2000) stress a wide range of KPIs at different levels (e.g. strategic plans; organizational mission; institutional goals; best management practices; employment rates; class size; examination pass rates; transfer rates). Other authors are disinclined to mention strategic plans and mission (Alfred *et. al*, 1999;

Sallis, 1990). While the latter authors agree with the former on examination pass and employment rates, they also introduce such KPIs as student, academic, and employer feedback. Table 3.4 displays these authors' broad range of KPIs.

Table 3.4: KPIs used in education

	Stoten, 2012	Zarkesh and Beas, 2004	Education Commission for the States, 2000	Alfred <i>et al.</i> , 1999	Sallis, 1990a
KPI TYPE		Best management practice	Best management practice		
		Institutional goal attainment	Institutional goal attainment		
			Strategic plan		
		Organizational mission			
		Examination pass rates	Examination pass rates	Examination pass rates	Examination pass rates
		Transfer rates	Transfer rates	Transfer rates	
			Employment rates	Employment rates	Employment rates
				Employer feedback	Employer feedback
					Student feedback
		Academic staff feedback			Academic staff feedback
	Lesson observation				

Source: Author

So far, the discussion has focused on formal feedback. Informal communication channels are also important, given that collaboration among different stakeholders in the FE arena is indispensable to manage multifaceted real world problems. Informal communication has four characteristics (Kroon, 1995):

1. It conveys information rapidly;
2. It is very selective, especially with regards to sensitive information;
3. Usually occurs within normal working hours;
4. Works together rather than against formal communication channels;

Such collaboration may lead to a shared vision and commitment and an enduring assurance to formal and informal communication channels (Brown *et al.*, 2011). It also includes those between vocational organizations and industry regarding students' progress and provision of new courses (Rushbrook and Pickersgill, 2008). Informal feedback between external stakeholders and FE organizations may be complemented by another type of feedback: informal formative assessment whereby classroom/work experience situations are prospective learning situations providing confirmations of student learning (Ruiz-Primo, 2011). Thus oral, written, graphic, practical, and non-verbal evidence may be used in these types of situations. Trust is perceived as imperative in these circumstances (Rushbrook and Pickersgill, 2008).

Trust involves 'positive expectations regarding the actions of others and the willingness to be vulnerable to the actions of others.' (Jagd, 2010, 260). Repeated interactions, as in the case between FE organizations and external stakeholders, may lead to relational trust where resources are exchanged (Fortuin and Bush, 2010; Hernes, 2005; Rousseau *et al.*, 1998). Trust is perceived as the 'glue' that binds these social networks and may enhance social capital (Caldwell and Harris, 2008; Rushbrook and Pickersgill, 2008), and a lack thereof may lead to organizational failure (Creed and Miles, 1996). Unfortunately, there are several problems linked with the concept of trust. First, the different terms used to describe trust have led to 'little agreement on the meaning of trust' (Atkinson and Butcher, 2003, 284). Secondly, contextual issues have been given much less importance, with few works on trust in managerial contexts, since the study of trust is more psychological than social (Kramer, 1994).

Informal feedback may affect formal feedback by colouring people's expectations, people in this case being external stakeholders on one hand, and FE organizations' SMTs and academic

staff on the other (Farr, 1993). Informal feedback is usually set on the premise that an organization is an information environment, where individuals actively seek information relating to their performance at work (Hanser and Muchinsky, 1978). In the FE context this is somewhat more complicated, e.g. a lecturer at a tourism vocational organization may seek information regarding a student's performance by directly contacting the hotel's HR manager. In this case, it seems that such feedback is not only important for the student but also for the lecturer concerned, since the latter might want to make sure that the course material is up to date.

While the usefulness of such feedback is perceived to be important (Becker and Klimoski, 1989), one major problem with informal communication is its haphazardness, which may lead to 'poorer training and employment outcomes for employers and trainees alike' (Rushbrook and Pickersgill, 2008, 10). Furthermore, lack of formal and informal relationships between vocational organizations and industry may occur, owing to vocational organizations' low rating in a particular geographical area (e.g. the plastics industry in north central Massachusetts) (Murray, 1999). In these cases, on-the-job training has developed 'to meet specific production needs' (*ibid.*, 272). The lack of formal communication led to vocational programs which did not add value to the plastics industry in the area.

Conclusion

This chapter built on the previous one, by conceptualizing the need for strategic planning in educational organizations and its importance in alignment theory. The literature review has also evidenced a lack of data in certain areas, notably alignment in education and its use in examining FE systems in small states. Furthermore, the use of stakeholder theory in building an FE model is theoretically new, since the importance of stakeholders, while explicitly stated by alignment theorists, has not been explained within a theoretical framework. As a

result, the research questions stated in the literature chapters were framed in such a manner as to reveal the relationships between stakeholders and the other areas explicated. The following chapter explains how research tools, based on a blended methodological approach, have the capacity to elicit this reality.

Chapter Four – Research design and methodology

Introduction

This chapter deals with the research questions emerging from the literature review, the methodology adopted to collect data, the specific methods used to collect such data, how the data was analysed, and how ethical concerns were tackled. This research uses a complementarity blended methods approach (Greene, 2008; Greene, Caracelli, and Graham, 1987), whereby different attributes of the research problem are uncovered. These attributes will contribute towards building an explanatory model for the Maltese FE sector.

The choice of a pragmatic epistemological basis for this research follows a list of research questions. Issues regarding validity and reliability are then discussed, followed by an explanation of why a complementarity blended approach was chosen, and the methods used to gather and analyse data. Ethical, pragmatic considerations, and positionality are also purposefully stated, since it is believed that research is not only an activity but a value-laden process (Philamore and Goodson, 2004; Greenback, 2003).

Research questions

Aim: to create an analytical model of the Maltese FE sector, showing how stakeholder links impact alignment between government policies and organizational policies. To build the model, the following research questions will be asked:

Government policy alignment

- 1a. How does the content of FE organizations' mission statements compare with statutory and advisory government policy for the sector?
- 1b. In what ways, and with what perceived success, are national quality assurance procedures intended for, and used to, ensure policy alignment to state goals?

Other stakeholders' alignment

2a. What are stakeholders' roles in working towards mission alignment with government policy?

2b. How do stakeholders perceive the effectiveness of FE organizations' efforts to align resources and strategic planning to organizational mission?

Related domains explored within the thesis were the respondents':

1. Conceptualization of government policy for the FE sector;
2. Conceptualization of internal and external feedback mechanisms;
3. Information related to the crafting and implementation of mission statements and strategic plans in Maltese FE organizations;
4. SWOT analysis of different FE organizations and the Maltese FE sector;
5. Uncovering the links between Maltese FE organizations and external stakeholders.

Methodological approach

To assess the usefulness of blended methods, the strengths and weaknesses of positivist and interpretive approaches will be evaluated. Positivism's success in the natural sciences led to social scientists adopting positivism as a methodology whereby social reality is made visible. Positivism is deterministic, leading from abstraction, meaning that any contextual issues are removed, with an emphasis on prediction rather than explanation, within a context of objectivity (Goodson and Philamore, 2004; Popper, 1935). However, the formal and rigid linearity of positivism rarely allows for any flexibility and is perceived as detrimental (Weinberg, 2008). Other criticisms include whether research can be value- and ethics-free, and whether there are alternative hypotheses (Humberstone, 2004; Goodson and Philamore, 2004; Tribe, 2004). Furthermore, the idea of pure objectivity is considered a myth, since social scientists make choices regarding sampling test subjects, questionnaire layout and what

data to publish (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004), a situation which is also common in the natural sciences (Potter, 1996).

Alternately, the ontological premise of interpretive techniques is relativism where richness of information, rather than numerical output is predominant (Veal, 2006; Philamore and Goodson, 2004; Decrop, 2004). Such qualitative data is ‘thick and descriptively rich’ (Goodson and Philamore, 2004, 35). The interpretative approach has also been criticized on a number of grounds such as being soft and non-scientific (Philamore and Goodson, 2004; Greenback, 2003), even though such an approach may be academically rigorous and involve such techniques as triangulation (Golafshani, 2003). To summarize these criticisms, qualitative data sets give rise to subjective realities while positivist approaches may not be appropriate for studying human behaviour (Bryman, 2008; Weinberg, 2008; Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004).

Paradigmatic research argues that, even though there are epistemological differences between the positivist and the interpretative positions, these ‘assumptions are logically independent and therefore can be mixed and matched’ (Greene and Caracelli, 1997, 8), thus discarding the incompatibility between them (Bahari, 2010). Employing a mix of methods may result in new insights since the strengths of both methodologies are utilized (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004) leading to blended methods. The core characteristics of blended methods are: methodological eclecticism, paradigm pluralism, research enterprise diversity, and ‘an emphasis on continua rather than a set of dichotomies’ (Teddlie and Tashakkori, 2012, 776).

The quantitative aspect of blended methods research has been held in higher esteem than the qualitative part (Mengshoel, 2012), but this conclusion which has been disputed, since most blended research articles prioritized both qualitative and quantitative strands (Harrison,

2012). The latter is congruent with the complementarity blended methods approach (whereby both qualitative and quantitative data streams are given equal importance) chosen for this thesis (Greene, Caracelli, and Graham, 1987).

The epistemology employed in this blended method research rests on the precepts of pragmatism, based on the studies of Charles Sanders Peirce, William James and John Dewey (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004) and more recently Davidson (1973) and Rorty (1982). Understanding the problem at hand may be perceived as being important (Caracelli and Greene, 1993; Maxcy, 2003) since pragmatism may improve communication among researchers from different backgrounds (Maxcy, 2003), aids in the best mix of research approaches (Hoshmand, 2003), and may be better at coping with the intricacies of modern society and technology (Gabb, 2009; Law and Urry, 2004). Pragmatism is also epistemologically justified, owing to the complex nature of most research (Brannen, 2005).

Pragmatism is distinct from positivist and interpretative approaches since there is agreement on external realities while denying their unconditional truth (Tashakkori and Teddlie, 1998). Most blended methods researchers classify themselves as pragmatists (Martins, 2009; Bryman, 2007). Such practicality is rooted in the notion of consequences, and the ‘meaning of words, concepts, statements, ideas, beliefs’ (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004, 17), involving a deliberation of their effects (practical and empirical), and leading to a ‘needs-based or contingency approach to research method and concept selection’ (*ibid.*, 17). Pragmatism guides researchers to a middle position between positivist and interpretative approaches, based on activities that are outcome-oriented thus diminishing doubt (*ibid.*).

Since the study of alignment is multifaceted, a complementarity blended methodology should help uncover its underlying complexities. This is perceived as justifiable, since other alignment studies use a pragmatic approach based on a mix of positivist and interpretative

methods (Aversano, Grasso, and Tortorella, 2009; Maxwell and Loomis, 2003; Morse, 2003; Palmer and Markus, 2000). One type of question may be insufficient to uncover all aspects relating to organizational alignment, making necessary a blended approach. This might help uncover both causal relationships (quantitative) and explanations (qualitative). Complementarity helps 'in building stronger conclusions' (Bazaley and Kemp, 2011, 56), and enhances completion and detail. Complementarity is therefore akin to creating a mosaic, with a definite pattern composed from qualitative and quantitative data (*ibid.*).

Complementarity seeks to inform and deepen understanding of a complex phenomenon, and to give a more holistic picture of the phenomenon's characteristics (Molina-Azorin, 2007; Chatterji, 2005). In this study, the semi-structured interviews, using constructionist thematic analysis, sought a thick description of various issues including alignment, teacher-training for the FE sector, government policy formulation and implementation for the FE sector, SWOT analysis, and performance measures. The closed questionnaire to teachers/lecturers in FE sought to understand, via a Likert scale, the perceptions teachers/lecturers hold regarding their organizations' mission statements. This also determined whether mission statements act as drivers, or whether they were reflections of FE organizational processes. The data from open-ended questions furnished information on the relevance or otherwise of FE organizational mission statements.

Different facets of the same problem were investigated even though some overlap regarding mission statements was visible and is a common occurrence (Seifert *et al.*, 2010; Greene, 2008; Greene, Caracelli, and Graham, 1987). These two sets of data (semi-structured interviews and questionnaires), together with the content analysis of FE organizations' mission statements, should enhance the quality of the inquiry by providing a more holistic picture. Data sets were collected at roughly the same time as the complementarity stance calls

for. Data sets were given equal priority (Creswell *et al.*, 2003). This is consistent with the research paradigm that sought to explore alignment between government policy and FE organizations' missions. This approach is also appropriate, since data collected may be used to build the FE model, entailing the use of deductive and inductive reasoning.

All this will help create that fuller, richer picture mentioned above as the basis for the FE model, in what have been described as 'mosaics [...] created out of research issues' (Flick *et al.*, 2012, 108). Green and Hall (2012) also value such rich pictures as enabling research to reveal avenues for further research as this has (Chapter 7). Even if data is found to be conflicting or divergent, the approach also assists the researcher in accommodating ostensibly discordant data, by bringing it under a more comprehensive explanatory framework, such as the model and radar diagrams used in this research (Howe, 2012).

Uses of complementarity blended methods are found in academic literature. Organizational culture in manufacturing companies has been examined in such a way (Yauch and Steudel, 2003). Organizational customs in post-secondary education and how these affect student outcomes has also been analysed using complementary blended methods (Seifert *et al.*, 2010) while the link between innovative teaching practices and students' twenty-first-century skills has been demonstrated (Shear *et al.*, 2010).

Validity and reliability

The use of the terms validity (accuracy) and reliability (consistency) has been challenged, with most researchers opting for quality (O'Cathain, 2010; Onwuegbuzie and Burke-Johnson, 2008; Bryman, 2008; Tashakkori and Teddlie, 2003). While there are no generally accepted criteria for gauging the quality of blended methods research (O'Cathain, 2010), researchers perceive that research outcome and process quality is paramount (Onwuegbuzie and Johnson, 2008; Tashakkori and Teddlie, 2003). The use of complementarity blended methods makes it

difficult to triangulate data, since the data sets arise from different facets ‘of the same common phenomenon’ (Greene, 2007, 1) with some researchers arguing that the quality of blended methods goes beyond triangulation (Cameron, 2009). Since different data sets inform the researcher in different ways, research quality should be enhanced (Cameron, 2009; Driscoll *et al.*, 2007). Two important quality issues relating to this thesis are:

1. Data transformation (from qualitative to quantitative) and data integration. These are perceived as key quality attributes in blended method studies (Cameron, 2009; Driscoll *et al.*, 2007; Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004). In this work, qualitative data from the open-ended questions in the questionnaires and mission statements, were changed into quantitative data and then integrated with data sets emanating from the close-ended questions in the questionnaire.
2. Addressing transparency in the way that data is collected and analysed (O’ Cathain, 2010; Teddlie and Tasshakkori, 2003) and the types of inferences and conclusions that may be drawn from such data (O’ Cathain, Murphy and Nicholl, 2008). In blended methods studies, inferences are generally drawn from the whole study, rather than its constituent parts (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2007).

Questionnaire reliability was tested using Cronbach’s α which is an indication of internal consistency (Zikmund, 2003; Thorndike, 1996). The general acceptable condition of Cronbach's α is over 0.7 (Loewenthal, 2001). Therefore, if Cronbach's α of one statement was more than 0.7, then the statement was accepted.

While the concern of quantitative research is statistical generalizability, analytic generalizability is used in connection with qualitative data (Yin, 2011; Horsburgh, 2003). Analytic generalizability refers to the skill of extending the validity of a study’s conclusions

to other cases of the same kind (Robson, 2004), suggesting that researchers should generalize results to theory, similar to the way a natural scientist generalizes from experimental results to theory (Yin, 2003). Therefore, ‘the goal [of analytic generalization] is to pose the propositions and hypotheses at a conceptual level higher than that of the specific findings’ (Yin, 2011, 101).

In this thesis, analytic generalizability was used to examine qualitative data related to alignment in the Maltese FE sector. An attempt was made to generalize a particular set of results to the wider alignment theory based on the logic that educational organizations are social enterprises, driven by a system of inputs, internal processes, and outputs. From a pragmatic, blended methods perspective, this study is neither as context-bound as a purely qualitative study, nor does it aim at generalizability to other populations as in traditional quantitative studies. This is in concert with Yin’s (2003) notion of analytic generalizability which refers to generalisations to theoretical propositions and not to populations. This concept gains further relevance in blended methods studies with Morgan (2007, 72) stating, ‘I do not believe it is possible for research results to be either so unique that they have no implications whatsoever for other actors in other settings or so generalized that they apply in every possible historical and cultural setting.’

Methods

Primary data

Primary data was compiled through face to face semi-structured interviews with thirteen key informants, a content analysis of FE organizations’ mission statements, and self-completion questionnaires administered to teaching staff at all nine FE organizations. Understanding stakeholders’ perceptions of FE organizations may be considered important in determining organizational systems’ alignment as explained on pages 8 – 9 (van Riel, 2012).

Semi-structured interviewing was used, since it allowed the researcher and informants to be free in their questions and responses within the limits of topics which were identified beforehand (Jansen, 2010; Ribbins, 2007) making it easier to make rational and valid comparisons across informants (Gubrium and Holstein, 2008). In this sense it may be termed a 'qualitative survey' (Jansen, 2010, 3). Questions were not rigidly ordered, thus promoting a certain depth and breadth, thereby permitting new concepts to surface (Dearnley, 2005). Transcripts were written in grammatically correct English to lessen informant distress (Kvale, 1996), and informants were given the option to answer in English or Maltese.

The interviews with all the informants followed the same semi-structured format, with the main research questions used as the basis of the interview schedule which consisted of an opening stage, main theme (main body of the interview) stage, and concluding stage (see Appendix D, p. 284). By using this consistent approach, the researcher aimed to make comparisons of the interview data more valid. In this investigation, one semi-structured interview was conducted with each informant in the period between April 2011 and June 2011.

The venue was designed to ensure an informal, quiet, and comfortable atmosphere. Questions were sent beforehand, to allow informants to familiarize themselves with the topic being investigated (Bottery *et al.*, 2008; Hand, 2003). All interviews were digitally recorded and were conducted in English, the only exception being the interview held with GCHSS's informant. There were times when respondents lapsed into Maltese for some seconds but then reverted back to English. This is a common occurrence in Malta, where most people are bilingual. It was clear that at times respondents were very well prepared. In one particular case (MCAST) the informant had typed out answers which he then read and amplified upon.

There were a few cases where informants appeared less prepared and this resulted in irrelevant answers.

In the case of interviews, judgmental sampling was used (Carcery, 2009; Whiting, 2008; Fogelman and Comber, 2007). Judgmental sampling is a non-probability sampling technique, where the researcher selects units to be sampled based on respondents' knowledge and professional judgment (Fogelman and Comber, 2007). Out of the diverse types of judgmental sampling, the researcher used maximum variation sampling (Carcery, 2009). Maximum variation sampling is a judgmental sampling technique, used to capture a wide range of perspectives related to the research questions, and might be perceived as a way whereby democratic values are included in research. The basic principle behind maximum variation sampling is to gain greater insights into a phenomenon by looking at it from all angles (*ibid.*). This can often help the researcher to identify common themes that are evident across the sample. Probability sampling was excluded as there are few FE organizations in Malta, and thus few top government officials working with them.

Senior FE organizations' SMT officials were approached (nine). However, permission to interview the SMT officials at independent organizations (two), and administer the questionnaire at said organizations was not granted with no reason given. Thus data from independent FE organizations is non-existent. Furthermore, permission to administer the questionnaire to academic staff at ITS was not granted with no explanation given. To partly mitigate the effects of the above, the researcher decided to interview two senior managers from two five star hotels. These particular hotels are known for their strong links with ITS. Such an approach led to the triangulation of these two respondents' answers. High ranking officials from the NCHE, the Malta Union of Teachers (MUT), the University of Malta, and the senior manager of a leading manufacturing company were also approached.

There were two reasons for choosing the senior manager of a leading manufacturing concern. First, was her vast experience in the Maltese HR field, having held senior management positions with multinationals which have offices in Malta. Secondly, while MCAST comprises a number of institutes, the engineering institute, which trains students for manufacturing industry is the largest. From Malta's only University, the official selected for interview was the person in charge of students' affairs, a choice made on the advice of Professor Ronald Sultana, Faculty of Education. The tourism managers of the two five-star hotels were chosen following advice given by Mr Winston Zahra, ex-President of the Malta Hotel and Restaurant Association. Both tourism managers represent two top luxury hotels in Malta. In all cases anonymity was achieved by using pseudonyms (Table 4.1).

Table 4.1: Pseudonyms used by interview respondents, 2012

Pseudonym	Organizational type
Noel	Vocational
John	Vocational
Jane	Academic state-funded
Nigel	Academic state-funded
Kevin	Academic state-funded
Antonia	Academic Church
Michael	Academic Church
Sandro	Malta Union of Teachers
Robin	Tertiary
Simon	Government
Diane	Manufacturing
Rachel	Tourism
Elaine	Tourism

Source: author

These respondents were in a position to furnish data relating to the research questions. FE organizations' SMT officials were invited to participate with the NCHE in drawing up government policy, and were also responsible for ensuring that government policy was implemented in their respective organizations, thus covering research questions 1a, 1b, 2a,

and 2b. The MUT official was involved with the drawing up of collective agreements related to the Maltese FE sector, and was also invited to collaborate with the NCHE (research questions 1a, 1b, 2a, and 2b). The experience and knowledge of the senior HR managers, from the manufacturing and tourism sectors, provided data related to research questions 1b, 2a, and 2b. The NCHE official was responsible for crafting government policy for the FE sector and afforded data related to all the research questions.

Interviews were recorded using a Sony digital recorder. The quality of the sound is good, it is easy to operate and quick to upload to a PC. All interviews were transcribed and kept as Word documents in a secure location. The use of face-to-face interviews was chosen, since informants live and work within close proximity of the researcher's home, and it seems the preferred method in both policy implementation and alignment studies (Aversano, Grasso, and Tortorella, 2009; Gronn, 2007; Honig, 2004; Giacchino and Kakabadse, 2003). Furthermore the lack of non-verbal cues in telephone and e-mail interviews may be annoying (Ribbins, 2007; Ribbens, 1989).

Following transcription, interviews were coded using NVivo. A primary code, based on the research questions, was established and fine-tuned, e.g. one of the primary codes was organizational strengths within which was subsequently fine-tuned according to strength type. Apart from such fine-tuning, interviews revealed another important alignment data set: internal processes in FE organizations. Such internal processes revealed information regarding organizational type, size, and student and teacher selection (Table 4.2).

Table 4.2: Internal processes in Maltese FE organizations, 2012

Variable	Organizational type	Student selection	Teacher selection	Conditions of work	Academic staff salaries/€	Teacher training
Vocational MCAST	Vocational education	Multiple entry points. Dependent on course.	Right qualifications. Three years' experience in industry. SMT selects new staff.	21 hours/week 8:00-16:30 daily with a one hour break	18,000-29,500	Internal training in VET pedagogy at Diploma and Master's level. External training encouraged by the provision of scholarships.
ITS	Vocational	Multiple entry points. Dependent on course.	Right qualifications. Experience in industry. SMT selects new staff.	Staff contact hours:21/week Might have to work till late due to restaurant	15,700-22,000	External training encouraged by the provision of scholarships.
Academic state-funded JC	Lecturing college	Merit based leading to University. Single entry point.	Generally Master's degree. SMT involved.	16-20 hours/week 08:00-1700. Need not remain on premises.	25,500-39,000 plus 1,800 works resources	External training provided via scholarships to pursue Masters and PhD.
GCHSS	Teaching school	Multiple entry points. Dependent on course.	Government (Directorate) selects new staff. SMT does not select new staff.	17-18 hours/week. 08:15-15:00 daily. 5 hours/week time in lieu	15,700-22,000	Internal training consists of professional development sessions once every three months.
SMAR	Teaching school	Multiple entry points but largely geared towards University entry.	Government (Directorate) selects new staff. SMT does not select new staff.	19.5 hours/week. 08:15-15:00 daily. 5 hours/week time in lieu	15,700-22,000	Internal training consists of professional development sessions once every three months.
Church SAC	Teaching college	Merit based leading to University entry. Single entry point.	General Bachelor's degree but preferably a post-graduate degree. SMT selects new staff.	24 hours/week Teachers need not remain on premises.	15,700-22,000	Internal staff seminar on a yearly basis. No explicit policy regarding external training. Teachers may be granted unpaid leave for a year.
DLS	Teaching college	Merit based leading to University entry. Single entry point.	Generally Master's degree but at times forced to choose applicants with a Bachelor's degree. SMT selects new staff.	24 hours/week Teachers need not remain on premises.	15,700-22,000	No explicit policy regarding external training. Teachers may be granted unpaid leave for a year.

Source: Author

Apart from semi-structured interviews, a questionnaire (see Appendix E, p. 291) related to perception of organizational mission statements was administered to all teaching/academic staff at the seven FE organizations. The teacher population at each of the nine organizations

is detailed in Table 1.1. The questionnaire was designed to ensure the elimination of complex, leading, double-barrelled, and ambiguous questions (Bell, 2007; Zikmund, 2003). For this reason, the administered questionnaire consisted of 19 closed statements (questions 1-3), four open-ended questions and four demographic questions keeping within the range that offers a better response rate (Iarossi, 2006; Zikmund, 2003). Demographic questions were placed at the end of the questionnaire since they are the easiest to answer and to avoid informant intimidation (Lazar, Feng, and Hochheiser, 2010; Downs and Adrian, 2004). The layout of the questionnaire ensured uncluttered questions, coupled with the use of a large font to enhance informants' comfort (Downs and Adrian, 2004; Zikmund, 2003).

The 19 closed statements in the questionnaire were to gauge the following attributes:

1. Government policy for the FE sector: attract more students, achieving excellence, attract foreign fee-paying students, relevance to Malta's economic, social and cultural needs, social inclusion, student mobility, and teacher mobility (government alignment – research question 1a).
2. Mission alignment: accountability, student learning, driving departmental agendas, aims, uniqueness, motivation, and values (stakeholder alignment – research question 2a).
3. Strategic processes: college plans, student identification, student orientation, resources, and performance management (stakeholder alignment – research question 2b).

Statements related to internal and strategic processes determine the state of internal alignment, while statements related to government policy determine external alignment. The four open-ended questions illustrated academic staff's perceptions related to the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats that the organizations face. The demographic

questions related to age, gender, number of years teaching in the FE organization, and qualification type (university degree, professional, other, or none at all).

Since the number of teaching staff in different FE organizations is strikingly different, all teaching/academic staff were included in the sample. Sampling techniques were excluded since this would have led to a very small sample from certain FE organizations. The intention of this questionnaire was not just to gather information but also to listen to voices that are sometimes left out by only focusing on the major organizations. Some might object that such a sampling technique will lead to larger FE organizations being privileged. Other sampling techniques might lead to smaller FE organizations remaining unheard. The latter may be considered worse than the former.

Questionnaire pretesting to identify incorrect or confusing words and terms was carried out on twenty members of academic staff at Junior College during March 2012. Judgmental sampling was used to identify respondents, thus incorporating elements like gender, age, qualifications, number of years teaching at FE level, and subject taught. The questionnaire was left in their personal mailbox in the reception area and was collected after ten days. These respondents were surveyed again with the total population, following any necessary changes to the questionnaire. Pretesting identified a small number of problems in the questionnaire, relating to format and question clarity. An important issue was the negative comments associated with one particular question ‘how does your work contribute to achieving organizational mission?’ This question was deemed too difficult to reply, and at times outright deceiving, since it would mean that respondents may inadvertently declare what they teach. The strong negative response elicited by the above question must also be seen in light of a previous questionnaire administered to FE teachers by the NCHE in November/December 2011. The questionnaire specifically asked what subject lecturers

taught. This led to the possibility that respondents could be identified, leading to Union intervention and a completely redesigned questionnaire. Considering the above, this particular question was restated as ‘how much do you think you do, or can, contribute to helping your organization achieve its mission?’

The questionnaire was left at respective FE organizations’ reception areas for academic staff to complete. E-mail and post were not used since this may have led to greater administrative complexities without necessarily increasing response rate. A short note preceded the questionnaire, detailing its purpose to informants. The note also included ethical issues relating to privacy and confidentiality, as delineated by the Maltese Data Protection Act (2001). Completed questionnaires were collected after two weeks. A reminder was sent one week after collection, if the response rate was low.

Content analysis of mission statements

A manual content analysis of mission statements at FE institutions was undertaken by identifying the components of FE organizations’ mission statements and their frequency in relation to EU/government policy themes evident in ‘Further and Higher Education Strategy, 2020’ (NCHE, 2009). Maltese FE organizations’ addresses studied in this thesis are available on the Department of Education website as well as the Yellow Pages[®]. Subsequently the FE organizations’ websites were accessed to see whether a mission statement was present. When a mission statement was lacking on the website the school was contacted by phone to see whether a mission statement actually existed. Using this procedure four institutions were found to have specific mission statements (ITS, MCAST, JC, and SAC). Another three institutions had no explicit mission statement. These were contacted by phone to check whether a document, or documents, existed to this effect. Out of those contacted, two schools reported their new mission statement via e-mail (DLS and SMAR). Another school stated via

phone that their mission statement was simply ‘To give another chance’ (GCHSS). Thus, all nine post-secondary schools had a mission statement (Table 4.3).

Table 4.3: Data sources: FE organizations’ mission statements, 2012

Name of institution	Mission statement on website	Mission statement or other document forwarded after contacted by phone
ITS	✓	
MCAST	✓	
JC	✓	
SAC	✓	
GCHSS		✓
SMAR		✓
DLS		✓

Source: author

The government policy themes evident in ‘Further and Higher Education Strategy, 2020’ (NCHE, 2009) were ‘attract more students’, competences (knowledge and skills), qualifications, student mobility, teacher mobility, and QA. Included with these policy themes are work and university. These inclusions are justified on the basis that the Maltese FE sector prepares young people for the place of work or to enter university. FE organizations were grouped according to the following criteria:

1. State-funded vocational (VET) organizations: two organizations fall under this category, namely, Institute of Tourism Studies (ITS) and Malta College for Arts, Science and Technology (MCAST).
2. State-funded academic organizations: the three organizations in this category are Giovanni Curmi Higher Secondary School (GCHSS), Sir M. Refalo Post-Secondary Complex (SMAR), and University of Malta Junior College (JC).
3. Church organizations: the two organizations in this category are St Aloysius College (SAC) and De La Salle College (DLSC).

The above groupings provide a basis whereby results may be compared within and between groups. Furthermore the total scores for all organizations may be obtained to evaluate which component(s) have the greatest frequency.

Binary coding was used to establish whether the above-mentioned themes were present in the mission statements (see Appendix A, p. 280) thus following mainstream academic research in the area (Barktus and Glassman, 2007; Ford *et al.*, 2006). If the theme was mentioned in a particular mission statement, the number '1' was given to that particular section of the mission statement. On the other hand, if the component was missing, the number '0' was assigned. This procedure was repeated for the different themes, keeping in mind that different words may be used to express the same intent.

Data analysis

Content analysis was used to analyse interviews and organizations' mission statements. Quantitative content analysis may be defined as 'a research technique for the objective, systematic, quantitative description of the manifest content of communication' (Berelson, 1952, 519). Such a definition, while still present in many texts (Riffe, Lacy, and Fico, 1998; Shapiro and Markoff, 1997), may be perceived as denying any contribution by the author (Krippendorff, 2004). It may thus be more helpful to define content analysis as a mental product that emerges 'in the process of a researcher analysing a text relative to a particular context' (*ibid.*, 19).

Content analysis proceeds by identifying and quantifying the occurrence of specific words, phrases, images, and sounds in texts, audio, film and photos, and combinations thereof (Kabanoff and Daly, 2002). The content analysis used here is quantitative, meaning the organization and summary of relevant themes found in FE organizations' mission statements. The analysis of written texts may help alleviate concerns regarding the internal validity of

primary data (Court and Abbas, 2010). Other advantages include the use of systematic descriptions, the analysis of changes over time, and that qualitative material is changed into quantitative data (Kabanoff and Daly, 2002).

Content analysis has been used to investigate mission statements in different scenarios. The links between mission statements and brand identification (Jorda-Albinana *et al.*, 2009), Corporate Social Responsibility (Sones, Grantham, and Vieira, 2009), tourism (Holcomb, Upchurch and Okumus, 2007; Kemp and Dwyer, 2003), the retail sector (Lee, Fairhurst, and Wesley, 2009), the health care sector (Ford *et al.*, 2006; Williams *et al.*, 2005), media organizations (Sidhu, 2003), and education (Semler, 2001) have all been investigated. Different researchers seem to use different styles of content analysis, making it difficult to compare results.

Interview transcripts were analysed using constructionist thematic analysis which is a type of content analysis. Thematic analysis ‘is a process for encoding qualitative information’ (Boyatzis, 1998, vi) and recognizes, investigates, and states patterns or themes within data (Braun and Clarke, 2006). The three areas of strategic processes, policy documents, and RBV were used to generate deductive themes. The impact of certain features of small nation states (e.g., vulnerability and adaptability) and the focus on localized narratives were factorized into respondents’ answers (Alebaikan and Troudi, 2010; Lurie and Snyders, 2010; Lynch, 1997). Any other themes which arose from the data were treated inductively (see appendix B, p. 281).

The variety of positions held within the constructionist viewpoint make it hard to define (Stam, 2001) and may lead to terminological discrepancies (Pernecky, 2012). Constructionism states that the world is understood by constructing how we comprehend it individually and with others (Dodge, Ospina, and Foldy, 2005), highlighting freedom and the

ability to use discourse (Lurie and Snyders, 2010). Constructionism is thus more likely to accentuate the way that humans understand the world (epistemological emphasis) rather the world itself (ontological emphasis) (Pernecky, 2012). Power and language manipulation and its relation to stakeholder groups become important since reality is ‘mediated and manipulated’ (Manson, 2008, 777). FE organizations’ SMT officials may afford a very different picture of their organization when compared to government, tourism, business and union officials. There may also be differences between FE organizations’ SMT officials and teachers within the same organization. In this work, a weaker version of constructionism was employed allowing for partial objectivity (Newton, Deetz, and Reed, 2011; Nightingale and Cromby, 2002). Weak constructionism overlaps with pragmatism (explained above) and critical realism, whereby objective reality and subjective views coexist (Easton, 2010; Longshore Smith, 2006).

Constructionism has been used to analyse education, management, and public policy (Gubrium and Holstein, 2008). In education the characteristics of teachers and learners, what is taught and learnt, as well as educational structures, have been examined (Wortham and Jackson, 2008). Constructionism is perceived as an antidote against the hegemony of positivism when examining strategic processes, entrepreneurship, and organizational structure (Samra-Fredericks, 2008, Schneider and Ingram, 2008). The variety of public policy work using constructionism ranges from small business procurement, health, and education to minority groups (Schneider and Ingram, 2008).

The project generated a considerable quantity of qualitative data: 28,563 words of interview data resulting from *c.* 21 hours interviewing and 339 words resulting from Maltese FE organizations’ mission statements. The researcher read the interviews several times, until he became thoroughly familiarized with the data. Data analysis commenced after this period of

familiarization, and included coding data into categories to develop themes which are the fundamental concepts researchers try to describe (Miles and Huberman, 1994). Codes were developed during the interview process and those codes were ‘tried out’ on subsequent interviews to see if they ‘fit’ (*ibid.*, 70). Following this procedure, ‘next, the most promising codes to emerge from this exercise are written up’ (*ibid.*, 70). These codes were then checked in all subsequent interviews. Therefore these codes stuck closely to the data and assigned a label to each section that helped to separate and sort data (Table 4.4).

Table 4.4: Examples of the coding process

Codes	Data from interviews
Student selection	The school selects students on merit (Antonia)
Crafting of mission statement	Our mission statement was crafted at a professional development session comprising staff and the senior management team (Kevin)
Involvement in crafting Maltese FE sector strategic plan	We were consulted towards the end of the process. (Noel)
Perception of FE organizations’ mission statements	For instance, mission statements are utopic when, for example, they mention that they want to embrace more students (Sandro)

Source: interview data

To help accomplish this, the four main research questions were broken down to form sub-categories to aid the organization and coding of interview data (see Table 4.5). It was the goal during this phase to keep the expressed intent and meaning related to the research questions and policy attributes and as such, the latter became key categories from which patterns and themes developed.

Table 4.5: Research questions' sub-categories used for data coding

Research question	Sub-categories
How does the content of FE organizations' mission statements compare with statutory and advisory government policy for the sector?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Attracting more students Social inclusion Student and teacher mobility Encouraging students to partake in Malta's economic, social, and cultural needs Funding Promoting excellence Attracting foreign fee-paying students Harmonizing organizations
In what ways, and with what perceived success, are national quality assurance procedures intended for, and used to, ensure policy alignment to state goals?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Formal QA regime Informal QA regime
What are stakeholders' roles in working towards mission alignment with government policy?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Control over organizational processes FE organizations' entry and exit points Barriers that hinder alignment
How do stakeholders perceive the effectiveness of FE organizations' efforts to align resources, strategic planning, and quality assurance (QA) procedures to organizational mission?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Crafting, review and perception of mission statement Presence, crafting and implementation of strategic plan Resources available Strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats

Source: interview data

This way, the researcher was able to describe an organized and detailed story of the phenomena under investigation. Analyzing the data in this manner may be considered reflexive, because it obliged the researcher to question informants' statements, while trying to suppress, as far as possible, any prejudices. This form of analysis might also have helped inspire concepts and themes to emerge, which could have remained unnoticed (Holton, 2007).

The methodology outlined above is justified by similar work done in Portugal and Australia. In Portugal, the work involved a qualitative survey of rectors and presidents within HE (Machado, Taylor, and Farhangmehr, 2004). Results indicate that public HE organizations are trying to implement strategic planning more than private organizations. Data may also illustrate that many private HE organizations do not subscribe to strategic planning and have no interest in following this path. Conversely, data seems to demonstrate that public HE

organizations would like to comprehend and follow strategic planning more dynamically (*ibid.*).

In Australia, HE strategic management was analyzed, via a qualitative survey using semi-structured interviews, with 36 governing body members from seven universities (Rytmeister, 2009). Interview content was examined to extract key themes and issues perceived to be contentious by respondents. The analysis demonstrated that while strategic management may have been construed in different ways by university governance members, important commonalities of understanding were present. For example, while it seemed likely that there was general consensus that strategic planning was a management role, the data seemed to demonstrate that ‘governing body members’ perceptions of the meaning of governance and management practice in strategic discussions and direction-setting vary according to both individual differences and social identity’ (*ibid.*, 154).

The close-ended statements in the questionnaire were analysed using SPSS[®] software (Version 16). The Microsoft Excel[®] package was not used owing to reported inaccuracies when processing data for inferential statistics (McCullough and Heiser, 2008). Notes were taken to ensure that errors were avoided. Data for every organization was analysed individually. The analysis consisted of checking whether the data for each attribute followed a Gaussian distribution (important in establishing the choice of inferential statistical tests), crosstabs between the different attributes, and demographic data (e.g. student learning against length of time teaching in the organization). Data sets for different FE organizations were then merged in groups.

Nonparametric inferential statistics, based on ranking were used to analyse ordinal data (Vigderhous, 1977). Table 4.6 demonstrates the various nonparametric statistical tests used and their suitability to analyse data collected in this thesis. An asymptotic significance means

that data were tested against an asymptotic distribution. An asymptotic distribution assumes that the probability of very high and very low values never reaches zero, thus creating a distribution graph with tails that never reach the horizontal axis (Brace, Kemp, and Snelgar, 2006).

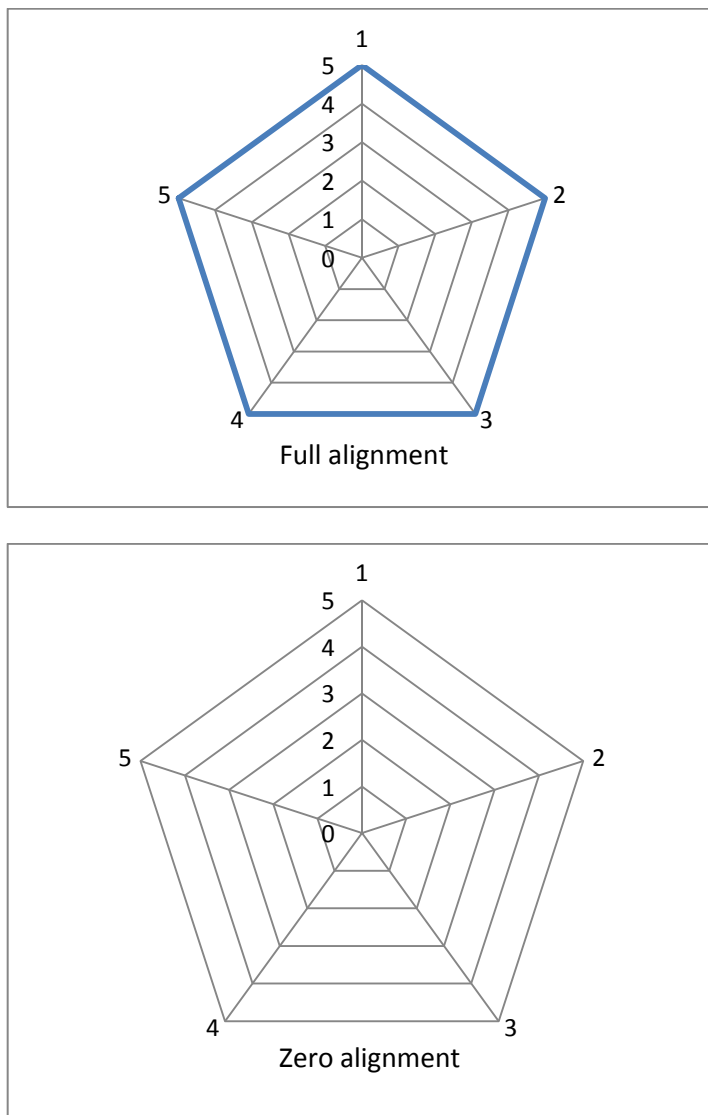
Table 4.6: Nonparametric statistical tests used to analyse quantitative data

Statistical test	Kruskall-Wallis	Mann-Whitney <i>U</i> test
Normal distribution	Not assumed	Not assumed
Parametric counterpart	<i>t</i> test	One-way ANOVA
Usage	To identify differences in response between two independent samples	To identify differences in response in more than two independent samples
Examples	Analysing conflicts among stakeholders (Barli <i>et al.</i> , 2006) Stakeholder engagement (Connolly, Hyndman and McConville, 2013)	Stakeholder preferences (Strager and Rosenberger, 2006) Stakeholder perceptions (Gelcich <i>et al.</i> , 2009)
Confidence level in examples examined	0.05	0.05
Asymptotic significance	Two-tailed	Two-tailed

Source: author

Furthermore, data from groups of close-ended questions were displayed in the form of radar diagrams. Displaying data in such a manner has been used in organizational alignment (Labovitz and Rosansky, 1997) and more recently in a UN publication on urbanization (UN-HABITAT, 2012). Figure 4.1 displays the form of such radar diagrams which are useful in assessing alignment. In full alignment all attributes in the diagram should be rated 5/5 thus creating a line on the outermost part of the diagram. Zero alignment will occur if all attributes in the diagram are rated zero, thus creating a point in the centre of the diagram.

Figure 4.1: Examples of a radar diagram



Source: author

The open-ended statements were analysed manually using inductive thematic analysis. The relevant themes were strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats which means that a SWOT analysis was conducted for each organization by counting the number of times a specific theme was mentioned. Greater importance was given to those themes with high counts. In this way qualitative data sets were changed into quantitative data sets. This was performed for each organization, as well as groups of organizations as outlined in the previous paragraph.

Positionality and ethical concerns

As a member of academic staff at Junior College for the last sixteen years, I am aware of the possible conflict that may arise from this work. These conflicts include the possible access to insider information and having a friendly relationship with interviewees. A commitment to the democratic value of listening to different voices from the FE sector might mitigate some of these conflicts. This is one of the reasons why the semi-structured interviews were analysed from a constructionist stance (Weinberg, 2008). At the same time a balance between a strict post-positivism and a postmodern approach, based on social constructionism, was sought while gathering and analysing interview data. This balance is essential, since it is highly unlikely that I can be completely objective in this enterprise. It is the acknowledgement of bias that is important in this respect rather than its total elimination. Aspiring to the kind of bias elimination found in the natural sciences (e.g. biology) will not guarantee the production of knowledge from a God's eye view – rather it has been shown that even the natural sciences are subject to some degree of bias (Potter, 1996).

A consideration of one's personal history is also important in determining blended methods choice (Greene, 2007). My worldview has undergone dramatic changes over the last nineteen years. While having an academic scientific background grounded in biology and chemistry, my teaching post (Systems of Knowledge) has informed me of other ways whereby reality may be perceived. Many texts which I have taught over the years also seem to strive for common ground between the positivist and interpretative paradigms (e.g. '*Zen and the art of motorcycle maintenance*' [Pirsig, 1974]; '*The ascent of man*' [Bronowski, 1976]).

Ethical research does not just reside in the way that informants are handled. It is an integral part of the research process as a whole. The ordered questioning of previous work in the

literature review may be viewed as ethical, since it respects the views of previous researchers, without necessarily agreeing with their conclusions (Busher and James, 2007; Merton, 1938). The major ethical concerns are a pledge to truthfulness and integrity, the impartiality and disinterestedness of researchers, and the acknowledgement of previous research (Glen, 2000; Busher and James, 2007). Researchers must consider the impacts on informants and the educational research community whilst respecting the dignity of the human person (University of Lincoln, 2010; University of Malta, 2010; BERA, 2004). The difficulty is that the number of FE organizations in Malta is small, and, even though the anonymity of respondents will be respected, certain statements may be traced to their original source. Data that is omitted or included in the final work largely depends on the value judgements of the researcher. Peripheral data from interviews not central to the thesis that may compromise the anonymity of the informant will be excluded.

In order to conform to ethical precepts of contemporary research the following procedure was adhered to:

1. FE organizations and government departments/ministries where research was conducted were contacted by mail detailing the research concept and asking for formal permission before proceeding with research (see Appendix G for a copy of the letter sent to informants, p. 297);
2. Permission from University of Malta Research Ethics Committee (2012) and Lincoln University's Ethics Committee (2011) was obtained before commencing research;
3. All informants (organization officials, government officials, and students) were assured that their identity will remain hidden;
4. All informants were assured that their answers will only be used for the research at hand and not be divulged to third persons;

5. Informants who were interviewed were given the opportunity to answer in English or Maltese (Bottery *et al.*, 2008);
6. Informants knew beforehand that interviews would be recorded and duly transcribed by the researcher and not by a third person;
7. All recordings and transcripts were kept in a secure location;
8. Transcripts were sent to each informant for confirmation of content. Informants were allowed to make alterations;
9. Recordings and transcripts would be made available to informants upon request in accordance with the Maltese Data Protection Act, 2001 (Office of the Data Protection Commissioner, 2010);
10. The results and publication of papers related to this work would be made available to informants who were interviewed;
11. At any stage of the research process, informants had the right to withdraw 'for any or no reason' (BERA, 2004, 6);

Conclusion

Educational research strives to further knowledge in a critical and methodical manner (Morrison, 2007). Such research should also enhance practice and social justice in education. If research grants favour positivist methodologies (evidence-based policy), researchers may be forced to use such an approach at the expense of interpretative methods (Greenback, 2003). The blended method approach will helpfully lessen such criticism. It is hoped that the results of this study will augment practice by providing empirical data detailing the level of alignment between government FE policy and FE organizational missions. A critical analysis of the data collected will also confidently contribute to better policy formulation and implementation.

Chapter Five – Analysis of mission statements, interviews, and questionnaire and merging of data sets

Introduction

This chapter deals with presenting the data that was collected from the three sources as specified in the previous chapter:

1. A content analysis of FE organizations' mission statements;
2. Semi-structured interviews with various stakeholders;
3. Questionnaire to academic staff at FE organizations;

As prescribed by the complementarity blended methods approach, these three strands of data will be presented and analysed separately for each of the research questions, following which such data streams will be integrated. The author would like to restate these questions to help the reader understand how the analysis was performed.

Government policy alignment

- 1a. How does the content of FE organizations' mission statements compare with statutory and advisory government policy for the sector?
- 1b. In what ways, and with what perceived success, are national quality assurance procedures intended for, and used to, ensure policy alignment to state goals?

Other stakeholders' alignment

- 2a. What are stakeholders' roles in working towards mission alignment with government policy?
- 2b. How do stakeholders perceive the effectiveness of FE organizations' efforts to align resources and strategic planning to organizational mission?

Content analysis of FE organizations' mission statements

This section covers question 1a. Figure 5.1 and Table 5.1 display the results of the content analysis of FE organizations' mission statements. Policy themes with values of zero were omitted. Vocational organizations' mission statements mention the highest number of themes (7) followed by state-funded academic (6) and church organizations (3). This means that vocational organizations' mission statements display the highest *variety* in terms of themes. Vocational organizations also display the greatest frequency mentioning six themes a total of eleven times. This is followed by state-funded (10) and Church organizations (9). Three themes are absent from all organizational mission statements (attract more students, student mobility, and teacher mobility).

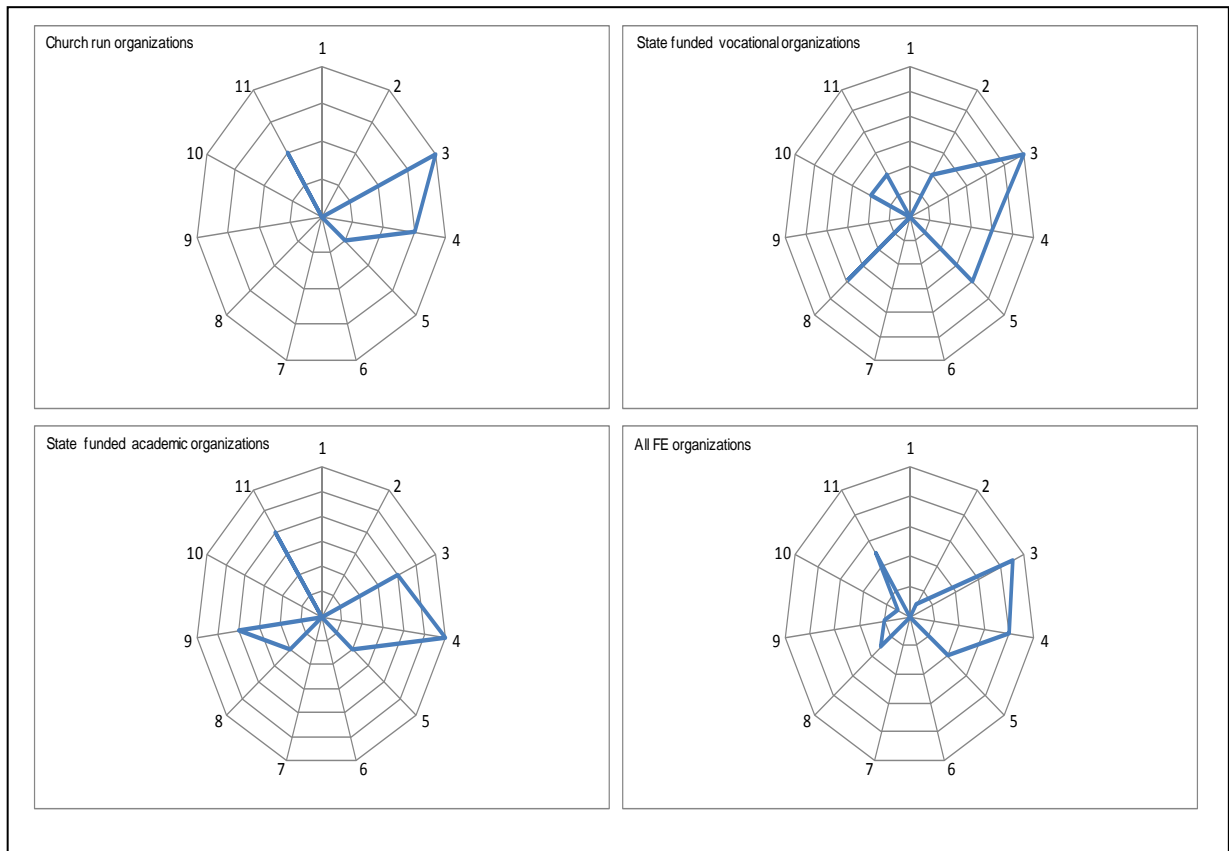
The major frequencies for all mission statements is knowledge (29.0%), followed by skills (24.0%), excellence (15.0%), qualifications (12.0%), and work (9.0%). University, QA, and inclusion are briefly mentioned (6.0%, 6.0%, and 3.0% respectively). Inclusion is only mentioned by one organization (MCAST), while QA is mentioned by ITS. The university is mentioned by JC making it unique in this way. There seemed to be no indication regarding the connection between core and peripheral organizational mission attributes (Vaughan, 1977) (see p. 59) and might indicate a divide between mission statement and organizational mission in the Maltese FE sector.

Table 5.1: Data sources: policy themes in FE organizations' mission statements, 2012

	Policy themes								Total
	Inclusion	Competences Know	Skills	Qualifications	Work	University	Quality assurance	Excellence	
Vocational organizations									
ITS	0	2	1	1	1	0	1	1	7
MCAST	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	5
<i>Total vocational</i>	1	3	2	2	2	0	1	1	12
State-funded academic FE organizations									
GCHSS	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
SMAR	0	1	2	1	1	0	0	1	6
JC	0	1	1	0	0	2	0	1	5
<i>Total state-funded</i>	0	2	3	1	1	2	0	2	11
Church FE organizations									
SAC	0	1	2	0	0	0	0	0	3
DLS	0	3	1	1	0	0	0	2	7
<i>Total Church</i>	0	4	3	1	0	0	0	2	10
GRAND TOTAL	1	9	8	4	3	2	1	5	33
% TOTAL	3.0	27.0	24.0	12.0	9.0	6.0	6.0	15.0	100

Source: author

Figure 5.1: Maltese FE organizations' mission statements: policy themes, 2012



Source: author

Diagram legend	
Number	Attribute
1	Attract more students
2	Inclusion
3	Knowledge
4	Skills
5	Qualifications
6	Student mobility
7	Teacher mobility
8	Work
9	University
10	Quality assurance
11	Excellence

The inclusion of quality assurance at ITS by focusing on skills, knowledge, and qualifications may be representative of a neoliberal educational discourse (Avis and Bathmaker, 2004; Hill, 2003). This might indicate that the results presented in Table 5.1 demonstrated that the

Maltese FE sector was only slightly neoliberal, possibly due to the lack of incorporation in the Maltese FE sector.

Skills were mentioned by every organization with the exception of GCHSS, but the skills mentioned by different organizational groups were dissimilar. In their mission statements, vocational organizations mentioned generic skills which may be used at the place of work (hard skills), whilst state funded and Church organizations mentioned critical, spiritual, affective, social, and personal skills (soft skills). The emphasis on different skill types by different organizational groups is relevant given that skills' gaps identified in Malta across different economic sectors focus on numeracy, language proficiency, and communication (NCHE, 2008). Broad reference to hard skills relating to tourism and university were in the mission statements of both ITS and Junior College, thus supporting research from Brown, Green, and Lauder (2001) in Australia. However, mission statements did not display differences between high skills and general skills, thus displaying little connection between economic growth and the educational system (*ibid.*).

The analysis of mission statements alone, appeared to indicate strongly that organizational and national FE policies are not aligned. The exclusion of three policy themes (attract more students, student mobility, and teacher mobility) appears incongruent with government policy aimed at increasing educational participation rates by 40% (16-24 year old cohort) within the next seven years (NCHE, 2008). This omitted policy also makes alignment with EU policies appear unlikely, since EU FE aims include greater teacher and student mobility as an important aspect, encouraged by the introduction of Europass (Ertl, 2006), and developments in making qualifications conform in different nations.

This analysis was carried out using themes extracted from Maltese FE policy documentation. There may be other themes which are not specifically mentioned in said documentation

which may be important to the FE organization concerned but lacking in relevance to FE policy (e.g. Church organizations' mission statements emphasize a Catholic upbringing, a fact immaterial to Maltese FE policy). Additionally, the inclusion of skills, knowledge, and qualifications may not necessarily be driven by Maltese FE policy as presented by the NCHE (2009), since seven of nine mission statements used in this analysis were written before the NCHE's policy document was published in 2009. The two mission statements crafted after said report are ITS and SMAR. However, both ITS and SMAR's mission statements fail to mention five themes.

Analysis of semi-structured interviews with stakeholders

The analysis of interviews with stakeholders is in concert with the listed research questions. They are repeated here for clarity's sake.

What are stakeholders' roles in working towards mission alignment with government policy?

To elicit responses to this research question, FE organizations' SMT officials were asked whether their organizations played an active role in formulating government policy for the FE sector as put forward by the NCHE, in what ways their organization was aligned to government policy, whether and how government encouraged their organization to follow sector policy, what barriers hindered such alignment, and how they perceived government policy. The NCHE official was asked how the NCHE ensured that FE organizations followed government policy, in what way(s) FE organizations were aligned to such policy, what barriers hindered such alignment, how government policy for the FE sector was formulated, and who was involved. The MUT official was asked about the union's role (if any) in formulating FE policy, how FE organizations were aligned to such policy, and what barriers hindered such alignment. Business and tourism informants were asked whether the respective vocational organizations they dealt with were aligned to government policy, barriers to such

alignment, and whether their sector was involved in formulating such policy. The university official was asked whether academic and Church FE organizations (also academic) were aligned to government policy, barriers to such alignment, and whether their sector was involved in formulating such policy. A summary of informants' responses is delineated in Tables 5.2 and 5.3 respectively.

Table 5.2: Roles, barriers and government policy formation: 2012 perceptions from interview respondents

Interview question	Role in formulating government policy	Perceived barriers	Government policy formulation
Informant			
MCAST	Very little	No perceived barriers	
Diane	Direct involvement of industry	Rapid growth of MCAST	
ITS	NA	Lack of staff professionalism	
Rachel	Direct involvement through MRHA	Lack of staff professionalism at ITS	
Elaine	Direct involvement through MRHA	Lack of staff professionalism at ITS	
GCHSS	Attended sessions but did not give any input		
JC	Unaware whether his ideas were taken into account		
SMAR	Involved in formulating policy	Academic FE organizations abandoned	
SAC	No involvement	Good job at MCAST and ITS but sixth forms left in the dark	
DLS	No involvement	Highly critical of government policy and Matsec	
Robin	University involved	Critical of Matsec	
Simon	Students, university, MCAST, MUT, the Ministry of Education, and the opposition spokesperson	Policy items may not apply to all organizations. Critical of Matsec	Interviews and seminars with various stakeholders. Written overnight.
Sandro	No involvement	Aims ambitious; implementation problematic	

Source: interviews

Table 5.3: Alignment of government and institutional policies: perceptions from interview respondents, 2012

Government policy	Attract	Excel	Foreign	Relevance	Inclusion	Student mobility	Teacher mobility
Informant							
Noel (MCAST)	PR campaign	QA unit	Not deemed important	PR campaign	Pathway Course	International Office	International Office
John (ITS)	Secondary school visits	More work needed	Status	Support from industry	Courses aimed at students with intellectual disabilities	Erasmus	Erasmus
Jane (GCHSS)	Problematic due to lack of space	SWOT analysis	No specific policy	Use of guidance teachers	Designing various courses/LSAs	EUPA	EUPA
Nigel (JC)	Use of guidance teachers; Open Day	CPD of staff	No specific policy	Full offering of Matsec subjects	Necessary structure in place	Euro Centre	Handled by university
Kevin (SMAR)	Geographic position	Result oriented	No specific policy	No specific policy	LSAs	EUPA	EUPA
Antonia (SAC)	Problematic due to lack of space	Result oriented	No specific policy	No specific policy	LSAs	Exchange program	Exchange program
Michael (DLS)	Problematic due to lack of space	Result oriented	No specific policy	No specific policy	LSAs	Exchange program	Exchange programs

Source: interviews

Attracting more students: Interview respondents were particularly worried about the number of students who failed to enter post-secondary organizations. Sandro was especially critical on this point, stating that, when he raised the issue at meetings with government and principals, he was not taken seriously. Conversely, Robin and Simon both expressed misgivings at the methodology used to gauge early school leavers, stating that it is probable that the percentage of school leavers was closer to 23–25% than the current 32–33%. Nevertheless, they conceded that this was too high and something should be done.

FE organizations used different strategies to encourage students to study with them. These strategies seemed to be linked to the importance of organizational image (Govindaswamy, 1999), rather than implementing a less demanding curriculum (Kissel, 2009), or using e-marketing technologies as in the USA (van Rooij and Lemp, 2010). For example, ITS tried to use a balanced approach, explaining the concepts of tourism and travel to secondary students in a variety of locations (in schools and at ITS). MCAST had more financial leverage, and used the annual prospectus and student support unit to address 4000–5000 potential applicants. John was, however, wary of using such aggressive means,

“Once I heard a talk, in a boy’s school, where the speaker said, ‘If you enter this course, there are a lot of girls, so I’m sure you’ll like it’. I find this in very bad taste.”

Such strategies were not present in academic FE organizations. Both SAC and DLS did not feel the need to attract more students, due to their small size and lack of space. Lack of space was also an issue at GCHSS, while SMAR focused on Gozitan students. Kevin remarked that parents did their best to channel students towards SMAR, rather than the Gozitan branches of ITS and MCAST. Nigel commented on the need for better marketing and PR to attract more students to JC, despite the fact that JC organized an open day for parents and students, that guidance teachers went to secondary schools to inform students, and that different newspapers and media were updated regarding what went on. The markedly different responses between respondents from vocational and academic organizations in this regard was echoed by Simon, who remarked that such a strategic aim was specific for vocational organizations and may be indicative of a situation where the voices of academic FE organizations were ignored in the policy making process. This policy theme was absent in all Maltese FE organizations’ mission statements.

Social inclusion: LSAs are usually provided by the government to academic FE organizations that had students with disabilities (mental and physical). However, some informants focused on better infrastructure and timetabling (Nigel), while others focused on providing a tailor made course (ITS, MCAST, and GCHSS). Jane contended,

“We also have students with individual educational needs, formerly known as special needs since there was a change in nomenclature. Depending on the disability and its level, we determine whether such students need a LSA on a one-to-one basis or not. These students deserve another opportunity as well. If their disability is severe, we do not load them with a lot of subjects. Generally, we teach them Maths, English, and Maltese which are essential. This shows our commitment to social inclusion.”

Noel stated that social inclusion was one of the organization’s strategic aims, and is mentioned in its mission statement (the only organization to do so). In order to achieve such an aim, MCAST launched its Pathway course designed for students with minor disabilities, since such students cannot join any of MCAST’s courses. Respondents thus based their arguments of social inclusion on ‘unitary forms of human difference such as sex, race, gender, and disability’ (Maringe, 2012, 464) thus omitting the ‘non-observable’ (*ibid.*) (e.g. intelligence, experience, and attitude).

It seems that ITS, MCAST, and GCHSS operated a system that seemed to exclude students with special needs rather than include them, and may lead to a situation where students gain qualifications which may not be adequate for employment purposes, coupled with a loss of self-respect (Landorf and Nevin, 2007). Conversely, these particular FE organizations had an admissions policy which reflected the wants of special needs’ students, thus widening participation in the FE sector.

Student and teacher mobility: All the FE organizations in this study formed part of Erasmus and/or EUPA (European Union Programmes Agency), specifically designed to encourage student and teacher mobility. JC, MCAST, and ITS had departments which dealt specifically with mobility. JC had a Euro Centre which was dedicated to other forms of student exchange besides Erasmus. It seems therefore, that this particular policy item is construed as going abroad rather than moving to another local organization. Nevertheless, some informants had reservations on this issue owing to mitigating factors. Michael stated he had mixed feelings, since students would miss out on a portion of the syllabus, given the rigidity and lack of time to cover the Matsec syllabus. Likewise, John questioned the value of Erasmus,

“Realistically, sometimes I feel that when students go on exchange visits they lose out on curriculum content, since it is timetabled in a tight way even though they are exempted. I am saying this because we give them the opportunity to go abroad on their six month internship. However, Erasmus is part of the curriculum and we encourage it. Thus Erasmus provides learning experiences for students as they encounter different organizations and procedures.”

It therefore seems that student mobility in the Maltese FE sector is a contested issue, with government policy encouraging mobility (following the Bologna Process), counteracted by FE organizations set up in such a manner that diminished the possibility of implementing such a policy attribute.

Teacher mobility was absent in most FE organizations (JC, SMAR, DLS, GCHSS, and SAC). Teacher mobility was not mentioned in any of the Maltese FE organizations’ mission statements. If Malta is geographically insular since it is an island, linguistically insular due its

unique language (Semitic but written in the Latin alphabet), then it may be plausible that the lack of teacher mobility is yet another example of insularity.

Encouraging students to partake in studies relevant to Malta’s economic, social, and cultural needs: ITS and MCAST used multiple strategies to achieve this aim, namely, PR exercises through the media and their yearly prospectus and school visits. MCAST also used the industry itself to achieve this aim. Thus MCAST’s prospectus for October 2012 focused mainly on pharmaceuticals, since it was considered as a rapidly expanding sector, with a lack of qualified people to work therein. Noel stated,

“We will soon be launching the new prospectus and we will be placing a lot on emphasis on the pharmaceutical sector because it’s a booming sector and they are not finding enough people. By bringing the relevant stakeholders we will launch a PR exercise together with them. The sector helps us financially to launch such an exercise.”

ITS realized that tourism inherently comprised the economic, social, and cultural: it supplied workers for a sector that accounted for about 25% of Malta’s Gross Domestic Product (GDP), while the cultural and social were integrated in the courses that they offered.

The results from academic and Church FE organizations were markedly different from vocational organizations. GCHSS, JC, SMAR, and SAC provided guidance teachers who supported students in their choices. Michael was, however, somewhat suspicious of such a policy. According to Michael,

“A few years ago we were told to channel students into IT, due to Smart City. Look what happened! I have one question: are students who are given government

scholarships coming back? I heard that they are not. I know two or three cases. I am at a loss to explain this strategic aim.”

The results from different respondents seemed to indicate that this particular policy attribute is contested. This may be due to the high risk strategy that vocational organizations embarked on. It seems that, at times, this strategy worked (e.g. aviation), but there were cases where it appeared to fail miserably (e.g. Smart City).

Funding: All the organizations in this study were either fully or partly government funded. In the case of Church FE organizations, the government paid for teachers’ salaries. SAC and DLS had to raise additional funds for infrastructure, IT, electricity and water bills, and laboratory equipment. Such funds came from parents or fund-raising. Antonia stated,

“We get funding from the government to cover teachers’ salaries. However there is always a shortfall of about 10,000 Euros/year. Thus we have to fork out money to address this deficiency. The other funding is from parent donations asked from parents. Most, but not all, parents pay this donation. We also get grants from the EU for school enhancement.”

JC received funds from the government through University. It also raised some funds from renting out its space to a fitness gym (Active Zone) and to a Bank of Valletta ATM machine. At MCAST, funding was received from government and the EU with Noel predicting that funds will get leaner with time. He stated,

“MCAST is already looking into new ways to generate its own funding. Efforts in this regard need to be taken even more seriously. There is a lot one may learn by following the example of foreign colleges.”

The above quote may indicate that in the future MCAST might be forced to emulate FE organizations in other countries. While there is no incorporation of the FE sector in Malta (as in the UK), some elements of incorporation might gradually find their way into the Maltese system precluding the need for government legislation. The researcher has yet to find a comparable example in the academic literature regarding this type of policy borrowing by stealth.

EU funding was not systematic across the organizations. Noel deemed it necessary that MCAST leverage as much funds as it could. EU funds were utilized in connection with a building extension, to accommodate more students at JC, upgrading the library and for an environmental project at GCHSS, and enhancing the school at SAC. While informants at DLS, ITS, and SMAR stated that, to date, EU funds were not utilized, an internet search unearthed a different reality, since ITS had used funds from the European Social Fund. There was no indication that DLS and SMAR had used such funds.

Promoting excellence: John, Noel, Kevin, and Jane linked the concept of excellence in managerial terms: for John, excellence was connected to the organization's mission statement, 'Developing people through quality learning to achieve excellence in tourism'. Noel stated that MCAST employed its own QA department, Kevin made a direct link between excellence and pass rates, and Jane conceptualized excellence in terms of the SWOT analysis performed in 2011. Jane stated,

“SWOT analysis, meetings with parents, and feedback from other people are all ways whereby excellence is achieved.”

Nigel suggested that the focus of excellence at JC was related to academic staff: if academic staff had the right qualifications, then students' learning experiences would be bettered. Michael and Antonia focused exclusively on the students, making sure they reached their full

potential. Simon pointed out that the benefits of promoting excellence by implementing a QA regime are linked to marketing,

“There is the need for QA which gives prospective students assurances about quality at MCAST and university, so it may be used as a marketing tool. I firmly believe in what is written in the 2020 document: that we can attract more students to Malta. It will pay rich dividends to the country.”

Questionnaire respondents’ average value for this policy item was 3.5, indicating moderate alignment. This contrasts with the high alignment reported for this attribute between government policy and Welsh HE providers (James and Hiusman, 2009). Furthermore, only two organizations (ITS and DLS) refer to excellence in their written mission statements.

Attracting foreign fee-paying students: This strategic aim was given very little priority by all FE organizations in this study. Space limitations at MCAST, SAC, and DLS made it almost impossible to embark on such a mission. This was further complicated by the issue of EU students, who, by virtue of their EU citizenship, did not pay, and maybe the need for negotiations between organizations. Simon explained,

“Let’s take the case of St George’s Medical School which wanted to set up a medical school in Malta. The consultation process lasted a couple of years. Unfortunately no decision was taken in the end. University was interested since it wanted to align itself with St George’s. I think it was a case of missed opportunities.”

The only organization which attracted foreign fee-paying students was ITS, where about 8% of the total student population in the academic year 2011–2012 were fee-paying. Such students came from Russia, Dubai, and China. John, however, admitted that more needed to be done to encourage such students, given Malta’s location in the middle of the

Mediterranean. This policy attribute was missing from all FE organizations' mission statements.

Harmonizing organizations: Noel had very little to say about this stating there were more pressing issues at stake within the organization. John, on the other hand, stated,

“Honestly MCAST engulfed a lot of different institutes. Thank God we remained out of it. First of all, as a smaller institute, certain changes may be done quickly (e.g. curriculum took us one year).”

The situation at state-funded academic FE organizations was somewhat different. The internal procedures used to recruit staff, the vastly different work conditions, related to hours at work, and pay, made it very difficult to harmonize these organizations (Nigel). Moreover, there seemed to be very little co-operation among such organizations (Jane). Thus Jane stated,

“This sixth form works with Sir M.A. Refalo (e.g. we start exams at roughly the same time). We don't work academically with Junior College, since that is not a state school. They have very different conditions of work. However working with the other school (SMAR) brings its own problems. They have a much smaller school population and so harmonization is very difficult.”

Simon, however, perceived harmonization in a different way by stating,

“This standardization may be difficult because of certain factors. E.g. at JC the wages are about 10,000 Euros more than GCHSS and SMAR. However, I am mainly referring to pedagogy and resources keeping in mind that each college has its own identity.”

The above constructions regarding harmonization also differ from harmonization as expressed by the EU's Bologna Process. The EU perceives harmonization in terms of QA and qualifications, making it easier for students and graduates to move from one country to another (Pobirchenko, 2011).

In what ways, and with what perceived success, are national quality assurance procedures intended for, and used to, ensure policy alignment to state goals?

To elicit data for this particular research question FE organizations' SMT officials were asked to specify government QA procedures for their organization and to identify opportunities and threats facing their organization. The NCHE official was asked whether such QA procedures existed, how data (if any) was collected, whether such data (if collected) was used to ensure government policy/organizational mission alignment, and what opportunities and threats were facing the Maltese FE sector. The MUT official was asked whether QA procedures existed, how data (if any) was collected, and what opportunities and threats were facing the Maltese FE sector. Business and tourism informants were asked whether their sector provided feedback to the relevant FE organizations and vice-versa as well as opportunities and threats facing the relevant FE organizations. The university official was asked whether university offers feedback to academic and Church FE organizations, and vice-versa, as well as the opportunities and threats facing these organizations (excluding university).

There were no national QA procedures in the Maltese FE sector since there is "*no legislation requiring institutions to conduct external evaluation and auditing*" (Simon). This does not mean that no feedback existed between FE organizations and external stakeholders. Informants answered this question in a number of different ways as outlined below.

Formal types

MCAST, ITS, and DLS all employed formal QA procedures, but still displayed diversity in the way the procedures were operationalized. At MCAST, Noel emphasized that QA was quite demanding and involved students' continuous assessment.

“This assessment consists of four assignments and normally one of them is time constrained. Each of these assignments is given to a coordinator who verifies the assignment. This coordinator (also called a verifier) will get a sample, usually about 10%, of the corrected scripts. If something is wrong he/she will call in all the scripts and correct them. Then there is the external examiner who will again do checks. We also have an independent QA unit to check that all documentation is in place at each Institute. At the end of the day it is quite rigorous. I think this is quite particular for some vocational colleges.”

For Diana (industry), QA was expressed differently since industry wanted to know what was happening to graduates. This contrasted with QA operationalization at DLS. Michael stated,

“Results are important. The majority of our students pass and go to university. At the end of the scholastic year, every second year student and their parents have to fill in a detailed questionnaire covering each and every subject, the teacher and the teaching environment. It's a mix of qual and quant. It takes ages to analyze. I can see patterns and I think students are being reflective. Being the last day of school, students are honest. Teachers are then given the results but confidentiality is always maintained. I don't go into classrooms.”

Both vocational organizations offer City and Guilds courses. John admitted that,

“The latter [City and Guilds] do come and check us. We have to fill paperwork and this is confirmed by an external verifier.”

Furthermore, at ITS other formal feedback is obtained from hotels. John stated,

“We check on hotels to ensure that students are in line with their training program (which is given to hotels). The student must follow this program. We monitor this through a department set up for this. We also have another department in charge of international placements. Remember, students have to work abroad for six months as part of their training. This department makes sure that students’ experiences are in line with what we want. There is a lot of checking going on.”

Rachel and Elaine pointed out the importance of the above but added more. Rachel stated,

“Apart from pass rates I would certainly look at the success of their students. I would find out the percentage of students who actually remain in tourism, and also check how many of them are in managerial positions. That way we would find out whether students wanted to go to ITS in the first place.”

On the other hand, Elaine concentrated on personality change,

“Apart from pass rates I would certainly advocate the use of personality change in students. Confidence and positive approach should be included apart from academic KPIs. This will mean using a more holistic approach.”

The types of formal KPIs used at these organizations varied. While pass rates as a KPI was common to all organizations, other KPIs emerge. Michael stated,

“Security is a problem. Students find it easy to come and go. We are not situated in a nice area and there are dangers. Security is a major issue. With separated parents

you have to be careful, since some parents might not have the right to see their children. I think one day we will have an incident.”

The issue of security was also mentioned by Sandro,

“This is still lacking. We have pushed the notion as well as practical provisions. The problem is money. It is an important KPI.”

Informal types

All state funded academic organizations and SAC employed informal internal QA procedures. Antonia stated,

“We don’t have any official indicators. Results are not the only indicator, since we rely on feedback from students and teachers which I consider important. It is not formal however.”

This informality was also present at JC. Nigel declared,

“We have no formal indicators. University does not impose any KPIs. It’s the responsibility of the Principal to see that there are no problems in the college. There is informal feedback between me and subject and area coordinators and maintenance staff.”

At SMAR, the situation was more complex since the principal inherited an organization he perceived as,

where teachers did practically whatever they liked. Trying to put my foot down on small things puts you in bad light, even though I know I am right. If I had a say in choosing teachers for my school I would definitely go for graduates with a Master’s degree since they are more specialised. A Bachelor’s degree is certainly not enough

at this level. This is still not part of the quality assurance procedure. The one and only thing they look at is the pass rate. When they send me a teacher, the government follows procedures that do not fit with our needs as a post-secondary school.”

The above contrasted with Robin’s (university) perceptions, who was adamant that the only KPIs in use were examination pass rates, but asked whether such a situation should continue,

“In addition to pass rates, FE colleges may have to craft and use additional KPIs, which are not subject related and deemed to be less important to students and to university. Some other abilities may compensate for A-levels. Shouldn’t you give such students a chance? I might be wrong but why not give students a second chance?”

The above perceptions seem to indicate that the Maltese FE system demonstrated a mix of formal internal and external feedback mechanisms. MCAST and ITS had some kind of internal feedback system. However, such a system did not seem to be linked to strategic purposes. This made it difficult to envisage the kind of transformation Sandro would like to see, that is, not to refine but to redefine, the Maltese FE sector. Furthermore, Noel’s assertion that MCAST had a rigid QA procedure was flatly denied by Simon. The only feedback available to academic state-funded and Church FE organizations derived from Matsec, which feedback was perceived to be generic and subject- rather than organization-focused. It was thus difficult for these organizations to use this feedback in a strategic way.

This may mean that the kind of KPIs used were very few with the emphasis on examination pass rates. While the latter is deemed important (Zarkesh and Beas, 2004; Education Commission for the States, 2000), other KPIs which are strategic in intent are left out. These include best management practice, institutional goal attainment, and employment rates (Zarkesh and Beas, 2004; Education Commission for the States, 2000; Alfred *et al.*, 1999).

DLS seemed to be the only FE organization that sought feedback from parents and students, as outlined by Sallis (1990a).

The role of informal feedback was deemed important by most interview respondents, based on the notion of trust. Since Malta is a small island state, such trust may be easier to establish (Farrugia, 2002). Furthermore, the links between vocational organizations and industry had been established over a long period of time (Diane). The notion of trust was also prevalent at DLS which is small. However, in this case, such informal feedback was used by the SMT in its relations with students, parents, and academic staff.

Presently there is a parliamentary bill³ which focuses on external QA with respect to FE organizations. This bill, once introduced and implemented will be beneficial since

“they [FE organizations] will have to align themselves with other institutions in the EU as required by the Bologna Process” (Simon).

The role of the NCHE in this regard was clear: making sure that implementation was done efficiently and effectively, by sourcing funds from the EU and probably

“engaging an external evaluator who has the experience” (Simon).

What are stakeholders’ roles in working towards mission alignment with government policy?

To elicit responses to this research question, FE organizations’ SMT officials were asked to outline what activities and processes were present in their respective organizations that ensured mission alignment. The NCHE, MUT, business, tourism, and university officials were asked whether their organization/sector was involved in ensuring such alignment. Table 5.4 delineates respondents’ answers.

³ Parliamentary readings of this bill have been provisionally suspended following elections held on the 9th March 2013 and the election of a new government.

Table 5.4: Alignment of organizational mission with government policy: perceptions from interview respondents, 2012

Interview question	Processes	Barriers
Informant Noel (MCAST)	Control over student intake Control over academic staff appointments Multiple entry and exit points Apprenticeships Job shadowing Regular meetings with stakeholders to build trust	People who oppose change Lack of an MIS system
Diane	Historical need for having different organizations under one umbrella Qualification set-up in line with EU recommendations	Massive growth of MCAST Lack of right pedagogy regarding adult retraining Industry might not know what it wants
John (ITS)	Control over student intake Control over academic staff appointments Multiple entry and exit points Apprenticeships Job shadowing	Government run
Rachel	Building a trusting relationship	Government-run ITS falls under the remit of the Education Directorate
Elaine Jane (GCHSS)	Building a trusting relationship Students accepted so long as they have the required qualifications No control over academic staff appointments Multiple entry and exit points	No say in choosing students No say in choosing teachers Teachers who do not keep up-to-date
Nigel (JC)	Students accepted so long as they have the required qualifications Control over academic staff appointments Following the syllabus set by Matsec Ensuring staff professionalism Use of technology in class	Large classes (at times numbering over 50)
Kevin (SMAR)	Students accepted so long as they have the required qualifications No control over academic staff appointments Assigning best classes to best teachers	No say in choosing students No say in choosing teachers Backtalk from teachers School culture
Antonia (SAC)	Control over student intake Control over academic staff appointments Personal contact with students and teachers	No policies to ensure alignment
Michael (DLS)	Control over student intake Control over academic staff appointments Religious activities given importance	No perceived barriers

Source: interviews

Control over organizational processes

Control over student intake and academic staff varied. At MCAST, ITS, SAC, and DLS there was full control over student intake and choice of academic staff; at JC there was control over academic staff appointments but not student intake; at GCHSS and SMAR there was no control over either student intake or choice of academic staff. Control over student intake and staff appointments may contribute to better mission alignment with government policy (Caldwell, 2007).

At MCAST and ITS, the respective SMTs ensured that both students and academic staff were aware of the importance of their organizations' missions. John stated,

“Every student is interviewed, so that we explain what tourism is all about. I think that tourism is a vocation and we have to ensure that our students are aware of this.”

Industry also helped MCAST fulfil its mission by sponsoring students via apprenticeships and job shadowing. This was actually set up by the Employment and Training Centre (ETC) before MCAST was established, but it is now run by MCAST and employers. Students thus gained rich experience from their contacts with industry (e.g. at Farsons Cisk Ltd., Playmobil, and Lufthansa Technik). This experience was perceived to be vital, marking MCAST as being different from University where such a system was not in place.

MCAST used a systemic approach to mission alignment involving,

“regular meetings with the Board of Governors, the Council of Institutes, the Board of Studies and last but not least through meetings with all stakeholders including industry” (Noel).

This contrasted with the way other FE organizations operate. Nigel (JC) considered personal involvement in choosing staff, following the syllabus set by Matsec, ensuring that academic staff were professional, and delivering up-to-date content using technology which was

present as the key factors in mission alignment. Using tutorials and lecturers' contact hours were also perceived as being important in this regard. On the other hand, Kevin concentrated on having a full complement of teachers, assigning the best classes to the best teachers, and ensuring that students study by following up on reports prepared by administration, as essential components to ensure mission alignment.

Antonia (SAC) relied on personal contact with teachers and students to ensure that organizational mission was accomplished. Communication was considered vital in this regard. At DLS, organizational mission was construed via Catholicism,

“Religious activities are given a certain amount of importance” (Michael).

Apart from academic work, students were involved in charity groups and encouraged to involve themselves in trips abroad, soirees, and other activities. Like SAC, DLS employed a rather complicated points system. Since places were limited, students with the best O-level grades, and those who completed secondary school in the same organization were given priority over others. At DLS students were not treated as adults since the organization,

“is a teaching school rather than a lecturing school” (Michael).

On the other hand, Diane used a historical approach to explain alignment at MCAST. Before MCAST was set up in 2001, there were many discussions among different stakeholders: government, different vocational institutes, and industry. The need was identified for an organization that was more aligned with industry's needs, and at the same time positioning itself as an alternative to university. The idea of having the different institutes under one umbrella made it possible for industry to have its voice heard, by ensuring its representation on the Board of Governors. This voice tried to ensure that MCAST developed employees who added value at the work place by being creative, by leading people, and by being

quality-conscious. This was coupled with a qualification system, which was designed via stakeholder consultation and was aligned with EU standards.

The relationship between ITS and external stakeholders contrasts with Diane's assertions. Tourism informants, from the Maltese hotel industry (Rachel and Elaine), both maintained that building a trusting relationship with ITS was the key so that the tourism industry helped ITS achieve its main role – that of developing people capable of working in the tourist industry. According to John, Rachel, and Elaine, ITS's new SMT had realized the importance of this, and had helped this alignment occur. Tourism leaders had direct links not only with ITS's SMT, but also with individual lecturers. Students were offered apprenticeships and job shadowing, and hotel line managers had open two way communication with ITS. The recent changes at ITS were perceived very positively, with Elaine stating that ITS,

“had reached a stagnant position over the last few years.”

This was echoed by Rachel,

“Probably if I met you three years ago I would have said that it's terrible with lack of communication, meaning that we didn't know what they were doing and they didn't know what we needed. At that time we were bringing over foreign students. Things have definitely changed through being proactive.”

The trust between the tourist industry and ITS, engendered by these close connections the stakeholders, have worked to achieve, is akin to Caldwell's social capital (see above, p. 52) in his alignment model and suggests a possible claimant for inclusion in any new model.

The clear two-way communication between ITS and tourism was perceived very positively, for a number of reasons by Rachel and Elaine. Even though there may have been barriers in the past, these were perceived by informants not to be present anymore. ITS administered a survey in hotels in order to understand its strengths and weaknesses, and work on the latter.

There was also the HR forum made up of respective HR managers of the top 10–12 hotels in Malta (Elaine and Rachel). These met informally every two months to discuss relevant issues. If there were any issues concerning ITS, these were brought up with ITS's SMT. Elaine and Rachel both perceived that there was a lot of improvement, with tourism experts working in hotels invited to partake in the student selection process at ITS.

The above results indicate that both internal and external processes were taken into consideration. This is congruent with the concept that educational excellence is achieved through such processes, which may include improving faculty productivity and recruitment (Labovitz and Rosansky, 1997; Kaplan and Norton, 1996). Industrial stakeholders included Malta Enterprise, ETC, and the Chamber of Commerce. Building trust was considered essential to guarantee mission alignment.

FE organizations' entry and exit points

MCAST, ITS, GCHSS, and SMAR offered multiple entry and exit points for students. At ITS there was also an emphasis on practice, so that students,

“can easily integrate in the place of work” (John).

Apart from this, students had three-month work placements in summer. This may demonstrate that internal systems at ITS, dealing with student intake, and development may be aligned with industry needs.

The provision of a number of entry points at GCHSS depended on students' previous educational achievements (based on exams). GCHSS catered for students who wanted to enter university but failed one O-level. Students followed the Matsec A-level course and received lessons in the O-level they failed. The second entry point was called the AIO (Advanced, Intermediate, Ordinary) system for those students who perceived the Matsec syllabus, as established by university, to be too vast. The third entry point was for students

who only had two O-levels. In this case, students studied subjects at O-level and, if successful, were given the opportunity to continue studying the Matsec A-level at GCHSS. GCHSS also catered for adults. However, these accounted for a small number of students. Therefore, GCHSS's mission alignment 'to give a second chance' had been operationalized in this way. Teachers provided a holistic education to students, built upon academic and practical elements (Jane).

JC, SAC, and DLS employed a one entry point system. At SAC and DLS students were selected on merit using a points system. Since places were limited, students with the best O-level grades and those who completed secondary school in the same organization were given priority. These organizations therefore displayed a certain rigidity which may be reflected in Simon's (NCHE) comment,

“Let me speak as a parent who has three children. I believe that students are under a lot of pressure because of Matsec, since the latter insist that all exams have to be passed in one sitting. Students' experiences at sixth form level are determined by this. They are not enjoying their studies per se. It is perceived as an extension of compulsory education. In my view, sixth form should be a first step towards university. Studies should be seen from a different angle, but it's not happening due to this pressure. Why can't a student sit for exams over a longer stretch of time? It will be more flexible, without dropping standards. Students should be able to work at their own pace and at the same time allow for more creativity and innovation. I would advocate flexibility in this matter which should be reflected in QA.”

Barriers that hinder alignment

Alignment barriers at MCAST included people who opposed change, lack of an MIS system which made alignment difficult to achieve, uneven improvement in different institutes,

massive growth leading to unresponsiveness, and lack of the right pedagogy regarding adult retraining (Noel and Diane). This was compounded by the fact that industry did not know what it wanted, since it was very difficult to predict future scenarios. Furthermore there may be,

“a difference between what is said and what actually takes place” (Diane).

The lack of an MIS system as an alignment barrier is concordant with Vandal (2009) who specifically states the need for such an attribute in aligned systems. The perception of trust by Noel and Diane sits well with the literature on aligned systems (Vandal, 2009; Caldwell, 2006; Duffy, 2004) and may well be included in an alignment model.

Being a government organization was perceived as being a barrier to alignment at ITS (John and Rachel). This was due to the perception of government organizations as entities which were less professional than private ones – a common perception held by many Maltese since having a government job is seen as safe. This led to John stressing the need for more care by staff, which then would be transmitted to students, thus enhancing mission alignment. John stated,

“I came from the private sector. Unfortunately ITS is a public entity. If we want students to be professional we also have to be professional. There is a ‘don’t care’ attitude which I don’t like and which I am trying to change. How do we expect students to care when we don’t?”

At GCHSS and SMAR, barriers to alignment included having no say in choosing teachers, no say in choosing students, and teachers who may not keep up-to-date. There was also a lack of caretakers and guidance teachers, coupled with a steep increase in student numbers at GCHSS.

Kevin also perceived the organizational culture inherited by the current SMT where teacher discipline was lax, not enough time to cover the advanced and intermediate Matsec syllabus, and political interference in disciplinary procedures as other alignment barriers,

“Unfortunately, the caretakers [janitors] do not do a good job....someone in power gave them permission to come here and they turn up when they like. I have been ordered to virtually shut up” (Kevin).

It may be that political partisanship may have a deleterious effect on mission alignment (Duffy, 2004) as argued earlier (see above, p. 42).

In church organizations there were no firm policies in place with respect to mission alignment. Antonia considered it difficult to visualize such policies, since teachers were not used to them. The issue of lack of concrete policies was perceived as bothering since there were no fixed targets, and led to lack of clarity.

The only barrier which Nigel perceived was the relatively large number of students in classes (on average between 40 and 50). Simon (NCHE) amplified on other barriers concerning academic sixth forms,

“The way JC is run should be aligned with preparing students for Matsec. Just because Matsec forms part of university, it doesn’t follow that JC is necessarily aligned with Matsec. The fact that JC lecturers are on the examination boards probably helps, but I don’t think there is a formal system linking JC with Matsec. I think there should be a formal system. The standards set by sixth forms should be aligned with Matsec. I think that sixth forms should also be standardized because you have JC, GCHHS, and SMAR, who are answerable to different masters. Thus I doubt whether JC is run in the same way as GCHSS and SMAR because of the different

regimes present there. This standardization is something which the NCHE has always advocated.”

How do stakeholders perceive the effectiveness of FE organizations’ efforts to align resources and strategic planning to organizational mission?

To elicit responses to this research question FE organizations’ SMT officials were asked: how their organizations’ respective mission statements were crafted and reviewed (if at all); what was needed from academic staff to achieve organizational mission; how they perceived their organization’s mission statement; whether they had a strategic plan (if any) and who was involved in crafting and implementing it; the availability and ranking of resources; organizational strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. The NCHE, MUT, business, tourism, and university officials were asked: how they perceived FE organizations’ mission statements and their alignment to government policy; the availability and ranking of resources; the role played by their organization/sector to ensure that FE organizations had the right resources; the role played by their organization/sector to ensure that the FE sector had a strategic plan; the Maltese FE sector’s strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. Respondents’ answers for the various FE organizations are displayed in Table 5.5.

Table 5.5: Alignment of strategic processes with organizational mission: perceptions from interview respondents, 2012

Interview question	Mission statement crafting and review	What was needed from academic staff	Presence of written strategic plan	Resources
Informant				
Noel (MCAST)	Crafted 10 years No review yet	Dedication and commitment	Written strategic plan	Funds, course materials, testing facilities
Diane	Crafted 10 years ago			Lecturing staff
John (ITS)	Crafted in 2012	Professionalism	No written strategic plan	Funds; lecturing staff
Rachel	Not involved			
Elaine	Not involved			
Jane (GCHSS)	Crafted 20 years ago No review	Qualified and well-trained	No written strategic plan	Overall infrastructure; Clerical staff
Nigel (JC)	Crafted in 1995 No review	Professionalism	No written strategic plan	Lecturing staff; IT; maintenance
Kevin (SMAR)	Crafted in 2007	Qualified and well-trained	No written strategic plan	Lecturing staff
Antonia (SAC)	Crafted at least 10 years ago No review	Qualified and well-trained	No written strategic plan	Lecturing staff; IT
Michael (DLS)	Crafted by the Frères; No review	Qualified and well-trained	No written strategic plan	Lecturing staff

Source: interviews

Crafting, review, and perception of mission statement

Maltese FE organizations' mission statements were crafted in different ways. For example, MCAST's mission statement was crafted ten years ago with the input of the government, the Board of Directors, the Institute directors, and industry. Lecturing staff was not involved. Conversely, ITS's SMT crafted a new mission statement in 2012. GCHSS's mission statement was crafted when the organization was set up over twenty years ago. There was no documentation regarding how it was crafted, or who crafted it. JC's mission statement was

crafted in 1995, following consultation among the MUT, the university, and some JC members. This was accomplished keeping in mind the problems that existed before JC was set up. At that time, students at sixth form would generally sit for foreign examinations, and would leave after the first term of second year.

Unlike vocational organizations, SMAR's mission statement was crafted at a professional development session where staff and the SMT met. Academic staff had a chance to have their voice heard. Mission statement crafting at the two Church organizations differed. SAC's mission statement was crafted by the SMT without staff involvement, while DLS's mission statement was crafted by members of a religious order. However, at DLS, the organization's mission statement was used to drive the sixth form prospectus.

The mission statements of Maltese FE organizations were never reviewed. Reasons for this included too short a time (Noel-MCAST), the belief that the organization was following its mission (Jane-GCHSS), and the fact that the organization's mission statement depended on internal stakeholders. For example, at SAC, mission statement review was perceived to be virtually impossible, since the mission statement was based on a,

“set of [a religious order's] principles which cannot be deviated from too much”
(Antonia),

This follows the basic rationale behind the creation of faith schools, that is, to provide religious instructions to their students (Dagovitz, 2004). At DLS, while there had been no review of the mission statement, the prospectus was reviewed every three years. The crafting of Church FE organizations' mission statements did not indicate the presence of government pressure, seemingly contradicting the external driver hypothesis (James and Huisman, 2009) as delineated on p. 67.

To achieve its mission MCAST needed,

“dedication and commitment together with a good knowledge of mission, vision, strategies, principles, clients (e.g. learners), stakeholders, external customers (e.g. apprentices’ sponsors), goals, objectives, responsibilities, and skills” (Noel).

MCAST’s mission statement was perceived as important and timely by Noel, since it provided vocational training and overcame artificial obstacles (Noel), by providing support for learners. This issue was raised by Diane, when she stated that the mission of MCAST was discussed by various stakeholders when the organization was being set up ten years ago.

On the other hand academic FE organizations (GCHSS, JC, SMAR, SAC, and DLS) focused on good teachers as exemplified by Nigel,

“that is, preparing and delivering a lesson using the present technological devices which are available”,

meaning that lecturers had to constantly update their knowledge.

Presence, crafting, and implementation of strategic plan

MCAST had a strategic plan, crafted by the same stakeholders who were involved in crafting the mission statement. MCAST was the only FE organization that had such a strategic plan with specific aims: student achievement, equal opportunities, efficiency, effectiveness, and accountability, among others. Noel stated,

“You always have people who oppose change, but I think the success that MCAST has had in such a short time (ten years), not only in student numbers increasing from about 1000 to 6000, but also in part time students and an explosion in the number of courses being offered, as well as the quality and level of such courses is dependent on

our strategic plan. The way whereby various organizations, government, parents, and students perceive MCAST in a positive light, because we have managed to achieve our mission by setting and achieving our targets, is admirable. I think our academic staff, middle management, and top management worked reasonably well to achieve MCAST's targets."

ITS had an unwritten strategic plan, which involved building a new campus and developing new and part-time courses. John stressed that the most important resource to implement the strategic plan was money. However, the way money was used differed considerably from other FE organizations. Production and demonstration kitchens, the Chocolate Academy, and food stores were not only a big expense, but also deemed essential for ITS to follow its stated mission. Rachel also stressed the need for qualified and experienced personnel. John added,

"There are certain things that we are doing. We are planning a new campus due to an increase in student numbers (close to 28%) after we launched the new prospectus. We cannot take on as many students as we would like. We may need a new building and to develop new courses, especially part time. Till now we only have one part time course (tour guiding) and part time modules. We would like to change that and introduce new part time courses. We would also like to add more bachelor's degrees."

While there was no written strategic plan at GCHSS, the SMT, in conjunction with past students and teachers, prepared a SWOT analysis. While students were interviewed, teachers were divided by subject to find ways whereby,

"teaching may be improved in each area" (Jane).

The SMT was still thinking of ways to implement the results of this SWOT analysis. In the past JC had a strategic plan, but Nigel perceived that it was now outdated. Nigel

acknowledged the need for a new strategic plan, insisting that implementation should not only be dependent on administration, but on every member of staff.

While there was no written strategic plan at SMAR, Kevin explained that the organization was pursuing two strategies. The first involved planning a new school with the Education Directorate. Work on this school was supposed to start later in 2014. The second part of the strategic plan involved Matsec by ensuring that teachers followed the syllabus meticulously. Kevin perceived that SMAR's strategic plan was controlled by external stakeholders. There were no strategic plans at SAC or DLS. While Antonia would like to introduce a strategic plan, Michael stressed the ambiguous position DLS found itself in,

“As a school we fall under the education authorities, but at the same time we are told that we fall under the remit of the NCHE. This is something which will affect where we want to go, because we have to see where our funding comes from.”

Resources available

Noel perceived that resource utilization at MCAST was closely matched with mission. Resources were ranked according to priorities, which were linked to organizational strategic goals. Most projects had multiple roles, and considerations such as cost reduction, risk, and return on investment, were considered important. Monetary resources from government covered the essential (Noel). MCAST had learnt how to apply for EU funds and how to leverage its trust with industry, so that the latter invested in MCAST. Both Noel and Diane cited Lufthansa Technic as an example. When Lufthansa Technic came to Malta they were faced with employee shortages. Rather than commence in-training, Lufthansa decided to collaborate with MCAST. Lufthansa helped MCAST by donating course material, foreign lecturers, and testing facilities. Concurrently, lecturing staff at MCAST job shadowed foreign

lecturers to gain the requisite skills and be able to teach the required subjects. As a result, MCAST was granted an international licence to operate as an aviation training centre. Noel continued,

“How much is enough? Somebody once remarked that the main reason for famines is not a shortage of basic food and that other factors like wages, distribution and even democracy matter more. MCAST has been able to maximise on the utilization of resources (including ESF and ERDF funds) in order to satisfy its mission to the best of its potential and abilities.”

Diane pointed out that the biggest resource at MCAST was academic staff.

“MCAST has a lot of valid people both full time and part time who come from industry. That is the only way that the right skills and knowledge are passed on. The people lecturing there are a big plus. We have to keep on strengthening that. The facilities that are available at MCAST have vastly improved as for example with the help of Lufthansa Technic. However, this is not evident in every area. The infrastructure is being looked at with the new campus being set up. MCAST, like a lot of other educational organizations needs much more resources such as the library and the IT system. MCAST is high on the priority of government due to the targets of 2020. However they still operate under tight budgets. What is exciting is that a lot of the institutes carry out projects under their own initiative with other schools so they get funding for different things. At times this is possible through EU funds.”

Like MCAST, ITS sources funds from the government while the tourist industry offers ITS different types of services. Money is used in a variety of ways which may be different from other FE organizations. John explained,

“Here we spend quite a lot of money on kitchens since they are used all the time. We have large kitchens, and equipment is not cheap. We have two production kitchens, one demonstration kitchen, and one individual kitchen. Then we have another production kitchen at Martin Luther King and the Chocolate Academy.

Our food stores are also a big expense. We are also in the process of upgrading the services we give to students (e.g. computers in language classes). Wages are also a big expense.”

Elaine explained the types of services they offer to ITS,

“We work with them on internship programs. There are a number of these. One of them would be that during the scholastic year students would come once a week (internship programs) to see what kind of work is accomplished here. We are giving ITS a resource by exposing students to the realities of work. There are also a number of other training programs (e.g. ESTS program) whereby students work for two days a week, and study on the other three days. They would then work the whole summer with us. Between first and second year students come here and work for the summer. We welcome these students since they need such exposure. Thus we provide ITS with such a resource.”

Rachel had this to add,

“There are times when we visit ITS and give talks and lectures on various aspects of hotel management. Just last week we were asked to provide a speaker to deliver a talk on food and beverage practices which we did. It was very well received by ITS. From our end I think it is positive that our people are involved in ITS. Thus we work together.”

These answers sharply contrasted with those from academic FE organizations. At GCHSS, interactive whiteboards, laptops given to teachers, laboratories, upgraded gym, health and safety, and the library (which was voted state of the art library) were perceived to be the most important resources. However, to continue being a state of the art library, funds were necessary. Jane continued,

“We are also addressing the physical environment of our school. Its position on a ridge makes it quite unique. Unfortunately, we don’t have gardeners to work for us. Since we are not a college they (government) do not send us any workers in this regard. I have a hard time trying to find such people from elsewhere. I have projects for waste separation and tree planting in this regard.”

While acknowledging that the quality of staff was the essential resource to follow JC’s mission, Nigel commented on the need to improve IT and maintenance. In the same vein Kevin stated that the most important resource was good teachers. If teachers were wanting, students would turn to private lessons. He conceded that this is a national problem, made worse by the divide that exists between O- and A-level in maths and science subjects. Therefore, there seems to be the need to align secondary school syllabi with post-secondary ones (Porter and Polikoff, 2012). Respondents at Church organizations’ displayed very similar answers to those at government run organizations. Both Antonia (SAC) and Michael (DLS) commented on the need of good academic staff, a pleasant environment, and a good IT system.

Strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats

The major strengths perceived by Noel and lecturing staff were communication and trust with industry which

“underpin the foundations on which the college was established.”

Such trust was built through formal and informal communication. Formal communication included links within The Chamber of Commerce and Malta Enterprise, whereas informal communication occurred through key people within industry. On a small island where everyone knows everyone else, this was easily established.

Other strengths included the introduction of vocational degrees and inclusiveness. The former was perceived as a strength, since it offered students who completed their National Higher Diploma (NHD) a chance to progress with their studies through a hands-on approach. Lecturing staff also indicated the wide range of courses available as a strength. Inclusiveness supported vulnerable learners and provided them with essential employability skills (Noel). Diane perceived lecturing staff as the biggest resource and strength of MCAST. Experience garnered through years working in industry was perceived as essential to the formation of students at MCAST. Noel, however, never mentioned lecturing staff as a strength.

At ITS, the strengths outlined by different informants included: certain courses especially those leading to qualified chefs, lecturing staff, and location (in the middle of the tourist industry) (John); a hands-on approach to learning and new courses such as events management and sports management (Elaine); and open communication channels (Rachel). Jane (GCHSS) perceived that small classes and professional staff were the organization's major strengths. Other strengths were location and good transport system (Jane). Nigel (JC) viewed academic staff, subject, and lecturers' contact hours as major strengths. Kevin perceived that SMAR's major strength lay in its teachers. Other strengths included being a small school where teachers know students personally, small classes (22–24 students) and equipping students with the right skills and knowledge. The major strengths outlined by Antonia (SAC) were excellent teachers, a good SMT, good communication, extracurricular activities, and the physical attractiveness of the building. The major strengths outlined by

Michael (DLS) were one-to-one contact with students, communication with parents, teacher/student relationship, and student mentoring.

While Diane noted that infrastructure and adult retraining had improved at MCAST, the absence of a MIS (Noel) and very quick growth may have led to an increase in bureaucracy, and was perceived as a weakness. Furthermore, both Diane and Noel admitted that not everyone had adapted to the changes. Conversely, lack of caretakers, resistance from older teachers, lack of landscaping (Jane), lack of space, and lack of time to complete the Matsec syllabus were perceived as weaknesses at GCHSS. Weaknesses perceived at JC included large classes, no KPIs, large organization, and location (Robin); and IT and maintenance (Nigel). Student overprotection, lack of guidance teachers, and lack of security were weaknesses perceived by Michael (DLS).

The fact that ITS was a public entity was perceived as a weakness, and the prevalent culture was one which John described as indifferent, further explaining that soft skills are essential to the tourist industry. The emphasis on soft skills was also elaborated by Rachel and Elaine, who recognized this weakness and elaborated upon it. I took up this issue with these three informants, asking them whether the role of ITS was to teach students to say ‘please’ and ‘thank you’. Rachel stated thus,

“At times we blame parents – shouldn’t parents be teaching their children how to say ‘please’, ‘thank you’ and be polite?”

John was convinced that such soft skills should be part of every course ITS offered, and that it should be the prevalent culture,

“It hurts me to say that some students coming from secondary school are not shaped yet. They still need a lot of skills (e.g. we stress uniform, you cannot have piercings,

and you cannot have visible tattoos). We treat students as if they are employed by us.”

Elaine stressed the importance of presentation skills, public speaking, and confidence. Respondents seemed to indicate that industry specific skills (not necessarily ‘high skills’), have a strong impact on employee performance, affecting the neoliberal concept specifying a direct link between economic growth and ‘high skills’ supply (Brown, Green, and Lauder, 2001). Other weaknesses included the perception that ITS may be the last option open to students (Rachel). This may hinder the organization from fulfilling its mission. ITS had also lowered the entry requirements, thus lowering standards, which was not perceived as an option in the tourism industry (Rachel).

A major weakness perceived at SMAR was the lack of time to cover the Matsec syllabus (Kevin). Matsec knew that not enough time was available, yet did very little to alleviate the problem. Thus the danger of external stakeholders having too much power is revealed. According to Kevin,

“These are things which are outside my control.”

This meant less time for extracurricular activities. Weaknesses perceived at SAC included certain teacher attitudes. Antonia stated,

“They may come and go as they please. I cannot see this changing. It is thus difficult to get teachers on board to do the things you want.”

MCAST’s major opportunity perceived by Noel related to funding. Over the years, MCAST had managed to attract funding from a variety of sources (e.g. ERDF [European Regional Development Fund]). This capacity was perceived to be indispensable in the future, when funds might be leaner. Other opportunities included attracting foreign fee-paying students

once the new campus was ready, producing people who added value (Diane), the fact that MCAST offered a different educational route (Diane), the introduction of legislation controlling certain sectors (e.g. plumbing) (Noel), the growth of new industrial sectors (Noel and Diane), the advent of new technologies (Noel and Diane), and attracting new types of learners (Noel).

The opportunities facing ITS were working on soft skills (Rachel and Elaine), and the feasibility of using lecturers from the tourist industry. While Elaine perceived student numbers decreasing at ITS, this was not the case (John). However Elaine continued,

“Other industries may be more appealing than tourism (e.g. IT). They may be paying better wages. Attracting more students in any one course affects other courses.”

The major opportunities outlined by Nigel included making use of business people and

“directing students according to the needs of industry.”

Furthermore, entrepreneurship was perceived as important, and,

“something has to be done in this direction.”

The opportunities outlined by Kevin were lengthening the school day and widening subject choice. The two opportunities cited by Antonia were preparing SAC for mixed-ability students and the way teachers would adapt to this new reality. Neither Jane (GCHSS) nor Michael (DLS) perceived any opportunities facing their respective organizations.

The growth of private organizations offering similar courses was perceived as the greatest threat by Noel. Noel hoped that such organizations had QA systems to ensure high educational levels. Limited resources, increase in bureaucracy as MCAST grew, and the changing needs of industry (made worse by the fact that industry did not always know what it

wanted) were cited as threats (Diane). The major threat that Jane perceived was GCHSS's growth witnessed over the last years stating that,

“Impersonality may creep in if the school increases in size.”

Nigel perceived the drop in student numbers over the last three years, owing to the expansion of other FE organizations, as a very minor threat while the major threats outlined by Kevin were the declining Gozitan population, outdated recruitment procedures, the organization's dependence on Matsec, and the great divide between O- and A-level standards. Kevin stated,

“I warn students that they have to study [at A-level] from the very first day at least two hours a day, irrespective of holidays and weekends.”

The major threats outlined by Antonia were a change in government (and hopes that whoever is in power will build a good relationship with SAC), and staff going to JC since salaries were better claiming that,

“the worst thing about it is the timing, since teachers will leave in November and it disrupts everything.”

The major threat noted by Michael was bureaucracy, which may be created by the government, if the latter insisted on school inspections claiming that,

“the NCF [National Curriculum Framework] is very prescriptive even telling us how to teach (in senior school).”

Questionnaire analysis

The questionnaire was analysed according to the relevant research question. A demographic analysis precedes this analysis. The 19 closed statements in the questionnaire (questions 1-3) gauge the following attributes:

1. Government policy for the FE sector: attract more students, achieving excellence, attract foreign fee-paying students, relevance to Malta's economic, social and cultural needs, social inclusion, student mobility and teacher mobility (government alignment – research question 1a).
2. Mission alignment: accountability, student learning, driving departmental agendas, aims, uniqueness, motivation and values (stakeholder alignment – research question 2a).
3. Strategic processes: college plans, student identification, student orientation, resources and performance management (stakeholder alignment – research question 2b).

Demographic analysis

Table 5.6 illustrates the number, percentages, and gender of respondents at the FE organization groups studied. The bracketed values display sub totals. Cronbach's α is also included. The latter is an indicator of questionnaire reliability. Since the value of Cronbach's α in all organizations was above 0.7, one can safely state that such reliability was achieved. Cronbach's α across all organizations was 0.92.

Table 5.6: Sample description: Maltese FE organizations' respondents, 2012

Variable	Total number of academic staff	Number of respondents		Missing values	Respondents as a percentage of total academic staff	Cronbach's α
		Male	Female			
Vocational						
MCAST	380	40	27	2	18.2	0.90
<i>Total vocational</i>	380	40	27	2	18.2	0.90
Academic state-funded						
JC	198	22	13		17.6	0.92
GCHSS	197	10	19		14.7	0.83
SMAR	70	17	20		54.3	0.98
<i>Total academic state-funded</i>	465	49	52		21.9	0.91
Church						
SAC	39	1	4		12.8	0.64
DLS	31	6	5		35.5	0.92
<i>Total Church</i>	70	7	9		22.9	0.89
Total	915	96	88	2	21.4	0.92

Source: questionnaire

When grouped according to organizational type, the lowest percentage of respondents was from vocational organizations (18.2%) and the highest was from Church FE organizations (22.9%). In total 51.6% of respondents were male ($n_o = 96$) and 47.3% were female ($n_o = 88$) with 1% declining to respond. A Kruskal-Wallis test⁴ demonstrated no significant differences among the organizations (Asymp. Sig. = 0.095; $p < .05$). This response rate compared well with other work done in the area, a notable exception being the 73% response rate garnered by Pedder and MacBeath (2008).

Table 5.7 displays the age groups at FE organizations. In this particular instance values for all FE organizations are displayed to illustrate how variability among organizations and groups of organizations was calculated. JC demonstrated the highest standard deviation (1.1) while GCHSS displayed the lowest (0.5). Thus respondents at JC showed the largest variation in

⁴ Kruskal-Wallis tests were used throughout demographic analysis since none of the data was normally distributed.

terms of age and it is the only organization where academic staff over sixty years of age answered the questionnaire. In this case a Kruskal-Wallis test demonstrated a significant difference between organizations (Asymp. Sig. = 0.000; $p < .05$). Further analysis illustrates that 17% of variability is attributed to organizational differences. This was done by using the following equation (Kvanli, Pavur, and Keeling, 2003),

$$\chi^2 \text{ value}/(N-1),$$

where the χ^2 value from the SPSS output of the Kruskal-Wallis test and N is equal to the number of cases. Procedural detail is given to demonstrate openness and will not be repeated elsewhere to avoid repetition. Mann-Whitney *U* tests determined that the mean rank at JC was significantly higher than those at DLS ($z = -3.12, p < .05$), GCHSS ($z = -4.06, p < .05$), MCAST ($z = -3.99, p < .05$) and SMAR ($z = -5.04, p < .05$).

Table 5.7: Respondents' age groups in Maltese FE organizations, 2012

Age group	21–30	31–40	41–50	51–60	Over 61	Missing values	Standard deviation
Vocational MCAST	16	23	18	10	0	2	0.5
<i>Total vocational</i> Academic state-funded JC	16	23	18	10	0	2	0.5
GCHSS	1	8	10	12	4		1.1
SMAR	7	13	7	2	0		0.5
<i>Total academic</i> <i>state-funded</i> Church SAC	9	22	4	2	0		0.8
DLS	17	43	21	16	4		0.8
<i>Total Church</i> SAC	0	3	2	0	0		0.6
DLS	4	4	2	1	0		1.0
<i>Total Church</i>	4	7	4	1	0		0.9
Total	37	73	43	27	4	2	1.0

Source: author

Table 5.8: Respondents' teaching experience in Maltese FE organizations, 2012

Teaching experience/yr	Vocational organizations	Academic state-funded organizations	Church organizations	Total
0–5	28	32	5	65
6–10	29	11	4	49
11–15	9	32	4	35
16–20	1	21	2	24
21–25	0	6	1	7
26–30	0	4	0	4
Over 30	0	0	0	0
Missing values	2	0	0	2
Standard deviation	0.8	1.8	1.5	1.4

Source: questionnaire

Table 5.8 (above) displays teaching experience at vocational, state-funded academic, and Church FE organizations. The highest standard deviation, that is, variability was observed in state-funded organizations, which is the only group of FE organizations where respondents with 26–30 years' experience answered the questionnaire. Furthermore, the greatest number of respondents who answered the questionnaire had the least teaching experience ($n_o = 65$; 35%).

An analysis of respondents' qualifications revealed that they (respondents) were in possession of a university degree in all academic state-funded and church organizations. Thus the standard deviation in these organizations for this particular parameter was zero. At vocational organizations (MCAST), the situation was slightly different (Table 5.9): 74% ($n_o = 51$) were in possession of a university degree, 20% ($n_o = 14$) were in possession of a professional qualification, 3% ($n_o = 2$) were in possession of other qualifications, and another 3% declined to answer. Unfortunately, respondents who answered 'other' did not divulge what qualifications these were, despite the request.

Table 5.9: Respondents' qualifications at vocational organizations, 2012

	University degree	Professional	Other	Missing values	Standard deviation
Vocational organizations (MCAST)	51	14	2	2	0.5

Source: questionnaire

Kruskall-Wallis tests illustrated the only significant difference was found in teaching experience (Asymp. Sig. = 0.000, $p = 0.005$), with 8.4% of such variability attributable to organizational differences. Mann-Whitney U tests revealed that the mean rank (teaching experience) for academic state-funded organizations was significantly higher than vocational ($z = -3.87$, $p < .05$). This could be due to the greater amount of time that academic state-funded organizations have been operating when compared to MCAST which was set up in 2001.

Cross tabulations were also created between Likert items in the questionnaire and demographics. This was accomplished using the same system as outlined on page 144 (above) that is, internal processes, strategic processes and government policy at organizational group levels and all organizations as one data set. In state-funded academic FE organizations these were the statistical significant differences based on Fisher's test:

1. Females rated accountability less than males ($p < .05$) with a statistical significant difference in respondents with 0–5 years' experience who rated accountability higher than others ($p = .05$);
2. More experienced respondents rated student identification higher than less experienced ones ($p < .05$) with a statistical difference in males who rated the item higher than females ($p = .05$);
3. Older respondents rated social inclusion higher than younger ones ($p < .05$) with a statistical difference in males and respondents with 0–5 years' experience who rated the item higher than others ($p = .05$). This might be due to younger people having a wider definition of social inclusion, rather than one focused on disability.

In Church FE organizations Fisher's tests led to only one statistical difference: females rated performance measures and student identification higher than males ($p < .05$). These items exhibited no statistically significant differences in terms of age, experience, and qualifications.

The following statistically significant differences were observed on all organizations as one data set: respondents with academic and professional qualifications rated motivation, relevance to country's economic, social, and cultural needs and promoting excellence higher than respondents with other qualifications ($p = .05$). Further Fisher test analysis shows a statistically significant difference for motivation within respondents with 6–10 years' experience who rated this item higher than other respondents ($p = .05$); males displayed a higher rating for relevance than females ($p = .05$).

Item analysis

How does the content of FE organizations' mission statements compare with statutory and advisory government policy for the sector?

Table 5.10 displays the average values for policy alignment for each organization.

Table 5.10: Alignment of government and institutional policies: 2012 perceptions from Malta's FE Colleges' employees (questionnaire data)

	Attract	Excel	Foreign	Relevance	Inclusion	Student mobility	Teacher mobility
Vocational MCAST							
Mean	3.4	3.1	2.7	3.3	3.6	2.9	2.5
SD	1.0	1.1	1.0	1.1	0.9	1.0	1.0
Academic state-funded JC							
Mean	3.3	3.4	2.7	3.3	3.3	3.0	2.6
SD	1.1	1.0	1.0	1.1	1.1	1.0	1.1
GCHSS							
Mean	4.4	3.9	3.1	3.7	4.4	3.9	2.6
SD	0.7	0.8	1.0	0.8	0.9	1.0	0.9
SMAR							
Mean	3.4	3.5	2.9	3.4	3.4	3.5	3.0
SD	0.9	0.9	0.9	1.0	1.2	0.9	0.9
Total academic state-funded							
Mean	3.6	3.6	2.9	3.4	3.6	3.4	2.8
SD	1.0	0.9	1.0	1.0	1.2	1.0	1.0
Church SAC							
Mean	4.2	4.4	3.2	4.0	4.2	3.2	2.2
SD	0.5	0.6	0.9	0.0	0.5	0.8	1.3
DLS							
Mean	4.3	4.5	3.1	4.0	4.3	3.1	2.9
SD	0.8	0.5	1.1	0.9	1.1	1.2	1.4
Total Church							
Mean	4.3	4.5	3.1	4.0	4.3	3.1	2.7
SD	0.7	0.5	1.0	0.7	0.9	1.1	1.4
Total							
Mean	3.6	3.5	2.8	3.4	3.7	3.2	2.7
SD	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0
Kruskal-Wallis test (two tailed Asymp. Sig.)	0.000	0.000	0.280	0.088	0.000	0.000	0.250
Variabilities attributable to organizational differences (%)	20.6	15.8			15.0	13.1	
χ^2	38.01	29.10	6.28	9.57	27.59	24.12	6.63
df	5	5	5	5	5	5	5
N _c	185	185	184	186	185	186	185

Diagram legend	
Attract	Attract more students
Excel	Excellence
Foreign	Attract foreign fee-paying students
Relevance	Relevance to Malta's economic, social, and cultural needs
Inclusion	Social inclusion

Church organizations were given the highest rating followed by academic state-funded and vocational organizations. One would hypothesize that respondents would give higher ratings to the link between government policy and organizational mission in those organizations where procedures were in place to ensure this happened (e.g. vocational organizations) and in organizations whose mission statement mention government policy. The opposite is true. Church organizations had no or very few procedures, yet respondent ratings were high.

The lack of formal internal and external QA procedures did not halt questionnaire respondents giving very high ratings to excellence at SAC and DLS. However, such perceptions may be due to these organizations' insistence on choosing the best students rather than on formal managerial procedures. On the other hand, lecturing staff at MCAST gave low ratings to excellence, despite the presence of internal QA procedures at MCAST, as outlined by Noel (informant at MCAST).

Congruencies were present: questionnaire respondents at SMAR gave a low rating to 'attract more students', and was in line with Kevin's (informant at SMAR), assertion that the student population in Gozo is,

“declining rapidly. It is also an aging population. It threatens the numbers of students, but not closure. Some teachers will be redundant. This is already occurring

in primary and secondary school. There are few work opportunities in Gozo. Thus they go to Malta and don't come back."

However, interview data from SAC, DLS, and GCHSS all display incongruences with questionnaire ratings. Even though interview data revealed a problem with space in these three organizations, questionnaire respondents rated 'attract more students' significantly higher than other organizations. Jane stated,

"All of a sudden there was a large increase in the student population, from 1900 to 2067. I have no place where to place these students. Every school has a carrying capacity and we have reached saturation point."

Kruskall-Wallis tests indicated significant differences in attracting more students, promoting excellence, social inclusion, and student mobility. The following were the variabilities attributable to organizational differences: attracting more students (20.6%); promoting excellence (15.8%); social inclusion (15%); student mobility (13.1%). Mann-Whitney *U* tests were thus conducted to establish where any demonstrate significant differences lay. Table 5.11 displays such differences.

Table 5.11: Mann-Whitney *U* tests for government policies displaying significant differences among government policy attributes ($p < 0.5$)

	Attract	Excel	Inclusion	Student mobility
Vocational MCAST	DLS GCHSS	DLS GCHSS SAC	DLS GCHSS	GCHSS SMAR
Academic state- funded JC	DLS GCHSS	DLS SAC	DLS GCHSS	GCHSS SMAR
GCHSS	JC MCAST SMAR	DLS MCAST	JC MCAST SMAR	DLS JC MCAST SMAR
SMAR	DLS GCHSS SAC	DLS SAC	DLS GCHSS	GCHSS JC MCAST
Church SAC	SMAR	JC MCAST SMAR		
DLS	JC MCAST SMAR	GCHSS JC MCAST SMAR	JC MCAST SMAR	GCHSS

Source: questionnaire

Results demonstrated that:

1. DLS's mean rank for **attracting more students** was significantly higher than JC ($z < -2.66, p < .05$), MCAST ($z < -2.70, p < .05$), and SMAR ($z < -2.85, p < .05$); GCHSS's mean rank was significantly higher than JC ($z < -2.47, p < .05$), MCAST ($z < -2.53, p < .05$), and SMAR ($z < -2.72, p < .05$); SAC had a significantly higher mean rank for **attracting more students** than SMAR ($z = -2.02, p < .05$);
2. The mean rank for **promoting excellence** was significantly higher at DLS than at GCHSS ($z = -2.38, p < .05$), JC ($z = -3.41, p < .05$), MCAST ($z = -4.09, p < .05$), and SMAR ($z = -3.37, p < .05$); significantly higher at SAC than at JC ($z = -2.12, p < .05$), MCAST ($z = -2.64, p < .05$), and SMAR ($z = -2.12, p < .05$); significantly higher at GCHSS than at MCAST ($z = -3.08, p < .05$);

3. GCHSS's mean rank for **social inclusion** was significantly higher than those at JC, MCAST, and SMAR ($z < -2.17, p < .05$);
4. For **student mobility**, GCHSS's mean rank was significantly higher than those of DLS ($z = -2.09, p < .05$), JC ($z = -3.55, p < .05$), MCAST ($z = -4.31, p < .05$), and SMAR ($z = -2.36, p < .05$); significantly higher at SMAR than at MCAST ($z = -2.71, p < .05$) and JC ($z = -2.04, p < .05$).

Respondents' answers for social inclusion display some measure of congruence with interview data. Jane (GCHSS) commented how students with individual educational needs (IEN) were given a learning support assistant (LSA), depending on the gravity of the disability. In these cases, students studied Maths, English, and Maltese, rather than the whole curriculum. Furthermore, GCHSS was the only academic FE organization located in Malta that offered multiple entry and exit points and might help explain why academic staff rated social justice significantly higher than JC.

On the other hand, while MCAST offers multiple entry and exit points, MCAST's strategic plan offered the Pathway course, designed for students with minor disabilities. There was also a system for student support whereby students were given help in specific areas (e.g. English). Noel stated,

“Teaching at this level is embedded. It means that we have two lecturers in the same class. We think that it is a good investment. Some of these students have special needs. They need facilitators making it even more expensive.”

Noel's response contrasts with the assertion that students with special needs be integrated with normal students (Yasin *et al.*, 2010).

The above data analysis procedure was repeated using organizational groups (that is, vocational, state funded academic, and church). Kruskal-Wallis tests indicated significant

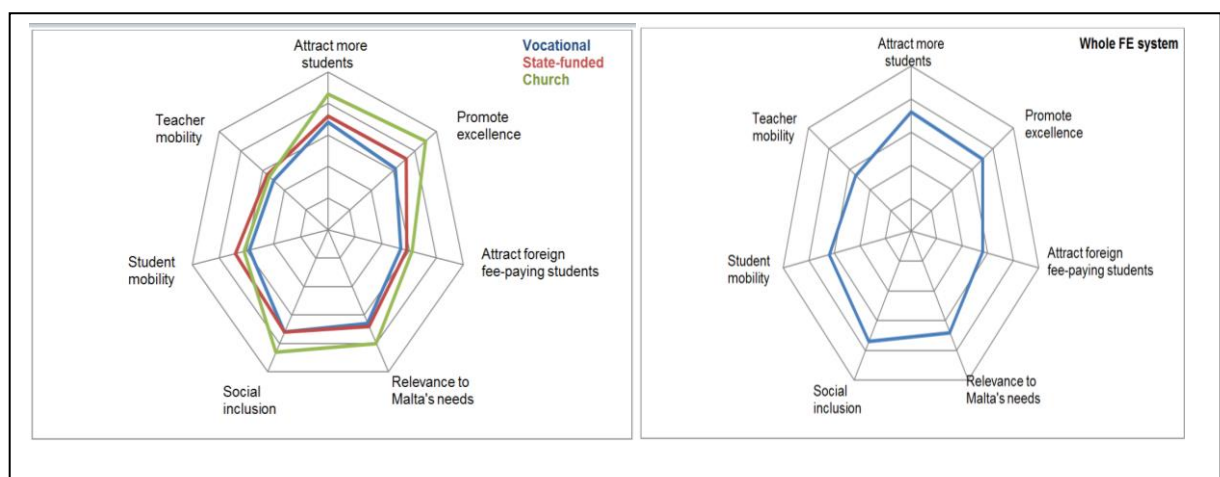
differences on all parameters apart from foreign fee-paying students and teacher mobility. The following variabilities were attributable to organizational differences: attract more students (4.8%); promoting excellence (14.3%); relevance (3.6%); social inclusion (3.5%); and student mobility (5.7%). Results illustrated that:

1. The mean rank for **attracting more students** was significantly higher at Church organizations than at state-funded ($z = -2.24, p < .05$) and vocational ($z = -3.16, p < .05$). This result was somewhat incongruent with interview data since both Antonia (SAC) and Michael (DLS) had grave reservations on this policy attribute, given that space was limited in both schools. Antonia stated, *“We cannot attract more students due to space limitations. We have had the NCHE asking us to take on more students which is impossible for us to do;”*
2. The mean rank for **promoting excellence** was significantly highest at Church organizations, and lowest at vocational ($z < 2.80, p < .05$) and may be due to policies at Church FE organizations which ensure that the best students are chosen;
3. The mean rank for **relevance to Malta’s economic, social, and cultural needs** was higher at Church organizations than at state-funded ($z = -2.15, p < .05$) and vocational ($z = -2.58, p < .05$). Considering the close ties that exist between vocational organizations and business and tourism, one would expect the opposite to be true. It may be that respondents at Church organizations focused on the social and the cultural, rather than the economic aspect;
4. The mean rank for **social inclusion** was significantly higher at Church organizations than at state-funded ($z = -1.98, p < .05$) and vocational ($z = -2.89, p < .05$), maybe due to the more controlled environment found in Church FE organizations coupled with the relatively small size.

- The mean rank for **student mobility** was significantly higher for state-funded academic organizations than for vocational organizations ($z = -3.22, p < .05$). There was some measure of incongruence since both MCAST and ITS have a wider variety of schemes whereby students may continue their studies abroad.

Figure 5.2 displays radar diagrams for organizational groups and the whole FE system. The ratings for Church FE organizations were higher than state-funded academic and vocational organizations. Teacher and student mobility got very low ratings, thus displaying the least alignment with government policy. This could be due to the rigidity of the Maltese FE system and the low perceived value of certain types of mobility, as outlined by many interview respondents. This rigidity is particularly seen in Matsec with many informants displaying their frustration with the system. The low perceived value of student and teacher mobility via Erasmus was stated by John (ITS), commenting that such mobility interfered with the way ITS ran its courses.

Figure 5.2: Maltese FE organizational groups and the whole FE system: government policy radar diagram, 2012



Source: questionnaire

What are stakeholders' roles in working towards mission alignment with government policy?

Table 5.12 displays respondents' answers regarding mission alignment (accountability, student learning, driving departmental agendas, organizational aims, motivation, values and uniqueness).

Table 5.12: Alignment of organizational mission with government policy: 2012 perceptions from Malta's FE Colleges employees (questionnaire data)

	Accountability	Student learning	Driving departmental agendas	Aims	Uniqueness	Motivation	Values
Vocational							
MCAST							
Mean	3.1	3.0	2.9	3.9	3.7	2.9	3.4
SD	0.9	1.0	0.9	0.8	0.9	1.1	0.9
Academic state funded							
JC							
Mean	3.7	3.1	2.5	4.2	3.8	3.3	3.5
SD	1.0	1.2	1.0	0.6	1.1	1.2	0.9
GCHSS							
Mean	4.0	3.8	3.4	4.2	4.5	4.0	4.2
SD	0.9	0.6	0.3	0.5	0.8	0.9	0.6
SMAR							
Mean	2.8	3.5	3.0	4.0	3.0	3.5	3.6
SD	1.0	0.8	0.9	0.7	0.8	0.9	0.8
<i>Total academic state funded</i>							
Mean	3.5	3.5	3.0	4.1	3.7	3.6	3.7
SD	1.1	1.0	0.9	0.6	1.1	1.1	0.8
Church							
SAC							
Mean	4.6	4.4	3.4	4.2	4.2	4.0	4.2
SD	0.6	0.6	1.3	0.4	0.4	0.0	0.4
DLS							
Mean	3.5	3.6	3.6	4.5	4.8	4.1	4.5
SD	1.1	1.0	1.0	0.7	0.4	0.9	0.7
<i>Total Church</i>							
Mean	4.1	4.4	3.5	4.4	4.6	4.1	4.4
SD	1.0	0.6	1.0	0.6	0.5	0.7	0.6
Total							
Mean	3.4	3.4	3.0	4.1	3.8	3.2	3.7
SD	1.0	1.0	1.0	0.7	1.0	0.9	0.9
Kruskall-Wallis test (two tailed Asymp. Sig)	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.020	0.000	0.000	0.000
χ^2	36.77	32.07	20.32	13.38	52.8	27.67	36.63
df	5	5	5	5	5	5	5
N_o	184	185	186	186	184	184	186

Kruskall-Wallis tests demonstrated significant differences for all items among the different FE organizations. The following were the variabilities attributable to organizational differences: accountability (20.1%); student learning (17.4%); driving departmental agendas (10.9%); aims (7.2%); uniqueness (28.9%); motivation (15.1%); values (19.8%). Mann-

Whitney *U* tests were thus conducted to establish where any demonstrate significant differences lay. Results show that for **accountability**:

1. The mean ranks for DLS, GCHSS, and SAC were significantly higher than for SMAR ($z = -2.24, p < .05, z = -4.27, p < .05$ and $z = -3.28, p < .05$ respectively);
2. The mean ranks for JC and SAC were significantly higher than for MCAST ($z = -3.02, p < .05$ and $z = -3.20, p < .05$ respectively).

For **student learning**:

1. DLS had a significantly higher mean rank than JC ($z = -3.09, p < .05$), MCAST ($z = -3.90, p < .05$), and SMAR ($z = -3.10, p < .05$), meaning that respondents rated student learning higher at DLS;
2. The mean rank at GCHSS was significantly higher than at MCAST ($z < -2.25, p < .05$);
3. The mean rank at SAC was significantly higher than at JC ($z < -2.39, p < .05$).

For **organizational aims**:

1. The mean ranks for DLS, GCHSS, and JC were significantly higher than MCAST ($z = -2.88, p < .05, z = -2.25, p < .05$ and $z = -2.02, p < .05$ respectively);
2. The mean rank for DLS was significantly higher than SMAR ($z = -2.28, p < .05$).

For **uniqueness**:

1. The mean ranks for DLS, GCHSS, JC, MCAST, and SAC were significantly higher than those for SMAR ($z = 4.70, p < .05, z = -5.55, p < .05, z = -3.21, p < .05, z = -4.15, p < .05$ and $z = -, p < .05$ respectively);
2. DLS had a significantly higher mean rank than JC and MCAST ($z < -2.88, p < .05$);
3. GCHSS had a significantly higher mean rank than JC ($z < -2.84, p < .05$) and MCAST ($z < -4.03, p < .05$).

For motivation:

1. The mean rank at DLS, SMAR, GCHSS, and SAC was significantly higher than at MCAST ($z = -2.99, p < .05, z = -2.60, p < .05, z = -4.31, p < .05$ and $z = -2.31, p < .05$ respectively);
2. GCHSS's mean rank was significantly higher than JC ($z = -2.64, p < .05$) and SMAR ($z = -2.12, p < .05$).

For values:

1. SAC's mean rank was significantly higher than that at MCAST ($z = -2.22, p < .05$);
2. DLS's mean rank was significantly higher than those at JC ($z < -3.18, p < .05$), MCAST ($z < -3.57, p < .05$), and SMAR ($z = -3.11, p < .05$);
3. GCHSS's mean rank was significantly higher than those at JC ($z < -3.75, p < .05$), MCAST ($z < -4.59, p < .05$), and SMAR ($z < -3.36, p < .05$).

The barriers outlined by interview respondents were thus mirrored by questionnaire results which demonstrated significant statistical differences, whereby academic staff at JC, MCAST, and SMAR tended to give significantly lower ratings to the different items related to organizational alignment when compared to GCHSS, SAC, and DLS, accountability less than SAC and JC, student learning less than GCHSS, DLS, and JC, driving departmental agendas less than GCHSS, organizational aims less than DLS, GCHSS, and JC, uniqueness less than DLS and GCHSS but more than SMAR and values less than GCHSS, DLS, and SAC. Despite the lack of concrete policies in Church FE organizations, academic staff in these organizations were more likely to give positive responses to organizational alignment.

This may mean that the concept of mission alignment akin to a manufacturing process may be misplaced. The relatively small sizes of SAC and DLS may allow SMTs in these organizations to deal with problems more effectively. Questionnaire results in these (Church)

organizations were also incongruent with Antonia's frustration at the lack of concrete policies. She perceived such planning as essential to fulfil SAC's mission,

"It also bothers me because I think that once things are in order and are clear, staff will have a better idea where we are headed. It creates clarity for both of us."

On the other hand, such incongruence seemed to be missing in the case of DLS. In this case, Michael asserted that DLS's SMT looked inwards, trying to ensure that the organization functioned smoothly.

The mean values for all mission alignment attributes for vocational, academic state-funded, and Church organizations were 3.3, 3.6 and 4.1 respectively. Thus, despite the lack of internal procedures and strategic planning, Church FE organizations displayed the highest level of alignment. A Kruskal-Wallis test determined significant differences on all parameters, except driving departmental agendas with the following variabilities attributable to organizational differences: accountability (6.4%); student learning (14.5%); aims (5.6%); uniqueness (6.3%); motivation (11%); and values (12.1%). Subsequent Mann-Whitney *U* tests revealed that the mean rank for:

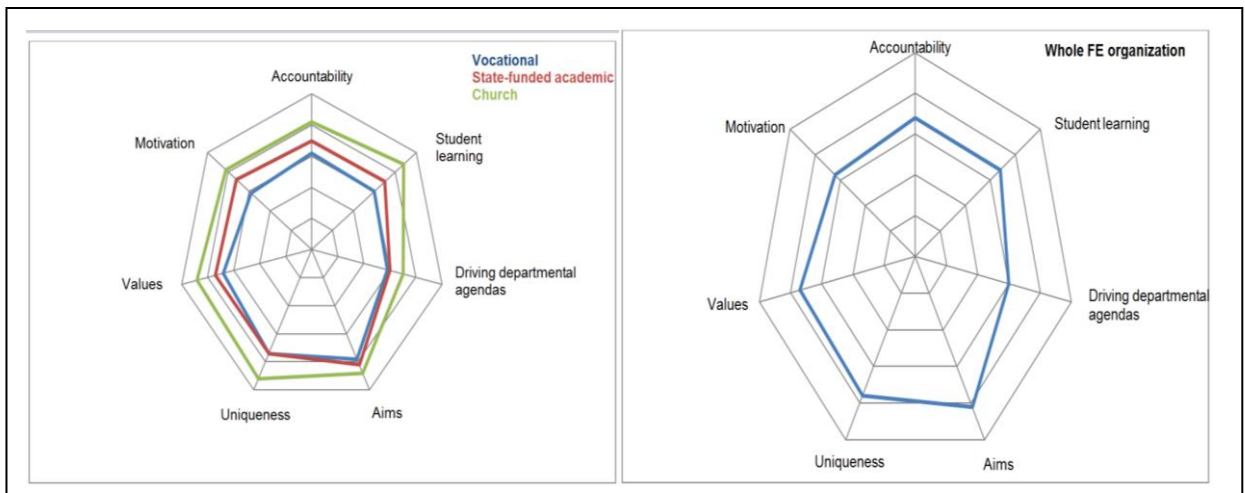
1. **Accountability** was significantly highest for Church organizations and lowest for vocational ($z = -1.96, p < .05$);
2. **Student learning** was significantly highest for Church organizations and lowest for vocational ($z = -2.97, p < .05$);
3. **Aims** for academic state-funded and Church organizations was significantly higher than those for vocational organizations ($z = -2.29, p < .05$ and $z = -2.80, p < .05$ respectively);
4. **Uniqueness** was significantly higher at Church organizations than for academic state-funded ($z = -3.08, p < .05$) and vocational organizations ($z = -3.64, p < .05$);

5. **Motivation** was significantly higher at Church ($z = -3.63, p < .05$) and academic state-funded organizations ($z = -3.63, p < .05$) than vocational organizations;
6. **Values** was significantly higher for Church organizations than academic state-funded ($z = -2.98, p < .05$) and vocational organizations ($z = -4.02, p < .05$).

Some of the above results display some measure of incongruence when compared to interview data. Mission alignment, which is academically perceived as being possible through organizational policies and processes, was significantly higher at Church organizations, where such policies were not in place. This may mean that relatively small organic organizational structures were able to develop an educational culture which seemed to benefit both students and academic staff.

Figure 5.3 is a mission alignment radar diagram for organizational groups, and the whole FE system. Values, uniqueness, and aims garnered higher values than accountability, student learning, and driving departmental agendas. This may mean that mission statements are there to provide a sense of purpose, and are more likely to reflect what happens in these organizations, rather than act as a driver. This is further compounded by the complexity of FE organizations' actual missions as opposed to their written mission statement. It seems that the latter can only encompass a small number of mission attributes.

Figure 5.3: Maltese FE organizational groups and the whole FE system: mission alignment radar diagram, 2012



Source: questionnaire

How do stakeholders perceive the effectiveness of FE organizations' efforts to align resources, strategic planning, and quality assurance (QA) procedures to organizational mission?

Table 5.13 illustrates questionnaire respondents' answers for these strategic items. Kruskal-Wallis tests demonstrate significant differences for all items among the different FE organizations. The following are the variabilities attributable to organizational differences: college plans (14%); student identification (15.6%); student orientation (19.9%); resources (20.6%); performance measurement (7.8%). Mann-Whitney *U* tests were thus conducted to establish where any demonstrate significant differences lay.

Table 5.13: Alignment of strategic processes with organizational mission: 2012 perceptions from Malta's FE College's employees (questionnaire data)

	College plans	Students identification	Student orientation	Resources	Performance measurement
Vocational					
MCAST					
Mean	3.0	3.3	3.3	2.5	2.9
SD	1.0	0.9	1.1	1.1	1.0
Academic state-funded					
JC					
Mean	2.9	3.4	3.7	3.1	2.7
SD	1.0	1.0	0.9	1.1	1.0
GCHSS					
Mean	3.4	3.7	4.4	3.8	3.4
SD	0.6	0.8	0.6	1.1	0.9
SMAR					
Mean	3.1	3.1	3.8	3.4	3.0
SD	0.6	0.9	0.9	0.9	0.8
Total academic state-funded					
Mean	3.1	3.4	4.0	3.4	3.0
SD	0.8	0.9	0.9	1.0	0.9
Church					
SAC					
Mean	3.8	4.2	4.2	2.4	3.4
SD	0.8	0.4	0.4	1.1	0.6
DLS					
Mean	4.4	4.6	4.5	3.1	3.7
SD	0.7	0.7	1.0	0.8	1.1
Total Church					
Mean	4.2	4.5	4.4	2.9	3.6
SD	0.8	0.6	0.8	1.0	1.2
Total					
Mean	3.2	3.2	3.2	3.0	3.0
SD	0.9	0.9	0.9	1.1	1.0
Kruskall-Wallis test (two tailed Asymp. Sig.)	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.012
Variabilities attributable to organizational differences (%)	14	15.6	19.9	20.6	7.8
χ^2	25.39	28.76	36.24	38.21	14.6
df	5	5	5	5	5
N _o	184	185	183	186	186

Results show that for:

1. **College plans:** DLS's mean rank was significantly higher than GCHSS ($z = -3.61, p < .05$), JC ($z = -4.01, p < .05$), MCAST ($z = -3.86, p < .05$), and SMAR ($z = -4.42, p < .05$), while the mean rank for GCHSS was significantly higher than that for JC ($z = -2.14, p < .05$);
2. **Student identification:** DLS's mean rank was significantly higher than those of GCHSS ($z = -2.78, p < .05$), JC ($z = -3.46, p < .05$), MCAST ($z = -3.89, p < .05$), and SMAR ($z = -4.02, p < .05$); GCHSS had a significantly higher mean rank than SMAR ($z = -2.88, p < .05$); SAC had a significantly higher mean rank than MCAST ($z = -2.36, p < .05$) and SMAR ($z = -2.70, p < .05$);
3. **Student identification:** GCHSS had a higher mean rank than DLS ($z = -2.50, p < .05$), MCAST ($z = -4.85, p < .05$), and SAC ($z = -2.43, p < .05$). The latter item also ranked higher for JC ($z = -2.99, p < .05$) and SMAR ($z = -4.41, p < .05$) than MCAST;
4. **Performance measurement:** DLS's mean rank was significantly higher than MCAST ($z < -2.28, p < .05$), JC ($z < -2.47, p < .05$), and SMAR ($z < -2.20, p < .05$); the mean rank was significantly higher for GCHSS than MCAST, JC and SMAR ($z < -2.20, p < .05$);
5. **Resources:** JC and SMAR's mean rank was higher than MCAST ($z = -2.99, p < .05$ and $z = -4.41, p < .05$ respectively).

As in previous data displayed, a measure of incongruence was present between questionnaire respondents' answers and interview data. Lecturing staff at MCAST gave significantly lower values to all attributes when compared to other FE organizations. Yet, Noel insisted that MCAST had a fully functioning strategic plan, internal QA procedures, and resources. It may be that respondents at MCAST paid lip service to such procedures with a 'tick the boxes'

attitude. The question of resources given such a low rating by academic staff at MCAST was puzzling given the amount of government and private investment and may indicate that respondents perceive such investment poorly. In Church organizations, high ratings were evident in all attributes, apart from resources. Again, this was partly incongruent with interview data which revealed that there was no strategic plan at either SAC or DLS. However, at DLS, an internal PM regime was present. Such a regime seemed to lack a certain transparency, since questionnaires sent to students and parents were controlled by one member of the SMT, rather than being handled independently.

Kruskall-Wallis tests determined significant differences at the organizational group level, with the following variabilities attributable to organizational differences: college plans (11%); student identification (10.8%); student orientation (12.8%); resources (17.5%); and performance measures (3.4%). Subsequent Mann-Whitney *U* tests revealed that:

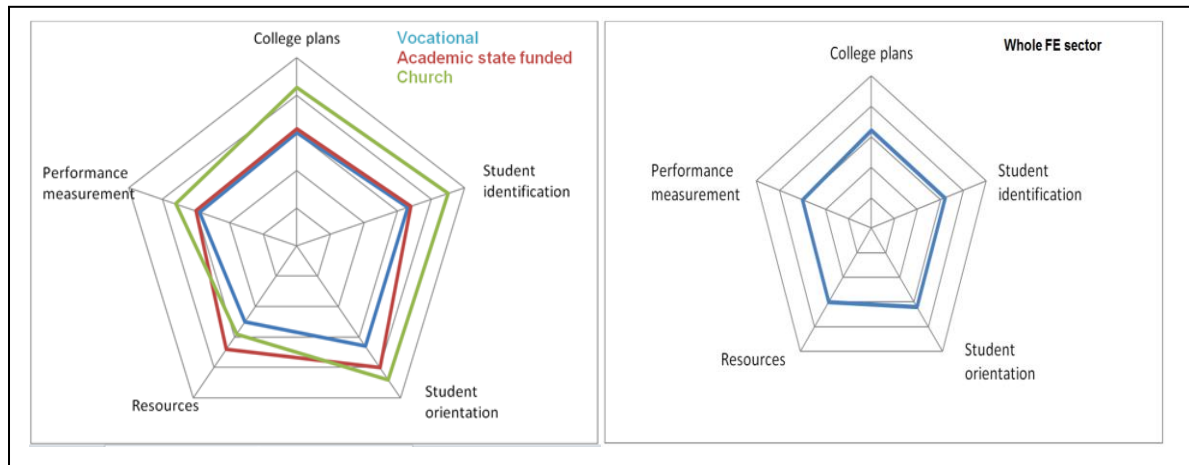
1. The mean rank for **college plans** was significantly higher for Church organizations than those for academic state-funded ($z = -4.63, p < .05$) and vocational organizations ($z = -3.89, p < .05$);
2. The mean rank for **student identification** was significantly higher for Church organizations when compared to academic state-funded ($z = -4.22, p < .05$) and vocational ($z = -4.34, p < .05$) and may be due to one of their student selection policies, stating that those students who completed secondary level at the same school were given preference over students coming from other secondary schools;
3. The mean rank for **student orientation** was significantly highest for Church organizations and lowest for vocational ($z < -3.91, p < .05$), and may be due to another student selection policy, stipulating stringent entry requirements, when compared to other FE academic organizations;

4. The mean rank for **performance measures** was significantly higher at Church organizations than at academic state-funded ($z = -2.45, p < .05$) and vocational ($z = -2.58, p < .05$);
5. The mean rank for **resources** was significantly higher at academic state-funded organizations than at Church ($z = -2.52, p < .05$) and vocational organizations ($z = -5.53, p < .05$). This was surprising, given that academic state-funded organizations are housed in relatively old buildings, when compared to Church and vocational organizations.

Point 4 above (performance measures) was one of the few attributes which was somewhat congruent with interview data, demonstrating that business officials may not be too impressed with MCAST's KPI system. Furthermore, DLS engaged in a formal KPI system, whereby the principal administered a questionnaire to all second year students and their parents at the end of their course. This particular way of using KPIs was, however, contrary to that noted in the literature review where authors stress that KPIs should be forward rather than backward looking (Shannak, 2009; Parmenter, 2007; Sugarman and Watkins, 2004).

Figure 5.4 displays the strategic items for organizational groups and the whole FE sector using radar diagrams. As in previous diagrams, Church organizations scored higher than other organizational groups meaning that questionnaire respondents perceived better alignment in these organizations. The pattern is similar to that of Figures 5.2 and 5.3 where values for Church schools and GCHSS are higher than other FE organizations.

Figure 5.4: Maltese FE organizational groups and the whole the FE system: strategic planning radar diagram, 2012



Source: questionnaire

Table 5.14 displays SWOT analysis results for organizational groups and the whole FE system taking into account questionnaire results and interviews.

Table 5.14: Strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats analysis of FE organizational groups and the whole FE system: interview and questionnaire respondents' 2012

		Vocational FE organizations	
	Internal	Strengths	Weaknesses
		Academic staff Wide choice of courses Hands-on approach to learning Connection with industry Accessibility to students Student diversity Certain sought after courses	Resources Lack of communication with management Academically weak students Low staff morale Management style Government run
	External	Opportunities	Threats
		New technologies Attracting new types of learners Government legislation Attracting foreign fee-paying students	Growth too fast Decreasing budgets Similar courses offered by other organizations

Academic state-funded FE organizations		
Internal	Strengths	Weaknesses
	Academic staff Choice of subjects University oriented Well organized departments Student/lecturer relationship Extracurricular activities Good pass rate	Management style Funding Discipline Timetabling Infrastructure Lack of QA Lack of space Crammed syllabus Resistance to change from older teachers
External	Opportunities	Threats
	Renewing organization through technology and IT Achieving excellence through EU standards Training new inexperienced teachers Being more practice oriented	Competition from other FE organizations Low O-level standards Decreasing student population Mixed-ability students Lack of involvement in National Curriculum Lack of involvement with NCHE Ambiguous position in educational system

Church FE organizations		
Internal	Strengths	Weaknesses
	Bond between students and teachers Academic staff Inclusion Sense of belonging Motivation One to one attention given to students	Resources Lesser pay than JC School infrastructure Crammed syllabus Certain teachers' attitudes
External	Opportunities	Threats
	New learning environments New investments Changing societal needs	Ideas and values counter to mission statement Funding Students' diverse cultural baggage Rapid technological change Crammed syllabus Bureaucracy connected with QA systems

Whole FE system		
Internal	Strengths	Weaknesses
	Academic staff Wide choice of courses Hands-on approach to learning Connection with industry and university Accessibility to students Student diversity	Resources Management structure Academically weak students Government run organizations Low participation rate Matsec inflexibility Lack of QA
External	Opportunities	Threats
	New technologies Attracting new types of learners Government legislation Attracting foreign fee-paying students	Growth too fast Decreasing budgets Similar courses offered by other organizations

Source: questionnaire

In accordance with the international literature focusing on *developing* countries (Hung, 2010; Sikwibele, 2007), academic staff in Maltese VET organizations was considered a strength. While organizational competences in vocational organizations are considered strengths in *developed* countries (Balamuralikrishna and Dugger, 1995), the same cannot be said

locally, where the management style in vocational and state-funded academic organizations was considered a weakness. Over-bureaucracy in terms of Matsec inflexibility and government run organizations (e.g. ITS), were other weaknesses noted by interview and questionnaire respondents, similar to what is found elsewhere (*ibid.*) as is the stress on technology as an opportunity (Xabec, 2011; Hung, 2010). Competition from rival FE organizations and decreasing budgets were considered threats.

Respondents were aware of the tangible and intangible resources needed. The former included a decent infrastructure and pleasant classrooms (Robin); IT, research and inputs from non-academics (Simon); and funds and qualified educators (Sandro). The latter two are probably the most important resources as confirmed by the international literature (Cinar, Dongel, and Sogutli, 2009; Caldwell, 2008). Passion and love were considered to be essential by Robin. He stated,

“To borrow a line from the Beatles ‘all you need is love’. You have to love your students. You can’t serve students if you are doing it for the money or if you can’t do anything else. If you can’t do anything else, then probably you can’t teach.”

Unlike the UK, Australia, and the USA, funding did not seem to be subject to complex formulae. This could mean that the quasi-market found in such countries (Jaquette, 2009; Karsten and Meijer, 1999) was absent.

In spite of this, there was a considerable amount of evidence suggesting that some kind of mission-based resource allocation took place (Ridley, Skochelak, and Farrel, 2002). Noel mentioned prioritizing funding according to whether the project under consideration will further MCAST’s mission. It also seemed that the idiosyncrasies of individual organizations impinged on such mission allocation. For example, at ITS a hefty portion of funding went into kitchens, the restaurant, and the Chocolate Academy.

The concept of aligning academic staff to the organization's mission (Integro, 2004), varied in Maltese FE organizations. At MCAST and ITS, the respective SMTs ensured that staff had a good knowledge of the organizational mission and stakeholders. In state-funded academic and Church FE organizations, academic staff were more likely to concentrate on the Matsec curriculum and making sure that such curriculum was covered in the time available.

While KPIs were used at MCAST and will soon be introduced at ITS, Matsec pass rates seemed to be the only criterion used by academic state-funded and Church FE organizations. Matsec exams were geared towards university courses. The only exception was DLS where a questionnaire was used to garner feedback from students and parents. Yet the lack of KPI usage was not reflected in lecturing staffs' perceptions in these organizations.

Merging the data sets

This section demonstrates how the qualitative and quantitative data sets outlined above were merged to provide a more complete picture of alignment. Figure 5.5 below delineates the alignment present between organizational mission and government policy for the Maltese FE sector. FE organizations are placed along a scale from 'more alignment' to 'less alignment'. In terms of social systems theory, more alignment acts to *lower* the entropy of the system, since it increases order. Conversely, less alignment tends to *increase* the entropy of the system, since it decreases order. The total 3.3/5 was calculated by averaging the values for the various government policies, that is, attract more students, relevance to Malta's economic, cultural and social needs, enhancing social inclusion, attracting foreign fee-paying students, promoting excellence, student mobility, and teacher mobility.

Figure 5.5: Alignment between Malta’s FE Colleges’ organizational missions and government policies: merged questionnaire and interview data, 2012

More alignment		Less alignment
Total: 3.3/5		
Yes	Involvement in setting up NCHE’s strategy	No
	SMAR MCAST GCHSS JC	SAC DLS
Yes	Attract more students: 3.6/5 Mission statement attributes: 0%	No
MCAST ITS JC		GCHSS SMAR SAC DLS
Yes	Relevance to Malta’s economic, cultural and social needs: 3.4/5 Mission statement attributes: 0%	No
MCAST ITS	GCHSS JC SMAR SAC DLS	
Yes	Enhancing social inclusion: 3.7/5 Mission statement attributes: 3%	No
MCAST GCHSS	ITS SMAR JC DLS SAC	
Yes	Attracting foreign fee-paying students: 2.8/5 Mission statement attributes: 0%	No
ITS	MCAST	GCHSS JC SMAR SAC DLS
Yes	Promoting excellence: 3.5/5 Mission statement attributes: 15%	No
SAC DLS	GCHSS SMAR JC MCAST ITS	
Yes	Teacher mobility: 2.7/5 Mission statement attributes: 0%	No
	MCAST	ITS GCHSS JC SMAR SAC DLS
Yes	Students mobility: 3.2/5 Mission statement attributes: 0%	No
ITS	MCAST	SMAR JC SMAR SAC DLS

Source: author

Figure 5.6 displays the roles, systems, barriers, and effectiveness with respect to organizational mission alignment. Roles were perceived in a positive fashion and were achieved through the academic staff’s perceptions of mission alignment. As with policy alignment, roles acted to decrease entropy (increase order), while barriers acted to increase

entropy (decrease order). As was stated earlier, mission alignment is comprised of the following attributes: accountability, student learning, driving departmental agendas, aims, uniqueness, values, and motivation. These attributes gave a mean value of 3.5 for mission alignment, which is the average for the attributes with respect to vocational, academic state-funded, and Church FE organizations.

These results seemed to indicate that most FE organizations had an external locus of control where various stakeholders (e.g. government and tourism operators) held more power than others and was congruent with the findings of Rowley, Lujan and Dolence (1997) working within the HE system in the USA. In the case of vocational organizations, such power lay with industry and tourism. Thus industry was central to MCAST's mission, a perception stated by both Noel and Diane. John, Elaine, and Rachel also commented on how the new SMT at ITS was now actively involving important tourism operators. It may be that both MCAST and ITS were more aligned with these stakeholders than with government policies.

The external locus of control was also evident at SMAR and GCHSS. These organizations had no control over who they employed and student intake. The latter were controlled by the Education Directorate. Furthermore, these organizations had to follow policy dictated by the Education Directorate, even if such policy was perceived not to be in the organizations' interest.

Figure 5.6: Perceived roles and barriers to mission alignment in the Maltese FE system: questionnaire and interview respondents, 2012

More alignment		Less alignment
<p><i>Focus on student and driven by external stakeholders</i></p> <p><i>Mix of organizations with one entry/exit point and multi entry and exit points</i></p> <p><i>Religious activities integrated within setup</i></p> <p><i>Managerial set up and personal contact with teachers</i></p>	<p>Mean value: 3.5/5</p>	<p><i>Internal resistance by academic staff</i></p> <p><i>No say in choosing students and teachers</i></p> <p><i>Government run organizations</i></p> <p><i>Lack of pedagogical training at FE level</i></p>

Source: author

Figure 5.7 (below) displays stakeholders' perceptions regarding the effectiveness of FE organizations' efforts to align resources and strategic planning to organizational mission.

Figure 5.7: Effectiveness of Maltese FE organizations' efforts to align resources and strategic planning to organizational mission: questionnaire and interview respondents, 2012

More alignment		Less alignment								
	TOTAL: 3.2/5									
MCAST GCHSS SMAR	Strategic plan: 3.2/5	ITS JC SAC DLS								
SMAR JC MCAST	Stakeholder involvement in crafting mission statement	ITS GCHSS SAC DLS								
Strengths Academic staff Wide choice of subjects Hands-on approach Connection with industry/university Accessibility to students Student diversity		Weaknesses Management structure Academically weak students Government run organizations Low participation rate Matsec inflexibility Lack of system-wide QA								
	Resources:3.2/5									
	<table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <thead> <tr> <th style="background-color: #D3D3D3; text-align: center;">Tangible</th> <th style="background-color: #D3D3D3; text-align: center;">Intangible</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td style="background-color: #D3D3D3; text-align: center;">Infrastructure</td> <td style="background-color: #D3D3D3; text-align: center;">Research</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="background-color: #D3D3D3; text-align: center;">Funds</td> <td style="background-color: #D3D3D3; text-align: center;">Love</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="background-color: #D3D3D3; text-align: center;">Qualified academic staff</td> <td style="background-color: #D3D3D3;"></td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Tangible	Intangible	Infrastructure	Research	Funds	Love	Qualified academic staff		
Tangible	Intangible									
Infrastructure	Research									
Funds	Love									
Qualified academic staff										

Source: author

Evidence demonstrated that while organizations (apart from MCAST) did not have a fully developed written strategic plan, these organizations engaged in some kind of strategic planning and was elaborated in rather different ways. Thus the SWOT analysis at GCHSS and the strategic plan linked to KPIs at MCAST demonstrated the formal managerial definition of strategic planning. While MCAST seemed to have approached strategic planning using a formal top-down approach, GCHSS used a more organic approach, involving consultation with teachers and students. Strategic planning at SMAR consisted of

planning for a new school, work on which is supposed to start in 2014. ITS, JC, SAC, and DLS had no strategic plan but for different reasons. ITS had a new SMT and was still in the process of establishing its authority. JC had strategic plans in the past and recognized the need for a new plan. On the other hand, SAC and DLS were church organizations and any strategic planning had to take into consideration the secondary and primary sections of these schools. This does not preclude an FE strategy element within their planning.

Conclusion

The evidence presented in this chapter suggests that FE organizations' mission statements only covered a very small part of organizational mission. Mission statements in vocational organizations seemed to capture more government policy themes, even though some themes were completely absent (attract more students, student mobility, and teacher mobility). Interview data revealed that some policy guidelines (e.g. attract more students, student mobility, and teacher mobility), while being important in terms of the Bologna Process, were not given importance by FE organizations, due to lack of space and rigid curriculum planning. Questionnaire data suggested that respondents in Church organizations gave a significantly higher rating to policy attributes, when compared to respondents from vocational organizations.

Interview data also revealed that the Maltese FE sector did not have a well-defined external QA or feedback system. However, some kind of internal QA and feedback mechanisms existed. These mechanisms were either formal (e.g. DLS and MCAST) or informal (GCHSS, SAC, and JC). Interestingly, many FE organizations employed a mix of both. For example, apart from the presence of a formal QA, MCAST also used informal feedback between employers and academic staff.

Interviews with respondents indicated that Maltese vocational organizations (MCAST and ITS) had a more managerialist structure than academic and Church organizations. There also seemed to be trustworthy relationships between vocational organizations and employers. However, certain problems emerged from the data: poor feedback mechanisms; lack of strategic thinking and planning in most organizations; and lack of coordination among the different stakeholders.

Stakeholders' roles in working towards mission alignment with government policy varied. MCAST, ITS, SAC, and DLS had more control than GCHSS and SMAR over certain processes such as student intake and academic staff employment. While JC had control over academic staff employment, all students with the right qualifications were accepted. While MCAST, ITS, SMAR, and GCHSS employed a multiple entry and exit regime, JC, SAC, and DLS operated a one entry and exit point system, thus demonstrating a certain rigidity. Various informants pointed out barriers towards mission alignment with government policy. These included large classes at JC, the rigidity of the Matsec regime, and the rapid growth of MCAST.

Furthermore, alignment of strategic processes with organizational mission was also diverse. MCAST was the only organization with a written strategic plan. GCHSS employed some attributes of strategic planning by means of a SWOT analysis involving students and academic staff. Informants agreed that dedication and professionalism was needed from academic staff for alignment between strategic processes with organizational mission to occur. On the other hand, Noel was the only informant who did not mention academic staff as an important resource.

The above considerations indicate that mission statements were reflections of what went on in organizations rather than driving employee behaviour. Besides, respondents gave low

ratings to 'driving departmental agendas' and 'college plans', the exception being Church FE organizations. This demonstrated the incongruence between mission statements and organizational internal processes. The following chapter will discuss the findings in light of the literature review.

Chapter Six – Discussion: an analysis of the principal issues

Introduction

This chapter illustrates how the collated results are reflected upon in the light of the substantive arguments discussed in the literature review. The results for government policy start this chapter, followed by quality assurance, mission alignment, and strategic planning, and resources respectively. The collated results are also reflected upon in the light of the substantive arguments discussed in the literature review.

Government policy alignment

All interview informants within FE organizations in this work, apart from Kevin, were highly critical regarding their role in crafting FE government policy, as spelt out in NCHE's Strategy 2020 document. Noel stated that they were not really consulted, except at the end of the process and would very much have liked to get involved at an earlier stage. SAC and DLS were only slightly involved in the process. This lack of involvement was echoed by Nigel who, at the date of the interview, was still unaware whether suggestions he passed on were taken up, and Jane who was invited to attend meetings but had no say. Lack of consultation was an important issue for Sandro,

“By and by, rather than saying that we have been excluded from policy insights, it seems that we have been side-lined and forgotten. This at times happens through the dissolving of certain committees. Our absence is not good.”

Statements such as these seem to demonstrate that primary stakeholders are being left out in the policy-making process, and may have a deleterious effect (Clarkson, 1995). The lack of input by most FE organizations, including the largest ones (MCAST, JC, ITS, and GCHSS),

demonstrates that the common sense logic followed by some researchers (Bonal, 2004) is to some extent inexact (see above, p. 32).

Yet, when interviewed, Simon maintained that there was a full consultative process including all stakeholders (students, unions, MCAST, government, opposition spokesperson for education, and university), and that it was a “*lengthy process*”, and included a presentation to all concerned. At the same time Simon stated,

“I remember working on this with the previous CEO (while I was still Chairman). We concluded it overnight after a period of time (months), dedicated to consultation with external stakeholders”.

The only FE interview informant in accordance with Simon was Kevin, who stated,

“They (NCHE officials) came here to interview staff. I went (to Malta) various times and contributed”.

Simon’s assertion was incongruent with the responses of many other informants, illustrating some ambiguity and conflict (Tan, 2008), as well as demonstrating that such meetings may have been symbolic in nature rather than instrumental or strategic (Louis and Corwin, 1984). Noel declared that he was presented with what one may call a *fait accompli*; Nigel had no idea whether his ideas were taken into consideration; Sandro was adamant that the union was completely side-lined and left out; Antonia and Michael perceived that they were left out with Michael stating that they hadn’t met for a long period; Jane was invited to NCHE meetings, but was not asked to contribute.

Simon admitted that some policy items in the NCHE document did not apply to certain FE organizations. It might be very difficult for state-funded academic and Church FE organizations to **attract more students** and **foreign fee-paying students** owing to lack of

space, and lack of marketing campaigns. However, there was scope for vocational colleges to accomplish this. To make this a reality, Simon stressed,

“the need for QA which gives prospective students assurances about quality at MCAST.”

Encouraging students to follow studies relevant to Malta’s economic, social, and cultural needs did not necessitate channelling students but a question of the educational system itself. (Simon). This meant conducting research to see whether there were any skill mismatches and future demands, thus displaying some congruence with Vandal’s alignment model (Vandal, 2009). Conducting such research was made more difficult since industry *“might not know what it needs”* (Diane). The emphasis here seems to coincide with a neoliberal view of education focusing on QA, testing, and accountability within a managerialist setting (Huang, 2012; Mather, Worrall, and Seifert, 2007). This was indeed reinforced by John, Elaine, and Rachel’s insistence that ITS should be under the Malta Tourism Authority’s (MTA) remit and the inclusion of skills, qualifications, mobility, and knowledge (Nairn and Higgins, 2011; Juul, 2010) in the NCHE’s strategic documents.

Sandro took a different approach towards government policy, claiming that the strategic aims were *“ambitious”* and that implementation was *“problematic”*. Besides, Sandro questioned why the post-secondary participation rate was so low,

“We would like to see specific and scientific research into what is causing this divide between us and other European countries. Thus far I have never been provided with research commissioned by the government specifically asking why this rate is so low.”

Robin and Simon both commented on this, stating that there was a possibility that the methodology used to collect data was not in line with what was done in other EU countries, meaning that the actual non-participation rate was about 23% rather than the reported 32–34%.

SMAR and GCHSS had to follow government policy to the letter, since they are both government schools, by following any directives issued by the Education Directorate. At MCAST, encouragement to follow government policy was not derived from government but from the organization's strategic plan. At JC, SAC, and DLS informants indicated that government did very little to ensure that policies were followed. Nigel added that any policies must be coupled with funds. Even though government policies seem to be somewhat centralized, as one would expect in a small state, their implementation is piecemeal, rather than comprehensive (Dunkel, 2008, see above p. 40).

Informants' perceptions of government policy were mostly critical. John and Sandro had reservations regarding 'attracting more students' due to the lack of space at most organizations, and due to early school leavers respectively. Kevin, Antonia, and Michael felt that they had been neglected, and that they were in the dark about what might happen in the future. Kevin felt that government had 'abandoned' FE, while Michael stated, *"It seems that education stops at 16, leaving us in a void."* This seemed to be confirmed by Simon, who stated,

"Unfortunately the focus has been on reforming compulsory schooling, which does not mean that FE has been given secondary importance, but reforming compulsory education is a tall order."

The focus on compulsory education seemed to be the line taken by government, and is likely to be congruent with the political agenda of the party in power (Yeatman, 1990) as discussed

on p. 28 while the focus of neglect has parallels with the situation of FE in the UK (Gleeson and Knights, 2008).

Furthermore, the various government policy attributes do not seem to be linked to one another, or to the realities faced by most Maltese FE organizations. Thus policy consistency, as outlined by Maclean and Pavlova (2010), appears to be absent (see above, p. 31). This lack of consistency may be linked to the lack of a fully developed neoliberal culture. In this thesis only MCAST and ITS seemed to have a managerialist regime. This, however, has to be tempered by the lack of incorporation in the Maltese FE sector. The managerialist regimes as espoused by Huang (2012) and Mather, Worrall, and Siefert (2007) seemed to be absent. Nonetheless, the assertion that such a managerial climate is essential for mission alignment (Duffy, 2004), may be unwarranted. The data illustrates that the smaller FE organizations, which are far removed from a managerialist set-up, are more aligned with government policy. Informants were also critical of the Matsec regime. One of the weaknesses perceived by Kevin was the lack of time to complete the Matsec syllabus, especially in the second year. Simon was also quick to point out that this inflexibility is counterproductive, since it inhibits creativity. Robin elaborated on this inflexibility stating that it was a win-lose situation, and wondered whether additional competences and skills may be graded. He stated,

“These students interacted with other students, some of whom had the same subject. Even if the student didn’t want to, he would have learnt more than he presents in his exams. Yet it is the latter that counts.”

Quality assurance

While FE organizations studied in this thesis displayed a variety of internal KPI systems, the same cannot be said regarding external KPIs. To date, government has not established any

KPI or QA regime (Simon). The lack of such a regime brought mixed reactions from informants. Church FE organizations' informants (e.g. Michael) were unenthusiastic, stating that such a regime would increase bureaucracy and undermine autonomy. Sandro did not commit himself on the effects of external KPIs, but stated that such KPI systems should be tailor-made for each organization. Conversely, Simon reiterated the usefulness of a system between academic FE organizations and university, since the latter led the syllabus process through Matsec (Robin). The only feedback from Matsec consisted of the yearly published subject reports (Robin). While many academic FE organizations' teachers and principals participated in Matsec syllabus setting, this was not perceived as a way whereby changes were made to the way that Matsec is run.

The situation was somewhat different at ITS and MCAST. Courses run in these organizations had to be verified by the NQC. Furthermore, a semi-formal system was in place, to ensure that students followed a prescribed routine when on apprenticeship and job-shadowing. This system comprised form-filling by employers, detailing the work done by the student. Besides this, there was informal contact between employers and lecturers at these organizations. This was built over a number of years and was based on trust (Noel). A curious development was the KPI regime practices between these organizations and City and Guilds. Since both ITS and MCAST offered courses leading to City and Guilds qualifications, the latter made sure that such courses followed set criteria. This was done by sending an external verifier to these organizations (Noel and John).

Finally, Robin stated that Malta was doing "*reasonably well*". However, such a statement needs clarification since Robin himself conceded that it was very difficult to compare FE organizations if the data was non-existent. Moreover, some organizations (e.g. SAC), may have been doing very well due to their policy of choosing students who were "*the cream of the crop*". Simon mentioned that Malta's FE system was enduring and financially stable,

while Sandro perceived academic and vocational student quality as being quite good. Hence, it seemed that the Maltese FE system was adaptable to the ever-changing economic, social, and political environment (Baldacchino and Bertram, 2009).

However, such assertions were made in the absence of any data which was collected systematically. QA and KPI regimes focus on such systematic collection, making it easier to compare different time periods. However, it may not only be difficult, but also worrying to compare different FE organizations. Such comparisons that lead to a league table of FE organizations as is the case in the UK may do more harm than good since it may foster a climate of competition rather than collaboration. Furthermore, the small size of the Maltese FE sector and its rigidity makes it very difficult for academic FE organizations to change focus (e.g. it would be almost impossible for Church FE organizations to provide vocational training). On the other hand, vocational FE organizations are somewhat more flexible and are now offering Bachelor's degrees in some areas. This is accomplished in different ways: ITS offers its students a chance to pursuing a degree in tourism at the University of Malta while MCAST offers Bachelors degrees without any input from university.

Opportunities and threats

The better use of public relations, industry growth areas, legislation requiring certification for certain work (e.g. plumbing), the increased space available when the new campus is completed, producing people who add value to organizations, and different funding routes were perceived to be the main opportunities open to MCAST. The opportunities open to ITS were the inclusion of soft skills in curricula and better usage of tourism experts. The opportunities at MCAST and ITS were partially congruent with what was discussed in the literature (see above, p. 55): increased industry needs and links with industry (Adepoju and Famade, 2010); use of IT in program delivery (Xabec, 2011); and lifelong learning (Hung,

2010). This contrasted with the opportunities open to academic FE organizations, which included lengthening the school day (Kevin), widening subject choice, introducing entrepreneurship (Nigel), making Matsec more flexible, and introducing and aligning KPIs with international standards. According to Simon, such KPIs should include pass rate, pedagogical training, employability, and academics' qualifications.

Threats at vocational organizations differ. Threats facing MCAST were massive growth which would bring added bureaucracy and lesser flexibility, lack of commitment, and the changing needs of industry (Diane). Yet Noel perceived limited resources and private FE organizations as significant threats to MCAST. This latter threat was mentioned by various authors (e.g. Valkanos, Anastasiou, and Androutsou, 2009, see above, p. 54). The constant changes in industry and tourism were also perceived as threats. Furthermore, while Elaine and Rachel thought that ITS student numbers were decreasing, this was not the case, the organization registering a 28% increase over the academic year 2011–12. This might indicate that VET's traditionally negative image was reduced, making this particular attribute less of a threat in this particular situation (Balamuralikrishna and Dugger, 1995, see above, p. 54).

Declining student numbers were perceived as moderate threats at JC and SMAR. In the latter case it may be more serious, owing to the small and ever-declining Gozitan population (Kevin). Conversely, increased student numbers was perceived as a threat at GCHSS, since it has already reached its carrying capacity. Jane was afraid that greater numbers would result in greater impersonality, and students getting lost. Dependence on Matsec, the vast difference between O- and A-level in the science subjects and maths, and the use of government procedures which were not in line with the organization, were also perceived as threats at SMAR (Kevin). Alternatively, adapting to mixed-ability students, change in government, and lecturers seeking employment at JC, because of better working conditions, were perceived as threats by Antonia.

Mission alignment

Internal processes, mentioned by Kaplan and Norton (1996) and Labovitz and Rosansky (1997), are somewhat different than those mentioned by interview respondents. Rather than focusing on faculty productivity, recruitment, staff satisfaction ratings, attendance levels, and health and safety aspects, respondents focused on a wider spectrum of attributes ranging from the influence of external drivers (e.g. Matsec, business and tourism), a mix of organizations, some of which operate multi-entry and -exit points to a range of managerial styles from managerialist (MCAST) to organic (DLS and SAC), and the inclusion of religious activities within the organization's set-up (e.g. DLS). This variety of missions contradicted the Foster Report's (2005) proposal for constricted and skill focused organizational missions.

In the vocational sector, leading firms and hotels were much more heavily involved than smaller ones, thus illustrating the importance of legitimacy, power, and urgency in stakeholder theory (Mitchell, Agle, and Wood, 1997). Firms like Farsons Cisk, Lufthansa Technic, Island Hotels Group, and Dragonara Hotel were mentioned as shining examples of how an external focus impinges on MCAST and ITS, to manage and accomplish their mission. There was, however, no mention of smaller firms and hotels and their needs. Furthermore, not all stakeholders were viewed favourably. Indeed, the government was perceived as a problem in the running of ITS. Such perceptions were based on the premise that government run organizations are inefficient and lack a professional ethos.

It is in this light that one may assess how informants' responses regarding mission alignment differ. MCAST, ITS, and GCHSS demonstrated a variety of missions. MCAST and ITS catered for different student types, offering full- and part-time courses. They were also involved in adult education. Both organizations held regular meetings with external stakeholders, to ensure that their missions were being met. In this way, plans conceived by

different institutes were aligned to organizational strategies. Additionally, MCAST tried to ensure that academic staff had a sound knowledge of organizational mission, and the strategies employed by different institutes. It seems that mission alignment in both MCAST and ITS were process-driven, with an emphasis on stakeholder consultation. The evidence indicated that in these organizations, the major stakeholders were industry and tourism. There also appears to be certain similarities with the alignment models discussed in the literature review. However, no one model captures the specific idiosyncrasies present. While it is evident that internal processes at MCAST and ITS are important (Labovitz and Rosansky, 1997; Kaplan and Norton, 1996), the focus is on industry and tourism (external) rather than the student (Caldwell, 2007), organizational mission (Labovitz and Rosansky, 1997), or strategy and vision (Kaplan and Norton, 1996). These results seem to specify a client shift from student to industry/tourism as postulated by Blackmore and Sachs (2003).

At GCHSS, more focus seemed to be placed on pedagogical factors, such as providing a holistic education (Jane). GCHSS offered a variety of routes for students, who may or may not have possessed the requirements to enter other academic FE organizations. These routes were interlinked so that, for example, if a student failed in one O-level, he was given the opportunity to study for his Matsec A-levels, while attending classes in the failed O-level subject. To ensure a holistic education, GCHSS also launched a Human Library consisting of individuals (e.g. illegal immigrants and ex-convicts) who shared their experiences with students, under the supervision of senior staff in a controlled environment.

The other organizations had very specific missions. This was reflected in the way that they selected students. At DLS and SAC the entry requirements were more demanding than GCHSS, JC, and SMAR. At JC, mission alignment was accomplished by following the Matsec curriculum, while making sure that teachers were professional in what they do. At

SMAR, making sure that the organization had the right amount of academic staff at the beginning of the year, and by constantly making sure that students did not miss classes were the attributes contributing to mission alignment.

Despite being small organizations, SAC and DLS used dissimilar approaches to mission alignment. At SAC, the focus was on one to one contact with teachers, and keeping the good reputation earned by the organization. This was done to help develop students able to contribute to society. At DLS, the mission statement drove the prospectus given to students while emphasizing religious extracurricular activities.

This may be countered by Sandro who was sceptical about mission alignment, deeming that they reflected, rather than drove, organizational processes. He further stated,

“There are some parts of the mission statements which are not fulfilled or cannot be fulfilled. For instance, mission statements are utopic when, for example, they mention that they want to embrace more students.”

In light of the above, a distinction between mission statement and organizational mission is warranted. A mission statement seems to be a statement delineating what an organization is supposed to do, while organizational mission is how such a mission is operationalized. Thus GCHSS’s mission statement ‘to give a second chance’ would seem vague and inappropriate, since there was no reference as to whom such a second chance should be given (even though one may assume that it referred to students). However, GCHSS’s organizational mission, the way those students were given a second chance, was very far removed from the mission statement. The use of multi-entry and -exit points and the high ratings given by academic staff indicated this different reality.

It seems to be true that GCHSS’s mission statement did not reflect reality, but for very different reasons to the ones apparent in the literature. The non-reflection of reality

mentioned by authors (Wright, 2002) is derived from evidence illustrating that organizational reality is drab, in comparison with organizations' mission statements. At GCHSS the opposite was true: organizational reality seemed to be rosier than the mission statement, thus turning conventional wisdom on its head.

SMAR's involvement of staff in crafting the organization's mission statement was also incongruent with the literature. It has often been assumed that staff involvement in mission statement crafting would automatically lead to 'ownership' of the idea (Safieddine, Jamali, and Novreddine, 2007; Edem, Spencer, and Fyfield 2003), with different authors positing different ways whereby mission statements should be crafted (Vorria and Bohoris, 2009; Cochran, David, and Wilson, 2008). Yet at SMAR questionnaire respondents' ratings for many items were significantly lower than other organizations which did not engage their staff in mission statement crafting. There may be cases where management's good intentions (staff involvement) do not lead to the desired results. One may also argue that respondents at SMAR might have given even lower ratings to questionnaire items, had they not been involved in crafting the mission statement.

Strategic planning and resources

Lecturing staff at Church organizations rated strategic planning highest in their organizations, while MCAST had the lowest rating (tied with SMAR). These results conform to the concept that strategic planning may be a non-linear, political process (Hargreaves, 2003; Thomas, 1996). Furthermore, results seem to indicate that in the smaller FE organizations, strategic planning was replaced by continuous communication among the SMT, teachers, and other stakeholders. Lack of strategic planning does not necessarily lead to lower perceptions of alignment as postulated by Kaplan and Norton (2006). It may be that in smaller organizations, the bureaucratic distance between the organization's SMT and staff is virtually

non-existent. Coupled with trust, communication, and being responsible for hiring their own staff might account for such high ratings.

The only evidence relating to the implementation of the strategic plan concerned MCAST. In this case, the plan listed specific aims the different institutes had to work for. These aims are (MCAST, 2006):

1. To escalate and broaden student participation, whilst safeguarding advancement and equal opportunities;
2. To encourage efficiency, effectiveness, and accountability;
3. To deliver a client directed, excellent teaching environment;
4. To work with external stakeholders to meet industrial and national needs;
5. To cultivate a holistic internal and external QA structure;
6. To guarantee that students are given a holistic hands-on education;
7. To develop an efficient and effective internal management information systems (MIS);
8. To capitalize on EU funding;
9. To construct local and international partnerships with a broad spectrum of stakeholders;
10. To ensure the CPD of academic staff;
11. To continue developing MCAST's infrastructure;
12. To become a centre of vocational excellence in the Mediterranean.

The linear approach used at MCAST was done after consultation with various stakeholders (e.g. government and industry). There seemed, however, to be a distinct emphasis on 'strategic planning' rather than 'strategic thinking'. The latter seemed to be absent at least in the way delineated on page 53. The overall lack of strategic planning in Maltese FE organizations seems to mirror the reality found in the UK (Jiang and Carpenter, 2013;

Lumby, 1998) (see above, p. 58). It may be the case that Maltese FE organizations are non-strategic in intent (Duffy, 2004), owing to their low locus of control (Rowley, Lujan, and Dolence, 1997).

The way FE organizations' mission statements were crafted differed. At GCHSS, JC, MCAST, and ITS mission statements were crafted 24, 17, 10 and one year ago respectively. At MCAST and JC the SMT, together with various stakeholders, were involved in the process. At ITS and GCHSS, only the SMT was involved. In all these cases academic staff was not involved in crafting the mission statement. At SAC and DLS, mission statements reflected the religious values of the Jesuits and Frères respectively. The mission statements in these organizations have been in place for a long time and the SMTs were not responsible for crafting them. SMAR seemed to be the only organization where a bottom-up approach was used to craft a mission statement in 2007. This was done via a series of workshops, where academic staff contributions were taken into account.

One would predict that this inclusivity would result in academic staff giving a high rating in the administered questionnaire (Desmidt and Heene, 2007; Safieddine, Jamali and Novreddine, 2007; Edem, Spencer and Fyfield, 2003). This did not occur, which may mean that, at least, in this instance, that staff involvement in crafting the organization's mission statement did not lead to high ratings. The lack of mission statement review may mean that SMTs and academic staff either pay lip service to mission statements, or that such statements reflect rather than drive organizations (Desmidt and Heene, 2007; Morpew and Hartley, 2006).

None of the organizations studied had reviewed its mission statement, even though DLS used the organization's mission statement to launch a prospectus with a slogan based on said mission statement. In this case, the slogan was revised once every two to three years. In the

cases of MCAST, ITS, and SMAR, the reason given for not reviewing the mission statements was the short amount of time since they were crafted. At SAC, the reason given was that the SMT had no control over the mission statement, and any review was in the hands of the Jesuits. At GCHSS and JC, informants seemed confident that their present mission statements accurately reflected the current state of affairs in their organizations.

Collaboration with industry and tourism leaders were perceived as the strengths of MCAST and ITS respectively. In both cases, this collaboration occurred in complex semi-formal ways. MCAST had meetings with the ETC and the Chamber of Commerce on many levels (e.g., it may have meetings with Chamber leadership or on a sector basis). Such collaboration served multiple interests: it was used to generate feedback both formally and informally, align courses with industry needs, and align qualifications with the NQC. At ITS such collaboration was conducted with tourism leaders (e.g. hotel managers). In both cases, (MCAST and ITS) student apprenticeships and job-shadowing were perceived as important strengths. In the case of ITS, this was further corroborated by the six-month internships that students had to complete abroad. Apprenticeships and job-shadowing were both perceived as ways whereby students prepared themselves for the place of work. Other strengths in these vocational organizations were producing graduates who competed on an international level, access to EU funding, adult retraining, flexibility, degree offerings, inclusiveness, and facilities available. Some of these strengths are congruent with what was found elsewhere. Thus EU-wide qualification recognition (Xabec, 2011) is perceived as a strength in developed countries (see above, p. 54). On the other hand, there were differences when compared to developing countries. In the latter enthusiasm, low fees, good reputation, student diversity, and political will were cited as strengths (Adepoju and Famade, 2010) (see above, p. 49).

Academic FE organizations perceived strengths in a rather different way, focusing on the professionalism of lecturing staff, small classes in SMAR, GCHSS, SAC, and DLS, and the use of tutorials and official contact hours at JC. The wide choice of subjects available to JC students was perceived to be a major strength (as opposed to SAC and DLS which do not offer such a wide range). Conversely, the personal relationships between academic staff and students at SAC, DLS, and SMAR were perceived as strengths that are difficult to emulate elsewhere. The physical locality of GCHSS and the facilities at SAC were also perceived to be valuable strengths. Pass rates at academic FE organizations were deemed to be good at most organizations (JC, GCHSS, and SMAR) and excellent in others (SAC and DLS). Simon also commented on the financial stability of the system and its durability, stating that other countries in the EU had problems in this regard.

This close attention to students was questioned by Michael who stated,

“As a result of our strength are we over protecting our students? That is a question I ask myself. Are we giving them too much? Maybe that is our weakness. We may be treating them with kid’s gloves a bit too much. University is a very different environment. I am still not 100% sure.”

Security, the lack of guidance teachers, and the physical locality of the college were perceived to be other weaknesses of DLS. Indeed, security was an issue raised by Sandro, who deemed that it was a problem. The physical locality of JC was also mentioned by Robin since the area around is peppered with bars which students frequent daily. The large number of students at JC was sometimes perceived as a weakness, which is somehow managed. Lecturing staff was, at times, perceived to be a weakness in many organizations (SAC, SMAR, ITS, MCAST, and GCHSS). The reasons for this vary. At GCHSS and SAC, some teachers were perceived to have a lax attitude, whereas at ITS and SMAR the professionalism

of some lecturing staff was questioned. On the other hand, Noel focused on the resistance shown by some members of staff towards reforms.

Other weaknesses inherent in many FE organizations were the lack of an MIS (MCAST), poor IT infrastructure (SAC and DLS), tight budgets, lack of structured internal KPIs or no KPIs at all (SAC, JC, and ITS), poor management in academic FE organizations, maintenance problems in the older FE organizations (GCHSS and JC), lowered entry requirements, the lack of soft skills in the curriculum, and political partisanship perceived at ITS. The issue of private lessons, owing to the lack of time to cover the Matsec syllabus, and overturning previous policies were perceived as being weaknesses at SMAR. The problem of private lessons was further explored by Simon and Robin who stated that these were a result of the Matsec syllabus being too vast and rigid. Furthermore Simon perceived the alignment between academic FE organizations and government policy to be poor. Some of these weaknesses mirrored what is found elsewhere. Over-bureaucratic systems and poor alignment with employers' needs (Augustine and Crop, 2008; Rwanda Ministry of Education, 2008) have been mentioned. However, the Maltese FE system does not seem to suffer from under-qualified staff as may be found in developing countries (*ibid.*).

Furthermore, the management structure at sixth forms, the need for a good QA system, the lack of space given to creativity and innovation, and short terms in second year, were weaknesses outlined by Simon echoing other respondents in different Matsec-oriented organizations. The low rate of participation, lack of funds, lack of character formation, and lack of security were weaknesses cited by Sandro. The issue of participation was discussed earlier, with Simon and Robin stating that the wrong methodology may have been used locally.

The most frequently stated resource needed to operate these organizations was good lecturing staff. Different informants explained this in rather different terms. MCAST and ITS's recruitment policy prioritized academic staff who had experience in the field. At academic organizations (both state-funded and Church), priority was given to academic staff with higher qualifications. At GCHSS, Jane stated that it would be beneficial if academic staff at this level had Doctoral degrees. Funds, good management systems, IT and MIS systems including interactive whiteboards, clerical staff, well-stocked libraries, and a pleasant physical environment were also deemed important resources that were needed to ensure alignment.

Academic staff at most FE organizations are university graduates (Robin). According to Robin, the problem lay with whether the university was adequately preparing these lecturers from a pedagogical viewpoint. Teachers may need special pedagogical skills to deal with the realities found in FE organizations.

Teacher quality was expressed in terms of individual attributes such as pedagogical knowledge, subject knowledge and classroom management (Bruijn and Leeman, 2011) rather than in terms of organizational attributes (Orr and Simmons, 2011) (see above, p. 45). Only MCAST provided teacher training directed at FE level, with interview respondents in other FE organizations insisting that having advanced knowledge of the subject is enough. Considering that teacher quality is considered the most important resource (Caldwell, 2007), the data collected might explain why the alignment measured in the Maltese FE sector was not high – it could be that teachers were conceptualized on an individual rather than an organizational level.

At MCAST, Noel stated that the continuous meetings with the Chamber of Commerce and individual firms, the use of internal and external moderators, and the way that KPIs are

linked to the strategic plan as being evidence of a coherent internal KPI system. This reality was countered by Diane's assertion,

“Industry feels that there is the need of a tracer study, considering that MCAST has been operating for ten years. Have they grown in their career? Has MCAST helped them? Are they stuck? This will help understand the performance of MCAST.”

Diane also deemed student intake, pass rates, and course variety as important indicators that should be used at MCAST. At ITS, no official KPIs were used. However, apart from pass rates, Elaine and Rachel both hoped that KPIs, such as personality change in students and the percentage of students who remain in tourism and who have managerial positions, would be considered by ITS.

Lack of formalized KPIs in academic FE organizations was evident in JC (no KPIs used) and SAC (informal feedback from students and teachers). GCHSS and SMAR used some form of KPIs, but there was no evidence linking these KPIs to strategy. At GCHSS, students must attend 70% of their lessons to sit for their annual exams and, from October 2012, coursework was included as a measure. Furthermore, teachers were encouraged to continue their education up to doctoral level. At SMAR, the principal received a monthly report indicating student attendance and homework given. Matsec pass rates were also used as indicators. DLS used a more complicated KPI regime: at the end of the scholastic year, second-year students and their parents were given an anonymous questionnaire regarding the teaching and learning experience at the organization. This questionnaire used a mix of qualitative and quantitative criteria. The principal personally analysed these questionnaires and passed feedback to the teachers concerned.

The lack of formal feedback mechanisms in Maltese FE organizations may have contributed to the moderate perception of alignment (van Riel, 2012), as outlined on page 68. Hence

there was hardly any evidence related to FE productivity and workforce inclinations (Wolf, 2011; Vandal, 2009). This is illustrated by the very narrow range of KPIs used in the Maltese FE sector which seem to gravitate towards examination pass rates. While this particular KPI was ubiquitously mentioned by researchers, other KPIs such as best management practice (Zarkesh and Beas, 2004), transfer rates (Alfred *et al.*, 1999), academic staff feedback and lesson observation (Stoten, 2012), and employment rates (Sallis, 1990a) are absent (see Table 3.4, p. 80).

The high level of informal feedback seems to counteract the above problems. Given Malta's small size such contacts appear to be crucial given the lack of a national QA system. Such informal feedback appeared to be linked to the trust mentioned by FE organizations' SMTs and industry and tourism informants. Such trust may be responsible for improving social capital (Caldwell and Harris, 2008) delineated on page 81, even though problems remain as to whether such trust is primarily an organizational or psychological attribute.

The lack of internal PM and KPI regimes in the Maltese FE system may be disconcerting, since feedback is generally perceived as a learning process both on the individual and organizational level (Mausolff, 2004). However, the time and expense needed to plan and operate such a system, coupled with the fact that PM provides statistical values rather than cause and effect (White and Medrich, 2002), may mean that few FE organizations are willing to operate such a scheme.

Conclusion

The above analysis sought to uncover the various tensions that exist within the Maltese FE system. In essence, various FE organizations offer a variety of educational options. There are two types of options: academic and vocational. Academic FE organizations are focused on the curriculum and syllabi set by Matsec which allow students to enter university. However,

one academic FE organization (GCHSS) operates a multi entry and exit point system. Vocational organizations cover a wide range of subjects with, until now, no overlap between them. One organization is dedicated to tourism (ITS), while MCAST is more focused on manufacturing, agriculture, business, and maritime courses.

Church FE organizations and GCHSS reported higher mission alignment than other organizations. This may be contrary to orthodox strategic thinking. The latter emphasizes the use of SWOT and PEST analysis, coupled with a strong mission statement and feedback mechanism using KPIs. Yet Church FE organizations do not use any strategic tools explicitly, and, while GCHSS have done a SWOT analysis, its mission statement is far removed from organizational reality, in a manner that is opposite to academic criticism of mission statements.

Conversely, vocational organizations are more likely to be aligned with NCHE's policy directives, the exception being excellence (Church organizations rated higher in this respect). If excellence may be used as a measure of student learning, this may mean that some policy directives might not have a direct impact on student learning. Furthermore, it is clear that some directives (e.g. attract more students), might not be followed owing to organizational priorities and contingencies.

The following chapter will posit an FE model based on systems theory, elucidate a new metaphor for alignment, and restate the main findings of this thesis with a number of recommendations to bolster efforts ensuring mission and policy alignment.

Chapter seven – Conclusion: a model explaining the Maltese FE sector

Introduction

This thesis started with the need to conceptualize alignment, and to use it to underpin a model for the Maltese FE sector. This need stemmed from the lack of academic literature on the FE sector in small states, as well as the urgency required to understand the workings of various FE organizations in this sector. The data presented in Chapter 5 revealed that FE stakeholders hold divergent views on some important issues (e.g. government policy formulation and implementation), and convergent views on others (e.g. level of trust between vocational organizations and business/industry).

This chapter will illustrate how the collated data in Chapter 5 may be used to delineate an explanatory model for the Maltese FE system, with its various parts discussed in detail, and how and why alignment occurs. A new metaphor for organizational alignment is also offered. Furthermore, reference is made to how the FE model and the organizational alignment metaphor form part of systems theory, before recommendations are put forward.

The Maltese FE model

The FE model outlined below is built in line with the data gathered for this thesis. The proposed model focuses on stakeholders, systems, mission, and strategic alignment as outlined by the research questions. The main features of the model are outlined in Figure 7.1. Each section of the model will be dealt with separately.

The model is built on four major pillars: inputs, organizational processes, outputs, and internal and external feedback. Inputs (in red) comprise resources from Government, parents, EU, industry, and university and include funds, expertise, and academic staff. The other

major inputs derive from the NCHE (strategic plan), Matsec (formal and rigid academic syllabi), policies, and students from secondary and other FE organizations. However policies for the FE sector may be said to be quasi demand-led, since the vocational FE sector is linked to industry, tourism, and university (eventually leading to the workplace), and may be viewed as an example of legislation interacting with texts (Spillane, 2008) (see above, p. 27). These inputs, may dictate, to a certain degree, what may or may not be done in the FE organization. Lack of inputs would result in a system following the Second Law of Thermodynamics, whereby disorder will increase (Kaplan and Norton, 2006; Easton, 1957). The fact that social systems are essentially open systems is implicit but this should not be misconstrued as meaning that systems have no boundaries. Rather an open system is one which is open to external inputs, which are essential for maintaining order amongst the different parts of the system.

These inputs were chosen due to their relevance to educational systems in general as evidenced by the literature (Caldwell and Harris, 2008; Caldwell, 2007). Excellent academic staff was mentioned by questionnaire and interview respondents, the only exception being Noel at MCAST. Infrastructure including pleasant classrooms, interactive whiteboards, well-stocked libraries, and laboratories were mentioned by respondents and closely follow the academic literature on the subject (Yasin *et al.*, 2010), meaning that such resources are aligned with students' needs, even though data illustrated that students with disabilities are not integrated with other students in Maltese vocational organizations. Results, especially from interview respondents, also indicate that vocational organizations place a heavier emphasis on infrastructure owing to the nature of the courses that they offer, which involve the use of certain machinery and hardware, thus aligning themselves with industry's needs (Isgoren, 2009; Vandal, 2009). FE organizations may find themselves in an ambivalent position, having to juggle between students' and industry's needs. However, it is still

uncertain whether Maltese FE vocational organizations give more importance to students or industry. This contrasts with research conducted in Australia, which established that industry was increasingly becoming FE organizations' main client (Blackmore and Sachs, 2003) (see above, p. 15).

Resources from various stakeholders are used to operate a wide variety of FE organizations, allowing for a spectrum of missions. These missions are vocational or academic in nature. Vocational missions are divided into two: tourism related vocational courses offered by ITS, and all other vocational courses offered by MCAST. In both these organizations, courses are validated by the Maltese NQC. Academic FE organizations are run by the state (GCHSS and SMAR), University (JC), and the Church (SAC and DLS). These organizations have to strictly follow syllabi set up by Matsec. This might mean that there is a low level of differentiation among different vocational organizations, and even less so in academic ones.

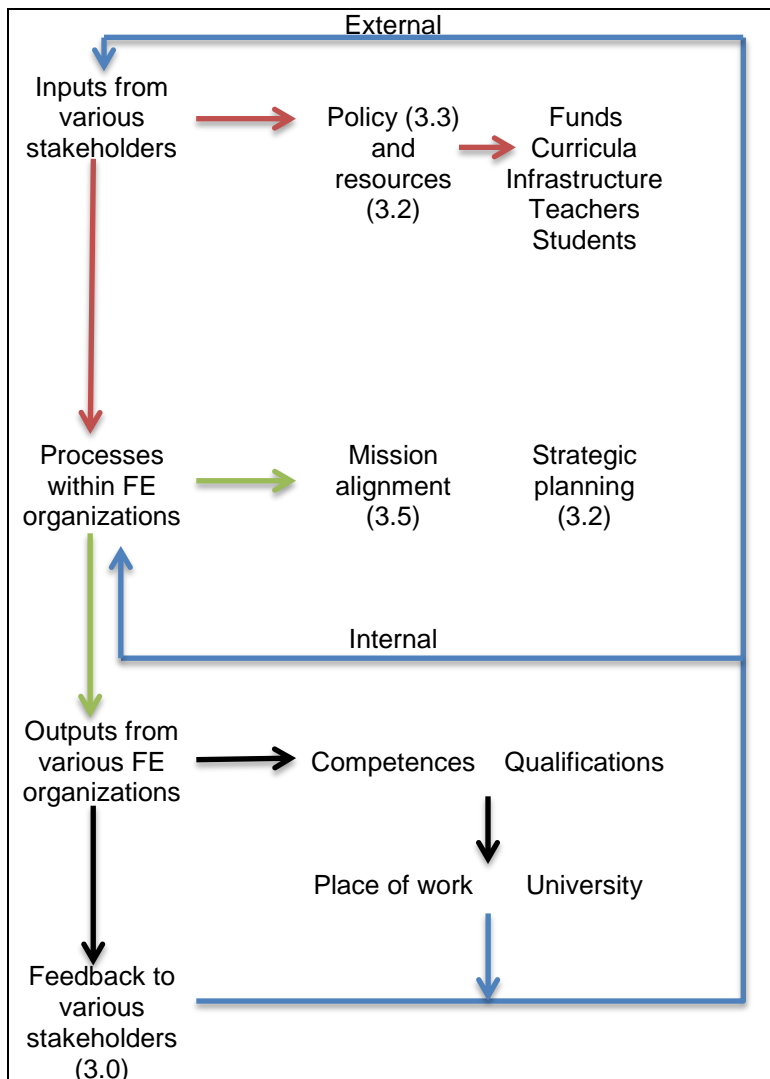
These inputs are then operationalized within each FE organization (in green). Such operationalization involves the tools available for mission alignment and strategic planning, or parts thereof. Mission alignment varies in the different FE organizations under investigation. In Church FE organizations, SMAR, and JC, such mission alignment was achieved by informal communication between the organization's SMT and the academic staff. However, questionnaire respondents gave significantly higher scores at Church FE organizations, maybe owing to the smaller size of these organizations, where the bureaucratic and physical distance between the SMT and staff is minimal. At MCAST, ITS, and GCHSS, a more process-driven approach was utilized. These three organizations operated a multiple-entry and -exit system, thus catering for a wider range of students. Academic staff at GCHSS gave significantly higher scores than academic staff at MCAST, in spite of the fact that GCHSS's mission statement does not include any attributes linked to government policy, and

does not seem to follow the prescriptions laid down by academics in the field (Desmidt and Heene, 2007; Thompson, Strickland, and Gamble, 2007; Beech and Cadwick, 1997).

Certain Maltese FE organizations seem to find themselves in an ambivalent position, since their mission statement is far from the reality operating therein. While GCHSS, SAC, and DLS's mission statements contain little or none government policy attributes, an external focus is still present, mirroring the reality found in Canada and the USA (Berg, Csikszentmihalyi, and Nakamura, 2003) (see above, p. 36). Furthermore, in those organizations where SMTs have very little or no say in employing academic staff (e.g. SMAR and GCHSS), difficulties may arise regarding external mission, as delineated by Duffy (2004) and Vandal (2009). This may lead to a policy-practice gap (Honig and Hatch, 2004, see above p. 36), meaning that Maltese FE academic staff may lack knowledge and understanding of local government policy.

Strategic planning involving a linear process whereby specific stakeholders were involved, only occurred at MCAST, and seems to be similar to seminal models found in academic literature (Thompson, Strickland, and Gamble, 2007). Other FE organizations did not engage in strategic planning. One may theorize that the locus of control in many Maltese FE organizations lies outside the organization itself (Rowley, Lujan, and Dolence, 1997). Thus JC's finances are controlled by the University of Malta; GCHSS, and SMAR are all state-run, and must follow all policies outlined by the Maltese Education Directorate; SAC and DLS are Church-run and subsequently have to follow local legislation, Church, and their respective societies' (Jesuits and Frères respectively) regulations. One may also add the ambiguity faced by certain FE organizations (e.g. SAC and DLS), making it very difficult to engage in strategic planning, as outlined by many authors (Rowley, Lujan, and Dolence, 1997).

Figure 7.1: Explanatory model of the Maltese FE system, 2013



Source: author

Outputs (in black), include competences (skills and knowledge) and qualifications. Such outputs are mostly deemed in synch with the needs of industry, tourism, and university. MCAST is perceived to be accomplishing its mission in this respect, according to Noel (MCAST) and Diane (industry). The concept of high-skills (Brown, Green, and Lauder, 2001; see above, p. 33), did not seem to be given importance by informants. Tourism informants, however, seemed to be preoccupied with the lack of soft skills possessed by many students. This indicates that working within the tourist industry requires specific requisites and skills that should start in secondary schools. Academic FE organizations also

provide students with the necessary skills and knowledge that they need to progress to university, in spite of the fact that many interview and questionnaire respondents were critical of Matsec A-level syllabi.

The above may be explained in neoliberal terms. Those organizations which lead directly to work (e.g. MCAST and ITS), remarked on their strong links with industry and tourism, while academic FE organizations led to university. One may argue that such a system is utilitarian in scope and perceived to be important in globalized knowledge-based economies (Nairn and Higgins, 2011; Juul, 2010; see above, p. 29). Furthermore, knowledge and skills are placed within curricula put forward by either the FE organization (MCAST and ITS), or Matsec (all academic FE organizations). As argued by Hantrais (2003) (see above, p. 30) such curricula are agreed upon by various parties (e.g. the aircraft maintenance courses at MCAST are agreed upon by MCAST and Lufthansa Technik). The latter may be viewed as an example of a national objective having priority over other considerations (Crossley, Bray, and Packer, 2011; see above, p. 30).

The inputs that generate outputs also guarantee a level of differentiation within the system. The Second Law ascribed to previously essentially means that low entropy (disorder) is synonymous with a high level of differentiation. Continuing with the biological metaphor mentioned earlier, high levels of order translate to different parts of a cell having different properties (differentiation coupled with complexity). These parts act together to produce the required outputs. A decrease in order means a decrease in complexity. The proposed FE model differentiates between inputs and outputs, as well as the different agencies responsible for the various features of the system. Besides, different FE organizations are partly differentiated amongst themselves. Some organizations are purely academic (e.g. JC), while some are vocational in nature (e.g. MCAST). A corollary of differentiation is integration, whereby different parts of the system work together. It is here that alignment becomes

important – the integration of the different parts in the right way should enhance the output function of the system as explained in the FE model.

Feedback mechanisms (blue), may be external or internal to the organization. Both mechanism types use a mix of informal and formal methods. There is, however, no overarching feedback mechanism, as proposed by Vandal (2009) (see above, pp.65/6), making it impossible to track long-term students' progress in both vocational and academic FE organizations. There is also no feedback from students after they exit the system. It is assumed that all students exiting the system are adequately skilled for the world of work or university. Many academic FE organizations do not operate a formal feedback mechanism, while interview respondents focused almost exclusively on examination pass rates, which is very different from the proposed KPIs delineated in Table 3.4 (see above, p. 73).

There are similarities and differences between the proposed FE model and the alignment models discussed in Chapters two and three. Thus, Figure 7.1 bears similarities with Kaplan and Norton's alignment model, since both models rest on the belief that internal alignment occurs when staff behaviour is linked to organizational mission. The model, however, differs from Duffy's alignment model (2004). While Duffy posits the existence of horizontal alignment between different schools, the Maltese situation is somewhat different since horizontal alignment is now akin to mission alignment, and is internally situated (that is, within the organization). Vertical alignment has also been expanded to include university, Matsec, business, and industry.

The placement of students in the model is divergent from other authors. The Maltese FE model posits that the system offers a range of organizations, which cater for different student types, depending on whether such students want to enter university (by following the Matsec curriculum) or the world of work (vocational organizations). Vocational organizations also

offer very different courses, since ITS focuses solely on tourism-related courses. Furthermore three organizations (ITS, MCAST, and GCHSS) operate multi-entry and -exit points, and cater for an even wider student diversity.

Vandal's notion of educonomy (2009), is present in the proposed model, since interview informants commented on the need of ensuring that students are prepared for either work (vocational organizations), or university (academic and Church organizations). However, Vandal's alignment model, based on the educonomy, omits the importance of informal feedback and the trust that may be built among various stakeholders. Considering that the concept of educonomy has not really been dealt with in academia, (only one article directly refers to the term educonomy), future work should try to incorporate these attributes. Conversely, the proposed FE model differs from Vandal's model, since some Maltese FE organizations cannot decide on student intake (e.g. SMAR and GCHSS), again indicating their low locus of control.

Readers will recognize the origins of this type of model in social systems theory. Social systems theory, also known as structural functionalism, was developed in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the main proponents being Comte, Spencer, Durkheim, Levi-Strauss, and Parsons (Babbie, 2010; Mooney, Knox, and Schacht, 2009; Easton, 1985). The main thesis of social systems theory is that society is akin to a living organism (Easton, 1985). The bits and parts that make up society work in an 'unconscious, semi-automated fashion' (Cragun and Cragun, 2008, 28). Society's elements may be scrutinized and dissected, to understand how the functions of the parts maintain the whole. Most modern scientists work with the assumption that 'there is no picture- or theory-independent concept of reality' (Hawking and Mlodinow, 2010, 38). This leads to the adoption of model-dependent realism: our ideas about the world are based on a set of rules, which may lead to empirical testing (*ibid.*). Indeed, the alignment models presented in this thesis have been studied using such an approach (Vandal,

2009; Caldwell, 2007; Kaplan and Norton, 2006; Duffy, 2004; Labovitz and Rosansky, 1997).

The seminal works of David Easton and David Apter (1950s–1990s), and their use of social systems theory in the field of political science, have acted as the major theoretical lens underpinning the FE model. This was bolstered with the more recent work of other authors such as Taagepera, Kaplan and Norton, Duffy, and Rissmiller (Taagepera, 2008; Kaplan and Norton, 2006; Duffy, 2004; Rissmiller, 2000). Society may be conceptualized as being made up of various subsystems. In the educational sphere, the interconnections among these subsystems are responsible for ‘producing and reproducing’ educational outcomes (Easton, 1981, 320). In all cases is the premise that a system is,

the most generalized structure for the performance of control functions and as an expression of generalized wants to be translated into legal and normative role prescriptions in all aspects of a given society (Apter, 1957, 750).

Using social systems theory one may categorize the major factors contributing to the final FE model. These are properties of identification, inputs and outputs, differentiation, and integration (Easton, 1965; Easton, 1957). Therefore, the FE model is made up of a number of different units or structural requisites (Government, private, and FE organizations), within a framework of strategic theory and RBV (Taagepera, 2008; Apter, 1958; Easton, 1957). It is distinguished from other educational sectors by virtue of legality (post-secondary education is not compulsory), and definition (the Maltese NCHE distinguishes between further and higher education, higher education being defined as tertiary or university education) (NCHE, 2009). However, while boundaries do exist, the setting wherein the system is located is stressed.

Social systems theory is useful so long as one is aware of its limitations. These limitations are a disregard for contextual attributes and the imposition of causality on the subject under investigation (Rissmiller, 2000). The application of social systems theory to the South African context in the 1980s has thus been criticized (Heydenrych, 1994). However the author's criticism actually regards the wrong application of theory, rather than the theory itself (*ibid.*). Another criticism levelled at systems theory is the 'loss of self' (Kress, 1966, 3). To counteract this loss, individual actors within the system were given a chance to express themselves about and within the system.

The need for a new alignment metaphor

This section will delineate a new alignment metaphor and compare it to other metaphors currently used. Alignment may be compared to a well-functioning operating theatre. The main attributes in such a scenario are the head surgeon, the anaesthetist, the nurses, fully functional equipment, the patient (all internal stakeholders), the patient's relatives and friends, and hospital administration (all external stakeholders). The role of the surgeon is to identify the patient's problem and perform an operation to enhance the patient's health.

To achieve this, the surgeon must communicate with the patient and next of kin, informing them what and why an operation is necessary. The patient must also be adequately prepared for the operation (e.g. no intake of food and water before the operation). The surgeon must also communicate with the nurses and anaesthetist in the operating theatre. The surgeon, nurses, and anaesthetist's actions and behaviour must be aligned towards achieving a successful outcome. Such behaviour is the result of training, trust, and open communication among medical staff. The equipment available in the operating theatre helps medical staff

achieve this success by monitoring the patient's vital functions and providing scalpels, forceps, and gauze that may be necessary to perform the operation.

However, the provision of the right equipment and medical staff at the right place and time is the responsibility of hospital management. Anything less than this might put the patient's life at risk. Furthermore, the surgeon and nurses generally communicate with the patient's next of kin, informing them of developments. After the operation, the patient may have to change his/her behaviour and take medicine accordingly till fully recovered.

In the above metaphor, the student is the patient. To successfully enter and complete FE, the student must be adequately prepared in secondary schools (pre-operation). The actual operation is akin to the learning processes at FE. To achieve a positive outcome, academic staff must work together, given the right equipment. The scalpels, forceps, and gauze signify those resources that are directly related to learning (e.g. books, classrooms, and whiteboards), while monitoring equipment relates to a direct feedback mechanism ensuring students' progress and wellbeing. Such resources must be made available from the government (hospital administration). In addition, other stakeholders (e.g. industry and tourism) must be informed about students' progress.

Alignment has been likened to a cockpit view in an airplane, as well as a rowing crew (Kaplan and Norton, 2006; Labovitz and Rosansky, 1997). The way an airplane aligns itself with a runway, using an Instrument Landing System, taking into consideration current conditions (e.g. airspeed, crosswinds, and rate of descent), means that organizations are challenged to ascertain their exterior and internal environment before embarking on an alignment program (Labovitz and Rosansky, 1997). This alignment is both vertical as well as horizontal. The rowing crew analogy shares similarities, in the sense that an organization must be able to assess external and internal conditions (in this case competition from other

crews, water currents, as well as the strengths and weaknesses of the individuals within the crew) (Kaplan and Norton, 2006). The human element is evident in the rowing crew metaphor, with its emphasis on the leadership of the coxswain, ascertaining the relative strengths and weaknesses of the individual oarsmen, and how they combine together efficiently to produce a winning team (*ibid.*).

Systems theory is more in line with the rowing boat metaphor than with the Instrument Landing System. The focus on individual team members is akin to the different functional units within the FE system (e.g. FE organizations and the NCHE). As each team member contributes in different ways to a winning team, so a great FE system is made up of different units contributing to the overall function and stability of the system. Furthermore, the rowing team needs to expend energy to achieve co-ordination – in other words, the rowing team may be said to be an open system, very much in line with the arguments put forward in this chapter regarding systems theory. It is difficult to apply the same conceptual analysis using Instrument Landing System, since the link between energy expenditure and actual alignment seems to be unclear.

The rowing boat metaphor offers additional advantages. The focus on the human element is stronger than that in the Instrument Landing System metaphor. Modern airplanes have the advantage of computer-controlled mechanisms, whereby the human element is diminished. While not disputing the technological inputs related to rowing in terms of specialized equipment, different people have to co-ordinate their actions for the ultimate goal, that is, winning the race. This co-ordination seems to be lacking in the ILS metaphor.

However, Kaplan and Norton's rowing metaphor has limitations. Their analysis of the external environment is restricted to competitors (other rowing crews), and exclude other stakeholders. In the Maltese FE context such stakeholders would include the government,

other FE organizations, the NCHE, the MUT and the EU. Furthermore, Kaplan and Norton's rowing boat(s) metaphor excludes the possibility of rival crews helping one another. Besides, Kaplan and Norton's metaphor focuses on internal communication only. Such internal communication seems to be a one way process – from the coxswain to the oarsmen but not vice versa. The operating theatre metaphor includes two-way communication among medical staff, patient, next of kin, and administration and seems to better reflect organizational realities. The above metaphor gives a deepened understanding of how alignment occurs since communication with internal and external stakeholders is given a central role.

Research limitations

The challenges arising from this research relate initially to those associated with almost any research and secondly to the study of strategic alignment in particular. Within the first group, I place its necessary level of generalization. Its conclusions relate to the whole Maltese FE sector, and the nuances of the individual colleges are therefore hidden (for example, data from individual departments was not collected). While its conclusions have to be generalized to some extent, their transferability to FE sectors in other countries can be questioned: Malta's sector is very small and includes both academic and vocational colleges, a mixture which might not be classified as entirely FE elsewhere. The research does generate more questions than it can answer such as the role of middle management in organizational alignment, and whether vocational organizations' curricula are aligned with micro-organizations. Investigating these was beyond the scope of this thesis in time and space, so they do at least offer routes for further research.

Secondly, limitations specific to this study focus around the concepts of alignment, the choice of a blended methodology, and restrictions imposed by the refusal of some of the Maltese colleges to participate in the research. The concept of alignment was difficult to

define and conceptualize since most FE organizations did not have a clear strategic plan (Chan and Reich, 2007). This posed a substantial task, since alignment models assume an existing organizational strategy, wherein alignment may occur (Vandal, 2009; Kaplan and Norton, 2006; Duffy, 2004; Labovitz and Rosansky, 1997). FE organizations' SMTs, such as MCAST, may also face uncertainty surrounding the differences between the written strategic plan, strategies in use, and managerial activities, many of which may be in conflict with one another (Ciborra, 1997).

The author employed social systems theory (Babbie, 2010; Easton, 1985) to account for alignment and subsequently used this to build a model of the Maltese FE sector. The limitations of social systems theory have already been noted on p. 225 (a disregard for contextual attributes, the imposition of causality on the subject under investigation, and the loss of self). The researcher tried to counter these limitations by adopting weak constructionism within a complementarity blended methodology. Further research might explore alignment from different viewpoints (e.g. postmodernist, feminist, and poststructuralist). Hopefully, these viewpoints will add a new dimension and richness to the study of alignment.

The third limitation relates to blended methodological choice. While the use of blended methodologies seems to be gaining academic acceptance (O'Cathain, 2010; Bazaley and Kemp, 2009), epistemological issues persist. Giddings has this to say,

Clothed in a semblance of inclusiveness, mixed methods could serve as a cover for the continuing hegemony of positivism, and maintain the marginalization of non-positivist research methodologies. I argue here that mixed methods as it is currently promoted is not a methodological movement, but a pragmatic research approach that fits most comfortably within a post-positivist epistemology. (Giddings, 2006, 195)

The use of a complementarity blended methods approach (pp. 89–91 above) lessened the impact of such marginalization, by ensuring that both qualitative and quantitative data

streams were given equal importance (Johnson, Onwuegbuzie, and Turner, 2007). While researchers have pointed out that the strict division between qualitative and quantitative research may lack meaning (Bahari, 2010; Greene, 2007), it may be beneficial to conceptualize social science research in terms of three paradigmatic domains: quantitative, qualitative, and blended methods (Johnson, Onwuegbuzie, and Turner, 2007). Furthermore, these three domains flourish and interact together, and might be helpful to keep researchers 'checked and balanced' (*ibid.*, 117).

The final challenges arose when attempting to persuade all of Malta's FE organizations to participate in the research. Unfortunately, all the private FE colleges declined and one of the state sector colleges did not wish to provide quantitative data. The omission of the private colleges could be seen as a substantial loss to the research as they constitute 22% of Malta's FE sector but as they only have 2.3% of the FE student population, the effect of this loss could be seen as minimal. However, their private status could have added an interesting dimension to considerations of how far government can control non-state sector institutions, especially in the context of neo-liberalism's desire for privatization.

ITS, with a student and teacher population of 1000 and 31 respectively, declined to provide quantitative data due to lack of permission from the college's SMT. The missing data would have proved valuable in demonstrating whether academic staff's perceptions of alignment were in concert with that of the SMT and hotel respondents (John, Rachel, and Elaine). However, in all other respects, ITS fully participated in the research.

Implications for policy and practice

This thesis focused on four particular research questions covering the following areas: the link between Maltese FE organizations' mission statements and government policy; the perception of such policies by a variety of stakeholders (SMTs, academic staff, University,

unions, industry, tourism, and government); the perception of national and internal QA regimes; the perception of the role of mission alignment within FE organizations; the perception of the role of strategic planning within FE organizations.

The Maltese government has always been directly responsible for crafting and implementing FE policy. Such policy attributes are currently perceived as the key to answering many of Malta's problems in terms of skills and national productivity. Stakeholders, however, perceive such policies in varied ways. What has been ignored by government, it seems, is the measure of trust among these stakeholders, which has been central to the functioning of the Maltese FE sector. If policy attributes are going to provide something valuable to stakeholders, then the government needs to ensure that this measure of trust is strengthened within FE, rather than focus on the prescriptive adherence to policy.

Evidence from interview respondents indicated that the NCHE strategic plan was crafted without full stakeholder involvement. This lack of stakeholder involvement translated into policies which were perceived by many respondents to be either ambitious (e.g. attract more students), or inexplicable (e.g. attract more foreign fee-paying students). This created a climate of uncertainty and ambiguity for some stakeholders and the organizations they represented (e.g. SAC, DLS, and MUT). In the future it is recommended that stakeholders be given a chance to voice their concerns, as is the norm in democracies. This will also enhance the principle of subsidiarity, whereby problems are dealt with closest to those citizens who are affected by said problems.

The ambiguity noted above is increased by informants' different concepts of education, its purpose, and how FE organizations serve that purpose. Robin (University) stated,

“Thus VET prepares students for present realities whereas university prepares people for future challenges by giving them the tools necessary to face these problems. I

want to open minds rather than to fill minds with how to fill pea cans! This is the biggest difference. Both academic FE organizations and university want to educate students. This may not be the case between MCAST and employers. The latter don't care about their employees' education. They only care about profits. Industry wants people who manage to create profits and lower costs."

Conversely, Noel (MCAST) and John (ITS) reiterated that education should be linked to employment, mirroring general government policy. This encapsulates the dangers of unbridled neoliberalism with its focus on what can be considered as legitimate knowledge (knowledge which serves employers), and the sites where such knowledge is accessed and approved (organizations which offer courses representing this knowledge and the level attained). However, such unchecked neoliberalism may not have such a dominant position in Malta.

Therefore, future national policy-crafting may have to take into consideration differences between vocational and academic FE organizations. Such differences include organizational size, set-up, and courses offered. Presently these differences are not accounted for. The author thinks that this is a problem, since it tends to increase the ambiguity perceived in some organizations. Future policy-making should distinguish between organizational type (that is, vocational and academic), and might help organizations focus on what is important.

To ensure that FE organizations and other stakeholders are indeed meeting their targets, a much better feedback system is required. Presently, pass rates seem to be the only KPI used in Malta. Yet, academics have pointed out a wide plethora of KPIs that may be used (e.g. P-20 database, student satisfaction, teacher satisfaction, and employment rates). However, any KPI system must be perceived as being timely and just, again pointing out the importance of including all stakeholders before such a system is actually implemented.

Nevertheless, whether such a regime should include strategic planning is doubtful. Many FE organizations do not operate under managerialist regimes, the exception being MCAST – and in this latter case academic staff gave rather low rating to many items. This does not mean that strategy is unimportant. Rather, organizational strategy is important if done correctly. The author proposes that FE organizations engage in strategic thinking rather than strategic planning. In this way, FE organizations will be forced to think creatively, rather than linearly, about their existence, and what they can offer to stakeholders. The author also proposes that such strategic thinking be done in a climate of collaboration with other FE organizations, rather than in isolation. Data from interview respondents indicated that such collaboration is lacking.

Informants were much more positive regarding mission alignment. While respondents were generally positive in their responses, this did not mean that FE organizations are autonomous, and might go some way to demonstrate that neoliberal values do not drive the Maltese FE sector. For example, in the UK, incorporation gave FE organizations a certain amount of autonomy while at the same time, subjugating them to a rigid QA regime (Oldfield and Baron, 2000). Incorporation is generally perceived negatively by researchers as part of a neoliberal agenda (Fitzsimmons, 2009). The lack of incorporation in the Maltese FE sector might indicate that education is perceived as a public good rather than a commodity, a concept enhanced by the fact that students in FE (and HE) receive a monthly stipend.

Mission alignment may be jeopardized by the inflexibility shown by Matsec. Most interview respondents pointed out their dissatisfaction with the current regime, since Matsec sets very rigid syllabi over two years with hardly enough time to cover the syllabi. In this regard there are only two solutions available: decrease the amount of subject matter in the syllabi, or set Matsec examinations in June rather than May.

The right syllabi and span of time to cover these syllabi are not enough to ensure that learning occurs. Data from this thesis revealed that most teachers in FE are not pedagogically equipped to deal with the specific conditions related to FE. Only MCAST offers such pedagogical courses to its own academic staff. The author suggests that the University of Malta should also offer units to those students who wish to specialize in FE. In the future, applicants who wish to teach at FE level will be equipped with the necessary skills to do so.

Strategic planning and formal QA procedures were largely absent in the Maltese FE sector. In the UK and Australia, the presence of these attributes had been linked with a neoliberal regime, focusing on the commodification of knowledge and economic utility. However, limiting the focus of FE organizations to their economic utility restrains societal opportunities and the communities in which people live. Such constraints influence the social context that buttresses curriculum development and educational debate. With the above in mind, one should be thoughtful before adopting any policies which apparently raise standards in education, but expressly designed for a better performing economy. The point being raised here is not the about QA *per se*, but about what QA represents – an apparatus designed on driving education along economic parameters.

The future introduction of a standardized QA regime in the Maltese FE sector may lead towards a standardizing of organizations, and corresponds to what has been termed the ‘audit society’ (Power, 1997). Such a society is based on ritualization and managerialism, as organizations are held accountable for what they do by establishing internal QA mechanisms. In this way, the focus of FE organizations may shift from students to standards. This neoliberal concept of education will therefore produce individuals who can process information to develop skills mandated by the market, get employment, and earn wages with which to purchase goods and services. While locally, education may still be conceived to be a

public good, neoliberalism dictates that education is just one more commodity to put into the private domain and from which to generate wealth, whilst ensuring inequalities both nationally and globally.

Conclusion

In future studies, the author will try to extend the analysis to include variations within each FE organization. Such an approach could facilitate further understanding of organizational alignment and subsequent consequences for SMTs, teachers, and students. It would also be useful to include organizations in other educational levels and in other settings, since the sample in this study is limited to FE.

The results of this thesis have implications for small states in general. The short bureaucratic distance between government and FE organizations is not a guarantee that such organizations are fully aligned with government policies. Governments of such states, which usually have limited financial and human resources, need to make sure that there an efficient feedback mechanism is in place. Furthermore, the economic and political climate in these small states may mean that courses in vocational organizations need to be aligned with industry (whether manufacturing or in services). Since this seems to be a high-risk strategy, the issue of size may help such countries, since stakeholders may trust each other more.

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Appendices

Appendix A – mission statements’ thematic binary coding

Components	Variables Coding	
Attract more students	stu1	stu0
Inclusion	inc1	inc0
Knowledge	know1	know0
Skills	skill1	skill0
Qualifications	qual1	qual0
Student mobility	SM1	SM0
Teacher mobility	TM1	TM0
Work	work1	work0
University	uni1	uni0
Quality assurance	QA1	QA0
Excellence	Ex1	Ex0

Appendix B: examples of deductive and inductive thematic coding

Example of deductive codes

Kpi-pass rates

Results are important. The majority of our students pass and go to university. At the end of

QA formal

The scholastic year every second year student and parents have to fill in a detailed questionnaire

Example of an inductive code

Weakness security

Security is a problem. At JC security is strict. Students find it easy to come and go.

Weakness security

We are not situated in a nice area and there are dangers.

Appendix C – coded FE organizations’ mission statements

Institute of Tourism Studies (ITS):

Know1/qual1/skill1

QA1/know1

ex1/work1

Developing people through quality learning to achieve excellence in tourism.

Malta College for Arts, Science and Technology (MCAST):

inc1

know1/qual1

skill1

To provide universally accessible vocational and professional education and training with

work1

an international dimension, responsive to the needs of the individual and the economy.

Giovanni Curmi Higher Secondary School:

To give another chance.

Sir M. Refalo Post-Secondary Complex:

skill1

Our aim is to equip our students with empowering critical skills to help them develop into responsible, educated and autonomous citizens.

know1/qual1/ex1

Our focus is not merely to meet academic demands and to facilitate students' entrance

work1

skill1

into the labour market but also to instil within them values to aid the development of their whole personality.

Junior College:

QA1/ex1

Our mission is to provide a holistic quality education to young men and women who seek

uni1

know1/ skill1

uni1

to join the University by preparing them to develop the attributes needed for tertiary level studies.

St. Aloysius College:

St Aloysius' College, in collaboration with parents, strives to educate youth in the service of the Faith that necessarily includes the promotion of justice. It

- helps each student achieve a balanced and well-formed personality so that the

know1 skill1

spiritual, moral, **intellectual**, **social**, **affective**, aesthetic and physical dimensions are integrated into a harmonious whole;

- forms mature and committed Christians to become, within their own sphere,

skill1

- **effective leaders** in a spirit of service to their fellow human beings;
- helps students to overcome their selfishness and become free persons enabling them to be agents of change in the spirit of the Gospel for the creation of a more just and human world.

De La Salle College:

De La Salle Sixth Form is a Roman Catholic Sixth Form College committed to the

skill1

ex1/know1

personal and spiritual growth of all its members based on Christian values, **academic excellence** and high quality pastoral care. At De La Salle Sixth Form students are

ex1/know1

inspired to achieve **academic excellence** and **personal success** and are actively

know1

supported to reach their full **academic potential**.

Appendix D – interview questions for respondents

Opening stage.

Establishment of relationship: *Interviewer shakes hands with the respondent.* My name is Nicholas Zarb. I am a doctoral student at the University of Lincoln.

Main stage.

Interview questions for FE informants

Research questions	Questions	Prompts
What are stakeholders' roles and effectiveness in achieving alignment?	What activities are needed to ensure that your college follows its stated mission?	Actions?
How do stakeholders perceive the effectiveness of FE organizations' efforts to align resources, strategic planning and quality assurance procedures to organizational mission?	<p>How is your organization's mission stated crafted?</p> <p>How often have you arranged review of your college's mission statement?</p> <p>What is needed from academic staff to achieve organizational mission?</p> <p>How do you perceive your organization's mission statement?</p> <p>Does your organization have a strategic plan?</p> <p>How is it crafted?</p> <p>Who is involved?</p> <p>How is the plan implemented?</p> <p>Do you think that resources available to your college are aligned to its mission?</p> <p>How would you rank such resources in order of importance?</p> <p>What strengths does your organization possess?</p> <p>What weaknesses does your organization have?</p> <p>What key performance indicators are used within your college?</p> <p>How are these aligned to your organization's mission?</p>	<p>Environmental scanning/SWOT analysis</p> <p>Tangible/intangible</p> <p>Student/staff absenteeism; safety/security; accessibility; maintenance; cleanliness; students pass rate; employment rate; University entrance rate.</p>
How does the content of FE organizations' mission statements compare with statutory and advisory government policy for the sector?	<p>Has your organization played an active role in crafting the FE sector strategic plan published by the NCHE?</p> <p>How and in what way(s) is your organization aligned with government policy for the FE sector?</p>	<p>Attracting more students; enhancing social inclusion; encouraging students to partake in studies relevant to Malta's economic, cultural and social needs; attract foreign fee-paying students; promoting excellence; facilitating and promoting student and teacher mobility; governance and funding</p>

	<p>In what ways has your organization been encouraged by government to follow its policies for the FE sector?</p> <p>What barriers hinder alignment?</p> <p>How do you perceive government policy for the FE sector?</p>	
<p>In what ways, and with what perceived success, are national quality assurance procedures intended for, and used to, ensure policy alignment to state goals?</p>	<p>Does the government specify quality assurance procedures for your organization?</p> <p>What opportunities and threats does your organization face?</p>	<p>Student/staff absenteeism; safety/security; accessibility; maintenance; cleanliness; students pass rate; employment rate; University entrance rate.</p>
<p>General information regarding your organization</p>		
	<p>How many students are currently studying in your organization?</p> <p>How many teachers/lecturers are employed by your organization?</p> <p>What criteria are used to select students who wish to join your college?</p> <p>What procedure is used to employ new academic staff?</p> <p>What qualifications are needed by academic staff to work within your college?</p> <p>What incentives are given to academic staff who wish to further their education?</p> <p>What conditions of work are currently practiced in your college?</p> <p>What opportunities and threats does your college face?</p>	<p>'O' levels; 'A' levels; experience</p> <p>Newspaper ads; website; internal calls; right for first refusal</p> <p>Diploma; Bachelors; Masters; Doctorate; experience</p> <p>Funding; time off; salary increase; promotions</p>

Interview questions for NCHE official

Research questions	Questions	Prompts
<p>What are stakeholders' roles and effectiveness in achieving alignment?</p>	<p>How does the NCHE work to achieve alignment within FE organizations?</p> <p>What barriers hinder such alignment?</p>	<p>Actions?</p>
<p>How do stakeholders perceive the effectiveness of FE organizations' efforts to align resources, strategic planning and quality assurance procedures to organizational mission?</p>	<p>How do you perceive FE organizations' mission statements?</p> <p>Do you think that resources available to FE colleges are aligned to their mission?</p> <p>How would you rank these resources in order of importance?</p> <p>What are the strengths and weaknesses of the Maltese FE sector?</p> <p>What is the role of the NCHE to ensure</p>	<p>Student/staff absenteeism; safety/security; accessibility; maintenance; cleanliness; students pass rate; employment rate; University entrance rate.</p>

	<p>that the FE sector has the right resources?</p> <p>What strategic plans are in place for the Maltese FE sector?</p> <p>How were such plans crafted?</p> <p>What key performance indicators are used in different Maltese FE organizations?</p> <p>Does the NCHE play an active role in developing and implementing such performance indicators?</p>	
How does the content of FE organizations' mission statements compare with statutory and advisory government policy for the sector?	<p>How does the NCHE work in ensuring alignment between FE organizations' missions and Government policy?</p> <p>How and in what way(s) are FE colleges aligned with government policy for the FE sector?</p> <p>What barriers hinder such alignment?</p> <p>How is government FE policy formulated?</p> <p>Who is involved?</p>	<p>Attracting more students; enhancing social inclusion; encouraging students to partake in studies relevant to Malta's economic, cultural and social needs; attract foreign fee-paying students; promoting excellence; facilitating and promoting student and teacher mobility; governance and funding</p>
In what ways, and with what perceived success, are national quality assurance procedures intended for, and used to, ensure policy alignment to state goals?	<p>Does government policy specify quality assurance procedures for FE organizations?</p> <p>What are the opportunities and threats facing the Maltese FE sector?</p> <p>How is such information collected?</p> <p>Is it analysed to check whether FE organizations are aligned with government policy?</p>	<p>Student/staff absenteeism; safety/security; accessibility; maintenance; cleanliness; students pass rate; employment rate; University entrance rate.</p>

Interview questions for the MUT informant

Research questions	Questions	Prompts
What are stakeholders' roles and effectiveness in achieving alignment?	<p>How does the MUT work to achieve alignment within FE organizations?</p> <p>What barriers hinder such alignment?</p>	<p>Actions?</p>
How do stakeholders perceive the effectiveness of FE organizations' efforts to align resources, strategic planning and quality assurance procedures to organizational mission?	<p>How do you perceive FE organizations' mission statements?</p> <p>Do you think that resources available to FE colleges are aligned to their mission?</p> <p>How would you rank these resources in order of importance?</p> <p>What is the role of the MUT to ensure that the FE sector has the right resources?</p> <p>What are the strengths and weaknesses of the Maltese FE sector?</p> <p>Has the MUT played an active role in developing the Maltese FE strategic</p>	<p>Student/staff absenteeism; safety/security; accessibility; maintenance; cleanliness; students pass rate; employment rate; University entrance rate.</p>

	<p>plan published by NCHE?</p> <p>What key performance indicators should be used internally in different Maltese FE organizations?</p> <p>Does the MUT play an active role in developing and implementing such performance indicators?</p>	
<p>How does the content of FE organizations' mission statements compare with statutory and advisory government policy for the sector?</p>	<p>How and in what way(s) are FE colleges aligned with government policy for the FE sector?</p> <p>What barriers hinder alignment?</p> <p>Is the MUT involved in formulating government policy for the FE sector?</p> <p>What the main priorities for the Maltese FE sector as identified by the MUT?</p>	<p>Attracting more students; enhancing social inclusion; encouraging students to partake in studies relevant to Malta's economic, cultural and social needs; attract foreign fee-paying students; promoting excellence; facilitating and promoting student and teacher mobility; governance and funding</p>
<p>In what ways, and with what perceived success, are national quality assurance procedures intended for, and used to, ensure policy alignment to state goals?</p>	<p>Does government policy specify quality assurance procedures for FE organizations?</p> <p>What are the opportunities and threats facing the Maltese FE sector?</p> <p>How is such information collected?</p>	<p>Student/staff absenteeism; safety/security; accessibility; maintenance; cleanliness; students pass rate; employment rate; University entrance rate.</p>

Interview questions for industry informant

Research questions	Questions	Prompts
<p>What are stakeholders' roles and effectiveness in achieving alignment?</p>	<p>Does the Maltese business sector play a role in ensuring that MCAST is aligned to its mission?</p> <p>What barriers hinder such alignment?</p>	<p>Actions?</p>
<p>How do stakeholders perceive the effectiveness of FE organizations' efforts to align resources, strategic planning and quality assurance procedures to organizational mission?</p>	<p>Do you think that MCAST's organizational mission is aligned with government policy?</p> <p>Do you think that resources available at MCAST are aligned to their mission?</p> <p>How would you rank these resources in order of importance?</p> <p>What are the strengths and weaknesses of MCAST?</p> <p>Does the Maltese business sector play any role to ensure that the FE sector has the right resources?</p> <p>What key performance indicators should be used internally at MCAST?</p> <p>Does the Maltese business sector play an active role in developing and implementing such performance indicators?</p> <p>Do you think that students exiting MCAST have the right qualifications, skills and knowledge to enter the place</p>	<p>Tangible/intangible</p> <p>Student/staff absenteeism; safety/security; accessibility; maintenance; cleanliness; students pass rate; employment rate; University entrance rate.</p>

	<p>of work?</p> <p>Is teaching at MCAST aligned with organizational mission?</p>	Lack of specific teacher training programmes for the FE sector.
How does the content of FE organizations' mission statements compare with statutory and advisory government policy for the sector?	<p>How and what ways is MCAST aligned to government FE policy?</p> <p>What barriers hinder such alignment?</p> <p>Is the business sector involved in crafting government policy for the FE sector?</p>	Attracting more students; enhancing social inclusion; encouraging students to partake in studies relevant to Malta's economic, cultural and social needs; attract foreign fee-paying students; promoting excellence; facilitating and promoting student and teacher mobility; governance and funding
In what ways, and with what perceived success, are national quality assurance procedures intended for, and used to, ensure policy alignment to state goals?	<p>Does MCAST provide feedback to the Maltese business sector?</p> <p>Does the Maltese business sector provide feedback to MCAST?</p> <p>What are the opportunities and threats facing MCAST?</p> <p>What are the main priorities for MCAST as identified by the Maltese business sector?</p>	

Interview questions for tourism informants

Research questions	Questions	Prompts
What are stakeholders' roles and effectiveness in achieving alignment?	<p>Does the Maltese tourism sector play a role in ensuring that ITS is aligned to its stated mission?</p> <p>What barriers hinder such alignment?</p>	Actions?
How do stakeholders perceive the effectiveness of FE organizations' efforts to align resources, strategic planning and quality assurance procedures to organizational mission?	<p>Do you think that resources available to FE colleges are aligned to their mission?</p> <p>How would you rank these resources in order of importance?</p> <p>Does the Maltese tourism sector play any role to ensure that ITS has the right resources?</p> <p>What are the strengths and weaknesses of the Maltese FE sector?</p> <p>What key performance indicators should be used internally at ITS?</p> <p>Does the Maltese tourism sector play an active role in developing and implementing such performance indicators?</p> <p>Do you think that students exiting ITS have the right qualifications, skills and knowledge to enter the place of work?</p> <p>Is teaching at ITS aligned with organizational mission?</p>	<p>Tangible/intangible</p> <p>Student/staff absenteeism; safety/security; accessibility; maintenance; cleanliness; students pass rate; employment rate; University entrance rate.</p> <p>Lack of specific teacher training programmes for the FE sector.</p>
How does the content of FE organizations' mission statements	How and in what ways is ITS aligned with government policy?	Attracting more students; enhancing social inclusion; encouraging students

compare with statutory and advisory government policy for the sector?	<p>What barriers hinder such alignment?</p> <p>Is the Maltese tourism sector involved in formulating government policy for the FE sector?</p>	to partake in studies relevant to Malta's economic, cultural and social needs; attract foreign fee-paying students; promoting excellence; facilitating and promoting student and teacher mobility; governance and funding
In what ways, and with what perceived success, are national quality assurance procedures intended for, and used to, ensure policy alignment to state goals?	<p>In what ways does ITS provide feedback to the tourism sector?</p> <p>Does the tourism sector offer feedback to ITS?</p> <p>What are the opportunities and threats facing ITS?</p> <p>What the main priorities for ITS as identified by the Maltese tourism sector?</p>	Student/staff absenteeism; safety/security; accessibility; maintenance; cleanliness; students pass rate; employment rate; University entrance rate.

Questions for University of Malta informant

Research questions	Questions	Prompts
What are stakeholders' roles and effectiveness in achieving alignment?	<p>Is the university involved in ensuring that Junior College is aligned to its stated mission?</p> <p>What barriers hinder such alignment?</p>	Actions?
How do stakeholders perceive the effectiveness of FE organizations' efforts to align resources, strategic planning and quality assurance procedures to organizational mission?	<p>Do you think that resources available to FE colleges are aligned to their mission?</p> <p>How would you rank these resources in order of importance?</p> <p>What are the strengths and weaknesses of the Maltese FE sector?</p> <p>Does the University play any role to ensure that the FE sector has the right resources?</p> <p>What key performance indicators should be used in academic sixth forms?</p> <p>Does the university play an active role in developing and implementing such performance indicators?</p> <p>Do you think that students exiting academic sixth forms have the right qualifications, skills and knowledge to enter university?</p> <p>Do you think that teaching at different academic sixth forms is aligned with their respective organizational mission?</p>	<p>Tangible/intangible</p> <p>Student/staff absenteeism; safety/security; accessibility; maintenance; cleanliness; students pass rate; employment rate; University entrance rate.</p> <p>Lack of specific teacher training programmes for the FE sector.</p>
How does the content of FE organizations' mission statements compare with statutory and advisory government policy for the sector?	<p>Do you think that academic sixth forms are aligned with government policy for the sector?</p> <p>What barriers hinder such alignment?</p> <p>Is university involved in formulating government FE policy?</p>	
In what ways, and with what perceived success, are national quality assurance procedures	In what ways do sixth forms offer feedback to university?	Attracting more students; enhancing social inclusion; encouraging students to partake in studies relevant to Malta's

intended for, and used to, ensure policy alignment to state goals?	<p>Does university offer feedback to sixth forms?</p> <p>What are the opportunities and threats facing academic sixth forms?</p> <p>What are the main priorities for academic sixth forms as identified university?</p>	<p>economic, cultural and social needs; attract foreign fee-paying students; promoting excellence; facilitating and promoting student and teacher mobility; governance and funding</p>
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Concluding stage.

I appreciate the time you took for this interview. Is there anything else you think would be helpful for me to know?

A transcription of this interview will be sent to you for validation and consent.

Appendix E – questionnaire administered to FE organizations’ lecturing staff

Further education organizations in Malta: modelling our sector

To: lecturing/teaching staff at post-secondary organizations

**From: Nicholas Zarb, researcher
(Junior College. email: nickyzarb@hotmail.com)**

**University of Lincoln, UK.
Centre for Educational Research and Development**

Your participation as an important stakeholder is needed to help generate an analytical model of the Maltese Further Education sector. Answering this questionnaire will enable you to express your opinions so this research can investigate how our organizations align with policies to produce a knowledge-driven economy. **Anonymity** and **confidentiality** will be strictly adhered to by following the University of Malta Ethics Committee and of the University of Lincoln, UK. Prior written consent from your organization will be sought before any type of publication.

Instructions

1. This questionnaire should take no more than ten minutes to complete.
2. Please fill in this questionnaire by answering each question with an X.
3. Place completed questionnaires in the box marked ‘Further Education Model’ at reception.
4. Thank you for your time and patience to complete this questionnaire.
5. Please feel free to contact me using the above email address.
6. Completed questionnaires will be collected on **(insert date here)**.

Indicate the extent to which you agree with these statements by marking the appropriate box with an X.

		Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1	Your organization's mission statement:					
	States its aims					
	Reflects its values					
	Shows to whom the organization is accountable					
	Distinguishes you from other organizations in the post-secondary sector					
	Enhances your motivation					
	Clearly drives student learning					
	Helps identify your students					
	Is student oriented					
	Reflects social inclusion					
	Promotes excellence					
	Facilitates student mobility among different post-secondary organizations					
	Facilitates teacher mobility among different post-secondary organizations					
	Attracts more students to your organization					
	Encourages students to partake in studies relevant to Malta's economic, cultural and social needs					
	Attracts foreign fee-paying students					
	Is used to drive the agenda of departmental staff meetings					
	Is clearly used by administration in college-wide organizational plans					
2	Material resources are available to ensure that the college's organizational mission is met					
3	Performance measurement systems are in place to ensure that the college's organizational mission is met					

4. How much do you think you do, or can, contribute to helping your organization achieve its mission?

5. What are your organization's main strengths?

6. What are your organization's main shortcomings?

7. What challenges does your organization face?

8. Indicate your age group by marking the appropriate box with an X.

21-30	<input type="checkbox"/>
31-40	<input type="checkbox"/>
41-50	<input type="checkbox"/>
51-60	<input type="checkbox"/>
Over 61	<input type="checkbox"/>

9. Indicate your gender by marking the appropriate box with an X.

Male	<input type="checkbox"/>
Female	<input type="checkbox"/>

10. Indicate the number of years of teaching experience IN THIS ORGANIZATION by marking the appropriate box with an X.

0-5	<input type="checkbox"/>
6-10	<input type="checkbox"/>
11-15	<input type="checkbox"/>
16-20	<input type="checkbox"/>
21-25	<input type="checkbox"/>
26-30	<input type="checkbox"/>
Over 31 years	<input type="checkbox"/>

11. Indicate the type of qualification(s) you achieved by marking the appropriate box with an X.

University degree	<input type="checkbox"/>
Professional Body	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other (please specify)	<input type="checkbox"/>
None of the above	<input type="checkbox"/>

THANK YOU FOR YOUR TIME AND CO-OPERATION

Appendix F – statistical equations

The statistical equations listed hereunder were sourced from Kvanli, Pavur and Keeling (2003), 'Introduction to business statistics'.

Mean

$$\bar{x} = (\sum x_i) / n$$

Standard deviation

$$s = \sqrt{[\sum (x_i - \bar{x})^2 / (n - 1)]}$$

Fisher's exact test

Fisher's exact test is a test for independence in a 2×2 table. It is particularly useful when sample sizes are small (even zero in some cells) and the *Chi-square* test is not appropriate. The test determines whether the two groups differ in the proportion

with which they fall in two classifications and is

given by the following formula:

$$\frac{(a+b)! (c+d)! (a+c)! (b+d)!}{N! a! b! c! d!}$$

$p =$

Cramer's V

$$V = \sqrt{\frac{\chi^2}{n(k-1)}}$$

Mann-Whitney U test

This test is the nonparametric substitute for the equal-variance t -test when the assumption of normality is not valid. When in doubt about normality, it is safer to use this test. Two fundamental assumptions of this test are:

- The distributions are at least ordinal in nature.
- The distributions are identical, except for location. This means that ties are not acceptable.

$$U_x = \frac{W_x - n_x(n_x+1)}{2}$$

Kruskall Wallis test

$$H = \frac{SS_{bg(R)}}{N(N+1)/12}$$

Appendix G – sample letter sent to interview informants

Letter sent to JC:

30, Marchesa
Bugeja Str
St Paul's Bay
SPB3042
10-04-12

The Principal,
Junior College,
University of Malta

Dear Principal,

At present I am reading for my PhD in Educational Management with the University of Lincoln. As part of my thesis I would like provisional consent to interview a senior member of JC's SMT and to administer an anonymous questionnaire to all lecturing staff. This letter will explain the subject of my thesis and its importance, how data will be collected, stored and used as well as your rights as detailed under the Malta Data Protection Act.

This thesis aims to build a model for the further education sector (FE) in Malta by assessing the alignment that currently exists between the Maltese government's policy for the FE sector and FE organizations' missions. The model will be based on strategic theory, the resource-based view of organizations (RBV), Maltese FE policy documents and structural functionalism. The model plans to ascertain and elucidate links amongst the possible stakeholders in the Maltese FE sector and analyse how these can be impacting on government policy for the sector.

In a 2010 speech the Maltese Prime Minister, the Hon Lawrence Gonzi identified further and higher education as the cornerstones for the government's vision for the county in a document known as Vision 2015. He noted that lifelong learning and skill flexibility are necessary for enhanced output and a thriving knowledge-driven economy. To attain this vision there may be the need to align educational organizations to government policy which may result in higher quality education. Such alignment may lead to better use of resources while making these organizations democratically accountable. Lack of alignment is hard to justify in a

world where efficiency, effectiveness, responsiveness, transparency and accountability are becoming ever more important.

As an important stakeholder, Junior College will be in a position to express its opinion via the questions I will ask. A list of questions is found in **Appendix A**. In order to protect the informant's identity strict anonymity will be adhered to. The exact procedure will be as follows:

1. A place and time for the interview will be established according to your wishes.
2. At the onset of the interview you may choose any pseudonym you wish.
3. Answers will be recorded digitally.
4. Answers will be transcribed in grammatically correct English and sent back to you for approval.
5. Digital recordings and transcripts will be stored on a pen drive and kept under lock and key.

Apart from the interview I would like to administer a questionnaire to **all** lecturing staff (**Appendix B**). Questionnaires will be left in lecturers' physical mailboxes and collected after two weeks. May I remind you that according to the Malta Data Protection Act you have the right to see, change and delete such data. You may also retire from the project for any or no reason whatsoever with no consequences for such action.

The results of my work will be available on completion of my PhD. Any information and knowledge resulting from data which directly relates to you and which may enhance your organization's work will be given to you. Publication of any data relating to you will remain anonymous and will require your consent.

Once provisional consent is given I will forward such consent to the University of Malta Ethics Board for final approval. Once this is obtained I will contact you to arrange a day and time for such interview. Should you wish any other clarifications concerning my research and how data will be used do not hesitate to contact me. My contact details are:

1. Email: nickyzarb@hotmail.com
2. Home number: 21571020
3. Mobile number: 79046187

Please find attached a letter from my tutor confirming the above.

I also thank you in advance for your help.

Regards,

Nicholas J Zarb

