



**Strategy narratives in Turkish international contracting:
Mobilising the past as a means of creating a heroic identity**

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Dedication

This work is dedicated to my parents, *Muammer & Emine Ulutaş*, my husband, *Seçkin Duman* and my lovely son, *Atlas*. Thank you for your unlimited love, and your invaluable support during this journey. You are *the heroes* of my life.

Abstract

This research is about competitive strategy in the international construction sector. Drawing on the ‘narrative turn’ in organisation studies, it emphasises the temporal and discursively constructed nature of competitive strategy. The central argument of the narrative approach is that individuals, and by extension practitioners involved in strategy, make sense of the world by telling stories. Such stories are continuously mobilized to constitute an overall sense of coherence and direction with direct material implications. This ongoing process of narrative construction resonates with ‘identity work’. The current study, therefore, proposes ‘identity work’ as a key strategic practice which is directly implicated in shaping not only the trajectory of individual contracting firms, but also the Turkish construction sector as a whole.

The empirical analysis focuses on strategy narratives as mobilized within the Turkish international contracting sector. Competitive strategy narratives are seen to provide a means of understanding the formation and enactment of strategy. Turkish contractors have projected themselves increasingly successful, often operating in turbulent, high-risk markets characterized by conflict, political discord and stark discontinuities. They describe themselves as the *heroes* of turbulent markets, especially in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) and former Soviet Union (USSR) countries. In contrast, much of the literature on competitive strategy is characterised by assumptions of economic and political stability. Such assumptions may well be justified in the markets of North America and Western Europe, but they have little resonance with the regions targeted by Turkish contractors.

The adopted narrative approach provides a retrospective and contextual understanding of the competitive strategy of Turkish contractors through the analysis of sectoral and individual narratives. The empirical data covers a sectoral narrative, published as a quasi-historical book and 30 narrative interviews carried out with experienced managers from Turkish contracting firms. The empirical analysis focuses on the ‘narrative infrastructure’ as continuously co-constructed by the narratives at sectoral and individual level. The findings highlight the multi-actor and multi-level processes of strategy making. Narrative analysis demonstrates the way in which actors, actions and events are positioned within a plot structure, with direct implications for the enactment of future strategic practices. The findings suggest that strategic actions can only ever be identified in retrospect, and that such arguments are always made with an eye on the future.

Keywords: Competitive strategy, narrative turn, international contracting, Turkish contractors, narrative analysis

Publications

The following is a list of my published papers related to the research carried out for this PhD.

Duman, D. U., Green, S. D., & Larsen, G. D., 2019. Historical narratives as strategic resources: Analysis of the Turkish international contracting sector. *Construction Management and Economics*, vol. 37, no. 7, 367-383.

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Duman, D. U., Green, S. D., & Larsen, G. D., 2017. Competitive Strategy as Narrative: Turkish Contractors in International Markets. In: *9th Nordic Conference on Construction Economics and Organization*, 13-14 June 2017, Chalmers University of Technology, Göteborg, Sweden.

Duman, D. U., Green, S. D., & Larsen, G. D., 2016. Competitive strategy along the silk roads: understanding the success of Turkish contractors, In: *Proceedings of the RICS COBRA 2016 Conference*, 20-22 September 2016, Toronto, Canada. The Construction, Building and Real Estate Research Conference of the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors.

Ulutas Duman, D. & Green, S. D., 2015. Understanding competitiveness in complex and dynamic environments: The case of Turkish contracting. In: *Raiden, A (Ed.) and Aboagye-Nimo, E (Ed.), Proceedings 31st Annual ARCOM Conference*, 7-9 September 2015, Lincoln, UK. Association of Researchers in Construction Management, pp. 937-946.

Declaration

I confirm that this is my own work and the use of all material from other sources has been properly and fully acknowledged.

Dilek Ulutaş Duman

Date 05.03.2020

Signature

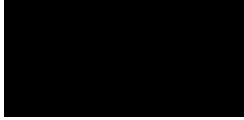


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Abbreviations

AAA: Adaptation, Aggregation, and Arbitrage

BIM: Building Information Modelling

BOT: Build Operate Transfer

CPM: Critical Path Method

ENR: Engineering News Record

EPC: Engineering Procurement and Construction

EPCF: Engineering Procurement, Construction and Finance

GDP: Gross Domestic Product

IMF: International Money Fund

JV: Joint Venture

MENA: Middle East and North Africa

M.Sc.: Master of Science

MBA: Master of Business Administration

MoT: Ministry of Trade

NATO: North Atlantic Treaty Organization

NBBs: Narrative Building Blocks

OPEC: The Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries

Ph.D.: Philosophy of Doctorate

PFI: Private Finance Initiative

PPP: Public Private Partnership

SaP: Strategy as Practice

SWOT: Strengths, Weakness, Opportunities and Threats

TCA: Turkish Contractors Association

UK: The United Kingdom

USSR: The Union Soviet Socialist Republics

USA: The United States of America

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1. Introduction

1.1 Introduction

This research is situated within the context of an increasingly competitive international construction sector. It examines how this competition is experienced from the perspective of Turkish contractors. The work applies an alternative theoretical approach in contrast with the current literature that tends to focus on identifying objective common factors that determine competitiveness. Instead this research focuses the narratives adopted by Turkish contractors, and their representative organisation, the Turkish Contractors Association (TCA), to explore how they describe the enactment of competitive strategy as it is experienced in the Turkish international contracting sector. Drawing on the ‘narrative turn’ in organization studies, it emphasises the temporal and discursively constructed nature of competitive strategy. More specifically, the research emphasises the formation and enactment of strategy through a continuous co-construction of individual and collective narratives. In line with other research (e.g. Brown, Gabriel and Gherardi, 2009), the concepts *narrative* and *story* are used interchangeably. The central argument of the narrative turn is that individuals make sense of the world by telling stories, and that those stories inevitably frame identities and the way individuals see the past, present and future (Fenton and Langley, 2011; Vaara, Sonenshein and Boje, 2016). Of particular interest is the suggestion that narratives and stories are seen to be a constitutive part of organisational activity rather than simply representative (Czarniawska, 2004). From a narrative perspective, it is axiomatic that we cannot access the past in an objective sense. Nevertheless, we can analyse the available narratives of what happened and draw appropriate conclusions. This research argues that the narrative perspective brings an alternative theoretical approach to the ways in which strategy can be understood and constituted.

The specific purpose of this chapter is to provide an introduction to the current research, outlining the context and rationale for the research, the aims and objectives, and provide an overview of the structure of the thesis. The chapter begins with discussing the research context in order to position this thesis within the context of current debates on international contracting. The contextual discussion is primarily focused on describing the geo-political context for international contracting in general, and for Turkish contractors in particular. It considers the competitive strategy literature and then shifts towards narrative understanding. This is followed by the justification of selecting Turkish international contracting sector as the empirical focus. Particular attention is given to explaining the development of Turkish international contracting sector and the role of TCA to provide the necessary contextual background. The next section discusses the rationale for this research, in relation to understanding how competitive strategies are constituted and

enacted in practice. This is followed by explaining the detailed research aim and objectives and discussing the scope of the research. Finally, the chapter provides an overview of each section of the thesis.

1.2 Research context

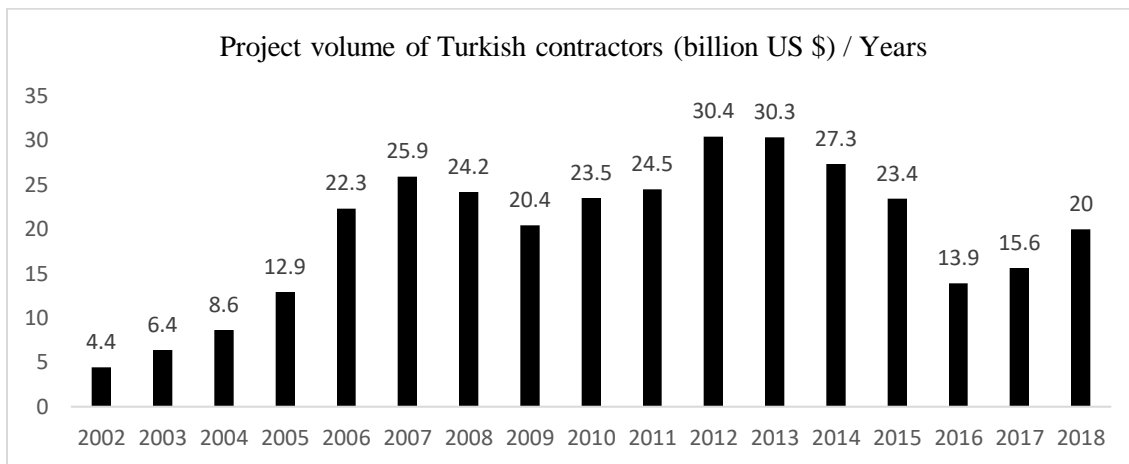
1.2.1 Turkish contractors in international markets

The Second World War constitutes an important milestone in any discussion of international contracting. The post-war period was characterized by large-scale construction activities in Europe funded through the Marshall Plan. Also important were the increasing aid programmes and development loans from international institutions to boost construction in developing countries. The post-war construction activities in Europe improved the experience and technical capabilities of contractors from developed countries (Langford and Male, 2001; Dunn, 2004). When such construction demand in Europe reached saturation towards the end of the 1960s, the oil boom subsequently generated a massive growth in the construction market in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). This created an opportunity for large Western contractors to offset the effects of domestic stagnation by increasing turnover in international markets. Construction companies from the US, Europe and Japan dominated international construction in this period, with the involvement of firms from emerging economies such as Turkey and Korea being limited to acting as sub-contractors (Raftery et al, 1998). The initial interest of Turkish contractors in international markets can be traced back to such emergent construction demand in MENA. It was the time that Turkish contractors were facing the domestic economic recession of the early 1970s, hence they were in part forced to look at international markets.

The political and economic instabilities throughout MENA in the 1980s led Western contractors to withdraw from these markets back to the relatively stable markets of the West (Crosthwaite, 2000; Hillebrandt, 2000). Turkish contractors however followed a different trajectory by relishing opportunities in markets which were deemed by Western firms to be unattractive. They were successful in dramatically increasing their presence in MENA countries throughout the 1980s. International activity of Turkish contractors reached a new plateau during the 1990s as a result of their successful involvement in the former Soviet Union countries following the dissolution of the Soviet Union (USSR) in 1991. The advent of the new millennium saw continued market penetration by Turkish contractors, especially within the newly independent republics of Central Asia along the southern fringe of the former USSR. This period was characterised by specialisation in specific sectors with corresponding increases in turnover through to 2007 (Turkish Contractors Association, 2019).

Figure 1-1 summarizes the annual project values of Turkish International contractors from 2002 through to 2017. The sharp drop in output in 2009 can be attributed in part to the global financial recession. MENA markets were further suppressed as a consequence of political instability in the wake of the so-called Arab Spring of 2010. Turkish contractors were subsequently challenged by deteriorating diplomatic relations between Turkey and Russia following the shooting down of a Russian warplane by the Turkish air force over Syria in 2015. However, Turkish contractors have been notably successful in navigating a prolonged period of instability across the Middle East, comprising not only the ongoing civil war in Syria but a series of conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq. Libya was an especially important market prior to the 2011 overthrow of Colonel Gaddafi which rendered market growth predictions redundant almost overnight. Given the geopolitically fractured contexts in which Turkish contractors operate, the extent to which the current construction-related literature on competitive strategy offers meaningful insights is at best contestable. Further uncertainty has most recently been created by a diplomatic row between Turkey and the USA resulting in a currency crisis and ongoing threats of a pending trade war. There are also new opportunities for Turkish contractors, arising out of on recent geo-political trends in Central Asia, and the China-led Belt and Road initiative. Frankopan (2018) argues that Turkey is perfectly positioned to take advantage of the emergence of the New Silk Roads.

Figure 1-1. Project volume of Turkish contractors (billion US \$), 2002-2018 (Adapted from Turkish Contractors Association, 2019)



1.2.2 Competitive strategy narratives of Turkish contractors

Competitive strategy in the construction sector has been explored from a range of different theoretical perspectives. Much of the literature is characterized by implicit assumptions about economic and political stability, or at least by an expectation that trajectories of change are predictable (cf. Dikmen and Birgönül, 2003, Korkmaz and Messner, 2008, Lee, et al., 2011). Such assumptions have limited validity in the context

of the highly unstable markets within which international contractors currently operate. More recent research has moved the debate away from rationalistic explanations towards a stronger focus on the dynamic interactions between contracting firms and the contextual landscape within which they operate (e.g. Fernie, Leiringer, and Thorpe, 2006; Kao, Green, and Larsen, 2009). Such studies have opened up the space for more constructionist perspectives, including those which conceptualise competitive strategy as a discourse (cf. Green et al., 2008). However, as yet little attention has been given to understanding the competitive strategy of international contractors from a narrative perspective. This research aims to develop an alternative argument to the current literature by focusing on competitive strategy narratives at macro and micro levels within the context of Turkish international contractors.

The adopted narrative perspective emphasises the socially constructed, discursive and temporal nature of competitive strategy. It also sees organizations as socially constructed, emergent and processual arenas within which the narratives of competitive strategy are socially constructed through multi-author and multi-level processes. Competitive strategy narratives are seen to be constitutive of temporal realities of strategy making which plays a central role in shaping the identities of individuals and future organizational actions (Fenton and Langley, 2011). More importantly, it is argued that narratives of the past are constructed in accordance with a degree of performative intent vis-à-vis the future. To provide a retrospective and contextualised understanding of strategy making in international markets, the research is based on competitive strategy narratives of Turkish contractors.

The initial part of the research focuses on the analysis of a formalized sectoral-level narrative published by the TCA. The TCA is the primary network organisation representing the interests of large Turkish-owned construction companies operating in international markets (c.f. Hardy, Phillips, and Lawrence, 2003). In essence, the aim of the TCA is described as increasing the competitiveness of its members in national and international markets. The organization publishes periodic sectoral reports on international contracting and hence continuously projects a series of authoritative narratives in support of Turkish international contracting. Especially important is the publication of two historical books providing a collective identity narrative for the sector members. The first one is the 'History of Contractors' which describes the development of contracting services in Turkey and the establishment of the TCA. The story dates back to the construction practices in the 18th Century Ottoman Empire and provides a summary until 2000s with a specific focus on the development of networks among contractors and the establishment of the TCA. This is followed by a second book called 'Geography of Contractors' which focuses on the development of Turkish international contracting from 1972 to the first decade of new millennium. The ostensive aim of the latter is to provide an explanation of how Turkish contracting firms have remained competitive in international markets over the course of several decades. The story compiled in the book draws from 54

interviews conducted with company managers and some governmental officials who have witnessed the internationalization process of Turkish contracting sector. It is argued that the TCA narrative draws from the past selectively to provide a heroic identity through the selected stories. The narrative as a whole is seen to provide a sectoral- level strategic narrative aimed at reinforcing the competitiveness of Turkish international contractors. It provides a primary empirical source of data which lends itself to analysis as a 'strategy text'. Of particular interest, the book seems to depict a collective identity for Turkish contractors, not least for subsequent generations.

The analysis of the TCA narrative is followed by a review of 30 narrative interviews with senior managers from Turkish contracting companies. The managers are asked to articulate their own stories regarding competitiveness and strategy making. The analysis of the empirical data highlights how managers interpret competitive strategy on the basis of their experienced reality. The analysis of strategy narratives at both sectoral and individual levels enable the researcher to depict the continuous co-construction of competitive strategy narratives as a multi-authored and multi-level narrative. Hence, it is argued that through understanding the formal narratives and engaging with practitioners' more informal interpretations of competitive strategy this research will provide an alternative theoretical understanding on the ways that strategy is constituted in international contracting firms.

Deuten and Rip (2000) further argue that multi-authored and heterogeneous narratives aggregate and interact over time in their social and material settings and progressively constitute a *narrative infrastructure*. The concept of a narrative infrastructure helps explain how coherent strategies can emerge from complex and contested contexts. More importantly, the narrative infrastructure is depicted as a key concept not only in informing present day decision-making, but also in generating possibilities for further strategic actions (Fenton and Langley, 2011). The construction of the narrative infrastructure follows a dynamic process of interaction with specific *narrative building blocks* (NBBs) (Deuten and Rip, 2000). The term narrative building block refers to commonly accepted discursive resources that are used to give meaning to emerging occurrences or events. It is important to emphasise that the processes of contestation between different narrators are continuous. The narrative infrastructure is hence continuously re-constructed over time. The analysis of narrative infrastructure and the NBBs from which it draws thereby provides potential insights into the ways in which competitive strategies are negotiated and enacted.

1.3 Rationale for research

Much of the competitive strategy research in construction management focus on either identifying the strategies which firms can adopt to enter different markets or defining parameters to increase the company

performance. However, such assumptions have limited validity in the context of the highly unstable markets within which international contractors increasingly operate. The markets of Turkish contractors are characterized by continuous social, economic and political instabilities. Such vicissitudes seem to have great impact on the way Turkish contracting companies operate. However, the current literature goes no further than linking their competitive performance to the analysis of external market forces and industry level discussions (i.e. Öz, 2001, Özorhon, 2012). Neither does the literature pay attention to the experienced reality of strategizing in emergent changes. While such sources undoubtedly make useful contributions to objectivist notions of strategic planning, they say almost nothing about the way in which strategy is actually performed in practice. In essence, they are primarily focused on describing the determinants of success, with an implicit assumption that these will continue to prevail in the future. This emphasis is of course by no means unique to the literature on Turkish contracting; it is equally apparent more broadly amongst researchers interested in competitive advantage in construction (e.g. Ofori, 2003; Flanagan et al., 2007; Zhao, Shen, and Zuo, 2009).

The ‘narrative turn’ accepts organisations as socially constructed, emergent and processual arenas (Tsoukas, 1994). Organizations, in this sense, become the arenas within which individuals develop, rehearse and test their narratives of competitive strategy. Such narratives hence become ways that individuals ascribe meaning to themselves and to their day-to-day practices. Hence identity work conflates with strategy making as both can be seen to be essentially concerned with constituting an overall sense of direction for ourselves (Oliver, 2015). However, as yet little attention has been given to the extent to which strategy can be understood as identity work. The available formalized narratives and managers’ own collections of lived experience provide key resources in this regard. While this is not the first study to adopt a narrative perspective to discuss the strategy and identity concepts in construction sector (Löwstedt and Räisänen, 2014), it contributes to this emerging stream of research. Especially important is emphasizing the use of history as a malleable source and highlighting the how strategizing activity can also be considered as identity work.

Narrative research is an empirical tradition that ‘provides a methodological position through which to engage not with a presumed neutral ‘real’ world, but with the complex nuances of the ‘lived’ world’ (Rhodes and Brown, 2005, pp.180). Such a perspective acknowledges there can be multiple realities alleged by individuals and the interaction between narratives and social context that they are developed from. Therefore, the methodological position of the thesis sits on a weak social constructionist ground. Adopting an iterative process (e.g. Green, Kao and Larsen, 2010), the relevant literature of competitive strategy and narrative turn are reviewed to develop the research design. Such an iterative perspective highlights the continuous process between existing theories and empirical findings and leaves itself open to additional

literature review through emergent findings in the research process. The focus on the strategic use of history and strategizing as identity work are developed as the emergent findings within the empirical study. The object of the empirical study is defined as the narratives of competitive strategy. Since the emphasis of the empirical research is the multi-voiced nature of competitive strategy narratives, the level of analysis is multi-level from formal narratives depicted by organizations and dominating industry bodies such as TCA to the individual narratives. The empirical data was collected by archival document analysis and face-to-face narrative interviews.

This research is based on the following axioms which are derived from the literature review on narrative perspective and identity studies. They play a key role the design of empirical study, data analysis and discussion. They are specified as:

- Narratives are temporal and discursive constructions reflecting continuous contestation and interpretations of competitive strategy on different levels.
- Narratives are not representative of reality; they are constitutive of reality. The generative power of narratives is of central importance to understanding the enactment of competitive strategy.
- Strategy narratives are temporal social constructions mobilized to persuade individuals toward certain understandings and actions and they are only meaningful in a given situated context.
- Strategy narratives are constructed through retrospective interpretations of past experiences in relation to present circumstances and future expectations.
- Strategy narratives are constructed on temporal plot structures through which narrators cast roles and causalities on past characters, events and actions.
- Strategy narratives rehearsed by individuals provide windows into processes of identity work through which individuals ascribe meaning to themselves and their day-to-day practices.

1.4 Research aim and objectives

This thesis adopts a narrative perspective to explain the recurring success of Turkish contractors. The specific intension is to bring a retrospective understanding to competitive strategy through the exploration of individual and formal narratives. Narratives are seen as the ways that individuals link past, present and future to create meaning for themselves and others. As such, they are accepted as the means that reflect post hoc rationalization of practitioners' experienced reality of strategizing.

Therefore, the research aim is to explore the extent to which the narrative approach provides an alternative understanding of competitive strategy to that currently represented in the construction management

literature. In order to achieve the aim and to position the thesis within the specific context of construction, the objectives of the research are defined as:

1. To critically analyse how competitive strategy is conceptualized within the current literature.
2. To evaluate the extent to which competitive strategy narratives can provide a means of understanding the enactment of strategies.
3. To understand empirically how the competitive strategy is represented, interpreted and enacted at the sectoral level (in the formal narratives of institutional bodies such as Turkish Contractors Association (TCA)).
4. To establish the ways in which practitioners conceive, explain and interpret the competitive strategy through their experienced reality.
5. To clarify the interactions and interdependencies between sectoral and individual level narratives of strategy.

1.5 Scope of the research

This research focuses on the competitive strategy narratives in Turkish international contracting sector. The empirical analysis initially concentrates on the analysis of a formalized sectoral narrative published by the TCA as a quasi-historical book, *Geography of Contractors* (Tayanç, 2011). The narrative presented in the book portrays the strategic development of Turkish contractors across four decades and depicts individual firms, projects and markets chronologically in a supposedly realist timeline. However, it also contains a great number of ‘narrative fragments’ derived from politicians, industry representatives and senior managers from within contracting firms. The TCA narrative is hence be seen to comprise a skilfully designed strategic product, informing the sectoral-level identity of Turkish contractors. Both the narrative fragments themselves and the very fact that they were chosen for inclusion are seen as important. It is argued that the collective narrative of Turkish international contracting informs how history can be used strategically.

The initial empirical study is followed by conducting 30 narrative interviews with senior managers from Turkish contracting companies. The previous analysis on sectoral level narrative helps the researcher to understand the collective identity narrative of Turkish international contractors and to identify the individuals who might usefully be interviewed. Such analysis on macro and micro levels reflects how narratives of competitive strategy are socially constructed through a continuous interaction of different levels. As advocated by Tsoukas (1994, pp. 772), conducting research by employing narratives as the object

of the analysis enables the researcher to ‘capture the many context dependent nuances, details, and flexible temporal connections that characterize strategy making’.

Since the narrative perspective conceptualises social reality as a process of continuous construction, the search for objective truth is discounted and replaced instead with a quest to understand how a given version of the world is constructed (Czarniawska, 2004). The scope of the research is limited to the narratives of competitive strategy on Turkish international contracting sector. However, the significance of the reported research is of course by no means limited to Turkish international contracting. The use of historical narratives as strategic resources and further conceptualizing the strategizing activity as identity work will have equal applicability to other major players in international contracting.

1.6 Thesis structure

Chapter 2 explains the nature of international construction. It describes the historical development of international construction markets and introduces the central characteristics of working in international markets. It is argued that much of the international construction research is dominated by the objectivist notions prescribing the factors that contracting companies are assumed to have. However, defining such parameters does not provide any explanation of how they are mobilized in practice. The second part of the chapter elaborates the development of Turkish international contracting sector. The retrospective analysis explains the key events that seem to shape the path followed by Turkish contractors, hence providing the substantial contextual information to understand the narratives reviewed later.

Chapter 3 includes three sections. The first part presents a critical overview of the relevant literature regarding the concept of competitive strategy both within organization studies and construction specific research. A review of a range of theoretical perspectives dominating the competitive strategy discussion in organization management is introduced. It is argued that there has been a shift from reification of competitive strategy towards seeing it as a socially constructed discursive concept. The second section explores the shift towards the narrative turn in strategy studies. It is argued that individuals make sense of the world by telling stories and that those stories frame the way we see the past and future in a constant state of flux. From a narrative perspective we cannot access the past and predict the future in an objective sense. Nevertheless, we can analyse the available narratives and draw appropriate conclusions. Lastly, it is argued that the doing of strategy takes place by means of the temporal narratives through which individuals seek to establish subject positions both for themselves and their organizations. Drawing on these assumptions, narrative perspective is justified as a convincing way to understand how identities are constructed and how competitive strategy is understood, explained and communicated through the

individual and formal sectoral narratives in international contracting.

Chapter 4 explains and justifies the underlying methodological position adapted in the thesis. The ontological and epistemological background of the research design is introduced. Narrative research is seen as an empirical tradition that acknowledges multiple realities alleged by individuals and the social context that they are developed from. The object of the empirical study is defined as the narratives of competitive strategy. Since the emphasis of the empirical research is the multi-voiced nature of competitive strategy narratives, the level of analysis is defined as multi-level from individual narratives to the formal narratives depicted by organizations and dominating industry bodies such as TCA. The methodology further provides an essential corrective approach to the recurring over-reliance on questionnaire surveys and semi-structured interviews within the construction-related research community. It is argued that the use of narrative interviews allowed the managers articulate their own stories regarding competitiveness and strategy making freely. The narrative analysis of the grey literature provides the contextual understanding and enables the researcher to make a comparison between the formal and individual narratives.

Chapter 5 consists of two sections. The first part of the chapter presents the analysis of the formal strategy narrative that was published as a quasi-historical book to explain the development of Turkish international contracting sector. The narrative building blocks emphasised in the formal narrative are explained as the key themes regarding the enactment of strategy, as interpreted on the sectoral level. It is argued that historical stories are used to create a collective sense of identity on the sectoral level. The second part of the chapter demonstrates the analysis of the empirical data obtained from 30 narrative interviews with senior managers from Turkish firms. The analysis demonstrates the Narrative Building Blocks (NBBs) regarding the competitiveness and strategy making on the individual level. Of particular interest is the way in which the heroic self-identities of managers are formed by mobilizing resources from pre-existing formalized narratives. A further point of discussion is the interaction between individual and collective level narratives.

Chapter 6 discusses the emergent findings from the narrative analysis against the relevant theories elaborated in chapter 3. The discussion is structured around the research objectives. First, the contributions of understanding strategy as a socially constructed narrative is explained. Second, the findings from sectoral narrative analysis are articulated. The TCA narrative is seen to comprise a skilfully designed strategy product which creates a collective identity on the sectoral level. Third, the outcomes of the individual level analysis are presented. Of particular importance is the acceptance of heroic identity across the interviewees and interconnectedness of strategy and identity work. Lastly, the key themes that underpin the sectoral and individual narratives are introduced as the constituent parts of the crafted identity for Turkish international contractors. The findings illustrate how these themes can be seen as the NBBs which inform stability and

change by encouraging some practices and hindering others for the described heroic journey of Turkish contractors.

Chapter 7 presents the conclusion of the PhD. The discussion starts with explaining how the empirical findings answer the research aim and objectives of the current research. Then, attention is given to the contribution made to existing knowledge. It is argued that while the narrative approach to understand strategy making provides a new theoretical understanding in construction related literature, it also provides a strong empirical argument to understand the narrative turn in organizational strategy studies. Of particular importance is to use of historical narratives as a strategic resource; while at the same time emphasizing the confluence of strategy making and identity work. This is followed by presenting the reflections on the methodological approach mobilized within the current research. Especially important is the use of literary plot structures as an analytical tool to understand strategy making in international contracting firms. Lastly, the limitations of the described research are explained with suggestions for further research.

2. Understanding the success of Turkish construction contractors

2.1 International contracting

2.1.1 Introduction

The aim of this section is to discuss the nature of international contracting. Initially, the historical development of international contracting and the changing requirements of undertaking construction projects in international markets are discussed. First, attention is given to the importance of international contracting, not only for the construction sector, but also for the broader economy within which such operations are based. Second, the motivating factors for the companies to compete in international area is presented. Third, the discussion is followed by a description of the extent to which international contracting differentiates from the contracting business in domestic market in regards to uncertainty and risk. Forth, modes of market entry for international contracting firms are described, with an emphasis on explaining the collaboration practices adopted by contracting firms. Fifth, the main factors affecting the market selection of international contractors are discussed, considering the extent to which the economic condition of the market impacts the expected risks and revenues. Finally, the main financial resources associated with international projects are explained. Of particular interest is the increasing expectation from contractors to provide financial solutions of the projects in addition to contracting services.

2.1.2 Characteristics of international contracting

Globalization and the associated shifts towards a free-market economy throughout the world have increased the importance of international contracting. International contracting is broadly described as contracting services delivered in a non-domestic market. Several authors have discussed the details of internationalization in the construction sector (Langford and Rowland, 1995; Strassmann and Wells, 1988; Bon and Crosthwaite, 2000; Mawhinney, 2001). While some have demonstrated a broad picture of international construction practices (i.e. Mawhinney, 2001), have focused on contractors from a particular country and examined their position in the international market (Langford and Rowland, 1995; Bon and Crosthwaite, 2000; Oz, 2001; Zhao and Shen, 2008). The general acceptance is that the nature of international construction work and its contribution to the broader economy run parallel with economic development. Bon and Crosthwaite (2000) contends that construction demand in developing economies is characterised by new work and large-scale projects hence also making a high contribution to national economic output. In contrast, the construction demand in developed countries comes mainly from repair and maintenance works, which corresponds to their relatively smaller economic contribution. Howes and Tah (2003) argue that contracting companies should analyse certain significant

domestic economic indicators, such as gross domestic product (GDP), national savings and balance of payments, the strength of the national currency, convertibility of the currency. They further contend that particular attention should be paid to the level of local technology and social infrastructure accessible in the targeted market. They argue that, in addition to the availability of professional staff and skilled labour, governance structures, legal system, codes and regulations, as well as social and cultural values should be properly considered. Such analysis helps contracting companies to assess the potential opportunity and risk of engaging in the markets.

The increasing importance of internationalization has attracted not only construction organizations but also governments. Most governments support domestic companies in taking part in international construction activities. As argued by Howes and Tah (2003), the export of expertise, goods and services through international contracting contributes to the balance of payments, therefore adds to national wealth. However, international contracting differs from domestic construction work. Each market involves diverse political, economic and social characteristics, as well as different ways of doing business. Contracting companies working in foreign countries are required to respond to such complexity and change. More specifically, they may need to alter their organization structure, business processes and marketing strategies (Lawrence and Lorsch, 1967). Hawk (2006) argues that construction companies are always expected to transform their practices in response to changing costs, availability of resources, alternative organizational forms, as well as changing technological and financial arrangements. In other words, continuous change and transformation is at the very core of international contracting. However, it has rarely been discussed in the current literature how such transformative processes are enacted. Instead, most of the discussion has been based on rational and static assumptions regarding strategy making in an internationalised context (i.e. Langford and Rowland, 1995, Langford and Male, 2001). Hence, the current literature requires a shift from such rational assumptions toward deepening the understanding of the enactment of strategies in new and potentially unpredictable work environments.

2.1.3 Development of international contracting

International construction goes back a long way in history. Langford and Male (2001) refer to infrastructure construction by the Romans in northern Europe, French contracting companies in Suez Canal, German construction activities on the Ankara-Baghdad railway project as examples of early international projects. The Second World War constitutes a significant milestone in the discussion about international contracting. Large-scale construction activities initiated in the post-war period became the main activities for Western contracting firms. International contracting then gained a new momentum with the increasing availability of large-scale aid programmes and loans from international institutions throughout 1950s and 1960s. For example, construction companies from USA started to expand beyond their domestic market as a consequence of the Marshall Aid programme (Dunn, 2004). Hence, Western

contracting companies began to increase their technical capability in international construction industry works long before those from developing regions (i.e. Strassman and Wells, 1988).

From the end of 1960s and the beginning of 1970s, the huge construction demand of post-war period declined in Western Europe. Whilst, the oil boom initiated massive construction demand in Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. Since the developing markets of MENA lacked the technical and financial capacity to conduct large-scale complex projects using domestic resources, they opened their markets to companies from developed countries. This created an opportunity for large Western contractors to increase their share of international contracts and enabled them to escape from domestic stagnation. More importantly, a low level of competition in the early period of the construction demand growth in MENA enabled Western contractors to achieve high rates of return. While construction companies from US, Europe and Japan dominated the international market within this period, they often worked in partnership with construction companies from emerging economies. For example, Korean contracting firms were the dominant partners of large-scale US companies in the 1970s (Raftery et al, 1998). It was also during that period within which Turkish contracting companies started their international activities in MENA region (Tayanç, 2011). Hence, the contracting companies from such emerging markets began to expand their experience and technical capacity in large-scale projects while working with larger contractors from developed regions. This change, coupled with their low-cost human resource and geographical and cultural proximity to the markets of construction demand, enabled them to increase their effectiveness in winning international contracts. As a result, the market shares of international construction providers shifted from developed countries to emerging economies, such as Korea, and Turkey, in the mid to late 1980s (Langford and Male, 2001). The developing economies that had high construction demand were subject to social, political and economic instabilities and considerable cultural differences to developed countries. Hence, contracting companies from developed regions lost their initial motivation in accessing those markets.

The attractiveness of high construction demand in the MENA region was limited by various economic problems and political instabilities in the 1980s. However, it was also the time that international contracting moved into another phase, with a shift towards free market economies and trade liberalization. The end of the Cold War and the dissolution of the Soviet Union created huge construction demand in the Eastern Europe and across Central Asia. The emergence of other Asian markets further increased the construction investment in Asia-Pacific in 1990s (i.e. Abdul-Aziz and Wong, 2010). While construction companies from USA and Western Europe dominated the Middle Eastern market, Japanese contractors led the Asian construction market. Japanese companies benefitted from their technological supremacy, financial capability and ability to form strategic alliances with host governments and local firms (Raftery et al, 1998). They also benefited from a government-led industrial policy which supported leading Japanese construction firms. However, the negative effects of the 1997

Asian financial crisis and the emergence of Chinese contractors as a strong power in international market changed the market share, not only in Asian markets but also globally. The negative effects of political instabilities in MENA region throughout 1990s led Western construction companies to increase their focus on developed regions or shift toward only offering consulting work. The main reason was that developed regions and consulting services were seen as less risky than undertaking construction projects in MENA. At that time, some of the biggest US contracting companies refocused on domestic projects and increased their focus domestic market opportunities in USA.

2.1.4 Changing nature of international construction market

International construction projects comprise several different practices, such as design contracting, consultancy, equipment, product and material supply or facility management. Such services used to be supplied by different organizations. However, changing trends in the industry have seen a proliferation of construction professional services, combining design, engineering and consultancy services. Also, there has been a shift towards integrated procurement systems, increasing the importance of Private Finance Initiatives (PFI) and Public Private Partnership (PPP) projects. This, in turn, has supported the further consolidation of consulting, contracting and facility management services. Therefore, organizations are expected to develop business practices that can respond to such consolidation trends, especially in large-scale international projects. As such, providing design and construction services, in combination with project finance solutions has become a requirement to win the tenders for large-scale international projects. Langford and Male (2001) argues that such new procurement systems require the creation of long-term relational contracts with clear supply chains. This has led to contracting firms to expand their practices beyond delivering technical works to managing supply chains.

International contracting means responding to the requirements of different markets and project types. Changes in the international markets not only include the shifts in the demand and market conditions. As argued by Han et al (2010), tender conditions, project types, financial requirements and business conduct have also been subject to transformation. Howes and Tah (2003) argue that domestic factors, such as availability of natural resources, geographic location, human resources and experience are important parameters that shape international contracting practices. As such, the scale and complexity of projects, type of client, project finance, and home country conditions emerge as crucial factors. Recent studies also emphasise the importance of entrepreneurship to compete successfully in international markets. For example, Abdul-Aziz and Wong (2010) discuss the internationalization of Malaysian construction firms. They define management's "go/no go" decision-making as the most important factor, followed by technology and knowledge capacity, good domestic reputation, market demand in host country and availability of experienced and capable staff. Such arguments are illustrative of the increasing dominance of the entrepreneurship and capabilities narratives in international contracting. Certainly, the notions of strategic management and marketing appear to have

become as important as operational and technical expertise.

Table 2-1. Key changes in international construction projects (Source: Han et al, 2010)

Classification	Past	Present and Future
Tender conditions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Exclusive (price-focused competition was dominant) *Requires local base *Mandatorily requires an engagement of local labour, equipment and materials, and local subcontractor 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Mutually negotiated (non-price factors are increasingly extended) *Diversified local requirements in both project scope and depth *Focuses more on technology transfer, risk protection for owners
Project types	Infrastructure projects dominate (standard quality level with standardized demands)	Industrial facilities, project-financed developmental projects, package deal projects with substituting payment with its natural resources dominate (higher quality requirements with more diversified demands)
Financial resources	Owner's domestic capital, international loans or aid from international banks or other agencies	Requires contractor's project financing, Build Operate Transfer (BOT) types of project initiation
Contractor selection	Lowest-bid wins the deal	Pre-tender negotiation or post-tender negotiation, to adjust contractual conditions, are becoming common
Selection criteria	More emphasis on construction experience and expertise	More focus on total capability for project development, financing, and management expertise
Level of competition	Often involves a few or a designated number of competitors	Often involves many competitors, with an emphasis on financing arrangements
Emerging markets	Mostly developing economies (Middle East, Asia)	Developing and resource-rich countries (Middle East, Central Asia, Africa, etc.)
Corporate management	Local context plays a key role	Multi-nationalization (cross-national/cultural management context) becomes crucial

Table 2-1 summarises the changing nature of working in international projects (Han et al, 2010). First, the tendering process seems to have shifted from focusing on bidding the lowest price to following a negotiated process with the clients. Contracting companies are expected to set up strong relationships with clients and address the local rules and expectations of different markets. International projects previously involved mostly infrastructure works requiring a 'standard' level of construction quality.

More recently they comprise of industrial facilities, within which contractors are both the operators and project finance providers. The contractors' ability to provide financial solutions has superseded the expectation for owners to provide capital or obtain project loans from third parties to fund projects. Thus the selection criteria for contracts has moved from simply one of technical expertise and experience, to include the contractor's capability for project development, financing, and management. Whilst, the Middle East and Asia are now established international construction markets, Africa and Central Asia have emerged more recently as resource-rich countries with growing construction demand. The organizational structures of the contracting companies have therefore evolved towards greater multi-nationalization, to respond to the local requirements of different markets. Langford and Male (2001) contend that the competitiveness and survival of firms seems dependent on the fit between firm and its environment, regardless of the size and the nature of the demand. This argument could be accepted as long as the 'fit' or relationship between firm and market environment is treated as a continuously evolving process, shaped by the practices of individuals who constitute the contracting firms and their interaction with a broader environment. Lastly, Hillebrand (2000) contends that demand for a particular type of work fluctuates more than the demand of the industry as a whole. Therefore, contractors are encouraged to spread their services in different types of works to remain their competitiveness.

2.1.5 Motivating factors to internalization

The demand for international construction projects has increased with globalization, in the shift towards free-market economies, trade liberalization and technological developments. A growing number of multinational companies have expanded investments on large-scale development projects in developing and least developed regions, further contributing to such demand. When coupled with the stagnation of domestic construction markets in many developed countries, large-scale construction companies have turned towards international projects to mitigate the cyclical 'boom and bust' nature of the construction industry to access the high revenues associated with increased demand elsewhere (Han et al, 2010). Langford and Rowland (1995) listed a number of reasons that motivate internationalization, including: maximizing profits, dividends, share value and stock market rating, securing viability and growth of the company, providing continuity of employment, maintaining the company's standing and autonomy, increasing career development and job satisfaction. They also stressed that contracting companies are further motivated to engage in international activities as it can contribute to increased employment and economic development in their domestic markets.

The international contracting sector contributes to the national trade balance and can promote an organization's expertise in certain types of construction or technology (Han, Diekmann, and Ock, 2005). Therefore, governments are keen to support construction companies to enter international markets, especially because international activities can have a positive boost to employment, trade

balance and income. For example, The Ministry of Trade (2019) lists the impact of international contracting on the Turkish economy as foreign currency inflow, increasing exports, employment volume, technology transfer, machinery and international market footprint. More importantly, contractors are more motivated to engage in those markets that they perceive offer an opportunity to gain higher returns from their activities. Langford and Male (2001) outline three motivating reasons for internationalization. First, when the firm objectives cannot meet their current portfolio in a domestic market because of market saturation, unreasonable returns, a decline in the domestic market demand and increased competitiveness. Second, when internationalization confers greater profitability and synergy than increasing the share of work in a domestic market, due to differences in the objectives of a firm and the nature of domestic market. Third, when domestic markets indicate a decrease in demand and an increase in the level of competitiveness, referred to as the 'grass is greener' syndrome (Langford and Male, 2001: 130). They also refer to the attractiveness of political stability, potential economic growth and level of competitiveness associated with a host country, as well as size of the project, potential for future work, and links between home and host countries. Hence, expanding to international contracting seems highly dependent on the current and expected market demands, and the level of competitiveness within home and host countries.

2.1.6 Uncertainty and risk

International construction works are generally associated with higher levels of risk than domestic construction contracts. Hence the companies that expand in international markets are seen to be more prone to end up with failures. The risks can be associated with political and economic contexts (broader country conditions), but also tied to the risks arising from the increased size and complexity of projects. While the former is more about the conducting business in different local contexts, the latter refers to the operational capabilities required to bring differentiated technical and financial solutions. Each market carries different political, economic, social and business risks and companies are expected to shape their practices to respond to such local differences. Working in international projects also means dealing with different trade rules and regulations, exchange controls, tariffs and barriers that are imposed by national governments (Howes and Tah, 2003). Such parameters require developing management skills beyond the rules of the domestic market (Langford and Male, 2001). Although organizations might apply risk management practices to protect themselves, it can be hard to foresee some emergent risks in advance. The general acceptance is that construction works in high risk markets are perceived as an opportunity for higher rates of return due to lower levels of competition when compared to more stable markets (i.e. Bon and Crosthwaite, 2000). However, the perception of risk and uncertainty seems to change according to the economic conditions of the contractors' home country.

An especially important risk factor seems to be the unexpected political and economic changes which might incur substantial losses to contracting companies. In essence, political risks usually cannot be

solved in short time periods. For example, the Turkish contractors' practices in Libya show that contracting companies can become entwined with international politics and suffer from unresolvable problems over long time periods (Tayanç, 2011). More recently, the political conflict between Russia and Turkey (linked to the loss of a Russian warplane over Syrian territories) has had a substantial impact on Turkish contractors' market share. It is important to note that the markets with high construction demand, such as in MENA countries, are also regions that have faced high levels of political instability for the last 30 years. The commonly repeated narrative is that the contracting companies from developed countries prefer working in safer markets, whereas higher risk markets are seen an opportunity for the companies from developing countries (Mawhinney, 2001). Turkish contractors' effectiveness in Afghanistan provides a good example for this risk acceptance argument. The TCA narrative strongly emphasise the Turkish contractors' involvement in Afghanistan as a positive case (Tayanç, 2011). However, it also indicates that while some companies returned with high profits, it resulted in high losses and even total failure for others. Uncertainty and risks are not associated with just developing regions. All markets are open to risk in different forms. For example, the 2008 economic crisis and its negative effects on US and Europe markets constitute a good example for this assumption. While they have been the most stable construction markets in general, the unexpected turbulence in financial markets has dragged these markets into a decline. Yang et al (2015) list economic instabilities, the steady rise in material and labour prices and currency fluctuations as important risk factors for international contractors in that context.

2.1.7 Entry mode selection

Market entry mode is another significant topic in the existing literature on international construction contracting. Chen (2008) identifies two different market entry modes: 'permanent' and 'mobile'. A permanent mode of market entry is seen as establishing ownership or equity investment for long-term business development in a market. Permanent entry to a market is associated with attaining local knowledge, gaining new capabilities and setting-up local networks more effectively than a mobile or temporary mode. Collaboration with a local company or establishing a temporary organization to enter a market for a project is labelled as a mobile entry mode. The key difference is that a permanent market entry means allocating more resources, taking investment risks and becoming less flexible than a mobile entry. It seems that Turkish contractors tend to use mobile mode of market entry by collaborating with local or other foreign companies to enter different markets (Tayanç, 2011). But it seems that some mobile companies have shifted to adopt more permanent modes of entry in some countries. For example, the firms ENKA and Renaissance work in several markets based on the mobile mode but both of them have also a permanent establishment in Russia.

Collaboration with other companies has become a key way to help reduce market entry barriers. For example, Tayanç (2011) argues that setting up consortia helped Turkish contractors to enter Soviet

markets in the early market entry process. Important benefits of working in collaboration with other companies include overcoming financial, managerial and technical barriers. Joint venture (JV) companies are seen as another key collaboration practice, referring to a temporary partnership between different companies in order to execute a construction project. Chen (2008) argues that JV partners can be companies from home or host country, or alternatively a company from a third country. As argued by Howes and Tah (2003) partners share their resources, knowledge, skills and assets, perform with mutual understanding and objectives and share profits. As all partners bring some type of strength, e.g. technical expertise, financial capability, companies are able to undertake complex projects that they could not perform by themselves. Selecting one of the partners from the home country where the project takes place is an accepted practice to help deal with local rules and regulations more easily (Jung, Han, and Lee, 2012). Working in JVs also is helpful for the local companies to increase their competitiveness, gain prequalification and share financial risks. Some governments make it a requirement for at least one domestic partner, as a condition for foreign contractors to bid for projects in their countries. JV partners do not only have to include contracting companies, they can include financial institutions, engineering and / or consulting companies.

Contracting companies might also prefer to work through merger and acquisition, which involves more strategic and long-term relationships and investment for potential future work. This is usually preferred by large companies which see the huge potential for future projects in certain markets. Acquisition of a local company can help reduce the political and cultural barriers that could be faced during the project process. Authors such as Howes and Tah (2003) argue that contracting firms might prefer to acquire a company downstream in the supply chain to help focus on some specialized projects. They also contend that closer relationships and strategic alliances with upstream clients or other contractors similar in size and capacity might help extend business networks. In essence, setting up in collaboration with other companies is generally an accepted practice to enter different markets, regardless of the type of collaborative arrangement adopted. This is also in line with the recent trends towards consolidation and integrated procurement systems, which lead companies to combine their powers with others.

2.1.8 Foreign market selection

Foreign market selection is an important parameter in international contracting. Typical factors affecting market selection can include: the level of competition, host country rules and regulations, perceived risk, geographical and cultural similarities. Langford and Male (2001) contend that stability of a country and guarantee of payment are the essential parameters for contractors when deciding which markets to enter. Authors such as Bon and Crosthwaite (2000), Dunn (2004) and Mawhinney (2001) suggest evaluation of risk and the expected revenues from different markets should be based on the economic development level of the countries. Mawhinney (2001:35) explains this as seen in Table 2.2:

Table 2-2. Risks and rewards associated with level of economic development (Sourced from Mawhinney, 2001)

Economic development level	Risks	Rewards
Developed	Low	Low
Developing	Medium	Medium
Country in transition	High	Medium/ High
Emerging	High	High

It should be noted that categorizing countries with such labels might change depending on various subjective interpretations. However, such categorization might help the contracting companies to compare the expectations of different markets. Dunn (2004) contends that the countries in transition and emerging regions attract contracting companies by accommodating demand for infrastructure projects, the availability of aid funding and high revenues. The common assumption is that such higher revenues attract the companies from developing countries much more than the companies from developed regions, as discussed in Section 2.1.5. The highly standardized business processes in developed markets is seen as a key barrier for international contracting, impeding market entry and possibility of obtaining high revenues. Tayanç (2011) supports this argument by emphasizing the bureaucratic processes in Western countries have been seen as a key barrier for Turkish contractors to enter such markets.

In the literature specific to Turkish contractors, Özorhon, Dikmen and Birgönül (2006) developed a decision support tool to be used by contracting companies when selecting the markets that they should seek to enter. The model is developed based on an empirical study, where 215 international contracting cases were evaluated by ten senior managers from large contracting companies. The data was collected from the governmental institution responsible for collecting information about international projects carried out by Turkish contractors. They argue that the availability of funds, construction demand in host country, contract/payment type, and country risk were found to be the most important determinants of expected revenues, and hence market selection (Özorhon, Dikmen and Birgönül, 2006). However, the TCA narrative indicates that Turkish contractors have hardly followed a rational process of market selection (Tayanç, 2011). Instead, the markets where the Turkish contractors engage seem to be shaped by existing networks and path dependencies. For example, Turkish contractors' initial involvement in the Libyan market was heavily shaped by established government networks at the time. Similarly, the initial foothold in Soviet Union was mediated through barter agreements signed between two countries. Alternatively, as argued by Strassmann and Wells (1988) Turkish contractors' involvement in Saudi Arabia was heavily shaped by cultural and historical proximity. Tayanç (2011) supports the emphasised importance of networks to enter different markets, describing the difficulties experienced by Turkish

contractors seeking to enter Morocco and Algeria. It is argued that those countries had established trade agreements with Italy and France, and such existing networks enabled the contracting firms from those countries to win tenders ahead of Turkish contractors.

2.1.9 Source of finance

The construction industry is heavily shaped by broader economic conditions, especially the effect of economic crises. It is generally accepted that when there is an economic crisis, the construction industry is damaged more than other sectors and it takes a longer time to recover such negative effects. In essence, construction demand is seen as directly related to the economic prosperity of the wider market conditions. As argued in section 2.1.3, international contracting is heavily shaped by the demand generated from oil income. The availability of the project finance is clearly a key parameter for international construction projects. Langford and Rowland (1995) argue that the main financial resources associated with international projects are development aid, public finance, private finance and different combinations of such resources. Mawhinney (2001) argues that the financial sources available for large-scale investment projects evolve with a shift to the next level in the economic development (i.e.: from being an emerging market to developing market). This points to a general tendency to a shift from depending predominantly on international aid towards adopting differentiated proportions of public and private finance. The increasing complexity of project types and a shift towards the integrated procurement systems, such as Private Finance Initiative (PFI), also lead contractors to find mixed solutions for complex financial requirements.

The international construction industry requires more complicated solutions for finance and monetary problems than domestic markets. As argued by Howes and Tah (2003), international contracting companies are expected to deal with fluctuating currency exchange rates, government controls, acquiring resources from international institutions. Hence, proving the capacity of the organization to manage the risks associated with the projects is an important factor in obtaining the required finance from such institutions.

The type of project finance adopted depends on the client type, scale and complexity of the project, market conditions in the project location, and associated procurement systems. Large scale projects are generally initiated by finding financial sources from third parties rather than depending on the client's own money. Project duration and expected time for the return on the investment are also listed as key factors affecting the preferred project finance type. Mawhinney (2001) argues that while working capital and short-term borrowing, such as through trade credits, can be the main source for short-term financing, bank loans and leasing agreements could be more common for medium-term finance. Whilst, issuing shares and secured stocks are seen as long-term sources of capital (Howes and Tah, 2003). Hillebrandt (2000) contends that contractors from developing countries are largely dependent on banks

for their working capital. Hence, the interest rates that the contractors are faced with can affect the decision of bid/no bid for large-scale projects. It is generally accepted that the advanced financial systems and project financing agreements in developed countries give contractors from these countries an increased opportunity to undertake projects, benefiting from low interest rates. Financing of international projects in least developed regions is seen to be more open higher risk and potential problems associated with fluctuations in foreign exchange rates and governmental exchange controls (Howes and Tah, 2003). In such cases, negotiations with local governments for financial incentives, such as tax subsidies, loans and guarantees, are seen the ways of solving these financial problems.

Accessing finance has been one of the key challenges for Turkish contractors since the beginning of their international expansion. Turkish contracting firms are mostly private, family-run, organizations, except a few companies that are publicly owned. The domestic banks are accused of charging unacceptable interest rates, impeding the acceptance of letters of guarantee given by Turkish banks for large-scale international projects (Tayanç, 2011). Providing project credits from foreign banks is seen as very problematic for most contractors. Such arguments are usually followed by emphasizing the lack of Turkish government support for the international contracting sector (i.e. Öz, 2001). Project finance seems to have become a more important issue with the increasing expectation that contractors make a financial contribution to a project. The common narrative is a trend towards ‘integrated’ procurement systems, i.e. a consortium takes responsibility for finance, design, construction and operation.

2.1.10 Summary

This section provides a brief description of international construction contracting and highlights its importance to the broader economy. The key turning points for international construction came with the Second World War, the oil boom in MENA, the dissolution of Soviet Union and more recently an increased demand for construction works in Africa. It is argued that each market requires different business models, as well as accommodating differentiated political and economic risks. Therefore, the current static assumptions dominating the literature on contracting strategy making fails to answer how contracting companies can successfully compete in such variable markets.

The difference between international construction from domestic works and the associated risks have been outlined, including the differences in political, economic, cultural and geographical contexts. The factors that motivate contracting firms to enter international markets have been considered, such as accessing opportunities for higher returns and reduced competition. This was followed by a description of the preferred collaborative practices that enable the contracting companies to enter different markets, such as merger and acquisition and joint ventures. Lastly, the growing tendency towards integrated procurement systems is identified within which the contracting firms are expected to develop project finance. These discussion points provide a necessary background for the following section that

elaborates the development of Turkish international contracting services.

2.2 Turkish contractors in the geo-political context

2.2.1 Introduction

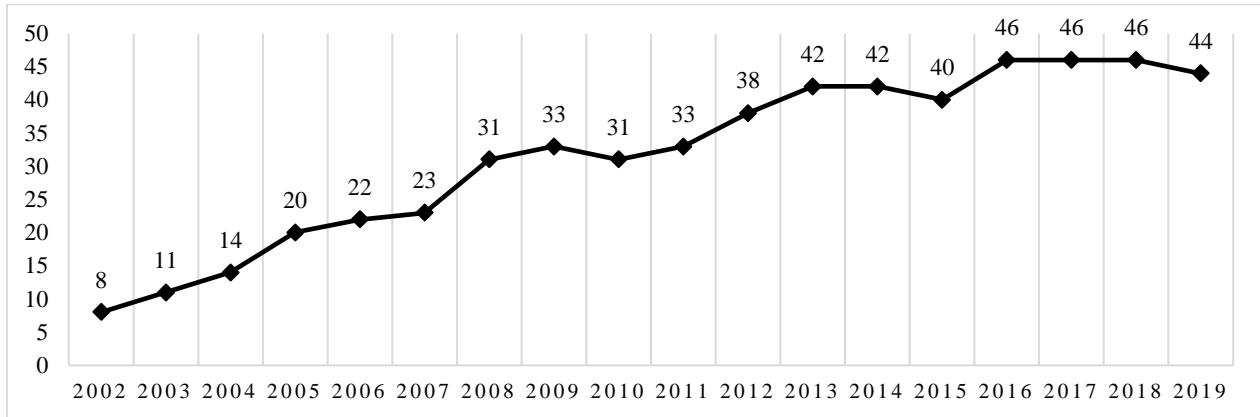
This section discusses the development of the construction contracting sector in Turkey. It also describes the broader evolving contexts that have impacted the operations and activities of Turkish contracting firms. Turkey has experienced three military coups, a coup attempt and five large economic crises since 1923, and such instabilities were followed by certain policy changes within the political and economic systems. The market for Turkish contractors has been characterized by constant economic and political vicissitudes. Such discontinuities, associated with both domestic and foreign markets, have had a great impact on the operations and activities of Turkish contracting companies. However, the existing literature on international contracting pays little attention to the geo-political context within which Turkish international contracting services have been delivered.

Turkish contractors are commonly held to have first commenced international operations in 1972 (Tayanç, 2011). They seem to have significantly lagged behind their competitors in Europe and the United States who have been active in international markets since the early 1900s (Mawhinney, 2001; Langford and Male, 2001). Yet, despite being late starters, by 2019 Turkish contractors accounted for 44 of the top 250 contractors in the international ranking produced by Engineering News Record (ENR) (Engineering News Record, 2019). This represents a significant growth from 2003, when only eight companies were listed amongst the top 250 (see Figure 2-2). Whilst such rankings are undoubtedly subject to manipulation, those produced by ENR stand up well to academic scrutiny (Lu, 2014). Since 1972 they have undertaken no less than 9,801 projects in 124 different countries (Ministry of Trade, 2019). The total value of these projects exceeds \$386,9 billion. Turkish contractors have been increasingly successful, often operating in turbulent, high-risk markets characterised by conflict, political discord and stark discontinuities, places where Western contractors fear to tread.

Figure 2-1. The broader events in geo-political context impacting the Turkish international contractors within the history of Turkish Republic (Developed from Tayanç, 2011)

1923	<i>Statism and protectionism</i>	1950	<i>Economic policy shifts: From early liberalization to neo-statist policies</i>	1970	<i>Integration into international market</i>	1980	<i>Liberalization and integration into the world economy</i>	1990	<i>Product and market diversification</i>	2000	<i>Global boom era</i>	2010	<i>New period in exterior Instabilities</i>	2019
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reforms in Turkish Republic Great Depression - II. World War- Shortage of construction firms and practitioners - Inefficient financial and technical capacity - Inefficient financial and technical capacity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Engagement with international institutions and finance (IMF/NATO/UN) - Establishment of Turkish Contractors Association (TCA) - Establishment of initial contracting firms - Increasing technical and financial capabilities of construction companies - I. Military coup - Shift from democrat party government to liberal party governance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - OPEC (Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries) oil embargo/1973 oil crises - Arab-Israel War - Iranian Revolution/1979 oil crises - Cyprus War - II. Military coup - Trade agreements with Libya - First international construction project in Libya - Increasing technical and financial capabilities of construction companies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Devaluation of Turkish Lira - Increasing monetarism trend - Shift towards free market economy - III. Military coup - Trade agreements with Soviet Union - Iran-Iraq War - Demolition of Berlin Wall - Establishment of Turkish Exim bank 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Collaboration among Turkish firms - Custom Union with Europe - 1994 Economic crises - Dissolution of the Soviet Union – 15 new countries - Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait - Lockerbie 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 2001 domestic economic crises - Establishment of Justice and Development party - 2008 global economic crises - Increasing political and economic relations with Islamic countries - Trade agreements with Africa/ Opening Turkish Embassies in African countries - Increasing specialization of Turkish contracting firms 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Arab Spring - Libyan Civil War - Syrian Civil War - ISIS threat - Instabilities in Iraq - Flight crises with Russia - Political uncertainties with US 							

Figure 2-2. The number of Turkish contractors within ENR top 250* international contractors list (Adopted from Ministry of Trade, 2019)



The expansion of international Turkish contracting has experienced key turning points, in almost every decade since the beginning of Turkish Republic (Figure 2-1). Earlier decades can be labelled as the domestic period, involving increased numbers of construction industry professionals, the establishment of the very first contracting firms and growing experience in domestic projects. The 1970s is associated with the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) oil crisis, increasing construction demand in the MENA region and gaining an initial foothold into international markets. The 1980s marks Turkey’s shift towards a free market economy, proliferation of domestic projects, and increased international experience through working with large-scale foreign contractors. The 1990s is the market entry phase, where contractors enter the vast geography of old Soviet Union and expand their technical and financial capabilities in specialized project types. The 2000s are seen as a boom period, with massive growth in annual project volumes (Figure 1-1), increased embeddedness in MENA and post-Soviet countries and an expansion into new markets. The current decade, from 2010 onwards, involves several political and economic instabilities within the markets, causing a series of rises and falls in project volumes. The details of each period are discussed in further detail in the following sections.

2.2.2 1923-1950: Statism and protectionism

The Republic of Turkey was founded in 1923, after various long-lasting wars resulted in the collapse of Ottoman Empire. The Ottoman Empire had failed to keep pace with the modernisation process that Western countries had experienced at the beginning of the 20th century. Turkey was subject to large cultural and social revolutions in the shift from monarchy to democracy. The early years of the republic were also associated with an underlying economic weakness, as a result of debts inherited from the Ottoman Empire

and the past wars. The Great Depression of the 1920s further decreased the exports and worsened the Turkish economy, which was heavily based on agricultural production. Statism was the guiding principle for the Turkish government, and keeping the government budget without deficits and inflation were the dominant economic considerations.

It was during this period Turkey also experienced extensive political, social and cultural revolutions. Such substantial changes could only be realized by efficient transportation and communication systems, and priority was given to the construction of new railways and nationalization of existing transportation systems (Pamuk, 2008). Nevertheless, the adverse effects of the Second World War worsened the economy and limited the pace of railway construction in the preceding years. Although Turkey did not participate in the Second World War, large resources were allocated to maintenance of the army in this period (Pamuk, 2008). More importantly, Turkey ended up becoming a member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and engaged in the US Marshall Aid programme. The American intervention through the Marshall Funds saw a shift away from railway infrastructure development towards road construction. Hence, Turkey initiated a 9-year road construction program which became the main construction activity between 1948-1957 (Tekeli and İlkin, 2004). More importantly, the increasing impact of the United States as the dominant world power after the Second World War promoted a shift from the dominant statist politics of the first decades of the 20th century, towards a more liberal economic model and open political stance in the 1950s.

The initial years of the republic saw the emergence of the Turkish construction sector despite all the prevalent political and economic difficulties. Early contracting firms were forming despite a scarcity of capital and construction industry professionals (Batmaz, Emiroğlu, and Ünsal, 2006). The following quote from Turkey's former Prime Minister Süleyman Demirel describes the context clearly:

[The] Turkish Republic did not have engineers, businessmen, capital, qualified manpower, technology in the initial period. There was a slow progress in first 30 years of republic. However, Turkish contractors were involved in large infrastructure projects and enhanced their knowledge working with foreign partners in 1950s (Demirel, 2010; cited in Tayanc, 2011).

As described in the quote, the shortage of construction industry professionals was one of the key problems. Since the technical and economic capabilities of initial construction companies were not enough to realize large-scale projects, they engaged in the construction activities as sub-contractors for foreign contracting firms, which helped to increase their knowledge and experience (Batmaz, Emiroğlu, and Ünsal, 2006).

Importantly, the Turkish government initiated an education strategy during the 1930s and sent many students abroad, raising the first generation of Turkish architects and engineers (Tekeli and İlkin, 2004;

Turkish Contractors Association, 2019). At the same time, the scarcity of construction professionals was filled by several European architects and engineers, who migrated to Turkey due to economic and political problems in the West. This increased the dominance of foreign construction industry professionals in the early construction works by the Turkish Republic. However, the statist policies and protectionist economic environment limited the activities of the construction sector within the bounds of publicly financed projects, therefore the construction activities were more limited until the 1950s. Nevertheless, several irrigation and dam projects involved construction programmes, in addition to various transportation construction projects.

2.2.3 1950-1969: Economic policy shifts: From early liberalization to neo-statist policies

Turkey experienced major structural changes in economic and political policies during the 1950s. There was a shift from an authoritarian single party to multi-party democracy in 1950 which brought early attempts at liberalization. Turkey was ruled by the Democrat Party from 1950 to 1960. The government agenda supported liberalization and an agricultural sector oriented towards integration with the world economy (Pamuk, 2008). However, towards the end of the decade, Turkey faced fiscal and payment crises and introduced, with the International Monetary Fund (IMF), a stabilization program. Such economic instabilities were coupled with the repressive regimes of the Democrat Party and concluded with a military coup in 1960. A military government followed this until the election of Liberal Party government in October 1961. This new liberal government returned back to statist policies and started an import-substituting industrialization strategy, with five-year developments plans (Öniş and Şenses, 2009). The first period of the 1960s was associated with further economic and political instabilities and as a result saw limited public investment in construction (Tayanç, 2011).

Around a similar time, Turkey started to get more involved in international institutions such as the United Nations (UN), the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and IMF (1961). These changes brought new financial opportunities to the construction sector and the second part of the 1960s experienced a boom in road, irrigation and railway construction. An especially important milestone was NATO membership, as it led to many large infrastructure projects such as airport, oil plants, military buildings and port projects (Tayanç, 2011). As a result, the Turkish construction industry became the central tool of capital accumulation. It resulted in increased migration to the urban areas and accelerated housing construction projects in the larger cities. More importantly, partnership projects with foreign contractors in large scale infrastructure and engineering projects helped to increase the knowledge and experience of Turkish contractors (Batmaz, Emiroğlu, and Ünsal, 2006). It was during this period that first generation of local engineers and architects graduated from universities and gained experience with the large infrastructural investments realized in 1950s. Although Turkey overcame the lack of construction industry professionals,

financial problems remained an obstacle at this time. Economic problems, coupled with political uncertainties, meant that investment in domestic construction activities declined and contracting firms started seeking new opportunities in international markets towards the end of the 1960s.

2.2.4 1970-1979: Integration into international markets

The 1970s corresponds with a period of increased economic and political instability, as well as rising foreign debt and increased inflation (Tavakoli and Tulumen, 1990). As a result, Turkey experienced a second military coup on 12 March 1971. This was followed by four coalition governments, which produced weak economic growth throughout 1970s. There were 11 different cabinets between 1971 and 1980, Turkey's foreign trade deficit also increased at this time, with various unsuccessful short-term economic strategies (Tayanç, 2011). Turkey was subject to economic embargos as a result of Turkey's invasion of Cyprus in 1974. Such events suppressed the development of new construction projects in domestic area once again. At the same time, government policy supported the internalization of contracting companies in order to help increase foreign currency flows into the country. Significantly, the experience gained from working in partnership with foreign contractors within the infrastructure projects initiated in 1960s, encouraged Turkish contracting companies to seek out new opportunities in international markets (Batmaz, Emiroğlu, and Ünsal, 2006).

The initial interest of Turkish contractors in international markets can be traced back to the domestic economic recession of the early 1970s (Giritli et al., 1990). Turkish contractors were partly forced to look at international markets, but at the same time the boom in the oil sector created a massive demand for construction throughout the MENA region. 1972 became a milestone year for Turkish contracting firms because they were engaged in the first international construction project gained by STFA's with Tripoli Harbour Project in Libya. In essence, Libya became the very first market of Turkish contractors' international expansion. It was not only because of Libya's huge construction demand due to the growth in oil income, but also as a consequence of the political and historical connections between Libya and Turkey. Following independence, Libya (the 1969 Libyan coup d'état) expelled US and UK installations inside the country, deported the Italians and went into a nationalization programme within the oil sector (Tayanç, 2011). There was a shortage of qualified people and infrastructure to meet the high construction demand in the local market, similar to the post-war period in Turkey. It was at that same period that the ruling Turkish government (Prime Minister Bülent Ecevit) ran in parallel to politics in Libya (Tayanç, 2011). In this context, Turkey took advantage of the cultural, geographical and historical connections and gained the advantage over its competitors. Two different trade agreements, signed between Turkey and Libya, paved the way for the increased dominance of Turkish contracting companies in Libya (Giritli et al, 1990). Turkish

contractors further benefited from the endorsement of certain leading bureaucrats, who were educated in Turkey with the scholarships given by Turkish government. Turkish contracting firms were exempted from certain tender conditions through the mobilization of such personal networks (Tayanç, 2011). These initial international operations enabled Turkish companies to work with other international companies and they learnt about the standards of international contracting and how to work in partnership with foreign companies.

While the increase in oil prices created a market for Turkish contracting firms internationally, this unexpected boom caused serious economic problems for the domestic market. As a result, domestic construction works in Turkey came to a standstill and Turkish contractors shifted attention to focus more on international contracting. They extended their international reach with new projects in Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Iraq. For example, only Muslims are allowed to do construction work in Mecca, which meant Turkish contractors had the advantage, getting involved in development projects associated with the oil price boom (Tayanç, 2011). Libya corresponded to three quarters of the total volume of work (Turkish Contractors Association, 2019). This consisted of industrial plant, harbour and transportation projects, more than 70% of the international projects undertaken in such initial decade. Tayanç (2011) argues that this initial period of internationalization was characterized by a higher risk-taking approach by Turkish contractors, a government push to bring foreign currency, increased construction demand in the MENA region, and privileges given to Turkish contractors. Giritli et al (1990) also emphasised that Turkey's cultural and geographical proximity to such oil rich countries and the availability of supporting industries in Turkey helped to shape the upwards trajectory of Turkish contractors' overseas expansion. On the other hand, Özorhon (2012) identified key weaknesses in Turkish firms at the time, including low capacity in design projects, language problems, low level of international experience, and bureaucratic problems related to the work force and the military coup. Although these studies provide useful insights about Turkish contractors' initial years, they hardly address the question regarding how strategies were developed and enacted to respond to such problems.

2.2.5 1980-1990: Liberalization and integration into the world economy

The 1980s were characterized with a trend towards increased monetarism and neo-liberal movements around the world. This was linked to a shift from closed economic models to free-market economies. In parallel with the changes in global context, Turkey experienced neo-liberal restructuring and integration into the world economy (Öniş and Şenses, 2009). More importantly, the strong unrest between the right and left political wings and the economic failures of short duration governments throughout 1970s resulted with the third biggest military coup of Turkey. It caused radical changes in economic and political structure of

the country. Turkey was governed by the military for three years and this was followed by the period of leadership by Prime Minister Turgut Özal (1983-1989) until the 4th quarter of 1989. This period is known as ‘Özalism’ in Turkish history and he was seen as a key person driving the neo-liberal shift in Turkey. He was popular, supporting foreign country visits by various business groups, including the managers of large contracting firms, to stimulate their involvement in overseas markets. This period is largely accepted as a key turning point for accelerating the internationalization of Turkish contracting services (Tayanç, 2011). The establishment of Turkish Eximbank is also seen as contributing to greater financial capacities of Turkish contractors.

These neo-liberal shifts also saw increased economic activities in the domestic area. Foreign investment entering the country increased from \$97 million in 1980 to \$665.2 million dollars in 1987 with the release of foreign investment (Tayanç, 2011). Such proliferation enabled huge building developments and large-scale infrastructure projects, such as Istanbul-Gebze motorway, Ataturk Dam and Second Bosphorus Bridge in the domestic market. Hence, large contracting firms looking for projects abroad in 1970s returned back to domestic sector to undertake such projects. These projects enabled them to gain experience in large-scale energy and infrastructure works. Such experience improved their capability to work in partnership with others, and expanded their technical and managerial knowledge. More importantly, Turkish firms grasped the details of working with global finance.

On the other hand, the economic boom in oil-exporting countries in the 1970s had also raised various disagreements and they started to experience a rise in economic problems towards the end of 1980s. As a result, activities of Turkish contracting companies in the MENA market were damaged on the second half of 1980s. Payment problems and incomplete projects in Libya emerged as the main challenges for contractors throughout 1980s (Tayanç, 2011). At the same time, the Iran-Iraq War (1980-87) increased the risks faced by Turkish contractors. However, the devastating effects of war also created new opportunities for contractors in post-war period. Despite these problems, no less than 91% of international work was secured in Libya, Saudi Arabia and Iraq (Turkish Contractors Association, 2019). Housing and dam projects consisted more than half of the volume of this work. In 1987, Turkish firms accounted for \$17 billion in international contracts collectively, in contrast with \$1.629 million in 1978 (Giritli et al., 1990). Such progress highlighted the increasing effectiveness of Turkish contracting companies to win contracts in the MENA region, despite all political and economic unrest, whilst also expanding their involvement in new markets. Especially significant, was the emergence of the Soviet Union as a new potential market. Turkey signed two natural gas barter protocols with Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) in 1984 and 1987 and agreed to cover some part of gas payments with construction services. These agreements were the starting point for Turkish contractors’ in engaging the Russian market (Batmaz, Emiroğlu, and Ünsal,

2006). The demolition of Berlin Wall in 1989 and the dissolution of Soviet Union in 1991 became another turning point in the development of Turkish international contracting.

Tayanç (2011) argues that the large-scale infrastructure projects in the domestic market, the trade agreements signed with the Soviet Union, increased construction demand after Iran-Iraq war and the expansion of partnerships with foreign construction companies were the main strengths of this period. On the other hand, Giritli *et al* (1990) highlights the financial weakness of Turkish firms, lack of bank credits and overly stringent custom regulations as the key problems they faced at the time. Özorhon (2012) extends such discussion by emphasizing the effects of economic crises on supporting industries, low capacity in design projects, the family business mentality of Turkish companies, and political problems with Libya as the weaknesses of this period. However, the existing literature on Turkish international contracting hardly examines how it was that Turkish contractors succeeded in expanding their market share, despite these described weaknesses and the political and economic instabilities in the markets.

2.2.6 1990-1999: Product and market diversification

This was the period that Iraq attacked Kuwait and the first Gulf War began in 1990. The economic problems of Libya increased, with the embargos of Western countries. Despite such increasing instabilities in the MENA region, the dissolution of Soviet Union had created new market opportunities for contractors. The post-Soviet states went into large-scale building developments and refurbishment projects in order to renovate and rebuild the timeworn built environment of the Cold War period. Such demand for construction activities and earlier business agreements, coupled with geographical proximity, meant that the post-Soviet countries became the biggest market for Turkish contractors. Turkish contractors won the significant proportion of the housing tenders for Soviet soldiers (Tayanç, 2011). Such projects were mainly funded by Germany and this increased the recognition of Turkish contractors within Europe. Especially important was a growing number of partnership agreements with Western companies. Another important step was taken with the initiation of a Customs Union between Turkey and European Community (1995), initiated 32 years after its definition in Ankara Agreement in 1963. Whilst this did not change the Turkish contractors' problems on entering the European market, however it did create new opportunities for the expansion of partnerships with Western contractors.

Turkey went into an economic crisis in 1994 (5th April Decisions) and experienced the biggest current foreign deficit in the country's history. Such economic instabilities not only led to a fall in domestic construction projects, but also damaged the financial credibility of Turkish companies. Once again, however the decreased demand in domestic market coincided with increased opportunities in foreign

markets. Hence, more Turkish contracting companies increased their practices in the international area (Tayanç, 2011). The experience gained by constructing and operating large-scale tourism projects in Turkey throughout 1980s led some companies to expand their practices beyond contracting services to making investments in real estate and manufacturing industries. In that period, joint venture agreements and BOT projects became the preferred arrangements to overcome the limited financial opportunities to work in international contracting (Öz, 2001). As such, consortiums were set up between large Turkish contractors to strengthen the financial capabilities of Turkish contractor through the market entry to the old Soviet Region (Tayanç, 2011).

More than half of the international contracting project volume was undertaken in the post-Soviet region within this decade. The proportion of Russian Federation contracts jumped from 1.7% to 35.1% of the annual international work volume (Turkish Contractors Association, 2019). Similar to the experiences of Libya and Middle East countries in 1970s, Turkic republics such as Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, and Uzbekistan started to benefit from increased income derived from oil and gas production. Central Asia became a key region, with huge demand for large-scale investments, not only in building projects but also industrial and infrastructural developments. Although the volume of housing projects was the highest project area, with 20.3% share in Turkish international contractors work volume, there was a great diversification in project types at this time (Turkish Contractors Association, 2019). The experiences gained in these different project types led many Turkish contractors to specialize in more specific types of construction works (Tayanç, 2011). More importantly, the work quality and the short project delivery time were described the underlying reasons why Turkish contractors achieved successful market entry to the post-Soviet region.

2.2.7 2000-2009: Global boom era

Turkey experienced its biggest economic crisis in 2001, as a result of fiscal and balance of payment problems, along with structural troubles in the banking system (Öniş and Şenses, 2009). This resulted in another standstill in domestic construction projects. Additionally, unfair domestic bidding conditions, with abnormally low budgets, led more contracting firms to focus on international markets (Tayanç, 2011). Some contracting companies ended their activities in domestic market and focused purely on international projects. The annual volume of business undertaken abroad increased sharply from \$4.4 billion in 2002 to nearly \$25.9 billion in the years of 2007 (Turkish Contractors Association, 2019). However, the 2008 global economic crisis affected this positive trend in the international markets. Growth of the construction industry declined in the following few years (Figure 1-2). Although the 2008 crisis caused some economic problems, Turkey was not affected as much as other Western countries (Tayanç, 2011). On the contrary, Turkey went

into a more stable economic and political period, especially when compared with the highly volatile characteristics of previous periods. The construction industry was also one of the main sectors supported by the ruling government, which had continued its dominant role over the market since 2002.

The 2000s correspond with a boom in oil prices and therefore saw increased investments in construction projects from oil and gas importing countries like the Gulf Region. Turkish contractors were involved in large-scale development projects, such as Palm Islands, skyscrapers and airports, which required a high level of specialization and engineering work. Furthermore, Afghanistan and Iraq became important markets in the post-war period, with rebuilding activities. Tayanç (2011) emphasises that work in such regions was an indication of Turkish contractors' risk acceptance, a key characteristic which differentiates them from Western contractors. He further contends that Turkish contractors benefited from cultural and religious proximity to these regions. For example, hiring Afghan workers and setting up effective lines of communication with local people was seen a key factor of their success in accessing the Afghan market. The main characteristic of this period is described as expansion of Turkish contracting companies around the world (Turkish Contractors Association, 2019). Tayanç (2011) argues that Turkish contractors improved their global reputation by offering high speed, low cost service and high-quality results. Furthermore, the geographical proximity to the post-Soviet countries and MENA region were seen as key factors, bringing logistic advantages to Turkish contractors. Hence, they benefited from a combination of cost advantage alongside with geographical and cultural advantages. In summary, the experience gained throughout 30 years of international work led some companies to specialize in certain project types (e.g. transportation, harbour) and a greater emphasis on investing in other business lines (e.g. real estate, energy).

2.2.8 2010-2019: New period in exterior instabilities

Turkish contractors have been notably successful in navigating a prolonged period of instability across the Middle East region, comprising not only the ongoing civil war in Syria but also a series of conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq. Libya was an especially important market prior to the 2011 overthrow of Colonel Gaddafi, which rendered market growth predictions redundant almost overnight. The Arab Spring and the new threat posed by ISIS worsened the ever-risky conditions of MENA markets (Turkish Contractors Association, 2014). Some companies experienced large losses and damages in their machinery and equipment and some were faced with high levels of unpaid debt (Sazak, 2013). On the other hand, the former Turkic Republics of Soviet Union had become more financially stable and offered lucrative markets with new megaprojects. Turkish contractors were challenged by deteriorating diplomatic relations between Turkey and Russia, following the shooting down of a Russian warplane by the Turkish air force over Syria in 2015. Most recently, economic uncertainty was created by a diplomatic row between Turkey and the

USA, resulting in a currency crisis and the ongoing threat of a pending trade war. A growth in project volume in the early 2010's reached a peak in 2012 and 2013 with more than \$30 billion in total annual international projects revenues. However, the following two years witnessed a decline, which worsened in the 2016, with a \$13.9 billion project volume (Figure 2-2). TCA links this sharp drop to the underlying political and economic instabilities in the main markets of Turkish contractors, however, they do not provide much details (Turkish Contractors Association, 2019). Instead the latest TCA Turkish international contracting report focuses on the growth in project volumes as seen in Figure 2-2. In essence, the interpretations of Turkish contractors' performance in the current decade has not been fully accounted for in academic literature yet. Given the geo-politically fractured contexts in which Turkish contractors operate, the extent to which the current construction-related literature on competitive strategy offers meaningful insights is at best contestable.

2.2.9 Summary

This chapter reflects on the trajectory of Turkish contracting sector, especially Turkish contractors' expansion to international markets. The discussion of each period demonstrates that the path followed by Turkish contractors has directly been shaped by the geo-political context within which international contracting is delivered. It is argued that Turkish contracting firms gained experience by working with foreign contractors in the domestic market until 1970s. After which they alternated between domestic and international projects, following the changing construction demand over next three decades. This was followed by product and market diversification and increased projects volumes at the start of new millennium. More recently, the side effects of 2008 economic crisis, political uncertainties in the MENA region and political conflicts between Turkey and Russia resulted in two downturns in the Turkish contractors' international expansion. Such retrospective understanding of the sector clearly indicates that the strategies enacted by Turkish contracting firms are heavily shaped by the geo-political context.

This thesis argues that research on Turkish international construction contracts has been limited to explaining how contracting firms 'strategize' in international markets. The majority of the research has adopted a quantitative approach which restricts a richer analysis about how such strategies were enacted in the context of market uncertainty. Most papers adopt theoretical frameworks which tend to conceptualize strategy-making as a linear logical process that do not reflect the contextual instabilities within which contractors work. Hence, there is a need to gain deeper understanding about the more qualitative and substantive information underpinning Turkish international contracting within a volatile geo-political context. It is argued that this section provides a background against which to understand how competitive strategy narratives are constructed.

3. Understanding competitive strategy

3.1 Existing literature on competitive strategy

3.1.1 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to present a critique of the relevant literature on strategy-making and competitiveness. A particular aim of this first section is to review how understanding of strategy-making has evolved in the field of organization studies and construction-related literature. Different perspectives are examined, with specific attention on their underlying theoretical and methodological assumptions. A key aspect is to challenge the taken-for-granted assumptions underlying the empirical studies described in the construction-specific literature.

As part of this critique, the current section highlights an apparent shift in literature towards accentuating the socially constructed and discursive nature of competitive strategy. The current understanding of strategy-making in construction-related literature is based on an adherence to old schools of thought regarding competitive strategy. In contrast, the narrative perspective has been found to provide an alternative basis for understanding the way in which strategy is formulated in the context of international contracting. The discussion presented in below three sections addresses the research objective one stated in the introduction chapter.

3.1.2 Economic based approaches to competitive strategy

The notion of ‘competitive strategy’ has been of central importance to scholars of organisation studies ever since the professionalization of management emerged as a discipline, in the aftermath of World War II. The very phrase is indicative of a commitment towards market-based competition, whereby each firm strives to outdo its competitors. The professionalization of strategic planning as a discipline owes much to authors such as Chandler (1962), Ansoff (1965) and Andrews (1971). Such studies were produced at a time when concepts of market certainty and predictability were taken for granted. Hence there was considerable faith in the advocated approaches to top-down rational planning. Whittington (1993) has characterised this rationale as one where ‘conception precedes execution for the purpose of profit’. The advice offered is mainly focused on the importance of defining the strengths and weaknesses of one’s own organization, prior to comparing them with opportunities and threats in the environment. The process is assumed to be hierarchical and linear, where strategies are defined by top management and then realized by operational-level managers. Such assumptions have continued to dominate the strategic management literature for several decades.

Strengths, Weakness, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) analysis was commonly advocated for the purposes of making strategic organisational recommendations. The ‘opportunities and threats’ components of the SWOT analyses tend to refer to the supposed exogenous characteristics of identified markets with associated assumptions of stability. The environment within which firms operate is notably construed as a potentially fully describable entity (cf. Tsoukas, 1994). The components of the SWOT analyses labelled ‘strengths and weaknesses’ are in turn usually related to the endogenous capabilities which a given sector or organization possesses (or lacks). These are likewise assumed to be directly accessible and hence subject to codification, leading to positivistic assumptions and quantitative methods of their adjudged relative importance (cf. Dikmen and Birgönül, 2003).

Giritli et al (1990) conducted one of the earliest studies on Turkish international contractors, drawing from the core concepts of SWOT analysis. They presented a review within which the internationalization of Turkish contractors is described. The discussion explained the contracting sector, with reference to other sectors and broader economic structure at national level. Such explanations were followed by detailed descriptions of the strengths and weaknesses of Turkish firms. The geographical location, availability of manpower, attitudes to risk and barter agreements with other countries were described as areas of strength, whilst a lack of national level strategy and government support for the contracting sector were defined as weaknesses. A further identified weakness related to Turkey’s lack of competence in terms of providing finance for contracting companies. More recently, Lee et al (2011) applied SWOT analysis to define the factors that were argued to secure the competitive advantage for Korean contracting firms in the international arena. The study was based on phone interviews with 96 managers who were asked to evaluate the past international projects they had worked on, according to their strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. The findings from SWOT analysis were then re-evaluated according to another framework called ‘AAA’ (adaptation, aggregation, and arbitrage) to define the strategies that should be applied in different phases. The findings were considered to be a useful reference for other countries to define their positioning and appropriate strategies, using the Korean case as a benchmark. Similarly, Zhao, Shen, and Zuo (2009) discussed the competitiveness of Chinese contractors in international construction based on an interview survey with 42 employees working in contracting firms. They alluded to the disadvantages of a lack of familiarity with the ‘local system’, in terms of regulations and procurement approaches. There was also a broad consensus regarding the importance of maintaining good client relationships and the pivotal role of governments. Although such studies provide useful insights regarding the approaches adopted by contracting firms from different countries at different times, they demonstrate only partial explanation. They consistently conceptualise strategy-making as a linear process. Strategy-making is

considered as a rational process of deliberate analysis, according to the findings from such analysis (cf. Whittington, 1993). They notably fail to provide any insights into how such determined factors were adapted and enacted by contracting firms.

Similarly, Porter's (1980) 'competitive positioning' approach has been especially influential in advocating the analysis of markets in terms of their supposed objective characteristics. Companies are expected to position themselves to best advantage in the market. Porter's vocabulary of 'five forces framework', 'value-chain analysis' and 'diamond framework' provide important points of reference (Porter, 1980; 1985; 1990). There is an assumption that practitioners can easily obtain information regarding the factors defined in these frameworks, where both the outside world and organization itself essentially stay stable. One of the drawbacks of this perspective is that market characteristics and structures are seen as key factors that shape the assumed reality. As such, the organisations themselves were ascribed relatively passive roles, even more so the individuals there within. Hence, any differences in constructing meaning at an organizational level and within individual processes tend to be omitted.

Porter's approach has long proved popular amongst scholars interested in the construction sector, not least those interested in the competitive strategy of Turkish contractors (e.g. Öz, 2001; Dikmen and Birgönül, 2003; Özorhon, 2012). Öz (2001) comprises a desktop study using Porter's (1990) diamond framework as the primary framework for analysis. Özorhon (2012) likewise adopts Porter's diamond framework which she uses to populate with empirical data from 65 interviews conducted across 27 firms. Additional insights are gained from a SWOT analysis. It is notable that these three sources were primarily interested in understanding the key 'sources of competitive advantage'. What they were rather less interested in were the processes through which competitive strategy is enacted, and how such processes evolve over time. Dikmen and Birgönül (2003) draw more liberally from Porter's (1980) three generic strategies of cost leadership, differentiation and focus. Their particular interest lies in the three-way interaction between organisational objectives, strategies and competencies. They collected data from 60 members of the TCA by means of a questionnaire survey, supplemented by face-to-face interviews. The responses were subjected to statistical analysis and conclusions were drawn *vis-à-vis* issues such as strategic decision-making, company competences and market strategies.

The overriding tendency of approaches, such as those described above, is to classify the determinants of competitive advantage into distinct factors, which are then in some way 'validated'. While such sources undoubtedly make useful contributions to so-called 'formistic knowledge' they say almost nothing about the way in which strategy is dynamically performed in practice (cf. Tsoukas, 1994). In essence, they are primarily focused on describing the

determinants of success, with an implicit assumption that these will continue to prevail in the future. Having the list of factors affecting competitiveness is good, but how such factors impact upon competitiveness is hardly questioned. This emphasis is of course by no means unique to the literature on Turkish contracting; it is equally apparent in the above-mentioned studies and more broadly amongst researchers interested in competitive advantage in construction (e.g. Ofori, 1994, 2003; Flanagan *et al.*, 2007; Zhao, Shen, and Zuo, 2009).

The instabilities initiated by the oil crises of the 1970s challenged the acceptance this classical perspective based on an assumption of stable world. The Suez Crisis (1956) and the Vietnam War (1955-1975) are also worth highlighting as key milestones that served to challenge the assumed steady expansion of Western influence. Such events not only conflicted with the self-confidence of Western countries, but also the assumed hegemony of Western management thinking. Besides, instability in the MENA region reached new heights, with increased disagreements among Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) in the 1980s. Such global events had very real and immediate consequences for the domestic North American and Western European markets. Stability and predictability became concepts that could no longer be taken for granted. Hence debates in the seminar rooms of international business schools shifted from models of stability towards critiques of change and discontinuity (cf. Whittington, 1993). Such developments gave rise to an emphasis on the emergent and context-dependent nature of strategizing (Nelson and Winter, 1982). Contingency theory gained ground over the earlier assumption that there was a single 'best' way of organising (cf. Lawrence and Lorsch, 1967). Organization studies started to emerge as a distinct discipline, with a strong focus on the routines and resources which enabled firms to respond to external change. In this respect, the contribution of Penrose (1959) was undoubtedly ahead of its time. As a result, the competitive market storyline of Porter began to shift toward those derived from the resource-based view (RBV), with an emphasis on internal resources and capabilities (Barney, 1991). The focus on the importance of context, and hence path-dependency, challenged previous analytical approaches to strategy, which were based on assumptions of rational decision-making at an industry-level. It was also slowly dawning on theorists in the academic world that the future is not always a predictable extrapolation of the past.

3.1.3 Resources, competences and capabilities

The resources and capabilities perspective emphasises the importance of endogenous factors such as resources, competences and capabilities. The broad approach is exemplified by Barney's (1991) resource-based view (RBV), which focuses on the strategic importance of unique organisational resources and capabilities that are difficult to imitate and substitute by competitors. Prahalad and Hamel (1990) offer similar arguments in respect of core

competences, and Grant (1996) extends the debate further with his knowledge-based view of the firm. Such approaches echo the logic of evolutionary economics in emphasising the importance of path dependency in shaping strategic choices (cf. Nelson and Winter, 1982). Hence competitive positioning is forever shaped and constrained by a firm's operating routines (or tacit knowledge) as they are developed over time. Despite moving the focus of analysis from an industrial level to organizational level, the expectation of defining parameters to improve company performance or competitiveness reflects some continuation of the stable-world assumption.

In the construction-related literature, Phua (2006) argues that the performance of firms is not only dependent on industrial factors but also on organizational factors. To test this hypothesis, she analysed 526 questionnaire surveys, answered by foreign and local firms operating in Hong-Kong. The findings pointed to a complex relationship between industry and firm-specific factors when predicting a firm's competitive performance. Similarly, Wethyavivorn, Charoenngam, and Teerajetgul (2009) identified a series of strategic assets in construction companies which shaped the organizational capabilities of the Thai construction industry. The study started by identifying the resources that were seen to contribute to the competitive advantage of Thai contracting firms. This was followed by a questionnaire survey which asked 28 firms to relate the pre-defined factors to their own company performance. The findings recommended that firms should have a clear long-term vision, invest in human resources and collaborate with foreign companies. In literature specific to Turkish contractors, Işık et al (2010) sought to measure the impact of company resources, capabilities and strategic decisions on construction company performance. The research, based on questionnaire surveys, consulted 73 construction companies who were asked to rate a list of vaguely defined exogenous factors associated with company performance. By doing a series of statistical analyses on the collected questionnaires, they defined certain parameters thought to increase company performance. However, the findings provided neither a clear explanation of how such determinants were mobilized to increase company performance, nor did they explain exactly what these determinants meant to contracting firms. Green, Larsen and Kao (2008) argue that the resources seen to increase company competitiveness or performance are usually recognised only after they are deployed. Therefore, the tendency to define the resources that make companies competitive seems invalid. Linking competitiveness to unique and discrete resources neither suits the project-based nature of construction business, nor the transient nature of the organizations and markets. More importantly, these realist approaches to understanding strategy-making, based on quantitative methodologies and rational theorizing, fail to explain how strategies are enacted in constantly changing construction markets. The 1990s came with big structural changes in the global socio-economic environment and such changes directly

impacted academic discussions. The Cold War certainties of the 1980s were challenged by the fall of the Berlin Wall (1989) and the subsequent collapse of the Soviet Union (1991). The ideological battle between communism and capitalism was seemingly won, but new models of gangster capitalism simultaneously emerged with little allegiance to democratic principles. Globalisation also accelerated a space-time compression through which technological change impacted the lives of everyone (c.f. Harvey, 1989). Real-time news became a reality, and with it new demands for accelerated decision-making. The need to adapt to continuous change became the new mantra of management gurus (i.e. Pettigrew, 1997; Teece, 1997). The dynamic capabilities view (DCV) was developed within this context to explain the ways that business organizations compete in highly dynamic environments (Teece et al, 1997). DCV promoted the idea that competitiveness is derived from an organization's ability to constantly adapt to the changing requirements of a dynamic business environment. Therefore, the focal point of the competitiveness discussion moved toward the ability of firms to transform and reconfigure their resources and operating routines (i.e. Teece, 1997; Teece, 2007). From this perspective, organizations are seen to have two kinds of capabilities, operational and dynamic (Helfat et al, 2007). While operational capabilities refer to the daily routines for the organization, such as technical competencies adopted to deliver specific projects, dynamic capabilities correspond to the ability to adapt to change or initiate change. Hence dynamic capabilities are defined as higher-level competencies that enable firms to transform their internal or external resources to address the changing demands of the wider business environment. Teece (2007) is especially persuasive in terms of the need to sense, seize and configure organizational competencies to respond to dynamic changes. Although there remains an empirical confusion regarding the precise meaning of 'dynamic capabilities', this perspective nevertheless points towards the decision-making processes that occur in organisations and the need to respond to dynamic environments. Zollo and Winter (2002) were influential in arguing that dynamic capability is best understood as a 'learned and stable pattern of collective activity'. However, it is important to note that much of the discussion on dynamic capabilities has focused on innovation in product development, with limited consideration of the characteristics of construction business.

In the construction-related literature, Green, Larsen and Kao (2008) set out to explore the coherence of DCV as a means of understanding how competitive strategy is 'constituted' and 'enacted' by construction companies. They argued that the notion of dynamic capabilities might have an obvious intuitive appeal to search strategy-making in changing and discontinuous nature of the markets within which contracting firms operate. The empirical analysis focused on a single regional contracting company in the UK. The data was based on semi-structured interviews with experienced managers who work for the company more than ten years. According to the data analysis, the future possibilities of the firm are found to be defined by

the company's current position which is shaped by the earlier paths they have travelled. Therefore, they suggested a stronger focus on the '*iterative relationship between actors and the ever-changing environment*' rather than stressing the static analysis of supposedly fixed '*exogenous and endogenous factors*', as proposed by the previous studies described above (*op. cit.*, pp.74). In this sense, dynamic capabilities are '*conceived as something that a firm does rather than something that it has*' (Green, Larsen and Kao, 2008: 66). Similarly, Kao, Green, and Larsen (2009) discussed the competitiveness of two regional contracting firms in the UK. They found that the unique capabilities of construction firms are not rooted solely within the focal company but spread across networks of relational ties between organizations. Therefore, they suggested that to better understand how a company remains competitive requires an understanding of the broader business environment within which the company is embedded. Any extension of these ideas to the sectoral level of Turkish international contracting would clearly be dependent upon the degree to which the learned and stable pattern of collective activity could meaningfully be applied across organisational boundaries.

Although the competitive strategy literature developed to recognize dynamic nature of markets, how these capabilities are developed and enable companies to retain their competitiveness are key elements which remain unanswered (cf. Green, Larsen and Kao, 2008). The notions of resources and capabilities perspective are challenged by process and practice perspectives. Pettigrew (1997) has been one of relatively few theorists to focus attention on the embedded nature of the strategy-making process. He coined the strand of strategy research called '*strategy process studies*' which prioritizes an understanding of the geo-political context within which companies operate becomes crucial to capture '*reality in flight*'. More recently, Chia (2017) argued that dynamic capabilities can be explained through the notions of the 'practice-turn' in strategy studies. He argued that dynamic capabilities can be seen to arise from the modus operandi of companies rather than from possessing particular assets, resources and competencies. The following sections will focus on the notions of process and practice perspectives in strategy research.

3.1.4 Towards a processual perspective

The recognition of increasing instability and unpredictability of markets and organizations gave rise to the emergence of alternative perspectives, based on behavioural science, with an explicit recognition of the complexity of strategy-making in practice. Mintzberg (1990; 2007) has long been critical of the very idea that strategy can be broken down into the two supposedly separate activities of 'planning' and 'doing'. He was especially critical of the idea that strategy is some sort of controlled process involving only senior managers and CEOs. Mintzberg (2007) also argued that planning and doing are irrevocably intertwined, such that strategy more often than

not emerges through a process of trial and error. He was also critical of any approach that seeks to abstract generic principles without accounting for the wider context within which they are enacted. Strategy therefore began to be understood as an emergent stream of decisions which unfold over time.

Pettigrew (1997) was especially influential in highlighting the politically and culturally embedded nature of strategy-making. It was no longer assumed that firms would engage in the same processes of strategy-making irrespective of geographical location and consideration of geo-political factors in the broader landscape. Hence, the so-called 'strategy process view' balances the extreme points of both classic and evolutionary perspectives by acknowledging the complexities of both organizations and markets (Whittington, 1993). Pettigrew (2012, pp.1316) argues that process research refers to '*the dynamic study of behaviour within and between organizations, focusing on context, activity, and actions that unfold over time*'. Authors Chia and MacKay (2007) and Langley et al (2013) argue that a central aspect of the process approach is to understand how organizational and individual activities and events emerge, develop and terminate over time and how such processes relate to each other. The key distinction of the process perspective, in contrast with the theories developed on classic and evolutionary economics, is the specific focus on the *process* rather than determining the relationship between rigidly defined variables to explain strategy-making.

As discussed by Mohr (1982), variance studies pay attention to understanding the relationships and causal links between discrete variables, whilst process studies are interested in an empirical study of changing and evolving phenomena. The underlying logic of variance-based studies is to explore the causes or relationships that might explain concepts such as strategy, competitiveness or change within organization studies. Therefore, the variance-based research inquiry mostly seeks to reach objectivist generalizations, developing an empirical study throughout positivistic assumptions, using 'comparative statics' (c.f. Pettigrew, Woodman and Cameron, 2001). Variance-based studies are interested in '*what strategic decisions are taken*', whilst in contrast process research moves the focus of attention towards explaining '*how a particular organizational strategy emerges*' (Chia and MacKay, 2007, pp.220). Such attention to understanding the details of process, draws on an interpretivist paradigm, which seeks to provide explanation through detailed descriptions, rather than drawing on generic and objective reasoning of positivistic approach.

The strategy process perspective requires a historical understanding combined with data regarding the broader geo-political context. For example, Pettigrew (1985) conducted a comparative longitudinal study to understand the strategic change process in Imperial Chemical Industry (ICI) in UK. The longitudinal real-time analysis of a single organization combined

historical analyses of business, economic, social and political changes between 1960 and 1983. The argument made was that the multi-factor and non-linear processes of strategic change, combined with a retrospective analysis, helped to better understand the interaction of agents and context over time. Similarly, Pettigrew and Whipp (1991) analysed the strategic and operational changes within four different industries in UK, comparing a high and low-performance company case studies from each sector, over a period of five years. The common characteristics of strategy process studies are in seeking to find a relationship between context, process and outcomes, following the example of other empirical studies for non-construction sectors (c.f. Pettigrew, 2012). In essence, strategies and change are seen as '*historical processes and products*' emerging as the '*outcomes of lived experience, as well as external structures and contexts*', and as '*a matter of temporally and contextually embedded human consciousness*' (Pettigrew, 2012, pp.1325). However, such assumptions carry certain limitations. First, the emphasis on linking the organisational context, process and outcomes tends to degrade process to a variable, through seeking to identify the supposed relationships between '*strategy context, internal organizational process, content and outcomes*' (i.e. Langley, 2007, pp. 272). As argued by Rantakari and Vaara (2017) the strategy-process school of thought renders process into stable categories. Second, it falls short to engage with the inherently dynamic nature of organizational reality (Nayak and Chia, 2011). More importantly, Knights and Morgan (1991) argue that the strategy-process school falls short in challenging the rationalist assumptions that strategy exists to resolve the problems between the organization and its environment. As such, it ignores the shift toward seeing organizations as on-going processes. Similarly, Tsoukas and Chia (2002, pp.282) state:

Organizations are relatively stabilized relational configurations that have evolved as actualities out of an infinite number of possibilities. They are collective social orders brought about through human interactions, oftentimes without any deliberate intention to do so on the part of individual actors themselves.

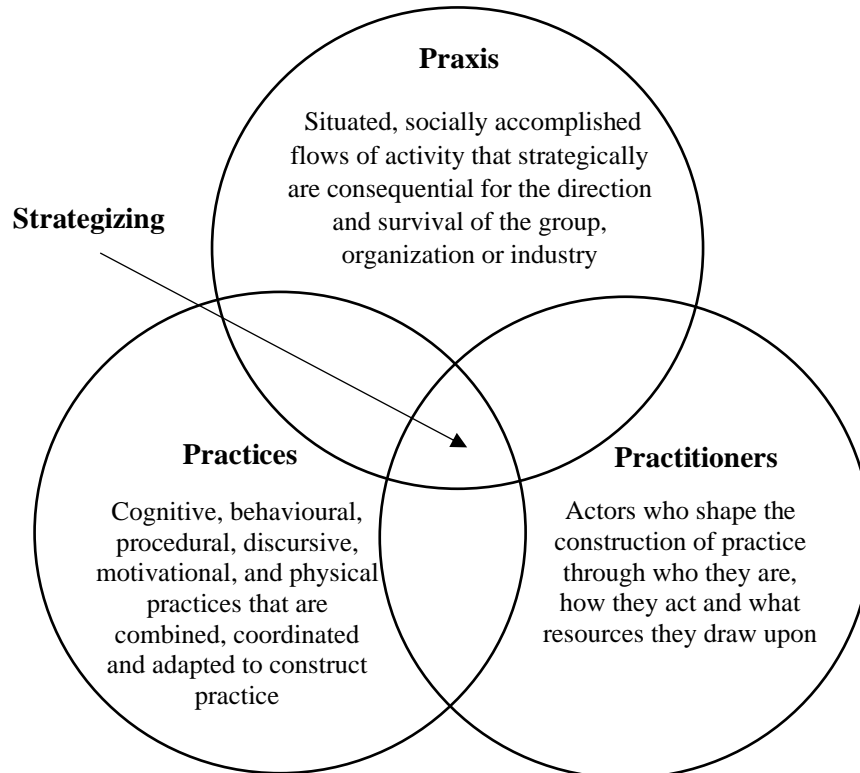
The above quotation highlights the need to understand individuals and organizations as temporally evolving social constructions rather than as discrete variables. Such a perspective is known as a strong process view (or 'becoming ontology') within which reality is seen as continually changing and transforming (Chia, 1995; Tsoukas and Chia, 2002). Reality becomes malleable with an infinite number of possibilities, depending on the perceptions of individual agents. The reflection of this perspective regarding strategy highlights an analytical shift toward how competitive strategies are '*constituted, reproduced, adapted and defined through on-going process*' (Langley, 2007, pp.271). The subsequently developed 'strategy-as-practice' approach extends these arguments by emphasising the importance of the micro-level social activities, processes and practices that characterise the day-to-day realities of strategizing (Whittington,

1996). The following section will discuss the details regarding strategy-as-practice theory and the narrative-turn it contains.

3.1.5 From strategy-as-practice to the narrative turn

A core argument of the strategy-as-practice (SaP) approach is that strategy is a socially situated activity, rather than being a property of organizations (Vaara and Whittington, 2012; Balogun et al., 2014). The proponents of SaP emphasise the importance of understanding the micro level social practices that constitute strategy making. As emphasised by Jarzabkowski (2005) strategy is seen as a ‘flow of activity’ which is enacted through the actions and interactions of multiple actors over time. Whittington (2006, pp.613) argues that researchers focus on strategy activity either at the level of individual organisation, or alternatively, on the aggregate effects of such activity at an inter-organisational level. In the latter case he likens strategy to an industry ‘*whose members from business, consultancy and beyond collectively produce the strategies and practices that help shape our world*’. This perspective resonates with the proposed focus on Turkish international contracting sector, where multiple actors collectively seek to shape emergent futures.

Figure 3-1. Strategy as Practice Framework (Sourced from Jarzabkowski, Balogun and Seidl, 2007)



The SaP approach pays attention to the micro-practices of strategy making while at the same time seeking to understand how such practices shape and are shaped by the macro-context

within which they take place. In seeking to bridge across micro and macro levels of analysis, Whittington (2006) proposes the three dimensions of 'praxis, practices and practitioners. 'Praxis' refers to the flow of activities in which strategic practice is enacted, such as board meetings, team briefings and even informal interactions around the photocopier. 'Practices' occur at an organisational level and refer to broad shared concepts of routines of behaviour, operating routines and the 'knowledge artefacts' produced by strategizing activity, such as marketing, research, sales, financial accounting. At a sectoral level, practices might include horizon-scanning activities commissioned by organisations such as the TCA. Practices could also feasibly include externally generated strategy discourses, such as competitive-positioning theory. Finally, 'practitioners' describes those actors involved in making, shaping and executing strategy. Whittington (*op. cit.*) further emphasises the interconnectedness between the three concepts, and the dangers of addressing different levels in isolation. As seen in Figure 3-1, Jarzabkowski et al (2007) argues that strategizing actually takes place at the nexus between these three dimensions.

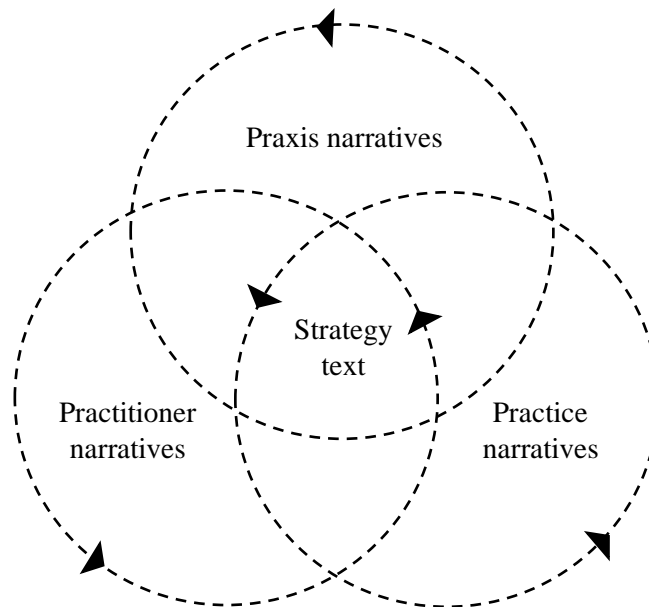
The majority of research within the SaP tradition emphasises the doing of strategy in real time, thereby calling for a shift towards ethnographic studies. However, ultimately it is not possible to capture the full complex reality of practitioners' material and discursive day-to-day practices. The difficulty is how to know which particular practices are significant at any one point in time, and the extent to which they can be meaningfully disentangled from the flow of praxis (Jarzabkowski and Spee, 2009). This is in line with Chia and MacKay (2007) who argue that strategies emerge from unconsciously acquired complex practice interactions. In their words:

Strategy may emerge as a consequence of the inherent predisposition of an actor to unselfconsciously respond to external circumstances in a manner that we may retrospectively recognize as being consistently strategic (Chia and Mackay, 2007, pp.228).

The above quotation states that strategic practices can be made more explicit by eliciting retrospective narratives and sense-making mechanisms of the practitioners. Drawing on similar ground, a growing sub-theme in SaP research follows the 'linguistic turn' and hence emphasises the use of discursive and narrative approaches to understanding strategy (i.e. Fenton and Langley, 2011; Brown and Thompson, 2013). Such studies accentuate the importance of talk, text and conversation as the means of 'doing' strategy and focus on the narratives of competitive strategy as the object of empirical analysis. Hence the 'narrative turn' in SaP moves the strategy research agenda towards understanding how practitioners make meaning, construct experience, and establish identity through narrative (Fenton and Langley, 2011). This perspective focuses on the way strategies are depicted, appropriated, and championed through stories (i.e. Barry and Elmes, 1997; Brown and Thompson, 2013). Fenton and Langley (2011)

go further by integrating narrative into all dimensions of the SaP framework and adding 'strategy text' as the fourth dimension. For them, strategy texts are the artefacts produced and consumed in the process of doing strategy.

Figure 3-2. Integrating narratives into SaP (Sourced from Fenton and Langley, 2011)



Fenton and Langley's (2011) key argument is that the 'narrative turn' provides a novel theoretical perspective for the empirical analysis of strategy making. In their words:

a particular focus on how narrative elements such as sequence, character and plot expressed in talk and text simultaneously reflect and structure people's understandings of what they are doing, of who they are, and what roles they do or can play, and what the organization is or should become (i.e., its trajectory or strategy) (op.cit. pp. 1176)

The above quotation highlights a strong commitment to a social constructivist ontology in which the notions of strategy, identity and organization cannot be seen to independent from the discourses which contribute to their construction. This is also consistent with discursive approaches to strategy which have been popular among organizational researchers for the last two decades. Knights and Morgan (1991) are of particular note in challenging the shortcomings of supposedly rational approaches to understanding strategy-making. They contend that the corporate strategy can be seen as '*a set of discourses and practices which transform managers and employees alike into subjects who secure their sense of purpose and reality by formulating, evaluating and conducting strategy*' (op. cit, pp. 252). Such a perspective accentuates the importance of text and conversations as the means of 'doing' strategy.

Researchers who adopt more critical approaches to construction management likewise tend to

stress the dynamic and embedded nature of strategy making (Green et al., 2008; Kao et al., 2009). Green et al (2008, pp.427) argue that theories of competitiveness should be seen ‘as a set of mutually supporting discourses that are directly implicated in shaping the reality within which firms, and actors within firms, operate’. They consider that the most commonly accepted theories of competitive strategy, i.e. strategic positioning, resource-based view and dynamic capabilities view, provide alternative sets of discursive resources that managers use to make sense of competitiveness. For them, the practices which are involved in strategy making can only be understood in retrospect, i.e. past practices are only labelled strategic for the purposes of making an argument about the present or future. Such studies have opened-up the space for more constructivist perspectives in strategy research within the construction-related literature. As yet however, little attention has been given to understanding competitive strategy from a narrative perspective. Löwstedt and Räisänen (2012) apply a narrative approach to understand strategic change in a construction company by comparing formal and individual narratives. However, with this notable exception, the potential of narrative methods remains relatively unexplored in the context of construction management research. The next chapter will discuss the narrative-turn in organization studies and construction-specific literature.

3.1.6 Summary

This section has presented a critique of strategy literature. It has demonstrated that competitive strategy research in organization studies has moved from reification of strategy towards understanding it as a socially accomplished activity. As such the focus of empirical studies moves from macro-level analysis, i.e. industry-scale, to a micro-level scale analysis of practitioners and practices, and more importantly the interactions between macro and micro levels. This shift towards micro-level analysis and the interaction between micro and macro levels has opened up the space for more constructivist perspectives, including discursive and narrative approaches to seek to understand strategy. Especially important is the increasing acceptance of process ontology within which organizations and individuals are seen as temporal and transient constructions. This not only challenges the positivist use of alternative theories but also critiques the research methodologies mobilized to understand strategy-making.

Competitive strategy in the construction industry has been investigated from several theoretical perspectives. Much of the literature is characterized by assumptions of economic and political stability (cf. Green et al, 2008), or at least predictable trajectories of change. Such assumptions have limited validity in the context of the highly unstable markets within which international contractors currently operate. More recent research has moved the debate away from rationalistic explanations towards a focus on the dynamic interactions between contracting firms and the contextual landscapes within which they operate (i.e. Kao, Green, and Larsen,

2009). Such studies shift the theoretical and methodological orientation of the discussion from quantitative to more qualitative and constructionist perspectives. However, as yet little attention has been given to understanding competitive strategy from discursive and narrative perspectives. Hence this research accentuates the socially constructed and discursive nature of competitive strategy. Drawing from the assumptions of process ontology and the ‘narrative-turn’ in organization studies, this study aims to understand how competitive strategy is conceived, enacted and communicated. Therefore, the next section elaborates the narrative approach as an alternative theoretical perspective to understand strategy-making in Turkish international contractors. A particular emphasis is given to the key concepts used in narrative analysis.

3.2 Competitive strategy as narrative

3.2.1 Introduction

This section focuses on the ‘narrative turn’ in strategy research and discusses why it has been chosen as the theoretical background of this thesis. Especially important is explaining the ontological and epistemological assumptions underpinning the narrative perspective. A specific aim is to explain the relevance of narrative theory to address the research question of this thesis. Although there is an increasing interest in understanding the narrative aspects of strategy in organization studies, it remains under-examined in construction-specific literature. Drawing on this gap, the empirical part of this study focuses on strategy narratives within the Turkish international contracting sector. The discussion presents the key assumptions of the narrative approach before discussing the main concepts that are mobilized within this thesis. Of particular interest is the way in which managers within Turkish contractors often ascribe to themselves a self-identity of heroes who constantly strive to overcome adversity. Such ongoing processes of identity work are seen to progressively shape not only the trajectory of individual contracting firms, but also the Turkish construction sector as a whole.

3.2.2 Strategy as narrative

Narrative is a temporal discursive construction that provides means for individual, social, and organizational sensemaking (Rantakari and Vaara, 2017, pp.271).

The central argument of the narrative turn is that individuals make sense of the world by telling stories, and that those stories inevitably frame the way we see the past and future (Rhodes and Brown, 2005; Fenton and Langley, 2011; Vaara, Sonenshein and Boje, 2016). Therefore, understanding the stories and implicit meanings embedded in those narratives accentuates the socially constructed nature of organizational phenomena. As De La Ville and Mounoud (2015, pp.252) highlights:

The basic function of a story is to organize a series of events and actors into a common, acceptable, and comprehensible temporal framework. By reorganizing events in a temporal framework, stories preserve and build the continuity of actions. The perception of the stakes of the present situation enables us to reorganize past events into a story. Restructuring a group of relationships creates retrospective senses, hence enabling further action.

The suggestion here is that narratives are the means through which individuals set up ‘*temporal linkages between experienced events over time*’ (Langley and Tsoukas, 2010, pp.10). Authors such as Garud, Dunbar and Bartel (2011) and Brown and Thompson (2013) argue that

organizational practitioners collectively make sense through jointly negotiated narratives, and by doing that they seek to turn the unexpected to expected and make presumptions about the future. By linking the past, present and future, narratives are seen to construct the organizational context in which individuals and organizations enact their own stories (i.e. Fenton and Langley, 2011). Rhodes and Brown (2005) build upon such arguments by highlighting how the narrative approach contributes to understanding organizations and organizational phenomena:

narrative can provide a different, and valuable, form of knowledge that enables researchers to engage with the lived realities of organizational life – the ‘truth’ that people at work live through every day. This is not a knowledge that aspires to certainty and control but rather emerges from a reflection on the messy realities of organizational practice. (Rhodes and Brown, 2005, pp.180)

The argument in the above quotation is that using stories to understand the organizational phenomena challenges the dominance of positivistic approaches which search for an objective reality that is assumed to exist ‘out there’. Polkinghorne (1988) defines narratives as temporal constructions within which experience is made meaningful. He especially emphasises that a narrative form of explanation that takes into account the historical and social context in which experiences take place. More importantly, he argues that narrative explanation is retrospective as it defines the significance of events that have occurred after an individual has reflected on the outcomes that have followed. Such argument predicated on Bruner’s (1986) definition of two basic forms of knowing, logico-scientific and narrative. The logico-scientific knowing, the paradigmatic mode as defined by Bruner (1986), provides an explanation of knowledge based on abstract categories and assumed objective cause and effect relations between them. In contrast, the narrative understanding focuses on subjective meanings that people construct through the stories they articulate. In the latter form, the agenda moves towards analyzing narratives for the purposes of understanding how practitioners make sense of themselves, their practices and experiences in regard to strategy. Such a perspective focuses on the way strategies are described, appropriated, and championed through stories. Barry and Elmes’ (1997) paper ‘*Toward a Narrative View of Strategic Discourse*’ was notable in suggesting the potential of strategy-as-story perspective. They argue that:

...narrativity emphasises the simultaneous presence of multiple, interlinked realities, and is thus well positioned for capturing the diversity and complexity present in strategic discourse...narrative highlights the discursive, social nature of the strategy project, linking it more to cultural and historical contexts... (Barry and Elmes, 1997, pp.430)

The above quotation highlights that adopting a narrative perspective to understand strategy might help to answer the limitations of current studies, which are heavily shaped by the

assumptions of logico-scientific knowing inherent in economic based approaches (see Section 3.1). Especially important is that the narrative perspective provides a retrospective and contextual understanding of competitive strategy. In contrast to adopting rational assumptions to determine factors improving competitiveness, it accentuates the importance of talk, text and conversation as the means of 'doing' strategy. Hence, the 'narrative turn' focuses on 'narratives of strategy' as the object of empirical analysis.

Narratives do not emerge just as individual stories. There are also composite narratives, which reflect more formal and institutionalized macro stories. Brown and Thompson argue that (2013, pp.1148) organizations tend to have '*well attested and largely accepted key strategy narratives and master texts that structure understandings and ongoing patterns of storytelling, providing them with some stability and coherence, and lending on-going activities certain predictability*'. At an individual level, the narrators select, prioritize and connect the events subjectively in their particular context (Søderberg, 2003). Such delineation and interpretation of events of course reflects the personal aims of narrators, as communicated through strategy narratives. As argued by Brown and Thompson (2013, pp.1147): '*narratives allow their authors to attach themselves to putatively desirable ends, to think well of themselves, and to promote feelings of self-worth and self-efficacy*'. This is the point in which the narratives enable an understanding of strategy-making as identity work, which is discussed in the following section.

The emphasis on seeing narratives as the means through which people understand the world and impose meaning upon it, sets the groundwork for the empirical analysis of this thesis. Following the narrative turn, this thesis emphasises the narratives of competitive strategy rather than seeking to reify strategy as something that can be accessed directly as an object. The main focus of attention then becomes less about 'universal relationships among abstract concepts' more about to search for '*understanding of how human beings make meaning, construct experience, knowledge, and identity through narrative*' (Fenton and Langley, 2011, pp.1174). In common with SaP, existing theories in competitive strategy literature are considered as alternative academic narratives and the competitive strategy discussions put forward by firms and construction industry organizations are scrutinised as institutionalized narratives on competitive strategy. The particular emphasis of the empirical research then becomes one of seeking to understand the narratives of competitive strategy mobilized by Turkish contractors and contrasting them with established academic narratives. A further point of comparison also lies in the formalized narratives of strategy, which are institutionalized within industry bodies such as the TCA. The following sections discuss the main tenets of the narrative perspective which underpin the theoretical background of this thesis.

3.2.3 Narrative construction: Elements and plot structure

Narratives consist of plot structure and narrative elements. The plot structure connects the narrative elements, such as events, actors, actions and contextual parameters, into a whole story with the aim of providing an explanation of the competitive strategy (cf. Polkinghorne, 1988). Linking these elements along a temporal dimension, assigning significance to each element and identifying supposed causalities is outlined as an intrinsic part of the process of narrative construction. Hence, plot structure works as the primary organizing concept which transforms the chronological array of narrative elements into a meaningful and coherent whole. As argued by Polkinghorne (1988) the construction of a plot comprises abductive reasoning, whereby a series of conjectures are generated and then tested to create the intended meaning. However, the created meaning can be easily changed by an alternative plot structure. Such temporality is an important characteristic of narrative knowing and it will be elaborated further in the following section.

It is argued that the narrative perspective addresses the challenges of SaP in terms of seeking to understand how strategies are enacted. Analysing narratives provides an alternative empirical basis for capturing the doing of strategy to simply observing enacted practices. As argued by Fenton and Langley (2011, pp.1172) narratives are inherent in *'the micro stories told by managers and others as they interact and go about their daily work, in the macro level institutionalized practices that people draw on for strategy making, in the accounts they give of their own and others' work as strategy practitioners, and in the artefacts produced by strategizing activity*. This is also in line with Czarniawska (1998) who argues that few are aware that an important event is happening at the point at which it takes place. More importantly, as events are not routinely abstracted from their spatio-temporal contexts, socially constructed narratives present important contextual knowledge, which would not otherwise be readily available. Phrased differently, such narratives constitute a retrospective sense-making process (Brown and Thompson, 2013). An analysis of competitive strategy narratives offers the opportunity to contribute to knowledge on the basis of a historical, temporal and specific rendering of causality in respect of the competitive trajectory of Turkish contractors (cf. Tsoukas, 1994). In other words, the analysis of the plot structure and narrative elements can be combined to explain the international trajectory of Turkish contractors, which in turn provides insights in the conceptualization of competitive strategy. This insight is certainly not available when applying existing competitive strategy theories as lenses to explain whether an assumed reality actually exists.

In addition to events, the actors and actions involved are also important components of any narrative explanation. Actors and actions also tend to predate the events that become

emphasised in the narratives. The narrative approach describes action as ‘*an expression of existence and that its organization manifests the narrative organization of human experience*’ (Polkinghorne, 1988, pp.142). Actions take place as a result of particular motives and goals within the circumstances of specific contexts, through interaction with other actors and contextual parameters. A narrative explanation interprets the relationships between actors, actions and events in the context within which the interactions occur, thereby, providing an embedded and contextual understanding (cf. Pettigrew, 1997). Different plot structures assign different roles to actors, such as protagonists and villains (Czarniawska, 2004). By assigning such roles to specific actors, narratives are variously structured as epic or tragic stories in accordance with aims and motivations of the narrator. The following section will discuss the key role of such plot structures.

3.2.4 The use of literary plot structures

Strategy is always something that is constructed to persuade others toward certain understandings and actions (Barry and Elmes, 1997, pp.433)”

If people believe a story, if story grips them, whether events are actually happened or not is irrelevant (Gabriel, 2000, pp.5)

Barry and Elmes (1997) suggest that strategic management can be seen as a form of fiction as strategies are created or made up for specific purposes. They further contend that strategy narratives should create credibility and novelty (defamiliarisation) in order to be accepted by particular audiences. The ‘credibility’ of a strategy narrative is seen to be related to certain structural characteristics, such as materiality, voice and perspective, ordering, plot and readership. First, ‘materiality’ is defined as the physicality of the narrative. It is argued that when strategy narratives are conveyed in written form they become more concrete for the readers and achieve greater acceptance. Second, ‘voice’ and ‘perspective’ refer to the organization of the narrative regarding *who* tells the story and from what *viewpoint* it is told. Traditional strategy narratives are seen to be told from an external single voice which creates a sense of an objective and rational world. In contrast, stories which reflect multiple voices are argued to find greater resonance with the readers, especially in relation to reflecting the temporality and dynamism of organizational contexts. Third, ‘ordering’ and ‘plot’ refer to how the narrative is sequenced and constructed. Literary plotlines are seen as mechanisms which enable the narrators to infuse temporal meanings. For example, in the epic form, the hero of a story successfully challenges the predicaments faced within their journey regarding some stated aim. Similarly, the failure of a hero can be described using a tragic plotline to cast blame on others. Lastly, the readership of the narrative is highlighted, recognising that narratives are likely to be understood differently by different individuals. Therefore, a strategy narrative gains

its meaning not solely in its own right but more through the way that the readers internalize it. These concepts are seen as important in highlighting the socially constructed nature of strategy. Significantly, it is this constructed understanding which has not been recognized within the strategy literature specific to the construction sector.

The concept of 'novelty' is argued to bring further distinctiveness to the strategy narrative. The argument is that narratives which are credible but very familiar are less likely to be accepted. In the words of Barry and Elmes (1997, pp.439) strategic narratives have 'shelf lives' and they need to evolve to keep up with today's dynamic business contexts. They exemplify this by drawing from various literary plot structures to discuss the prevalent competitive strategy theories. For example, SWOT analysis is linked to the epic plot structure, as it describes the trajectory of an organization as navigating toward opportunities, while moving away from threats. Such interpretation of competitive strategy theories with reference to literary plot structures provides an alternative theoretical frame from which to understand and discuss the competitive strategy narratives in international contracting.

There had been a long acceptance of conceptualizing organizations as storytelling systems (Boje, 1991; 2001; Gabriel, 2000). Gabriel (2000, pp. 3) argues that collecting and comparing different stories and investigating how the narratives are constructed can enable the researcher to gain access to '*deeper organizational realities*' and '*individual experiences*' within the organizations. For him, epic, tragic, comic and romantic plot structures offer alternative ways to describe occurrences in organizations. Each structure builds a different relationship between the narrator and the audience by infusing a different meaning into events. Herein, the epic structure aims to amaze the audiences by emphasizing the contest and achievements of the heroes, whereby the tragic story engenders compassion and sorrow over the failures of the protagonist. Of particular importance is that the narrators can combine the different features of story structures whilst also casting their own narrative. Therefore, the meanings attached to the characters or events become temporary and dynamic. For example, a hero can just as easily be described as a victim in a different part of the same story.

In an epic plot structure, the protagonist is casted as *hero* who follows a journey for noble endeavours in which they display courage and dedication in the face of several predicaments and challenges encountered along the way. However, the integrity and loyalty of the hero can never be doubted. Although the hero emerges as a central character, the plot is enriched by the availability of secondary characters, such as helper, adversary or villain. Table 3.1 presents the central characteristics of epic plot and related narrative elements.

Table 3-1. Characteristics and narrative elements of the epic plot (Gabriel, 2000)

Characteristic	The narrative elements
Protagonist	Hero
Other characters	Rescue object, assistant, villain
Plot focus	Achievement, noble victory, success
Predicament	Contest, challenge, trial, test, mission, quest, sacrifice
Fixed qualities	Nobility, courage, loyalty, selflessness, honour, ambition
Emotions	Pride, admiration, nostalgia, (envy)

In a similar vein to the above, Greimas' (1987) argues that narratives are structured on certain elements which he labels as 'actants'. For him, all narratives focus on a *subject* (or 'hero') actant who follows a journey to reach an *object* actant (or 'plot focus'). Each narrative journey routinely describes how the *subject* interacts with a series of characters at different stages of the process to reach the stated end-goal. The characters who impact the trajectory followed by the *subject* are variously assigned the role of *helper* and *opponent* actants (Greimas, 1987). The *helpers* are expected to assist the *subject* to achieve the end-goal, whereas the *opponents* are expected to hinder the journey. *Helpers* and *opponents* can be living beings or abstract concepts. Table 3-2 presents the concepts derived from Greimas' actant model that were used in the analysis.

Table 3-2. The analytical concepts derived from Greimas' actant model (Greimas, 1987)

Actants	Corresponding to
Subject	The key protagonist of the story ('heroes' in this research)
Object	The plot focus (the end goals of the heroes)
Helper	Actors, actions and events that help the heroes to achieve the plot focus
Opponent	Actors, actions and events that challenge the heroes to achieve the plot focus

It is important to note that the researcher used the concepts presented in Table 3-1 and 3-2 loosely as interpretive devices rather than as discrete lenses for the purposes of interpreting the data. In essence, the researcher used these concepts selectively to construct her own argument (See Chapters 5 and 6). Such selective use of these analytical models is consistent with the temporal and subjective nature of narratives. Czarniawska (2004) argues that many narratives build particular plot lines around the tendencies of *helpers* to subsequently turn into *opponents*, and vice versa. Further to that, the same characters can be presented as *heroes* or *villains* at different times. By demonstrating such temporal and dynamic connections across an extended

timeline, narrative analysis provides a means of understanding the essential temporality associated with the negotiation and enactment of strategy. It should be noted that each narrative fragment allows for alternative interpretations, by formulating temporal subject positions through the mobilization of the different narrative elements. Therefore, this perspective does not accentuate any objective reality or fact, rather it highlights the discursive, dynamic and iterative process of the use of narrative fragments in identity construction and strategy-making (i.e. Alvesson and Willmott, 2002; Fenton and Langley, 2011). The following section elaborates the temporality and time dimension of narratives.

3.2.5 Temporality and time dimension of narratives

Narratives are seen as a central means for understanding of the social construction of organizational phenomena. It is argued that practitioners mobilize narratives to give meaning to past events, and such narratives constitute an overall sense of direction in present day decision-making, with a direct implication for the future. When a practitioner tells a narrative, they can relate the past events and actors through a temporal ordering and provide an explanation from a certain point of view in the present time (Søderberg, 2003). Vaara and Reff Pedersen (2013) argue that strategy means creating images of the future, and that constructing such images inherently requires definitions of the past and present. Such temporal ordering and viewpoints are created through the plot line, which is the way that the narratives are structured. Drawing on this approach, a part of the empirical research intends to explore the plot-links between specific events and actors, contrasting individual and formal narratives of competitive strategy and discussing why and in what ways they can differ from each other.

Temporality is an important and widely ignored element that needs further attention in understanding strategy in construction-related literature. It is related to the underlying ontological assumptions adopted in this research. This research accepts organizations as temporally evolving social constructions rather than static entities. Such assumptions are in accordance with the ‘process ontology’ that assumes a world made of temporal processes rather than static things. Langley et al (2013) argues this by tracing back to the differing philosophies of Democritus and Heraclitus. They contend that:

Democritus pictured all of nature as composed of stable material substances that changed only in their positioning in space and time. From this view, substances exist independently of other substances, and their underlying nature does not change although their qualities may change...In contrast, Heraclitus viewed reality, not as constellation of things but as one of processes (Langley et al, 2013, pp.4)

In the above quotation, temporality and change are seen essential to help understand any

organizational phenomena, thus strategy-making. The question then becomes how competitive strategies are '*constituted, reproduced, adapted and defined through ongoing processes*' (Langley, 2007, pp.271). The advocates of this perspective tend to think in '*gerunds*' rather than states to emphasise the importance of '*action, movement, process and emergence*' (i.e. Chia, 1995, pp.597). Vaara, Sonenshein and Boje (2016) draws on this ground to consider how analysing the polyphonic construction of narratives enables a richer understanding of the multiple meanings of stability and change in organizations.

Taking an emphasis on understanding the strategy-making process as experienced by the organizational participants, Kaplan and Orlikowski (2013) conducted an empirical study of five strategic projects in a large communications equipment manufacturer that was subject to an industry crisis. Their findings highlighted three main points, which provide an empirical endorsement for the explanatory power of narratives and the above critiques reflected on existing competitiveness literature. First, strategy-making is not about formulating an accurate prediction of the future, it is more about creating coherent, plausible, and acceptable temporal accounts that enable managers to move from one decision to another. Second, managers tend to use interpretive explanations of the past rather than deterministic conceptions of path dependencies. Lastly, strategy-making is more a process of responding to emergent realities in the present through perpetual linking of the past, present, and future, 'temporal work'. It is less concerned with outcomes or underlying determinants. They further argue that strategy-making is not about '*accurate forecasting, it is more considering the multiple interpretations of present concerns and historical trajectories that help to constitute future forecasts*' (Kaplan and Orlikowski, 2013, pp.965). This highlights a critical point, that the narrative approach is also connected with the 'historical turn' in organizational studies, providing the theoretical basis for the empirical part of this thesis.

Recent discussions in organization management and business history highlight the differences between objective and interpretive use of past events (i.e. Bucheli and Wadhvani, 2013). Authors such Suddaby, Foster, and Trank (2010) argue that the past refers to an objective reality, presenting events in a timely manner, whereas history requires a social and rhetorical construction of the past from the point of view of the present. In this conceptualization 'history' becomes a malleable basis from which individuals can construct their narrative, remembering some parts while forgetting others to use it for strategic purposes (i.e. Suddaby, Foster, and Trank, 2010; Mills et al, 2016). From a narrative perspective, it is axiomatic that we cannot access the past in an objective sense. Nevertheless, we can analyze the available narratives of what happened and draw appropriate conclusions. By definition, 'strategy narratives' are constructed with a degree of performative intent. They are invariably produced by drawing

from the past and labelling selective actions as ‘strategic’ (Foster et al., 2017). Hence actions are only ever labelled as strategic in retrospect, and always with a view to persuading an audience vis-à-vis some preferred course of action. The same logic would also apply to other constituent ingredients of the narrative, including actors, events and decisions.

The strategic use of historical narratives has in recent years attracted increasing interest, not only within the field of business history (Foster et al., 2017) but also within organisation studies more generally (Adorisio, 2014). The advocates of path dependency have consistently invoked the importance of ‘history’ in terms of shaping and constraining strategic choice (e.g. Barney, 1991; Teece et al., 1997). Pettigrew (1997) also emphasises the importance of history in his heavily-contextualised longitudinal studies of strategy development. However, Pettigrew’s so-called ‘Process School’ is notable for emphasising an objective past which, once fixed, is thereafter assumed to remain unchangeable (Brunninge, 2009). Such realist approaches to history tend to reduce the past to a set of exogenous variables which are forever beyond the control of managers (Suddaby, Foster, and Trank, 2010). In contrast, constructivist interpretations of the past can be seen as malleable assets which can be mobilised to serve different strategic purposes (Rowlinson et al., 2014). Key facts or events can of course remain fixed but are nevertheless invariably subject to different interpretations to serve different purposes. Hence the argument that the historical narrative, contained within the sectoral narrative of Turkish contractors, was deliberately created to serve a particular strategic purpose. As such, this narrative constitutes a source of empirical data in terms of how it has been constructed, providing insights into the way strategy on the sectoral level is constituted.

3.2.6 Polyphony, dialogism, and complexity of narrative representations

The concept of narrative knowing highlights the subjective construction of multiple realities. The interactions of multiple voices seem to shape the temporally evolving organizational phenomena. This argument is in line with Bakhtin’s (1981; 1986) concepts of *polyphony* and *dialogism*. Polyphony refers to multiple voices in a text. Bakhtin (1984) analysed Dostoyevsky’s novels and argued that the characters in Dostoyevsky’s stories are presented from their individual voices and perspectives. Hence, the reader directly meets with different characters and faces from a plurality of standpoints rather than a single reality reflected by a single protagonist or from the voice of the author. This allows the reader to move away from notions of a single objective world towards understanding a plurality of realities. Dialogism refers to the interactions between such multiple voices. For Bakhtin (1981; 1986), everything is told in response to other statements and realities are co-constructed through a constant interaction of different subject points. It is argued that the concepts of polyphony and dialogism are inherent in the notions of narrative perspective. It is important to emphasise that this

research sees narratives as a constitutive of reality which is constantly changing and transforming.

As discussed in the previous section, this research accepts narratives as temporal artefacts embedded in certain context within which they are produced. Hence, the narrative perspective requires a focus on *'the means by which narratives are produced and consumed'* (Vaara, Sonenshein and Boje, 2016, pp.498) and paying attention to the multifaceted structures through which narratives emerge. Therefore, it is important to recognize the links between micro-scale narratives, i.e. individual narratives and emergent macro-scale narratives at the time.

One line of narrative research focuses on the concept of power and seeks to understand why some narratives are privileged whilst others are silenced through narrative deconstruction (Vaara, Sonenshein and Boje, 2016). For example, conceptualizing the organization as a storytelling place, Boje's (1995) conducted an ethnographic study of the Disney Corporation. The research analysed the narratives of Disney's history and highlighted the marginalized and silenced voices in the formal storyline. Following a slightly different route, some studies focus on narrative emergence and seek to examine how *'narratives and stories emerge and come to play a central role in the social construction of organizational phenomena'* (Vaara, Sonenshein and Boje, 2016, pp. 507). The studies developed on this ground mostly draw on the concept of 'ante-narrative', which refers to the unfinished and fragmented phases of a story, before a narrative is developed with a coherent beginning, middle and end (Boje, 2001). As argued by Boje (2001, pp. 5) *'rather than reified plots, there are fragments of stories, bits and pieces told here and there, to varying audiences, so that no one knows the whole story and there is no whole stories anyway'*. Highlighting the concept of ante-narrative, Vaara and Tienari (2011) examined how certain ante-narratives were mobilized in intentional organizational storytelling to legitimate or resist change in a cross-border merger of financial services group (a cross-border merger combining Swedish, Finnish, Danish, and Norwegian corporations). Collecting empirical data through media texts, company documents, interviews and direct observation, they identified three ante-narratives: globalist, nationalist, and regionalist (Nordic). They then focused on understanding how organizational actors mobilized these ante-narratives in intentional storytelling and analysing the dialogical relationships between stories. Drawing on a similar ground, the academic theories of competitive strategy are seen as alternative narratives from which organizations and individuals select certain bits and pieces of information to communicate strategizing and the concept of competitiveness. Therefore, a part of the empirical study will focus on analysing to what extent the formal and individual narratives of Turkish contractors reflect or derive from or contradict with the dominating academic narratives and why.

3.2.7 Creation of narrative infrastructure

Competitive strategies are constituted, mobilized and consumed temporally over time through the interaction of different levels. The empirical studies either focus on individual narratives to understand organizational phenomena or composite narratives to reach the collective meanings of organizational members (i.e. Vaara, Sonenshein and Boje, 2016). The latter one tends to compare subjective constructions of individuals to seek to understand the multi-voiced nature of narratives (i.e. Dunford and Jones, 2000; Currie and Brown, 2003) and highlight the coexistence, interaction and mutual definition of various voices and logics (De la Ville and Mounoud, 2015). Deuten and Rip (2000) coined the concept of ‘narrative infrastructure’ to highlight the aggregation of multiple levels of narratives, which then produce the overall thrust and direction for organizational and individual actions. The construction of narrative infrastructure is seen to follow a dynamic process of interactions with specific narrative building blocks (Deuten and Rip, 2000). The term ‘narrative building block’ (NBB) is used to refer to commonly accepted discursive resources that are used to give meaning to emerging occurrences. NBBs could include: grand narratives, such as regarding globalization, regionalization, climate change etc. (cf. Vaara, 2002) or alternative discourses of competitive strategy, such as positioning, unique resources, dynamic capabilities, etc. (cf. Green et al., 2008). It is important to emphasise that the processes of contestation are continuous, so that the narrative infrastructure is also continuously re-constructed over time. The analysis of narrative infrastructure, and the NBB from which it draws, thereby provides potential insights into the ways in which competitive strategies are negotiated and enacted. Figure 3-1 illustrates the researcher’s interpretation of these concepts.

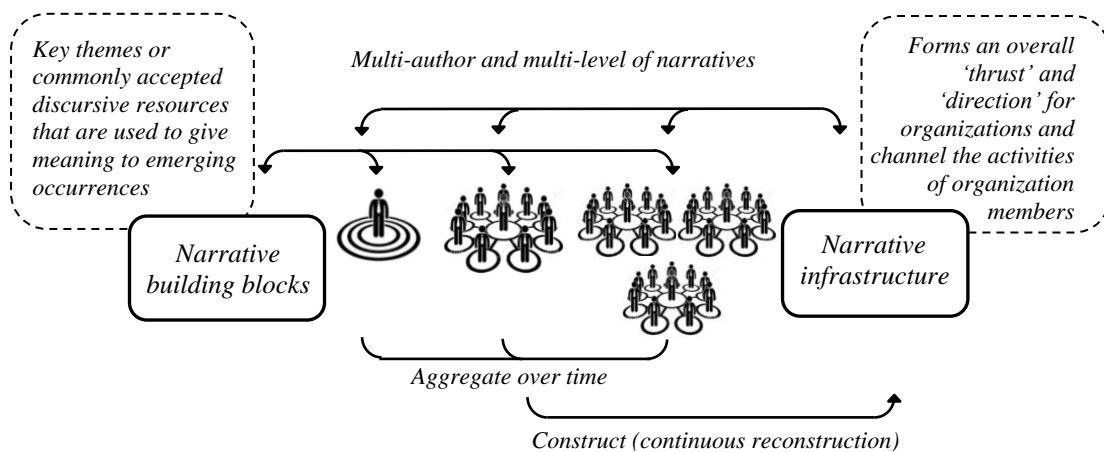
Narrative infrastructure is depicted as a key concept, not only to inform present-day decision-making but also in generating possibilities for further strategic actions (Fenton and Langley, 2011). The central argument is that narratives become generative of individual actions within organizations. Löwstedt and Räisänen (2012) draw on a narrative perspective to understand 20 years of change processes within a Swedish construction company. They sought to compare the formal narratives stated by company documents and the individual spoken narratives of middle managers, producing a description of the differences between two levels of narrative. They contend that the formal narratives:

...reflect the organizations beliefs, norms and values and mediates a vision of a future reality founded on a coherent past and present. It constructs an ‘as if reality’ that is meant to reduce uncertainty and ambiguity by using a future perfect strategy through which actions and states in the future are presented as practically achieved. This strategy cognitively creates a sense

of causal links and predetermination intended to depict the organization as proactive. (Löwstedt and Räisänen, 2012, pp.803).

The above quotation highlights the constitutive role of narratives to reduce uncertainties. This is in line with the argument that narrative infrastructure creates a sense of thrust and direction. Fenton and Langley (2011, pp. 1186) explains this by saying that *'the stories shape the organizational landscape as individuals and organizations become actors in their own stories'*. More importantly, the constitutive role of narratives, by reducing uncertainties, is described as *'telling yourself forward'* (Deuten and Rip, 2000, pp. 85).

Figure 3-3. The construction of narrative building blocks and narrative infrastructure (Adapted from Deuten and Rip, 2000)



Drawing from this perspective, this thesis argues that the formal narratives developed by TCA generate an overall thrust and direction which shape the organizational and individual narratives and then construct the reality of Turkish international contracting. Therefore, a part of the empirical study focuses on the analysis of formal sectoral narratives and intends to recognize the structural characteristics and emphasised points to explain a competitive strategy. This is followed by a comparison between formal and individual narratives, where the analysis focuses on explaining the emergence of narrative infrastructure for Turkish international contracting.

3.2.8 Summary

This section has presented how the 'narrative turn' contributes to a better understanding of competitive strategy in the international contracting sector. Narratives are accepted as temporal, subjective, sense-making mechanisms within which strategies are constructed, communicated and disseminated. Hence, the analysis of competitive strategy narratives is seen a way of understanding the interactions of multiple realities and indicate something of the complexity

and diversity across individual accounts of strategy-making. It is further argued that narrative analysis helps illustrate the temporal connections made between the actors, the actions that they take, and the events that are initiated by external parties. Such connections are seen to reflect the perspectives of the narrators for the purposes of making a particular argument. Hence, narrative analysis provides a basis for understanding how different actions are taken in different situations, and how they may subsequently be interpreted as a strategy. As such, narrative analysis can be used to describe the embedded contexts and time. It is argued that narratives need to be credible and novel in order to gain acceptance from targeted audiences. To achieve credibility and novelty the narrators benefit from the stereotypical plot structures available in literature. The epic plot structure is found especially important for the empirical analysis of this research, as the narratives of Turkish contractors are created around heroic characters.

Each narrative is seen to offer a selective interpretation of past events, and it seems reasonable to suggest that these interpretations offer a means of linking the past with the future. Hence narratives should be read, not only in terms of what they say about the past, but also in terms of what they say about expectations for the future. In essence, narratives are the central means that individuals construct and share their experiences. The interactions of individual narratives generate a multiple voice and multi-level mosaic of stories, whereby certain narrative building blocks emerge as a common set of discursive resources. The temporal interactions and evolving aggregation of narratives and NBBs constitute an evolving narrative infrastructure. Such narrative infrastructure enables a strong point of reference for the generation of further narratives, which constitutes the enactment of strategies. Narratives not only constitute a description of strategy but also help clarify the subject positions and identities of individuals (Fenton and Langley, 2011). Narratives can also be seen as the means of constructing identity on individual and collective levels. Hence, the next section focuses on the literature addressing the concept of identity.

3.3 Strategizing as identity work

3.3.1 Introduction

The aim of this section is to explain the intersection between strategy-making and identity. It should be noted that the relevance of identity literature emerged as a result of the empirical findings. It is argued that identity construction is a process whereby individuals create temporal narratives for the purposes of legitimizing themselves and their actions. Hence, strategic practices are seen as forms of identity work. First, the relevant literature on identity is explained, with a specific focus on the concept of ‘identity work’. Second, different levels of identity are discussed; individual, collective and organizational. Especially important is the use of collective-level narratives as a key basis from which to construct individual identities, which are also directly related to strategy-making. Lastly, the relational aspects of identity work are described. Of particular interest is the way in which Turkish contractors are commonly ascribed to a self-identity as *heroes* who constantly strive to overcome adversity. Such identity work is seen to progressively shape, not only the trajectory of individual contracting firms but also the Turkish construction sector as a whole.

3.3.2 Mutual constitution of strategy and identity

It is contended that the way in which narratives of strategy are constructed is indicative, not only of issues of strategy but also of the self-identities of those involved (Ashforth, Rogers and Corley, 2011, Brown, 2015; Vaara, Sonenshein and Boje, 2016). The core aim of identity research is about finding temporal answers to the perennial questions of ‘who am I?’ and ‘who are we?’ (Sveningson and Alvesson, 2003; Brown, 2006; Brown and Phua, 2011). Identity literature is developed based on two different ontological assumptions (Gioia et al, 2013). Early identity studies centred around the assumption that identity is a central, stable and distinctive quality of an individual or a collective (Albert and Whetten, 1985). Latterly, following the linguistic turn in organization studies, identity has been treated as a social construct that individuals or collectives continuously contest (i.e. Brown, 2006). It is this latter perspective that aligns with the adopted narrative perspective which constitutes the theoretical background of this thesis. Especially important is accepting organizations as socially constructed, emergent and processual arenas (Tsoukas, 1994). Authors, such as Sveningson and Alvesson (2003) are particularly influential, emphasizing the processual nature of identities by coining the term ‘*identity work*’. Identity work is defined as a process through which individuals continuously form, modify, strengthen or revise their sense of coherence and distinctiveness in relation with others.

Identity work takes place by means of tracking a temporal narrative through which individuals seek to position both for themselves and their organizations (Ybema, 2009; Fenton and Langley, 2011). Such narratives are seen as the ways of ascribing meaning to ourselves and to our daily practices. For that very reason, identity work conflates with strategy-making and is essentially concerned with constituting an overall sense of direction or purpose for ourselves (Chia and McKay, 2007; Sillince and Simpson, 2010). Oliver (2015) also highlights that the organizational identity discussions get closer to strategy work by moving from questioning ‘who the collective is?’, towards ‘what the collective stands for?’ or alternatively ‘why a firm is successful?’. Hence, the way that individuals connect with the past is seen to carry through into the present, thereby setting out a trajectory for the future.

Sillince and Simpson (2010) contend that both identity and strategy are mutually constituted processes which are shaped by the continuous interaction of the actors and the context. They further argue that identity work is ‘*the retrospective reformulation of meanings ascribed to past events*’ and strategy work is ‘*the prospective re-imagination of alternative futures*’ (*op. cit.*, pp.112). Herein, the actors involved are seen as key elements, understanding those who continuously engage in the simultaneous production of identities and strategies in the living present, through constant projections to past and future. This approach is in line with Ricoeur (1991), who contends that identity is seen as a continuously enacted process in which individuals interpret themselves within the intersection of their past experiences, present realities and future expectations. This transient and fluid interpretation of identity construction implies that self-identities are continuously contested concepts rather than fixed constructs. Furthermore, when identity narratives are unsuccessful people will move on other narratives and test them out, as they do in strategy work.

In construction-related literature, Green and Sergeeva (2019) developed a theoretical paper contending that value creation can be construed as identity work. They position the existing theories of value management in construction context as alternative narrative resources. The specific focus of the paper emphasises the socially constructed nature of value. They argue that diverse narratives of value provide a basis for understanding how ‘value creation’ is interpreted and enacted. These studies reinforce the argument that identity construction is a process whereby individuals create temporal narratives for the purposes of legitimising themselves and their actions. Such processes refer to a continuous and temporal interaction between different levels, whereby self-identities are formed by mobilizing resources from lived experience and accepted formalised narratives (Löwstedt and Räisänen, 2014). Authors such as Coupland and Brown (2012) also argue that individuals draw from numerous established, overlapping and interrelated narratives at organizational and sectoral levels while enacting their identities.

Similarly, Oliver (2015, pp. 331) argues that:

Originating as an individual level construct in the field of psychology, identity has long been used to explain behaviour and enhance self-understanding by offering a personal frame of reference that legitimizes decision-making and enables the formation of stable relationships with others. It has also extended to the collective and organizational levels, where it can provide an evolving sense of structure and continuity over time.

The preceding quotation highlights that identity work not only emerges from the individual-level but also from collective-level narratives, i.e. the organization or sector. This is an important point for the empirical part of this study, as the empirical data covers both collective and individual-level narratives. The next section will elaborate the multi-level nature of identity work.

3.3.3 Different levels of identity work

It is accepted that when an individual mobilises a narrative, it is as much about their self-identity as it is about the external landscape which they are purportedly describing (i.e. Sveningsson and Alvesson, 2003; Brown, 2006; Sillince and Simpson, 2010). Oliver (2015) identifies three levels of identity in organizational studies; individual, collective and organizational. First, individual identity is defined as the way an individual develops a self-image through interactions with others. The unit of analysis becomes single individuals, the temporal construction of 'who am I'. The strategy narratives rehearsed by individuals provide windows into the micro-processes of such identity work at an individual level. Brown and Thompson (2013) contend that strategy narratives are the means through which practitioners are linked to desired goals, encouraging and enhancing their self-esteem and self-efficacy. They further argue that:

Making the claim to being a strategist and representing the self as responsible for the future of collectives has, arguably, an almost inherently narcissistic character... Relatedly, a focus on narrative encourages recognition that strategies and their formulation are bound up with issues of impression management, and that in telling their strategy stories executives are motivated to construct themselves often in self-aggrandising way... (Brown and Thompson, 2013, pp. 1147)

The above quotation clearly highlights how practitioners envision their future and assign responsibility to themselves to achieve the desired ends. This is consistent with Sveningsson and Alvesson (2003) who highlight the dominance of management discourse, which turns managers from administrators to entrepreneurs, leaders and visionaries. They argue that leaders assign themselves or are assigned to the roles to make people inspired, committed and

motivated through their visionary and ambitious characteristics. In essence, practitioners do not generally talk about strategy in a detached manner; they like talking about strategy because it boosts their sense of self-identity. It also enables them to project their sense of self-identity onto others.

Second, the extension of individual identity to collective level is defined as ‘social identity’, within which identity work emerges as ‘we’ or ‘us’. The specific focus on this collective identity work is to understand the ways how a group of people are gathered around some common values and distinctive features that differentiate themselves from others. Brown (2006) defines the collective identity as the totality of its participants’ individual identities. This is an important point as it informs the fragmented, heterogeneous and complex nature of collective identities. A collective identity is expected to accommodate many voices and the subjective reflections of individuals. It can accommodate both commonalities and contradictions regarding who the collective is, what it stands for and who it should be. Hence, there is a constant struggle of centring and decentering notions to define the collective. In such process, those individuals whose voices can be heard louder than others can impose who the collective should be but this is always open to be challenged by other voices.

Löwstedt and Räisänen (2014) focus on the relational aspects of individual and collective-level identities, based on an in-depth case study of a single Swedish construction company. They contend that identity construction at the individual-level draws from the industry-level collective identity, rather than from the job or from organization levels. Especially important here is the identification of a collective identity based on the trade-view of ‘*being a construction worker*’, which includes to being practically oriented and having a long-standing professional background in the construction industry (*op. cit.* pp, 1103). Such a finding is indicative that the collective identity of work groups within construction companies has intrinsically evolved around the materiality of construction. Coming from a construction-sector background emerges as the dominant identity which transcends organizational-level identity. They further review how individuals from different professional backgrounds position themselves regarding such collective identity and how such interactions have certain performance outcomes in relation to their specific case study. Similarly, Sergeeva and Green (2019) argue how the innovation narratives, promoted on the policy-level, are interpreted by practitioners within the sector. Their empirical study is based on 32 narrative interviews with senior executives who identify themselves as innovation champions. They argue that the individual stories about innovation can be interpreted as identity work and, more importantly, that such discursive processes directly shape what is retrospectively accepted as innovative. Such studies provide a justification to argue that sectoral narratives provide discursive resources which individuals

mobilise for the purposes of legitimacy.

Third, organizational identity is a form of collective identity which emerges from seeing organizations as social actors that have unique characteristics differentiating them from other social actors. Brown (2006, pp. 735) argues this by using a patchwork metaphor:

The very fabric of organization is constantly being created and re-created through the elaboration, contestation and exchange of narratives. What is more, the strands of this fabric are not produced 'unthinkingly', but woven by reflexive agents with individual as well as group-level aspirations and beliefs. The fabric is both a patchwork quilt of narrative episodes stitched together through shared conversations, and rippled, with stories variously borrowing threads from each other, continuing and extending some, and seeking to unravel others... The result is a fabric that is in a constant state of becoming, unravelling in some areas, embroidered over in others.

The above quotation clearly emphasises the fragmented, heterogeneous and complex nature of organizational identity. More importantly, it shows that organizational identity is not same as collective identity because organizations can accommodate numerous collective identities which can co-exist in tension with each other (Alvesson, Lee Ashcraft and Thomas, 2008). Oliver (2015) extends this argument by contending that the debate on organizational identity focuses on whether organizational identity consists of institutionalized claims or shared perceptions among organizational members. It is important to remember that the construction sector is project-based and each project is undertaken by a collaboration of multiple organizations. Hence, it is expected that there is also likely to be a project identity which may contradict with the organization identity. This possibility is in line with Löwstedt and Räisänen (2014), who contend that the construction sector consists of highly heterogeneous collaborations of different professional groups, where professional identity claims can dominate organizational identities.

The empirical work of this thesis reviews both individual and collective-level identity claims. It is important to note that Turkish international contracting sector consists of several different firms, and therefore hence accommodates numerous accounts of identity work at an organizational-level. Although the firms have different trajectories and path dependencies, they are expected to share some common characteristics to those offered at the sectoral level. It is also important to remember that the adopted social constructivist perspective prioritizes the individual-level, as organizations are seen as aggregates of individuals. As argued by Brown (2015, pp.26), individuals may accept the identities that are offered to them but they can also adjust and reformulate such identities. Alternatively, they may '*distance themselves from them through irony, humour and cynicism, or contest them*'. Such processes constitute the temporal realities of identity work. In essence, some voices can dominate others at certain times and

other voices might be stronger at other times. A strong collective identity might support greater coherence at the sectoral-level to some extent, however, considering that each company evolves through different past trajectories, it is unlikely that each will carry the same sense of identity.

3.3.4 Relational aspects of identity work

Identity work evolves through the interaction between individuals and the broader environment. It is a process that individuals or collectives continuously use to define themselves in comparison with others (Alvesson, Lee Ashcraft and Thomas, 2008; Oliver, 2015). Authors Brown and Thompson (2013, pp.1147) argue that '*who we are*' lies strongly '*in the hands of other*' and that the strategy stories we deploy directly impacts what others say about us. This is known as the 'relational aspect' of identity work. In construction-related literature, Brown and Phua (2011) contend that it is important to understand how construction managers craft and negotiate their identities in relation to others. They further highlight the importance of understanding such relational aspects of identity on project performance. Similarly, Ybema (2009, pp.306) emphasises that identities are about the similarities and differences:

...identities emerge though the articulation of similarities and; differences. Enactment involves the discursive separation of 'self' from the 'other' and it seems that an intrinsic part of the process by which we come to understand who we are is intimately connected to notions of who we are not and, by implication, who others are (and are not).

The preceding quotation clearly emphasises that identity work is about those accounts that others might find to be acceptable and therefore highly dependent on who we are not. As such, the roles that the individuals assign themselves are dependent upon the extent to which they are acceptable to others. Thus, both strategy and identity work incorporate what others might find to be acceptable, and both are dependent on defining who we are not. Brown (2015) argues that the choice of characters, turning points and the structure of the plot become key elements of identity work. It should further be noted that self-identity is not about the factual representation of what happened, it is how meaning is infused, through the verbal devices used, to construct narratives (Gabriel, 2000). As argued by Czarniawska (2004) practitioners can draw from stereotypical plot structures (e.g. epic, tragic, and comic) for the purposes of defining the subject positions of central importance in identity work. This approach is strongly in line with Greimas (1987), who argues that stories define heroes, villains, adversaries and helpers. At the same time, practitioners are expected to draw from broader narratives, available in their specific contexts, to continuously co-construct their self-identity. These broader narratives might be the accepted theories, the voice of dominating institutional forces or grand narratives which provide narrative resources for the individuals. It is expected that individual-level strategy narratives are also about the identity work of practitioners, where they define themselves in relation to

their organization, as well as to other individuals and organizations in the wider environment. This identity work is a further important point of discussion that contributes to understanding strategy-making in contracting firms.

3.3.5 Summary

This section argues that strategy-making is inseparable from the identity work with which individuals continuously engage. It is contended that identities are never fixed or stable, and the processes of identity construction are multi-faceted and constantly contested. Managers can be seen to draw from temporal narratives about the past to legitimize their strategic visions for the future. It is argued that strategy is not an observable material practice that can easily be accessed. However, new insights can be gained by viewing strategy through the lens of identity work. In essence, strategy is seen as inseparable from the continuous identity work of individuals. The key argument is that practitioners like to talk about strategy; it bolsters their sense of self-identity. It also portrays their sense of self-identity to others. The clear depiction of the subject positions attributed to other characters illustrates the relational aspects of identity construction. It is suggested that such processes are continuously enacted through narratives, and are hence best explored through narrative analysis. Lastly, the notion of epic stories is offered of central importance to understand the identity work of Turkish contractors.

4. Research methodology

4.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to explain the adopted methodological position. Research methodology comprises the justification of the choice of research methods for data collection and analysis (Sarantakos, 2013). The methods chosen for the data collection and analysis are heavily informed by the adopted theoretical position. In essence, any theoretical perspective embodies a set of assumptions regarding the ontological and epistemological ground of the research. While the former relates to the nature of the reality the latter informs the nature of the knowledge and the ways in which the reality is known. The current research follows an established theme in adopting an interpretive narrative perspective (cf. Vaara, Sonenshein and Boje, 2016). The interpretive narrative perspective informs the definition of the research question, the details of the research design and the process of empirical work. It is important to note that the research has evolved through an iterative process as the researcher moved back and forth in above described steps.

The chapter starts with a discussion of the research philosophy that shapes the research design of this thesis. This is followed by a description of the research design, within which different streams of narrative research are introduced prior to explaining the details of the adopted narrative perspective. In addition, the content and scope of the empirical work are explained. The next section presents the details of the data collection process. This includes a discussion on the scoping study, the empirical data on collective and individual levels, the place of the researcher and sampling strategy and size. Thereafter, the data analysis methods are introduced and the processes of structural and thematic analysis are elaborated. The chapter is concluded by reflections on the researchers' experience of mobilizing the narrative perspective.

4.2 Research philosophy

Drawing on interpretive research methodology, this thesis follows the notions of narrative research to understand strategy making in international contracting firms. The empirical study focuses on 'culturally derived and historically situated interpretations of the social life-world' (Crotty, 1998, pp.67). Such interest in the qualitative perspective pays attention to the subjective meaning and social construction of reality. Hence, the researcher has looked at how people make sense of their world and attach meaning to their experiences (Sarantakos, 2013). Narrative research fits with this tradition very well as narrative is a key form of representing

and understanding experience and a key way of writing and thinking about it (Holstein and Gubrium, 2012). As advocated by Tsoukas (1994, pp.772), conducting research by employing narratives as the object of the analysis enables the researcher to understand the temporal and contextually embedded nature of strategy making. Authors such as Rhodes and Brown (2005, pp.178) argue that narrative research is an empirical tradition that *'provides a methodological position through which to engage not with a presumed neutral 'real' world, but with the complex nuances of the 'lived' world.* This is based on the distinction between narrative understanding and logico-scientific understanding. As coined by Bruner (1986), while the logico-scientific understanding looks for universal truths and situates itself on objectivist assumptions. In contrast, the narrative understanding draws from the constructionist paradigm and acknowledges the importance of subjective meanings. These two perspectives provide different ways of ordering experience and constructing reality. They accommodate contrasting logics to connect events and establish causality. While logico-scientific understanding tends to develop generalizable outcomes, narrative understanding focuses on subjective, temporal and situated explanations. As argued in Section 3.1, much of the construction-related research on strategy is informed by approaches derived from economics which are heavily shaped by the logico-scientific paradigm. Hence, the current research seeks to contribute to knowledge by providing an alternative interpretation of competitive strategy, drawing from narrative understanding.

As argued in Section 3.2, the ontological argument which underpins the current research is that narratives are constitutive of reality with direct material consequences. Czarniawska (2008, pp.6) puts this clearly by contending that *'reality has no essence other than it is constantly re-constructed'*. More importantly, as the narrative perspective conceptualises social reality as a process of continuous construction, the search for objective truth is discounted and replaced instead with a quest to understand how a given version of the world is constructed. Polkinghorne (1988) argues that narratives are one of the most important forms through which people create meaning in their lives. In narrative research, language, text and talk are seen as the essential means of reality construction. Hence, narrative research is informed by the premises of the hermeneutic tradition, which focuses on the ways that individuals interpret things and assign meaning to gain understanding (Alvesson and Sköldbberg, 2009). The hermeneutic tradition is seen as a way of understanding through interpretation. As argued by Polkinghorne (1988, pp.183), the knowledge developed is based on interpretation which *'cannot be organized by the concepts of objectivist laws, and it does not provide information for the prediction and control of future linguistic events'*. However, it is also important to note that reality cannot be degraded to the linguistic reality of subjects alone. Indeed, narratives are continuously shaped by and shape the institutional context within which they are produced (e.g.

Gabriel, 2000; Holstein and Gubrium, 2012). As no discourse or strategy statement emerges out of nothing, it is important to understand the broader context within which the narratives are constructed.

A further important underpinning idea relates to process philosophy, within which processes, relations and interactions are seen as the primary characteristics of reality (Tsoukas and Chia, 2002). From this perspective, organizations and organizational phenomena are seen to be essentially temporal and continuously evolving. Such emphasis on temporality and continuous change is consistent with the adopted narrative perspective as described in Section 3.2.5. Authors such as Nayak and Chia (2011) argue that the process perspective is positioned against the substance ontology which sees individuals and organizations as discrete entities that are assumed to stand spatially isolated and act deliberately. Hence, the empirical research based on substance ontology tends to abstract the entities of concern from the context that they are constructed. The central points of concern for the research are often the viewpoints, assigned properties and objective assumptions attached to such entities. It is argued that much of the construction competitiveness research, described in Section 3.1, is based on the assumptions of substance ontology. In contrast, this thesis is developed on the basis of a process philosophy which accepts competitive strategy narratives as temporal and subjective realities, which dynamically shape the trajectory of international contracting firms.

4.3 Research design

Narrative research comprises a vast array of theoretical and methodological traditions. This multiplicity comes partially from the disparate characteristics of the disciplines within which narrative research has been developed, i.e. education, nursing, organization studies. It also derives from the confusion that 'narrative' is used to describe a theoretical perspective and methodological approach. At this point, Vaara, Sonenshein and Boje's (2016) categorization of narrative studies in the organization and management literature provides a useful methodological grounding. They identify three key streams of narrative research which they label as realist, interpretive and post-structuralist. First, the realist approach to narratives follows the notions of positivism. Hence, narratives are mostly treated as a means of presenting the data which will be used to explain some other organizational phenomena. In other words, the organizational phenomena being researched are assumed to exist independently of the narrative. Second, the interpretive approach treats narratives as social constructions of organizational phenomena (i.e. Gabriel, 2000; Czarniawska, 2004). Researchers following this second stream see narratives as an active part of reality construction rather than as representations of reality. The empirical studies in the interpretive tradition are generally

conducted by focusing on either individual or collective level narratives (Vaara, Sonenshein and Boje, 2016). While the former concentrates on collecting individual accounts of organizational phenomena, the latter focuses on capturing the collective meaning of a group of organizational members. The key focus on both levels is to examine the means through which narratives are constructed and the multiple meanings ascribed within them. Third, the post-structural approach to narrative research consists of studies that seek to problematize dominant narratives and explain what they represent. The aim of the researchers within this stream is usually problematizing dominant narratives, criticizing hegemonic representations and emphasizing the silenced voices that are repressed. The studies developed in accordance with the post-structuralist approaches may also discuss the constitutive role of narratives in organizational emergence and becoming. In such studies, the central question often becomes how particular narratives become the dominant shared meaning, over others. In essence, the interpretive and poststructuralist approaches share the central argument that the narratives are constitutive of reality.

The current research follows the interpretive approach within which the central concern is the social construction of reality in and through narratives. In line with Vaara, Sonenshein and Boje (2016), the empirical study focuses on two forms of narrative: the collective and the individual. These narratives are seen as the objects of the analysis, providing the basis of the discussion regarding strategy making in international contracting firms. The empirical analysis aims to explore how narratives play a key role in the construction of a collective identity for the Turkish international contracting sector. The analysis further aims to demonstrate how such identity work informs the enactment of strategy in individual contracting firms. Hence, the initial phase of the research focuses on analysing the formalized collective narrative as projected by the TCA. As previously discussed in Section 1.1.2, TCA's historically-orientated book, *Geography of Contractors* is seen as a sectoral narrative which constructs a collective identity for the sector. The analysis of the book provides a retrospective and contextualized understanding of strategy making at a sectoral level. The adopted approach is based on the premise that strategy narratives constitute the temporal realities of strategy making (Fenton and Langley, 2011). Narrative analysis depicts the use of a legitimised narrative, which casts the actors, their actions and involvement in specific events of the past into an epic plot structure for an intended purpose (cf. Czarniawska, 2004). It is argued that the meanings embedded in such narratives can provide insights into the discursive and socially constructed nature of competitive strategy. It follows that when the intended audiences accept such narratives, they become available to others as 'strategic resources' for the purposes of generating future narratives and actions. A part of the empirical analysis draws from the concepts of 'narrative building blocks' (NBBs) and 'narrative infrastructure' as explained in Section 3.2.7. Deuten and Rip (2000) argue that once

the narrative infrastructure is constructed, it then becomes a continual point of reference for others. Hence narrative infrastructure sets the tone and sense of direction for the present day and future activities. This contention is strongly correlated with the argument that narratives are a constituent part of reality rather than merely a reflection of it.

The second part of the empirical research is based on narrative interviews with senior managers who currently work in international contracting firms. The essential starting point is that the narratives rehearsed by practitioners provide windows into the micro-processes of strategy making. It is argued that practitioners do not talk about strategy in a detached manner; they enjoy talking about strategy for the very reason that it boosts their sense of self-identity. If identity work is accepted as a continuous and contextually constructed process, then practitioners within Turkish contracting firms would be expected to draw from the available collective narratives of Turkish international contracting. Furthermore, the choices of characters, turning points and plot structure become the key activities of identity work (Brown, 2015). As Gabriel (2000) argues, self-identities are not seen to be about the factual representation of what happened, but about how meaning is infused through the construction of narratives (see Section 3.2.4). Hence, the empirical work is informed by the stereotypical plot structures used in literary studies, i.e. epic, tragic, and comic (cf. Gabriel, 2000; Czarniawska, 2004). The empirical analysis explores the extent to which the narratives espoused by managers are structured around the notions of epic plot structure.

The object of the empirical study is defined as the *narratives of competitive strategy*. Since the empirical part of the study covers different levels of narrative, the analysis adopts a multi-level approach from both sectoral level and individual narratives. However, the unit of analysis will be the narratives of competitive strategy themselves. As narratives are the primary form by which human experience is socially constructed, the sectoral and individual narratives are seen as key resources for the purposes of understanding strategy making. Hence, the individual stories and written histories are accepted as primary data which has to date been largely ignored in construction-related strategy research.

4.4 Data Collection

4.4.1 Scoping study

The empirical research started with a scoping study which was conducted with three experienced managers from different Turkish contracting companies in January 2015. A semi-structured interview approach was used to gather insights into competitiveness and strategy making in international markets. The interview questions were loosely informed by the

dynamic capabilities view (Teece et al, 1997). However, the analysis of the interview transcripts showed that the managers expressed themselves without any strong reference to theoretical concepts reviewed in Section 3.1. Moreover, the managers were keen to describe the trajectory of their organizations by specifying their and other characters' role in it with great detail. Such findings led the researcher to move from the dynamic capabilities view to the narrative perspective, and further the use of literary structures as analytical devise. The shift in theoretical background towards narrative resulted in changes to the methods of data collection. In essence, semi-structured interviews were replaced by narrative interviews.

Semi-structured interview method consists of open questions which aim to elicit the interpretations of the interviewees. It allows new ideas to be brought up during the conversation between interviewer and interviewee (Denzin and Lincoln, 2013). However, as the questions are designed around certain themes that are pre-determined, the interviewees are guided from the beginning. On the other hand, the narrative interview approach allows the interviewees to express themselves more freely (Hopf, 2004). Although the researcher still has a pre-prepared list of questions that she wants the respondents to talk about, the interview develops beyond the constraints of specific questions. In narrative interviews, the researcher invites the interviewees to tell their own stories; however, the researcher can engage in the process with prompts or comments if required. The characteristics of narrative interviews are elaborated in Section 4.4.3.

Before describing the methods used, it is important to address the benefits of conducting a scoping study. First, it allowed the researcher to practice their abilities to engage with interviewees and manage the interview process. Second, it showed the researcher the importance of conducting a desk study about the managers, the organizations that they have worked and the broader business environment. This background knowledge was useful because the managers became more enthusiastic to talk when the interviewer signalled that they had a good knowledge about the managers, their organizations and the context within which they operate. Third, the managers interviewed were used to identify other managers who were subsequently interviewed in the main study. Lastly, the empirical data gathered in one of the interviews was extended by conducting a more detailed archival analysis on a specific organization which was subsequently published as conference paper (cf. Duman, Green and Larsen, 2016).

4.4.2 Historical narratives as written data

The initial empirical data, used to inform the research, was the written historical narrative on Turkish contractors produced by the Turkish Contractors Association (TCA), a quasi-historical

book (Tayanç, 2011). This data source, *Geography of Contractors*, presents an epic story of the Turkish international contracting sector. It describes the development of international contracting with the explicit stated purpose of creating a common memory for the sector and providing a point of reference for subsequent generations. It was published in Turkish and at the time of writing remains publicly available on TCA's website. As discussed in Section 1.2.2, the TCA is the primary membership organisation representing the interests of large Turkish-owned construction companies operating in international markets. It publishes regular periodic sectoral reports on international contracting and hence continuously projects a series of authoritative narratives in support of Turkish contracting. TCA is generally accepted as the most established and successful network organization representing Turkish international contractors. The book chosen for empirical analysis was developed by the TCA as a special project in partnership with the History Foundation of Turkey. The latter is a publishing institution which is specialised in sectoral and organisational level narratives. The ostensive aim of the book is to provide an explanation of how Turkish contracting firms have remained competitive in international markets over the course of several decades. The preface, by a past TCA president, sets the tone in suitably epic terms:

In this book you will find the story of Turkish contractors spreading to 83 countries of the world by the end of 2010.... You will meet the exciting proud adventure describing how they have stretched from Libyan deserts to Russian steppes, from Central Asia, Europe, the America continents to the interior of Africa, and how they have managed to fit such a story into 38 years. (Erdal Eren cited in Tayanç 2011, pp. 13)

The preface of the book also includes speech abstracts from the president and prime minister of Turkey as well as the president of TCA at the time of publication. Such narrative fragments not only emphasise the heroic success of the Turkish international contracting sector for the broader Turkish economy, but also highlights the longstanding nature of the success story. The stated aims of the book are to set a common memory for the sector and to provide a reference point for the future generations. The story told in the book differs from other sectorial reports on international contracting by presenting a meta-narrative which draws from numerous other authoritative publications relating to the Turkish international contracting sector. The TCA occupies a unique space in the institutional landscape of the sector in the way in which it provides a conduit for the purposes of influencing government. On this basis it lends itself to interpretation as a strategy text produced by and for the TCA to legitimize its role.

The sectoral narrative contains rich data in different aspects. It presents market and project-type expansion of Turkish contracting firms chronologically in a supposedly realist timeline from 1972 to 2012. As seen in the Table 4-1, the sectoral narrative of Turkish contractors is described in five main chapters in addition to introduction, preface and conclusion. Each

chapter contains ‘narrative fragments’ derived from 54 face-to-face interviews conducted specifically for this book. In such narrative fragments, the interviewees tell their story of their lived experiences at the time. The interviewees include politicians, industry representatives and senior managers from within the contracting firms. There are also narrative fragments from newspapers and institutional reports which discuss the issues relating to Turkish international contractors at different times. Figure 4-1 presents two sample pages from the book to demonstrate how the sectoral narrative is constructed. The page on the left-hand side includes the TCA’s voice (written text on white background) and a quotation from a manager (written text on pink background). Similarly, the page on the right hand includes the TCA’s voice (written text on white background), a visual from a construction site and a quotation from a newspaper (written text on pink background). The length of the narrative fragments quoted from other resources changes from a paragraph to a couple of pages.

Table 4-1. The structure of the sectoral narrative (Adapted from Tayanç, 2011)

Chapter name	Content
Introduction	Includes narrative fragments from president, prime minister and president of TCA
Preface	General overview of the contracting sector based on Porter’s diamond model
Chapter 1: Internationalization of contracting sector: 1770s	Describes the activities of contracting companies by presenting the details of the projects, companies, and markets.
Chapter 2: Middle East and North Africa: 1980s	Describes the activities of contracting companies by presenting the details of the projects, companies, and markets.
Chapter 3: The transition process from old USSR to Commonwealth of Independent States	Describes the impact of the dissolution of the Soviet Union on the activities of Turkish contractors
Chapter 4: An overview to Geography of Contractors: 20 years after the Tripoli Port Project	Described the product and markets differentiation by presenting the details of the projects, companies, and markets.
Chapter 5: New millennium, New developments	Describes the increasing market expansion and growing project volumes by presenting the details of the projects, companies, and markets.
Conclusion	Provide a general overview with messages for the future

It is argued that insights are gleaned not only from the narrative fragments themselves but also from the very fact that they were chosen for inclusion. The book includes a summary analysis of the sector’s development based on Porter’s diamond framework, but this is marginal to the way in which the subsequent narrative unfolds. It is contended that the TCA narrative draws

from the past selectively to provide a framework for the selected stories, otherwise interpreted as an epic plot structure. The narrative as a whole is notable for the way in which it assigns heroic roles to key individuals in forging the success of Turkish contractors. In essence, the TCA's publication is seen to provide a sectoral-level strategic narrative aimed at reinforcing the competitiveness of Turkish international contractors. It is important to note that the book does not explicitly claim a purposive strategy for the future of the sector. It is especially the researcher who underlies the importance of crafting such a book regarding strategy making on sectoral level.

4.4.3 Narrative interviews with senior managers

The second part of the empirical study comprises thirty narrative interviews conducted in face-to-face meetings with experienced managers in Turkish contracting firms. The narrative interview is a type of qualitative data collection method which is used to obtain life histories, career portrayals and historical description of certain processes (Czarniawska, 2010). Polkinghorne (1988) argues that the key purpose of conducting interviews in narrative research is to invite the individuals to share their stories by asking 'why and how has something happened?' Hopf (2004) argues that the narrative interviews should be based on *narrative generating questions* which invite the respondents to share deeper insights about the research topic without too much intervention (Hopf, 2004). This approach is also known as qualitative in-depth interviewing, in which participants are encouraged to recite their experiences of the phenomena under research (i.e. Reissner, 2011). As the key focus of this thesis is to access the narratives of strategy making, the aim of the interviews was to elicit the interpretations of targeted managers on the topics of competitiveness and strategy making in international markets.

As articulated in Section 3.1, much of the existing research relating to competitive strategy in the construction sector is based on structured questionnaires. It is argued that the findings of such empirical studies are limited as the respondents are only offered a selection of answers specified by the researchers. In contrast, the use of narrative interviews aimed to challenge such limitations by allowing the respondents to explain themselves in their own words. Interestingly, several interviewees asked why the researcher did not send them a questionnaire as other researchers had done before. The managers were seemingly saying that they are used to questionnaire surveys but they are not used to be invited to describe their lived experiences. It was notable that almost all the managers became more interested in answering the questions when the researcher explained the central importance of their stories in understanding strategy making in international contracting. It was clearly observed by the researcher that the managers felt themselves honoured to contribute to the development of current knowledge on

competitiveness and strategy.

Figure 4-1 Sample pages from the Geography of Contractors (Sourced from Tayanç, 2011)



Drawing from notions of narrative interview, the researcher prepared six generic open-ended questions together with a few prompts for each question. Since the narratives offer a way to establish meaning, they help to provide insights into the subjective construct of individuals. As such, the interviews were intended to reveal meanings rather than identify supposed objective ‘truths’ on competitive strategy (c.f. Rhodes and Brown, 2005). The interviews were initiated by asking the respondents for a brief introduction of themselves and their professional background. The managers were encouraged to describe their experiences and responsibilities that they have held during their professional life. They were asked to talk about their past and present experiences as well as describe to what extent they had been involved in strategy making. Thereafter, they were invited to describe how the companies they have worked for had evolved over time. While most of the managers described their current company, a few managers preferred to describe the company that they have worked for longer than the current one. Such initial questions were followed by encouraging the managers to describe how their companies have kept themselves competitive and how they would describe the competitive strategy process. The researcher was frequently asking ‘could you tell me a bit more about this?’ to invite the managers to describe further details. Thereafter, the interviews progressed by asking what the managers think about the future prospects of Turkish contractors in international markets. Lastly, the interviewees were invited to describe what they thought about the relationship between past trajectories of the firm, the decisions made in the present and their

future opportunities or expectations.

The interview questions are presented in Appendix A. However, the process of asking these questions developed differently in each interview. The intention of the researcher was to leave the decision about what was more important to discuss to the interviewees and giving them flexibility to tell the stories they wanted to tell. Söderberg (2006, pp. 413) describes this process as ‘*opening a window to the diverse worlds that key actors in an organization construct, and often act upon as if they were real*’. Hence, the interviews were conducted to elicit a narrative understanding of the challenges raised in much of the existing construction-related competitive strategy literature where the empirical work is largely based on logico-scientific knowledge. While the latter strives to reach generalizable truths, the narrative interview is about in depth understanding through accessing subjective viewpoints (cf. Czarniawska, 2010). As described by Holstein and Gubrium (1995), the narratives gathered from the interviews are contextually bound and mutually created stories. It is important to note that the interviews are co-constructed by both the researcher and the managers, as the researcher participated the process as *fellow traveller* (cf. Gabriel, 2000) (see following section).

All interviews were recorded with the permission of the interviewees, except one manager who was not willing to be recorded. However, he gave enough time to the researcher to note all the details and he shared some written documents that would support the story he told. At the beginning of each interview, the researcher presented the interview form, which includes a brief description of the research aim and questions, to the managers. The managers were allowed to skim through the interview form quickly to understand the focus of the interview. The researcher took notes during the interviews in addition to the recordings. Those field notes helped the researcher to note what points were stressed during the interview, as well as enabling her to see the points that could be questioned more. ‘Can you tell me more about that point?’ was asked to invite the managers to elaborate certain points in more detail. The researcher reviewed the written notes immediately after each interview to expand any details of conversation while they were still fresh. As argued by Gabriel (2000), such brief notes that were taken during the interviews help the researcher during the transcription and analysis process. The researcher paid specific attention to transcribing the recordings in a few days after each interview. This not only enabled the researcher to combine the field notes with the interview transcripts but also enabled the analysis of the data to commence from the very first day of the data collection process. More importantly, the researcher continuously evaluated her participation and management of the narrative construction process and hence improved her performance as the *fellow traveller* in the subsequent interviews (cf. Gabriel, 2000). The names of the interviewees were anonymised in regard to data confidentiality. The following section

describes the role of the researcher in the data collection process.

4.4.4 Place of the researcher

The researcher takes an active role in much of the narrative research. This is one of the key characteristics which differentiates the narrative approach from the empirical studies based on logico-scientific knowing (cf. Polkinghorne, 1988). Gabriel (2000) defines the position of the researcher in a narrative research as *fellow-traveller*. They contend that:

The metaphor of the researcher as fellow-traveller on the storyteller's narrative suggests an inquisitive quality that combines passivity with activity. Like a traveller, the researcher is subject to the narrative's momentum, never seeking to control it or derail it, yet constantly and attentively engaged with it, encouraging it, sometimes nudging it forward, sometime slowing it down. Like a traveller, the researcher must be prepared for disappointments, for long hours of waiting, and for dead ends. At times, the researcher can be afflicted by doubt and anxiety—is he or she still on the narrative, still following the story, missing important clues? (Gabriel, 2000, pp. 3).

The above quotation emphasises how a narrative is created through an interaction between the researcher and the narrator. This is in line with Hopf (2004), who contends that the researcher should adopt a role of attentive listener and contribute the construction of the narrative by gestures and non-directive brief comments. Such argument is also consistent with Seymour, Crook and Rooke (1997), who argues that meaning in management research is created through an iterative and interpretive process, through which researcher and researched are engaged in intersubjective interaction. In other words, the empirical data gathered through narrative interviews are co-constructed by the interviewees and the researcher (Holstein and Gubrium, 1995). The active role of the researcher is clearly described by Polkinghorne (1988, pp.164) as:

In discourse theory, the story is the result of the total situation- the teller of the story, the codes of the story and the hearer of the story. The interviewee is the teller of the story, the interviewer the hearer. In this context, the story selected to be told can function to present a particular image of the teller, and the kind of interview the hearer can affect the kind of story told...If we wish to hear respondents' stories, then we must invite them into our work as collaborators, sharing control with them, so that we try to understand what their stories are about.

The above quotation emphasises that the narrative created in the interview gives a version of the story which might have been constructed differently in any other situation. As argued by Sørderberg (2006) the narrators treat the interviewer as their mediator, who reflects their interpretations and world-views in a more interactive way, beyond simply acting as a passive audience. This is in line with Brown, Stacey and Nandhakumar (2008, pp.1042) who argue that

'researchers need to be reflexively aware that interviewees may be engaged not merely in the recounting of facts or experiences but in political action, script following and impression management'. Therefore, the researcher paid specific attention to signal their knowledge about the field of the research and broader discursive context. The interview process showed that using a common and shared language with the interviewees was very helpful to encourage richer insights from the managers. As the empirical work of this research started with analysing the written sectoral narratives, the researcher was already familiar with the broader narratives at the sectoral level. The analysis of the sectoral narrative also helped the researcher to identify the names of the organizations and the key people who could usefully be approached.

4.4.5 Sampling strategy and size

The interviewees were selected from senior managers within Turkish international contractors. The selection of interviewees was initiated by identifying the names of the key companies and individuals through reviewing TCA publications on international contracting. Two early interviewees were accessed through two university professor contacts in Turkey. Another three preliminary interviewees were directly obtained by the researcher cold-calling the companies. The researcher first contacted the assistants of the targeted managers to extend an invitation for the interview. Then, a brief invitation letter was sent to both using the email addresses of the managers and their assistants. The key strategy of the researcher was to call the assistants until they gave a positive or negative response. Following a snowballing strategy, each interviewee was asked to recommend other potential interviewees who they thought would suitably relevant and experienced. Although it was often hard for the managers to find an appropriate time in their busy schedules, they were enthusiastic to spend time to properly explain their story. It was seen that the duration of the interviews was influenced by the empathy established between the researcher and interviewees, with the exception of a few interviews which were constrained by the managers' need to catch a flight for a business trip.

The researcher conducted a detailed desk study before each interview to become familiar with the managers and the organizations which they worked for. Such preparation helped the researcher to create harmony with the managers in the interview process and led the interviewees to explain more about the research topic. In essence, the managers seemed more willing to share their deepest insights when they felt that the researcher was well informed about them, their organization and international contracting sector in general.

The researcher carried out thirty-three interviews in Turkey between April 2017 and June 2017. Three of the interviews were eliminated from the analysis as the content of the interviews was not relevant to the research aim. Although these three managers had considerable experience

in international markets, they tended to provide more insights about the domestic market due to their current position. Most interviewees were selected from different companies. However, the researcher also interviewed managers from the same company, since the degree of experience in international markets was seen as more important than requiring managers to be from different companies. The key criterion for interviewee selection was the length of their experience in international markets, as well as their active role in the decision-making processes of the organizations that they worked for. Most of the managers held senior positions within their companies, such as being a member of the executive board (Table 4-2). One of the interviewees was a representative of the Turkish Contractors Association. As they held a strategic position within the organization, their narrative provided a general overview of Turkish international contracting. The interviewees came from different backgrounds, with a diversity of professional career paths. However, all of them held at least a bachelor's degree in engineering, particularly in civil engineering. Most of the managers had postgraduate degrees, including M.Sc.s., MBAs, and Ph.Ds. The number of years' experience ranged from 10 to 53 years. The contracting firms that they work for differed in terms of the project and market types. The summary of the interviewees' profiles is presented in Table 4-2.

The interviews were carried out in English or Turkish. All managers were capable of reading and talking in English. However, some managers preferred talking in Turkish as they stated that they would express themselves much easier. The interviews held in Turkish were translated into English during the data analysis process. However, the researcher kept both Turkish and English transcripts to prevent any meaning from being lost in translation. The duration of the interviews varied from 40 minutes to 3 hours which added to 3,194 minutes of recorded data. The interview transcripts consisted of 667 pages of word documents for the data analysis. The number of the interviews was determined through the data analysis process. The interview process was finalised when the themes emerged from the narratives became repetitive and saturated.

Table 4-2. The profiles of the interviewees

Number	Interviewee	Interview duration (minutes)	Experience	Bachelor	Postgraduate	Position	Areas of business
1	Interview 1	84	22 years	Civil Eng.	M.Sc.	Former CEO (10 years)/ Owner of his own company since 2015	Transportation, Infrastructure, Energy, Environmental, Real estate
2	Interview 2	83	28 years	Civil Eng.	MBA	Vice President	Contracting, Energy, Development & Investment, Healthcare
3	Interview 3	126	10 years	Civil Eng.	MBA	Deputy Manager, Business Development	Superstructure, Infrastructure, Transportation, Industrial
4	Interview 4	124	44 years	Civil Eng.	M.Sc.	Member of the Board	Transportation, Energy, Civil
5	Interview 5	89	20 years	Civil Eng.	M.Sc.	General Manager (Owner)	Civil, Industrial & Project management
6	Interview 6	145	33 years	Civil Eng.	M.Sc.	Project Development Manager	Multiple firms / multiple business lines
7	Interview 7	117	53 years	Civil Eng.	M.Sc.	Former Member of the Board	Marine, Civil, Infrastructure, Groundworks, Energy, Management
8	Interview 8	99	44 years	Mechanical Eng.		General Manager	Housing, Transportation, Petrochemicals, Industrial, Water and Sewage, Energy
9	Interview 9	92	13 years	Civil Eng.	M.Sc., MBA	Business Development Executive	Water, Energy, Transportation, Superstructure
10	Interview 10	120	17 years	Civil Eng.	MBA	Commercial Manager / Business Developer	Energy, Infrastructure, Civil, Transportation, Real Estate
11	Interview 11	93	23 years	Architecture		General Manager and Board Director	Superstructure, Infrastructure, Industrial, PFI
12	Interview 12	55	27 years	Mechanical eng.		Secretary General	Trade Association/ TCA
13	Interview 13	175	47 years	Civil Eng.	M.Sc.	Partner, Member of the Board	Transportation, Infrastructure, Civil, Real estate, Construction Systems & Materials
14	Interview 14	82	16 years	Civil Eng.		Owner and CEO	Contracting, Energy, Development & Investment, Healthcare

15	Interview 15	63	11 years	Civil Eng.	M.Sc., Ph.D.	Director of BIM	Transportation
16	Interview 16	106	40 years	Civil Eng.	M.Sc. + MBA	Owner	Civil, Infrastructure, Industrial, Engineering
17	Interview 17	170	39 years	Civil Eng.		Advisor to the Board	Marine, Civil, Infrastructure, Groundworks, Energy, Management
18	Interview 18	62	19 years	Civil Eng.		Project Controls Director / Business Development Manager	Transportation, Energy, Civil
19	Interview 19	118	15 years	Civil Eng.	M.Sc.	Project Controls Director / Business Development Manager	Civil, Infrastructure, Industrial, Transportation, Engineering, Real Estate
20	Interview 20	126	20 years	Civil Eng.		Commercial Manager / Business Developer	Energy, Infrastructure, Civil, Transportation, Real Estate
21	Interview 21	40	25 years	Civil Eng.	M.Sc.	General Manager and Board Director	Superstructure, Infrastructure, Industrial, PFI
22	Interview 22	82	16 years	Civil Eng.	MBA	Owner and Chairman	Contracting, Energy, Development & Investment, Healthcare
23	Interview 23	98	40 years	Civil Eng.		Construction Coordinator	Energy, Infrastructure, Civil, Transportation, Real Estate
24	Interview 24	143	38 years	Aeronautical Eng.		Group Deputy Coordinator	Housing, Transportation, Petrochemicals, Industrial, Water and Sewage, Energy
25	Interview 25	103	24 years	Aeronautical Eng.	M.Sc.	Coordinator	Superstructure, Infrastructure, Transportation, Industrial
26	Interview 26	136	49 years	Civil Eng.		Construction Coordinator	Energy, Infrastructure, Civil, Transportation, Real Estate
27	Interview 27	166	22 years	Civil Eng.	M.Sc.	Vice President	Groundworks, Marine
28	Interview 28	166	26 years	Civil Eng.	M.Sc., Ph.D.	General Manager	Groundworks, Marine
29	Interview 29	162	40 years	Civil Eng.	M.Sc., Ph.D.	Member of the Board	Marine, Civil, Infrastructure, Groundworks, Energy, Management
30	Interview 30	135	35 years	Civil Eng.	M.Sc.	Project Manager	Energy, Infrastructure, Civil, Transportation, Real Estate

4.5 Data analysis

4.5.1 Overview of the analysis process

The data analysis was conducted in two phases. The initial phase was the analysis of the sectoral narrative, the strategy text as reproduced in the TCA publication *The Geography of Contractors*. The analysis of the sectoral narrative continued from September 2016 to February 2017. The first phase was finalized prior to conducting the interviews, as the outcomes of the sectoral narrative analysis enabled the researcher to understand the broader narrative on the sectoral level. The second phase of the empirical work was the analysis of the narrative interviews conducted with the individual managers. The analysis of the interviews started from the very beginning of the interview process commencing in April 2017. The researcher paid special attention to initiating the analysis of the interviews in parallel with the data collection process (Holstein and Gubrium, 1995). The findings from the analysis of each interview helped the researcher to expand her insights about the research subject as well as increase her confidence while communicating with the subsequent interviewees. It is important to note that the data analysis process was not a simple linear path whereby the researcher moved from one step to another. It was more of an iterative process whereby the researcher goes back and forth between empirical data, relevant literature review and the adopted theoretical and analytical concepts.

The described research followed two complementary methods of narrative analysis on the basis that '*narrativity encompasses both the telling and the told*' (Barry and Elmes, 1997, pp.432). One method is the *structural analysis*, the main concern of which is how the story is constructed or how the narrative elements are linked (cf. Czarniawska, 2004). The second method is the *thematic analysis* which focuses on the role of the narrative in creating a shared social reality for the benefit of an intended audience. Thematic analysis concentrates on issues of content and provides a means of understanding 'what is told' (Riessman, 2008). The analysis of sectoral and individual narratives drew from both structural and thematic analysis, often iterating between the two. The following two sections presents the details regarding both methods prior to describing how they were used to analyse each data set.

4.5.2 Structural analysis

The structural analysis of the narratives pays attention to how and why a story is told in a particular way. This line of research focuses on the ways that the plot is structured, events are defined and roles assigned to characters within a depicted contextual setting (Holstein and Gubrium, 2012). Riessman (2008) describes

Figure 4-2. A snapshot from the structural and thematic analysis of the sectoral narrative

The screenshot shows a word processing application window titled "2-The Analysis of TCA Book [Compatibility Mode] - Word". The main text area contains several paragraphs of text with various words and phrases highlighted in different colors (yellow, green, red, blue). To the right of the text, a sidebar displays a list of thematic categories, each with a blue person icon and a text description. Dashed lines connect these categories to specific highlighted text in the document.

Document Text (with highlights):

There is an discussion on whether sub-contracting or contracting should be counted as the first internationalization point... The quotation from [SARIK TARA ENKA] highlights that they were the very first Turkish contractors in LIBYA in 1971... but the important point in his talk is that "The following attempt after the export company was to participating the tender" [The message in here is that the export company was seen the leading route to the international contracting business] [HELPER] This first work was a subcontracting of iron and concrete molds for [GERMAN FIRM] internationalization through joint ventures

A quotation from [MOHAMMED MANGUSH] highlights that "the contractors who want to conduct business in Libya should meet the condition that they should had completed \$50 US million work in abroad before... However, none of the Turkish contractors had the capacity to fulfill this condition" [OPPONENT] Through my help, Turkish firms were exempted from this condition" ... "There was another point that [Turkish Banks] were not acknowledged [OPPONENT], (therefore) they (the contractors) had to bring security deposits from [European Banks]... Through the decision that I had enacted, the security deposits from Turkish banks were accepted as well" [personal networks + Turkish government's scholarships + financial capability of Turkish contractors + problems related to Turkish banking system]

However, the explanations of [Mohammed Mangush] highlights some other points that caused the problems arose between Libya and Turkey. One of them was that [The Ministry of Public Works in Turkey] gave the international contracting certificates to several companies without considering their capability conduct business in abroad [Government's lack of strong auditing systems cause problems (negative image) in the following period] [OPPONENT], and also some of the [TURKISH BANKS] [the capability of the domestic banking system for the regulations of international business found insufficient] [OPPONENT] could not pay the security deposits brought by Turkish contractors.

p.40: A picture from Benghazi Cement Factory Project, 1976, Libya

Drawing from an interview with [SARIK TARA ENKA] (2005), the text emphasize the importance of working in partnership with foreign companies on not only getting familiarize with foreign companies but also learning the standards of international contracting. [Hero learns and develops networks through partnerships]. The quotations from [Sarik Tara ENKA] also highlights the entrepreneurial behaviour the the company leader. "A contracting firm should have international work to answer the conjecture", (p.40). [entrepreneurial behaviour]

p.41: A picture from Misrate Harbour Project, 1973, Libya

The narrative of Turkish contractors in LIBYA followed by the quotations from co-founder of STPA [FEVZI AKKAYA], in which he tells his partner [SEZAI TURKES]'s experiences in LIBYA

"Following the experience gained by the tender preparation for Tripoli Harbour, [Sezai Turkes] repaired tender for Misrate Harbour in haste [Emphasis on the heroic role / playing it down]... [YUGOSLAVIANS] were so close to our bid price, but we won the tender... From then, our Istanbul office became a modern Babel Tower [reference to a mythical story], in which two [ENGLISH FIRMS] go in and out. The Englishman with a handlebar moustache was chasing [SEZAI TURKES] and asking "Mr. Sezai, I don't get it, why the bid price of MISTRATE is

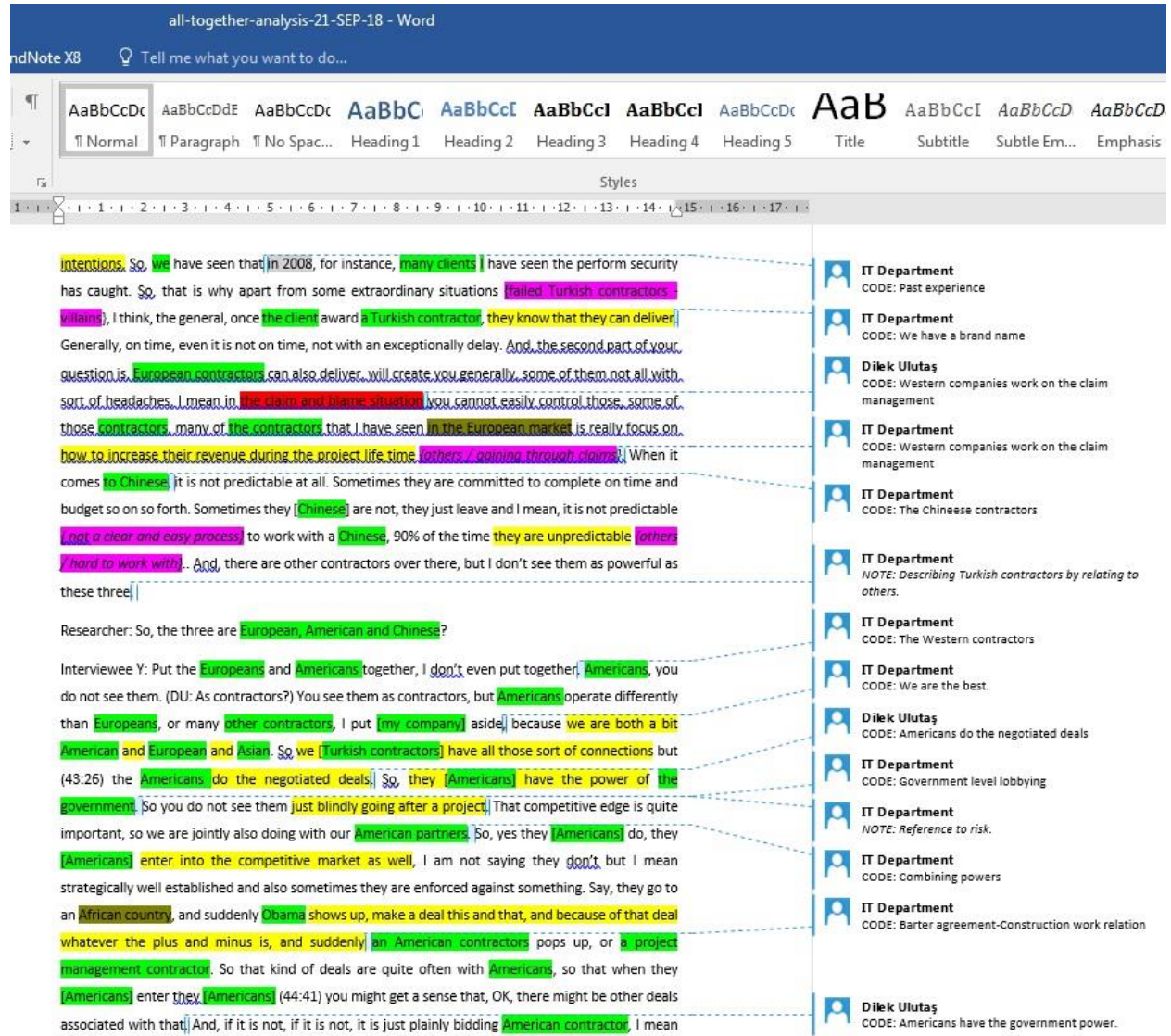
Thematic Analysis Results (from sidebar):

- IT Department**: Sub-contracting practices
- IT Department**: Benefiting from first mover advantage
- IT Department**: JV/consortium practices
- Dilek Ulutaş**: Financial capabilities (required)
- Dilek Ulutaş**: Turning point / Key event; Mobilization of the networks
- IT Department**: Lack of governmental regulation
- Dilek Ulutaş**: Technical / organizational and managerial capabilities
- Dilek Ulutaş**: Financial capabilities to work in overseas
- IT Department**: Learning from partners
- Dilek Ulutaş**: Visionary leaders
- IT Department**: Past experience

the structural analysis as focusing on the 'telling' of the narratives which means how the content is organized by the narrator. The structural analysis of the described research was carried out by the deconstruction of the sectoral and individual narratives through interrogative processes resulting in the identification and coding of their key constituent elements. Rather than adopting a single structural analytical model, the researcher created a coding structure on the basis of an iterative process involving oscillation between the empirical data and narrative analysis literature. The process was informed by Polkinghorne's (1988) discussion of the constituent elements of narrative, Gabriel's (2000) discussion on the use of literary plot structures, and Greimas' (1987) actant model. In line with the approach advocated

by Polkinghorne (1988), the important narrative elements were accepted as events, actors, actions, and the spatio-temporal context (for an explanation of these terms see Section 3.2.3). Drawing on such accepted narrative elements, a colour coding structure was developed to highlight each narrative element with a specific colour. Figure 4-2 and Figure 4-3 illustrate sample pages from the structural analysis of sectoral and individual narratives.

Figure 4-3. A snapshot from the structural and thematic analysis of the individual narratives



When the colour coding was completed, the focus of the empirical analysis progressed to the identification of the way in which the described narrative elements were connected into a coherent story by a plot structure. It is important to emphasise that it is the plot structure of a narrative that assigns significance to

the selected events, actors and the actions (Polkinghorne, 1988; Gabriel, 2000; Czarniawska, 2004). As argued by Barry and Elmes (1997) structuring narratives in the form of familiar plot structures increases their credibility and acceptance to a targeted audience.

Authors such as Gabriel (2000) and Czarniawska (2004) argue that there are a number of stereotypical plot structures (i.e. epic, tragic, and comic) derived from literature which can be used to conduct narrative analysis in organisational studies. The reading of the empirical data with these concepts in mind enabled the researcher to identify that both the sectoral and individual level narratives are structured around the notions of *epic plot*. The epic plot is generally constructed around a *hero* who is projected as being involved in a noble *journey* towards a successful outcome. The hero is expected to display courage and dedication (*fixed qualities*) in overcoming certain *predicaments* on the way to a specified aim (Gabriel, 2000). Table 3-1 presented in Section 3.2.4 demonstrates the elements of a typical epic plot structure. Such elements of the epic plot structure were used as analytical concepts to carry out the structural analysis. The elements of epic plot enabled the researcher to identify the key *events* and *actors* which are considered to shape the trajectory of the Turkish contractors. The structural analysis was also loosely inspired by concepts derived from Greimas' (1987) 'actant' model as presented in Table 3-2. It is argued that the concepts defined in Gabriel's poetic modes of epic stories and Greimas' actant model (see Section 3.2.4) are very similar, and more importantly, complementary. For example, the *protagonist* and *plot focus* concepts in Gabriel's epic plot structure are seen to resonate with the *subject* and *object* actants in Greimas' model. Similarly, the *helper* and *opponent* in Greimas' actant model are seen to elaborate the roles attached to *other characters* in Gabriel's epic plot structure.

It is important to note that the researcher used the concepts, derived from Gabriel and Greimas, loosely as interpretive devices rather than discrete lenses for the purposes of interpreting the data. They are seen to be important to help analyse the ways in which strategy narratives are constructed. More importantly, the researcher used these concepts selectively to construct her own argument within the analysis and discussion chapters (See Chapters 5 and 6). Such selective use of these analytical models is consistent with the temporal and subjective nature of narratives. Czarniawska (2004) argues that many narratives build particular plot lines around the tendencies of *helpers* to subsequently turn into *opponents*, and vice versa. Further to that, the same characters are expected to be presented as *heroes* or *villains* at different times. By demonstrating such temporal and dynamic connections across an extended timeline, narrative analysis provides a means of understanding the essential temporality associated with the negotiation and enactment of strategy.

It is important to note that the analysis of the empirical data was not limited to the structural characteristics. The researcher was also interested in common themes that the narratives were constructed around. Although the narrative literature tends to define the structural and thematic analysis as separate methods, it is often not possible to draw a boundary between them in the process of analysis (cf. Riessman, 2008). This is because the central structural element, that of international competitiveness, is closely tied to the themes that iteratively emerge through the reflexive analytical process. In essence, the researcher finds the two methods to be closely interlinked.

4.5.3 Thematic analysis

The thematic analysis pays attention to the content and meaning of stories and seeks to understand ‘what is said’ in the narratives. As Riessman (2008) argues, the focus of thematic analysis is on the *told* rather than the aspects of *telling*. The key focus of the empirical work becomes searching for common themes to explain the research phenomena. Although there is not a certain route to follow in thematic analysis, the existing literature and adopted theoretical background provides initial clues for the themes that the researcher detected within the empirical data (Denzin and Lincoln, 2013). Brown and Humphreys (2003, pp. 127) suggest detailed initial reading of the empirical data to understand ‘*similarities, dissimilarities and recurrent words and themes*’ as a starting point. This is also consistent with Polkinghorne (1988, pp.177) who describes the thematic analysis as an interpretation circle between ‘original data and the emerging description of the pattern’.

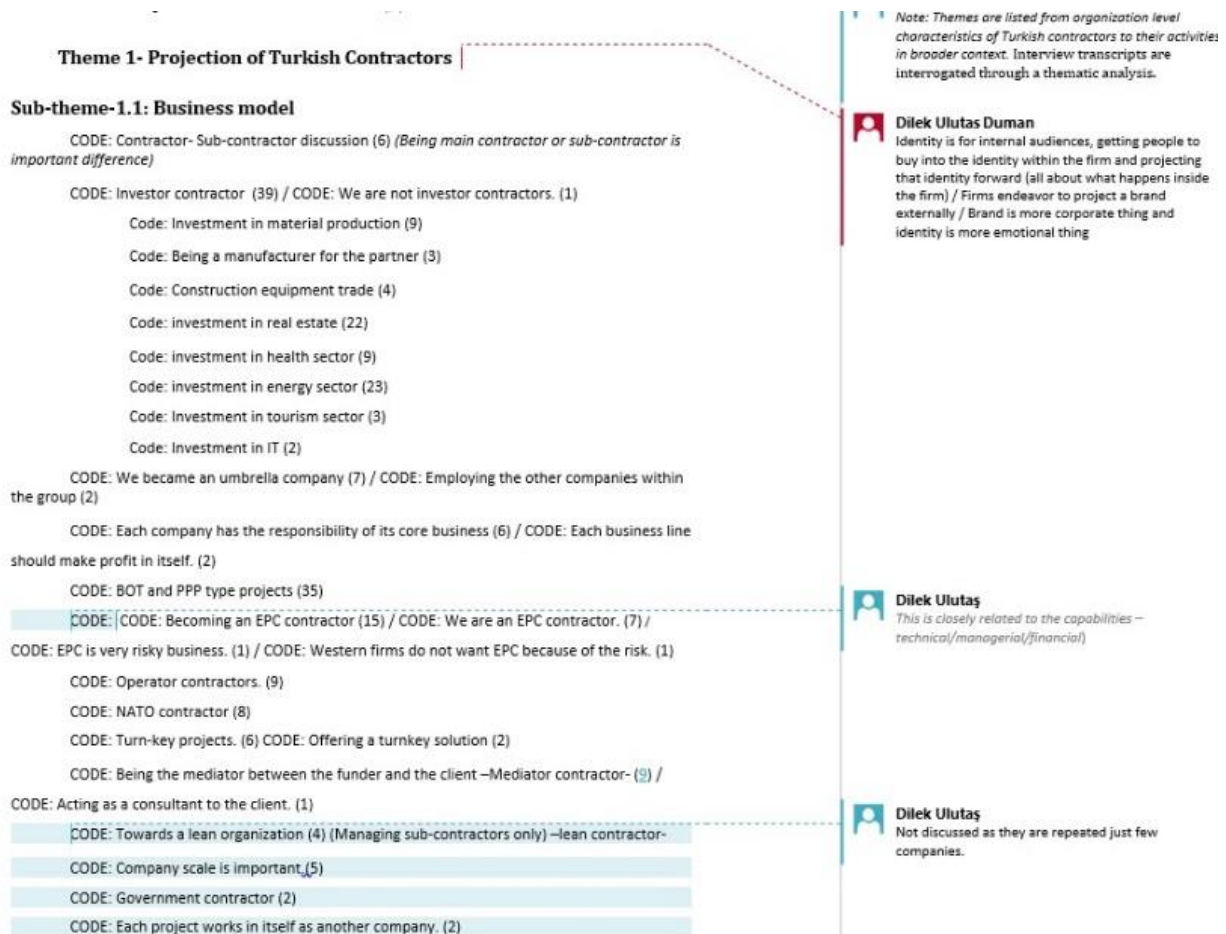
The thematic analysis of the described research was informed by the research question and the relevant literature. The themes were created through an abductive process involving oscillation between the empirical data and the concepts represented within the relevant literature (Reichertz, 2004). Although the researcher did not have any predetermined ideas regarding emergent themes, neither did she approach the data with a blank mind without any theoretical or contextual awareness. The competitive positioning school is especially notable for its knowledge artefacts that indicate supposed relationships between key variables (Wilson and Jarzabkowski, 2006). Other theories of competitive strategy are more conceptual in nature and have hence spawned fewer identifiable tools of analysis. It was therefore necessary to search for evidence in support of the broader-based concepts associated with the various schools of thought. The concept of ‘bricolage’ is relevant here whereby pre-existing tools and concepts are mobilised in ways which suit the needs of the user (op. cit.). Hence a particular terminology can often be appropriated without any allegiance to its theoretical antecedents.

The thematic analysis of sectoral and individual narratives was carried out by following a similar process

(differences will be explained in the following section). A process was followed whereby initially codes were developed, then classified and thereafter grouped into themes. Next, the key themes which emerged from the narratives are identified as the NBBs. Developing codes is generally accepted as the first step of a thematic analysis process (Charmaz, 2009). As argued by Saldana (2013:4), coding is ‘an interpretive act’ whereby the researcher assigns words or short phrases to a portion of text representing a line of thought. Saldana (2013) further identifies several different coding methods that could be used to analyse the qualitative data. The codes developed within the current research resonate with the *in-vivo* and *descriptive* coding methods. Whilst *in-vivo* coding means using the words and phrases directly taken from the empirical data as a code, *descriptive* coding refers to the codes developed by the researcher to label an aggregated set of common ideas. For example, while the codes such as (i) *hands on approach*, (ii) *successive projects* exemplify *descriptive* coding; (i) *make it up as you go along* and (ii) *we built trust* illustrates *in-vivo* coding in the current research.

The coding process was repeated several times until the researcher was convinced that there were no new codes emerging from either the sectoral or individual narratives. Then, the codes circulating around similar theoretical ideas were grouped into emergent themes. In the sectoral narrative, the identified themes were cross-referenced across the five main chapters presented in the book (see Table 4-1). Similarly, the emergent themes detected in the interview transcripts were cross-referenced across the 30 interviews. In this process, the researcher also developed notes on the empirical data to reflect her interpretation of the identified themes. The process was finalized by identifying a number of central NBBs which illustrate how competitive strategy is interpreted and explained within sectoral and individual narratives. Figure 4-3 exemplifies snapshots from this process of moving from codes to identification of the NBBs.

Figure 4-4. A snapshot from the processes of coding, grouping and theming



Once the identification of the codes, themes and NBBs were finalized, the researcher went back to the empirical data to copy all the passages assigned to each code to a new Microsoft Word file sequentially. This enabled a cross comparison between the selected phrases and identification of the most illustrative quotations which are represented in analysis chapter (see Chapter 5). Figure 4-4 demonstrates a snapshot from this process. The visual is an example from the comparison of the phrases that were assigned to the code, *combining powers*. It is important to note that most of the time the selected phrases included multiple codes as the narrators can refer to several different issues in a short phrase. For example, the sample passages presented in Figure 4-5 have multiple codes assigned to the same phrase. This means those phrases were evaluated for each code. The described process was repeated for all codes until the researcher constructed her own narrative regarding the identified themes and NBBs at both data sets. The outcomes of this analysis process are presented in Section 5.2 and 5.3.

Figure 4-5. A snapshot from the cross comparison of the passages labelled with the same code

CODE combining powers - Word

Tell me what you want to do...

BbCcDc AaBbCcDdE AaBbCcDc AaBbCc AaBbCcC AaBbCcD AaBbCcDc AaB AaBbCcD AaBbCcDc AaBbCcDc AaBbCcDc AaBbCcDc AaBbCcDcE

Normal ¶ Paragraph ¶ No Spac... Heading 1 Heading 2 Heading 3 Heading 4 Title Subtitle Subtle Em... Emphasis Intense E... Strong Quote

Styles

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 17 18

Sub-Theme-3.5: Collaborative practices

CODE: Combining powers (64)

Passage - 1

Researcher: Was that a subsidiary of [Company 1] (mentioning about his company)?

Interviewee 1: It was the [Company 1] who went there and established a company. On behalf of [Company 1], established a company with a local partner, so that [Company 1] entered the market without any headache. We gave the other company the chance to survive in the market with the name of [Company 1], and also I introduced the name of [Company 1] to the market. [EPIC] If you make something in Qatar Westway, everybody knows you, the name of [Company 1], any way, [Company 1] has never happened because of 2008 crises, [TRAGEDY] We just signed the client 3 months before the crises, so but I succeeded with my idea at the end of the day I am the hero. These kinds of populations, associations, committees, they visited the Qatar with the president, with the prime minister, tens of contractors, hundreds of contractors, and always Emirate of Qatar, Emirate of Dubai or the others or the king of S. Arabia, they say of course they are welcome, of course, of course (1:02:03) nothing happen. [Because] Middle East, especially Middle East, they are British, how should I say it, they are British organized communities, so in order to get any project from Qatar you have to have a consultant how to establish a company there, very sophisticated, you cannot even price a project there, it is very hard, it is very tough. If you don't know the whole legislation you cannot give the right price, because in very small article, it says any foreigner labor that want to work in Qatar in a construction project, he should fly to Doha from his country by Qatar Airways.

Passage 2

Researcher: But, isn't it a big change? (Interviewee 1: It is big change) Especially, the investments in energy projects, because it is totally a new type of construction projects that you need to develop you...

Interviewee 2: No, experience means...experience what you need to compromise. If your company, let's say COMPANY X (16:46) is experienced in power generation, this means that your COMPANY Y has experience in housing. In Turkish style (Laugh!) if COMPANY Y has good men, good people, good stuff there, COMPANY Y has power, experience, make sure, it is people, I was experienced for example in this COMPANY Z and COMPANY Z, in oil and gas and I came here now and I (17:18) bring my expertise here. That is why we have got a project, oil and gas projects now. We are doing a refinery now, doing power plants. I bring my experience here. So, experience means your network, your people, I know the people, I go and how talk to people, of course. Of course, there are some projects that we are not qualified technically, legally, and in this case we are able to bring new people next to us, or under us, or above us a company.

Passage 3

Researcher: A kind of partnership (Interviewee 2: A company)

Annotations:

- Dilek Ulutaş**
CODE: We have a brand name.
CODE: Combining powers
- IT Department**
Turning point
- Dilek UlutaşDuman**
Emphasis on self
- Dilek UlutaşDuman**
I can do much better than TCA/ government.
- Dilek UlutaşDuman**
CODE: Government level lobbying
- Dilek Ulutaş**
Note: Market characteristics/rules of Qatar.
- IT Department**
Could be quoted!
- Dilek Ulutaş**
CODE: Transferring individuals who has the expertise and know how
- Dilek UlutaşDuman**
Turning point
Emphasis on self
- Dilek Ulutaş**
CODE: Combining powers
- IT Department**
Could be quoted!

4.5.4 Reflections on the analysis of the sectoral and individual narratives

Although the sectoral and individual narratives were analysed through similar processes described above, there were slight differences. As explained earlier, the data analysis started with the sectoral narrative. This included analysis of the hard copy text in the book, as well as the English translation in Microsoft word. The aim of using the copies of the data in both languages is to assure the quality of the analysis process, especially to prevent any misleading interpretation. The researcher was constantly taking notes, either by handwriting or inserting comments on the text. The analysis process followed the structure of the book (the chapters in chronological time) (see Table 4-1 in Section 4.4.2). Once the initial analysis was completed in all chapters, it was recognized that the notions of epic plot structure inherent in the overall story were more

important than the chronological order. Therefore, the attention of the researcher turned towards extracting the key NBBs within the overall story rather than paying attention to chronological order of the book. This is consistent with the temporality of the time conception in narrative research. Appendix B exemplifies how the researcher moved from themes identified in each period to extract the NBBs underpin the sectoral narrative.

The analysis of the sectoral narrative helped the researcher to follow a more systematic analytical process in the analysis of interview data. The transcripts of the individual narratives were listed sequentially from interview 1 to interview 30. The process of coding, grouping the codes, identifying themes and NBBs was carried out on the interview transcripts in Microsoft Word software. Furthermore, the colour coding structure developed in the first phase was used to identify the narrative elements and the plot structure of the interviews. The thematic analysis started with more than a hundred codes which were progressively refined into themes and finally to four key NBBs. Appendix C presents the theme structure developed from the narrative interviews.

One of the questions that the researcher kept in mind throughout the data analysis was the similarities and differences between the individual and sectoral level narratives. Another important point was understanding the extent to which the individual and formal narratives of competitive strategy reflect/ drive from or contradict with the academic narratives of competitive strategy. The NBBs identified in the sectoral and individual narratives were used to structure the data analysis presented in Chapter 5.

4.6 Validity issues in narrative research

The purpose of this section is to address issues of validity and reliability in narrative research. As argued in Section 4.2, the narrative approach pays attention to subjective and temporal meanings created to make sense of the 'lived worlds' (cf. Rhodes and Brown, 2005). In line with Bruner (1986), the empirical research, carried out at sectoral and individual levels of Turkish international contractors, followed the central notions of narrative understanding. This means focusing on the analysis of stories in order to understand both personal and broader social realms. Polkinghorne (1988) argues that the validity of narrative research is achieved by generating well-grounded and supportable conclusions. This is achieved by clearly presenting each step followed within the research together with the underlying assumptions. The structure of the thesis is organized to allow the reader to follow the research process and the reasoning of the researcher. This includes identifying the research problem and describing the details of the empirical context through a critique of the existing literature and early empirical interviews. The adopted theoretical and

methodological perspectives are considered in comparison with alternative approaches. Finally, the data is interpreted using illustrative quotations and discussing the findings in comparison with the related literature. The data analysis presented in Chapter 5 outlines the informal reasoning which underpins the discussions presented in Chapter 6. The data analysis process described in Section 4.5 further illustrates the reasoning of the researcher, through which the conclusions have been derived. In line with the underlying methodological position, the main concern of the researcher was not claiming any truth regarding strategy making, it was rather the persuasiveness of the research outcomes.

To reach well-grounded and supportable conclusions, the researcher paid specific attention to ensuring reliability. While reliability means achieving stable and consistent results in quantitative research, in qualitative research it refers to the dependability of the data and the trustworthiness of the data analysis (Polkinghorne, 1988; 2007). The dependability of the research was achieved by keeping the records of all research process in an accessible manner, according to the ethical principles of the University Research Ethics Policy. The trustworthiness of the research was achieved by ensuring the quality of the data collection and in relation to analysis process in accordance with the methodological approach (see Section 4.4 and 4.5). It is important to note that the empirical data collected for this research are the narratives that reflect the subjective interpretations of competitive strategy at different levels. The empirical data gathered from TCA book reflects the dominant voice at the sectoral level and it does that by providing insights from variety of lived experiences, quoted in the book. As such, the interviewees were selected from the key decision makers within Turkish contracting companies who have been involved in international markets for decades. The data analysis process in each data set was re-evaluated several times until the researcher reached a point where there was no new code emerging. However, it is important to note that the primary aim of the researcher was not to reach any *prima facie* accuracy relating to the trajectory of the Turkish international contractors. It is more about reaching a variety of interpretations to achieve a well-grounded argument, comparing and contrasting the meanings created by a multi-authored and multi-level context.

4.7 Research ethics

The research was carried out strictly in accordance with the principles of the University Research Ethics Policy. Ethics approval was obtained prior to undertaking the empirical part of the research. The relevant documentation cover various issues including background information about the researcher supervisors and school, as well as details about the purpose and scope of the research, confidentiality and voluntary participation in the research. The supporting documents of the ethics form includes a consent form, an

information sheet and interview questionnaire¹. (see Appendix D). These supporting documents were presented to each participant prior to interview. The participants were asked to review the documents and sign the consent form. In line with the ethical guidelines, all the data generated for the research was kept confidential, allowing only the researcher and the supervisor to access it. The names of the interviewees and their companies were anonymized in the data analysis process.

4.8 Summary

This chapter discussed the underlying research methodology of the current research. The discussion started with outlining the underpinning assumptions of narrative research adopted to explore how strategy making is understood through the analysis of sectoral and individual narratives of Turkish international contractors. Different streams of narrative research were described prior to explaining the interpretive narrative approach adopted within the current research. Narratives were seen as constitutive of reality which is continuously co-constructed through a multi-authored and multi-level process. Then, the data collection process was described by presenting the details of data collection at two different levels. First, attention was given to describing the nature of the scoping study and explaining the outcomes achieved by conducting it. Second, the use of a historical book as a primary resource from to understand the sectoral level narrative of Turkish international contractors was justified. Third, why and how the individual narratives was constructed through the use of the narrative interview method was outlined. This included a discussion about the active and reflexive role of the researcher during the construction of individual narratives. Then, the details of the interviewees and the process of carrying out narrative interviews were explained. The discussion was followed by outlining why and how the empirical data were subjected to structural and thematic analysis. Lastly, the attention was given to the validity issues and ethical considerations followed in the research. The following chapter presents the analysis of the sectoral and individual narratives.

¹ As the interview questionnaire is presented in Appendix A, it is not included in Appendix D)

5. The narratives of Turkish international contracting

5.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to present the findings from the analysis of the sectoral and individual narratives. As described in Section 4.5 of the preceding chapter, the empirical data has been subjected to both thematic and structural analysis. The structural analysis enabled the researcher to understand how epic plot structures are used to infuse meaning on certain narrative elements. The thematic analysis led to the identification of a number of narrative buildings blocks (NBBs). These NBBs and the way that the narratives are constructed are seen to provide insights into how strategies are enacted within Turkish international contracting firms. The findings are presented in two sections; (i) the analysis of the sectoral narrative, (ii) the analysis of the individual narratives. Each section explains the identified NBBs and central themes related to them.

5.2 Historical narratives as strategic resources: A sectoral-level analysis of Turkish international contracting

The generic TCA narrative notably depicts the 40-year history of Turkish international contractors as an *adventure* story. The *subject* of the story emerges as either the companies or the senior managers. Both are invariably described as *heroes* when they are associated with successful outcomes regarding to expansion in international markets. But the same actors can easily turn to *villains* when their actions are retrospectively associated with failure. The *object* (the end goal) is described as the creation of new markets and growth of the project volumes. These are seen to be achieved by overcoming the barriers presented by particular geographies together with the challenges of operating in conflict zones. The generic narrative is relentlessly positive in emphasising the achievements of Turkish contractors, but the narrative fragments (the quotes presented throughout the book), drawn from senior managers, represent a more heterogeneous set of voices which accommodates successes and failures. The emphasised themes in the narrative fragments frequently point towards the *helpers* that should be strengthened and the *opponents* that need to be overcome. These narrative fragments clearly draw selectively from the past with a view to emphasising what might be important in the future. This reflects the use of historical stories to legitimise some practices while discrediting others.

Table 5-1. The main findings from the thematic analysis of the sectoral narrative

NBBs	Related themes
The ‘initiators’ of internationalization	The capabilities of the firm Market characteristics
Building brand recognition	Early project completion Commitment to quality Characteristics of Turkish people Adversity to conflict
Love of work in high-risk markets	Risk lover attitude ‘Make it up as you go along’ approach
Ensuring financial and consulting capabilities	Limited financial capabilities Absence of consultancy expertise
Mobilization of networks	Historical and cultural connections Government lobbying Mobilisation of individual contacts
Avoiding ‘internal’ competition	Avoiding competition through low cost Working collaboratively

The details of the narrative fragments also provide insights into the actors, actions, and events which are deemed to be important. This again is representative of the choices made in terms of the elements which are considered to be deserving of emphasis, and hence need to be linked into the plot structure. The adopted interpretive analysis enables the researcher to depict how the historical narratives were compiled for the envisaged strategic purposes of the sector. It is argued that the implied distinctions between actors, events and actions are shaped by the intentions of the narrators rather than an historical objective reality. Hence, the sectoral narrative of Turkish contractors is seen to be a crafted artefact. The analysis focused in particular on the way the intended strategic purpose played an important role in constructing an epic plot structure based on a selection of narrative fragments. The essential point is that the plotline of the constructed narrative constitutes a negotiated memory of the past together with a set of strategy resources for shaping the future of Turkish international contracting.

The thematic analysis of the sectoral narrative addresses the following emergent NBBs: the initiators of internationalization; building brand recognition; love of work in high-risk markets; the requirement for financial and consulting capabilities; mobilization of the networks; and avoiding internal competition. Table 5-1 illustrates these NBBs and related themes identified in the sectoral narrative. The following sections

will present an explanation for each theme by illustrating quotes from the empirical data.

5.2.1 The ‘initiators’ of internationalization

The analysis of the TCA narrative demonstrates that the starting point for the internationalization of Turkish contracting is associated with two primary themes. The first relates to *the capabilities of the firm*, with a particular emphasis on the entrepreneurship of the owner-managers. The narrative presents the owner-managers’ vision as the catalyst for internationalization, once the companies had achieved the necessary level of technical, managerial and financial maturity. The co-founder of one company describes how they had little choice other than to explore overseas markets:

After the port project in [Turkey], we did not find a project in our size and ability in the domestic market, hence we had no option other than to explore overseas markets. (Akkaya 1996 cited Tayanç 2011, pp.19)

The TCA narrative repeatedly depicts contracting companies’ founding owner-managers as *heroes* who created opportunities out of nothing in the deserts of the MENA. They are presented as the key protagonists, who repeatedly perform heroically to find temporary solutions to complex problems in adverse conditions:

He won the agreement that he did with the [Client] he dug both tunnels and got the project done before the Haj season. He made a rough spray alum and opened the tunnels for Haj [temporarily]... and with this job, our firm had settled in Saudi Arabia... (Akkaya 1996 cited Tayanç 2011, pp. 54)

The above quotation emphasises the company manager’s *heroic* action to support the annual Muslim pilgrimage to Mecca. The subsequent part of the narrative fragment celebrates how an innovative temporary solution enabled the company to become embedded in the Saudi market. There is also a message to pay specific attention to the local context. The acknowledgment of cultural values and the ability of the contractors to find solutions by answering them, in addition to the work itself, is emphasised as a point of differentiation for Turkish contractors. Consideration also needs to be given to the way in which owner-managers are empowered to make such decisions in response to emergent problems. In the context of Western plcs, such autonomy might be perceived as an inappropriate lack of governance. More importantly, presenting a *heroic* character who is empowered to make decisions, seems to generate an important insight for subsequent generations of managers.

The TCA narrative is further notable for bolstering the credibility of the depicted epic storyline by including quotations drawn from the foreign media:

The works and successful performance of Turkish contractors in Libya were covered in the foreign media, which described how ‘Turkey is getting hold of the Libyan market with a decisive breakthrough, and signs new works with incomprehensible success’... (8 Days 1981 cited Tayanç 2011, pp. 83).

The phrase ‘incomprehensible success’ serves to reinforce the acclaimed *heroic* characteristics of Turkish contractors. The narrative also emphasises the importance of diversification by investing in business lines beyond contracting. Indeed, the concept of an investor-contractor is repeatedly positioned as a *helper* throughout the TCA narrative, thereby again shaping the future expectations of member companies. Many Turkish contractors have indeed since chosen to invest in a range of diverse subsidiary markets, not least real estate, energy and manufacturing. Since the early 2000’s others have chosen to develop their capabilities as an operator-contractor in Build Operate Transfer (BOT)-type projects. Specialization in airport projects, power plants and the health sector, both in the domestic and international markets, are key examples.

The second theme relating to the initial steps of internationalization relates to *market characteristics*. Part of the discussion emphasises the (recurring) economic and political crises in Turkey and the consequent stagnation in the domestic market. These are variously described as ‘push factors’, whereby the government emerges as the initiator of the *heroes*’ expansion into the international arena. In the words of one quoted manager:

As you know, there has been a decrease in domestic investment in Turkey lately, as a result, contractors are speeding up international contracting as previously happened in the 1980s, 1970s... (Erdoğan 2009 cited Tayanç 2011, pp. 237)

It is notable that the narrative does not position such ‘push factors’ as having shaped the trajectory of Turkish contractors in isolation; emphasis is given to the way in which several factors interacted. For example, the high construction demand in oil-rich countries such as Libya in the 1970s, and across the MENA region more broadly in the 1980s, were interpreted as *helper* events. The subsequent decline in construction demand during the second half of 1980s, due to reduced oil price, is thereafter positioned as an *opponent*. The plotline is that high oil prices initially helped Turkish contractors to expand in international markets. However, the ensuing reduction in the global oil price was a problem which had to be overcome as it decreased the project demand. The storyline progresses by emphasising the dissolution of the Soviet Union as a pivotal moment for Turkish contractors, not least due to the subsequent opportunities opening up within the newly emergent post-Soviet states, where demand had previously been suppressed. Hence the emergent opportunities within the former Soviet Union are positioned as a new

helper in creating markets for the Turkish international contractors, who were at the time struggling throughout the MENA region:

In fact, the opening of these new markets in the former Soviet Union took place just in time considering [...] the decreasing job opportunities in Libya in the late 1980s, and the market shrinkage in the Middle East market after the first Gulf Crisis. (Tayanç 2011, pp. 122).

Involvement in international contracting is also interpreted as a consequence of the liberalization of Turkey's economy in the 1980s. Government initiated business delegations, changes in overseas business legislation and the convertibility of the Turkish currency are suggested as having been of particular importance. The narrative hence points towards government policies which have been helpful in the past, with an implied suggestion that the sector is likely to continue to depend upon supportive government policies in the future.

The TCA narrative is also strong in attributing agency to a few *other characters* who are seen to have had a big impact on the internationalization of Turkish contractors. First, Turkish contracting firms were exempted from the preconditions required to bid for new projects in Libya by the actions of prominent key *actors*. This is attributed to be a consequence of Libyan government officials being educated in Turkey in the 1950s with direct financial assistance from Turkish government scholarships. Colonel Gaddafi, President of Libya (1969-2011) is also positioned as a *helper*, due to his tendency to favour Turkish contractors over Western firms. The third key *actor* to be given prominence, is the former Prime Minister and President of Turkey, Turgut Ozal. His economic restructuring agenda of the 1980s is described as one of the key *helpers* in enabling the expansion of Turkish international contracting. The story of the first tentative steps towards internationalization also places great importance on operating as a main contractor rather than accepting the more limited role of sub-contractor. Interestingly, the status of being labelled an 'international contractor' is denied to those firms working only as sub-contractors. Hence, the narrative creates a strong future expectation that firms operating as sub-contractors should aim to progress to lead contracting.

5.2.2 Building brand recognition

The TCA narrative emphasises the importance of creating a collective brand image for Turkish contracting as a means to strengthen their presence in the international market. Although there are subtle nuances across different narrative fragments, the narrative as a whole seeks to build brand recognition based primarily on their capacity to achieve *early project completion* and an *adversity to conflict* on the part of Turkish firms.

Emphasis is also given to their commitment to *quality*. Such qualities are frequently used as a characteristic to distinguish Turkish firms from their Chinese and Western competitors. In the words of one company owner:

The Chinese were working in front of us; and the Indians were working behind us. Everyone saw that we did the most successful work; we did it very well before than the expected time...So we are recognized in India...We did a few more works with this firm [the client], and we continued to work (Özdemir 2010 cited Tayanç 2011, pp.245).

What is especially important in the above quotation is the acclaimed reputation of Turkish firms for early completion, which seems to have been adopted as a motto by some companies. Several narrative fragments emphasise the number of days won by early completion. This is especially emphasised in the context of BOT projects. The narrative specifically links the reputation of Turkish firms to the *flexibility* and *hardworking character of Turkish people*. The narrative is undoubtedly selective in its supporting evidence; but the argument is not really about past performance, it is about the future. The narrative serves to build a collective commitment to early completion such that it becomes an issue of national pride. It is easy in this respect to understand how a strong and consistent narrative can indeed be constitutive of the desired reality that Turkish contractors deliver on time. One especially vivid narrative fragment presents an example from Russia in the early 1990s:

Yeltsin bombed the Parliament building...then ordered the renovation of the [Russian] White House...They wanted it done in a short time...two and a half /three months...As they saw our work in Gazprom, they asked us to do the work... it took great courage to undertake such a project in winter time...We accepted and finished before the end of the year... The parliament gave us an expression of appreciation... (Üçer 2009 cited Tayanç, 2011, pp.157).

The firm undoubtedly benefited from the resultant publicity from such a prestigious renovation, but in terms of a strategic narrative it is the internalisation of the message which is arguably of primary importance.

The TCA narrative also emphasises a supposed *aversion to conflict* on the part of Turkish contractors. This is purported to be a key characteristic which differentiates Turkish firms from their competitors:

One of the most important points of Turkish contractors' reputation in the world today is that they do not engage in wrong behaviour that would cause a dispute with any country. Being the side that gives concessions all the time and moving in the direction of their will has brought great advantages. You do not win anything from the conflict... (Sever 2009 cited Tayanç 2011, pp.244).

Another important contribution to brand recognition are the numerous actions taken to ensure that Turkish

contractors are included in the ‘approved contractors’ lists of the leading international institutions. The inclusion on such lists is held to be especially important in overcoming Turkish contractors’ traditional lack of financial credentials. In the words of a TCA representative:

The firms that have close relationships with the international institutions will have more chance in the long term. In long term projects, the companies who can enter the qualification list of the institutions such as World Bank and Asian Development Bank can get a share from the [Afghan] market. (Özdemir 2002 cited Tayanç 2011, pp.246).

The inclusion on this list is seen to be especially important to ensure that Turkish contractors are well placed to participate in mega-projects. Similarly, setting up long-term joint ventures (JVs) with US-based contractors or asserting the identity of Turkish firm as ‘NATO contractors’ are depicted as important means of breaking into the European and African markets. The narrative is at pains to emphasise that building the brand of Turkish contractors has been a long-term project. The inference is that the next generation of owner-managers carries the responsibility for maintaining this brand into the future.

5.2.3 Love of work in high-risk markets

Several narrative fragments emphasise the adventurous and risk-seeking nature of Turkish people. A *risk-lover attitude* is described as a *fixed quality* that differentiates Turkish contractors (*the heroes*) from their competitors. A more cynical reading of the narrative might suggest that Turkish contractors had little option other than to operate in risky markets given that other markets were already dominated by Western companies. However, such an interpretation would not fit the brief of celebrating the success of Turkish contractors, and nor would it contribute to the self-identity of the firms’ owner-managers. Hence assigning a *heroic* stance is much more ‘on message’ than describing such markets as the choice of last resort. But the narrative is also careful to position risky markets as providing an opportunity to move into new markets rather than being an end in themselves. The two quotations below provide examples of perspectives:

I have no expectation that somebody will deliver a project to me in Champs Elysees, I know that I need to go difficult countries. (Tara 2001 cited Tayanç 2011, pp.139).

I don’t expect that Western companies will pay attention to Afghan market, because the conditions are very difficult...As it will be a door to open other global markets, it is very important for Turkish firms. (Çeçen 2002 cited Tayanç 2011, pp.246).

Hence the narrative seems to suggest that developing capabilities by working in risky markets creates the opportunities to operate successfully in less-hostile environments. The message is that if a firm can develop a reputation for delivering on time in hostile environments, this will undoubtedly enable them to be more competitive in positioning themselves in developing markets elsewhere. The narrative would seem to be

reinforcing this reputation as a means of encouraging similar entrepreneurial behaviour by future generations. However, it is important to note that Turkish contractors are seemingly willing to accept lower risk premiums than their European rivals. In the words of one manager:

We are willing to accept lower rates of profit, which is another factor, an important factor. When Europeans make the costing, they add 20% risk premium, if the country is very risky they add 35%, but we add 5,8 or 10%... (Aykar 2009 cited Tayanç 2011, pp.298)

A recurring theme of the narrative is that risk taking is an intrinsic quality of Turkish contractors:

We have to be successful... When you say 'we have to be successful', it means you are ready to act aggressively and give any kind of self-sacrifice if necessary. We are eager to get a job and to do the job. This is really important... Turkish people are hungry to succeed... we yearn success both for us and for our country." (Yiğit 2009 cited Tayanç 2011:303)

As seen in above quotation, risk taking is connected to the deeper cultural norms which support the self-identity of the Turkish people. Similar examples occur throughout the TCA narrative, especially in terms of social behaviours such as 'make it up as you go along', which means initiating an action without any detailed plan or risk evaluation in advance. The narrative also legitimizes international contracting as a key sector that contributes to the Turkish economy, not only in terms of foreign earnings, but also in terms of creating employment.

5.2.4 The requirement for financial and consulting capabilities

Two further recurring themes emerge as the *limited financial capabilities* of Turkish contractors and the *absence of any consultancy expertise*. Both of these are presented in the narrative as significant *opponents* to be overcome if the *heroes* are to be successful in international markets. Reference is made to the recurrent problems which Turkish firms face in gaining 'letters of guarantee' to be included in tender submissions. Other key problems highlighted are the high rates of interest in return for access to finance and the lack of a well-developed insurance system. The narrative therefore tends to position the banking sector in Turkey in the role of *opponent*. The overriding message is that Turkish contractors are financially disadvantaged in comparison to their Western counterparts. This is especially true when tendering for mega projects which are routinely reliant on project credits and financial guarantees provided by the government and/or the Exim banks. In the words of one quoted manager:

The biggest problem for Turkish firms is the letters of guarantee... If you undertake a 700 billion US \$ project, you need a security deposit of at least 25% to 30% of the total

value... It is impossible to get these from Turkish banks... (Yavuz 2009 cited Tayanç 2011, pp.235)

Several of the narrative fragments refer to critical *actions* taken by the contractors to overcome such financial difficulties. These actions can easily be labelled as ‘enacted strategies’ that might guide future generations. One action is the strategy of establishing local subsidiaries in targeted markets. The contractors then seek to access finance through local banks in the name of their local subsidiaries. The other action outlined in the narrative is to work in partnership with a Western contractor. This enables Turkish contractors to become eligible for Western finance on the basis of being a JV partner. Although rarely mentioned, a third action flagged in the narrative is to secure guarantee of letters from Turkish banks on the basis of government lobbying. It is notable that the positioning of the Turkish government varies in accordance with the argument being made at the time. Government is on occasion positioned as a *helper*, but is also frequently positioned in the role of *opponent* in respect of its perceived failure to provide the required financial guarantees.

The second theme that is positioned as an *opponent* is the inability of Turkish consultancy firms to compete internationally. The TCA narrative highlights how the formalised tendering procedures advocated by Western consultancy firms pose a big obstacle to Turkish contractors. Such procedures are seen inevitably to promote Western standards and products. The point is emphatically reinforced by a quotation from the Turkish Ministry of State:

It is extremely important that Turkish consulting firms should take, win, and prepare the projects prior to Turkish contractors delivering them. We give serious support to this...For example, we will contribute by allocating 30 million US \$ to support the costs for opening an office overseas, and by giving government support to the contracts that they sign. I say to our consulting firms ‘Bring me such ideal and good projects that Turkish contracting firms can undertake using Turkish construction materials and you can take the cost of project from me... (Çağlayan 2010 cited Tayanç 2011, pp.332)

The above quotation supports the broader strategic narrative that the development of Turkish consulting services should be a key agenda, not only for the TCA, but also for the Turkish government. The emphasis on the need for a Turkish consulting sector notably emerges as a more recent theme. In contrast, the lack of financial capability is interpreted as having been an on-going problem from the outset.

5.2.5 Mobilization of the networks

The narrative themes relating to the importance of networks emerges in a number of different forms. One is the emphasis given to the *historical and cultural connections* between Turkey and its targeted markets.

The TCA narrative suggests that the preferred markets of Turkish contractors lie along the traditional trading routes of the Ottoman Empire. The narrative is especially strong in emphasising that Turkey's cultural connectivity gave it a distinct advantage in accessing MENA markets during the first two decades of international contracting. These markets are seen to be more accessible to Turkish contractors because they have similar religious or cultural values. It is contended that this narrative is again directed at two audiences, one of which is internal to the TCA membership and the second of which is populated by potential clients throughout the MENA region. The inference is that, for whatever reason, such clients often feel uncomfortable about giving work to Western contractors. The narrative makes much of the way that the experience gained in these markets was mobilized thereafter in Russia, and across the former southern Soviet republics of Central Asia. The key point is emphasised in the concluding chapter of the book:

In [the internationalization] process, Turkish contractors benefited from ...the common historical and cultural background with Middle East, North Africa and Turkic Republics... it is obviously because of the historical and cultural connections that came from living together in the vast geography of the Ottoman Empire in addition to the blood ties. When such markets are compared with those of the West, Turkish contractors benefit from being in markets that don't have 'the legal and administrative infrastructure established in Western countries, and the former colonies that they continue to dominate. (Tayanç 2011, pp.228-330).

As seen in the above quotation, the narrative clearly highlights the historical and cultural connections as a *helper* to create new markets. Russia however constitutes a markedly different case. Turkey and Russia have a long-established trade relationship which seemingly survives periods of strained diplomatic relations. The strong emphasis on working in Russia is perhaps primarily influenced by its perceived strategic importance in the future.

Government lobbying also emerges as a key theme that is emphasised in several narrative fragments. Groups of Turkish contractors are often invited to take part in official diplomatic visits to other countries, involving ambassadors in addition to Foreign Ministry officials. In this respect, government is firmly positioned as a *helper*. The storyline is reinforced by several cited narrative fragments which highlight the very close relationship between foreign diplomacy and market entry into targeted countries. In such trips, the owner-managers of the contracting companies are able to establish government-level networks which are invaluable in paving the way for commercial opportunities. Turkey of course is not alone in dispatching government-led trade delegations, but the point of interest here is that they are such an explicit theme within the strategic narrative. The trade agreements signed with Libya in the 1970s and the USSR in the 1980s are presented to be particularly important to the subsequent path trajectory of Turkish contracting. This is undoubtedly a retrospective interpretation, reflecting back on events. The broader message is presumably

aimed at the Turkish government with a view to ensuring similar support in the future.

Linked to this, there are several narrative fragments which argue that lobbying by government is a common strategic action for all countries. Within the TCA narrative, France is the most frequently cited example. Most notably, winning a tender for a mega-project is routinely represented as a victory by one country over another. In such narrative fragments the *subject* of the narrative shifts from the role played by company leaders to that of the Turkish government, whereby presidents and diplomats are underlined as key *helpers*. From a quotation of a Turkish newspaper article in 2005:

Foreign Minister, [Abdullah] Gul won his second victory over French President, Chirac in international tenders... (Sabah 2005 cited Tayanç 2011, pp.238)

Lastly, it is pertinent to highlight the way in which the narrative fragments allocate roles to personal friends in introducing owner-managers to new markets. *The mobilisation of individual contacts* is repeatedly cited as one of the key *actions* that shaped the internationalization of Turkish contractors. Personal contacts are of course important for business development everywhere, but they are especially important within Middle Eastern cultures. The following quotation illustrates the point:

Following the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, we were faced with the new republics of the Commonwealth of Independent States. There was a Yugoslavian with whom we were doing business at that time. He ... convinced us of the high construction potential in Kazakhstan and asked whether we would be interested. We accepted his invitation. (Kaya 1999 cited Tayanç 2011, pp.173).

In a similar vein, many narrative fragments attach significant importance to the networks originally created by working as a sub-contractor to Western contractors in Turkey. For many companies, their initial overseas contracts were seemingly acquired through working with Western firms as subcontractors on Turkish domestic projects during the 1940s/50s.

5.2.6 Avoiding ‘internal’ competition

The narrative depicts the failure of Turkish firms to cooperate with each other as a key *opponent*, which inhibits competitiveness of Turkish contracting. More pointedly, Turkish contractors are themselves positioned as *opponents* as a consequence of their alleged tendency to compete with each other on cost. This is repeatedly raised as a problem, starting with Libya in the 1980s and going right through to the Afghan market of the 2000s. The cited interview with a former government official is especially telling:

It happened everywhere, in Libya, in the Middle East, in Central Asia, in Afghanistan. Competition among [Turkish contractors] was everywhere. In a sense, whenever a few

companies earned good money and started to get jobs; everyone started to enter the same market. This increased competition... by lowering prices. And then some of the companies working at very low prices failed to finish jobs. Some projects were left unfinished, and problems arose in some countries, or they led to a number of negative consequences. (Çetin 2010 cited Tayanç 2011, pp.332)

The TCA narrative specifically highlights the short-term JVs set up by Turkish firms to bid for projects in the Soviet Union in late 1980s and thereafter in the Russian Federation of the early 1990s. These are seen to be important in paving the way for the initial foothold of Turkish contractors in the post-Soviet states. The use of phrases such as ‘band together to bid’ (p.122) seems to give a clear message about the need to avoid needless competition between Turkish contractors (Tayanç, 2011). The names of successful JVs are listed to emphasise their *helper* role to win the tenders in overseas. However, the temporality of such cooperative initiatives is highlighted as an *opponent* that should be overcome. The following quotation reflects the call for more cooperation in the future:

This is first time that we bring our powers together without any foreign company... We prevent unfair competition... We have a bad experience in Libya that firms competed on lowest costs. This is a good start... (Özdemir 2009 cited Tayanç 2011, pp.281)

Although the idea of ‘combining powers’ emerges as a key theme in the TCA narrative, the narrative fragments from different sources depict ‘competition on low cost’ as an on-going problem of Turkish contractors. The narrative notably highlights the TCA’s preference for a collaboration means of avoiding cost competition among members.

We can see that one or more Turkish companies compete with each other in almost all countries and project types. This of course is another problem of us in general... This is not easy to handle, but what only could be done in here: cooperation. I think, the best thing, if one or two companies come together and establish a partnership on a project basis and establish a business partnership and bid together on a project. Otherwise we start breaking down each other by lowering the prices, reducing the margins. (Tayanç 2011, pp.332)

The message here is very clear, and very much directed at the future. Simply stated, it is not deemed sensible for Turkish contractors to be competing among themselves. Alternatively, working with foreigners is emphasised as a helper to win tenders. Such narrative fragments highlight the importance of the track records, or networks developed by working as project partners with foreign companies in the past as the way to set up JVs with foreign companies. Several story fragments indicate how both sides of a collaborative practice help the other to secure significant projects. This is clearly described by a board member:

...It was a huge project ...It is not possible for a Turkish company to take this project... (Japanese) are the giant companies working all over the world. We had a work experience with them in Turkey [before]... They...know the experience... the capabilities of Turkish contractors and possible economic benefits that we could bring...it is very easy for a Turkish minister or a Turkish bank to talk (with the client) ...understanding the client...it is almost impossible for a Japanese firm... As they thought we would bring benefit to them, as they know us, we set up a JV (Aykar, 2009 cited Tayanç 2011, pp.240).

Similarly, setting up long-term JV with US based contractors or asserting their identity as ‘NATO contractors’ provide alternative narrative resources for the purposes of breaking into the European and African markets.

5.2.7 Summary

This chapter has presented the findings from the analysis of the sectoral narrative. The identified NBBs and related themes are explained with reference to selected quotations from the empirical data. While the identified NBBs are seen as the messages conveyed by the TCA book, the analysis of the structural characteristics illustrate how certain meanings are implied to create a *heroic* narrative for the sector. The following section looks at the findings from the analysis of the individual narratives.

5.3 Strategizing as identity work: Creating *heroes* in international contracting

The individual narratives have strong commonalities with the epic sectoral narrative of the TCA. Although different *events* and *actors* were stressed by different managers, the common tendency was to depict Turkish managers and contracting firms as *heroes* of the international markets. The focus of the *heroes'* *journey* was described as expanding into new markets, increasing penetration in current markets and moving up the value chain to deliver more complex projects. There is also a recurring emphasis on describing the role of *other characters* such as *helpers*, *opponents* and *villains*. This reflects how Turkish managers construct their identities in relation to others in the sector. The individual narratives often described the *predicaments* that the *heroes* are expected to overcome in great detail, thereby echoing one of the key characteristics of an epic plot structure. There is a strong consensus regarding the *fixed qualities* of the sector professionals. In line with sectoral narrative, the managers were keen to assign *heroic* attributes to themselves such as abiding courage, risk acceptance and dedication. Indeed, these features are consistently described as being of 'second nature' to Turkish construction managers. Taking pride in their work is seemingly of note, but the interviewees also at times gave indications of anger, despair and envy by drawing on elements of tragedy. In essence, all interviewees seemed to internalize the collective identity as *the heroes* of international contracting. However, the individual narratives indicate identity struggles regarding the ownership of the heroic role, as the managers tended to highlight themselves and their organizations as the 'real' heroes of Turkish contracting.

Table 5-2 presents the NBBs identified from the empirical data collected through narrative interviews with the managers, relating to: the identity work of contractors; qualities and capabilities; strategic practices; and the macro contextual stage and other characters. Each NBB covers a set of central themes that have been frequently emphasised by the managers. The following sections will present an explanation of each theme by illustrating quotes from the empirical data.

Table 5-2. The main findings from the thematic analysis of the individual narratives

NBBs	Related themes
Identity work of Turkish contractors	Projection of the protagonist: ‘Turkish contractors’ Conflicting views on risk attitude Agile decision-makers of international contracting The concept of ‘organization’: Family vs corporate company Moving upstream beyond ‘contracting only business’
Qualities and capabilities	Human capital Technical and managerial capabilities Financial capabilities Second-order capabilities Path dependencies
Strategic practices	Making sense of competitive strategy Positioning in the market Cost and pricing Localization and embeddedness Collaboration practices
The macro contextual stage and other characters	Economy, politics and market characteristics The iconic status of the client The role of government ‘Others’: Competitors in the international markets

5.3.1 Identity work of Turkish contractors

Projection of the protagonist: ‘Turkish contractors’

The individual narratives project a *heroic* identity for the Turkish contractors. ‘Breaking new ground’, ‘creating novelty’ and ‘winning awards’ are commonly repeated phrases reflecting the notion of an epic narrative. The managers often tend to promote themselves and their organizations by emphasizing the idiosyncratic characteristics differentiating them from other Turkish contractors. However, they also refer to collective identity of ‘Turkish contractors’ by using phrases such as ‘our brand value’ and ‘our name’.

This is reflective of the multi-level nature of identity work. In the words of many, ‘Turkish contractors’ brand name is closely associated with trust and client satisfaction. Especially important is the emphasis on phrases such as ‘Turkish quality’ and ‘the client knows that we can deliver’. A former CEO of a contracting company expressed the sentiment as follows:

Because Turkish contractors have such an impression in these countries [implying Turk’s quality], [the clients] saying that when you have awarded a Turkish contractor, they will definitely deliver it (Interviewee 1)

The above quotation reflects identity work on the sectoral level. Some managers are very keen to emphasise that it has taken Turkish contractors decades to create a successful brand. Hence maintaining this carefully nurtured image is considered to be of primary importance. Most of the managers complain about the contracting firms which go abroad without having sufficient capability to work on international projects as key *opponents* of the emphasised *heroic* identity. There is a strong expectation that the government to tightly control those firms which are permitted to work abroad.

Most of the managers support the idea that the dynamic and unpredictable characteristics of international construction suit the attributes of the Turkish people. For them Turkish contractors have unique capabilities to deliver projects on time-cost-quality within such dynamism and unpredictability. Especially important is associating the ‘Turkish contractors’ identity with fast-track projects. Promoting his company as a pioneer, one manager strongly emphasised ‘early completion’ as the key *action* that differentiates Turkish contractors from their competitors:

...how we entered [the Soviet Union] ... we strived to get one contract to build the military housing, and we finished as you said ‘earlier’ than its scheduled date, and that made a huge, really huge marketing boost for [our company] throughout Russia. [The Soviet clients] said: ‘Ok! How this is possible. These guys completed 10 months earlier than the scheduled date whereas all other projects in the region suffer from years of delay’. So, that boosted new contracts one after another, and one after another (Interviewee 10).

What is especially notable from the above quotation is the way in which early completion is highlighted as creating novelty in the market entry process. For him, the early project completion guaranteed successive projects and thereby embedded his company in the Russian Federation. Fast-track delivery is also described as the key action enabling some Turkish companies to embed themselves in the African market in recent years. Such an emphasis on fast track project delivery is usually followed by emphasizing the quality delivered by Turkish contractors. Of particular note is the suggestion that Turkish contractors provide the same quality as Western contractors for lower price and shorter project duration. One manager further

points out working for ‘zero profits’ or ‘losing some money’ as accepted practices to achieve recognition when entering new market.

We won two projects in Soviet Union...One of them was [X] project, we did not earn any money on that. It was the mission and vision project of our company leader... We had an extraordinary job there...Russians were impressed by our quality, work approach and diligence. Our boss organized a special opening to the project and brought two planes of people from Turkey. We had a very big opening ceremony and the project created a huge impact (Interviewee 23).

The above quotation refers to a conscious attempt at impression management. Paying extra attention to creating quality beyond normal expectations, organizing special opening events to increase the recognition of the company and even losing money are labelled as key *actions* to enable successful market entry. For several managers, establishing a brand name is essential for securing successive projects on the basis of negotiation rather than competitive tendering. In the long term, this is seen to realise higher profits.

When asked about the current and future markets, most of the managers tend to emphasise that ‘they say no limits on what could be achieved’. A manager is very assertive in emphasising the notion of ‘no limits’ by saying ‘My company thinks; I can even do a nuclear power plant on the moon’. Such an expression can be interpreted as the internalization of the *heroic* role ascribed to the managers of Turkish contracting firms. This argument is clearly depicted in the following quotation from a business development manager:

We do not consider that there is any project that cannot be executed by [our company]. We have this self-trust, self-motivation that [our company] can execute any project anywhere. Because executing the project in [our main market], imagine that you are building a factory, or a sport complex, and the only material you can find in the country is cement... If you can do this [project] in [that market], you can do [projects] anywhere (Interviewee 2).

The above quotation illustrates that the *heroes* are cast in the role of creating opportunities out of crises on the basis of their great courage. The extent to which this is true is not the issue. The important point is the way such *heroic* roles are continually reinforced as being of primary importance to the continued success of Turkish international contractors.

Conflicting views on risk attitude

The individual narratives highlight a dichotomy regarding the acceptance of risk by Turkish contractors. Although there is a tendency to accept the ‘risk lover’ role emphasised in the sectoral narrative, the managers often refer to the crucial importance of risk management. The broadly accepted narrative is that

Turkish contractors accept more risks than their Western counterparts. Expressions such as ‘Europeans and Americans always hesitate to go, but the Turks, we never hesitate to go anywhere’ are frequently repeated by the managers. High risk acceptance is depicted as a helper to gain competitive advantage to Turkish contractors especially in the context of unstable markets. The recurrent reference is the Turkish contractors’ market entry into the Russian Federation immediately following the dissolution of the USSR despite all uncertainty. More importantly, such past experiences are mostly emphasised to point out the similar expectations in future. For example, a former CEO emphasised his expectations related to the Middle East as:

If there is a peace in Middle East...wow! [Researcher]: It will generate a new volume?
[Interviewee 1]: ...the whole Middle East will be a super market for Turkish construction sector. Again, everybody will be scared to enter but we will be pioneers of entering there (Interviewee 1).

The key message in the above argument is depicting political risks as an opportunity for Turkish contractors. Similarly, a board manager describe how they turned their face to Algeria as a key market after their Russia projects that are at signature stage were suddenly held because of an emergent political crisis. A former board director strengthened this argument by describing the works delivered by Turkish contractors within war zones:

We are Turkish, we can, I can work in Afghanistan, I can work in Russia, I can work in Saudi Arabia as the manager or engineer. So, I can find a crew, organize a crew and go there to do the work. So, we can! Look at those countries, like Afghanistan, or Iraq, or Yemen, during the war time even [Company X], the biggest company in Turkey had some contracts in Iraq, they very successfully completed projects over there. We did some, [my company] did some work over there (Interviewee 7).

When the managers are asked to explain the underlying reasons for their emphasised risk acceptance, they tend to emphasise the importance of being family type of firm together with the cultural characteristics of Turks. For some managers, the key decision makers in family firms are more open to undertaking projects in risky markets compared to the more cumbersome corporate governance structures which prevail in Western firms. As such, Turkish people are described as being used to be living with constant risk due to the continued politic and economic vicissitudes in Turkey. A director from a contracting company illustrates this as follows:

We [Turkish people] don’t worry about political risks because, as you know, you are grown up in Turkey. We have always lived with uncertainty to some extent, I mean, social, political and economic as well. We have experienced many things... Our people

could accept many things that the Western people would be disturbed by (Interviewee 11)

As seen in the above quotation, most of the managers emphasise the expectation that Turkish contractors can cope with instability much easier than those coming from politically and economically stable markets. Such expectation is often strengthened by emphasizing the courageous nature of Turkish people. However, some managers attribute such described ability to cope with risk to the similarities between the uncertain economic and political context in Turkey and those of MENA and Central Asia. More importantly, the historical and cultural connectivity between Turkey and such countries is commonly presented as a *helper* not only in adapting to such markets but also in convincing employees to work in such markets. However, for most of the managers, Turkish contractors should pay attention to risk management capabilities rather than the risk acceptance attitude. A founder owner of a contracting company described this with a gambling metaphor:

Well, risk taking is a totally different perception from company to company; from person to person. And, some people take calculated risks, we call them businessmen; some take uncalculated risks, we call them gamblers. So, I would say, in a way, Turkish companies especially at the beginning of their expansion into international markets they were gambling (Interviewee 16)

Several storylines, similar to above quotation, recall the Turkish companies which went out of business as a consequence of failing to manage the risks. Although most of the managers emphasise that ‘high risk means high returns’, there is a strong call for Turkish contractors to adopt risk assessment and risk management practices much better. It seems that when the company size gets bigger and the organization structure evolves to become more corporate, the risk management narrative becomes an ever stronger point of reference. Managers coming from such larger structures were very keen to identify their companies as ‘low risk takers’ which constitute a stark contrast to the risk lover identity routinely emphasised on the sectoral level.

Agile decision makers of international contracting

The managers frequently describe Turkish contractors as *agile decision makers* which refers to their apparent ability to act quickly in response to a perceived opportunity. In the words of many, such agility means moving forward without spending too much time worrying about the formal need for accountability. Agile decision-making is strongly linked to the organization structure of the firms and the extent of empowerment given to the managers. The managers frequently argue that construction business requires quick responses. A board manager describes the importance of agile decision-making as:

[Construction business] is an online management; this is why decision makers of the company should have 100 % in power. [Researcher]: You mean hands on? [Interviewee 4]: They must have, because when I go to discuss a project with a prime minister, or a government, or a minister, they ask me to make a reduction, to give them some favour... You cannot say these people let me go and ask my board, my boss, etc. (Interviewee 4)

The above quotation focuses on giving a quick and direct answer to the client as a *helper* to forge ahead of competitors. One board manager extends such argument by describing agile decision-making as a key *action* enabling market entry:

Let's say you are developing a project in Uganda, for instance. Now, in Uganda, project is big naturally, of course it affects president, or the minister minimum, so if a European company is interested in that, he sends the business development manager, area manager, etc. But when a Turkish company is interested, the owner is there, and it has a very big effect on those countries. So, flexible management, quick decision-making ([Researcher]: and hands on approach) and also direct contact (Interviewee 13)

Of particular interest here, is the emphasis on clients' preference to have a direct contact with the key-decision makers who have the authority to make decisions. For the majority of managers, clients do not spend time waiting on decisions from a board or any kind of bureaucracy. Answering the client requests directly is described as the key *action* to securing projects in the Middle East, Russia and Africa. This is well illustrated when a TCA representative describes the development of international contracting:

Turkish people ... are always quick to decide and go to such markets abroad. For example, the first contractors who went to Russia after the demolition of the Berlin Wall in 1989 were Turkish contractors. When Western contractors were thinking about how to do this, our people (Turkish contractors) went quickly and delivered a lot of social housing in a year before the others did reach any decision. Similarly, they went to Central Asia, and the first contractors who went to Afghanistan in the same way were Turkish contractors (Interviewee 12).

The preceding quotation highlights how Turkish managers can take action faster than others. In essence, agile decision making is emphasised as a key characteristic which differentiates the *heroes* from their Western counterparts. There is a broad consensus that managers in Western contractors spend more time involved in bureaucracy. Hence, agility is seen as an important quality that should be strengthened for the continuity of the *heroes'* journey.

The concept of 'organization': Family vs corporate company

The individual narratives indicate that Turkish contracting companies are owned and governed by either a family or a small group of partners, and only few of them are publicly listed. The managers share conflicting

views about whether a contracting firm should be a family company or a corporate company. The managers who support the latter view, emphasise that centralized decision making in family companies are the key *helpers* that enable Turkish contracting companies to be flexible and agile. Their argument is clearly depicted in the following quotation:

My opinion is [that] the stakeholders of the company, the owners of the company; they must have their hands-on in the company management. I don't believe that a construction company, especially in Turkey...can be managed by professionals or can be opened to public. This is my personal decision ...but as a professional who has lived in this company for 45 years in the Turkish market, construction companies cannot be managed by the professionals... decision makers of the company should have 100 % in power... They are dealing with the [client] (Interviewee 4)

This emphasis on the requirement for direct control by the owners/partners is usually followed by describing the complex and hierarchical organization structures of Western firms as an *opponent* of agile decisions.

The managers, who support the shift from family firms to corporate organization structures, frequently discuss the view that family companies can only survive 3 generations. For these managers the benefits of family structure, or as defined by one manager 'one-man shows', could take the company up until a certain growth level. For them, when the company expands in multiple markets and project lines, the roles should be distributed among other key managers. This latter group emphasise two key predicaments associated with family companies. First, is the failure of the second generation to keep the company as successful as the heroic first generation. Second, is the risk of losing know-how gained by the strong actors who managed the company throughout their formative decades. Of particular note is the necessity of effective organizational structures to enable the transfer of know-how from past experience to the next generation. A couple of managers also add that it is impossible to be a real decision-maker in a family organization, unless you are the owner, you could only be someone who 'sings from the papers' that the boss ultimately decides.

The managers from the companies that are seen to have corporate management structures proudly differentiate their firms from other Turkish contractors. 'We are different' emerges as a phrase used in contrast with the common view that 'Turkish contracting firms are family organizations'. This is well illustrated by the following comments from a board member:

It is a very important aspect of competition that construction companies could institutionalize and maintain continuity. We see this very clearly. We laugh to the aged companies that have not been institutionalized. In terms of competition, we know it very well those could not compete with us. Successful people prefer us when there is an

opportunity, because they say that who would do the job if the key person dies... Company X died out, Company Y was sold...there are examples like that. In other words, staying within the limits of founders and owners' aims destroys the competitive advantage of those companies. Such companies are born, grow and die with these people... (Interviewee 11).

The above quotation expresses the perspective of the corporate-structure supporters. However, an interesting outcome is that these managers, who label their companies as 'corporate', often refer to a strong boss figure. For majority of managers, the crucial point for family firms is the difficulty of having an active hands-on approach when the company grows into multiple divisions and regions. The key *action* is described as ensuring effective delegation of responsibility within a tightly-knit management group (i.e. board directors responsible for specific markets or project lines). There is an emphasis in finding the right balance between being dependent upon a single leader and the potential danger of discord among multiple decision makers. A manager indicates that 'having polyphony is bad but having only a single voice is much worse'. The suggestion is to allocate the responsibilities to a key decision-making group who are loyal to the firms and share the same business mentality.

These friendship and family metaphors are repeatedly used to emphasise a requirement for strong company culture which reinforces particular ways of working. The argument frequently repeated is that the new generation of managers should be nurtured into adopting the pre-existing company culture. Hence, such actions are seen as *helpers* to develop the agile decision-making of future leaders. The motto, commonly manifested, is the 'integration of the dynamism of the new generation with the experience of the old generation' and 'raising the *new heroes* with strong company culture' for the continuation of the epic story. The extension of this emphasis is labelling the growing gap between different generations as a key *opponent* of the heroes.

Moving upstream beyond 'contracting-only business'

For most of the managers, 'contracting-only services' is outdated and Turkish contractors should *move upwards in the value chain*. Moving upwards in the value chain is described as providing integrated services beyond contracting. The managers frequently repeated statements such as 'investor contractor is the new trend' or 'mega projects are being constructed by BOT or PPP'. Such statements could be interpreted in terms of highlighting the new challenges for the *heroes* to overcome. Hence, the old challenge to move from sub-contracting to lead contracting is seemingly replaced by a call to move upwards in the value chain. The TCA representative emphasise this clearly:

I could say that the construction [business] is undergoing a transformation right now. From now on, ours [Turkish contractors] started to remain in classical contractors' class. So, we know how to make a road project or dam project, but the projects are not to call a contractor to do the construction part, there is no job like this anymore. There is EPC and now it is plus with finance... All around the world, you cannot mention about construction sector without finance, now you should create the project and present the client. (Interviewee 12)

The key message of the preceding quotation, and several other similar ones, is that Turkish firms need to move away from the identity of being 'muddy boots contractors' or accept the tragedy of market loss. For the managers, being 'masters of contracting' is not enough for the continuation of the epic story of Turkish contractors within the changing pattern of international contracting. An interesting interpretation is the projection of international contracting in terms of league tables. For example, an owner of a contracting company offered the following comments:

Turkish contractors are not too many in this league. I would say this is the first league that is a very specific field that not too many companies manage to enter that. [Why?] Because of requirements of the client, because they say that to be eligible for such projects, you should have this much turn over, you should complete this type of projects, there are so many requirements, not only technical but also financial, but also past experience, so on. So that is a different level which international companies are playing with better margins, not too many Turkish companies there yet I believe (interviewee 16)

This quotation clearly shows how managers identifies a challenge to themselves by describing 'the first league' in international contracting as a plot focus. Such storylines frequently followed by emphasizing the development of design, engineering and financial capabilities in addition to being 'masters of contracting'. The managers from few largest companies emphasised that they have developed the capabilities to deliver EPC projects in the industrial and energy sectors. However, for many others, Turkish contractors should collaborate with Western contractors until they are able to develop the full range of engineering and procurement capabilities.

The individual narratives commonly suggest that only a small number of Turkish firms can provide EPC services, but many of them have experience in BOT projects. It seems that most of the companies have specialized in particular project lines as a result of being involved in BOT projects. The key examples are specialization in transportation, industrial and energy projects. Alternatively, the investor-contractor concept seems to date back to the early decades of contracting services in Turkey. Starting from investment in manufacturing within construction related sectors, investments in real estate, energy and health are key points of reference when the managers describe the competitiveness of their organizations. Similar to the

sectoral narrative, the managers often highlight that Turkish contractors should not accept the identity of being sub-contractors, pointing to the higher returns gained by working as lead contractors. However, of special note is the expansion the role of Turkish contractors, from ‘construction’ to the ‘procurement’ and ‘engineering’ phases in EPC, hence moving upstream in the supposed international league.

5.3.2 Qualities and capabilities

Human Capital

The individual narratives routinely link the success story of Turkish contractors to *human capital*. Similar to the sectoral narrative, the company leaders or owners are consistently cast as the *heroes* who have strong vision and sensing capabilities to challenge the harsh markets of international contracting. ‘Entrepreneurship’, ‘social capital’ and ‘network provider’ are the most repeated attributes used to describe company leaders. Especially important is the emphasis on presenting them as great engineers and managers with obvious admiration and respect. These owners or managers are described as having strong communication skills to engage with a variety of people, from important international clients to labourers on the construction site. Although such heroic attributions mostly focus on the founders of the first generation Turkish international contractors, they are extended to the other top managers who are involved in the growth of the companies in subsequent years. More importantly, they convey messages for the new generation of managers regarding how they can continue the journey initiated by these heroes.

Consistent with the sectoral narrative, the employees within Turkish contracting firms, starting from the company owner and extending to the unskilled labourer are depicted as dedicated, self-motivated and hardworking. The individual narratives emphasize that ‘work is the priority of life for Turkish people’ without exemption. This hardworking nature is presented to be a *helper* in achieving success in unstable and risky markets. Interviewee 3 describes this as:

We are very hardworking company... starting from the bosses to every professional in the company, and everyone puts up their hands and takes the risk under this stone as we say in Turkish. I remember at that time [several project deliveries in a year] we didn’t do vacations; everything was postponed until the completion. Everyone without bothering anything, with the excuses from their families... [Researcher]: What is the motivation behind this? [Interviewee 3]: ... You know, I can proudly say that at that time ... we felt this power to become a mega contractor from a small contractor, and we have, each one of us took part, and felt that we are a part of something important, not for only to that country also for our own country (Interviewee 3)

The above quotation is a clear example of the attribution of the dedication quality to all levels of employees

within Turkish firms. The emphasis on being a part of company success and contributing to the Turkish economy seems to legitimize the heroic role and pride ascribed to employees at all levels. For all managers, Turkish employees are passionate, flexible and self-motivated or, as they describe it, ‘madly hardworking’. As described by one line manager:

If you go to an international work site, the employees say that I am far from home, I can work long hours to earn more. In a sense, Turkish people can prioritize work than pleasure... This is the reason of increasing number of Turkish contractors in ENR list. If our people prioritize their life, for example, if you want to take a Canadian to Algeria, he says, I play ice hockey every week, I could not go there. This can turn an opponent. But our people sacrifice from such pleasures for the welfare of their family (Interviewee 11)

What is notable in the preceding quotation is the depiction of Turkish employees as willing to sacrifice their personal lives and devote themselves to work wholeheartedly. The managers repeatedly extend this argument by interpreting the employees of Western contractors as reluctant to work more than what is defined in their job description. Some managers argue that the positive image of the construction industry, limited job opportunities in other sectors and the complexity of living conditions in Turkey are the *helpers* in the provision of a motivated workforce. Especially important is describing the international contracting sector as a key career development area, enabling young employees to progress in their professional life. Of note is the attractiveness of higher salaries abroad and the extra benefits gained through the value exchange rate. Another common point of reference is the quality of engineering education in Turkish universities, and the high intellectual capital available to the construction sector. The language capabilities of Turkish young engineers and architects are further highlighted as an important *helper*. The managers emphasise that it is very easy to find Arabic or Russian-speaking Turkish engineers or benefit from employing the young professionals from MENA region who come to Turkey for their university education. A general manager described this as:

Turkish workforce... adopting to the local laws, rules much faster than anybody. If you go today, I mean, the amount of Russian-speaking Turkish engineers, I mean you can form your whole team... with only Russian speaking engineers. You can form a whole team with Arabic speaking engineers who know your system, who know Turkish system, and who also know Russian system. Same thing with Turkmenistan, same thing with Azerbaijan, same thing with Kazakhstan, you know, all these teams you can continue! That is the most important competitive advantage I think that we have (Interviewee 5)

The language advantages described in the preceding quotation are repeatedly highlighted as key *helper* for achieving cultural engagement and local embeddedness. It was noted that since the beginning of 2000 there

has been increasing number of foreign students coming to Turkey for the university education, especially from the Turkic Republics of the former Soviet Union and also from MENA. Such engineers and architects going back to their own countries are described as *helpers* that might strengthen the expansion of Turkish contractors into these markets. Such storylines seemingly convey messages about how Turkish contracting firms can benefit in future.

The discussions referring to human capital consistently tended to emphasise two different levels of employees. First, the qualified managerial employees and, second, the operatives employed on construction sites. The managers invariably agree that Turkish contractors benefited from using only Turkish workforce in the earlier periods of international contracting. The changing labour rules and regulations in the international markets and the employment regulations in Turkey are highlighted as forcing them increasingly to use cheap labour coming from low-wage economies. However, there was a concern about a reduction in work efficiency and quality with the use of cheaper international workforce. It seems that Turkish contractors tend to balance this by using Turkish employees in critical roles, as engineers or foremen, to keep the quality assurance and tight control on the construction sites. Despite the complaints of having lost their low-cost advantage in unskilled labourers, it seems that Turkish contractors do still benefit from relatively cheap skilled employees at the managerial level, especially in comparison to Western companies. Phrases such as ‘motivation of the human capital’, ‘low employee turnover’ and ‘raising the employees by company culture’ emerge as common points of references. In essence, the individual narratives emphasise the notion of human capital as the key *helper* for the continuation of the *heroic journey*.

Technical and managerial capabilities

Technical capabilities and technological assets are also depicted as *helpers* in international expansion. The managers proudly described how their companies have developed their technical capabilities and moved from simple building projects to working in complex infrastructure and industrial projects. In the words of many, their technical capabilities have ‘evolved project by project’ leading directly to the award of ever larger contracts. An alternative interpretation is described how such process have led some companies to specialize in some project types. As discussed by one board manager:

There are four major trends in Turkish contractors’ activities...Second, there was a change in the technological level of projects. At the beginning Turkish contractors were only doing houses and simple infrastructure, but today we are making rail systems, metro systems, refineries, industrial plants, so technological [complexity] changed. (Interviewee 13)

As seen in above quotation, 45 years of internationalization was described as the process of developing technical capabilities towards delivering projects in different specialisms. The new challenge of the *heroes* is highlighted as the development of managerial, design and engineering capabilities. Especially important practices included; achieving compliance with international contract management systems, quality assurance and Health and Safety (H&S) regulations. Some managers define these capabilities as a strength which differentiates their firm from other Turkish contractors. However, the general view was that most of the Turkish contractors are still in the process of developing these managerial capabilities; especially those acting with a more ‘hands on’ approach. In the words of some, developing managerial capabilities meant ‘understanding the whole picture’ and outsourcing the job as packages to specialized sub-contractors. In such a scenario, having a list of trusted sub-contractors is referred to as a source of competitive advantage. This is illustrated by a business development manager:

The competitiveness of our company is, we have specialized sub-contractors and... we know that they can deliver on time with a certain cost... Having this sub-contractor database and having a variety of business lines kept us alive and more competitive in the market like if there is no tender in water, there is a tender in superstructure, if there is not a tender in superstructure, there is a tender in railway, if there is no tender in railway then we can focus another one. (Interviewee 9)

What is notable in above the quotation is the notion that managing sub-contractors give the firms flexibility to compete in various project lines. Or, as described by another manager, ‘if you know how to manage, you can go anywhere’. More importantly, developing managerial capabilities was depicted the key *helper* to increase the share of Turkish contractors within the international markets. However, for most managers, the development of managerial capabilities was not enough to increase the market share by itself. The contracting firms should also improve their design and engineering capabilities to move up the value chain.

Financial capabilities

The individual narratives routinely referred to the crucial importance of financial capabilities, regardless of the focus of the interview questions. The ability to provide project finance was repeatedly emphasized as a key requirement for continuing the epic storyline, especially in moving up the assumed league table of international contracting. In the words of most, the new trend towards Engineering, Procurement and Construction (EPC) projects has evolved to Engineering, Procurement, Construction and Financing (EPCF) which means providing the financial solution as part of the project package. Similarly, finding project funding was described as a significant requirement to bid for BOT and Public Private Partnership (PPP) projects. The managers from a few leading companies proudly described the financial power of their firms, especially the capacity to obtain project finance from international credit institutions. These managers were

keen to emphasise the reputation and credibility of their firms as key *helpers* to reach project finance. Of note is the strength of their companies' balance sheets, especially in terms of the income from investments in other sectors (i.e. real estate, energy). Getting income from investments in other sectors was seen as a *helper* in depicting a financially strong image, especially to gain credits from international institutions. Cash flow was widely accepted as the life blood of the contracting business or as some managers described it, the 'life saving water'. However, the benefits of being an investor-contractor seem to be available to a limited number of firms. As raised by one manager:

Financing capability, in limited to one-two companies. [Company X] find funding, OK, [Company Y] can find funding, OK, maybe [Company Z] can find funding, but 10 companies maybe, I mean, then the other medium levels [smaller companies] can develop in much smaller countries and very profitable projects but they cannot reach to funding. (Interviewee 6).

What is important in the above quotation is extending the scope of the financial capability discussion to contracting firms of different sizes. The individual narratives tend to highlight limited financial capabilities as a consistent *predicament* for most Turkish contractors except for a few larger companies. In the words of some, working in partnership with large Western contractors was the key strategic *action* to overcome the financial requirements of international projects.

The individual narratives also emphasized that the ability to provide financial solutions for large-scale international projects is directly related to the credit capacity of the government. The key discussion point was the need for project credits or loans to be provided by the governments and their credit banks. Hence the limited financial capabilities of the Turkish government and the limited credit capacity of the Turkish Exim Bank were identified as key *opponents*. Of particular note is that if a country provides the credit for a project, the contractors from this country would be the most likely winners of the project tender. A general manager described the expectation from Turkish government to provide financial solutions:

The government should provide the finance. The selection of the contractors is 100% related to which country provides the project finance. The Turkish contractors managed to show success without such support but I am not sure to what extent we can keep this (Interviewee 28)

The preceding quotation clearly features the Turkish government as the key *actor* for the continuation of Turkish contractors' epic story within international markets. The strong consensus was that if the lack of financial capability could not be solved, the narrative of Turkish international contractors would turn to a tragedy. 'Everything depends on the finance' or 'Turkish contractors can do really good job if they have financial support' were frequently repeated phrases which seemed to target the government. Despite the

wide prevalence of the accusations against the government and Exim Bank, there were a few dissenting voices that alluded to a more opportunistic scenario:

Turkish Exim should give the sparkle, in a sense, the projects that we follow or we bid are the projects have a value more than 1 billion \$. So, Turkish Exim neither have a capital like this, nor a possibility to have this. But, if it becomes a part of the process, then it is seen a guarantee by the international finance institutions, it becomes a reference... But, you should find the rest from somewhere else. We managed to find it, we can manage this, we learned. Now, we work for them by using credits from Sweden, Denmark, Switzerland, Austria, Italy, France, and USA Exim Banks (Interviewee 13).

The above quotation reflects the interpretation of a manager whose firm benefited from Exim Bank credit to undertake projects in Africa. It emerged as one of the few positive interpretations that seemed to suggest a strategic *action* to overcome the financial predicament. Although raised by only a single interviewee, Turkish international contractors' exemption from tax since the 1990s was another positive interpretation where the government was cast as a *hero*.

There is also an argument suggesting that Turkish contractors should learn to secure finance from foreign banks, rather than being dependent on the financial opportunities available in the domestic market. Another important point regarding finance emerges as the client's payment guarantee or appetite to finish the project on time. It seems that the Turkish contractors define the target markets according to the availability and trustworthiness of project funding. Financial guarantees by government were seen to be especially important together with the existence of a legal framework within the targeted markets. This provides a slight contrast to some managers' argument that Turkish contractors are more open to manage late payments and accept high risks compared to their Western counterparts. It seems that it is not only the Western contractors who look for clear frameworks and payment guarantees; Turkish contractors seem to prefer working in safe markets despite frequently labelling themselves as risk lovers. This seemingly shows that the narratives projected regarding their risk-taking identity might not be entirely consistent.

Second order capabilities

When the managers described the development of their organizations within international markets, the individual narratives referred to phrases such as 'transferring know-how' and 'capability to bring alternative solutions'. In essence, such *actions* are accentuated as primary to explaining the success story of the *heroes*. When the managers were invited to describe the details regarding knowledge transfer, the narrative fragments tend to highlight three *helpers*. First is the accumulation and transfer of know-how from projects and partners over time, as depicted in the following quotation:

You start first working with an international company for a specific project. For example, for the tanks, we started to build with French, then we kick out the French people, and we started to build our own tanks together with our manufacturing. We started to build the jetty... with the Dutch people... we learned this, we kicked out [the Dutch firm] we build the two jetties of [our company] on our own. I did the design, we did it. So that this is how Turkish contractors are entering in international market. Firstly, you work with an international company, who is a specialist, and you learn how to the job, know how, and then later if you have some investigation and skilled people, you do your own work (Interviewee 4)

The storyline described in the preceding quotation was repeated by several managers. In the words of most, first learning takes place, and then the partners are eliminated. Of particular note is the way in which the progression from sub-contractor to competitor was described as a simple linear process. The managers from relatively old companies paid particular attention to learning from others, especially from the project partners and transfer such knowledge to other projects.

Second, transferring key practitioners or acquiring the companies who have experience and know-how were described as another key *helper*. However, the managers who emphasised this were from relatively young Turkish contracting firms, as illustrated by one board member:

If you look at us, we are relatively young firm. Therefore, it would take long time to gain know-how, to have some required experiences or even won't be possible. Then, what you do, you grow by acquisitions rather than organic growth. We find a European firm that have the technology, important experience, and [we] analyse the technologies, the technical staff, the current economic status [of the company] ... if we see that they have achieved very good until today but their profits plunged, then we can buy this firm with a normal price and transfer their capabilities to us (Interviewee 11)

The preceding quotation not only depicts the company age and accumulated experience as the way to increase the technical capabilities but also promotes acquisition as an alternative strategic action to help relatively young firms close the gap. A frequently repeated message was the availability of 'human resources' in the domestic market. Economic crises and market loss for some contractors were described as *helpers* for others who are in markets unaffected from these crises. Alternatively, construction industry professionals from older companies were seen as critical resources by the younger Turkish contractors.

Third, knowledge transfer between generations emerged as another strategic *action* seen as a *helper*. Of note is the importance of transferring the tacit knowledge gained by key individuals into common know-how in the organization, especially for those companies associated with a strong boss. In the words of most, contracting companies should pay more attention to the exchange between of different generations. This was depicted as a way of creating greater value, combining the experience and know-how of the former

generations with the dynamism and capabilities of the new. There was an emphasis on referring to a number of Turkish contracting companies whose failure was directly linked to the gap between generations. The managers recalling such failed companies were keen to highlight that the epic story of *heroic* managers can easily turn to a tragedy if Turkish contracting failed to achieve an integration between different generations.

Many managers tended to differentiate their organizations by emphasizing a capability to bring alternative solutions to emerging problems. Although it was generally ascribed to the technical and engineering capabilities, the key point was that Turkish people ‘think way out of the box’. In the words of most, Turkish people are capable of finding alternative ways, distinct to the solutions of competitors. Of particular note were the cost and time advantages gained by developing alternative solutions from what is expected. A business development executive describes this as:

If you evaluate [pioneers] companies they brought value engineering, they said that, OK, why are you doing in this way, if you do it in that way, we can do it with a lower price, but without ... eliminating from quality... They delivered the result with a different approach, still this strategy is effective, which allowed [Company X] to win a tender in Ethiopia...they won it from the Chinese. They did value engineering, they said why don't we change the route from this to that and we reduced the project cost. That was appreciated by the president of Ethiopia; they were awarded for the project. (Interviewee 9)

What is notable in the above statement and many similar explanations by other interviewees is the tendency to promote an argument that the ability to develop an alternative solution to the one that was defined by the tender documents is a key *helper*. There was a strong emphasis on questioning the nature of the project and proposing an alternative solution to create cost and time advantages and then negotiate with the client directly. Such narrative fragments are mostly linked with the phrase ‘we are innovative’. For most of the managers, Turkish contractors tend to negotiate with the client to seek alternative solutions and a better value. The ‘innovative’ label was also used by some managers to emphasise their assumed capabilities related to problem-solving and engineering. In essence, those managers who labelled themselves as innovators tended to position themselves as the ‘new’ *heroes* of Turkish contractors. Despite discrepancies between managers coming from different companies, the strong emphasis on ‘transferring know-how’ and ‘thinking out of the box’ seem to convey messages for the future trajectories of contractors.

Path dependencies

For most of the managers, track record and past experience were the key *helpers* that enable the companies to expand into international markets and tender for certain specialized projects. Path dependency was also

interpreted as the way of moving from ‘chasing projects’ to ‘being invited for projects’. Several managers suggested that ‘history matters’; however, they were careful to specify ‘only to some extent’. There was a strong agreement about the danger of becoming over-embedded in past practice. The phrases such as ‘what brought us here’ or ‘your history is the most impressive point from the client perspective’ were often followed by emphasizing the constant change and dynamism of the construction sector and the uniqueness of each project. A few managers however pointed to fast growing young firms who challenged this view of path dependency. As discussed by a former CEO:

When you look at the list of the Turkish contractors comparing their turnover, and preparing a list, you can see that within 10 players, 80 percent, 7, 8 or 9 of them are only 20 years old companies, which means they start from scratch, they are very flexible, they started with good margins, they were so active and they used the latest technologies. That means the track record is not helping you. Check the biggest companies, [lists few young companies], how old [they are]. Look [lists the older companies] are behind... Now, track record is not helping or past experience is not helping to get new projects (Interviewee 1).

The above quotation challenges the notion of path dependency by highlighting the success of younger companies. This argument was supported by a few other managers who suggested transferring key managers to benefit from the path dependencies of the older companies. Other managers also advised working in partnership with experienced firms to overcome perceived weaknesses generated by the lack of track record. For example, one board manager strongly downplayed the notion of path dependency by arguing that the ‘past is past’ now there is technology:

It is past, leave the past there, it is just a name, a trust, it is another era. [How about using this name to benefit you today?] Yes, we have the name of the company as a past legacy, but today the machines have changed, technology has changed. Were there CPM [critical path method] in the past, no! But now I use Primavera and this makes me like ‘Mr. X’ (the company founder who is known as one of the biggest and innovative engineers in Turkey). He could have the ability to follow everything, but we use tools now (Interviewee 29)

What is notable in above quotation is labelling those managers who adopt the newest technology as the ‘new’ *heroes* of Turkish contractors. Although this quotation reflects a single interpretation, it offers an example of the fight over identity between different generations.

The individual narratives routinely complained about the development of other competitors in the market over time. Foreign contractors targeting the markets of Turkish contractors and the development of local contracting firms were often described as *opponents*. Those discussions were routinely followed by emphasizing the uniqueness, dynamism and unpredictability of the contracting business. This is illustrated

by one board manager when describing the relationship between past, present and future:

I think it is not so straightforward to think and decide, take precautions or define strategies for the future ... Now, think, you say I should not put all of the eggs in the same basket. What does that mean for a construction firm, let's say I work in Middle East, Russia or Africa. Then, your government attacks a Russian flight. There you go! Where is the strategy? Do you know what I mean? Therefore, the conjecture should be encountered, and expectations, the events happening, and your experience. Among them all, strategy should be dynamic somehow (Interviewee 13)

Above quotation clearly challenges static notions of competitive strategy and promotes concepts such as dynamism and unpredictability. Herein, the notion of path dependency becomes only one of many parameters shaping the trajectory of contracting firms. For the managers, although path dependency matters, 'construction business is a jungle' within which the strategies seem to emerge through mundane activities in emergent happenings. The managers frequently repeated phases such as 'being in the right place at the right time' and 'chance is very important in strategy'. Hence, the notion of path dependency is repeatedly challenged by the emphasis on constant change and uncertainty.

5.3.3 Strategic practices

Making sense of competitive strategy

When the managers were asked to talk about competitive strategy, they tended to describe how their companies' strategic planning with reference to projects and market choices. However, when they were invited to give details of their real-life experience, the common storyline focused on the emergence and dynamism of strategy making through mundane activities. 'Things happen accidentally', 'everything changes all of a sudden' or 'things come up impromptu' become the most repeated phrases. Especially important is highlighting the project-based nature of construction work and the unpredictability and dynamism of the markets within which contractors operate. For example, when describing the development of Turkish international contracting, a manager referred to the oil crises of the 1970s and the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991. These were seen as two prime *events* shaping the path followed by Turkish contractors. The unpredictability of these events were emphasised by expressions such as 'who could have known that' or 'nobody dreamt about it'. In the words of most, contractors need to follow the money, which is directly dependent on oil prices. However, those managers usually followed this view by arguing that those markets driven by oil income are highly unstable and risky. The key suggestion was that contracting companies should be responsive and agile to emergent opportunities and instability, rather than establishing long-term strategic plans. One board member described the contradiction between static assumptions of

competitive strategy and the nature of construction:

[The books] say that, the professionals have to make the study, they have to form the strategy, they have to propose us and we have to approve it..., I have to confess you one thing, which is very important, which I am against with everybody. A construction company, like us, cannot have a long-term strategy, because you are like water, so you have to take the form of the glass where you are. For example, you have written a very nice strategy about Qatar, and what happened? One night! One night, and everything has changed. Or, we had a very nice strategy for Libya, we were thinking to do many other jobs, and what happened. Somebody came and killed Qaddafi and everything changed. This is why a construction company like us chasing in the jungle. I am calling that the outside market a jungle. We are in the jungle... This is why, if you are in the jungle, you have to protect yourself from all risks and... You cannot write 5 year or 10 year strategic plans... I told you this is a jungle; you are a survivor (Interviewee 4)

What is notable in above quotation is the emphasis on survival rather than adopting a strategic approach, depicting international contracting as a wild jungle. For the managers, to survive in this jungle they should be dynamic, flexible, responsive and agile. In their words, they should ‘put their eggs in different baskets’ or ‘wear different jackets’ for each market and client. In other words, the emphasis is not on a single formula for success. Each project, each client and each market are unique. As one of the interviewees described it, strategic management in the construction sector is like ‘trying to swim upstream’.

Several managers referred to being in the right place at the right time, luck and hard work as key *helpers*. Additionally, for most of the managers being the first mover in a market means having a competitive advantage over others. The phrases ‘being late to enter the market’ and ‘missing the train’ emerge as expressions of regret in some managers’ narratives, whilst chasing opportunities, acting fast and working for client satisfaction would pave the way for successive projects. The common point of reference is seeing each project as stepping stone for the next. Successive projects are depicted as a way to help companies specialize in specific project lines or become embedded in certain market niches. Similarly, aggressively seeking out projects and staying in markets during crises were described as strategic *actions* to ensure the competitiveness of contracting companies. These individual narratives conflict with wider discourses of economic-based strategy theories but reflect the emphasised storylines within the capabilities and practice literature.

Positioning in the market

The individual narratives often depict the finer details of how Turkish contracting firms have positioned themselves in the international markets. A common point of agreement is the way that contracting firms have specialized in certain type of projects over years. It seems that the government investments in Turkey

have had an important role within the trajectory of specialization in certain projects for most of the companies. For example, the energy projects initiated in 1990s led one contracting company to make energy services into a key business line. Similarly, another contracting firm involved in Turkish metro and light rail systems expanded into the MENA region as a railway contractor. For most managers, undertaking successive projects has led them to become specialized in certain project types. One owner manager described how they decided to focus their project lines:

There was a big structural change in 2012. I oriented the company towards health, industrial and oil and gas projects. You need to concentrate and specialize in certain areas. In a sense, if you approach like we can do all types of projects, it is not for us. We preferred focusing on some sectors, we decided undertaking qualified projects in certain areas and paid more attention to the health care, industrial and oil and gas projects (Interviewee 22)

The above quotation is seemingly informed by Porter's notions of positioning narrative, as emphasised by several other managers. Similarly, 'you should differentiate' or 'you should do special projects' were frequently repeated phrases in several other narratives. The managers routinely emphasised that specialization meant lower competition, a limited number of contractors and higher revenues. However, it seems that most of the companies specialized along certain project lines organically rather than adopting a targeted positioning process. Hence, there is also reference to the path dependency argument within individual narratives. Although most managers promoted specialization as a key action to take, fewer were keen to suggest that their firms are open to all types of projects. For the minority, moving their companies towards only managing sub-contractors was described as the way to remain open to different project types. As expressed by one business development manager:

The competitiveness of our company is, we have specialized sub-contractors that we know that they can deliver on time with a certain cost. Whatever the cost they say, they are not overrunning the cost that they submit to us. Having this sub-contractor database and having a variety of, different kind of business lines kept us alive and more competitive in the market like if there is no tender in water, there is a tender in superstructure, if there is not a tender in superstructure, there is a tender in railway, if there is no tender in railway then we can focus another one (Interviewee 9)

The above quotation is an example of 'we can do all types of projects' narrative. Despite such explanations, it was more common for interviewees to highlight the danger of 'being out of control'. For the most, strategy should mean 'choosing what not to do' or 'being selective'. For example, one manager expressed regret about becoming 'over-fragmented', emphasizing 'we diversified a lot, unfortunately it did not pay back'.

Despite a strong emphasis on project specialization, there was less reference to the market-level focus. The

managers commonly highlighted MENA and post-Soviet countries as the main markets for Turkish contractors. There seemed to be a general tendency to shift between the two markets according to project demand, which continuously changed due to political and economic vicissitudes. For the managers, such constant volatility seemed to enable them to increase their capability to shift dynamically or extend to new areas. Following the ‘project funding opportunities’ or ‘investment agendas’ were the most repeated phrases regarding the discussions on market-level competition. The managers often labelled the markets as ‘deep’ or ‘shallow’ according to potential for future successive projects. When asked to identify new market targets, Sub-Saharan Africa was frequently referenced by several managers. However, some companies had started to become involved in Western Europe, South Asia and India. This was linked to the constant ‘requirement to find new markets’ and ‘putting the eggs in different baskets’.

Another key narrative theme emerged as ‘investing in other sectors’ in addition to contracting services. Investments in manufacturing, real estate and energy, or more recently the health sector, were mostly referred actions. Making investments in different business lines was identified as a way to give companies more flexibility when there was a downturn in construction. One manager referred to a quote from his company leader, ‘being a fleet that consists several small ships is better than being a single transatlantic cruise liner. If there is a storm you lose 10 ships but 40 of them might continue’.

Regardless of the different trajectories adopted by different companies, the managers defined a common positioning for Turkish contractors. For all managers, Turkish contractors provide better quality than Chinese contractors and with relatively cheaper prices when compared to Western contractors. When the discussion moved on to the company-level positioning the most repeated phrase was ‘you have to know yourself’. By this, they emphasised knowing the ‘capabilities or strengths’ of the company and its competitors. Such notions reflect the pervasiveness of the strategic positioning and capabilities narrative in the individual accounts, along with an emphasis on the need for constant dynamism and emergence in strategy making.

Cost and pricing

The individual narratives often depict Turkish contractors’ initial internationalization as characterized by providing low cost construction services in MENA. The dominant view is that Turkish contractors responded to emergent construction demands in MENA by providing fast track and low cost construction services. For many, Turkish contractors benefited from using low-cost Turkish construction materials and workforce in earlier decades; however, they lost these advantages through moving away from working as sub-contractors. Increased company size, specialization in certain project lines, and growing competition

were seen as new trends which move them away from providing low cost construction. However, offering lower price than others was defined as still being a crucial *helper* to win tenders. A few managers suggested that Turkish contractors provide cheaper services than their Western counterparts, largely through reducing their profit margins. This was described as how to aggressively win a greater share of the international market:

Previously, we were sub-contractors doing the heavy works among the foreign contractors who brought the technology and took the main profit, but, now, we obtain this technology, by this we can take the contractor's share and come to forefront in competition because I can win the tender by adding 3% whereby a European contractor adds 5%. My target is getting bigger, undertaking more work, it is not earning more by a single project (Interviewee 11)

What is notable in above quotation is the emphasis on Turkish contractors' low cost positioning even within the upper levels of international contracting. Herein, the ability to manage the contract conditions and pricing details are highlighted as *helper* for continuing the successful progression through the upper leagues of international contracting. Although the Turkish contractors are not the cheapest anymore, they try to be the cheapest in terms of efficiency and cost comparison, i.e. providing a relatively cheaper service without sacrificing quality was depicted as key to their market positioning.

Localization and embeddedness

The discourses of localization and embeddedness emerge as frequently repeated concepts in the individual interviewees. Understanding the local culture and having market knowledge were described as key *helpers* to achieve international market success. Those managers who had experience of different markets were seen as central *actors* who enable the firm to expand its market share. In the words of one manager, the employees sent to different geographical markets should not be in a hurry to finalize the project and return home; they should be enthusiastic about living in such markets for the long-term. Others also consistently referred to the importance of employees' embeddedness in a local area, in addition to their professional capacity. For example, it was emphasised that if a manager gets married to someone from the local community and establishes a family, they will naturally play a more active role in embedding the organization in the local market. 'Being in there', 'getting the insider information' and 'playing the game according to local rules' are commonly repeated phrases. A business development manager described the importance of an active market presence in the following terms:

You need to have a local eye, you cannot sit down on your table in your head office, and try to price the projects in a place, which you don't have any idea about. You need to have a local sense; you need to have a local smell of the environment. Otherwise,

you cannot compete, you cannot... you will just lose time, money and resources; it will be meaningless (Interviewee 9)

The above quotation seemingly reflects notions of the dynamic capabilities view, referring to ‘seeing’, ‘sensing’ and ‘smelling’ the market characteristics. It was argued that assigning such sensory capabilities to managers seems to reflect the expectations of those managers. While some managers endorsed working with local partners to gain such local sense, others argue that company managers should be embedded there. In both scripts, ‘employing local workforce’ and ‘developing the right local networks’ are emphasised as *helpers*. This is well illustrated by the quote below from a board member:

Local relationships are primary... You should go to markets considering the local factors. In fact, you can never patronize to the local public authorities. We always pay great attention to get approval from locals... This is very important for us. Because lots of world’s giants withdraw from the markets unsuccessfully as they expect from the markets to adopt their rules. But we know that we have something to learn from them as much as we should teach them (Interviewee 11)

The above quotation highlights the view that firms should adapt to the local context rather than expect the reverse. The central message is that contractors need to be flexible and responsive to the client needs and cultural habits, whilst still reflecting the business culture of the company. For most managers, local market engagement was a different ball game in every market. For example, it was emphasised that it is impossible to survive as a business in Libya by operating in accordance with the rules which prevail in Russia. Phrases such as ‘assume that you are 70-year old company and you have built the whole world, if you go to [a new market] you are like a kid’, highlighting a perceived need to adapt to the idiosyncrasies of the local market. The managers often emphasised how construction work was the same everywhere, the only difference was the local rules, regulations and ways of doing business. For example, while flexible and long working hours are highlighted as *helpers* for the purpose of becoming embedded in Russia, they were seen to be of little value in Western Europe. For most managers, Turkish contractors were more open to adapting to the requirements of unregulated markets than their Western counterparts. As such, the interviewees described their Western competitors as very good in certain areas, such as working systematically in accordance with regulations, but weaker at accommodating the requirements of local culture. Such statements were routinely reinforced by highlighting Turkey’s geographical advantage as a cultural bridge between the West and East. The dominant logic seems to recommend developing different strategies to win tenders in different countries. For example, offering the lowest cost was the key *helper* for success in some markets, whereas finding a strong JV company was highlighted as of primary importance in another. The most important *helpers* for achieving market embeddedness however were seen as; being the first mover, staying in the market for a long time, and having a local partner on the ground.

Collaborative practices

The individual narratives routinely emphasised *joining forces with others* in the market as a key *helper*, especially the role of collaborative practices in winning the tenders for projects that exceeded the capabilities of a single organizations. A board manager explained this simply:

Of course, there are some projects that we are not qualified technically, legally and in this case we are able to bring new people [referring to partners] next to us or under us or above us (interviewee 2)

The above quotation outlines how Turkish contractors follow different collaboration practices depending on the project. The most commonly described way of combining powers was defined as becoming a JV or consortium partner with Western companies. ‘Stronger muscles’ and ‘larger financial opportunities’ were the metaphors used to describe the benefits of collaboration. The partners were seen as *helpers* in reaching beyond the capabilities of the organization, especially on large-scale EPC projects.

Alternatively, becoming an accepted contractor by large scale engineering or energy firms (i.e. Shell, Samsung, and Bechtel) was described as a way to guarantee future successive projects. While few managers promoted long-term strategic alliances with one or two companies, the majority advocated collaborating with different companies, depending on the project requirements. Several managers also referred to partnering with local companies as a *helper*. In contrast, some managers complained about being forced to work in local partnerships in MENA countries. It seems that partnering with locals is attractive only if it is by choice rather than a requirement by others.

Collaboration between Turkish companies emerged as another way to join forces. In line with the sectoral narrative, managers referred to some successful but short-lived Turkish JVs or consortia practices as key *helpers* for market entry into Russia in the 1990s. However, the broadly accepted narrative was that Turkish contractors tend to compete with each other rather than collaborate. A representative of the TCA supported this view by saying that ‘the managers are all good friends in the TCA building but when they go out they don’t know each other’. One general manager was very assertive in positioning the competition among Turkish firms as a key problem:

The biggest problem of Turkish firms is that when they enter to a new market, they trip themselves up. Western firms do really well by consolidation or focusing on different markets...not only the companies from the same country, in European Union... For example, the French and German do not enter each other’s market. But, this is missing among our companies (Interviewee 28)

What is especially notable about the above quote is the emphasis on the tendency among Western firms to consolidate which they see as good practice. Several other managers complained about the ‘meaningless competition’ among Turkish contractors [emphasis in the original transcript]. However, most managers were pessimistic about collaborative practices among Turkish firms. For some, certain Turkish characteristics worked against collaboration, especially if the partner was another Turkish company. Phrases such as ‘this is who we are unfortunately’ or ‘there is nothing we can do about it’ are indications of such pessimism. In essence, the family organization structure and strong boss figures were described as *opponents* for collaborative practice among Turkish firms.

In all the interviews referring to collaboration, a key point of reference was ‘complementing each other’ and ‘bringing some strength to the table’. In the words of most, historical relationships and language are two primary parameters which shaped partner selection. For example, cooperation with Spanish firms was suggested for market expansion to South America. Or, alternatively combining forces with the old colonial countries were described as a potential *helper* to promote market entry to Africa. Few were keen to propose cooperative practices between Turkish and European contractors as a means of competing against the growing power of Chinese contractors. Others briefly alluded to the benefits of partnering with Chinese to overcome their market power, stating, ‘if you can’t beat them, join them.’

5.3.4 The macro contextual stage and other characters

Economy, politics and market characteristics

The individual narratives highlight that the *heroes’* journey has been heavily shaped by broader economic, political and market characteristics. The strong link between oil prices and project demand is often referred to. The 1970s oil price boom and subsequent high construction demand within MENA counties are referred to initiating Turkish contractors’ adventure in international markets. For all managers, this expansion was extended by the market entry into the former Soviet countries that increased demand following the dissolution of the Soviet Union. One owner manager expressed this clearly:

Actually we [first] went abroad in 1991. And, by that time there was a crisis in Turkey. That is why we put a target to be international...It was oil crises for us, but it was a big chance for the oil producers like Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan, or Russia, Tatarstan, which means that if there is a crisis in Turkey, there is a big opportunity abroad. When there is an oil price drop then they have a crisis but the other countries like European countries, Lithuania, Poland, and Romania are potential construction markets. That is why we moved from West to East, East to West due to the oil prices mainly. (Interviewee 14)

What is notable is the depiction of the international pattern by Turkish contractors, *journeying* between the East and West depending on the oil price. Economic and political stability of the markets were thus *helpers* for the *heroes* to expand their activities. For all managers, stability meant investment and hence increasing demand for construction projects. On the contrary, any economic instability meant “suspension of the projects”, “late payment”, or in the worst scenario “no payment”.

Political instabilities were described as *opponents*, with volatility in Libya the most frequently cited example. However, some managers depicted an optimistic picture, highlighting the expectation of Turkish contractors to continue working in such markets despite any turmoil. One manager described this as:

When there is war, and there is not much activity. But, if those wars, somehow, stop or move to another part of the world, then Syria may become all of a sudden the world's biggest market, who knows, I mean, if the country want to invest over there, or Libya is now, who is governing Libya, I don't know, but there is still oil over there, so it can all of a sudden become a very nice market, because energy demand is not reducing, it is always increasing. I mean, these days, I think, we are in the bottom of this loop. Probably, it will go up again, because if by construction ups and downs are predictable, I can say, it can be in the 5-6 years' time, again become a very good (Interviewee 6)

The above quotation is a good example of the way in which political crises are seen to create an opportunity for future construction activities. Most managers described Russia, Libya and Iraq as ‘deep’ markets with the promise of successive projects. The managers also emphasised long standing weaknesses of Turkish contractors to enter Western markets. This was linked to the ‘make it up as you go along’ mind-set, which clashed with the more rigid Western standards and regulations. Managers tended to describe the high standards expected in Western countries as an *opponent* for Turkish contractors’ market entry.

The managers also shared their interpretation of domestic market characteristics and how it impacted their international activities. Competition over low prices was highlighted as a persistent problem in the Turkish domestic market. The phrases ‘we can't compete in the domestic market’ or ‘we had to leave Turkey’ are repeated by several managers who see such low cost competition as an *opponent*. Second, there were conflicting voices regarding current construction projects within the domestic market. For a few, the domestic market has a huge potential for large contracting companies with the Turkish government's current agenda of mega projects. For these managers, such projects provide a good opportunity, especially considering the decreased construction demand in foreign markets in recent years. For others, who argued about being forced stop domestic works, the current government creates unfeasible projects to sustain a construction- led economic agenda. However, managers from both sides emphasise the initiation of PPP projects within Turkey as an opportunity for the contracting sector, especially in terms of coping with the

stagnation within their main markets. For all managers, the economic crises experienced in the domestic market almost every ten years are labelled as the main driver behind leading contracting firms to go abroad. In essence, the economic and political vicissitudes in Turkey are described as *helpers* that taught the Turkish managers about working in high-risk and unstable markets. ‘We have grown up with conflicts and problems’ or ‘we see all these as usual in our life’ were frequently repeated phrases.

The iconic status of the client

Client satisfaction is highlighted as a primary *helper* for boosting competitiveness in contracting companies. The managers strongly note that Turkish contractors are very successful in answering client requests and obtaining the appreciation of clients. Phrases such as ‘you should treat each client as special’ and ‘wherever we work the clients are happy’ were common statements. One manager described this, using parenting as a metaphor:

Every client wants to feel that his project is different [important] than what you have built previously. Like your kid, if you have a kid, you believe that your kid is different than other kids. Even you see that the other one is more handsome or beautiful, but you believe that yours is the best. You have to read their (Client) psychology; [each has] to be treated very differently than the others. If you just become a snob guy and say that ‘You know what! I have built billions of dollars all around and billions of m2 and this is a very simple project!’ that is the last word they want to hear. (Interviewee 1)

The above quotation clearly describes that the contracting firms should treat each client as the most special. Others similarly emphasise how treating each client as ‘the most special’ is a key *action* that differentiates Turkish contractors from their competitors. In contrast, Western companies are described as the ‘snob guys’ who expect clients to adapt to their rules and management techniques. Clients in MENA and post-Soviet countries are identified as the parties who might have request changes or face financial problems at any time during the project. For the managers, Turkish contractors are open to respond to such ad-hoc requests constructively while Western firms prefer adopt ‘claim and blame’ [emphasis to original] practices. The phrases such as ‘we do not extend the project even if the client makes last minute changes’ or ‘we don’t say no, even if the client is wrong’ become the repeated phrases by several managers. One board member described this:

We never dogmatize. For example, if the client makes a change in the project, an American firm can say ‘We are sorry, we did what the project says, we can do the change as another work package’. But we don’t. The client satisfaction is very important. Or, if the client says ‘Mr. X, I run out of money but I want such an addition. Can you do that as well? I can pay when I start operating’. We do it. [Client asks] ‘Can we make such changes?’ We say ‘Of course’. If the client earns money, it brings client

satisfaction. As such we have delivered 7-8 projects to a client in Russia. [Researcher]:
The continuity of the projects? [Interviewee 1]: Continuity and the reason for this is the
client satisfaction. This is primary... (Interviewee 11)

The preceding quotation highlights the flexibility of Turkish contractors' to accept clients' emergent requests. Some managers emphasised that they see ensuring client satisfaction as a way to galvanize future contracts and that is why they do it as free of charge. When asked about how they accommodate the costs arising from such practices, one manager say that they compensate this loss through the overheads of future projects. However, one board member strongly criticized this tendency to accept financial losses, emphasizing the dangers of a routine 'carrot and stick' activity.

The individual narratives highlight that the markets Turkish contractors work in are not as transparent and systematic as in Western countries, likewise regarding the mind-sets of the clients. Therefore, the contractors need a direct relationship with the client, not only to win projects but also to execute them efficiently. Especially important is emphasizing the demand for fast-track projects and the weakness of management practices promoted in Western countries. One-to-one relationships and active negotiations with the client were depicted as key *helpers* to execute fast-track projects. One board manager clearly illustrated this:

If the guy [the client] wants you to finish in 27 months, you should get a benefit out of this, you should say: 'Look, I can do this in 20 months, but first you should guarantee to release my materials and equipment from the custom. Second, I need my Turkish workers to work this project fast and quality, therefore I do not accept any quota on worker permits'. These are examples, you know. Third, you should say 'Do not get tax from me, etc.' You should say these.' If you [the client] agree on these, then I will open this project in 24 months. (Interviewee 13)

The above quotation suggests that fast-track project demand can be answered through a direct negotiation between the client and contractor. Several managers referred to the marriage metaphor to define the contractor and client relationship. The common points of reference were 'speaking the same language [metaphorically]' and 'having to trust the other party'. More importantly, choosing the right client are described as key *helper*. It seems that while some organizations prefer governmental bodies, others prioritize private organizations as their target clients. Regardless of the client type, the key action was answering the client requests directly. For the managers, clients should communicate directly with a decision-maker, not a representative who lacks sufficient authority. Such findings suggest that the individual narratives assign an iconic status to the client.

The role of government

The individual narratives routinely position the government as a central *other character* within the journey of Turkish contractors. In the words of most, government lobbying is *helper* for the contractors, especially regarding expansion into new markets. Of note is how government-initiated business trips provided leaders of contracting firms with an opportunity to develop networks with government officials and / or business leaders from other countries. A former CEO of a contracting company expressed this:

We have to find new markets. Is it easy? No, it is not easy, it never become easy, it is very hard to find it. It is where the government comes in. I am not waiting for the government or these kind of associations to give me a project, I just want them to go and have an agreement with the president of Pakistan saying that now we have this kind of economical agreement, you can import, you can bring your own labour, yes you are eligible to enter into new market, you don't need to look for a local partner. (Interviewee 1)

The quotation reflects the expectation that the government should develop trade relationships with other countries that can later be followed by contractors. All managers felt that competitors from other countries were backed by their governments so they should have a similar support. Some managers assigned this lobbying role to Turkish embassies and ambassadors. There was common agreement that Turkish ambassadors have become more supportive to contracting firms in recent years. However, some managers tended to blame the government for only backing those companies who support the government. These managers argued that there should be equal government support for all companies considering the contribution contracting services make to the Turkish exports. A few managers also proudly described how their companies had been successful without government backing. For these managers, success obtained via government lobbying was unsustainable. Hence, they argued that companies who were successful without government support were the main heroes who would survive in the long-run.

For several managers, international contracting services should be regulated by a governmental body to maintain the successful image of Turkish contractors. They also felt the government should prevent 'unfair' competition between contracting firms. As described by one manager:

The biggest problem of Turkish contractors, when they enter a market is they compete with each other on low cost. The West is a good example for this, they consolidate, and share the markets...A superior authority is required to do that, in a sense the government can do this. For example, in Korean firms the government led them, 'You will enter to automobile industry, you will do construction' and then these firms became the largest...The government should say these three firms should enter this market, the

other three to that market...for me this is government's job, firms cannot do this by themselves. (Interviewee 28)

The above quotation describes how the government is expected to intervene and regulate the sector. However, there was no agreement about how the government should regulate the sector. Government control is suggested to prevent competition between Turkish firms; however, none of the managers seemed very clear how this might happen.

The unstable international politics of the Turkish government and external political instabilities within the key markets were often emphasised as key *opponents* for contractors. Interviewees called on the Turkish government to pursue more stable international relations. One business development executive clearly expressed this:

This mismanagement in the foreign affairs causes a lot more problems for contractors, and also to Turkish economy. This is the lack of government. You know the crises with Russia, what did it cost to the contractors, to tourism sector, you can imagine. You know, whatever the government says, he says and does the opposite three months later, or in eight months, or a year. This is a huge mismanagement, and that costs the country, not only contractors. (Interviewee 3)

The preceding quotation describes how unpredictable international politics can harm several sectors in Turkey. The managers were insistent that the Turkish government should pursue more stable international policy, with a longer-term perspective. The flight crises with Russia in 2015 became the most repeated example to illustrate how political crises can create a market block for contracting companies. Such complaints were typically followed by highlighting the volume of Russia projects for Turkish contractors. In the words of one board manager:

When we were running after several new projects the flight crises happened, all our efforts go down the drain. More importantly, others started entering the market that we dominate. If this hadn't happened, the others would not be in this [Interviewee 21]

The above quotation emphasised how political crises meant market loss for Turkish contractors to competitors. Most interviewees felt if Turkish contractors' activities were curtailed, even for short period, others immediately filled the place and Turkish contractors lost market power. Hence, the individual narratives clearly emphasise the contracting firms' expectations from the government.

'Others': Competitors in the international markets

The managers routinely describe how *other characters* contribute toward their journey in international markets. Especially important were labels attached to Chinese and Western contractors, and Western

consultancy firms. First, Chinese companies were defined as low-cost low-quality construction providers who received considerable financial support from the Chinese government. Phrases such as ‘We can’t give prices as low as Chinese’ or ‘Chinese offered half of what we submitted’ were repeated by several managers. They were especially concerned about Chinese dominance in African markets. However, the managers frequently emphasised that the market power of Chinese contractors in Africa was not created by Chinese contractors themselves but more a result of China’s broader economic agenda, including trade agreements between China and African countries. This was described as unfair competition. As outlined by one manager:

China gives a surplus. And, China is very big economy, so China is doing incredible projects in Africa, but those are not the projects that Africans want. Because China offers money to those countries but the main objective of China is to access underground resources in these countries. They say, I will make a railway from here to there, I construct a port and I take this mine for 30 years...The target of China is not constructing a road between two main cities, constructing a road that won’t benefit the people there but the road enables transporting the mine...The Africa has awoken up a little, they are not very happy. (Interviewee 12)

What is notable in the above quotation is accusing the Chinese that their construction work does not benefit local people. A couple of managers suggested that Turkish contractors could overtake the Chinese by focusing on what local people need. For these managers, ‘contributing to the local people’ is the path that Turkish firms should follow.

The individual narratives also pay attention to describing Western contractors. A common point of reference is that whilst Western companies provide good quality, they are slow to deliver as a result of high standards associated with their work practices and bureaucracy. Some managers argued Western contractors provided better quality than Turkish contractors, especially in relation to complex engineering and technology projects. Despite this appreciation, most managers associate Western contractors with claim management practices; ‘They employ more lawyers than managers’ was routinely repeated by several managers. One manager explains this with an anecdote:

There was a project in Jordan that we worked as JV partner of company X [a Western firm], they prefer working with us because of low-cost man power. We prepared the project proposal separately to discuss and compare. Our leader looked the English [proposal] and said - ‘Why you did not include the profit’ they said: -‘No, there is no profit-added to the price in contracting’, [Our leader] -‘No way! Why do we work then?’ They said - ‘We will take it by claims’ our leader found it interesting and said OK. He always says ‘this project has been the most profitable work (Interviewee 26)

The above quotation exemplifies how most of the managers believe Western contractors earn their profits

through legal claims. These narratives about Western and Chinese contractors are often followed by defining a clear positioning for Turkish firms, as described by one business development executive:

When I look at the Turkish contractors, I mean what you pay and what you get, if we have this focus compared to the Western companies, the Chinese companies, which are the most expensive and which are the cheapest contractors, Turkish contractors have this optimum value, the quality and the amount that you pay for that quality is in the optimum level (Interviewee 3)

The preceding quotation was echoed by several others who argued that Turkish contractors are positioned between the low-quality, cheap Chinese firms and high-quality but slow Western firms.

The managers also tended to complain about working with Western consultancies who are depicted as the *opponent*, causing project delays by applying high performance criteria with detailed specifications. In the words of most, these consultancy firms' specifications extended the project duration to earn more money through this extension. One board member describes this:

If the Africa is not being westernized by British or American firms as the Middle East is, Turkish contractors can have a greater chance there if only the market is not managed by Western rules. But the structure of these countries is not suitable to do that. But they tend to call such consultancies as they are aware of the absence of such practices. I worked in Libya for 14 years without any consultant, then after years when I tried to take my new firm to that market it was full of such companies who were departed from the Middle East (Interviewee 7)

What is notable in above quotation is that the Western consultancies are labelled as almost *villains*, who restrict Turkish contractors' market dominance. Several other managers highlighted the embeddedness of Western firms in MENA as an *opponent*, not only opportunities for Turkish contractors' to win tenders but also regarding the use of Turkish construction materials. Some managers follow this argument by calling for the development of Turkish consulting and management firms in the international markets.

Although, the individual narratives refer to other institutional bodies, TCA is the most common. When the managers are asked about the role of TCA in their international activities, most of them emphasised that TCA did not have any impact on their business. However, they clearly described how becoming a member of TCA was essential to becoming recognised as a large Turkish contractor. 'We have to be a member to be recognised internationally' was often stated by managers. Some managers also described the market analysis, business meetings and visits organized by TCA as a *helper* to contracting firms. However, a few managers complained that TCA kept some companies closer than others, especially those whose leaders were in the TCA management.

5.3.5 Summary

This chapter has presented an analysis of the individual narratives from Turkish international contractors. The identified NBBs, and themes relating to them, are explained with reference to selected quotations from the empirical data. The findings of the thematic analysis demonstrate the key issues that are linked to strategy making in the interviews with the managers from the Turkish contracting firms. The analysis of the structural characteristics illustrates how the notions of epic plot structure emerge within individual narratives.

The following chapter discusses the findings from the analysis of sectoral and individual narratives in comparison with the relevant theories underpin the current research.

6. Discussion

6.1 Introduction

The preceding chapter presented the analysis of sectoral and individual level narratives of Turkish international contracting and the insights they provide into strategy-making. The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the implications of the empirical findings, with reference to the research objectives outlined in Chapter 1. The stated aim is to explore the extent to which the narrative approach can provide an alternative understanding of strategy to that which is currently represented in the construction management literature. Narratives are seen as the means of understanding the way in which strategies are enacted, or in other words ‘how strategy happens’.

The chapter is structured as four sections in accordance with the research objectives identified in the introduction. Given that the first objective (identifying the potential gaps in past literature and analysis of strategy) has already been addressed in literature review section, the discussion starts with objective 2. The first section of this chapter therefore discusses the extent to which strategies are socially constructed narratives. It is argued that strategy narratives shape and are shaped through the interaction of multi-authored and multi-level conversations. Of particular interest is the extent to which the adoption of a narrative perspective enables a new understanding of how strategy is enacted in the context of international contracting.

The second section evaluates the findings from the analysis of the *formal sectoral narrative* of Turkish international contracting, as constituted by the TCA publication the *Geography of Contractors*. Of particular interest is the way the sectoral narrative is constructed as an epic plot for the purposes of creating a heroic collective identity. It is argued that the process of creating this heroic identity, using historical stories as ‘strategic resources’, illustrates a form of strategy-making that occurs at a sectoral level.

The third section concentrates on the findings from the *individual narratives* derived from the narrative interviews. The discussion here focuses on the extent to which the collective identity, created by TCA, is accepted by the managers within individual Turkish contracting firms. It also explains the conflicting sense of identity associated with the ownership of the heroic role and how, as a result, strategy becomes inseparable from identity work.

The last section focuses on explaining the narrative infrastructure of Turkish international contractors which

continuously evolves through interactions between sectoral and individual narratives. The discussion introduces the narrative buildings blocks (NBBs) that are seen to constitute the narrative infrastructure of Turkish international contracting. Of particular importance is how such NBBs inform both stability and change within the described epic journey of Turkish contractors.

6.2 Strategy as a socially constructed narrative

Research objective 2: To evaluate the extent to which competitive strategy narratives can provide a means of understanding the enactment of strategies.

The above stated research objective is addressed by drawing from the literature which frames competitive strategy as a socially constructed and discursive organizational phenomenon (see Section 3.2). Underlying this perspective is the principle that organizational life is seen to comprise temporally constructed narratives which constitute ‘reality in flight’ or in action (Czarniawska, 2004; Vaara, Sonenshein and Boje, 2016). It is argued that the analysis of such narratives helps to provide a more authentic understanding of the enactment of strategy in contracting firms. The four sections below illustrate how the narrative perspective can provide a new theoretical lens through which to understand strategy-making in Turkish international contractors.

6.2.1 Narratives as the object of the analysis

The empirical analysis of sectoral and individual narratives provides a multi-authored and multi-level understanding of the competitive strategies as enacted by Turkish contractors. The empirical analysis, presented in Sections 5.2 and 5.3, supports the assumption that narratives are temporal and discursive constructions and that they reflect multiple different interpretations of strategy making on different levels. This stands in contrast to the tendency within the current literature to explain competitive strategies through objective generalizations (i.e. Öz, 2001; Dikmen and Birgönül, 2003; Özorhon, 2012). The knowledge created through the analysis of strategy narratives contributes to the developing literature which sees competitiveness as a discourse (e.g. Green et al, 2008; Kao, Green, and Larsen, 2009) (see Section 3.1.6). It is important to note that the narrative perspective conceptualizes social reality as subject to continuous construction (Chia, 2017). Therefore, the search for some form of fixed ‘objective truth’ to explain strategy making and competitiveness in contracting firms is replaced by an understanding that narratives enable access to differing and dynamic interpretations (cf. Czarniawska, 2004).

The narrative analysis presented in previous chapter emphasises an understanding of strategy as a social

practice, situated within the context of Turkish contractors. As argued by Gabriel (1995), narratives are products of specific contexts and they cannot be understood in isolation. This requires a sensitivity to those contexts and an understanding of the broader environment in which competitive strategy narratives are constructed and consumed (Pettigrew, 1997; Green, Larsen and Kao, 2008). The analysis of the sectoral narrative enables such contextual understanding by demonstrating the strategic processes adopted by Turkish contractors within a broader geo-political context. Hence, the analysis of TCA sectoral narrative enables access to the social practices of strategy making within individual Turkish contractors, including the way the strategies are legitimized, with reference to a particular version of history (see Section 5.2). Such understanding of strategy clearly challenges the current literature on Turkish international contracting. The literature which goes no further than a fairly superficial description of Turkey's geographical position and its historical and cultural connections with targeted markets that are understood as sources of 'competitive advantage' (i.e. Öz, 2001; Özorhon, 2012). However, seeing these elements as determinants of success does not explain how such assumed advantages are mobilized in practice in the process of making strategy. In contrast, the identified Narrative Building Blocks (NBBs) in the previous chapter provide an embedded and rich contextual interpretation of those strategic actions which have shaped the trajectory of contracting companies.

The empirical analysis further indicates that there are multiple interpretations of how strategies are enacted in contracting firms (see Sections 5.2 and 5.3). This is in line with the assumption that strategy narratives are constructed by different narrators casting roles and causality on past characters, events and actions with specific attention to the underlying context. For example, the interviews conducted with two practitioners from the same company (an owner and a strategic management executive) presented two different constructed plots to explain the trajectory of the firm. The owner emphasised market entry to the health sector as a strategic action, proudly describing his own role in seizing an opportunity in the market. In contrast, the strategic management executive prioritized the market entry to new industrial projects as the key strategic action of the company of which he considered himself to be the primary actor in leading the company to enter such market. This is consistent with the discussion that strategy is '*a multi-authored process in which there are struggles over alternative meanings as actors compete to dominate the future direction*' (Balogun et al., 2014, pp. 180). As argued by Brown and Thompson (2013), strategy stories describe the causal patterns and relationships between different events; the stories are composed of winners and losers, successes and failures; the narrators attribute responsibilities and point to the role of serendipity; they allocate blame for problems and praise for supposedly prescient thinking. Focusing on narratives as the objects of the analysis facilitates access to such multiple interpretations which are always present at any one moment. It is argued that strategy cannot be understood without understanding the way in which it is

discursively contested. The current study contributes to the literature on strategy and narrative, by emphasizing narratives as *bona fide* objects of empirical analysis for the purposes of understanding strategy making.

6.2.2 Narrative elements and plot structure

The empirical analysis illustrates how the Turkish contractors' sectoral narrative is constructed as an *epic plot* within which the company leaders / senior managers are depicted as the *heroes* of international markets (cf. Gabriel, 2000). The analysis presented in Section 5.3 indicates that the heroic identity ascribed to the sector's role models resonated with many of the interviewees. Sectoral and individual narratives have been constructed around visionary leaders and 'madly hardworking' employees who strive to overcome the predicaments of working in high-risk international markets (see Sections 5.2.3 and 5.3.2). The data analysis presented in the previous chapter illustrates that the narratives are constructed around similar events and actors; however, the actions linked to the espoused strategy differ according to different individual subjective viewpoints. This accords with Polkinghorne's (1988) argument that narratives are constructed on temporal plot structures which can transform the chronological array of narrative elements into a coherent story in the way someone emphasises their significance and impact on others. The empirical analysis presented in Chapter 5 shows that the narrative perspective enables an understanding of which elements of the narrative are seen as *helpers* and which are seen as *opponents*, and how such interpretations can easily shift, depending on who is giving the account (cf. Greimas, 1987). For example, the sectoral and individual narratives emphasise Turkish employees as key *helpers*, highlighting their hardworking and dedicated characteristics without exception. In contrast, the government and financial institutions frequently move from being *helpers* to *opponents*, both in sectoral and individual narratives. Such findings are consistent with Czarniawska (2004) who argue that different plot structures can not only assign different roles to actors, but the same characters can at different times appear as both protagonists and villains.

Strategy narratives are temporal social constructions and they are only meaningful when understood in the context within which they are constructed (cf. Langley and Tsoukas, 2010). As presented in Chapter 5.3, managers coming from different backgrounds and experiences in different companies construct alternative plots which prioritize slightly different practices to explain how their firms have remained competitive. For example, Interviewee 23 connects the competitiveness of his company to the 'strong company culture' and 'raising the employees through the company culture'. In contrast, Interviewee 14 links his company's competitiveness to flexible employment on a project by project basis. This accords with Gabriel (2000), who sees plot structures as the key mechanisms through which different meanings are infused into narrative

elements. For example, Turkish employees are consistently depicted as keen to work abroad, with a strong sense of determination and self-sacrifice, even in high-risk markets (see Section 5.2.2 and 5.3.1). An alternative interpretation might focus instead on the limited opportunities that have traditionally been available within the Turkish domestic sector as the reason underpinning the employees' motivation to work abroad. However, the latter negative view seems to be much less appealing intuitively than ascribing positive heroic attributes to the employees. This also chimes with Gabriel (2000), who argues that the use of epic plot contributes to presenting optimistic messages for the future, emphasizing qualities that would help a protagonist to achieve an ideal plot focus.

In essence, linking the narrative elements along an epic plot structure and identifying supposed causalities, not only informs a retrospective understanding of strategy but also provides a sense of direction for the future of Turkish international contracting. For example, the emphasis on describing Turkish managers as courageous, dedicated and self-sacrificing entrepreneurs clearly reflects the expectation for subsequent projects and generations. Alternatively, as argued by Deuten and Rip (2000), such qualities ascribed to the Turkish employees might be interpreted as 'telling yourself forward'. This notably presents a challenge to the current ways in which strategy is conceptualised within the construction-related literature (see Section, 3.1.2). Much of the current literature on Turkish contractors continues to adhere to realist assumptions, where empirical studies go little further than an analysis of external market forces and industry-level capabilities (e.g. Öz, 2001; Dikmen and Birgönül, 2003; Özorhon, 2012). In contrast, the narrative perspective points towards an explanation of Turkish contractors' successful internationalization as a dynamic process. The process is seen to be shaped (and continuously re-shaped) by a series of interactions between particular emphasised narrative elements. Hence, the narrative analysis on Turkish contractors contributes to existing knowledge on the basis of a historical, temporal and specific rendering of causality in respect of the aspired trajectory of Turkish contractors (cf. Pettigrew, 1997; Tsoukas, 2005).

6.2.3 Continuous temporality and change

The sectoral and individual narratives analysed in this research demonstrate a continuous dynamism and temporality in the accounts of strategy making in international contracting firms. It is argued that such differentiated interpretations are indicative of multiple realities regarding the socially constructed and discursive nature of strategy making (i.e. Green et al, 2008). This perspective contrasts with the dominant tendency within the literature to search for discrete parameters to explain the competitiveness of Turkish firms (i.e. Öz, 2001; Özorhon, 2012). Green et al. (2008) suggest that the existing 'theories' of competitive strategy comprise discursive resources that the practitioners draw upon for the purposes of legitimizing

their actions. The analysis of the sectoral and individual level narratives clearly supports such an argument. The narratives mobilised by the managers of Turkish contractors are seen to be constructed by drawing discursive resources from the accepted ‘theories’ of competitive strategy (see Section 5.3.3).

The findings further illustrate that the core ideas of Porter’s competitive strategy theory still dominate the language that is used to talk about strategy (cf. Porter, 1980; 1985; 1990). For example, the TCA sectoral narrative includes a chapter devoted to a brief discussion of the ‘competitive advantages’ of Turkish international contractors based on Porter’s diamond model. However, the narrative which follows is entirely disconnected from the identified concepts. Similarly, most of the managers used phrases such as ‘analysing target markets’, ‘defining or understanding the competitors’, ‘focusing on your strengths’. The tendency to use such concepts supports the discussion that Porter’s theories continue to provide the lexicon of terms which are used to describe competitiveness (Green et al, 2008; Kao, Green, and Larsen, 2009). However, such expressions are invariably followed by referencing the sudden changes and continuous disruptions, with a great emphasis on the importance of responding to serendipitous opportunities. This supports Mintzberg’s (2007) argument that strategy making happens in-between planned activities and discrete and emergent practices. The concepts of resources and capability theories are also prevalent discursive resources used to describe how Turkish contractors adapt to continuous change and respond to unpredictability within the markets (see Section 5.2 and 5.3).

The empirical findings presented in Section 5.3.2 also resonate with the language of Barney’s (1991) resource-based view. The TCA sectoral narrative consistently positions the human resource as the key competitive advantage of Turkish contractors. Similarly, the language used in much of the empirical data is found to resonate with the discourse of the dynamic capabilities view (Teece et al, 1997). The phrases ‘constant dynamism’, ‘capabilities’ and ‘adapting to change’ seem to be infused within the language used to talk about strategy at both levels (see Section 5.2 and 5.3). The analysis of individual level narratives shows that the interviewees give particular importance to the second order capabilities, as explained in Section 5.3.2. In particular, ‘learning from partnerships with overseas firms’ and ‘providing alternative solutions’ are suggested as key strategic actions that shape the successful path followed by Turkish firms. The important point is not to discuss whether Turkish firms have such acclaimed capabilities in substantive terms, it is the use of these capabilities as rhetorical devices that is of interest. The narratives analysed seem to create a persuasiveness that the contracting firms should follow know-how transfer from their foreign partners and provide alternative solutions to the clients. Such findings are consistent with Barry and Elmes (1997) and Gabriel (2000) who argue that strategy narratives are temporal constructions mobilized to persuade individuals towards certain understanding and actions.

The analysis presented in Section 5.2.3 and 5.3.3 highlights how the trajectories of contracting firms are mostly shaped by a prevailing logic of ‘making it up as you go along’. This is consistent with the emergent strategy concept coined by Minzberg (2007) (see Section 3.1.4). The emphasis on ‘making it up as we go along’ also accords with the argument that competitive strategies are enacted through non-deliberate everyday practical coping rather than the existence of purposeful strategic plans (cf. Chia and Holt, 2006; De la Ville and Mounoud, 2015). For example, Interviewee 23 describes the market entry to the Russian Federation as a key opportunity for enabling survival after having suffered a large financial loss in the MENA markets of the 1990s. From the same company, Interviewee 30 alternatively describes the market entry to the Russian Federation at the beginning of 1990s as the result of the ‘capability’ of the company leader to seize new opportunities. While the former describes the market entry as an emergent action to cope with an unexpected crisis; the latter links it to the capabilities of the manager. Such different interpretations of the same action highlight how the decisions are subsequently interpreted differently for the purposes of creating subtly different arguments. Such findings not only support the argument that strategy making is partially about retrospective sense making, but also supports the inherent temporality and dynamism within strategy narratives. This aligns with the ‘becoming ontology’, as advocated by theorists such as Tsoukas and Chia (2002) (see Section 3.1.4). From this perspective, the accepted tendency to interpret popularised theories as lenses to provide a fixed view or supposed objective reality becomes invalid. In contrast, the narrative perspective enables a more dynamic and multi-layered understanding of the temporal and contextually bounded nature of strategy making (Tsoukas, 1994).

6.2.4 Altering the treatment of ‘time’

The general tendency in strategy research is to conceptualise strategy making as being essentially about looking forward (see Section 3.1). The popularized competitive strategy theories either pay little attention to time or conceptualize it as an entirely objective construct. For example, Pettigrew’s (1997) process school of thought, highlights the importance of the past and promotes longitudinal analysis for the purposes of understanding how strategies emerge. Similarly, the dynamic capabilities view emphasises the concept of path dependency to focus on the importance of the past to the development of a firm’s capabilities (cf. Teece et al, 1997). However, both theories treat time as a concrete reality which supposedly gives a fixed identity to organizations. However, the narrative perspective adopted in this research is based on a more fluid understanding of time which challenges the linear understanding presented by a chronological timeframe (cf. Ricoeur, 1991).

Ericson, Melin and Popp (2015) link the unidirectional understanding of time, inherent in competitive

strategy theories, to an underlying 'being' ontology. As argued in Section 3.2.5., strategy research that is based on the being ontology does not recognize the temporality of social constructions. In contrast, the narrative perspective challenges this one-sided thinking and offers a richer understanding of strategy, whereby the past, present and future are in a continuous flow and interaction (cf. Polkinghorne, 1988). It is argued that the narrative analysis of the TCA book invites the reader to travel constantly between past, present and future (see Section 5.2). The analysis of the sectoral narrative illustrates that the epic story of Turkish contractors uses selected narrative fragments from the past to convey clear messages for the present conditions as well as future trajectories for the sector. This is in line with Vaara and Reff Pedersen (2013), who argue that strategy narratives are constructed through retrospective interpretations of the past, set in relation to present circumstances and future expectations.

As argued by Czarniawska (2004), it is difficult to identify which practices are strategic by focusing only on the present time. Nevertheless, we can analyse the available narratives of what happened and draw appropriate conclusions. For example, when the interviewees are asked to travel back into their previous experiences to articulate how their organizations have remained competitive, they tend to describe temporal causes and outcomes drawing from the past, whilst considering the present conditions and future expectations (see Section 5.3). The findings suggest that strategic actions can only ever be identified in retrospect, and that such arguments are always made with an eye to the future (cf. Chia and MacKay, 2007). Hence, the current research contributes to the growing body of strategy literature which calls for a shift in the conceptualization of time (cf. Sørderberg, 2003; Vaara and Reff Pedersen, 2013). The adopted narrative perspective challenges the linear conception of time, by enabling the researcher to consider the temporal movement between the past, present and future.

6.3 Construction of a collective identity: Understanding strategy through sectoral narrative

Research objective 3: To understand empirically how competitive strategy is represented, interpreted and enacted at the sectoral level (in the formal narratives of institutional bodies such as Turkish Contractors Association (TCA)).

The current research is based on the argument that narratives are the means by which individuals create a social reality that frames 'who they are' and 'what they stand for' (i.e. Sveningsson and Alvesson, 2003). Such processes happen not only on the individual level but also on organizational and sectoral levels, by the creation of formal narratives emphasizing a collective identity (Brown, 2006; Coupland and Brown, 2012). From this perspective, the TCA book, *Geography of Contractors* is seen to offer a sectoral narrative

which provides a key resource for sector members. The book defines what it means to be a ‘Turkish contractor’ and how they have kept their competitiveness. More importantly, the sectoral narrative gives clear messages regarding the characteristics of Turkish contractors and the practices that should be adopted in the future. Such messages conveyed by the sectoral narrative can be interpreted as clear ‘collective identity work’. They are further seen to be inseparable from the way strategy making in the construction sector happens on the sectoral level. In contrast, strategy research in the construction-related literature rarely emphasises the link between identity and strategy making. The following four sections aim to fill this gap by emphasizing the confluence of identity work with strategy making at a sectoral level to address the above stated objective.

6.3.1 TCA and construction of a credible collective narrative for the sector

It is argued that *Geography of Contractors* provides a strong empirical source to understand strategy making at the sectoral level. The heroic story described in the book can be seen to play an important role in constructing a sense of collective identity regarding who Turkish contractors are and how they have maintained their success over the last 40 years. More importantly, it frames what should be done for the idealized future of Turkish international contractors. The text highlights how that ‘Turkish contractors’ is an established brand. It describes authentic characteristics which supposedly differentiate them from other contractors in international markets. TCA seemingly adopts the role as the primary organization that engages in identity work on behalf of Turkish contracting firms. Hence, the sectoral narrative seeks to legitimize TCA membership as a badge of endorsement in the eyes of its members and in the perception of potential clients in international markets. In contrast, when the managers are asked about the role of TCA, they tend to underrate this by only emphasizing that TCA membership means being recognized as a large Turkish contracting company (see Section 5.3.4). However, the findings from the analysis of the individual narratives (see Section 5.3) show that many of the messages conveyed by the sectoral narrative manifest themselves in individual accounts. This might be explained by Brown’s (2006) argument that individual and collective identities constantly evolve through interaction with each other. The level of consistency across individual and collective level narratives also supports the argument that TCA is a key institution that shapes the evolving identity of the Turkish international contracting sector.

The central claim of the TCA narrative is that it seeks to create a collective memory for the contractors, reflecting upon the lessons learned by the previous generation. It is the narrative perspective that unveils the value of the TCA book in respect of identity work and strategy making in the construction sector. This is evident in the interview with a TCA representative where he refers to it as a ‘memory book’, while also

pointing out some other reports as examples of TCA's strategy practices. The reports in question tend to define clear targets and discrete plans for the future. The tendency to understand strategy as the process of producing discrete plans for the future is not only apparent among TCA members, but also within the relevant literature specific to Turkish international contracting (Section 3.1.2). However, the empirical analysis presented in the previous chapter clearly illustrates the inadequacy of such dominant rationalistic and instrumental understanding of strategy making.

It is important to remember that narratives need to be credible to be accepted by intended audiences (Barry and Elmes, 1997) (see Section 6.2.1). In this respect, *prima facie* factual accuracy is also important. The narrative of course is strengthened if it is supported by facts, but it is not the facts themselves which tell the story. It is the plot structure, constructed around conveniently selected facts, which tells the story, and it is the persuasiveness of the story which will dictate how effective it is in shaping the future. The engagement of the History Foundation of Turkey in itself serves to strengthen the credibility of the narrative. Although this research is limited to Turkish international contracting, the use of literary plot structure to create a collective identity for the sector is undoubtedly equally applicable to other mayor players in international contracting. As argued by Barry and Elmes (1997) the credibility of a narrative is linked to its materiality, voice and perspective, ordering and plot, as well as the readership.

First, the publication of the sectoral history as a printed book delivered to members, governmental institutions and also as an online book on the TCA's web page give materiality to the sectoral narrative. The interviewee from TCA emphasised that a printed copy of the book was sent to targeted audiences with an expectation that it would become a key reference book for the future of the sector. This can be interpreted as a strategic practice to increase the recognition of the described collective identity through achieving materiality. Second, the narrative perspective enables us to recognize the multi-voice nature of the meta-narrative (see Section 5.2). It is argued that compiling a meta-narrative that includes the voices of senior managers, government officials and media documents provide a more acceptable strategy artefact than any single voiced report. Third, as discussed within Section 5.2, the development of Turkish international contracting is presented as an epic plot. It is argued that the creation of a collective identity through ascribing a heroic role to the individuals within Turkish contracting firms provides a clear message for the future. Lastly, the target readers of the meta-narrative are explicitly described as the next generation of leaders, who are expected to gain inspiration from the TCA narrative in moving forward on their own journeys.

The details within the TCA's meta-narrative can be seen to describe the strategies which are enacted to

answer different predicaments within the targeted journey of the heroes. The adopted narrative perspective positions the TCA book as a key strategic artefact frozen in time. Such an understanding clearly challenges the tendency to define discrete strategies, drawing on concepts from the competitive strategy theories. Indeed, creating a credible narrative that finds acceptance among the sector members might be interpreted as a key strategic practice on sectoral level. If we accept strategy making as storytelling, then indeed the epic narrative crafted for Turkish contractors can be construed as a credible and novel strategic tool that finds prevalent acceptance by the sector (cf. Barry and Elmes, 1997; Dunford and Jones, 2000).

6.3.2 Creating a sectoral identity: Masters of contracting

The sectoral meta-narrative is plotted with a specific emphasis on the ‘masters of contracting’ (or rather ‘heroes’ as defined in this research) who are portrayed as conducting a noble adventure towards a successful outcome. The sectoral narrative highlights the achievements of individual firms in establishing themselves across a geographical spread of diverse and often very challenging markets (see Sections 5.2.1 and 5.2.2). For example, the quotes presented in Section 5.2.3 illustrate how the sectoral narrative emphasises the way the heroes have created a success story by seizing the opportunities within risky markets. Such depictions are usually followed by stressing how Turkish contractors display courage, risk acceptance and dedication in overcoming difficulties and challenges along the way. Indeed, these features are consistently described as ‘second nature’ to Turkish employees, which seems to express the expectations for the next generation of managers. From a narrative perspective, this is clearly identity work answering the questions of ‘who we are’ and ‘what we stand for’ at a collective level (i.e. Sveningsson and Alvesson, 2003; Oliver, 2015). The construction of the story as an epic plot is consistent with Gabriel’s (2000) argument that self-identity is not about the factual representation of what happened, rather it is about how meaning is infused through the devices used to construct the narratives around events.

The *heroes* are designated to particular tasks, such as expanding into new markets, increasing penetration in current markets and moving up the value chain to deliver more complex projects (Section 5.2). This is in line with Brown and Humphreys (2003) who argue that epic narratives emphasise optimism and adventure, describing a journey towards a successful desirable end. The TCA meta-narrative also infuses some tragic notes by describing details from failure stories. For example, the problems associated with family firms, the dangers of failing to manage accepted risks, and financial incapability are emphasised as the key predicaments which might turn the epic story towards a tragic end. The narrative analysis presented in Section 5.2 enables an understanding of such infused meanings on the events, actors and actions. More importantly, such infused meanings seem to convey messages for the sector participants so they can make

sense of their own trajectory (cf. Vaara, Sonenshein and Boje, 2016). This is consistent with Brown and Humphreys (2003) and Fenton and Langley (2011), who argue that collective narratives have power effects that impose beliefs and practices which members of the collective might accept, reinforce or reject. It is argued that the TCA manages to convey such power subtly by telling the heroic story directly from the voices of practitioners in the sector. This supports Brown (2006)'s argument that collective identity is the aggregation of the individual identity work of those who constitute the collective (see Section 3.3.3).

As explained in Section 4.4.3, the TCA constructs this collective identity by compiling narrative fragments from practitioners' retrospective accounts and other historical documents. Hence, the TCA's meta-narrative can be seen as 'a transient accomplishment' of identity forming for the sector (cf. Ybema, 2009). However, it is important to note that the TCA narrative is the product of 'selective harvesting', as the story is constructed from the narrative fragments of a selected group of managers. Especially important is the strength of the epic plot structure as a means of evoking feelings of pride and honour, drawing selectively from the past to emphasise the expectations for the future (cf. Gabriel, 2000). If we accept that the narratives and stories are constitutive of organizational reality (Czarniawska, 2004), then conveying messages for the purposes of creating a collective identity can be seen as a key strategic practice.

6.3.3 The strategic use of history

The analysis presented in Section 5.2 illustrates how the quoted narrative fragments reflect the managers' interpretations of their past experiences. The quotations demonstrated within this research reflect only a very small part of the individual narrative fragments compiled to construct the sectoral narrative (see Tayanç, 2011). As argued in Section 4.4.2, the TCA does not only use the individual accounts of the senior managers, but also other written documents published on Turkish international contracting at different times in the past. The quotations seem to be selected to suit a pre-determined script which aims to describe how the heroes have faced significant difficulties within their journey in international markets and how they have overcome the challenges. For example, the sectoral narrative pays specific attention toward emphasizing the predicaments that have been faced in Libyan and Russia markets at different times. However, such storylines are usually followed by introducing a variety of interpretations of how the heroic managers have found ways to survive (see Section 5.2). It is argued that TCA's meta-narrative invokes historical stories to create an epic sectoral narrative which is intended to provide direction for the future of the sector. This is consistent with Rowlinson et al (2014) who suggest the use of constructivist interpretations of the past for strategic purposes (See Section 3.2.5). Although not described explicitly, the intended audience for the narrative seems to be Turkish contractors who work (or intend to work) in

international markets. It could be argued that Turkish contractors are saddled with the expectation of living up to the heroic deeds of the previous generation; a more positive interpretation is that they are empowered by the way such expectations mobilise national pride in the pursuit of commercial success. In Gabriel's (2000) terminology, the TCA's meta-narrative can be understood as an attempt to create a sectoral 'mythology' to reinforce desired sectoral values and direction (see Section 5.2.2).

The empirical analysis also illustrates that the sectoral narrative provides a rich description of the socio-economic contexts within which contracting companies work. This is in line with Brown (2006), who argues that narratives can only be understood from the context within which they are constructed. The broad approach resonates with the canons of the process school which advocates that strategy can only be understood as a process which unfolds in a specific context over time (cf. Pettigrew, 1997). However, in contrast to the realist use of the past inherent within Pettigrew's work, the narrative fragments within the sectoral narrative give vent to a diversity of individualised perspectives with little attempt to verify the claims being made. It is clear that each narrative fragment offers a selective interpretation of past events, and it seems reasonable to suggest that the interpretations are offered as a means of linking the past with the future (cf. Czarniawska, 2004). Hence the narrative fragments should be read not only in terms of what they say about the past, but also in terms of what they say about the future.

The TCA narrative uses the importance of historical stories in a slightly different way, by selecting bits and pieces from past experiences in order to emphasise particular messages. For example, the experiences of Turkish contractors in Libya and other markets are selectively used to give advice about the practices that should be followed or abandoned (see Section 5.2.6). It is the narrative perspective adopted in the current research that moves the conceptualization of history beyond a fixed construct that remain unchangeable (Brunninge, 2009). As argued by Foster et al. (2017), such selective use of past happenings positions history as a malleable strategic resource. The content of the TCA sectoral narrative provides a good empirical example of such malleable use of history on sectoral level. The story fragments which are quoted within the book seem to give voice to the companies who have already won the narrative battle within the Turkish contractors. By doing so, the sectoral narrative conveys certain messages for the participants of the sector regarding how to make progress in the future. More importantly, the sectoral narrative repeatedly emphasises that 'everything will be better one day'. Hence, the current research contributes to literature by demonstrating how history can be used as a strategic resource on sectoral level. In essence, construction of such a sectoral narrative through the use of historical perspectives can be construed as the actual 'doing of strategy'.

6.3.4 Dialogism in the collective identity

The analysis of different narrative fragments embedded in the sectoral narrative demonstrates how individuals might infuse meanings differently to past experiences. The empirical analysis clearly describes how labels, such as *helpers* and *opponents*, attached to characters in one narrative fragment might easily acquire the opposite label in other fragments. For example, while the government is described as a key *helper* when it provides lobbying for contractors to enter a new market, it turns into an *opponent* when the discussion refers to the lack of financial guarantees (see Section 5.2.4 and 5.2.5). These are followed by describing the alternative ways to strengthen financial capabilities of contracting firms beyond blaming the government. Such changing interpretations provide the basis for understanding how different actions are taken in different situations, and how they may subsequently be interpreted as strategy (Fenton and Langley, 2011). This accords with Brown and Thompson (2013), who argue that the narrative fragments reflect the interaction of multiple realities and signify the complexity of, and diversity across, individual accounts of strategy making.

Describing the trajectory of a sector, giving details of the markets, companies and projects on a realistic timeline and explaining the details with quoted narrative fragments, is attuned with Bakhtin's (1981, 1986) dialogism concept (see Section 3.2.6). As explained in Section 5.2, the quoted narrative fragments are stories that reflect the lived narratives of managers. Hence, from Bakhtin's perspective, the readers of the TCA meta-narrative can easily feel themselves to be in conversation with current and former professionals from the sector. As Bakhtin reads Dostoevsky's novels as containing multiple voices that are not subordinated to the voice of the author, the narrative analysis of TCA book demonstrates different identity claims over and above the imposed 'heroic' character (cf. Bakhtin, 1981; 1884). The narrative fragments embedded within the TCA narrative not only talk about success stories, but also describe the failures related to other projects and markets (see Section 5.2.6). This is aligned with Brown (2006) who argues that the collective identities are not fully consistent and enduring stories intrinsic to organizations. The multi-voiced and multi-level nature of TCA narrative supports Oliver (2015)'s argument on the sectoral level, by compiling the discursive constructs of different individuals to craft a collective identity. The presentation of the collective identity, based on a selection of individual stories, provides an aggregation of ongoing negotiation of meaning on the individual level over other possible meanings (i.e. Søderberg, 2006).

Oliver (2015, pp.337) argues that identity discussions are connected to strategy as they extend beyond '*who we are*' to inform activities and beliefs about '*what the organization stands for*' or '*why a firm is successful*'. From a narrative perspective, the readers of the TCA book find themselves immersed in the brainstorming

of senior managers in terms of how their companies have remained competitive over time and how this could be sustained in the future. For example, the sectoral narrative emphasises how a low-cost work force cannot continue to provide competitive advantage to Turkish contractors as it did in past (see Section 5.2.6). Developing capabilities, moving towards corporate organization structures, high productivity and continuous innovation are highlighted as the requirements to compete nowadays. Alternatively, the quotes presented in Section 5.2.6 reflect the interpretations of different managers regarding the ongoing competition amongst Turkish contractors. From a narrative perspective, the reader of the TCA narrative can understand strategy making in international construction as an ongoing dialogue between practitioners. In essence, the described research contributes to the literature by understanding strategy making in contracting firms from the lived narratives of the protagonists. This challenges much of the existing construction competitiveness research which tends to identify the factors that are assumed to make contracting organizations more competitive (cf. Green et al, 2008). The narrative perspective points to the value of the book, especially regarding the polyphonic and dialogic nature of strategy making on sectoral level. As argued by Barry and Elmes (1997) narrative perspective enables the reader to recognize how different logics do not only ‘coexist’ but also might ‘inform and shape’ each other.

6.4 Acceptance of heroic identity: Understanding strategy through individual narratives

Research Objective 4: To establish the ways in which practitioners conceive, explain and interpret the competitive strategy through their experienced reality.

The discussion presented in this section presents the findings from individual level narratives to address the Objective 4. This research is based on the assumption that strategy narratives rehearsed by individuals provide a window into the processes of identity work, as both are ways of ascribing meaning to ourselves and to our day-to-day practices. As argued by Sørderberg (2006, pp.413) the narratives comprise the ‘*narrators’ retrospective interpretations and the poetic elaboration on a course of events and their sense making of them*’. This is the point where the strategy making is blended with identity work as a continuously evolving process and individual narratives become an important point of focus in strategy research (cf. Oliver, 2015). Hence, it is argued that the focus on understanding ‘what competitive strategy means’ and ‘how it happens’ on the individual level enables the researcher to understand how strategy making is interpreted by the managers working in Turkish contracting firms. The following four sections will address above stated research objective by emphasizing the interconnectedness of strategy and identity work on the individual level.

6.4.1 How does strategy making happen?

The interviews conducted with senior managers illustrate that the managers like to talk about the competitiveness of their organizations (see Section 5.3). Almost all of them address the question ‘how their firms have kept their competitiveness over time’ with great enthusiasm (see Section 4.4.3). However, a more limited number of managers notably display a moment of hesitation about whether they are the right person to talk about the competitiveness and strategy making in their company. Such recognized hesitation on who should talk about strategy signals a confusion about how strategy making is understood and defined in the sector. For this minority, the initial reaction indicates that the board is the legitimate arena to get an answer regarding the strategy making of their organizations. This clearly reflects the dominant assumption of seeing strategies as planned and applied practices (see Chandler, 1962; Ansoff, 1965; Porter, 1985). Once it is made clear that the intention of the study is to reach their individual interpretations, they thereafter become much more willing to share detailed insights of their personal views regarding strategy. This seems to reflect an ongoing identity struggle regarding who is eligible to talk about strategy in contracting firms (cf. Sveningsson and Alvesson, 2003). However, the majority of managers did not show any hesitation that they are the exactly right person to talk about the issue in their firms. This group of managers seem to feel such legitimacy in themselves either because of having a long experience of the construction sector or possessing a title explicitly relating to strategy, e.g. board member, business development manager. The empirical findings illustrate that talking about strategy not only bolsters the self-identity of the managers but also portrays their sense of self-identity to others. This is in line with Oliver (2015) and Brown (2015), who argue that strategy making is inseparable from the identity work with which individuals continuously engage.

Much of the existing literature on construction competitiveness pays scant attention to how competitive strategy is understood at the individual level. The analysis of the individual narratives illustrate that managers tend to use Michael Porter’s language at the very beginning, referring to the concepts such as low-cost advantage, market focus and differentiation (see Porter, 1985; 1990). The managers start by describing strategic management meetings and long-term decisions taken at the board level. However, when they move on to describing their experiences in more detail, they hardly refer to any clear application of those discrete strategy making assumptions. For example, Interviewee 4 clearly describes the invalidity of much of the existing theories of competitive strategy to explain strategy making in contracting firms (see Section 5.3.3). Several other managers highlight emerging opportunities and how their companies have adjusted constant unexpected changes. For example, Interviewee 13 describes transportation projects as the ‘focus strategy’ of his company in international markets (cf. Porter, 1985). However, thereafter he

emphasises that it all began as a result of winning a tender and taking part in successive railway projects, rather than being the result of conscious planning. This clearly shows that the ‘market focus’ label is used to legitimize certain actions of the company in retrospect. Similarly, Interviewee 23 points to real estate investments as one of the focus markets for his company. However, later on, the interviewee emphasises that investment in real estate started to deal with a sudden economic crisis which caused a standstill in construction activities and the significance of real estate has been increasingly recognized over time. Both examples are consistent with Chia and Holt’s (2009) argument about how some mundane activities are latterly viewed as strategic decisions in retrospect.

The managers often link assumed strategic decisions to the ‘sensing capabilities’ of company leaders or senior managers. For example, Interviewee 9 emphasises that the managers should ‘sense’ and ‘smell’ emergent opportunities. Such interpretations are indicative of the acceptance of DCV lexicon among managers (cf. Teece, 2007). However, the extent to which managers identify opportunities consciously, using their sensing capabilities, is open to question. The frequent use of ‘being in the right place at the right time’ after emphasizing the requirement for sensing capabilities reflects a degree of confusion regarding the making and enactment of strategy. However, such findings are in line with Green, Larsen and Kao (2008), who emphasise the importance of maverick behaviour and acceptance of some actions as strategic in retrospect. The examples given above are consistent with the argument that the practices seen as strategic in retrospect seem to be enacted through interactions with the others and the context, over time without clear pre-determined plans and targets (Kaplan and Orlikowski, 2013). As such, who it is that makes a strategy seems to be only argued retrospectively, depending on the temporal connections made in individual accounts. As organizations are temporal social constructions, such individual accounts become of primary importance for shaping the trajectory of the companies. The multiplicity of the interpretations on what is seen as strategic is indicative that individuals tend to appropriate different versions of strategy stories reflecting their subjective viewpoints and drawing resources from the context in which they are embedded (Balogun et al, 2014). The empirical analysis of the individual narratives clearly challenges the dominant expectation in the literature, towards an acceptance that strategies are the products of clear planning and application processes. More importantly, the narrative perspective enables a better understanding of how practitioners within the sector interpret strategy making.

6.4.2 Acceptance of the ‘heroic’ collective identity

The analysis of the individual narratives shows that the heroic character, tailored in the TCA’s sectoral narrative, finds wide acceptance by senior managers. Most of the managers see themselves as *the new*

generation of heroes, who would advance the legacy of older generations further by extending into new markets and moving upwards in the value chain (see Section 5.3.1). There is also a notable expectation that they will learn from the mistakes of the older generation and act accordingly. This clearly highlights the strategic value of TCA's sectoral narrative to give a frame of reference and sense of direction for individuals. The common point of reference was the depiction of Turkish people as 'madly hardworking', extending the attribution of heroic character to the employees working at all levels (see Section 5.3.2). The argument is frequently made with reference to the employees available to Western contractors, who are seen to be reluctant to move beyond their comfort zone. In contrast, Turkish employees were seen to be dedicated and willing to sacrifice their personal life. The extent to which this is true is not the issue. The important point is the way in which this collective self-identity is continually reinforced as being of vital importance to the continued success of Turkish international contractors. Especially important is declaring themselves as the 'masters of contracting' by emphasizing the experience gained in different markets over several decades. This is the point where individual identity work is extended to organizational and sectoral levels (Brown, 2006; 2015). The common point of agreement is 'Turks can deliver the project no matter what happens' (Section 5.3.1). It is argued that such expressions establish distinct discursive resources that are mobilised as a means of 'telling yourself forward' (cf. Deuten and Rip, 2000). The managers are very explicit in emphasizing national stereotypes, and in reproducing such images for the purposes of projecting their self-identities.

The individual narratives support the message given in the meta-narrative that Turkish contractors should escape from the identity of being 'muddy boots contractors'. Most of the interviewees expressed similar accounts, regarding a desire to move up in the value chain (see Section 5.3.1). Such emphasis clearly shows that identity work involves not only addressing the question 'who am I?' but also the question 'who do I want to become' (cf. Sveningsson and Alvesson, 2003; Oliver, 2015). While 'the nostalgia of the old good days' highlighted in the TCA narrative also appears within individual narratives, the common tendency is to emphasise how a new generation of managers extends beyond the limits of older generations (cf. Brown and Humphreys, 2003). For most of the managers, Turkish contracting firms are still seemingly managed by 'make it up as you go along' approach (Section 5.3.4). The managers criticizing this ad-hoc approach were keen to emphasise an ambition to adopt Western management systems and techniques, i.e. assign clear distribution of roles and responsibilities, compliance with health and safety regulations and latest risk management techniques. For example, Interviewee 11 associates the successful continuity of the firms to moving toward a more corporate management style (see Section 5.3.1). However, those managers who support adopting this corporate management style also emphasise the 'make it as you go along' approach as a key tool or *helper* that enables them to overcome their competitors. The critical question then becomes

whether such improvement recipes would also allow Turkish contracting firms to keep their much emphasised *heroic* character; or just turn them into the same kind of Western company which they tend to label as ‘unsuccessful’ in many regards. This seems to reflect the identity struggle at the individual level. The managers seem to move between being ‘the heroes of risky markets’ towards seeking to become a ‘Western type’ company (cf. Brown, 2006; 2015). Such findings illustrate that the construction of identity is a process whereby the narratives, on different levels, overlap, interact and evolve together rather than follow a simple linear relationship (Ricoeur, 1991).

This study contributes to the literature around strategy by interpreting the competitive strategy as an epic plot within which the managers ascribe themselves the heroic role (cf. Gabriel, 2000). It is clear that the existing competitiveness research in construction management literature does not talk about the heroes and their novel accomplishments (see Section 3.1.2). Rather, it prescribes determinants, factors that supposedly improve the competitiveness of firms in construction without any attention to the level of individuals (e.g. Öz, 2001; Dikmen and Birgönül, 2003; Özorhon, 2012). In line with authors such as Chia and McKay (2007), Sillince and Simpson (2010) and Oliver (2015), strategy making can be seen as a part of identity work, opening up new ground to understanding the enactment of strategies. It is important to note that the adopted narrative perspective accepts organizations as temporal, polyphonic, and social constructions in which individuals continuously rehearse, test and co-construct their self-identities (cf. Tsoukas, 1994). In such context, identity work is always temporal, that narrators continuously test these identities against the audiences with whom they interact. The resonance between the findings from individual and sectoral-level analysis clearly shows that the managers draw from the meta-narratives created at the sectoral level to legitimize their individual accounts (cf. Fenton and Langley, 2011; Coupland and Brown, 2012). Strategy, in this sense, becomes not just a simple matter of practice that can be observed and planned in any concrete form, as assumed by much of the competitiveness related literature. Rather, strategy making becomes the identity work through which individuals continuously enact who they are and what they are for (cf. Sveningsson and Alvesson, 2003; Oliver, 2015). As narratives are a means through which identity work takes place, therefore narrative analysis offers a rich platform to further the strategy-based research in construction management literature.

6.4.3 Identity tensions on the ownership of ‘hero’ label

The empirical analysis of the individual narratives shows that the senior managers are keen to assert that Turkish contractors are the visionary, innovative and courageous heroes of international contracting (Section 5.3.1). This evidently demonstrates the acceptance of the heroic identity as created by TCA’s

narrative among the practitioners in the sector. This accords with Brown (2006), who argues that identity work occurs at the nexus where narratives on different levels continuously overlap and interact. However, managers tend to turn the discussion to their own organization and label their organization as the ‘real’ hero, describing how and why their organizations are superior to other Turkish contractors. For example, Interviewee 11 stresses the importance of his company over the older companies, by arguing that they could not compete with his company (Section 5.3.1). This also illustrates that TCA’s strong emphasis on avoiding internal competition (Section 5.2.6) finds little acceptance at the individual level. In essence, even the managers highlighting the ongoing competition between contracting firms as a key *opponent* for the Turkish contractors’ brand image, tended to promote their own organizations over others.

The tendency of the interviewees to emphasise their organization as the ‘real hero’ is usually followed by shifting the emphasis to the role of the individual in creating the epic success. Herein the managers diverge in two groups; the ones who manifest themselves as heroes and the others who ascribe the heroic role to the company founders or leaders. The former group is very keen to express their pride and respect for such legendary leaders of the past, with a specific emphasis on the strong company culture in their organization (Section 5.3.1). In contrast, the latter group asserts their own role, using expressions such as ‘I bring my expertise to that company’ or ‘we entered this new market because of my expertise’. This latter group tend to label the older managers almost as *villains*, who resist the new ways of doing business in international contracting, resulting in the reduced competitiveness of the company. Such claims about being the real hero of the company is usually strengthened by labelling company owners or older managers as hidebound (old minded). For example, Interview 29 clearly positions himself as the new hero by contending that the technological capabilities of new generation managers who are replacing the key role of omnipresent first generations (see Section 5.3.2). Such identity tensions are in line with Brown and Phua (2011, pp.85), who argue that organizations are ‘*important arenas for the exercise of power*’. Hence, the current research contributes to existing literature by illustrating how ongoing identity struggles take place in the sector and more importantly how this impact upon the practices that are seen as strategic.

The narrative perspective helps us to see the dynamism in ascribing the heroic role. The temporality of the narrative construction seems to provide flexibility to infuse different meanings on narrative elements, i.e. the older generation of leaders can easily be construed as the *villains* of their own organizations (Section 5.3.1). For example, when the interviewees describe the failure of their companies to enter a specific market, the blame can easily be allocated to the owner of the company. As such, by labelling various characters as helpers, adversaries and villains, the managers make sense of the roles themselves and others carry, in the trajectory of Turkish contracting (cf. Gabriel, 2000; Sørderberg, 2006). Hence the analysis of individual

narratives is in line with the arguments that identities are never entirely fixed and stable, and the processes of identity construction are multi-faceted and constantly contested (cf. Sveningsson and Alvesson, 2003). Authors, such as Balogun et al (2014) and Brown and Thompson (2013), contend that such processes of identity construction are inseparable from the enactment of strategy. Hence, the identity struggles within the individual level narratives reflect the subjectivity with which practitioners conceive, explain and interpret competitive strategy.

6.4.4 Labelling other characters

The individual narratives are notable for the way in which the managers ascribe subject positions to *other characters*. Such clear depiction of these subject positions attributed to other characters, illustrates the relational aspects of identity construction (Brown and Phua, 2011). By labelling other characters as *helpers* and/or *opponents* the managers not only interpret what roles others play in their story but also make sense of how they should benefit from or cope with them. For example, almost all managers expect that the foreign ambassadors should be *helpers* to the contractors regarding supporting market entry to different countries. Similarly, describing Turkish employees as ‘madly hardworking’ conveys a message for the employees in the sector. However, the labels attached to other characters easily shift from being a *helper* to an *opponent*. For example, the individual narratives designate the government as the key *helper* when mentioning the lobbying activities which would open up new markets (Section 5.3.4). However, most of the managers also cast the Turkish government as an *opponent* for the international contracting sector. The argument being that the unstable and unpredictable foreign policy of the Turkish government is a key reason for market shrinkage of Turkish contractors in recent years. Such discussions are followed by labelling the Turkish financial institutions as another key *opponent*, or, as described in some interviews, the *villains* (Section 5.3.2). The argument is that the contracting sector needs additional finance to compete in international markets; however, the financial institutions in Turkey fail to respond to such demand. The credit banks in the Western countries and public finance available to Chinese contractors are often described as enviable. This evidently conveys a message on a broader scale, that the success journey of Turkish international contracting can only be sustained with the support of government and the financial sector. The existing literature on Turkish international contracting also mentions the importance of human resources, government and financial institutions (i.e. Öz, 2001; Özorhon; 2012). However, the narrative perspective highlights that strategy making can only be properly understood by taking into account the roles played by others in the context. Considering the performative power of the narratives, in influencing future strategic ambitions, such labels attached to the other characters becomes important in regard to strategy making (Vaara, Sonenshein and Boje, 2016).

The heroic journey of Turkish contractors is frequently described as a 'market war' against powerful Western and Chinese companies (Section 5.3.4). The managers are very explicit in attaching labels to their competitors and by doing that they define a clear positioning for Turkish contractors. For them, the Western contractors' identity means high quality work but with a high price, long project durations and a project process associated with 'claim-blame'. This is usually contrasted with describing the work quality, agile decision-making capability and responsiveness to the client requests as the distinct identity of Turkish contractors. When the story comes to Chinese contractors, the labels include low quality, state-backed companies, and cultural differences. The narrative fragments especially emphasise that the Chinese contractors are a distinct case, as the Chinese international contracting develops as part of China's global trade agenda. Such tendency to label *other characters* is very indicative of relational aspects of identity work (Brown and Phua, 2011). The practice of labelling others is seen to provide rhetorical resources which inform the practices that should be followed by the Turkish contracting firms. Hence, labelling is one of the key ways to understand how strategy making is interpreted on an individual level.

6.5 The narrative infrastructure of Turkish international contracting

Research Objective 5: To clarify the interactions and interdependencies between sectoral and individual level narratives of strategy.

The specific aim of this section is to evaluate the findings from the empirical analysis in order to address the above quoted research objective. While the preceding two chapters present the findings from the sectoral and individual-level narrative analysis separately, this section illustrates what emerges from the comparison between the two. It is argued that the incessant interaction of individual and sectoral-level narratives creates a continuously evolving narrative infrastructure for the sector as a whole (cf. Deuten and Rip, 2000). Such a narrative infrastructure provides a clear point of reference for the generation of further narratives, which constitute the subsequent actions of Turkish contractors. The identified narrative building blocks (NBBs) from the analysis of sectoral and individual narratives are seen to be constitutive elements of the narrative infrastructure. It is argued that the identified NBBs are socially constructed resources which emerge through a constant iteration between the past, present and future. More importantly, they can be seen to inform stability and change by encouraging some practices and hindering others (Brown and Humphreys, 2003; Vaara, Sonenshein and Boje, 2016). The identified NBBs within the narratives of Turkish contractors were structured around the characteristics of an epic plot (cf. Gabriel, 2000) (see Section 3.2.4). The discussion in each section illustrates how stability and change are represented within the narrative infrastructure of Turkish international characteristics.

6.5.1 The *fixed qualities* of ‘Turkish contractors’

The comparison of the sectoral and individual narratives presented in Sections 5.2 and 5.3 indicates a strong consensus regarding the key characteristics ascribed to ‘Turkish contractor’ identity. Drawing on Gabriel’s epic plot structure, such emphasized characteristics are seen as the *fixed qualities* attributed to *heroes*. These can be listed as (i) early project completion; (ii) quality of work; (iii) conflict-adverse attitude; (iv) risk-taker; (v) agile decision-maker; and (vi) innovative. The narrative fragments are highly suggestive that the managers should exploit such qualities in order to sustain the epic journey of Turkish contractors. This is in-part identity work, but more importantly it gives insights into what can be understood as strategic practices and how such practices are promoted (cf. Sillince and Simpson, 2010; Oliver, 2015). The analysis in Section 5.2 and 5.3 illustrate how such ascribed *fixed qualities* of Turkish contractors are linked to specific outcomes. Especially important examples of these outcomes include the ability to create new markets, undertaking successive projects with same project partners, especially the client, or involving the approved contractors list held by international institutions.

First, the sectoral and individual narratives directly link the ‘Turkish contractor’ identity to fast-track project delivery without any exception. For example, the sectoral narrative emphasises early project completion as the key way to have successive projects (see Section, 5.2.2). Second, the sectoral narrative clearly depicts that early project completion should be achieved without any compromise on quality. Interviewee 1 exemplifies how an emphasis on quality is routinely promoted within the individual level narratives, using phrases such as ‘the client knows that we can deliver’. As such, several of the interviews highlight early completion with exceptional quality as the key *helper* of creating embeddedness in markets (see Section 5.3.1). Third, Turkish contractors’ identity is strongly associated with a conflict-adverse attitude. The sectoral narrative emphasises that Turkish contractors are averse to conflict by highlighting that they are always looking to find a compromise even in situations where they feel they are in the right (see Section 5.2.2). The individual narratives frequently underline this conflict-adverse attitude by using phrases such as ‘Turkish contractors do not work with claim and blame practices.’. However, a few dissenting voices also emphasise that the conflict-adverse attitude must not mean they suffer a financial loss (see Section 5.3.4).

Forth, the sectoral narrative argues that the first generation of managers constructed the international contracting sector out of nothing, by taking considerable risks to work in unstable markets (Section 5.2.3).

As such, it gives the message that high risks have been experienced for decades, and several markets have been created by embracing such challenges. More importantly, the experience gained by working in high-risk markets are highlighted as a springboard from which to expand into other markets. This is clearly identity work which seems to constitute a sense of direction for the sector (cf. Chia and MacKay, 2007; Sillince and Simpson, 2010). Similarly, the individual-level narratives highlight Turkish people's resilience in coping with risk. For example, Interviewee 11 connects the apparent risk-seeking nature of the Turkish people to their experiences of living with constant economic and political vicissitudes in the domestic market. Some managers extend the risk argument by pointing to the geographical position of Turkey as an underlying reason for their expressed attitude to risk. Interviewee 13 is very assertive in emphasizing that Turkey is a bridge between West and East, with deep cultural and historical connections to both sides. He further contends that such connections and similarities enable Turkish contractors to cope with the risks that the Western contractors tend to avoid. The individual narratives clearly show that managers accept their identity of being the entrepreneurial heroes within conflict zones; however, they are paradoxically keen to emphasise how well they have adopted enhanced risk management techniques as compared to previous generations (Section 5.3.1). In the words of many, the new generation of managers are not 'gamblers' anymore, they are risk lovers, with sophisticated capabilities of risk management. Such interpretations of attitudes to risk and the messages given within the narratives at both levels is consistent with Vaara, Sonenshein and Boje's (2016) argument relating to the power of narratives to facilitate change or stability.

Fifth, the analysis at both levels suggest that agile decision-making is frequently offered as a key characteristic which differentiates Turkish contractors from their competitors (see Sections 5.2.2 and 5.3.2). The shared message is that Turkish managers can respond to client requests directly or undertake the operational activities without wasting time through overly bureaucratic processes. This is commonly argued as 'this is who we are', drawing from deeper cultural norms to support the self-identity of the Turkish people (cf. Sveningsson and Alvesson, 2003). For example, Interviewee 14 connects such described agility to the nomad culture within the history of the Turks. The generic inference is that the geographic position and historical roots of Turkish people give Turkish contractors the advantage of understanding and answering the local culture and act accordingly. However, some managers emphasised the ownership and decision-making structure of Turkish contracting firms as the main reason for their claimed orientation towards agile decision-making (Section 5.3.1). The argument made is that because Turkish contractors are private companies, the owners or senior managers have the authority to decide immediately how to engage and negotiate with the client.

Finally, this emphasis on agility is usually followed by describing Turkish contractors as ‘innovative’, using phrases such as ‘we think differently’. The sectoral narrative strengthens the heroic role ascribed to Turkish managers by describing the innovative solutions they have created. Of particular note is describing the first generation of managers as the great engineers (see Section 5.2.1). The sectoral narrative gives a strong message that the book ‘Geography of Contractors’ was created as a reference to encourage a new generation of managers to extend the described legacy into future practice. The individual narratives frequently illustrate the constituent identity work by using phrases such as ‘we think differently’ and ‘we find alternative ways’ (see Section 5.3.2).

From a narrative perspective, the extent to which the above-presented arguments relating to the supposed *fixed qualities* of Turkish contractors are true or not is not the main issue. The key point is that such practices of identification are continuously being reinforced as being of vital importance to the continued success of Turkish international contractors. Thus, the narratives serve to build a collective commitment to such qualities so that they become, not only identity work on the level of Turkish contractors, but also an issue of national pride. It is easy in this respect to understand how a strong and consistently reinforced narrative can indeed be constitutive of the desired reality that Turkish contractors are encouraged to pursue (cf. Deuten and Rip, 2000; Fenton and Langley, 2011).

6.5.2 *Predicaments within the heroes’ journey*

The NBBs identified within the sectoral and individual-level data suggest some challenges which may hinder the continuation of Turkish contractors’ epic journey (cf. Gabriel, 2000). Drawing on the elements of epic plot structure, the key *predicaments* within the heroes’ epic journey are described as: (i) limited financial and consulting capabilities; (ii) internal competition among Turkish contractors; (iii) organization and management structure of contracting companies; and (iv) constant economic and political vicissitudes. While there is a strong consensus on the ascribed *fixed qualities* of Turkish contractors in the previous section, the narrative fragments accommodate dissenting voices on the NBBs discussed as predicaments. Finding such divergences among the narrative fragments supports the perceived temporal, discursive and contested nature of narratives (De la Ville and Mounoud, 2015). However, the sectoral and individual narratives also suggest certain the ways in that particular qualities of Turkish contractors can be exploited or challenged (cf. Vaara, Sonenshein and Boje, 2016).

First, the narrative data analysed at both sectoral and individual levels highlights the possibility that inadequate financial and consulting capabilities continue to hinder the success of Turkish contractors. The sectoral narrative describes the financial weaknesses of Turkish contractors as an ongoing opponent or

barrier from the very early days of internationalization (see Section 5.2.4). The analysis of the individual-level narratives strengthens such argument by emphasizing that providing project finance has become the responsibility of contracting firms (see Section 5.3.2). Such findings are in line with Han et al (2010), who argue that changing procurement processes within international construction projects requires contractors to provide financial solutions to the international projects for themselves. From a narrative perspective, the significant point is not the identification of such capabilities as key predicaments. It is how the narrative fragments selectively draw from the past to emphasise the practices that can be seen enacted in the strategies that help the heroes along their targeted journey (cf. Foster et al, 2017). For example, combining forces with other companies and proving income from investments in other sectors emerge as the suggested practices within both data sets. More importantly, the government was assigned a key *helper* role, who help the heroes to overcome the finance predicament. The sectoral-level narrative highlights how that Turkish international contracting sector suffers from a lack of Turkish consultancy services (see Section 5.2.4). A quotation taken from Turkish Ministry of State at the time highlights that the development of consultancy services is not only a key issue for the contracting sector but also for the broader economy in Turkey. In contrast, the individual narratives rarely refer to an expectation that Turkish consulting firms should expand. The managers rather emphasise the development of managerial, design and engineering in the contracting firms themselves as a key practice to expand the heroes' market share within international markets (see Section 5.3.2).

Second, the alleged needless competition between Turkish contractors is described an ongoing predicament that decreases the market power of Turkish contractors. The quotes presented in Section 5.2.6 illustrate how such argument is emphasised within the sectoral-level narrative. In essence, Turkish contracting companies are depicted almost as the *villains* to each other. Such messages are usually followed by pointing out that collaborative practices between Turkish contractors offer a way to overcome the technical, financial and managerial barriers instead of competing in the market as a single company. For example, the sectoral narrative highlights that there have been few successful collaborative practices in the past that enable some Turkish contractors make a successful market entry into Russia (see Section 5.2.6). The TCA's call to eliminate the competition between Turkish firms also finds a strong resonance within individual narratives (Section 5.3.4). Despite a consensus on the negative effects of internal competition in the Turkish contractors, there are dissenting voices about the likelihood of future collaborative practices. While the sectoral narrative invariably depicts an opportunistic view regarding the expectation of increasing collaboration among Turkish firms, the individual narrative tends to depict a pessimistic scenario. The quote derived from Interviewee 28 clearly explains such recognised pessimism at an individual level (Section 5.3.4). Also, the individual narratives describe how younger Turkish firms acquire know-how, by

transferring key senior managers from older companies, reinforcing their pessimistic expectations around collaborative practices (see Section 5.3.2).

Third, the organizational structure of Turkish contracting firms is frequently seen as a key predicament. The empirical data suggests that most of the Turkish contracting firms are private family-owned firms, even the ones who are publicly shared belong to a single family or only a few partners. This argument is usually followed by emphasizing the wide prevalence of centralized management in Turkish contracting firms. This accords with Giritli et al (1990), who emphasise that owner managers avoid delegating responsibilities to other managers. As demonstrated in Section 5.3.1., the phrases such as ‘one-man show’ and ‘hands on’ approach are used to describe the current organization structures. The managers coming from relatively young firms are keen on to criticize the prevalence of centralized management in older companies, almost labelling those managers as the *villains* of Turkish contractors’ identity. The empirical analysis indicates a clear consensus that Turkish contracting firms should move away from a centralized management model towards corporate management structures which enables delegation of responsibilities to lower managers. Such expectation for higher level managers to become detached from operational daily work is also an accepted idea in the identity literature (i.e. Sveningsson and Alvesson, 2003). In contrast, some board-level managers (i.e. Interviewee 4; in Section 5.3.1) are very assertive that clients within the Turkish contractors’ markets expect to communicate with managers who have sufficient authority to make decisions. It seems that the narratives at both levels reflect conflicting interpretations, emphasizing the expectation that Turkish contracting firms should change their corporate structure but they should also keep their agile decision making capabilities.

Forth, the sectoral and individual-level narratives consistently refer to the constant economic and political volatility present within Turkey and the markets of Turkish contractors’ as a *predicament*. However, the narratives on both levels tends to depict such volatility as the norm of their work. The broad tendency is to emphasise how Turkish contractors have the capacity to cope with such challenges (See 5.2.3 and 5.3.1). More importantly, this ascribed capability is promoted as a key quality which differentiates themselves from their counterparts. The important point is not whether Turkish contractors actually have this capacity in substantive terms; it is the use of this as a rhetorical reference to generate further actions of the heroes that is significant. The individual narratives extend the argument by highlighting the unpredictable foreign relations of Turkish government as a robust *opponent*. The quotations demonstrated from Interviewee 3 and Interviewee 21 exemplifies how the foreign diplomacy of Turkish government challenges the success story of Turkish contractors. Such findings are also in line with Pettigrew (1997) who argues that strategic practices can only be understood by taking into account their embedded context and time, as discussed in

process studies.

These details emphasise how a change in some practices towards other alternative ways of working can be seen as a clear example of how narratives convey messages for the continuity and change of some practices (Fenton and Langley, 2011; Vaara, Sonenshein and Boje, 2016). The interpretation of such emphasised NBBs as the predicaments faced by the heroes also shows how mobilizations of the epic plot structure can be used as an analytical tool to discuss strategy making. The important point of such NBBs identified above is not whether the arguments had happened or not; the key is how such stories work towards ‘telling yourself forward’ (Deuten and Rip, 2000).

6.5.3 Plot focus: The practices to be followed

The empirical data conveys clear messages regarding the types of practices that the strategic narrative seems to be important. From the perspective of epic plot structure, the NBBs discussed in this section emphasises the *plot focus* within heroes’ journey (cf. Gabriel, 2000). First, the empirical analysis demonstrates how Turkish contracting firms pay (or should pay) specific attention to *mobilizing of the networks*. The sectoral narrative frequently highlights how the historical and cultural connections between Turkey and its targeted markets have helped Turkish contractors to be seen in a more favourable light than their foreign competitors (see Section 5.2.5). Most of the managers supported the TCA’s argument that the preferred markets of Turkish contractors lie within the traditional trading routes of the Ottoman Empire. There is a clear consensus that Turkish contractors have made use of such historical and cultural routes to expand their market and project scopes (see Section 5.3.3). Only a small percentage of interviews challenged this dominant view by arguing that their organizations are sufficiently capable to extend further than the traditional markets of Turkish contractors (pointing to Western countries as target markets).

An alternative perspective to the *mobilizing of the networks* emerges in the form of ‘*joining of forces with foreign companies*’. A common point of emphasis is that collaboration with foreign contractors enables Turkish contractors to expand into new markets and project lines, as well as led them to developing new capabilities (see Section 5.2.6 and Section 5.3.3). The sectoral narrative highlights that the initial contracts in overseas markets were frequently established by working as a partner to the Western companies (see Section 5.2.5). The sectoral narrative also clearly underlines how some Turkish companies have benefited from long-term alliances with large Western companies. The individual-level narratives support this argument by emphasizing how collaborative practices with others helped them to be a part of large-scale projects, exceeding their capabilities. The findings presented from the narrative analysis in Section 5.3.3 illustrate how different companies label different collaborative practices as strategic. Such multiplicity

supports the inherent dynamism and temporality of strategy making (Vaara, Sonenshein and Boje, 2016). The emphasis on collaborative practices are in-line with Chen (2008), who suggests that collaborating with other companies is a key practice for market entry to international markets. Such emphasis on collaborative practices are also in line with Kao Green, and Larsen (2009) who argue that the capabilities that make companies competitive are situated across relational ties within a specific business context.

Second, the empirical data frequently emphasises that the *satisfaction of the client* is a strategic practice that characterizes the ‘Turkish contractor’ identity. The argument is that good relationships with the client or project partners means guaranteeing future projects and market embeddedness. The empirical findings are in line with Kao, Green, and Larsen (2009), who emphasise the strategic importance of building networks with others. The empirical data presented in Section 5.3.1 clearly illustrates how company leaders and senior managers are assigned the role of network provider at an organizational level. And, when the discussion moves on sectoral level, responsibility is then allocated to the government officials (Section 5.2.5. and 5.3.4). Especially important is the highlight of the need for a very close relationship between foreign diplomacy and market embeddedness in different countries. The broader message is presumably aimed at the Turkish government, in that the government should seek to be more stable in terms of foreign diplomacy. Such clear promotion of certain practices and the allocation of responsibilities to different actors supports the argument that narratives establish the sources of stability and change in organizations (Vaara, Sonenshein and Boje, 2016). Although the findings are limited to the case of Turkish contractors, the outcomes of the narrative analysis provide clear insights into the strategic practices which might be adopted by contracting companies from other countries.

Third, the sectoral and individual narratives consistently emphasise that contracting business is associated with a constant *search for new markets*. The empirical findings presented in Section 5.3.2 highlight that either the local contractors develop over time or that other foreign contractors increase the competition. Such explanations are often followed by emphasizing the importance of first entry, developing key networks and then becoming embedded as a sequence of key practices that help *the heroes* to reach the *plot focus*. These findings align with Kao, Green, and Larsen (2009), who argue in support of localized learning and embeddedness as emergent discourses of construction competitiveness. For most of the managers, *understanding the local culture* and *embeddedness in the markets* are key practices that should be followed (Section 5.3.2). The message given in the narratives is that Turkish contractors are more open to answer the expectations of unregulated markets and they have the advantage of understanding the local culture within the markets that they work. This supports the argument that historical and cultural connections continue to be important to modern patterns of trade which are flourishing following the collapse of the Soviet Union

(cf. Frankopan, 2018). The emphasis on *understanding the local culture* and *becoming embedded in the markets* further supports the argument that strategic practices can only be understood in their embedded context and at a particular time (cf. Pettigrew, 1997). The empirical findings presented in Section 5.3.3 suggest that the practices that are seen as strategic in one market are not necessarily strategic in another. More importantly, the commonalities and differences inherent in the empirical data reflect the interaction of multiple realities and signify the complexity and diversity across individual accounts of strategy making (cf. Fenton and Langley, 2011).

It is notable that the sectoral narrative of TCA constructs a clear image of the idealized future of Turkish contracting firms. The narrative underscores the expectation that Turkish contractors should operate as the main contractor, rather than accepting a more limited role of sub-contractor. The individual narratives extend this discussion by defining a target as *moving upwards in the value chain* beyond contracting to undertaking Engineering, Procurement and Construction (EPC) projects in specialized project lines, particularly in industrial and energy projects (see Section 5.3.1). The key argument is that the contracting-only business no longer an effective business model, and it is time for delivering integrated construction services. A few managers tend to use a ‘league table’ metaphor to discuss the positioning of Turkish contracting firms in international markets (see Section 5.3.1). As illustrated by a quote from Interviewee 16, there is an expectation that Turkish contractors should move upstream beyond a ‘contracting-only business’. Therefore, the current challenge of Turkish contracting firms is described as developing new design, engineering and financial capabilities to provide these more integrated services. More importantly, being a sub-contractor is seen as an identity that the contractors seek to avoid. This accords with Brown and Phua (2011) who argues that identity work does not only informs who we are but also tells who we are not. The individual narratives tend to emphasise that the practices applied to address moving upstream vary among organizations. For example, while some firms seem to prioritize developing an in-house design and engineering line, others refer to prioritizing working in partnership through strategic alliances. Similarly, while some companies are seen to derive financial benefits from being an investor contractor, others appear to prefer working as a JV with large-scale engineering firms in order to benefit from their greater capacity to provide project finance. These findings support the argument that the objectivist competitive strategy recipes advised within the current literature (see Section 3.1.2) becomes invalid when observing the multiplicity and temporality that exists within strategy narratives.

The process of creating NBBs, as discussed in this section, might be construed as a strategic *action* for others to follow. However, it is important to note that such NBBs are temporary and subject to continuous change. Therefore, it is argued that the narrative analysis presented in Chapter 5, not only enables an

understanding of the enactment of strategic practices but also strengthens the argument that strategic practices are situated activities which can occur differently in different contexts (cf. Green, Larsen and Kao, 2008). It is evident that a narrative perspective enables the researcher to make sense and apply meaning to the enactment of strategic practices. This seems clearly much more useful than an endeavour to interpret strategy making from the perspective of a single, static and popularized competitive strategy theory (Section 3.1). As argued by Green et al (2008), seeing the alternative theories of competitive strategy as discursive resources to construct ever-changing narratives seems to provide richer insights into the enactment of strategies in the construction sector. This study contributes to existing knowledge by demonstrating that strategy making is often based on post-hoc rationalization, specifying and labelling of certain actions, and decisions as strategic, and creating narratives that can lead to construct further actions in the future.

6.6 Summary

The discussion in this chapter has presented how the findings from the empirical analysis addressed the research objectives. The discussion initially focused on how the empirical findings justify the argument that strategies are socially constructed narratives which are continuously co-constructed through multi-authored and multi-level processes. The empirical study has shown that focusing on strategy narratives as the object of analysis provides an understanding of the enactment of strategies at sectoral and individual level. More importantly, the findings have illustrated how the notions of literary plot structures enable not only an understanding of how strategies are enacted but also give clear insights how strategic stories can be created. The findings also challenge the dominant objectivist understanding of competitive strategy, firstly, by demonstrating the temporality and continuous change that occurs within the narratives, as well as emphasizing the temporality in the conception of time. Second, the findings from the analysis of the sectoral narrative has illustrated how an epic plot can be used to create a sectoral identity. Of further note is the use of historical stories as strategic resources to create a sectoral level narrative which establishes a clear intention for the future. Third, the findings from the individual narratives have shown how a sectoral level narrative can inform the identity work on the individual level. More importantly, the analysis of the individual narratives has illustrated the confluence of identity work with strategy making. Lastly, the empirical data has shown how a continuous interaction of sectoral and individual level narratives underpin certain NBBs which are seen to inform the stability and change in the practices of the international contractors. It has been argued that the continuous co-construction of these NBBs constitutes a narrative infrastructure which becomes a central point of reference for the subsequent actions of Turkish contractors. It is important to note that such findings are based on the researcher's interpretation of the empirical data,

referring to the theoretical axioms specified in Section 1.3. Therefore, all the outcomes discussed in this chapter need to be read with an awareness of the theoretical choices derived from the literature review on narrative perspective and identity studies. The following chapter provides a summary and outlines the key conclusions that have emerged from the current research

7. Conclusion

7.1 Introduction

The aim of this last chapter is to present the principal conclusions of this PhD research. The described research has examined the formation and enactment of strategy, based on the analysis of individual and collective narratives. The empirical data comprised sectoral and individual-level strategy narratives for Turkish international contracting sector. The chapter starts with explaining how the research aim and objectives were achieved. This is followed by a discussion on the contribution of the current research to existing knowledge. Then, consideration is given to reflections of adopting a narrative perspective to understand strategy making. Finally, some recommendations are made for future research.

7.2 Reflections on the research aim and objectives

The research explores the strategy making in Turkish international contracting sector through the analysis of sectoral and individual narratives. The adopted narrative perspective enabled an understanding of organizations as temporal, polyphonic social constructions. In such context, the narratives were seen as temporal mechanisms that provide a multi-authored and multi-level understanding of the competitive strategies enacted by Turkish contractors. This section discusses how the research objectives outlined in the introduction chapter have been addressed through the empirical research. The objectives are restated again below:

- To critically analyse how competitive strategy is conceptualized within the current literature.
- To evaluate the extent to which competitive strategy narratives can provide a means of understanding the enactment of strategies.
- To understand empirically how the competitive strategy is represented, interpreted and enacted at the sectoral level (in the formal narratives of institutional bodies such as Turkish Contractors Association (TCA)).
- To establish the ways in which practitioners conceive, explain and interpret the competitive strategy through their experienced reality.

- To clarify the interactions and interdependencies between sectoral and individual level narratives of strategy.

The first objective was achieved by articulating a detailed critique on the relevant literature. Much of the existing literature has been characterised by positivist approaches and rationalist explanations. Such perspectives bear little resemblance with the continuing instability and unpredictability described within the markets that contracting companies operate. The analysis of the sectoral and individual narratives clearly illustrates that Turkish contractors' international trajectory cannot be understood by adopting any single theory reviewed in Section 3.1. More importantly, Section 2.2 demonstrates that the markets Turkish contractors operate in are simply not stable enough to justify adopting a kind of static mechanism through which to plan, achieve and improve competitive strategies. This is an important finding which supports the argument that understanding competitive strategy should move from strong adherence to objectivist understanding (cf. Green et al, 2008a). Although the empirical data includes multiple references to elements of existing theories, such knowledge artefacts are mostly used by the managers to make sense what they have done, for their own strategic purposes. Essentially, any references to certain theoretical concepts within the existing literature seem to be made without any adherence to the theoretical standpoints underpinning these concepts. This finding justifies the argument that competitive strategy can be understood as a socially constructed and discursive concept. The empirical analysis also shows that to understand the success of Turkish contractors it is necessary to also understand their history, geography, and above all else the global geo-politics that shape and are shaped by their work.

The second objective was addressed by the mobilization of narrative ideas for the purposes of understanding strategy making. The empirical data, presented in Chapter 5, provided a multi-authored and multi-level discussion on the competitive strategies applied by Turkish contractors. The analysis demonstrates that actors create narratives to make sense of themselves and their experiences. These narratives reflect the interaction of multiple realities and signify the complexity and diversity across individual accounts of strategy making. The analysis of narratives further illustrates the temporal connections made between the actors, the actions that they take, and the events that are initiated by external parties. Such connections provided the basis for understanding how different actions are taken in different situations, and how they may subsequently be interpreted as strategy. The findings point to the requirement for a post-hoc rationalization to specify and label certain actions and decisions as strategic. The narrative analysis highlights how narrators can temporally draw from stories about the past to legitimize their strategic visions for the future. Hence strategy is not an observable material practice that can easily be accessed; however, new insights can be gained by focusing on how it is interpreted and enacted through narratives. It was

argued that by following an interpretive process, which views narratives or narrative fragments as a resource through which strategy is enacted and meanings are constructed by decision makers, it is possible to capture the ‘reality in flight’ in terms of construction competitiveness research.

The third objective was achieved by conceptualizing the historical interpretation offered by TCA as a strategy text. The argument is that the TCA document constructs a sectoral-level meta-narrative through the selection and prioritization of certain stories over others. The sectoral narrative analysis illustrates how TCA creates a collective sense of identity by drawing on retrospective stories. The findings provide empirical support for how historical stories can be used as strategic resources to construct a sense of direction for the future. More importantly, the formulation of the sectoral narrative, infused with the notion of an epic plot structure, is seen a strategic practice at the sectoral level. It is this epic plot structure through which managers are identified as quasi-heroic characters. The managers were skilfully credited with heroic attributes on the basis of their ascribed roles, overcoming risk and uncertainty in the successful pursuit of overseas expansion. The structural analysis provides a means of understanding how actors, actions, events and the broader geo-political context are temporally- linked to constitute a narrative infrastructure for the purposes of guiding further action. The current research contributes to strategy literature by illustrating how the production of a sectoral-level narrative can be constitutive of both identity work and strategy making.

The fourth objective was achieved through analysing the individual narratives collected from 30 managers working in Turkish contracting companies. The empirical analysis of the individual narratives illustrates how the *heroic* collective identity created by the sectoral narrative became a key resource that the individuals were able to draw from to construct their sense of self as managers in international contracting companies. More importantly, the individual narratives indicate a strong commitment to improving the identity or brand name of ‘Turkish contractors’. There is a strong consensus that the legacy of the past generations should be extended. Hence, the empirical research demonstrates the confluence of identity work with strategy making. The findings illustrate that identity work occurs at the nexus where the sectoral and individual narratives continuously overlap and interact. Various commonalities and discrepancies between the sectoral and individual narrative were raised which also support the argument that identities are never fixed or stable, and the processes of identity construction are multi-faceted and constantly contested. By labelling particular characters as helpers, adversaries and villains, the managers seemed to make sense of the roles of others in the epic story of Turkish contracting. Such processes reflect the relational aspects of identity work which is continuously displayed through narratives, and are hence best explored through narrative analysis.

The fifth objective was achieved by mobilizing the concepts of narrative infrastructure and narrative building blocks to analyse the narratives of Turkish international contractors. It is assumed that narratives provide the central mechanism through which individuals create meaning for themselves and their actions. The empirical data portrays a continuous juxtaposition between the individual and that of the collective. The findings illustrate that strategy making occurs at the nexus where narratives at different levels overlap and interact. Such interaction and evolving aggregation and disaggregation of narratives are found to underlie particular narrative building blocks (NBBs). This constitutes the dynamic narrative infrastructure present in the Turkish international contracting sector (cf. Deuten and Rip, 2000). The identified NBBs seem to convey strong messages for continuity and change of particular practices associated with the competitiveness of Turkish contracting firms (Vaara, Sonenshein and Boje, 2016). The use of epic plot structure strengthens these messages by evoking feelings of pride and honour associated with being ascribed as the heroes of international contracting. The empirical data shows that the significance of such NBBs does not lie within the facts, whether they are actually helpers or opponents, but how these labels create intentions for the future practices of Turkish international contractors. Hence, of particular importance is not the substantive meaning of the identified NBBs, it is their generative power for future practice.

7.3 Contribution to existing knowledge

It is argued that the research makes a contribution to two literatures; construction management and organization studies. First, the current research extends strategy-related studies in the construction sector by conceptualizing strategy as a narrative action. It is the first systematic narrative analysis of strategy making in construction-specific literature. The empirical work focuses on the narratives at both individual and sectoral levels. The findings suggest that strategy making is a multi-authored and multi-level discursive process within which alternative meanings interact, change and evolve together over time. In agreement with Foster et al (2017)'s argument on the strategic use of history, TCA's narrative is seen as a means to create a collective identity for the sector, drawing on selected narrative fragments. Although not described explicitly, the intended audience for the sectoral narrative seem to be the Turkish contractors who work (or intend to work) in international markets. This is, in part, about identity work but it is also about the social construction of a future reality. The narrative creates a strong expectation that Turkish contractors will deliver on time, avoid adversarial relationships with their clients and compete on the basis of high quality outputs. The TCA have selected narrative fragments to support past claims but also to establish very clear expectations for the future. It could be argued that Turkish contractors are saddled with this expectation of living up to the heroic deeds of past generations. A more positive interpretation is that they are empowered

by the way such expectations mobilise a sense of national pride in the cause of commercial and national success.

Second, the current study illustrates how literary plot structures can be mobilized to construct strategic narratives and further, can be used as analytical tools to analyse them. The sectoral narrative has constructed an *epic plot*, assigning heroic roles to key individuals who forge the success of Turkish contractors. More often than not, *the heroes* are the owner-managers of previous generations. The epic plot structure further cast others in the role of *villains* if they are retrospectively associated with failure. *Events* and *actions* are also variously cast in the ‘roles’ of *helpers* or *opponents* when the narrator views them at different points in time. These events and actions are seen to have played an important part in the stories of how the implied heroes undertook their epic journeys to the desired *end goal*. The allocation of agency is of course highly selective and choices are consistently made for the purposes of creating a particular *plot structure*. This again is part of an interpretive process. It is further important to recognise that some *events* are deliberately emphasised, and others correspondingly de-emphasised. It is notable the *events* are described as ‘things which just happen’, while the *actions* emerge as the things which are intentionally enacted by the *heroes* (or *villains*). The accuracy of the facts referred to in the narrative increases the credibility and therefore acceptance by target audiences. However, the primary importance is not the facts in themselves regarding the process of strategy making. It is the emplotment of selected facts and other narrative elements to create an epic story. The TCA narrative is hence seen to comprise a skilfully designed strategic practice at a sectoral level.

Third, this research mobilizes the concepts of narrative infrastructure and NBBs to analyse a strategic text. It is demonstrated that the sectoral narrative created by TCA is produced, not only to create a shared memory and a point of reference for future generations. The analysis of the sectoral narrative also illustrates creation of a narrative infrastructure through mobilization of different NBBs. Such building blocks clearly legitimize certain practices and discredit others, as a result they inform both stability and change within the future direction of the Turkish contractors’ journey. Narrative analysis further illustrates how the temporal interpretations and connections presented from the perspective of the narrators are used for the purposes of making a particular argument. In this respect the findings provide the empirical evidence to support the theoretical argument of Brown and Thompson (2013) that individual narratives reflect the interaction of multiple realities and signify the complexity of, and diversity across the individual accounts of strategy making. The analysis of the narratives strongly endorses the assertion that strategies can be often identified in retrospect, with a view to impacting present conditions and establishing future expectations.

Fourth, the empirical work has contributed to identity studies by demonstrating how strategizing activity can be considered as identity work. The research provides an innovative interpretation of identity work in the Turkish international contracting sector. Especially important is the creation of a collective heroic identity at the sectoral level and the acceptance of that identity at an individual level. The empirical research looking at individual level narratives highlights the tendency of Turkish managers to depict themselves as heroes of international contracting. The findings illustrate that the identity work occurs at the nexus where narratives at different levels continuously overlap and interact. Managers are seen to draw from temporal narratives about the past to legitimize their strategic visions for the future. This provides strong empirical support that strategic work is inseparable from the identity work that individuals continuously engage in (cf. Oliver, 2015). The research illustrates that managers make sense of the roles that others play in the epic story of Turkish contracting, by labelling various characters as helpers, adversaries and villains. Such clear depiction of the subject positions attributed to other characters illustrates the relational aspects of identity construction. The empirical work contributes to the argument that identities are never fixed and stable, and the processes of identity construction are multi-faceted and constantly contested (cf. Brown, 2015). The current research extends the use of identity studies in construction-specific literature by demonstrating that identity work is continuously enacted through narratives and are hence best explored through narrative analysis.

Fifth, the research findings provide strong evidence that the management literature relating to competitive advantage only offers part of the explanation behind the success of Turkish contractors. The cultural and linguistic connectivity of Turkey with the MENA region and the post-Soviet states is deeply rooted in history. The cradle of civilization lies not in the West, but in the ancient Silk Roads which link China to the Mediterranean, and the Russian steppes with the Indian sub-continent. These are the very networks that Turkish contractors have re-engaged with so successfully since the collapse of the Soviet Union. To understand the success of Turkish contractors it is necessary to interpret the development of Turkish international contracting within the broader geo-political context. NATO membership has been hugely beneficial to Turkey and provided much of the foreign inward investment during the 1960s. The success of Turkish contractors in Russia and other post-Soviet nations has happened despite Turkey's membership of NATO. Turkey has developed strong trading links with Russia and a strong competitive position within the Russian markets and now also builds US embassies around the world. This is a remarkable feat of geo-politics. Much of the success of Turkish contractors has also been aligned with Turkish foreign policy. Where the Turkish government goes, the Turkish contractors follow quickly behind.

Lastly, the significance of the reported research is of course by no means limited to Turkish international

contracting. The use of historical narratives as a source of strategic resources is undoubtedly equally applicable to other major players in international contracting. Indeed, it could be argued that the absence of any effort to create and sustain a strong sectoral-level narrative potentially acts as a strategic disadvantage, not least because it deprives individual firms of strategic resources from which they can draw. Other construction-related researchers have previously championed the cause of narrative analysis. Nevertheless, the research described in this thesis is held to be original in its theoretical underpinnings, especially in terms of the focus on historical narratives as sources of strategic resources. It also extends strategy research in the field by conceptualizing identity work as a strategic practice. The methodology further provides an essential corrective critique to the recurring over-reliance on questionnaire surveys and semi-structured interviews within the construction-related research community. Of particular importance is the way in which the research legitimises alternative sources of empirical data, not least those which might be found in archival sources and grey literature. The empirical work provides strong support for the use of narrative interviews to get in depth understanding through accessing subjective viewpoints. The methodological debate is also extended by mobilizing the notions of literary plot structures to guide the empirical analysis. The temporality of the plot structures and the dynamism of the infused meanings to the narrative elements supports the argument that strategy research in construction should move to adopt methodological perspectives that are in line with the notions of ‘becoming ontology’.

7.4 Reflections and limitations

The research aimed to explore the extent to which the strategy making can meaningfully be understood through the analysis of sectoral and individual narratives. As ‘every way of seeing is a way of not seeing’, it is important to acknowledge the limitations of the adopted narrative perspective (cf. Burke, 1965). The empirical data depicts a multi-authored and multi-level interpretation of strategy making within the context of Turkish international contracting. Practitioners have been found to attach multiple meanings to their experiences and emphasize different possible meanings of strategizing. By collecting and analysing multiple different stories of strategy told at individual and sectoral level, the research reflects the varied interpretations of experienced realities of strategy making in international markets. The findings of the study will therefore challenge those research communities who strive to reveal a kind of singular reality to explain strategy making in international contracting firms (cf. Rhodes and Brown, 2005).

The reported research was based on a narrative approach and hence the knowledge created therein does not conform with the expectations of logico-scientific understanding (cf. Bruner, 1986). The research does not claim any direct ‘mirroring of reality’ in respect of how actual strategizing happens in practice (cf.

Soderberg, 2006). It rather argues that narratives are directly constitutive of strategy making in practice. Hence the reality of strategy-in-practice can only be accessed by examining at the multiple narratives which are mobilised in its name. The key argument is that empirical analysis presents a reflection of the messy realities of strategizing in contracting firms. As argued by Rhodes and Brown (2005), narrative research provides a contextually and historically bounded temporal interpretation rather than any 'disembodied abstract realm'. Therefore, the narrative building blocks described in the current research do not refer to any concrete reality that exist out there. It is hence important to recognise that the results are not necessarily generalizable to other contexts.

The research argues that organizations comprise socially constructed discursive arenas. Hence, narratives are seen as the means through which organizations and identities are temporally co-constructed (Rhodes and Brown, 2005). Researchers in the narrative tradition, hence, should acknowledge that their findings are also stories created by selecting over many alternatives. It should further be noted that the researcher was an active part of the narrative construction and meaning creation process. Therefore, this research does not match with the expectations of 'formal science' that the researcher should be neutral and detached from the phenomena under study. Nevertheless, the active involvement of the researcher does not mean that she was necessarily constrained by any preconceived ideas and assumptions through selective framing, although there is of course a danger of this happening with any research of this nature (cf. Gabriel, 2000). It is also important to note that organizational reality cannot be degraded to mere narratives as they are continuously shaped by and shape the broader discourses in the related institutional context (Søderberg, 2006).

Similarly, the analytical concepts used to analyse the empirical data reflect the researcher's own selection and interpretation of the methodological tools available in narrative studies. Narrative research is inevitably based on interpretations and hermeneutic understanding. Hence the methods mobilised are not as precise and neutral as they usually presented in the context of positivistic research (Polkinghorne, 1998). It is especially important to emphasize that the concepts used in empirical analysis (i.e. 'heroes/villains' or 'helpers/opponents') came to surface as analytical tools as a consequence of researcher iterating between the data and the literature. As emphasized in Section 3.2.4, none of these concepts imply any dualistic notion as a *hero* can also be described as a *villain*, or a *helper* can turn into an *opponent* easily at any part of the narrative. Such explicit recognition of temporality would again fail to answer any expectation of revealing generalizable outcomes.

The narrative turn literature in itself accommodates several different definitions of narrative and story with conflicting ideas about what each concept means (Vaara, Sonenshein and Boje, 2016). The research is

positioned within the argument that narratives and stories are concepts that can be used synonymously. The literature is also quite confusing about whether narrative research is a theoretical perspective or a methodological approach. Hence, the theoretically-based outcomes of this research might not receive the same degree of acceptance by those who see narratives from a more methodological perspective. The narrative perspective advocated by key authors such as Rhodes and Brown (2005), Fenton and Langley (2011) and Brown and Thompson (2013) is used as the theoretical background of this research. To prevent confusion, the researcher has sought to list the central axioms which have guided the research design within the reported research.

The research is limited to the narratives of the interviewed Turkish contractors and their views of the markets that they work in. The findings offer an explanation that is specific to Turkish contracting firms and the geo-political context relevant to them. Therefore, the outcomes that are outlined in Section 7.2 and 7.3 do not necessarily offer more generalizable knowledge regarding strategy making in international markets. As argued by authors such as Polkinghorne (1998) and S oderberg (2006) narratives lose much of their meaning when they are isolated from the context that they are produced and consumed. However, the narrative ideas developed within this research could be mobilized to understand strategy making in contracting companies from other countries or other construction stakeholders, such as design, engineering and consulting organizations.

The researcher recognizes that the interviewees were not used to being participants in academic studies based on qualitative methodologies. They were expecting to answer a list of multiple-choice questions defined by the researcher. Some interviewees tended to limit their talking, with an expectation that the explanation they provided was enough and they seemed to expect the researcher to want to quickly move on to each question. A few of them persisted in asking the researcher why she wanted to collect stories when it was easier to collect answers in the form of a questionnaire. The researcher clearly explained to each interviewee that the key focus of the research was to explore the stories on their experienced realities in international contracting. However, it is important to note that researchers who intend to use narrative interviews as the data collection method should prepare themselves to be an active listener. Encouraging and guiding the respondents to share their experiences is dependent upon the researcher's knowledge about the research context.

Because narrative research is based on individual stories, the data might include sensitive information that could be used against the interest of the interviewees. More importantly, this might prevent the respondents from expressing themselves freely without hesitation. To prevent this, researchers should apply the ethical

principles which confirms the anonymity of the names and extracting certain critical information that the respondents would not want to be disclosed. Such limitations can create difficulties for situating the contextual background within the analysis of the empirical data and reviewing of the researcher's narrative.

7.5 Suggestions for future research

The current research has been one of the initial empirical studies which applies narrative ideas to strategy research in the construction related research community. The empirical work explored the narratives on sectoral and individual levels and highlighted how they continuously evolve by interacting to each other. Future research could extend the findings of this study especially in four key areas explained below.

First, the current research can be extended by increasing the empirical data at sectoral and individual level. The current study has little explanation for the trajectory of Turkish contractors especially within the current decade. This is because the written narratives of recent history have not been widespread. However, the individual narratives indicate strong support regarding the market expansion of Turkish contractors to Sub-Saharan Africa in recent years. Such a study could focus more on the narratives in flight that could be connected with mobilization of more ethnographic data collection methods. Alternatively, the future research can focus on understanding the strategy practices at organizational level by collecting written and told narratives specific to a single organization.

Second, the narratives ideas mobilized to understand strategy making in Turkish international contracting could be applied to understand strategy making in different contexts. Especially important concepts are narrative infrastructure, narrative building blocks and the use of literary plot structures to understand strategy. These concepts can be used in relation to each other as presented in this research, or they can be mobilized separately. As such, they be can be used to explore how strategy making is understood and enacted at organizational level. The findings from different organizations working in different contexts can provide rich insights to explain the socially constructed and discursive nature of competitive strategy.

Third, the use of historical stories as strategic resources has not been acknowledged in construction related literature. The current research provides very first empirical support how such argument can be mobilized to understand strategy making at sectoral level. Similar studies can explore the use of history strategically in other levels, not least the organizational level. The strategic use of history might also receive great interest in institutional and policy contexts. The TCA seems to achieve such strategic use of historical stories by creating a collective identity of Turkish contractors. Similar research can be applied to understand the strategy practises of different institutions and policy makers.

Forth, the emphasis on the confluence of identity and strategy making can be extended the strategy research in construction related literature. Especially important is the use of literary plot structures to understand the enactment of strategy. The described study exemplifies the use of epic plot structure; however, other plot structures such as tragic or comic provides alternative concepts to discuss strategy making. Especially important is the strength of such concepts to construct identities while at the same time to attach labels other events and characters described in the stories.

7.6 Summary

The research of sectoral and individual narratives to understand strategy making in Turkish international contracting sector highlights the socially constructed and discursive nature of competitive strategy. The empirical analysis illustrated how narrative perspective challenges the limitations of the positivist perspectives and quantitative methodologies dominating much of the current strategy literature in construction related literature. The analysis of the sectoral level narrative illustrated how creation of a sectoral identity which seems to shape the narratives at the individual level can be seen as actual strategy practice. It also illustrated how a selective use of historical stories can assign a heroic role to the members of the sector. The analysis on the individual level analysis demonstrated how the identity work at the individual level is shaped by the narrative infrastructure created at the sectoral levels. The empirical analysis shows how the identity work at different levels are continuously co-constructed while at the same time illustrating the identity tensions and struggles across levels and generations. The findings demonstrate how strategy making is directly related to the identity work at the individual level. This indicates that the strategy research should pay more attention to individual levels analysis to understand the enactment of strategies. The current study identifies how certain narrative building blocks are emphasised within the epic narrative of Turkish international contractors. This includes projection of an identity by identifying particular qualities to the individuals, describing the predicaments that the individuals might have been challenged and the practices that should be followed by the continuation of the heroic identity. It should be noted that this research is also a narrative created by the researcher drawing from a particular perspective. Hence, the outcomes, limitations and future suggestions outlined within this section reflects the researcher's own interpretation out of several potential conclusions that could be reached by others.

8. References

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Appendix A



Interview Questionnaire

This interview questionnaire is part of a doctoral research project on *Understanding the Competitive Strategy: The Narratives of Turkish Contractors*, which is being conducted by *Dilek ULUTAS DUMAN*, a doctoral researcher in the School of the Built Environment at the University of Reading. As an experienced manager involved in strategy making process and practices of your company, you are invited to participate in this study.

If you are willing to be interviewed you will be asked to participate in an interview of about an hour. During the interview I will ask you questions on your experience and interpretations of competitive strategy practices and processes within the construction sector.

Participation is voluntary. You do not have to answer all of the questions and you can stop at any time. Responses are confidential. The only persons to see the completed interview will be myself (Dilek ULUTAS DUMAN and my supervisors (Prof. Stuart D. GREEN and Dr. Graeme D. LARSEN). Your identity and place of employment will not be mentioned within any publication or presentation resulting from this survey.

By attending this interview you understand that you are giving consent for your responses to be used for the purposes of this PhD research.

If you have any questions, you can contact me at [dilek.ulutasduman@pgr.reading.ac.uk] or my supervisor at [Prof. Stuart GREEN / s.d.green@reading.ac.uk] and [Dr. Graeme LARSEN / g.d.larsen@reading.ac.uk]

Interview Questions:

1. Would you please start by *describing yourself and your professional background*? What is your current role in the firm? What were your previous roles in construction industry?
 - a. How long have you been within the firm? How many years of experience do you have?
 - b. What sort of responsibilities do you have? Or, what sort of responsibilities have you had in your career?
 - c. How and to what extent are you involved in strategy making?

2. Could you please describe the story how your company has evolved over time? How has it developed to the way that it is today?
 - a. Where has the company started? Who founded it? (*As I know your company was founded in (location) in (year). Since its foundations by (company leader), it has expanded in different markets and project type. Would you like to add something to that you think is important?*)
 - b. It is important for me to understand *your interpretation* about the changes over time. Could you please describe the ways how your company expand its activities into *new segments? and new markets?*
 - c. Could you please think about the changes in domestic area and the local markets that your company has worked in overseas? Are there any *key facts / events* that, you think, shape the way that your organization has followed?
 - d. Could you please think about the *changes in global area*? Are there any *key facts / events* that, you think, shape the way that your organization has followed?
 - e. How do you describe the role of mergers / acquisitions or local subsidiaries role in such process?

3. As an experienced practitioner how do you think your company has kept itself competitive over time?
 - a. Much of the literature about competitiveness exists within the space between competitive positioning and competitive performance. What I am interested in is how these two relate to each other over time?
 - b. How do you define the *key actors, actions and events that enable your organization to remain its competitiveness?* / What actors, actions and events, do impact such decisions?
 - c. You have described the way the firm has switched across markets and segments. How are the decisions actually made? For example, how are the decisions made for the shift from one market to another?

d. Are the strategies formally decided by the board and then implemented? Or are they occurred as emergent strategies? (Formal strategies vs emergent strategies) Who has been involved? Who does affect or shape the competitive strategy discussions in your organization and how?

e. How are defined strategies constituted in practice? What is the involvement of different actors in that?

4. It is important for me to understand how *you describe the competitive strategy*? As an experienced manager in international contracting, what do you see as the *important things associated with competitive strategy or enactment of strategies*?

a. When and how any specific decision or activity is *recognized/labelled* as competitive strategy?

b. How is *competitive strategy communicated* in your organization? *Who talks* about it and how?

c. Who/ or what are the *helpers and opponents* in the strategy enactment process?

d. How do you see the *role of government/ governmental institutions*?

5. How do you think *about future prospects of 'Turkish contractors' in the international markets*?

a. Could you please describe the ways that Turkish contractors *have followed differently than their competitors*? For example, when all others countries started to enter the markets of Soviet Union, what Turkish contractors did better than others?

b. How do you think about Turkish contractor's stance in international contracting in the *present day*? (*There is a decrease in the market volume for last 3 years.*)

c. How do you see the future of Turkish contractors in international contracting?

d. How do you define your company's place in Turkish Contractors Association? How has your company been affected by its activities and policies?

6. How do you think about the relationship between past trajectories of the firm, the decisions made in the present and the future opportunities/ expectations?

a. How does the *track record of the company* affect its competitive performance? Can you say that we have much of our power because of past investments; relations or it is a kind of different way?

b. *Could you describe the role of project partners or clients* that you have worked within different markets?

c. To what extent previous investments and business developments (retrospective) impact/shape the decision making in the company (prospective)?

d. How do you describe the relationship between past experiences and future expectations of your organization? To what extent they do you link them to make sense of the emergent events?

Appendix B

Table 1. Coding list of the sectoral narrative

Phase 1 – Understanding the emerging codes (The initial analysis)
<p>1- Codes emerged within 1972-1989 period (the codes in two initial decades are very similar)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1980s agenda (structural changes in the economic system of Turkey / shifts to laissez faire) • Risk behaviour / Ability to work in harsh conditions (climate and underdeveloped infrastructure system / loose bureaucracy) • Financial capabilities / Insurance, guarantee letters / inefficient structural system in banking / Inefficient support from banking and insurance sector in Turkey • Technical and managerial capabilities / (machine and equipment infrastructure) • Learning from partners (Libya was the school for Turkish contractors) • Cultural and historical connections (key reason in Libya) • Political stance in international arena (underlying reason of the Libya problems) • Religious connections (key reason in S. Arabia) • Embeddedness (The embeddedness of French and Italians in Algeria prevents Turkish firms to enter the market) • Low cost work (competition with Koreans) • Using local labour (seen as the obstacle in some markets – ie. Nigeria, S. Arabia) • Bringing innovative solutions (i.e.STFA (in port and tunnel contractions) and KISKA (in transportation projects) / Finding temporary and creative solutions / • Using networks (Underlying reason of ENKA’s success – using joint ventures, consortiums and [personal networks –especially in S. Arabia]) • Government agenda and incentives (Turkish international contracting services was seen as the key sector bringing foreign money and balancing foreign deficit of Turkey) • Brand recognitions / image making / proven success • International politics (sometimes as helper, sometimes as opponent) • Company scale (seen as one of the key factor for financial/ technical and managerial capabilities) • Adventure/ courage /foolhardiness / adaptive behaviour • Setting up local subsidiaries (i.e. ELTES) • Inviting other companies to internationalize / providing them network to go abroad (supporting within Turkish contracting companies) / But other side of the story emphasises the competition between Turkish companies that decreases the returns from projects. • Comparison between direct (involvement as the main contractors) and indirect involvement (involvement through consortiums and JVs)

- Quality of the work
- Using advance payments to invest in other sectors, and face with cash flow problems when payment problems of Libya emerged.
- Localization / learning the rules of business / local rules and regulations
- Wars as an opportunity for future construction works.

2- Codes emerged within 1990-1999 period

- Networks [develops on three themes] [international partners from old projects might be the fourth narrative]
- NATO (We are known as NATO contractor narrative)
- Government [Official foreign trips of government with a group of businessmen and entrepreneur narrative]
- Individual [a friend of mine narrative]
- Struggles experienced with standards and the building regulations in Europe / low profit margin. [Champs Elysees example]
- Local partnership
- Ally and brother country narrative / [For Pakistan and Romania]
- The narrative of investor contractor [The contractors turns a key investor in Russia, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan]
- Turks construct the Silk roads [Narrative of Pakistan]
- Gaining Brand Recognition in Soviet Union [following initial foothold of natural gas agreements, they use early completion strategy to find a temporary solution to emergent demand of Soviet Union / The work quality of culturally valued buildings' renovations becomes HELPER/ receiving architectural prizes]
- Building reputation / [Don Quixode (p.157) / in Canada example]
- Availability of transportation facilities [increasing transportation facilities were emphasised a HELPER to create effectiveness in foreign markets]
- ENKA / bidding by invitation not on competitive base [a narrative against the main low cost narrative embedded in existing literature on Turkish contractors]
- Taking risks in financial crises or politically risky regions [risk attitude of heroes – should be questioned more as the book does not say so much]
- Turkish contractors offer better quality, low price and early completion. [the initial narrative in Soviet Union]
- Bidding for the projects that are based on acquaintance and recommendations, rather competitive tenders in Russia. (Summa, p.165) [highlighting networks once again]
- Once more the negative conditions in Turkey forced the contactors to go overseas.

3- Codes emerged within 2000-2012 period

- Consolidation between Turkish contractors (This helps the financial strength)

- Trying to become embedded in EU member countries to expand in EU
- Change in organization structures and ownerships because the increasing company scales
- Withdrawing from risky markets/ tendency towards working less risky markets (but not as strong as risk taker identity)
- Specialization in airport/ subway/ industrial and energy projects (along with being investor)
- Using networks (working with local partner embedded in the target market)
- Avoid competing with local firms / Bid for the complex projects (which extends the capabilities of local firms) and compete with other international contractors who are also the foreigner company in the market
- Working for international/ foreign investor projects in a third country (mostly the projects made by international finance institutions funds)
- Project level decision making comes to the forefront (I think this because of maturation - increased technical and financial capabilities- by the time) or working to large-scale government projects. [Client becomes important decision-making criteria to bid]

Table 2: Moving from codes to themes

Phase 2 – Extracting key themes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Finance and guarantee of letters • Heroes have reached this point by clawing their way to top. / Madly hardworking • Early completion / On time completion • ‘A friend of mine narrative’ / [by personal networks, using social capabilities] • Combination of strength / capabilities • Track record / Because we worked together before • We are known as NATO contractor • Finding trustful sponsors in Gulf countries (you need a local network) • Culturally valued projects / projects designed by star architects • Brand recognition / creating recognition / getting known • Technical capabilities. • We don't earn money in the first project, but we learn the market • Increased experience and becoming embedded in the market. • Turkish firms like high risks • Funding country forces its own contractors' involvement to the tenders. • Using local workers can turn to advantage (in Afghan case) • Vitalization of Silk Roads.

- We should combine our powers / intention to consolidation
- Bidding for the foreign clients work in a country / bidding for the works that exceeds the capabilities of local firms
- Successive projects with same client
- Contractors of the funding country become main contractors; in that case Turkish firms become sub-contractors.
- Reflecting the competition in the tender as the fight between countries.
- We utilize the heritage of our ancestors (Mostar bridge)
- We don't prefer competitive tenders/ We take projects by negotiation or using networks from prior projects or partnerships
- “There is no Chinese competition in Russia market. It is not an easy market for Chinese, their culture don't match. Chinese are generally active in north Africa...”
- Becoming TCA membership and involving the ENR list.
- Some of the disadvantages of Turkish contractors turns to advantage on the other hand: (1) No government guarantee, (2) Quick decision making, (3) Risk taking capability.
- Contractors generally grow by political support.

Table 3: The key themes emerged from revisiting the empirical data

Phase 3 – The key themes identified in the sectoral narrative
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A friend of mine narrative [helper] • Government as network provider narrative / government lobbying (foreign secretary / foreign affairs / ambassador / president and prime minister involvement) [helper/ opponent] • Track record / past experience [helper] • Former partnership / they knew us before / networks from former projects [helper] • We love to take risks / we have to work in harsh markets [helper / opponent] • We learned from the bad experience / it was a lesson for us [helper / opponent] • Competition between Turkish contractor / Failure in combining capabilities [opponent] • We should expand in consulting / EPC / Turnkey projects [opponent/ expected helper] • Finance and guarantee of letter problems [opponent] • Brand image / recognition [helper] • Financial and technical capabilities [helper] • Investor contractor [helper] • Early completion / in time, quality and budget work [helper] • We are NATO contractors / we involved in approved contractors' list [helper]

- International political instabilities [opponent]
- Wars [helper / opponent]
- Oil crises [opponent]

Table 4: The NBBs identified in the sectoral narrative

Phase 4. The NBBs identified in the sectoral narrative
<p>The ‘initiators’ of internationalization</p> <p>Building brand recognition</p> <p>Love of work in high-risk markets</p> <p>The requirement for financial and consulting capabilities</p> <p>Mobilization of the networks</p> <p>Avoiding ‘internal’ competition</p>

Appendix C

Table 1. Thematic analysis of the individual narratives (last version)

NBB -1	Identity work of Turkish Contractors - Heroes of international contracting
<i>Theme -1</i>	<i>Projection of the protagonist: ‘Turkish contractors’</i>
Codes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We have a brand name. • The collective identity of Turkish people [- Flexible and adaptable nature of Turkish people / - Make it up as you go along / -The courage and adventurousness of the Turkish people / - Entrepreneurship / - Communication capabilities of Turks / - We have a nomad culture] • We can achieve anything we want • We build trust • Creating novelty. • We are the best
<i>Theme -2</i>	<i>Conflicting views on risk attitude</i>
Codes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High risk acceptance • Risk management is important • Low risk acceptance • High risk means high revenue
<i>Theme -3</i>	<i>Agile decision makers of international contracting</i>
Codes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agile decision makers [- Fast process, not spending long time in bureaucracy / - Early completion – fast track / - Mobilization / logistics capability] • Hands-on vs decentralized decision making [- Code: Single decision maker / boss-owner decides / - Hands on approach / - Giving initiatives to others with a tight top management control / - Giving initiatives to others
<i>Theme 4</i>	<i>The concept of ‘organization’: Family vs corporate company</i>
Codes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family company structure • Corporate company structure • Strong company culture • Company scale is important • Private ownership • Public ownership • Restructuring the company/ organization management
<i>Theme 5</i>	<i>Moving upstream than ‘contracting only business’</i>
Codes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Investor contractor • BOT and PPP type projects

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • EPC contracting • Towards a lean organization • Mediator contractor • We became an umbrella company • NATO contractor • Each company has the responsibility of its core business • Contractor- Sub-contractor discussion (Being main contractor or sub-contractor is important difference) • The leagues in international market
NBB -2	Qualities and Capabilities
<i>Theme 1</i>	<i>Human capital</i>
Codes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The importance of company leader and key managers [- Visionary, hard-working company and business developer leader / - Strong governance of company leader and key management group / - The importance of key actors and leaders] • The nature of human capital [Code: Dedication narrative / - Productive, motivated and hard-working human capital / - Turkish employees can take the initiative and wide scope of responsibility / - Intellectual capital educated in Turkey] • Investing in human capital [- Human capital is the biggest value of us / - Managing manpower / motivation / - Keeping the human capital of the company / low employee turnover rate / - Raising the human capital by company culture] • Access to human capital [- Construction industry is attractive for employees / - Young executives / young human capital / - - Turkish labour is not cheap anymore / - Low cost human capital]
<i>Theme 2</i>	<i>Technical and managerial capabilities</i>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Managerial capabilities / Company special manual to time/cost/quality assurance / - Contract management/ administration is important / - Quality-time-cost triangle / - Project delivery on time and within budget / - Health and safety record] • Design and engineering capabilities / - Developing the process engineering service for the energy projects / - Turkish consultancy and design companies are required] • Developing technical capabilities • Technological assets [- information technology / - BIM / - data / - tight site control, IT, cultural change is required]
<i>Theme 3</i>	<i>Financial capabilities</i>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Finance capability [- You have to find/bring your finance / - Using third body finance / - Bringing finance may enable having the power to set the rules / - Cash flow from investments in other sectors]

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Government guarantees / insurance system / hedging / legal framework (22) / - Availability of project funding /financial safety (17) (related to client/ country and seen as less risky) / - Cash flow / receivable problems (7) • Finance incapability (36) / - Incapability of banking system in Turkey (13) • Turkish international contractors' exemption from tax (1)
<i>Theme 4</i>	<i>Second order capabilities</i>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transferring the know-how (11) / - Transferring the know-how to next generations / - Risk of losing tacit knowledge / - We have the know-how / - Accumulation of the know-how / - We take know-how there / - Transferring individuals who has the expertise and know how / - Integration of different generations / - Generation difference/ requirements • Capability to bring alternative solution (design/time/price) • We are innovative! / - We need to innovate / adapt new business systems / - We need to think/act/employ internationally • Learning from past and reflecting to the future / Learning from partners/ reflecting / - Contracting companies should share the lessons learn • Sensing and seizing
<i>Theme 5</i>	<i>Path dependencies</i>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Path dependency [- Track record / - Past experience / - Past is past / - Both past and future] • Other contractors are developed by the time / increased competition / - Local contractors are developed by the time / increased competition
NBB -3	Strategic Practices
<i>Theme 1</i>	<i>Making sense of competitive strategy</i>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategy is emergent / dynamic [- Construction industry specific characteristics / - Construction business is being in a jungle / - By Coincidence / Chance / Maverick Behaviour / - Being at the right place at the right time] • Successive projects / - Aggressive search for new projects / - We need to increase our market share / - Staying in the market during crises. • Benefiting from first mover advantage • Long-term perspective and planning [- Site work/ operation – Strategy making dilemma] • Strategy is made in both ways (planned and emergent) • Strategy is recognized by post rationalization
<i>Theme 2</i>	<i>Positioning in the market</i>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project type specialization / - Project type diversification / - Specialization means high profit / less competition / - Focusing on your strength / - Advance-technology and specialization required projects / - Moving to technically complex projects / - Targeting landmark projects] • Market level focus / - Market based diversification

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positioning / - You have to know yourself • Diversification in different business lines / - Don't put all your eggs in one basket • Supporting industries / Porter
<i>Theme 3</i>	<i>Cost and pricing</i>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Competition on low price • Profitability / rate of return / margin • Pricing details are critical
<i>Theme 4</i>	<i>Localization and embeddedness</i>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local knowledge [- Having the local market knowledge / - You need to know / adapt local rules/regulations / - Knowing the nature of the work / nature of the people / - Ease of coping with the local rules and regulations / - Understanding the local culture] • Localization [Localized strategy development / - Localization in the market / - You have to employ local workforce / - Advantages of being embedded in the market / - Opening a local branch / - Active engagement with locals / - Developing right local networks / - Sunk cost of getting embedded / - You need to/ have to partner with local companies] • Language advantage / disadvantage •
<i>Theme 5</i>	<i>Collaborative practices</i>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Combining powers / - Partnering with reputable companies / Partnering with right companies / You need a partner (finance/technical/market embeddedness) / If you can't beat them join them • JV/consortium practices • Turkish contractors compete to each other • Acquisition practices • Sub-contracting practices • Networking at present [- We follow the demand coming via networks / - A friend of mine narrative / - Right access to the political setting / - Developing networks] • Mobilization of broader existing networks [- Benefiting from historical/ cultural/ religious connections / - Cultural/regional/religious blocks / - Benefiting from regional closeness]
NBB -4	Macro Contextual Stage: Other characters and Predicaments
<i>Theme 1</i>	<i>Economy, politics and market characteristics</i>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We need stability (political) • Oil price – construction sector relationship • We need economic stability

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dynamism / disruption in Turkey • Turkey's political strength / closeness • Political/economic crises as an opportunity for construction • The nature of domestic market (- Unfair competition in domestic market / - Unfeasible projects in the domestic market / - Initiation of PPP Turkey] • High demand / low demand • High standards and regulation of West / - European/US market means redevelopment of infrastructure • Deep market / shallow market • Corruption • Turkmenistan is a special case
<i>Theme 2</i>	<i>The iconic status of the client</i>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Treatment to the client [- Client is the key / - Satisfaction of the client! / - Answering client requests/ demands / - Getting appreciation from the client / - Competitive strategy changes according to the client] • Managing client relations [- Client engagement is important / - Having good relationships with the client / - One to one relationship with the client / - You should understand the client. / - Client as your partner / - Negotiating and convincing the client] • Client characteristics [- Choosing the right client / - Client's appetite to complete the project / - Financial capability and payment guarantee of the client / - Public vs private client]
<i>Theme 3</i>	<i>The role of government</i>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Government level lobbying • We don't have government support • Construction sector needs regulation by government • Barter agreements- Construction work relation
<i>Theme 4</i>	<i>Labelling the 'others'</i>
•	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Chinese contractors [- Chinese have government and money strength / - Chinese are very low cost / - Chinese have low quality] • The Western contractors [- Western companies have slow process / - Western companies work on the claim management / - Western contractors are expensive / - Western firms create /bring the technologies / - Western firms do quality job] • The Western consultancy firms [- Western consultancies dominate the MENA / - High expectations of consultancy firms / - Western companies prefer doing consultancy] • The institutional actors [- TCA should control / -We don't use TCA / - TCA helps / - TCA creates a successful image / - DEIK helps / CODE: Turkish Airlines / - ENR / - IMF / - World Bank /- NATO /- EBRD]

Appendix D



Content for an Information Sheet

My name is Dilek ULUTAS DUMAN and I am a PhD Researcher in the School of the Built Environment at the University of Reading. I am carrying out a doctoral research project called *Understanding the Competitive Strategy: The Narratives of Turkish Contractors*.

The aim of this doctoral research project is to explore the narratives of competitive strategy within international contracting firms. The focus lies on the interpretations of senior executives within Turkish contractors, which have competed highly successfully in international markets for years. The empirical research focuses on understanding the ways in which senior managers make sense of the enactment of competitive strategies. The data will be collected through face-to-face interviews with the individual actors who purport to have been involved in key strategic practices and processes. The interview questions are intended to access the ways in which practitioners conceive, explain and interpret competitive strategy.

If you are willing to be interviewed you will be asked to participate in an interview of about 60 minutes, at a time and place of your choice. During the interview I will ask you questions about your experience and interpretations of competitive strategy practices and processes. With your permission, I would like to record the interview to enable transcription of detailed analysis later. Copies of the transcript will be available on request and any changes, which you ask for, will be made. You can choose not to answer any questions. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time.

At every stage, your identity will remain confidential. Your name and the identity of your company will be removed from the written transcript. My supervisors and I will be the only people who will have access to this data. The data will be kept securely and *destroyed when the study has ended, which will be a maximum of 3 years from the completion of the research*. The data will be used for academic purposes only.

Copies of any outputs, such as articles or presentation slides, will be available on request. If you have any further questions about the study, please feel free to contact me or my supervisors.

[Dilek ULUTAS DUMAN, dilek.ulutasduman@pgr.reading.ac.uk]

[Prof. Stuart GREEN / s.d.green@reading.ac.uk] and [Dr. Graeme LARSEN / g.d.larsen@reading.ac.uk]

This project has been subjected to ethical review, according to the procedures specified by the University Research Ethics Committee, and has been given a favorable ethical opinion for conduct.

Signed:

Date:

Consent Form

1. I have read and had explained to me by Dilek ULUTAS DUMAN the accompanying Information Sheet relating to the PhD research project and any questions have been answered to my satisfaction.
2. I understand that my participation is entirely voluntary and that I have the right to withdraw from the project any time, and that this will be without detriment.
3. I understand that my personal information will remain confidential to the researcher and her supervisors at the University of Reading, unless my explicit consent is given.
4. I understand that my organization will not be identified either directly or indirectly without my consent.
5. I agree to the arrangements described in the Information Sheet in so far as they relate to my participation.

Name:

Signature:

Date: