



**BIRMINGHAM CITY**  
University

**Academics Sensemaking Of Change and Managing  
Change in Higher Education Institutions**

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## ABSTRACT

Understanding the process and outcomes of sensemaking, particularly in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), is a matter of concern. This thesis investigated how academics make sense of change and its management in higher education institutions (HEIs). It explored the factors academics reference and how these factors interact as academics construct their realities and enact change in HEIs. The assumption guiding this thesis is that the different actors of change are participants and co-constructors in the change process. It echoes the stance that organisational change is an interpretative process in which change leaders and recipients create and shape change outcomes (Balogun, 2006).

Adopting a multi-case study design, it also examined how the institutional context of HEIs influences the sensemaking of different change actors (manager- academics and front-line academics). It drew data from interviews with 27 academics across three UK institutions, comprised of manager- and front-line academics. To understand organisational systems, scholars explore their properties and behaviour to reveal why it is what it is and why it behaves the way it does. The present thesis adopted this analytic technique to move beyond extending knowledge of the sensemaking of academics on change in HEIs towards facilitating understanding. By implicating sensemaking's individual and organisational features, it responds to calls to extend understanding of narratives and sensemaking.

A significant contribution of this thesis is the finding that sensemaking is simultaneously cognitive and discursive. Other contributions of this thesis are (1) It confirms that multiple interacting resources shape sensemaking narratives of change rather than singular sensemaking resources. Furthermore, it highlights how these resources interact as academics construct meaning about change in HEIs. Academics' development of meaning implicates subjectivity, the formation of narrative and cognitive and discursive resources, which include leadership, identity, culture and context. (2) It found that academic identity was integral to the perspective of change and all sensemaking narratives. The findings from this thesis support the minimal empirical evidence that identity is a critical resource used by academics to construct meanings of change in HEIs. (3) An understanding of the uniqueness of HEIs and the relationship between HEIs and the environment is inherent in academics' interpretive processes. Because of the nature of HEIs, manager academics and frontline academics construct

predominantly similar narratives of change in HEIs. (4) It provides empirical evidence that Context plays a broader role beyond constraining sensemaking. It observed that specific institutional contexts influenced which aspect of a particular narrative became prominent across the three institutions.

Overall, the thesis adds an essential dimension to the body of knowledge on sensemaking and HEIs. It identifies a framework that consolidates the essence of academics' sensemaking. It captured the dynamics of academics' sensemaking and the mechanisms of the sensemaking process. Its findings on the perspectives of change and the factors that shape this made explicit the interpretation and meaning construction of academics in universities implementing organisational change and the varying realities that become enacted.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

|       |                                     |
|-------|-------------------------------------|
| HEIs  | Higher Education Institutions       |
| MA    | Manager Academics                   |
| FA    | Front-line Academic                 |
| MA-FA | Manager Academic/Frontline Academic |
| FA-MA | Frontline Academic/Manager Academic |
| RQ    | Research Question                   |
| RO    | Research Objective                  |

## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

### 1.0 INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides the synopsis of this thesis, which investigates how academic change actors, differentiated here into manager academics and front-line academics, make sense of organisational change and managing change in UK HEIs. It briefly describes research development in organisational change and Higher Education, summarising the existing research gaps and the overall philosophy framing the study. Following that summary, it explains the rationale for developing the research question before introducing the study's objectives. It also presents the theoretical framework of the thesis, highlighting the significant points of the study's theoretical lens. In light of the theoretical lens adopted and the gaps identified, this chapter justifies the study, synthesising arguments for the importance of investigating the sensemaking of academics on organisational change and managing change in HEIs. The final sections summarise the research methodology, the contribution of this thesis and an overview of the thesis outline.

### 1.1 FOCUS OF THE THESIS

The keywords for this thesis are change, sensemaking, HEIs, and academics. The thesis arose from a puzzling observation after attending a university faculty meeting where members discussed a proposed change initiative. Why were there different understandings of the university's strategic objectives and the proposed change initiatives, especially between front-line academics (FA) and manager academics (MA)? How would the different understandings influence the outcome of the change? This observation corresponds with other scholars who propose further research to understand the impact of organisational members' interpretations on achieving organisational change (Cummings *et al.*, 2005; Higgins and Thomas, 2016; Sonenshein and Dholakia, 2012).

This thesis aims to contribute to scholarship on sensemaking and organisational change in HEIs, from the perspective of academics. It explores how academics make sense of organisational change and how it is managed in HEIs.

Organisational change has become ubiquitous in HEIs and has a massive impact on academics. HEIs are predominantly institutions for producing and disseminating knowledge. They realise these strategies through academics, who directly or indirectly interact with other stakeholders. Extant literature indicates that change in HEIs affects the nature of academic work (Gumpert, 2000; Söderlind and Geschwind, 2019), yet research addressing organisational change and managing change specifically from the perspective of academics remains limited. Studies have shown the importance of considering the perspectives of front-line workers and middle managers (Balogun *et al.*, 2015; Sonenshein and Dholakia, 2012). Like others (Corbo *et al.*, 2016), this thesis treats academic faculties as the unit of change. While there are various groups of workers in Higher Education institutions, the present thesis focuses on academics to understand how this set of employees negotiates the meaning of events to produce accounts of change in HEIs.

In this thesis, the investigation of academics' perspectives and meaning-making of organisational change sits within the practice-theoretical concepts (e.g., Jarzabkowski *et al.*, 2019), which suggests that reality emerges from mutually constitutive abstracts. In the case of this thesis, these are cognition and discourse. The cognitive-discursive dialectic is vital for studies of organisational change, particularly within the context of HEIs. Change in organisations frequently involves a cognitive reorientation, modified by and through discursive processes (Gioia and Chittipeddi, 1991; Balogun, 2006). Managing change depends on managing meaning (Sonenshein, 2010, Sonenshein and Dholakia, 2012). In other words, managing change involves moving individuals towards discarding existing interpretations and adopting new modified accounts.

Sensemaking studies have been instrumental in explaining organizational change, emphasising it as an outcome of the co-construction of different actors engaged in a sensemaking-sensegiving dyad. However, fragmentation in conceptualisation and studying approaches has left some of its underlying mechanisms underexplored. These include the under-theorisation of factors which shape sensemaking, the exclusion of Institutional Context and the investigation of multiple perspectives in a single study.

Therefore, this thesis looks at the sensemaking of change, specifically, the process and the outcomes of meaning construction of change by academics in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). It positions sensemaking as the retrospective rationalisation which occurs when members encounter unexpected events or during periods of uncertainty, using existing frames of reference (Louis, 1980; Gioia and

Chittipeddi, 1991; Weick *et al.*, 2005; Maitlis and Christianson, 2014). The following section discusses the rationale and research questions of this thesis.

## 1.2 RATIONALE AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

There is a growing understanding among organisational scholars that research on micro-processes of change and sensemaking closes significant gaps in organisational and change theory (Weick *et al.*, 2005). Existing empirical research on change in HEIs has investigated the strategies and outcomes of managing change in universities (Arnaboldi and Azzone, 2005; Lueddeke, 1999) and the impact of the external environment on university change (Rebora and Turri, 2010). They have also explored employee commitment to change (Al-abrrow and Abrishamkar, 2013). Scholars have explored these questions from one perspective; the initiators (Govender *et al.*, 2005; Cummings *et al.*, 2005); the implementers (McRoy and Gibbs, 2009; Kezar *et al.*, 2015) or the change recipients (Newton, 2002, 2003; Brown, 2012). Nevertheless, change is multi-authored; differences among organisational levels arising from individual and group; history, characteristics and values create varying perceptions of change (Buchanan and Dawson, 2007; Bolman and Deal, 1991 *in* Lueddeke, 1999; Kuntz and Gomes, 2012). Singular view studies such as those mentioned above are limited in their ability to explain the underlying mechanisms and dynamics of the meaning interaction among change actors that lead to these unexpected outcomes.

Despite extensive analysis and understanding of the importance of meaning and underlying meaning systems, such as culture, in initiating and implementing organisational change, a limited understanding of how change happens in HEIs persists. Most studies have explained the strategies for driving change and the outcomes of sensemaking in HEIs. The narrow focus on the micro-processes of change sensemaking has hindered the explanatory power of existing studies. In other words, they are inadequate to explain the fundamentals and process of meaning construction, that is, “how” organisational members make sense of change. The field of organisational change can advance by employing a lens such as sensemaking to explain the importance of the dimensions identified by cognitive studies (Kezar, 2013). This analysis extends to critical dimensions of managing change, such as the influence of members' sensemaking activities on implementation strategies and change management outcomes (Mills, 2003, pg 3).

This thesis aims to investigate the interpretation of change in HEIs using the perspectives of academics from various positions in the organisational structure. It also expands the multiperspective analysis to conceptualise change-actor roles. Reports from scholars (Kezar *et al.*,2011; McCaffery,2018) indicate that universities struggle to manage organisational change. This stance is reflected in response to change by academics in Diefenbach's (2007) study, who either employed coping tactics or left the university. These findings suggest that understanding change involving academics in universities through investigating micro-processes of change can limit the challenges of change for universities. Brown (2012) highlights the need for greater insight into the institutional context, while Diefenbach's (2007) study highlights the need for additional insight into the influence of interpersonal relationships and structures such as communication systems. This view highlights the interaction and meaning-making of different organisational members and groups.

This thesis's research question (RQ) is how academic change actors, differentiated here into manager academics and front-line academics, make sense of organisational change and managing change in UK HEIs. It then considers how different categories of UK universities influence this. Individuals make sense of events in specific ways through interpretive activities conditioned by contextual, social and individual-specific influences. The research questions and their rationale are as below.

**RQ1. How do different academic change actors conceptualise organisational change and managing change in UK HEIs?**

Sensemaking studies have demonstrated the limitations of the traditional differentiation of actors as change recipients, change agents and change initiators. Balogun (2004) indicates that contrary to the stance within traditional change management research, hierarchical levels are not always reflective of the change actor roles. Their findings suggest that middle managers are predominantly portrayed as change agents and recipients of change. Ambivalent goals and diverse stakeholders with diverse, sometimes conflicting interests characterised HEIs (Sporn, 1996; Davies *et al.*, 2007). Change management research in the context of HEIs demonstrates that organisational change in the university can arise from any hierarchical level (Cummings *et al.*,2005).

Consequently, the present study differentiates the actors of change into manager academics (MA) and front-line academics (FA). It seeks to avoid apriori differentiations into change initiator, agent



and recipient since such an approach is unsuitable for investigating change in HEIs. This approach is consistent with similar studies of organisational processes adopting a sensemaking perspective, such as Sonenshein (2010) and Balogun and Johnson (2004) Balogun (2006), which differentiate the actors into managers and employees and then signify their roles in designing the change as either change agents, recipients or initiators. Adopting this approach enables this study to present organisational change from the perspective of the different actors of organisational change, who are also stakeholders of the university. It enhances the understanding of sensemaking and change within HEIs and highlights actors' "sensegiving" and "sensemaking" (Gioia *et al.*, 1994).

**RQ2. What resources do academics use to construct an understanding of change in HEIs, and how do these resources shape their construction of reality?**

The creation of meaning is consistent with the notion of authoring change (Weick, 2005) highlighted above. Although existing studies highlight the importance of meaning and underlying meaning systems, they lack an extensive analysis of meaning creation and the factors driving this meaning. For example, while culture is an acknowledged construct that facilitates sensemaking, only a few studies integrate this. Previous sensemaking studies have investigated the triggers for sensemaking (Balogun, 2004,2006; Maitlis and Lawrence, 2000; Weber *et al.*, 2015). They have also investigated the enactment of sensemaking and the components of sensemaking that influence the outcome of organisational change initiatives (Balogun, 2015; Antonacopoulou and Psychogios, 2015). Many sensemaking studies investigate major organisational events, leaving the continuity of sensemaking practices in question and portraying one facet of sensemaking (Hong and Lao, 2006; Dwyer *et al.*, 2021). Antonacopoulou and Psychogios (2015) explore managers' lived experiences of change through phronesis (practical judgement) and its consequence on managers' stance or attitudes to change but examine meaning creation and change from a resistance to change view. Burke's (2011) account of implementing a change initiative within a university demonstrates that framing within the resistance to change dimension, either positive, negative or ambivalent, might pose the danger of overlooking or under-emphasising change as a co-construction of meaning.

Hence this thesis examines organisational change beyond the dynamics of resistance and power (Thomas and Hardy, 2011) to provide a comprehensive view of the dynamics involved when

organisational actors produce meaning. Such framing acknowledges other dynamics, such as dynamics of identity (Beech and Johnson, 2005), existing schemata and informal social processes (Balogun, 2006) involved in organisational change and sensemaking. For example, retrospection, identity and context also influence change interpretation. A broad view of aspects of organisational dynamics allows the complex interaction of essential features that facilitate meaning creation for change to emerge and become integrated into explanations of the phenomenon. This is significant considering that HEIs possess unique characteristics (Stephens and Graham, 2010), including but not limited to their operations, structures, governance, and stakeholders with conflicting interests, such as monetary versus intellectual value. These unique characteristics generate intricacies for change absent from other organisations.

### **RQ3. How do institutional contexts influence academics' construction of change in HEIs?**

The present thesis emerged from the preliminary analysis of this study's data that academics' perception of change in HEIs occurs through an interpretive process that produces narratives of change guiding their response. At the conceptual phase of the research, the researcher addressed the issue of academics' perception of change in HEIs using traditional organisational change theory. The initial review of extant studies suggested an inherent complexity to universities, a phenomenon incorporated into the research design. In addition to reinforcing the complexity of change in HEIs, the initial reading of the research data highlighted significant micro-processes involved in academics' evaluation of change and managing change in HEIs. This observation meant adopting a theoretical framework that would allow examining these micro-processes, a sensemaking lens. Sensemaking refers to the process of interpreting phenomena, producing meaning, and enacting the social world by constructing accounts intersubjectively (Gephart *et al.*, 1990). Scholars demonstrate that further advances in organisational studies revolve around understanding organisations and their processes as socially constructed and discursive (Gioia *et al.*, 1994; Weick, 1995).

Various individual, professional and organisational factors (Cornelissen, 2012) are pertinent to actors' sensemaking. However, these studies, particularly within the HEI research, have failed to address those factors specific to academics. As Johnson *et al.* (2000) suggest, exploring the components and process of enacting organisational change is significant for understanding organisational change. The observation from the preliminary analysis consequently became the analytical focus of this thesis, a

sensemaking approach to the change in HEIs from the perspective of academics, leading to the development of the third research question.

The research questions translate into the objectives in the following ways:

**RQ1.** How do different academic change actors conceptualise organisational change and managing change in UK HEIs?

**RObj1** To examine how different academic change actors: Manager-academics, and front-line academics define change in HEIs

To answer the question “How do different academic change actors conceptualise organisational change and managing” the thesis examines how different academic change actors: Manager academics and front-line academics, define change in HEIs. This objective emerges from the assumptions of the heterogeneity of sensemaking and the divergent meaning held by organisational actors and between groups about events. Change in HEIs is a dynamic process involving academic change actors whose active participation contributes to its enactment. Because they actively construct this reality, these actors may interpret similar events differently and have different conceptions of proposed change strategies (Taylor, 1999; Balogun *et al.*, 2015). These constructions of change ultimately affect employees' response to change, with implications for gaining agreement to change initiatives (Sonenshein and Dholakia, 2012; Spee and Jarzabkowski, 2017). Therefore, understanding how different academic change actors: Manager-academics, and front-line academics, define change in HEIs will have practical applications for stakeholders involved in promoting strategic objectives.

**RQ2.** What resources do academics use to construct an understanding of change in HEIs and how do these resources shape their construction of reality?

**RObj2** To evaluate the resources used for making sense of change in HEIs by these change actors.

**RObj3** To examine how sensemaking resources shape academics' interpretations of change in HEIs; Mechanisms of Sensemaking

**RObj4** To explore the sensemaking narratives of change in HEIs of Manager-academics and front-line academics

**Research question 2 generates Research Objectives 2 and 3.** Factors conceived in this thesis as sensemaking resources play an instrumental role in determining the direction of their interpretation. The present study proposes that sensemaking resources are instrumental in deciding sensemaking. They go beyond constraining sensemaking. This conception of resources is informed by Glynn's (2006) observation of the diverse influence of context, such as facilitating sensemaking. There are calls for empirical studies which expand the understanding of the role of context beyond a restrictive role in sensemaking. This thesis extends this understanding to the other resources examined in this thesis, such as leadership. Similar to context, scholars have examined their role in sensemaking from one dimension. What factors shape these differences, and how do their interaction lead to these differences in sensemaking? In other words, how do these influence the way that academics define change in HEIs?

**Research question 2 generates Research Objective 4** and is predicated on the reality constituting role of sensemaking, and extends the analysis of the third objective. How does the sensemaking of different actors interact and result in the creation of change in HEIs? How does the sensemaking of academics shaped by these factors influence the production of narratives that frame how people interpret and act towards organisational processes? With these research objectives, this thesis seeks to explore what divergent definitions of change in HEIs by academics result from their sensemaking.

**RQ3** How do institutional contexts influence academics construction of change in HEIs?

**RObj5** To examine the moderating effects of the various types of UK universities as different institutional contexts on the sensemaking of academics on change in HEIs.

**RObj6** To explore the interaction processes/ interplay of sensemaking for academics regarding change in HEIs.

**Research question 3 generates Research Objectives 5 and 6,** based on the assumption that context does more than constrain sensemaking and seeks to further the arguments on the role of context in sensemaking. How does the relationship between institutional context, in the form of university-specific structures and practices, interact with the sensemaking of academics in HEIs? Due to the unique characteristics of HEIs, these actors can adopt fluid roles in the change process as either change initiator, agent, or recipient.

## 1.5 RESEARCH METHOD

Methodologies of social research are located within the framework of sociological theory (David and Sutton (2011, pg 75). This thesis utilises an interview method based on a qualitative methodology underpinned by a social constructivist worldview. Consistent with this worldview, this thesis views organisations and organisational change as socially and discursively constructed (Czarniawska, 2014; Fairhurst and Grant, 2010; Fairhurst and Putnam, 2004; Ford, 1999). Sensemaking is a process of interpretation, and this thesis aims to explore academics' construction of change in HEIs. An appropriate methodology for studying sensemaking reveals evidence of a phenomenon and how it emerges by capturing and documenting definitions and descriptions from the participants' perspectives (Burns, 2000, pg 388; Miller and Glassner, 2016, pg 51).

Consequently, it uses data from interviews with academics at different hierarchical levels to address the research questions and objectives highlighted in the section above. Collecting data from academics at varied levels allows the thesis to explore change interpretation from change actors, manager-academics (MA), and front-line academics (FA). Twenty-nine (29) interviews were conducted with academics across three UK universities.

Participants were selected from three UK universities to evaluate how context shapes sensemaking. Adopting a multi-case approach allowed the researcher to ask participants questions concerning their specific institutions. Their responses were then analysed comparatively to explore the differences in their interpretation of change. As context is critical to sensemaking (Weber and Glynn, 2006), it makes a multi-case approach suitable for analysing its role in the academics evaluation of change in HEIs. The ability of the case study to enable a rich analysis of the contextual conditions that are highly pertinent to sensemaking lies in the use of three (3) universities. The universities were selected to reflect the differentiation and characterisation of UK HEIs and to elicit how different types or categories of universities in the UK influence the sensemaking of academics.

The interview data were subjected to thematic analysis, using steps guided by the principles of Gioia *et al.* (2012), a seminal scholar of sensemaking in HEIs. This method helps explore a priori conceptions and provides a holistic account of how academics make sense of change and managing change in HEIs. The empirical findings from the data are presented as narratives, keeping with this thesis's

discursive understanding of sensemaking outcomes. This is consistent with the approach adopted by other sensemaking studies (eg. Cornelissen, 2012; Balogun *et al.*, 2015).

## 1.6 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE THESIS

The thesis seeks to expand knowledge of the dynamics of sensemaking in HEIs by making explicit the interpretation and meaning construction of academics in universities implementing organisational change. It aims to achieve this by exploring the factors academics reference and how they interact as academics construct their realities and enact change in HEIs. The view of this thesis guiding this aim is that the different actors of change are participants and co-constructors in the change process. It echoes the stance that organisational change is an interpretative process in which change leaders and change recipients create and shape change outcomes (Balogun, 2006).

This thesis claims significance explicitly in three areas: sensemaking, contextual sensitivity and the role of narratives. A review of sensemaking literature reveals plural and disparate perspectives that comprise implicit, underdeveloped assumptions. Therefore, in addition to being exploratory, the study is also one of theoretical elaboration. According to Maitlis (2005), theory elaboration involves using pre-existing ideas as the foundation for a new study. It draws on and extends views from organisational sensemaking research and shows how cognitive and discursive resources shape meaning construction and how this occurs.

Analysing organisational change and managing change in universities differentiated by structural contexts, the study draws on earlier assumptions and conceptions that institutional context influences sensemaking and discourse (Louis, 1980; Mills, 2003; Weber and Glynn, 2006; Trowler, 2001). Thus, this thesis provides empirical evidence absent in other sensemaking studies that context shapes sensemaking in myriad ways. It demonstrates how aspects of institutional context shape narratives of change by making context explicit. It explores generalisable factors that shape sensemaking and the context-specific understandings of these resources. Different university contexts influence the sensemaking of academics and are relevant when managing change. The institutional contexts of HEIs, in conjunction with other sensemaking resources, produce diverse narratives that characterise change realities for academic actors. These findings show the

“situatedness” of change for academics in HEIs, considering the uniqueness of this organisational type. This situatedness extends to the conception of actor roles within the change process.

It contributes to organisational change research and Higher education research by demonstrating the significance of the sensemaking resources applied by academics in interpreting critical organisational events in universities, particularly organisational change. These sensemaking resources are the individual and organisational attributes academics use to evaluate change and managing change in HEIs. It then demonstrates how these resources shape the narratives of interpretation. In showing how identity influences sensemaking, it builds on the findings from Lockett *et al.* (2014) study within the NHS, which suggested that the nature of the organisation contributes to the formation of actors’ contexts. Their study is significant as similar contexts bound that study and the present study; both case study organisations are examples of pluralistic organisations. By exploring the sensemaking of different actor roles in managing change, presented here as manager-academic and front-line academic, it extends sensemaking scholarship by illuminating the points of convergence and divergence in the sensemaking of these different actors. Such explanations are fundamental to understanding organisational change and managing change as an interpretative process and actors of organisational change as participants and co-creators of the change process.

## 1.7 OUTLINE OF THE THESIS

The present thesis comprises nine chapters and follows the structure below:

**Chapter One** introduces the main focus of the thesis. It starts by highlighting the relevance of the study. This is followed by an overview of the focus of existing organisational change research in HEIs. It provides an overview of the philosophy which frames the research. The chapter presents the research question and the study's objectives, delineating the study's focus. Following that section, the chapter proceeds with presenting the theoretical perspective for analysing organisational change and managing change in HEIs. The chapter also justifies the relevance of the present study for the scholarship of organisational change and managing change in HEIs, followed by a summary of the

research method. The chapter also highlights the thesis findings and concludes with a description of the structure of the thesis.

**Chapter two** explores organisational change concepts and provides a brief overview of the approaches to change. It identifies the limitations of these traditional notions of organisational change. It summarises and criticises traditional models for managing change, provides the background for adopting an alternative view of organisational change, introduces the context of higher education change research, and summarises the traditional notions of characterising HEIs. This highlights the changes HEIs have been subject to, the drivers of change and their implications for change and managing organisational change in HEIs. The chapter also explains sensemaking, which is the theoretical framework adopted in the study. It also evaluates the links between organisational change and sensemaking.

**Chapter Three** discusses the conceptual framework of this thesis. It justifies adopting the terminology “sensemaking resources” and identifies specific resources explored in the study. The chapter also reviews applications of the concept of resources for sensemaking of change in Higher Education research. It draws attention to the role of identity and structure in restricting and directing sensemaking, such as by influencing the actions expected from others. The chapter explores views on sensemaking and narratives.

**Chapter Four** provides an overview of the research philosophies guiding the research and its implications for the study of change in HEIs. The research design and methods employed in the study were then discussed. It provided an overview of multi-case study research, which is the method used in the present study. It also described the practical steps undertaken by the researcher in analysing the data created in the research process. The final sections of the chapter discuss the validity and ethical concerns and the efforts to address these issues. The next chapter provides the findings of the study.

**Chapter Five** presents findings on perceptions of change and narratives which emerge when constructing meanings of change in HEIs. It identifies four narratives of change.

**Chapter Six** presents the findings from the analysis of sensemaking resources identified from the conceptual framework. Findings suggest that identity is significant in how academics evaluate change in HEIs. Context was also identified as a significant factor for actors' sensemaking and also implicated



in the kinds of identity observed in the different case study institutions. It presents the mechanism underpinning the creation of the narratives presented in Chapter five.

**Chapter Seven** presents a cross-case analysis of the three case study institutions. It demonstrates the effect of specific institutional contexts on how academics express their understanding of change in HEIs. In other words, it highlights the moderating effect of specific HEIs on academics' narratives of change.

**Chapter Eight** Positions the outcomes of the data analysis for this thesis against prior studies. It identifies the similarities in the interpretation from other studies and the conception of sensemaking among academics in HEIs from this study.

## Chapter Summary

This chapter has introduced the principal justification for this thesis. It has also explained the focus and research questions for this study. The present study lies within the discursive perspective of organisations framed by the social constructivist view of organisations to address the gap on how academics, differentiated into manager academics and front-line academics, constitute an understanding of change in HEIs and the role of the academics in the section above. It adopts the stance that organisations are discursively pluralistic and polyphonic rather than monolithic, with multiple conversations occurring simultaneously and sequentially (Fairclough, 1992; Hazen, 1993 in Ford, 1999), where meaning emerges from social interaction processes. Underpinned by this stance, the central aim of this thesis is to contribute to this understanding by exploring how academics make sense of organisational change and managing change in HEIs.

Drawing on studies (Louis, 1980; Harris, 1995; Weick, 1995; Balogun and Johnson, 2004; Lockett *et al.*, 2014 ) that implicate individual and organisational features in sensemaking and the role of discourse in shaping meaning, this study explores organisational change and the managing of change in HEIs through a sensemaking- discourse lens. Applying a sensemaking perspective and exploring the sensemaking perspectives of different academic actors of change in the university, this thesis promotes the plurivocality and continuous nature of change. By adopting this theoretical framework, the study is expected to address the limitations of previous research highlighted in various instances

in the preceding sections to explain organisational change and managing change in the context of Higher Education Institutions. Methodologically, it uses interviews with participants from three universities to explain how academics bounded by different institutional contexts make sense of organisational change and managing change. A key contribution of this thesis is highlighting the interaction of micro and macro identity and context in shaping how academics interpret change in HEIs and the resulting narratives of this construction. The next chapter will provide an overview of perspectives of organisational change and change in HEIs.

## CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

### 2.0 INTRODUCTION

This chapter explores relevant literature in the area of organisational change to reveal current knowledge and identify gaps in current knowledge. It provides the foundation for understanding the positions adopted in this thesis on change among academics. The chapter also highlights the different approaches to change in HEIs and argues for the application of a sensemaking theory to analyse change in HEIs. Although this thesis adopts a sensemaking perspective of change, it is important to recognise the evolution of the study of change in organisations and the various perspectives which permeate the field. This chapter, therefore, begins with an overview of different approaches to change, differentiating this into traditional and contemporary. It discusses the concept of the cognitive element to the study and understanding of organisations, organisational change and managing organisational change and links the development of cognitive understandings of organisational change to the emergence of the sensemaking lens. This evaluation provides a background for explaining sensemaking, the theoretical framework adopted by this thesis. It shows diverse views on its fundamental assumptions reflected in the views of scholars on the way it occurs and implications for change and managing change in HEIs (Maitlis and Christianson, 2014; Brown *et al.*, 2015). The final sections examine this thesis's core conceptual approach to assessing academics' sensemaking of change in HEIs. It draws attention to the role of leadership, culture, context and identity in the sensemaking process.

### 2.1 APPROACHES TO ORGANISATIONAL CHANGE

The study of organisational change has a long and varied history, and scholars have approached it from various perspectives. This history is evidenced by the diverse themes in organizational change literature as scholars seek ways to conceptualise and research this phenomenon effectively. The difficulty in attaining a unitary definition persists because organizational change is ideological; individual beliefs affect how they define change and its management. It draws on several disciplines,

often without rigid or clearly defined boundaries (Zammuto, 2001; Burnes, 2017). A complete historical examination of the approaches to change is beyond the scope of this study. The present thesis differentiates them into two perspectives to summarise, contrast and explain the stance adopted by this study. The first is the traditional approach which describes change as a rational process that specific organisational actors can control. The second is contemporary perspectives which theorise change as constructions. The following sections examine these approaches.

### **2.1.1 Traditional Perspectives Of Change**

While traditional perspectives comprise various ideas on change and its study, two episodic views dominate. Examination of the understanding of organisational change indicates definitions based on the frequency of events or their impact on organizational dimensions. The first view defines change based on rhythm or frequency into radical or episodic and incremental or continuous change. Radical or episodic change is infrequent, discontinuous, and intentional and occurs as organisations move away from equilibrium. The second type, continuous or incremental change, comprises ongoing, evolving, and cumulative events: minor uninterrupted adjustments created simultaneously across units, which lead to cumulative and substantial organisational change. However, Weick and Quinn (1999) suggest that the perception of organisational change as incremental or radical depends on the observers' analytical perspective. From the macro level, change may appear intermittent, while at the micro level, it may appear incremental.

The second view typifies change as first-order or second-order change based on its impact on organisational dimensions: the interpretive schemes, the design archetypes and the subsystems (Bartunek, 1984; Bartunek and Moch, 1987; Parker, 2002). The interpretive schemes or lifeworld represent the organisation's culture. Subsystems are the organisation's tangible elements, such as structures, technology and people and their interactions. Organisational design archetypes or steering media are the organisational structures and designs intended to ensure that the systems reflect and express the organisation's interpretive schemes. Similar to the conception above, it highlights the frequency of events. First-order or morphostatic change affects the design archetype and the systems in daily operations but does not affect the interpretative schemes of the organisation. This adjustment results in an organisational adaptation either by rebutting the

disturbance altogether or reorienting to some degree. Alternatively, Second-order (morphogenetic) change is a deeper degree of organisational change occurring when the interpretive schemes of the organisation are affected.

The traditional perspectives regard change as a manageable phenomenon accomplished through eliminating inertia and challenging pre-existing mindsets. Managing change is seen as enabling organizations to move from an existing state to a desired future state to improve their effectiveness (Jones, 2010 *in* Hughes, 2010). The outcome is either incremental modifications that reinforce and keep things fundamentally the same or the creation of new forms of understanding. This outcome can be individual, group or system change (Bartunek and Franzak, 1988; Smith, 1990 *in* Roach and Bednar, 1997; Burnes 2017). It requires interventionists to motivate organizational members and manage their response, mainly through the control of resistance. Various scholars encapsulate such thinking in the definitions of change and its management. Moran and Brightman (2001) argue that managing change pertains to managing the impact of organisational change on organisational performers rather than managing the change event. Armstrong (2011) highlights managing the response of organisational members, especially the control of resistance, as the purpose of change management. In the same vein, Voehl and Harrington (2016) suggest that the challenge of change management is anticipating and minimizing resistance.

While beneficial to a certain extent, traditional perspectives fail to rationalize the complexity of organisations and organisational change. They define change as a series of static events instead of ongoing processes (Tsoukas and Chia, 2000). So, they do not accommodate the complex realities of change as a dynamic, continuous process. Additionally, definitions focusing on the rhythm of change neglect the possibilities of unaccounted consequences of change. Critics of traditional models share similar views and suggest that their focus and characteristics contribute to the challenges associated with organisational change. For example, Weick and Quinn (1999) note that the perception of organisational change as incremental or radical depends on the observers' analytical perspective. From the macro level, change may appear intermittent, while it may appear incremental from the micro level. Fliss and Zajak (2006) suggest a relationship exists between the challenges of managing organisational change and the controversies related to the outcomes of organisational change, such as the reordering of priorities and the disruption of established relationships. Worley and Mohrman (2014) suggest there should be a focus on models which allow the organisation to change itself continuously as an adjustment to the current organisational environment, which is chaotic and highly

disruptive. Bouchikhi (1998) argues for a less restrictive approach to researching organisational change and criticises research that ignores organisations' inherent complexity. While applying knowledge from change management models may lead to successful change, it may also lead to failure. Failure may occur from neglecting other factors, such as employee commitment and self-efficacy, which may influence the managing of change (Herold *et al* ,2007).

Classic models implicate terminologies such as resistance to change to reflect the response of organisational members, usually at lower levels of the hierarchy, whose views on organisational change are contrary to those of upper management. Complications from resistance to change arise because traditional models promote a singular view of meaning; they endorse particular viewpoints and condemn others. Sonenshien (2010) supports this stance by suggesting that classic approaches to change based on Lewin's 1951 "unfreeze, move, refreeze" model promulgate a narrow view of meaning whereby meaning is either positive or negative. According to Diefenbach (2007), who investigates strategic change in a university, this indicates a managerialistic ideology of change management characterised as a hierarchical approach whereby knowledge of the direction and the institution's best interests lie with individuals at the top.

Consequently, a growing body of research advocates alternative, cognitive-based conceptions of organisational change and argues for recognising the polyvocality of organisations and multiple meanings present during change. In contrast to the traditional models, it promotes a different view of management as a shaping process rather than a controlling process (Palmer and Dunford, 2008; Maitlis and Sonenshein, 2010). Managing change is an inherently interpretative process; different actors and their construction of meaning significantly alter change processes and outcomes. In other words, organisational change emerges from the combined interpretations of multiple actors. This conception is inherent in Gioia and Chittipeddi's (1991) research on change in a higher education institution involving attempts to influence other actors to adopt a preferred redefinition of the organisation. The resulting change outcome was a modified initiative, influenced by feedback from widespread stakeholders, from the lower to higher levels of the university.

Findings from Luscher and Lewis (2008) demonstrate the advantages of applying contemporary approaches over classical perspectives. They report their engagement by senior executives at Lego to support managerial sensemaking because the managers seemed paralysed, stuck between their previous understandings and the new approach. Findings from their action research demonstrate the

advantages of applying a sensemaking approach to identify and evaluate the challenges of implementing change. For instance, Kotter's (1995) change model suggests the errors which lead to the failure of change, but their study indicates that the obstacles to implementing change were not related to any of these factors for Lego managers at the time of their research. Instead, they were concerned with the impact on their "roles" and "relationships" and "organisation" - format of the new structure. Developing their argument, the researchers suggest these issues were about performing, belonging, and organising. This alternative conception of organisational change frames the present thesis. The following section provides details of a contemporary concept of organisational change and its applications.

## 2.2 CONTEMPORARY CONSTRUCTIONS OF ORGANISATIONAL CHANGE

Critics of traditional models assert that the rationale for change espoused by upper managers sometimes disguises the actual reasons for the change. For proponents of change, the planning and implementation of change initiatives may revolve around less rational objectives rather than rational objectives. Although the reasons may appear to be increasing efficiency and reducing costs, promoting growth, or ensuring the organisation's survival, they may be about growing influence, power or control. Exploring subjective dimensions enhances the insights of managing change and minimizes the risks of applying rationalistic explanations to understanding organisations and their processes. (Diefenbach, 2007). Such findings support Tsoukas and Chia's (2002) argument that managing change comprises micro-processes which need to be understood better to explain the process and outcomes of organisational change. These goals can be achieved using studies based on a theoretical lens focusing on exploring meaning.

Scholars recommend applying a different level of analysis, which is underpinned by an awareness of the profound interconnectedness of change and prioritising investigating the influence of actors' ideals on action and outcomes (Tsoukas and Chia, 2002; Tsoukas *et al.*, 2003; Weick *et al.*, 2005). The notion that change comprises actors who enact their environment and participate in constructing their realities (Ford *et al.*, 2008) is central to this argument. In other words, each actor's construction of reality affects their attitudes towards the change process and subsequently contributes to the outcomes of change in organisations.

### 2.2.1 Cognitive Perspectives

Scholars adopting cognitive assumptions view organisations as sites of continuously evolving human action and therefore define organisational change as the negotiation or the renegotiation of shared meaning about values, beliefs and aims (Whiteley, 1995 in Spencer-Mathews, 2001; Tsoukas and Chia, 2002). Applying cognitive frameworks to organisational change research emerged from the need to delineate strategy formulation and implementation (Bartunek *et al.*, 2011) and recognise the influence of less rational processes on organisational outcomes. Findings from studies analysing patterns of organisational change highlight the difficulty of differentiating between formulation and implementation due to the modification of earlier design decisions during execution. Their research outcomes led to the reformulation of strategic change processes as outcomes of incremental, political, cultural and social processes, which can lead to notions of strategic inertia rather than results of rational decision-making (Bartunek *et al.*, 2011).

In contrast to the classic approach to change, the cognitive approach incorporates the perceptions of different organisational members and components. It promotes organisational change as an outcome of altering interpretive schemes, values or meaning systems of the actors. For change to occur, the values and expectations of members modify to meet the revised goals of the organisation. Under this notion, change constitutes the renewal of parts or even the whole organisational culture, structures, processes and relationships with the outside environment.

Although cognitive concepts such as mental representations continue to play a role in explaining organisational behaviour, their assumptions of bounded rationality and the environment as an objective reality limit the ability of cognitive approaches to address the significance of multiple interpretations for change in organisations. Although modern scholars such as Noteboom (2006) have sought to address this limitation by downplaying the concept of rationality, they continue to promote “one best way”. Balogun and Johnson (2005) demonstrate the limits of framing organisational change within the notions of rationality which underpin the cognitive approach. As different organisational actors interact in the change process, planned change processes become more incremental and unexpected outcomes emerge.



Other conceptions, such as the sensemaking approach to the study of change, developed alongside the cognitive view of organisations to address the gap in cognitive perspectives. This thesis argues it can be seen as the cognitive view intertwined with a social constructivist, discursive view of organisations.

The sensemaking perspective suggests that people actively participate in creating their work environments. Organisations and their interaction with their members are interpretative and socially constructed: context-dependent, historically and socially shaped, and less rational. (Hodgkinson and Healey, 2008; Bartunek *et al.*, 2011). Research within this developing area of study analyses how violated expectations (e.g., from the expected outcome of a change initiative), the noticing, interpretation and incorporation of external stimuli from the environment trigger the construction of meaning, sensemaking, resulting in actions which alter the very environment in which they occur. It also explores why some cues are more prominent than others for sensemaking (Maitlis and Christianson, 2014). This capacity makes it a valuable perspective for examining the deeper processes of change in HEIs from academics' perspectives, the approach adopted by this thesis.

### 2.2.2 Sensemaking Perspectives: Interpretation And The Construction Of Meaning

The sensemaking approach moves the scholarship of managing change from ideas on “controlling” change toward ideas on “creating” change (Balogun, 2006). It is viewed as a process of interpretation entwined with action and used as a retrospective explanation for decision-making processes (Weick *et al.*, 2005; Klein *et al.*, 2006; Bartunek *et al.*, 2011). Some scholars provide alternative standpoints on sensemaking as a retrospective process. They suggest that sensemaking also includes rationalising events as they occur (Wiebe, 2010). These views imply that sensemaking occurs as the experience of a situation is ongoing. In other words, organisational members interpret events in both present and past tense. Despite differences in conception, it assumes the polyphonic and narrative nature of organisations and change.

An articulation of organisational change, which implicates the sensemaking perspective adopted in this research, defines change as “an ongoing improvisation enacted by organisational actors trying to make sense of and act coherently in the world” (Orlikowski, 1996 pg 65 in Tsoukas and Chia, 2002).

Since meaning or sensemaking is a primary generator of action (Drazin *et al.*, 1999), such contemporary views of organisational highlight the effect of actors' interactions on the outcomes of organisational change. As a map for enacting the territory (Weick, 1979), it is a conscious process triggered by novel incidents. The table below demonstrates the different attempts to explain the essence of the term.

**Table 1: Definition of Sensemaking from different authors**

| Author                       | Definition  |
|------------------------------|---|
| Louis (1980)                 | <p>“Sensemaking can be viewed as a recurring cycle comprised of a sequence of events occurring over time. The cycle begins as individuals form unconscious and conscious anticipations and assumptions, which serve as predictions about future events. Subsequently, individuals experience events that may be discrepant from predictions. Discrepant events, or surprises, trigger a need for explanation or post-diction and, correspondingly, for a process for developing interpretations of discrepancies. Interpretation, or meaning, is attributed to surprises. Based on the attributed meanings, any necessary behavioural responses to the immediate situation are selected. Also, based on attributed meanings, understandings of actors, actions, and settings are updated, and predictions about future experiences in the setting are revised. The updated anticipations and revised assumptions are analogous to alterations in cognitive scripts.” (p. 241)</p> |
| Starbuck and Milliken (1988) | <p>“Sensemaking has many distinct aspects—comprehending, understanding, explaining, attributing, extrapolating, and predicting, at least. For example, understanding seems to precede explaining and requires less input; predicting may occur without either understanding or explaining; attributing is a form of explanation that assigns causes.[ . . . ] What is common to these processes is that they involve placing stimuli into frameworks (or schemata) that make sense of the stimuli (Goleman, 1985).” (p. 51)</p>   |

|                             |   |
|-----------------------------|---|
| Gephart (1993)              | “Sensemaking has been defined as the discursive process of constructing and interpreting the social world”. (p. 1485)   |
| Hill and Levenhagen (1995)  | “To cope with these uncertainties, the entrepreneur must develop a ‘vision’ or mental model of how the environment works (sensemaking) and then be able to communicate to others and gain their support (sensegiving).” (p. 1057)   |
| Weick (1995)                | “Sensemaking is a process that is (1) grounded in identity construction, (2) retrospective, (3) enactive of sensible environments, (4) social, (5) on-going, (6) focused on and by extracted cues, (7) driven by plausibility rather than accuracy.” (p. 17)  |
| Taylor and Van Every (2000) | “[S]ensemaking is a way station on the road to a consensually constructed, coordinated system of action.” (p. 275)  |
| Balogun and Johnson (2004)  | “Sensemaking is a conversational and narrative process through which people create and maintain an intersubjective world (Brown, 2000; Gephart, 1993, 1997; Watson & Bargiela-Chiappini, 1998).” (p. 524)   |
| Balogun and Johnson (2005)  | “Sensemaking is primarily a conversational and narrative process (Brown, 2000; Gephart, 1993, 1997) involving a variety of communication genres (Watson & Bargiela-Chiappini, 1998), both spoken and written, and formal and informal. However, more specifically, sensemaking involves ‘conversational and social practices’ (Gephart, 1993:1469). It occurs through both verbal and non-verbal means (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991; Gioia et al., 1994). Individuals engage in gossip and negotiations, exchange stories, rumours and past experiences, seek information and take note of physical representations, or non-verbal signs and signals, like behaviours and actions, to infer and give meaning (Isabella, 1990; Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991; Gioia et al., 1994; Gioia & Thomas, 1996; Poole et al., 1989; Labianca <i>et al.</i> , 2000). Change comes about through shifts in conversations and language (Barrett et al., 1995; Brown & Humphreys, 2003; Ford & Ford, 1995; Heracleous & Barrett, 2001).” (p. 1576) |

|                |  |
|----------------|--|
| Maitlis (2005) | “Sensemaking occurs in organisations when members confront events, issues, and actions that are somehow surprising or confusing (Gioia & Thomas, 1996; Weick, 1993, 1995). As Weick argued, ‘The basic idea of |
|----------------|--|

|  |   |
|--|---|
|  | <p>sensemaking is that reality is an ongoing accomplishment that emerges from efforts to create order and make retrospective sense of what occurs (1993: 635). Thus, sensemaking is a process of social construction (Berger &amp; Luckmann, 1967) in which individuals attempt to interpret and explain sets of cues from their environments. This construction happens through the production of ‘accounts’—discursive constructions of reality that interpret or explain (Antaki, 1994)—or through the ‘activation’ of existing accounts (Gioia &amp; Thomas, 1996; Volkema, Farquhar, &amp; Bergmann, 1997). In either case, sensemaking allows people to deal with uncertainty and ambiguity by creating rational accounts of the world that enable action. Thus, sensemaking both precedes decision-making and follows it. Sensemaking provides clear questions and answers (Weick, 1993: 636) that feed decision-making, and decision-making often stimulates the surprises and confusion that create occasions for sensemaking. Organisational sensemaking is a fundamentally social process: organisation members interpret their environment in and through interactions with others, constructing accounts that allow them to comprehend the world and collaborate (Isabella, 1990; Sackmann, 1991; Sandelands &amp; Stablein, 1987; Starbuck &amp; Milliken, 1988; Weick &amp; Roberts, 1993).” (p. 21)</p> |
|--|---|

|                            |  |
|----------------------------|--|
| Rouleau (2005)             | “Sensemaking has to do with the way managers understand, interpret, and create sense for themselves based on the information surrounding the strategic change. Sensegiving is concerned with their attempts to influence the outcome, communicate their thoughts about the change to others, and gain support. Although these processes appear to be conceptually different, the boundaries of each are permeated by the other. As discourse and action, sensemaking and sensegiving are less distinct domains (Hopkinson, 2001) than two sides of the same coin—one implies the other and cannot exist without it.” (p. 1415) |
| Weick <i>et al.</i> (2005) | “[S]ensemaking unfolds as a sequence in which people concerned with identity in the social context of other actors engage on-going   |

|                              |   |
|------------------------------|---|
|                              | circumstances from which they extract cues and make plausible sense retrospectively while enacting more or less order into those on-going circumstances.” (p. 409)  |
| Klein <i>et al.</i> (2006)   | “Sensemaking is a motivated, continuous effort to understand connections (which can be among people, places, and events) in order to anticipate their trajectories and act effectively.” (p. 71)  |
| Gephart <i>et al.</i> (2010) | “Sensemaking is an ongoing process that creates an intersubjective sense of shared meaning through conversation and non-verbal behaviour in face-to-face settings where people seek to produce, negotiate, and sustain a shared sense of meaning.” (pp. 284–285)  |
| Sonenshein (2010)            | “For Weick (1995), sensemaking involves individuals engaging in retrospective and prospective thinking to construct an interpretation of reality. ‘Sensegiving’ is a related process by which individuals attempt to influence the sensemaking of others (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991; Maitlis & Lawrence, 2007). Both sensemaking and sensegiving are closely related to narratives, with many scholars treating sensemaking/sensegiving as interchangeable with constructing narratives (Currie & Brown, 2003; Dunford & Jones, 2000; Gabriel, 2004).” (p. 479) |

|   |   |
|---|---|
| Cornelissen<br>(2012)                                 | “Sensemaking refers to processes of meaning construction whereby people interpret events and issues within and outside of their organisations that are somehow surprising, complex, or confusing to them.” (p. 118)   |
| Maitlis and<br>Christianson<br>(2014)                 | “Sensemaking is defined as a process, prompted by violated expectations, that involves attending to and bracketing cues in the environment, creating intersubjective meaning through cycles of interpretation and action, and thereby enacting a more ordered environment from which further cues can be drawn” (p.67)  |
| Brown <i>et al.</i><br>(2015)                         | Sensemaking refers “generally to those processes by which people seek plausibly to understand ambiguous, equivocal or confusing issues or events (Colville, Brown, & Pye, 2012; Maitlis, 2005; Weick, 1995) (pg 2). Although sometimes mistakenly used as synonyms, there is an   |
|   | important distinction between equivocality and ambiguity in terms of sensemaking: Lessening ambiguity implies that through action, you can learn to discount what <i>might</i> have been going on and reach an answer to the question as to what <i>is</i> going on (i.e. ‘what is the story?’). Reducing equivocality suggests that action does not clarify by allowing you to eliminate lack of clarity but clarifies by shaping what it is that you are attending to and in the doing, shapes what <i>is</i> going on. (Colville et al., 2012, p. 7; emphasis in the original) |
| Ivanova-<br>Gongne, M., and<br>Torkkeli, L.<br>(2018) | Sensemaking is a cognitive, narrative and communicative process, as well as an outcome of that process in the form of cognitive representations (Brown <i>et al.</i> , 2008; Henneberg <i>et al.</i> , 2010; Mattsson <i>et al.</i> , 2015)   |

Source: Maitlis and Christianson (2014) and Researcher

The table above demonstrates that though they are many commonalities in the definitions of sensemaking, there are also differences. However, approaches to the concept suggest that the lack of consensus on its definition results from differences in their fundamental assumptions or ontology.

(Brown *et al.*, 2015 Maitlis and Christianson, 2014; Sandberg and Tsoukas, 2020). Evaluation of literature seen in how scholars approach its core attributes reveals these assumptions as Cognition, Social and Discursive. Brown *et al.* (2015) synthesised these core attributes from a literature review. These are presented in table 2 below, along with the points of divergence. This thesis delineates these points of divergence based on triggers, origin or location, focus, and understanding of meaning within groups.

The table provides an overview of the attributes of sensemaking and positions which confer differences

**Table 2: Attributes of Sensemaking and Points of Divergence**

| Point of divergence                     | Attributes of Sensemaking   |
|---|---|
| Origin or Location                      | Individual-cognitive (e.g. schemata, mental maps) <b>Versus</b> collective-social (interactions between people) or specifically discursive (linguistic/ communicative) processes; |
| Triggers                                | Occurs daily <b>Versus</b> when members encounter discrepant cues   |
| Focus                                   | Retrospective <b>Versus</b> prospective;  |
| Understanding of meaning within groups. | Shared understanding among members of the group <b>Versus</b> diverging understanding within groups.  |

Source: Researcher

The cognitive-social view manifests in the definition by Klein *et al.* (2006), who depict sensemaking as a cognitive process which occurs through social activity or social interactions, transcends individual activity, and guides future actions. Weick's (1995; Weick *et al.*, 2005) definition illustrates the socialdiscursive view based on an understanding of organisations as subjective accomplishments. Weick and collaborators suggest sensemaking is a collective product of organising processes which occur retrospectively (Weick, 1995; Weick *et al.*, 2005; Gioia, 2006). However, he positions it as an individual and a social process (Weick, 1995, pp 6). Weick argues

*“Sensemaking is usually thought to involve activities of negotiations between people as to what is out there. Less prominent in these analyses is the idea that people, often alone, actively put things out there that they then perceive and negotiate about perceiving. It is this initial implanting of reality that is preserved by the word enactment” (Weick, 1979, p. 165 In Sandberg and Tsoukas, 2015).*

Extending Maitlis and Christianson (2014) explanation, this thesis suggests these differences could also result from researchers' varied applications and research questions. This assumption is particularly applicable when the study aims to explain organisational behaviour. For example, Gephart's (1993) research question on how individuals and groups assign blame in disaster studies: the public enquiry of a fatal pipeline fire, led to his adopting a discursive perspective of sensemaking. Based on the assumption that meaning is acquired and embedded in multiple discourses and texts, he defines sensemaking as a discursive activity. Individuals invent shared meanings for interpreting the world through conversational and social practices.

Conversely, Louis (1980) promotes a cognitive perspective that emerges from applying the sensemaking framework to explain the relationship between the turnover rate and initial entry expectations of an organisation. Her study on the antecedents of turnover is concerned with a “how” question. How do recruits to an organisation cope with discrepancies between initial expectations and actual experiences when they enter the organisation? From the findings, she describes sensemaking as a cognitive process through which organisational newcomers understand, interprets, and ultimately respond in unfamiliar organisational contexts. In doing so, she draws on the work of Abelson (1976), Berger and Luckman (1966) and Weick (1979) regarding the role of cognitive scripts, a coherent sequence of expected events (Abelson, 1976 *in* Louis, 1980) also known as interpretative schemes or schema (Berger and Luckman, 1966 *in* Louis, 1980).

The Weick notion informs the majority of sensemaking research. Therefore, most studies emphasise its discursive features despite the differences among scholars on sensemaking. For example, the interweaving of discourse and sensemaking is apparent in Gephart (1993 p. 1485) definition. He indicates that sensemaking is “the discursive process of constructing and interpreting the social world”. The link implies describing the relationship between sensemaking and discourse as nested. Meanings develop during sensemaking because sensemaking is discourse: talk, communication and language (Weick, 2005 *in* Balogun *et al.*, 2014). Scholars see discourses as frames for understanding and interpreting the world around us, drawing on and moulding our mental



representations of the world simultaneously (Berger and Luckmann, 1966; Paroutis and Heracleous, 2013 in Balogun *et al.*, 2014). Frames organise meaning, motivation, and subsequent involvement and action by linking meaning to events and vice versa (Drazin *et al.*, 1999).

This thesis positions sensemaking as the retrospective rationalisation which occurs when members encounter unexpected events or during periods of uncertainty using existing frames of reference (Louis, 1980; Gioia and Chittipeddi, 1991; Weick *et al.*, 2005; Maitlis and Christianson, 2014).

The following section discusses organisational change in universities and shows the impact of change on academics and institutions, justifying the importance of incorporating actor agency.

## 2.3 ORGANISATIONAL CHANGE IN UNIVERSITIES

Understandings of university processes have been underpinned by the notion that “*Universities have their own distinct character as organizations, being members of a type defined in organization theory as the federated meritocratic professional bureaucracy*” (Redding *et al.*, 2019 pg 160). In the UK, they have traditionally been regarded as specific types of organisations underpinned by elitist, social and cultural hierarchies. They were characterised by institutional freedom and autonomy and distinctive modes of working and professional cultures. Universities were independent of the allocation of resources and regulation of quality and standards in teaching and research. Their exclusivity and uniqueness were described under the notions of the Humboldtian university and were attributed to their values of knowledge generation and sharing for its own sake and their decision-making processes (Musselin 2006; Harris, 2005; Taylor, 2003; Bruckmann, and Carvalho, 2018).

From the '80s, universities have been expected to become like other organisations, with their specificity denied. Brennan and David (2010) and Gumpert (2000) attribute this to the shifting patterns of social and economic demand. There are also shifting alterations in the ways of knowledge production and organisation within universities and other ‘knowledge organisations’. Technology is also driving change; with the introduction of concepts such as e-learning (de Fretas *et al.*, 2015).

Other views indicate that these changes align with the desire to maximise the ability and potential of HEIs to create and support the nation’s economy and drive social change. Governments' realisation and increased interest to utilise the ability of HEIs to contribute to the development of the economy

and society instigated these changes. In addition to government, students, employers, community and professional expectations are increasing, characterised by questions on the validity and accessibility of knowledge (Newby, 2003; Wilmott, 1995, Brescia *et al.*, 2016; Croucher and Woelert 2016). While HEIs may appreciate this interest, it can sometimes become a disadvantage. Government interest comes with the requirement to widen participation and deliver improvements, measured by performance targets and indicators (Newby, 2003).

Performance targets and indicators have been connected to HEI funding and used as an incentive by the Government to drive change in Higher Education (Trowler, 1998; Varghese, 2004; and Govender *et al.*, 2005). This is sometimes depicted as introducing New Public Management (NPM) and neoliberalism rationalizations, bringing more standardisation and intrusiveness requirements. Therefore, the concern for cost-effectiveness, performance targets and indicators has a tremendous influence on driving change at the institutional level. Proponents of the arguments for evaluation suggest there is a necessity to justify the investments by government and private investors in Higher Education (Brennan and David, 2010). Evolving perceptions of HEIs now include evaluating their impact on society, the workforce and the economy.

These changes surrounding higher education may historically be traced to the movement to mass education from a system which regarded Higher Education as the privilege of an elite few (Musselin, 2006). The move reflects a modification of the dominant legitimating idea of higher education (HE) from one of a social institution towards the idea of HE as an industry. As social institutions, they were expected to contribute to developing human capital, preserving knowledge, and fostering other legitimate pursuits for the nation-state, such as economic development. Over time, and with an increasing focus on educating workers and engaging in industry-relevant research, the idea of HE has evolved to that of an industry; quasi-corporate entities producing a wide range of goods and services in a competitive marketplace such that they are now seen as major creators of wealth and economic advancement (Gumport, 2000; McCaffery, 2018 pp2). By emphasising the increasing perception of HE as an industry, such arguments underplay the fact that HE as social institutions already embody some of the characteristics decried as characteristics of industrial institutions, such as research and economic development. In other words, there should have been attempts to highlight the overlap between the characteristics of social institutions and industry.

Olsen (2007) explains the shifting legitimating frames about universities using the concept of institutional imperialism. Attempts at control and intrusions by other institutions such as governments, threaten to destroy an institution's distinct aspects: systems of normative and causal beliefs and resources. In such instances, institutions under attack re-evaluate their ethos, foundations, pacts with society and codes of behaviour (Merton 1937, 1942 in Olsen, 2007). Olsen (2007) describes this as a method of institutional resistance against the invasion of alien norms. The result is that rather than being destroyed, the institution modifies its behaviour codes.

Olsen (2007) view corresponds to the stance that developments in HEIs characterise the deviation of the university from its traditional role to serve wider society by applying knowledge for public benefit (Boyer, 1996). There are arguments that changes in the landscape of HEIs result in the erosion of the principal objectives of higher education and the autonomy of institutions through these reforms. HEIs are increasingly regarded as industries and generate knowledge for commercial applications rather than intellectual enterprises, where knowledge is an end in itself (Gumport, 2000; Croucher and Woelert, 2016). According to Mautner (in Broadbent, 2011), discussions for creating income streams for entrepreneurial universities embed notions of marketization. These developments in HEIs emerge as organisational shifts involving adopting economic rationalisations that change their core values and strategic focus and applying managerial tools from the industrial sector, which means changes in their governance systems. (Deem, 2008; Holmes and Lindsay, 2018; Sims, 2019).

Thus, two discourses become visible in Higher Education change literature: the managerial discourse and the collegial discourse. The managerial discourse originates from discussions on the influence of control measures to which institutions are subject, arising from financial constraints and diversified missions (Broadbent, 2011). More recently, these discussions have expanded to include the growing accountability issues for public funds. This language of marketisation drives the changes in the legitimising frames and structures of the university. The next sections review the impact of these changes on the institution and academics and the approaches to managing change in HEIs.

### 2.3.1 Impact of change on Higher Education Institutions and Academics

As universities seek to respond to the varied expectations from external and internal groups, they have implemented various changes. The result is a multifaceted higher education context with

different kinds of universities, students with diverse backgrounds, motivations, diversity in student living conditions, and the forms of students' engagement with higher education (Brennan and David, 2010). Newby (2003) states that these changes correspond to different categories based on their content and goals. They include Structural, Bureaucratic, Quantitative, Demographic, Qualitative, and Economic. Structural and bureaucratic changes involve the creation of different kinds of institutions and increasing documentation, including documentation to demonstrate quality. These aim to diversify the university's mission and implement effective leadership, governance and management. Qualitative changes involve introducing and altering performance indicators concerned with research excellence and fostering excellence in teaching and learning. Quantitative and demographic changes describe the increase in student numbers and modified student composition. Economic changes encourage more significant links with businesses and communities and are seen in revised funding measures.

Implementing the abovementioned changes, such as prioritising revenue generation, reallocating resources, and developing strategic links with businesses and government (Parker, 2002), have affected working practices for academics in HEIs. This impact can be described as affecting the nature of academic work resulting in notions of academic de-professionalization (Adams, 1998; Brennan and David, 2010). Broadbent (2011) describes these legitimating frames as organisational lifeworlds. So, there is the concern that the fundamental characteristic of academic work defined by its aims and techniques will disintegrate with time. Brennan and David (2010) argue that the increasing policies regarding higher education have influenced research, teaching and learning. Demographic and quantitative changes have led to modifications in methods of learning, teaching and assessments. Different teaching techniques emerge to cope with the diversity in the academic and social backgrounds and student ages. Other impacts of this type of change exist in the debates on learning and teaching practices in higher education, which are beyond this study's scope.

At the individual academic level, changes in expectations and reconceptualization of the role of higher education and the contribution of academics in meeting this revised role have resulted in modifications to the nature of academic work. The research profile of universities and individuals is linked increasingly to research partnerships with industries that may restrict access to research reports and introduce bias to research findings. There are discussions of the impact on knowledge generation by the changes in Higher Education promoting an increasing emphasis on economically viable research rather than on scholarly, fundamental research. The modification of academic work

has also extended to introducing evaluations of teaching (Gumport, 2000; Pereira, 2016; O’leary and wood, 2019).

Changes in HEIs, such as bureaucratic changes affecting governance termed “new managerialism” by Deem (1998), directly impact academics. Increasingly, the management of institutions is moving away from academics and toward professional managers or groups with little knowledge of academic practices (Parker, 2002; Shattock 2010 pg3). These changes can modify university institutional and individual academic identities (Harris, 2005; Olsen, 2007; Gill, 2017). Academic work defines academic identity; therefore, as HEIs react to change, the effects on aspects of academic work modify academic identity (Harris, 2005).

The highlighted consequences of the different types of change to institutional and individual identity are significant to change research within Higher Education Institutions because scholars suggest that the impact on academic identity influences the perceptions and responses of academics to change (Churchman and King, 2009; Ylijoki and Ursin, 2015 in Evans, 2015). This link corresponds to arguments of the sensemaking perspective, which establish identity as a crucial component for creating meaning around change. The table below highlights the types of changes adopted by HEIs and how they affect academics.

**Table 4: Types of changes and impact on academics.**

| Category of change | Content and goal of change  | Goal of the change  | Impact on Academic |
|--------------------|---|---|--------------------|
| Structural         | The creation of different kinds of institutions                           | Diversify the mission of the university and implement effective leadership, governance and management | Yes                |
| Bureaucratic       | Increase in documentation, including documentation to demonstrate quality |   | Yes                |

|              |   |   |     |
|--------------|---|---|-----|
| Qualitative  | introduction and alteration of performance indicators | Concerned with research excellence; fostering excellence in teaching and learning | Yes |
| Quantitative | Increase in student numbers                           | Modifying student composition   | Yes |
| Demographic  | Diversity in type of student                          |   | Yes |
| Economic     | Revision of funding measures                          | Encouraging greater links with businesses and communities                         | Yes |

Source: Researcher

The table above suggests that different categories of change impact the role and work of the academic. Thus, understanding how academics interpret change is crucial. In the next section, the literature reviews traditional approaches to managing change in HEIs before discussing the scholarship of sensemaking in HEIs.

### 2.3.2 Approaches to managing change in universities

Universities comprise varying stakeholders, including management, different staff groups- academic and non-academic and students. The multiple stakeholders generate different pressures based on conflicts of interest concerning the need for change and appropriate strategies for managing change.

Some challenges associated with change within Higher Education Institutions revolve around the need for change within this environment. The stakeholders question the purpose of strategic change concerning the benefits of suggested change initiatives. They apply pressures for change that conform to their perception of the university as an organisation. Differentiations also exist with stakeholder groups, for example, among different academics. Pressures for change from academics arise from their different perspectives of the university. The absence of a single view of the university has been linked to differences in academic or professional associations and organisational roles. (Kerr 2001; Marginson 2004 in Marshall, 2010; Russell, 2009). Evidence suggests these differentiations impact management practices within HEI's resulting in requests for "social" models of managing change. A social model promotes a nuanced understanding of academic groups by acknowledging the effect of social practices and the construction of reality. This characteristic suggests it is an appropriate tool to mitigate the effect of the pressures from group differentiations on change (Trowler, 2008 pg xi).

Cummings et al. (2005) identify three (3) approaches to change in universities: the top-down approach, the bottom-up approach and the middle-out approach. The different approaches follow different trajectories to achieve the same outcome. Tsai and Beverton (2007) suggest that in the topdown approach, change initiators and change agents utilize power conferred by political, economic or administrative means to establish shared commitment and achieve change. It is more effective when universities are small, in an acknowledged state of crisis, conspicuously out of date or adopt an autocratic management mode (Birnbaum, 1988 *in* Marshall, 2010) Organisational change in the bottom-up and middle-out approach is adopted through imitation and osmosis. Change occurs through a participatory-style change driven by early adopters (Cummings et al.,2005).

Spencer-Mathews (2001) reports that imparting a sense of ownership among individual academic staff is essential for achieving university change objectives. Staff develop a sense of ownership when they feel involved in decision-making, both in deciding the outcome and the appropriate steps to achieve those. This means enlarging the scale of communication measures, including higher staff numbers in the formal communique. Participants in their study report that the lack of involvement in the design process was a significant factor in deciding compliance. In the university used for the case study, it led to the development of feelings of distrust and alienation among staff. In contrast, findings from Diefenbach (2007) indicate a university failed to meet all its change objectives. The change agents used the university's organisational structure to communicate the procedures and objectives

for the change to staff members. The study reports no opportunities for feedback from university members in non-managerial positions. The case university adopted the 'new public management style, which translated into their approach to managing the university's change efforts. They indicated the approach to change was top-down, with linear, rigid guidelines of procedures. Members of the university viewed the choice and implementation of organisational change as the prerogative of the select few in senior management positions. Based on this qualitative case study of one university, using a study sample comprised of senior managers (academic and non-academic), he suggests that a managerialistic ideology dominates change in universities. The disclosure of the participants supports this view. According to senior management, the change strategy reflected "basic business principles to evolve the priorities that we've got now, and there is nothing very original about that" (Diefenbach, 2007).

Arnaboldi and Azzone (2005) present organisational change in universities as a processual approach. This approach advocates the understanding that power and politics are central to understanding processes of organisational change (Dawson, 2005). Politics within the organisation shows in the consultation, negotiation, conflict and resistance during change. An essential contribution from Arnaboldi and Azzone (2005) study of strategic change in an Italian university is the finding that the change process relies on participation. The change strategy followed an incremental, non-linear approach, allowing strategies to be modified as the internal environment shifts. The strategy included the following steps: identify the goal, engage staff in participatory discussions of possible solutions, small-scale implementation, and readjustment of solutions if needed. Their findings highlight the view of organisations as dynamic entities whose processes are affected by their interactions with contextual influences.

Scholars who link the outcomes of participatory approaches to the university's values and governance promote contextual influences on change. Studying senior academic managers in a university, Brown (2012) suggests that attaining high levels of engagement with organisational change policies depends on adopting a collegial approach to managing change. According to the participants, the rationale for adopting a collegial approach was to utilize staff experiences. Comparing her findings with the study by Holt *et al.* (2011), she outlines the strategies for change by the university. They include New Vision/new plans; Preparation of new/continuing academic staff; Compulsory casual teaching development programme; Just-in-time professional programme; Communities of practice; Strategic funding for developments, Supporting teaching excellence through awards and fellowships;



Disseminating exemplary practice online; Recognition and use of education experts; and Renewing leadership. Brown's study highlights some crucial elements. The first is the content of change; promoting the role of teaching in the university was already a priority for the academics in the case university. The second aspect is using university teacher fellows as local advocates for change. The fellows were at the frontline of engaging with staff and emphasized a collaborative approach toward creating solutions for the change initiatives. As limitations of Brown's study include the ambiguity around the relationship between context and the objective of the change, this raises questions on the role of context, perceptions of identity and the role of HEIs. Could this have accounted for the significant enthusiasm reported in the study? The second limitation concerns explanations of the microdynamics between the use of teacher fellows as advocates for the change and the outcomes of change. These gaps support the aim of this thesis to explore the influence of different university contexts, the social processes of meaning construction and the notion of identity within that process.

Scholars of organisational change agree that fundamental assumptions on the definition or understanding of the organisation affect the perception and response to change from organisational members. This perception occurs in organisational members irrespective of their adopted change actor identities; change initiator, implementer or recipient, or academic roles as manager- academics or front-line academics. Taylor (1993 in Tsoukas and Chia, 2002) highlight the influence of fundamental assumptions on the outcome of change, based on a study to promote office computerization sponsored by the Canadian government. In reporting the change program as unable to meet its objectives, he links the failure of the change program to the definition of organisations adopted by the change initiators as "collections of individual "pieces" (human and nonhuman)". As a result, strategies for managing change rely on an enforced, top-down approach based on the notion that external agents decide organisational meaning. This definition dismisses the interpersonal and contextual dynamics that can exist in organisations.

Linking change outcomes to how meaningful the change is to the actors involved implicates the cognitive attributes of organisations and their members. Cognitive studies of organisational change evaluated the dynamics underlying organisational change. They identify factors, including internal characteristics, that influence organisational members' perceptions of organisational change and relate these to the outcomes of managing change. The beliefs of change recipients are critical to the change process's steps (Armenakis and Harris, 2009). Following this stance, employing a lens such as

sensemaking, explaining the importance of the dimensions identified by cognitive studies advances research of organisational change (Kezar, 2013).

## 2.4 MAKING SENSE OF CHANGE

### 2.4.1 Interpretation and Enactment of Organisational Change

Change in organisations generates uncertainty for the members of the organisation and requires the cognitive reorientation of its members to achieve its objectives. Conceptualising change as a sensemaking process denotes a dynamic approach to managing change, responsive to introducing new information and adjusting sequential strategies (Weick, 2005). Sensemaking is a continuous integrated activity and a conditional interpretative process (Wallemacq and Sims, 1998). This feature implies that sensemaking only applies to certain organisational activities or processes which trigger interpretation. According to Weick *et al.* (2005), it happens when individuals ask if an event/process/situation is “Same or Different” under one of three conditions: circumstances where there is a dramatic loss of sense; situations where the loss of sense is more ordinary, but its effects are similar to cases where the loss of knowledge is overwhelming; and unfamiliar contexts where sense is elusive. Maitlis and Christianson (2014) present these prerequisites in simpler terms. Firstly, when organisational members encounter discrepant events or issues where the meaning is ambiguous, making them uncertain of how to act. Secondly, the individual’s recognition or awareness of the event as discrepant is subjective. The discrepancy between expectation and experience should be significant such that organisational members question what is going on and what they should do next. This discrepancy could be due to various factors, such as its impact on individual, social, or organisational identity (Corley and Gioia, 2004; Pratt, Rockmann, and Kaufmann, 2006 *in* Maitlis and Christianson, 2014) and personal or strategic goals (Balogun and Johnson, 2004; Maitlis, Vogus, & Lawrence, 2013 *in* Maitlis and Christianson, 2014). Finally, the ambiguous events should be unsusceptible to the normalising effects of group norms or culture

Sensemaking as a process of meaning construction and reconstruction is an essential element of the change process (Balogun *et al.*, 2014). It is used diagnostically and continuously during periods of organisational change by organisational members to understand connections and potential outcomes (Weick, 2005, Klein, Moon, & Hoffman, 2006). Its capacity to explain underpinning reasons

for behaviour is substantial because it involves assigning a frame of reference to stimuli that enables people to comprehend, explain, understand, extrapolate and predict (Starbuck and Milliken, 1988 in Weick, 1995). Stensaker and Falkenberg (2007) suggest that during this process, it is components of the change initiative; that is, the content of the change initiative rather than the prospect of organisational change, that triggers sensemaking.

Luscher and Lewis (2008) explain the role of sensemaking in their research on middle managers' sensemaking of a major restructuring plan. They report that paradoxes of change shape sensemaking, forming a significant part of actors' change narratives. As the initiators had a vision and specific outlines of the format of the outcome, it confined the managers or implementers to stricter guidelines, leading them to experience uncertainty as they tried to navigate the direction of the change. Their findings establish that change in organisations generates ambiguity for organisational actors, subsequently triggering a search for meaning using cognitive frames as a response to minimise or remove this uncertainty. Ambiguity renders new demands uncertain and frequently misunderstood (Warglien & Masuch, 1996 in Luscher and Lewis, 2008), while equivocality fosters confusion as demands become open to varied, even contradictory, interpretations (Putnam, 1986 in Luscher and Lewis, 2008). To lessen ambiguity, through action, individuals learn to discount what *might* be going on to answer the question "what *is* going on?" (i.e. 'what is the story?').

The other role of sensemaking, reducing equivocality, suggests action clarifies by shaping what members attend to and, in the process, shapes what is going on (Colville *et al.*, 2012 in Brown *et al.*, 2015). Gioia and Thomas (1996) study to investigate the process of change in a university evinces this difference. They describe an incident where the president said, "I want the university to be in the top 10", but was unclear about the strategies to meet that objective. This requirement triggered an interpretive process which progressed through various stages where participants examined their role in the change initiative, moved from identity concerns to recognising the influence of others on their sensemaking, to distinguishing their influence on others before arriving at a plausible explanation for themselves and others. The study established that interpretation can occur in the absence of a preexisting frame of reference. It aligns with Weick's (1995) stance that sensemaking involves both authoring and interpretation, where interpretation follows discovery. Gioia and Thomas (1996) study also reflect sensemaking's directionality: sensemaking is inward-directed and sensegiving is outward directed. Supporting other explanations, this suggests sensemaking drives and results from organisational change. Correlating these interactions in this way underpins the stance of this thesis

that the process of change is a process of sensemaking. Sensemaking and sensegiving thus provide explanations for the convergent and divergent actions as members respond to organisational change (Weber *et al.*, 2015).

Providing a complementary point of view, other scholars explaining sensemaking's role during change suggest it leads to different stances toward organisational change, including acceptance or resistance to change (Bartunek *et al.*, 2011; Antonacopoulou and Psychogios, 2015). Stensaker and Falkenberg (2007) apply the sensemaking approach to illustrate how the response to change at the individual level affects the response to change at the organisational level. Their research identifies five responses: convergent response, divergent response, unresolved sensemaking, creative response, and non-compliance. Antonacopoulou and Psychogios (2015) examine the lived experiences of change taken by middle managers using a case study of three banks. Analysing the role of talk and conversation in making sense of lived experiences of organisational change, they suggest that the predisposition towards change develops from practical judgment (*phronesis*). They demonstrate that *phronetic* (practical) judgments which affect stance to change are social constructions of conversations with others using a process of reflective critique. Explaining the boundaries of their research, they state that they do not adopt a discursive view of predispositions to change in organisations. Instead, they focus on the importance of conversation as a meaning-making process. Despite this, their findings highlight the importance of conversations, a form of sensemaking discourse and support the link between discourse and sensemaking.

Such views reflect the analytical focus of organisational change research using a perspective or lens which depicts organisational change and its processes as a result of the socio-cognitive and discursive interpretation of change actors. The discursive viewpoint assumes discourse is constitutive of organisations. In times of change, it has a performative power, acting as a resource in sensemaking (Chia, 2000 *in* Grant and Iedema, 2005; Balogun *et al.*, 2014). According to Potter and Wetherell (1987 *in* Trowler, 2001), discursive practices describe things and do things which have fundamental implications individually (in terms of identity), socially (in terms of social construction) and politically (in terms of the distribution of power). It incorporates contexts and constraints recognised by actors and used in organising (Fairhurst and Putnam, 2004). For example, areas of study combining discourse and sensemaking include exploring the construction of legitimacy for organisational change through discourse. This discursive interpretation of the organisation and sensemaking is manifested

in narratives. Thus, this thesis aims to explore how organisational actors create sensemaking narratives.

#### 2.4.2 Sensemaking Of Change In HEIs

Expansions in sensemaking studies, including advances in explaining organisational change processes through this lens, correspond to a continued interest in the cognitive and emotional processes within organisations (Bartunek *et al.*, 2011). Change entails the interaction of the social processes of different actors (Ford *et al.*, 2008), and the concern of sensemaking with explaining processes of interactions and their outcomes (Colville and Pye, 2010) maintains its application in change research. As a framework for analysing organisational change, sensemaking research explores its influence on the different dimensions associated with change, such as questions on perceiving a need for change and the impact of these perceptions on the change process, the identity of the change agent as well as the focus of change initiatives (Mills, 2003; Gioia *et al.*, 1994).

A review of Higher Education literature suggests HEIs are subject to volatile conditions, which result in change as universities seek to incorporate the requirements of broader stakeholders. The changes occur as fundamental transformations across structures, cultures, governance and academic ways of working (Vaira, 2004; Boyce, 2003 in Hoover and Harder, 2015; Decramer *et al.*, 2012; Marques *et al.*, 2017). Instituting change effectively in HEIs is challenging, so research on change remains relevant (Adserias *et al.*, 2017). Burke (2011) clarifies the term “effective” and suggests that this involves maintaining the accomplishment of goals rather than achieving the goals of change. Discussions about HEIs highlight their plurality and complexity, which pose additional constraints on the acknowledged consequences and challenges of change implementation (Bartunek, 2003 pg ix; Herold *et al.*, 2007; Sonenshein and Dholakia, 2012; Chia, 2014). This complexity includes distinct characteristics regarding their governance structures, the absence of a specific group responsible for implementing change, and staff expectation of participation (Cummings *et al.*, 2005; Higgins and Thomas, 2016; Hechanova *et al.*, 2018). Achieving effective change under these circumstances requires understanding the reasons and diverse overarching realities of organisational processes and decisions (Thompson and Martin, 2010).

In analysing the appropriate leadership strategies for managing change in HEIs, scholars suggest that effective change in universities relies more on participation rather than a top-down approach (Blackmore and Sachs, 2000; Arnaboldi and Azzone, 2005; Mcroy and Gibbs, 2005; Newton, 2002; Cummings et al., 2005 and Brown, 2012). Newton (2002) suggests is this because academics view themselves not as passive recipients of management policy but as strategy makers. This can be linked to the culture and identity of academic staff, whereby the autonomy and authority of the academic in setting objectives to ensure the generation and transmission of knowledge, seen as the essential role of the academic and of higher education, are esteemed (Newton, 2002). If the success of the bottom-up and middle-out approaches of managing change depends on the identity and culture of academic staff, then applying a sensemaking theory to understanding leadership in change management among academics assumes higher explanatory power.

Change in HEIs occurs because of expectations from different stakeholders of higher education as well as modifications in the legitimating idea of the university (Gumport, 2000; Newby,2003). The consequences of these changes on HEIs, particularly the academics within them (Deem, 1998; Brennan and David, 2010), indicate the usefulness of exploring how academics make sense of change. It is useful because change in HEIs causes anxiety and loss for academics (Lane,2007), which triggers a process of interpretation: sensemaking. Sensemaking is an ongoing accomplishment to create order and make sense of events retrospectively (Weick, 1993). In organisations, it is concerned with answering the question: “How does something become an event for organisational members? What is the meaning of an event?” It captures the realities of flow, transience, unfolding, emergence, reaccomplishment, equivocality and agency (Weick *et al.*, 2005 pg 410). Analysing the meaningconstruction process of organisational actors leads to a greater understanding of the responses to organisational change.

Gioia and Chittipeddi’s (1991) seminal study of sensemaking in a university, the nature of strategic change, and the CEO's role in initiating strategic change have been crucial to studies of sensemaking. Their study focused on interpretations of the president and his role in managing the change process. They analysed the organisational leaders' process of initiating strategic change, using an ethnographic approach with data based on interactions with senior university management, such as the President and Vice-president/Provost as the core participants. Demonstrating the university president's involvement in the process of sensemaking, they show that sensemaking comprises two components. The two components, sensemaking and sensegiving, occur in an iterative, sequential way.

Sensemaking of organisational change and managing change can be interpreted as a period of understanding the direction of change objectives and how it aligns or dissociates with the organisation's system of meaning and its effect on the organisation. Sensegiving involves the actions associated with attempts to influence the meaning constructions of other actors to align with the preferred view of the organisation.

Implementing change in HEIs creates occasions for sensemaking (Eckel and Kezar, 2003). Certain strategies stimulate sensemaking, such as senior administrative support, collaborative leadership, and vision or robust design (Kezar, 2002) for managing or guiding organisational change. Such strategies allow actors of change to construct the meaning of the change to their identities, roles, and modifications to accepted definitions of institutional practices, such as ways of viewing students. Kezar (2002) studied multiple universities with varied strategies for managing change on their rate of successful change implementation. The universities with reports of achieving organisational change outcomes were those that provided opportunities for sensemaking (Kezar, 2002). Furthermore, they showed that sensemaking should be sustained from inception to completion of the change process (Kezar, 2013).

Sensemaking studies have examined the strategies and mechanisms for creating sensemaking (Gioia and Chittipeddi, 1991; Gioia *et al.*, 2006; Kezar, 2013). They adopt a predominantly leader-centric view. Degn (2015) analyses academics' decision-making mechanisms in top managerial positions in HEIs as they respond to pressures for organisational change. They link the sensemaking of academic managers to concerns of context, identity, and enactment. The leaders-centric view is problematic as Sonenshein (2010) has demonstrated how the visible narratives of change reflect the combined narratives of the different stakeholders of organisational change.

Research question 2 of this thesis, "What resources do academics use to construct an understanding of change in HEIs, and how do these resources shape their construction of reality?" builds on and extends the findings of Kezar (2002) using data from academics in UK universities. It utilises data from frontline academics and manager academics in contrast to Kezar's (2002) study, which utilises data from academics responsible for leading the change. It provides a more comprehensive view of how strategies for managing change foster sensemaking and influences the interpretation and actions of academics experiencing change. This is significant because differences in organisational positions and

professional and personal histories influence the pathways or issues which compel sensemaking (Maitlis, 2005).

## Chapter Summary

This chapter provided an overview of approaches to studying and understanding organisational change. It started by differentiating foundations to studies of change into traditional and contemporary approaches and highlighted studies significant for conceptualising the present research and its contribution to sensemaking and change scholarship. The sensemaking perspective stands out for its ability to explain the relationship between individuals and different perceptions and the outcomes of change processes because it focuses on their development of meaning. It promotes organisations as founded on processes and assists in understanding the complex and dynamic ways organisational actors make their experience sensible. Meaning is subjective and influenced by the conditions of actors' goals (Gioia and Chittipeddi, 1991). Therefore, exploring organisational sensemaking can explain how unanticipated outcomes emerge during implementing planned organisational change (Balogun, 2006).

The thesis seeks to expand knowledge of the dynamics of sensemaking in HEIs by making explicit the interpretation and meaning construction of academics in universities implementing organisational change. It aims to achieve this by exploring the factors academics reference and how they interact as academics construct their realities and enact change in HEIs. The view of this thesis guiding this aim is that the different actors of change are participants and co-constructors in the change process. It echoes the stance that organisational change is an interpretative process in which change leaders and change recipients create and shape change outcomes (Balogun, 2006).

This thesis addresses three areas which stand out for further research in the large and stilldeveloping field of sensemaking in HEIs. Despite the studies of sensemaking in HEIs, there is a limited investigation of sensemaking and change in HEIs from academics perspectives. Change in HEIs requires sensemaking, a process of meaning construction and reformulation of existing understandings. Studies such as Sonenshein (2010) demonstrate the interaction between changemanager and change-recipient perspectives. However. Most studies remain manager-oriented and underestimate these dynamics. Although Bien and Sassen (2020) implicate the values



of academia in sensemaking, this is considered from leaders' perspective. This thesis therefore seeks to analyse how MA and FA academics make meaning and interpret their organisational life in HEIs by exploring the process involved in developing new understandings of organisational reality during periods of turbulence.

Second, while it has been recognised that the sensemaking process includes antecedents, content and outcomes, these have not been combined and their mechanisms explored in one study. The gaps explored in this thesis is predicated on the assumption that cognitive and discursive factors shape interpretation and which this thesis presents as sensemaking resources. These antecedents and content interact to generate varied sensemaking outcomes. This thesis aims to analyse the combination of the cognitive underpinnings of sensemaking and its definition among individual scholars as a discursive process to examine the factors which shape sensemaking and how these elements or resources interact and develop into a sensemaking process.

Third, while there has been conceptual support for the varied role of context in sensemaking and the dynamics of change in organisations and HEIs, there have been limited empirical studies to support this (Balogun *et al.*, 2015). This thesis seeks to fill this gap by including context as a sensemaking resource for academics and examining how this influences the nuances of meaning construction.

The gaps identified above correspond to the thesis research questions outlined below. Investigating these areas responds to calls to reimagine sensemaking and develop this field of study.

**RQ1.** How do different academic change actors conceptualise organisational change and managing change in UK HEIs?

**RQ2.** What resources do academics use to construct an understanding of change in HEIs and how do these resources shape their construction of reality?

**RQ3.** How do institutional contexts influence academics construction of change in HEIs?

The next chapter explains this thesis's conceptual framework for understanding academic sensemaking of change in HEIs in light of the above gaps.



## CHAPTER 3 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK : SENSEMAKING RESOURCES

### Introduction

This chapter discusses the conceptual framework of this thesis, sensemaking resources. It explains the rationale for adopting this terminology for the factors that shape sensemaking. The chapter then links this to the broader sensemaking literature. It begins by exploring extant approaches to the factors that shape sensemaking. Next, it discusses the constructs that characterise the sensemaking resources that make up the conceptual framework.

### 3.1 SENSEMAKING RESOURCES

Maitlis and Sonenshein (2010) definition of sensemaking as “.. the bracketing of cues from the environment, and the interpretation of those cues based on salient frames to develop plausible meaning” underlines the importance of understanding the factors which shape this process. Scholars suggest organisational and individual contexts such as structures, cultures, and relationships shape and are shaped by sensemaking. Other factors identified in the literature include context, language, identity, cultural assumptions or interpretive schemes, emotion, predispositions to attribute causality to self, others’ interpretation, politics, and technology (Louis, 1980; Weick, 1995; Sandberg and Tsoukas, 2015). This treatment implies that the meanings academics or change actors construct of change initiatives are conditioned by contextual boundaries, such as structures, cultures, and relationships. Sandberg and Tsoukas (2015) review of existing studies suggests that less than 10% of studies regard these factors as sensemaking resources. The outcome of the literature review of the present study, where the majority depict these as triggers for sensemaking, supports their finding. A limited number of scholars such as Gephart (1993) explicitly use the term “resources” for sensemaking.

A literature search of sensemaking in organisations indicates that most studies (e.g. Balogun *et al.*, 2015) analyse this concept without explicitly applying the word in their research. These studies appear concerned with the “how” questions, excluding the “why” question. Vlaar *et al.* (2006)

explicate the significance of sensemaking resources as they analyse formalization as *a facilitator* of sensemaking in inter-organisational relationships following the combination of two organisations.

They focus on the mechanisms through which formalization shapes sensemaking in such instances. Bean and Eisenberg (2006) use the term “frames” in examining the sensemaking of members of an organisation undergoing a shift to nomadic work practices. They describe these as stabilising anchors which enable actors produce meaning about change. Weick (1995 pg 111) denotes resources for sensemaking in terms of substances of sensemaking: Ideology- vocabularies of society; Third-order controls which are vocabularies of the organisation; Paradigms which are vocabularies of work; Theories of action which are vocabularies of coping; Tradition which are vocabularies of predecessors; and Stories which are vocabularies of experience.

This thesis argues the distinction between the term resources and factors encapsulates Weick’s (1995 pg 14) explanation of sensemaking as a process that involves a higher level of engagement by the sense-maker better. Phrasing these factors as resources denote organisational members use these factors consciously and deliberately for their sensemaking (Sandberg and Tsoukas, 2015). In other words, using the term “resource for sensemaking” implies an active rather than a passive use of the factors to shape sensemaking.

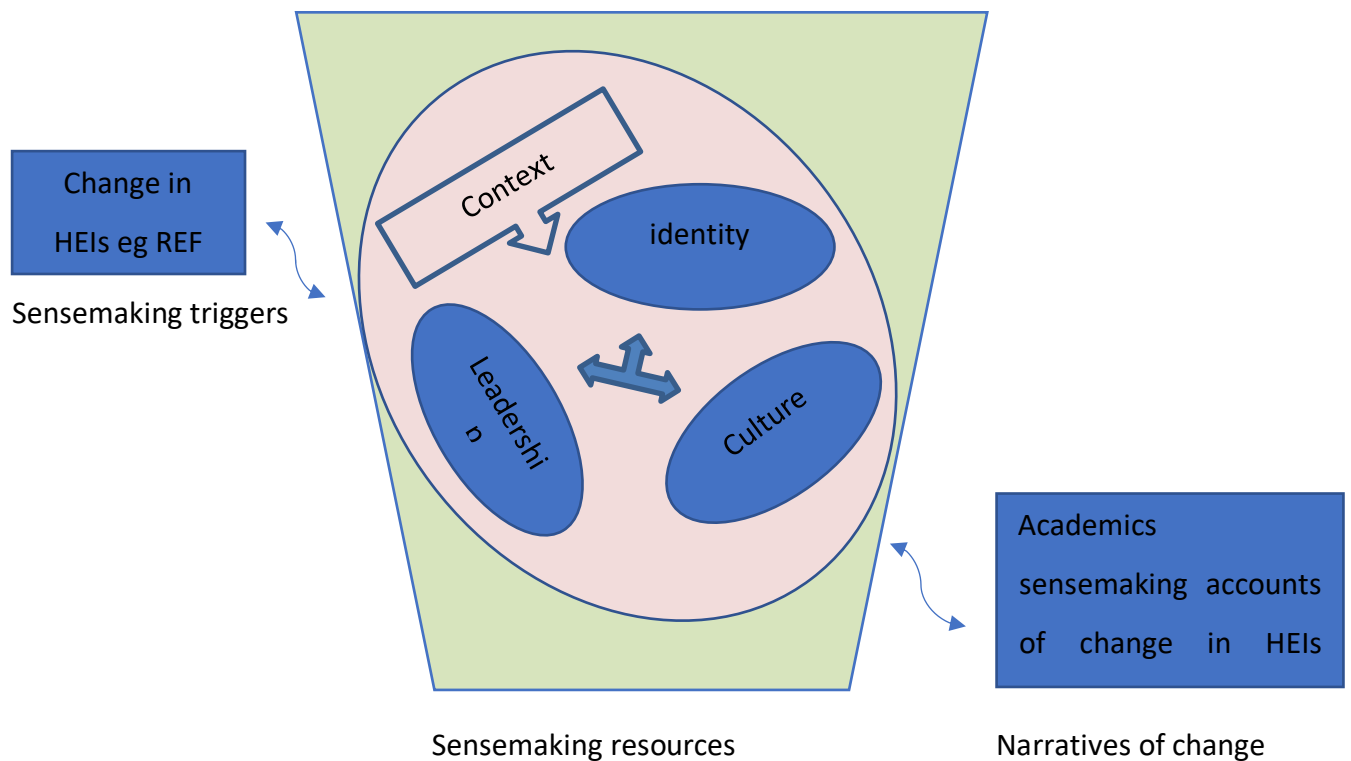
Exploring resources for sensemaking involves examining the frames or structures actors draw on as they construct and make events sensible (Weick, 1995). This thesis bases its argument to describe these factors as resources for sensemaking on the analysis of Gephart’s (1993) explanation of sensemaking. He suggests organisational members use two forms of interpretative schemes as to interpret and construct meaning about organisational events. The first is collective entities, which include organisation, the second is individual entities which include selves. Organisational entities comprise the organisation’s needs, the rules for the members of the organisation, the structure of the organisation. In contrast, individual entities indicate how individuals are aligned or fit into the organisation. This study suggests this distinction represents the two substantial components of sensemaking: the enacted environment and the actors who enact the environment. By making this differentiation, this thesis aims to establish the process of interaction between the environment and the actors immersed in change.

Three components from Gephart's (1993) definition of sensemaking are critical to the present study and integrated into the conceptual assumptions of this study regarding sensemaking resources. It is affected by personal characteristics, including an understanding of the causal effects of others and self. It occurs through social interactions, or in other words, is affected by the interpretation of others, and it is bounded by institutional context. In her study, she refers to these as the resources used for sensemaking. This study adopts this terminology and, in subsequent sections, discusses the conceptual framework and the constituents of the framework.

### 3.2 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This thesis's conceptual framework (fig 1) revolves around sensemaking resources and their instrumental role in determining academics' interpretation of change in HEIs. The conceptual framework articulates the cognitive and discursive factors that interact to shape sensemaking. It aims to link these concepts, making their interactions explicit and explaining the sensemaking process. In this way, it will lead to a contribution of knowledge in the field of sensemaking field. The framework considers three main assumptions: first, by recognising organisations as discursively constructed and change as a product of the discursive interactions of actors. Secondly, it recognises the role of cognitive structures in sensemaking and the function of discursive practices in acquiring and developing such cognitive structures by organisational actors. Thirdly, it incorporates the Weicken view implying a nested relationship between discourse and sensemaking. A few scholars implement this stance by adopting a discursive perspective of sensemaking (Abolafia, 2010, Balogun *et al.*, 2014). For example, Balogun *et al.* (2014) suggest examining the identity of strategists and change agents and how other actors perceive them strengthens the applicability of sensemaking. They adopt this approach based on a prior study (Balogun *et al.*, 2011), highlighting the cognitive aspects of sensemaking and the relationship between discourse, cognition and action.

The diagram below (fig 1) shows the resources for sensemaking and how they sit between the triggers of sensemaking which characterise the beginning of the sensemaking process, and the accounts of sensemaking, the outcomes of sensemaking.



*Fig 1 Conceptual framework of meaning construction*

Fig 1 shows this thesis's conceptual framework. Change in HEIs triggers a search for the meaning of these events and response to these events. Actors continually construct organisations through their actions and interpretations of their actions and that of others. To interpret the change, academic change actors consciously utilise specific resources to shape their meaning construction. Culture, leadership, context and identity are the resources that shape meaning construction. Academics draw on any of the constructs-identity, culture or leadership. They are presented in blue in the conceptual framework (fig 1), as there is an assumption of a certain level of heterogeneity of these constructs across MA and FA academics. The thesis, therefore, makes the following proposition:

**Proposition 1.** Manager-academics and front-line academics will utilise a combination of cognitive and discursive components as resources for creating meaning of change in HEIs

In Fig 1 above, Context is presented in a different colour to echo the stance that MA and FA academics' constructions change relative to the context, resulting in multiple descriptions (Czarniawska, 2014, pg 6). The following proposition emerges to demonstrate this relationship

Proposition 2: P2: Academics' narratives of change will be shaped by the expected context of their respective institution.

The final element of the framework is the interpretation that emerges as academics filter the cues from change through the resources. As these interactions occur, accounts emerge that explain and understand the change and guide the subsequent action of academics. These accounts become the outcomes of MA and FA sensemaking in the form of narratives of change. Consequently, the thesis proposes that:

Proposition 3: Manager-academics and front-line academics will produce divergent narratives using the sensemaking resources

### **3.2.1 CONSTITUENTS OF THE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

Sensemaking is primarily about creating meaning, and this thesis suggests that academics utilise certain constructs or frames of reference as resources to interpret change in HEIs. These constructs/resources are:

1. Leadership,
2. Context,
3. Identity
4. Culture

The researcher selected these constructs on the assumption that they reflect the evaluation of sensemaking developed by Weick (1995). Context reflects sensemaking as extracted by cues. Leadership reflects both the contextual and social property of sensemaking, while identity incorporates sensemaking as grounded in identity construction. Gioia *et al.* (2006) study demonstrates the importance of identity and context as resources for interpreting change. They identify a sequence of change processes or strategies and describe these in terms of the progress of organisational change. This thesis argues that the strategies allude to the properties of sensemaking.

Weick *et al.* (2005) adopted a comparative approach in highlighting the properties of sensemaking by describing the actions of a nurse faced with a patient who unexpectedly and quickly went into what she presumed to be a critical condition.

The constructs selected also represent the forces or processes which shape sensemaking; social, political and cultural (Maitlis and Christianson, 2014). In addition, they acknowledge the mutual interaction between the cognitive and discursive constituents of sensemaking, which Brown *et al.* (2015) suggest is absent in recent sensemaking studies. These correspond to the assumptions of an approach which construes social, political and cultural dimensions as forces which shape the development of meaning.

It is essential to highlight that the approach of this thesis differs in use from other scholars. Higher education literature identifies leadership and culture as facets of structure that form the institution's context. Sensemaking literature also identifies culture as an aspect of structure and, similar to higher education organisational studies, is part of the institution's context. Balogun *et al.* (2015) categorise context as relational and evaluative context, represented by leadership and culture, respectively.

Research of the sensemaking process in a university by Hong and Lao (2006) suggests experience influences the sensemaking of actors in a university. Because of this significance, this thesis suggests that academics draw on these constructs as resources for making sense of change. They include culture, leadership and context and identity as context. These selected resources reflect the understanding that sensemaking analysis can be seen as concerned with the sense-maker, where he/she is located, and his/her interactions. In so doing, it reflects the three critical themes that Sonenshein and Maitlis (2010) indicate influence sensemaking: individual, collective, and institutional influences.

### 3.2.1.1 Leadership As A Sensemaking Resource

Research on the social processes involved with influencing others during organisational change underscores the role of leadership in meaning-making and suggests it is pivotal to successful organisational change (Maitlis, 2005; Hope, 2010). Organisational change is inherently paradoxical, and leaders' understanding of employee needs facilitates shared interpretations that contribute to



outcomes of organisational change. The effect of change in organisations requires leaders to provide sensegiving that enables members to revise their interpretive frames and embrace the change (Longmann *et al.*, 2019). Through their sensegiving, leaders shape how actors understand themselves and comprehend different events by identifying cues and frames and synthesising multiple interpretations (Kraft *et al.*, 2018; Kezar, 2013).

Based on this understanding that leaders direct the interpretations of organisational members, sensemaking studies have focused on leader-sensegiving, with the majority centred on investigating leadership actors and their actions to drive meaning construction towards a specific direction. In organisational change studies, sensegiving denotes influencing change recipients towards a preferred position. Two interrelated concepts appear to underlie evaluations of leader sensegiving. Sensemaking originates from linguistic and communicative processes (Weick, 1995), and leadership is a sensemaking activity achieved through discursive practices in which communication is a central medium for construction and negotiation (Fairhurst and Grant, 2010; Rouleau and Balogun, 2011).

Matlis (2005) examines organisational change in different orchestras and concludes that leader sensegiving is critical to how organisational members make sense of change. They suggest that different levels of sensemaking emerge when leaders shape meaning construction through sensegiving. Balogun and Johnson (2004) highlight the consequences of limited communication from change leaders, represented by senior managers, on the sensemaking of change recipients, represented by middle managers. Lateral mechanisms of sensemaking come to the fore, identified as influenced by negotiation and social interaction processes among peers.

The interaction between construction and communication corresponds to Gioia and Chittipeddi's (1991) sensemaking and sensegiving dimensions of leader interpretation. Sensemaking is concerned with meaning construction and reconstruction by leaders to develop a meaning framework for understanding the nature of planned organisational change. In contrast, sensegiving attempts to influence 'the meaning construction of others toward a preferred redefinition of organisational reality' (Gioia and Chittipeddi, 1991, p. 442).

Discursive activities for sensemaking through which change leaders influence the meaning construction of other change actors as performing the conversation and setting the scene (what to say and whom to say it to). The discursive activities are associated with the sense-givers knowledge of the organisational context, symbolic and verbal representations, and sociocultural systems. Thus,

leadership is presented as a relational construct since the mechanism of influence is affected by their knowledge of and relationship with other change actors (Rouleau and Balogun, 2011). In change management literature, leaders exemplify change agents who are an essential aspect of the sensegiving -sensemaking dynamic (Gioia and Chittipeddi, 1991). Therefore they are integral to how sensemaking about change develops. Balogun *et al.* (2015) represent the influence of those managing the change on the sensemaking of recipients as a relational context involving evaluations of those managing the process and the nature of relationships with those individuals.

Successful sensemaking and sensegiving rely on the leader's knowledge of and use of meaningful contextual elements in framing and relating the change message (Rouleau and Balogun, 2011). Multiple goals characterise universities: the focus on either research or teaching by academic staff, the recent increasing trend towards income generation and entrepreneurship and the autonomy of the academic (Enders and Musselin, 1998; Blackmore and Sachs, 2000). This stance supports Marshall's (2010) assertion that the awareness of the dynamics and culture of the organisation enables leaders to create systems which provide resources for change.

Foldy *et al.* (2008) and Whittle *et al.* (2015) explore notions of leadership and sensemaking of change by examining how leaders contribute to the development of meaning by the way they frame organisational issues to achieve a cognitive shift among their members. Leadership is, therefore, equated with meaning construction through the concept of framing. Framing is "the ability to shape the meaning of a subject—usually the situation at hand—to judge its character and significance through the meanings we include and exclude as well as those we emphasise when communicating" (Fairhurst, 2011 *in* Fairhurst and Grant, 2010). They define the questions we ask and the solutions we find ( Berger, 2014 *in* Bolman and Deal, 2017). The frames employed in constructing the meaning of events do not develop in a vacuum but are a function of sensemaking (Fairhurst, 2011, pg 5).

Gioia and Chittipeddi (1991), who investigate a strategic change in a university, suggest sensemaking is a mechanism for interpreting organisational change employed by the university CEO. Their findings discussed in a previous section are particularly relevant to the present thesis. It is one of the few empirical studies involving multiple perspectives and illuminates the effect of the interaction interpretation of change from diverse actors on organisational processes. They suggest that meaning construction in change management implicates various stakeholders and comprises two iterative,

sequential components; sensemaking and sensegiving. Sensemaking involves producing meaning for oneself, and sensegiving involves attempts to influence the meaning constructions of other actors.

It is important to note that there is often a lack of differentiation between "leaders" and "leadership" within sensemaking literature. Instead, they employ "leader sensegiving" to describe attempts to influence meaning construction and highlight leaders' characteristics, behaviours, and tasks. Studies apply the terms "managers" and "leaders" interchangeably (e.g. Longmann *et al.*, 2019) and focus on their roles and behaviours to drive meaning from an influencing perspective. For some, leadership is seen as sensegiving and sensegiving as a leadership activity (Foldy *et al.*, 2008; Gilstrap *et al.*, 2016), while for others, "leadership is sensemaking in action" (Pye, 2005 pg 32). This approach reflects the emphasis on the role of managers in achieving organisational change (Sonenshein and Dholakia, 2012), which implicates leaders as actors who manage meanings that account for the outcomes of organisational change. Leaders, as sense-givers, author the conversation and provide alternate meanings to those held by the followers (Shotter, 1993; Thayer, 1988 *in* Weick, 1995). They present this as a sensegiving- sensemaking dialectic of agent and recipient, respectively.

However, as demonstrated in the preceding sections, which identify change as emanating from the co-construction of different change actors, this idea of co-construction remains unexplored. This thesis suggests the focus on the sense-giving of senior managers or leaders to shape the interpretations of organisational members projects, these members as passive. Criticisms of "giving" sense to organisational members have grown in recent studies (Logemann *et al.*, 2019). Longmann *et al.* (2019) allude to this different way of thinking about leadership when they suggest that leader sensegiving provides organisational members with form- a way of making sense. This gap provides the rationale for adopting leadership as a sensemaking resource.

This study promotes leadership as a sensemaking resource based on a social-constructivist understanding of leadership. Leadership is an interactive process of successfully structuring experience and shaping reality that leads to organised action (Smircich and Morgan, 1982; Crevani *et al.*, 2010). It is a product of sociohistorical and collective meaning-making, co-constructed and continually negotiated through a complex interaction between leadership actors, designated or emergent leaders, managers, or followers (Fairhurst and Grant, 2010). The seminal work of Smircich and Morgan (1982) on leadership to achieve organisational change implicates power processes in meaning-making. Their findings suggest leadership emerges from the constructions of the "leader"

and the "led" through a process of negotiation where the "led" surrender the power to shape reality to the "leader" (Smircich and Morgan, 1982). In other words, power is embedded in enacting leadership (Pye, 2005). Power is the ability to influence and define reality (Pye, 2005; Clegg, 2006 in Schildt *et al.*, 2020; Lunenberg, 2012), suggesting this function may account for the associations between leadership and sensemaking of organisational change.

While studies denote sensemaking as a leadership attribute (Maitlis and Lawrence, 2007), few explicitly identify leadership as a factor that shapes sensemaking. As such, this thesis makes essential observations from broader studies of leader sensegiving and manager sensemaking. The table below summarises some vital concepts of leadership and sensemaking underpinning this thesis's position that leadership is a sensemaking resource.

**Table 3: Links between Leadership and Sensemaking**

| Leadership  | Intersection of Leadership and sensemaking                              | Sensemaking   |
|---|---|---|
| <p>Leadership involves sensegiving as a fundamental leadership activity used to shape understandings and accounts of issues by identifying issues and cues which are important</p> <p>(Maitlis, 2005)</p> | <p>Assimilating cues from a variety of sources to construct meaning</p> | <p>Sensemaking includes how people in the social context of other actors engage ongoing events, extracting salient cues to make plausible sense</p> <p>(Weick, 1995;2001)</p> |
| <p>Leadership is a sensemaking activity achieved through discursive practices</p> <p>(Rouleau and Balogun,</p>  | <p>Using communicative processes to arrive at a particular meaning</p>  | <p>Sensemaking is accomplished through linguistic and communicative processes</p> <p>(Weick, 1995).</p>   |

|  |   |  |
|--|---|--|
| <p>2011), in which communication plays a central role of communication as a medium for construction and negotiation (Fairhurst and Grant, 2010).</p>   |   |  |
| <p>Leaders contribute to meaning construction by the way they frame and consolidate multiple interpretations from different stakeholders (Foldy <i>et al.</i>, 2008)</p>   | <p>Leaders can determine which cues are salient and disseminate this to others to shape their sensemaking</p> | <p>Sensemaking includes how people in the social context of other actors engage ongoing events, extracting salient cues to make plausible sense (Weick, 1995;2001)</p>   |
| <p>Leadership is a product of sociohistorical and collective meaningmaking, co-constructed and continually negotiated through a complex interaction between the "leader" and the "led" through a process of negotiation in which the "led" surrender the power to shape their reality to the "leader."<br/>(Fairhurst and Grant, 2010; Smircich and Morgan, 1982).</p> | <p>Leaders and led interact within a power system</p>   | <p>The sensemaking perspective of change indicates outcomes of initiatives are a constructed reality in which power is a critical component of sensegiving-sensemaking; Power is inherent in the enactment of sensemaking (Brown <i>et al.</i>, 2015; Vaara, and Whittington, 2012),</p> |

Source: Researcher The table above demonstrates that there are intersections between leadership and sensemaking. These assumptions contribute to the selection of leadership as a sensemaking resource. This stance denotes outcomes of change initiatives as a constructed reality, in which power is a critical component for shaping the form and content of sensemaking processes (Schildt *et al.*, 2020). On this basis, sensegiving and sensemaking are enactment processes shaped by the situation's embedded power relations (Brown *et al.*, 2015; Vaara, and Whittington, 2012). The present study argues that some of this ability is a function of the culture and context of HEIs characterised by high levels of autonomy. Baran and Scott (2010) indicate that the organisational structure, the context influences the framing process. On the other hand, Humphreys *et al.* (2012) link forms of sensemaking using leadership to historical context. The next two sections explore culture and context as constructs that guide sensemaking.

### 3.2.2.2 Culture As a Resource for Sensemaking of Change

Culture is a critical factor shaping sensemaking as members apply cultural frames or schemes to create meaning about interactions and organisational issues (Ivanova-Gongne, 2015). Organisational culture influences decision-making patterns (Shrivastava, 1985) and is delineated as one of the critical aspects which influence the interpretation process of change.

Nevertheless, sensemaking scholars tend to neglect culture in their analysis of sensemaking (Brown *et al.*, 2015). Instead, scholars have highlighted the role of interpretive schemes in shaping the meaning constructions of organisational actors. Scholars such as Balogun *et al.* (2015a; 2015b) who evaluate culture outside the notion of interpretive schemes, do so as a facet of context. While there are merits to this approach, as it takes cognizance of Weber and Glynn (2006) stance that the role of context goes beyond constraining interpretation, it also has its limitations. In HEIs, both iterations as interpretive schemes or as a facet of context are dimensions of culture but do not represent the totality of culture. Instead, these combine to form the culture observed in HEIs.

The present study argues that the different attributes of culture influence its identification as a resource for sensemaking. Culture explicitly focuses on shared meaning, values and norms as sources of collective identity and commitment. Arising from this, it signals how to act and feel by emphasising norms and values to actors. One of the properties of sensemaking, the social dimension, which

includes the organisation's rules, symbols, routines and language (Mills, 2010) is comparable to the characteristics of culture identified above.

Culture is a group-level and individual-level phenomenon that influences the interpretative schemes for evaluating change. At the group level, it is manifested in organisational stories and sagas: the artefacts of culture. Based on the view that culture at the individual level is revealed and maintained by the sensemaking of organisational actors, Harris (1995) suggests the concept of schemas explains the influence of culture on organisational practices. At the individual level, it exposes the mechanism through which culture influences sensemaking. Harris (1995) observes that culture is a manifestation of congruent salient schemas that direct and are directed by sensemaking following interaction with other entities.

Schema is central to both culture and sensemaking. Schemas are cognitive structures or organising frameworks that mediate interpretation, directing the acquisition and synthesis of information and acting as an information repository (McVee *et al.*, 2005; Harris, 1995; Bartunek and Moch, 1987). Schemata can develop from individual and collective interests and give experience form and meaning. (Bartunek and Moch, 1987). In other words, as the underlying structures which guide the interpretation of different facets of organisational life, schemas facilitate sensemaking by providing the framework for interpretation: perceptions of self and role within the organisation, relationships with others and organisational events. As a result, schema's have been described as data reduction devices (Bartunek and Moch, 1987): they guide the recognition of cues and what constitutes importance. They produce shared meanings that are maintained and disseminated through myths and stories. Despite the enduring nature of schemas, they are amenable to modification by the sensemaking of novel events. (Bartunek and Moch, 1987; Harris, 1995; Labianca *et al.*, 2000 in Balogun and Johnson, 2004). Based on this correlation, a transactional relationship exists between culture and sensemaking, mediating each other (McVee *et al.*, 2005; Harris, 1995).

Investigating the individual factors which influence meaning construction, Lockett *et al.* (2014) suggest that an actor's disposition affects the sensemaking of organisational change. Their analysis suggests a conceptual overlap between dispositions and culture. Dispositions are defined as habitualized know-how and enduring ways of seeing and believing, often existing at the unconscious and taken-for-granted level (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992 in Lockett *et al.*, 2014). As such, dispositions act as a form of schemata because they have a structuring quality that helps to reproduce patterns

of behaviour over time. By juxtaposing that definition and the definition of culture, the findings from their study are relevant to explaining the influence of culture on the sensemaking of change.

The analysis of culture is a search for meaning (Geertz, 1993 pg 5 *in* Silver, 2003), although research on organisational culture has predominantly neglected this perspective (Silver, 2003). This function of culture suggests that culture and sensemaking are linked. In his analysis of the actions and meanings of the actors involved in a crisis, Gephart *et al.* (1990) suggest that culture affects sensemaking by shaping the interpretation of events and strategies for action. Balogun and Johnson (2004) support his stance by articulating the significance of culture for middle manager sensemaking from three divisions in their case study organisations. They attribute the restructuring process's outcomes to the divisions' different cultures.

In this sense, culture lends itself to analysis as a resource for sensemaking. Notions of the relationship between schema, culture and sensemaking inform the present study's view of culture as a construct that shapes meaning. By reflecting on other actors' normative and discursive influence, it recognises the impact of social contexts (Chatman and O'Reilly, 2016). These characteristics are encapsulated in Weick's (1979 *in* Louis, 1980) suggestion of culture as a resource for sensemaking by acting as a map by which members enact their meanings in a specific territory.

Culture consists of the characteristics of individuals and groups, which account for the rationalities that shape how actors determine the sensibility and meaning of events. Thus, analysing actors' cultural perspectives can explain their sensemaking. However, studies implicating culture in the sensemaking of change are sparse. Ivanova-Gongne (2018) attributes this to two reasons. The first is that organisational studies adopt functionalist approaches, and the second is that they take this for granted. It supports the observations from studies reviewed, which, while highlighting the relevance of culture, do not systematically address how this links with actors' accounts of change. The present study seeks to address this by identifying and analysing narratives of change and the way culture organizes these narratives.

Culture is a critical factor that influences discourses in organisations. As sensemaking is a dynamic process, culture interacts with aspects of context to shape the meanings academics create of change in HEIs. Arguments that the success of the change process in HEIs depends on the extent to which they violate or enhance cultural norms (e.g. Kezar and Eckel, 2002) implicate culture in enactments of change. Using a case study of three universities in the change process, Kezar and Eckel (2002;2013)



investigated how the different universities exhibiting different cultural typologies interpreted and applied change implementation strategies. The results of their study indicate that the interpretation and application of activities varied according to the organisation's culture. Zhu and Engels (2014) and Kezar and Eckel (2002) suggest that actors make sense of change within a culture to determine its salience with an existing schema. This interaction determines the actors' response to change. Weick (1995) argues that in studying culture as a resource for sensemaking, attention to process is significant because the content of culture is heterogeneous and can be localised. In other words, cultural meanings for events can vary between groups and individuals. For example, perceptions of university culture for academics in the business can be distinct from the judgments of university culture of academics in the medical sciences, which will influence their meanings constructions about the introduction of quality measures as a type of change for HEIs. (Weick,1995). Organisations are discursive, and as actors construct and negotiate meanings through their interactions, these negotiations are affected by their different experiences, interests, values and responsibilities. These negotiation leads to differences in interpretation, evaluation, and how members subsequently enact these interpretations.

Analysis of organisations as cultural-cognitive institutions is an under-theorized component of current sensemaking theories (Jordan and Mitterhofer, 2010). Brown *et al.* (2015) suggest there is a seeming reluctance of sensemaking scholars to debate the role of culture in sensemaking. Except for Harris (1994) and despite findings on the relevance of sociocultural systems to the enactment of sensemaking from scholars such as Rouleau and Balogun (2011) and Gephart (1993), there is a lack of understanding of the process through which culture influences sensemaking of change. There are calls to extend the application of cultural issues in sensemaking (Maitlis and Christianson, 2014). Therefore, one of the objectives of the present study is to explore how culture is utilised as a resource for the sensemaking of organisational change by academics in HEI's. This thesis relies on the following assumptions from the literature review. The first is that the significance of culture for change is linked to organisational members' perception of the impact of organisational change on underlying organisational and individual belief systems. The second is that organisational change events trigger sensemaking processes within individual organisational actors.

### 3.2.2.3 Identity As A Factor Shaping Sensemaking Of Change

Understanding identity is essential because it forms the basis of sensemaking (Weick, 1995, pg 77). Identity represents a referential description that enables an actor to have a sense of who it is, who other actors are, and the association between the actors, providing them with an understanding of the social or organisational landscape and thus allowing them to situate themselves within that landscape. The referential description offers cognitive, emotional, behavioural, and social boundaries that enable actors to comprehend and negotiate social worlds (Ashforth *et al.*, 2008; Petriglieri *et al.*, 2019). Under this notion, identity shapes how actors perceive organisational processes such as change programs and justify their reactions or actions during those change processes. While there is a consensus among organisational scholars that identity answers “who am I or who are we”, there are varying positions on its construction, ranging from the affective, the discursive, and socio-cognitive (Brown, 2020 pg 3-4). This thesis views identity as socially constructed using shared expectations and cultural norms and encompasses the fundamental, uniquely descriptive or enduring characteristics of the individual or organisation (Humphreys and Brown, 2002; Ibarra and Petriglieri, 2010). It includes the integration of individual identity with social or institutional identity (Weick, 2005). Who we are shapes how we view the world, defined and redefined through experiences and interactions with others. Thus, identity is not static but evolves or is in flux. It is concerned with actors’ existential questions through which the world becomes intelligible to them (Weick, 1995, pg 14). People make sense of their work activities under the influence of their individual-specific needs for self-enhancement (self-esteem), self-efficacy and selfconsistency (Erez & Earley, 1993 *in* Brown *et al.*, 2008), impression management, and attributional egotism (Brown *et al.*, 2008).

This thesis predicates its conceptualisation of identity as a factor that shapes understanding and actions around change on definitions of sensemaking. One of the properties of sensemaking, “grounded in identity construction”, Identity is central to the process of meaning construction (Weick, 2005 pg 20). The central argument for this stance is Weick's (2005 pg 20) statement, “depending on who I am, my definition of what is out there will also change”. This statement implies that the definition of “self” determines the selection of cues, that is, the “authoring” dimension of the “authoring” or “bracketing” and “interpretation” dynamic of sensemaking. Identity shapes how organisational members make sense of themselves through occupational demands and the opportunities and constraints in their institutional environment (Mayson and Barrett, 2017).

According to Gioia (1994), identity determination is one of the initial stages of sensemaking. Cornelissen (2012) finds that individuals create sensemaking accounts using two dimensions: commitment to role and activation of social accountability pressures. Similarly, Sonenshein and Dholakia (2012) found that commitment and identification affect the production of meaning.

Organisational change impacts members' identity (Smollan and Pio, 2016), and academics are not exempt from these threats to identity as one of the consequences of change in HEIs is a modification of identity (Harris, 2005). Threats to identity, such as organisational change, trigger sensemaking as members try to understand the implications of the change for and to their identity. Other conceptions suggest that identity produces and is a product of sensemaking (Skalen, 2004). It is through constructions of identity that members interpret and act on events and experiences (Weick, 1995, pg 21; Maitlis and Christianson, 2014). The stance of the present study is that identity shapes interpretation for academics in HEIs. In the context of change in HEIs, which has been identified as driven by external pressures, identity assumes a central role in sensemaking.

Identity analysis is limited in sensemaking scholarship and an underdeveloped area of study (Gioia *et al.*, 2010 in Colville *et al.*, 2013). This finding is unexpected since identity and plausibility differentiate sensemaking from cognitive studies of organisations (Weick *et al.*, 2005). Additionally, the analysis of identity contributes to understanding the fundamental levels of sensemaking (Gioia *et al.*, 2013) suggest that.

Identities in/ and for sensemaking are multiple and shifting (Weick, 1995 pg 59,61). The present study applies a view of identity which integrates organisational identity with individual identity. When individuals author their reality, they integrate salient concepts of their organisation in their selfdefinitions (Humphreys and Brown, 2002). Similar integrations of identity are visible in explanations by scholars such as Weick (1995) and Smollan and Pio (2016). By adopting this approach, all salient aspects of identity utilised by the participants for their sensemaking will be captured and analysed in the present study.

#### 3.2.2.4 Context as a Sensemaking Resource

This thesis promotes context as another resource academics use to construct change meanings in HEIs. It acts as a resource that influences the recognition of cues, extraction and interpretation of cues (Weick, 1995, pg 51). Context includes aspects of the organisation and its actors, such as structures, cultures, relationships, resources, and markets (Balogun, 2015).

As one of the seminal scholars in the field, the work of Karl Weick continues to be a reference point. Using discussions of indexicality, (Weick, 1995, pg 53) explains how context affects the interpretation of meaning. In interpreting the extracted cues, context plays a crucial role as cues can have several meanings, but context determines to a large extent which meaning is adopted. Some scholars criticise Weick's notions of context. Consequently, they recommend expanding the scope of research questions on the role of context in sensemaking. Without supporting or contradicting the views of these scholars, it is essential to observe that Weick does not identify context as a property of sensemaking. He uses it to explain that sensemaking is "focused on and extracted by cues".

Criticisms of the "Weicken" perspective include its limitations in demonstrating the influence of organisational structure, including rules and formative contexts, on sensemaking activities (Mills, 2003 pg3). The insufficient attention to the role of social, historical and institutional contexts promotes a partial view of the cultural cognition of organisations. Thus, the scholarship of sensemaking underestimates its embeddedness in social space and time. The skewed analysis of the institutional context in sensemaking is evidence of this limitation. This imbalance includes relegating institutional context to a cognitive constraint which makes some actions unimaginable and others self-evident (Weber and Glynn, 2006).

Weber and Glynn (2006) imply that the relationship between institutional context and sensemaking is more dynamic than the traditional notion of an external constraint which reinforces some actions and excludes others depicted in literature. In addition to acting as cognitive constraints, context may also prime, edit and trigger sensemaking. That is, institutions restrict both opportunities for sensemaking and direct sensemaking. Weber and Glynn's (2006) explanation points to extending the perspective of institutional context to include a role as a resource for sensemaking. Through an analysis based on an underlying assumption of institutions as socially constructed, Weber and Glynn (2006) deconstruct and highlight the contents of institutional context (actors, situations and actions) and, by applying the ideas of social mechanisms, demonstrate additional mechanisms which implicate institutional context in sensemaking. They suggest that when the implicit notions of

institutional context inherent in the sensemaking perspective are made explicit, it accommodates a more diverse role for institutions, including how actors make sense with institutions.

Their conception appears similar to Weick's framework because their adaption demonstrates the capacity of contexts to confine sensemaking. However, their adaptation suggests a weaker mechanism of restraint embedded in non-cognitive institutionalised conceptions. Through "Priming", the constraint is attributable to the immediate or local context, such as the unit, irrespective of broader organisational norms. In "editing", social feedback mechanisms such as the expectations of colleagues and peers act as a source for refining sensemaking. A "triggering" mechanism activates when there are ambiguities in institutionalised expectations, such as differences in conceptions of the nature of the organisation. In the case of HEIs, these differences may concern the underlying discourses of Higher Education. The explanations for these additional mechanisms support this study's arguments that context is a sensemaking resource. A few studies have built on Weber and Glynn's (2006) conceptual portrayal of context.

Rouleau and Balogun (2011) are among the few scholars who investigate how organisational members enact sensemaking through context. However, their study focused on how middle managers enact sensemaking through their knowledge of the organisational context. They suggest that the effective sensemaking of middle managers acting as change leaders depends on the content and application of their knowledge of the organisation's context. They describe the sensemaking activity through which middle managers influence other change actors as discursive competence. Their study identifies personal relationships and symbolic and verbal representations as elements of context that affect sensemaking.

Drawing on the social position concept of field theory and Bourdieu's theory of practice, Lockett *et al.* (2014) explore the influence of individual actors' contexts on the content and process of their sensemaking to explain behaviour during organisational change. Based on a case study of the NHS, they interviewed participants on their motivation for change and rationale or objective for the organisational change. Their findings suggest that sensemaking of change involves three dimensions: the social dimension, disposition and the schema of change. The first dimension, the social dimension, arises from their theoretical framework and comprises economic, social and cultural capital. They found social and cultural capital to be the most influential to sensemaking. Economic capital is associated with controlling finance or other objects directly and immediately convertible

into money and is commonly seen as a significant power source. Social capital emanates from the strength of the relationships with other actors influenced by trust, reciprocity and the perception of understanding other perspectives. Cultural capital relates to knowledge, skills, and possessions, including professional affiliations, which can shape the actors' position in the organisational hierarchy and the symbolic potential to impact reputation. The second dimension partially arises from theory and involves Bourdieu's definition of dispositions. This phenomenon influences the subjective perceptions of an actor's field, often at the unconscious and taken-for-granted level (Bourdieu, 1988, Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992 in Lockett *et al.*, 2014). Their data suggests disposition differentiated into two forms that can co-occur: "profession-centrism" and "allocentrism". "Profession-centrism" is the actor's degree of orientation towards their professional group's interests, while "allocentrism" is the extent to which an actor recognizes the influence of other actors on their ability to enact change. The final dimension, the schema of change, is the frame of reference for understanding and evaluating the change. Sensemaking of change in organisations depends on the levels and patterns of interaction between the three dimensions. Social position influences disposition which in turn affects the schema of change. For example, an actor with homogeneous social capital and a weak disposition toward allocentrism enacts low sensemaking behaviour about opportunity problematizing. This stance means that in the process of change, an actor with a limited relationship with other actors or groups has a greater tendency towards overlooking the influence of these other actors on his/ her ability to implement organisational change. This tendency results in a limited understanding of the dynamics associated with implementing organisational change. Lockett *et al.*'s (2014) analysis of individual context is similar to the findings of Rouleau and Balogun (2011) on the contextual elements for sensemaking. However, in the former, these resources are utilised for sensemaking in the inward direction. In the latter, they are used for sensemaking in the outwards direction (sensegiving).

For the current study with participants who occupy different social positions, this implies that interactions between the origins and extent of social and cultural capital, the disposition of the actors will affect their sensemaking of change and factors which are modified and modify by sensemaking: context, identity leadership and culture. Although the focus of the study by Lockett *et al.* (2014) is change agents, they have implications for the present study. This thesis proposes that this condition may be homogenous across the various actors of change since both contexts are examples of pluralistic organisations. However, there may be variations in the micro-processes.

Another study with senior managers further demonstrates how context shapes sensemaking. They identify categories of context differentiated into local, organisational, relational and interpretative contexts (Balogun *et al.*, 2015). Similarly, Sonenshein (2010) distinguishes context into local and organisational context and demonstrates their relationship with sensemaking of organisational change. His research suggests that while change agent sensemaking is unaffected by time and local context, change recipient sensemaking is affected by time and local context.

Other investigations, for example, Harris (1994), have explored contextual attributes such as motivation and culture, which moderate and are moderated by sensemaking. Rovio-Johansson and Liff (2012) introduce the concept of the social context to describe the organisation's hierarchy. These findings suggest a need to explore the relationship between context and the different actors of change. The present study addresses this gap by exploring the sensemaking of academics enacting different change actor roles. Additionally, using multiple university typologies will study the influence of different institutional contexts on sensemaking. According to Bitnner (1965 *in* Whittle *et al.* 2015), members' behaviour materializes from the "*methodical use of the formal organisation as a scheme of interpretation*". From a sensemaking perspective, it implies that members actively use organisational structures to create meanings for actions. Understanding this relationship requires an analysis to explain how this occurs. Accordingly, the present study examines three different types of universities to explore the various narratives that emerge within that context. Participants' responses draw parallels with their descriptions of why particular meanings apply to their respective HEI.

Prior studies have demonstrated the differences in understanding and application of context and the various ways they influence sensemaking. The limitations of those studies illustrate the need to explore contexts in different types or configurations of organisations. Findings from Gioia *et al.*'s (1994) study of sensemaking of change in an HEI implicates the influence of the organisational context, which in organisational studies definitions include influence relationships and political structure. By expanding Weick's (1995) analysis of the integration of context and sensemaking, context can be demonstrated as integrated into sensemaking through three processes. These are: serving as the building blocks or substance for sensemaking, dynamically guiding and editing action formation and becoming activated when actors encounter sensemaking triggers. Using categories which reflect Burns and Scapens's (2000, p. 8 *in* Börner and Verstegen, 2013) definition of institutions, Weber and Glynn (2006) suggest the content of institutions which form the context that affects sensemaking comprises actors, situations and actions. Within the sensemaking perspective, this

implies that specific actions are expected of certain actors in certain situations. This relationship within the three aspects guides the sensemaking of organisational members.

The next section introduces the outcomes of sensemaking when the resources discussed in the previous sections act on the cues.

### 3.2.3.5 Narratives of Sensemaking

Discursive investigations of sensemaking in organisational change studies frequently involve narrative approaches to illustrate the modified interpretations and discourses used during change implementation (Sonenshein, 2010; Brown *et al.*, 2015). According to Wallemacq and Sims (1998), this practice represents the phenomenological perspective of sensemaking. They suggest that the close association between sensemaking and narrative exists because storytelling occurs in parallel to meaning construction. Individuals use stories to express the paradox of being embedded in a situation and their self-awareness within those circumstances. Furthermore, they access their subjective identities through narratives constructed from available discursive resources (Brown *et al.*, 2008).

Proponents of narrative as sensemaking express its instrumental and constitutive ability (Abolafia, 2010). Sonenshein (2010) provides an example of this capacity using a multi-sited retail company case study. He combines the narrative lens with a sensemaking perspective to investigate the meaning constructions of organisational change by different actors, initiators, and recipients, represented by senior and middle managers and employees, and its effect on change management. Through the concept of strategic ambiguity, he suggests that change initiators view sensemaking and the promotion of discourses of change as strategic tools to enhance positive responses to organisational change initiatives. His study indicates that the rationalization processes of different change actors produce multiple narratives of organisational change, including the possibility that change initiators may simultaneously produce and disseminate contrasting discourses of change to change recipients.

The notions above correspond with views that change is a multi-authored process and its outcomes emanate from the interactions of the different actors of change; change initiators, agents and recipients (Ford *et al.*, 2008; Thomas *et al.*, 2011; Heyden *et al.*, 2017). Surprisingly, most research on



HEIs and non-HEI organisations neglect this interaction or interplay and instead focuses on a single group of actors. Limited studies (e.g., Sonenshein, 2010) explain the interplay between the sensemaking of different change actors by making such multiple perspectives explicit. This finding supports assertions from scholars that a propensity for single-view studies is a shortcoming of sensemaking research. Investigating change in non-HEIs, Luscher and Lewis 2008 argue that few studies examine managerial perspectives. As a scholar of change in HEIs, Kezar (2013) suggests that the position is reversed, and the managerial perspective dominates research.

Gioia and Chittipeddi (1991) highlight the importance of the change agents and initiators, while Sonenshein (2010) demonstrates the significance of change recipients' sensemaking by indicating that change recipients are not passive actors. His study, which involves both the change agents and the recipients, shows how both groups made sense of the change and how these interacted to create the version of organisational change that members finally observed and adopted. Although agents may guide the interpretation of recipients by promoting particular narratives of organisational change, change recipients extend these narratives and produce new narratives using a concurrent sensemaking process.

This interplay is implicit in studies such as those by Balogun (2006), which propose that the actions of senior managers influence sensemaking for middle managers. Their findings indicate that interrecipient or lateral interactions are pivotal for the change process. They mention that their evidence contradicts other studies exploring multiple actors' perspectives, implying vertical and lateral sensemaking have equal significance for the change process. These demonstrate the gap for investigations to highlight the interplay between the sensemaking of change recipients and change agents or managers and employees. The present thesis aims to address this.

Maitlis (2005) study of orchestras is one of the few studies evaluating both change leader and recipient sensegiving. It suggests that leaders' sensemaking behaviours, including statements or activities, interact with other stakeholders' sensemaking to create diverse forms of sensemaking. (minimal, restricted, fragmented, and guided). The level of sensegiving determines the forms of sensemaking to produce different patterns of sensemaking outcomes.

Additionally, some existing studies portray members in managerial roles as change initiators or change agents and assign recipient roles to non-managerial members. Some studies of organisational change among managers (e.g. Balogun, 2004; Luscher and Lewis, 2008) suggest this is an ambiguous

stance. Luscher and Lewis (2008), analysing the challenges of making sense of organisational change, depict managers as recipients of organisational change. Subject to the mandates of top management who design change initiatives, they are also responsible for operationalising these objectives in alignment with senior management mandates. They identify middle managers as situated in what the present study describes as a paradox in their role within the change process, where they are both change agents as well as change recipients.

From the above, multi-level perspectives contribute to a greater understanding of the meanings which exist in organisations. The outcomes of organisational change have been depicted as a coconstruction of the diverse actors of change (Ford *et al.*, 2008; Sonenshein, 2010). Furthermore, this co-authoring can assume different meanings beyond the positive-negative approach to consequences and responses promoted by traditional notions (Sonenshein, 2010). This view corresponds with the idea that organisations consist of competing groups whose joint accounts create reality (Barry *et al.*, 2006). Under this perspective, change narratives are unfolding constructions- progressive translations developing and differing across groups and situations.

Thus, the present thesis examines how academics adopting different change roles make sense of change in HEIs through narratives. It explores the influence of the interplay or interaction of different academic change actors' sensemaking on managing change in HEIs. It extends the finding of Maitlis (2005) by exploring both sensemaking and sensegiving dimensions.

To achieve this, it involves academics occupying middle management positions and those directly in contact with students, termed in this study as Manager academics (MA) and front-line academics (FA), respectively. It explores issues with change which may be specific to either group. It examines if any interaction exists between both groups so that this thesis can contribute to the limited literature in this area.

## Chapter Summary

This chapter addressed the conceptual framework for this thesis. It clarified the application of the term sensemaking resources in HEIs and summarised the justification for conceptualising leadership,

culture, context and identity as resources for sensemaking of change in HEIs by academics. Individually, they correspond to findings within Higher education and change literature. For example, investigating enabling factors of sensemaking through the single university case study, Hong and Lao (2006) suggest leadership influences actors meaning constructions. Their findings inform this thesis's arguments that academics draw on certain constructs as resources that determine their behavioural response to change in HEIs.

The studies reviewed demonstrate two common themes. First, events such as change create ambiguity and uncertainty for organisational actors, which trigger a search for meaning as a response to minimise or remove this uncertainty and equivocality. Second, the construction of meaning and the frames for this construction does not occur in a vacuum (Fairhurst, 2011 pg 5) but is a process influenced by an endless possibility of different factors. Such studies of sensemaking and the factors shaping the sensemaking of change are relevant to the present thesis. These factors, denoted as resources in this thesis, are the main framework for exploring academics' sensemaking of change in HEIs.

The chapter also reviewed the conceptual framework's components and the arguments for choosing them as components. Change in HEIs is then seen as subject to the interpretative and meaning constructions of academics in universities and can differ across institutional contexts. The stance that various constructions of organisational change exist among academics adopting different change actor roles is integral to the sensemaking framework. The terms polyphony and plurivocality suggest the presence of several voices within the organisation. Creating meaning occurs through contestation and interaction with others (Weick, 2005). The idea of multiple perspectives is consistent with the social constructivist view of organisations as polyvocal adopted within this research. This view highlights the interaction and meaning-making of different organisational members and groups.

While reviewing the conceptual framework, the chapter also introduced the thesis propositions. These propositions link the framework's components. They implicate the assumptions of the conceptual framework and the predicted relationships. The outcomes from these propositions will enable this thesis to elucidate MA and FA academics' experience and formulations of change in HEIs. The propositions are:

P1. Manager academics and front-line academics will utilise a combination of cognitive and discursive components as resources for creating meaning of change in HEIs

P2. : Academics' narratives of change will be shaped by the expected context of their respective institution.

P3. Manager academics and front-line academics will produce divergent narratives using the sensemaking resources

The resources which shape meaning construction and constitute the conceptual framework act at the individual and group levels. They can become visible through the interactions of various organisational actors. These propositions will guide the researcher in analysing the interviews of academics participating in the study to identify accounts that indicate their sensemaking of organisational change in universities. The next chapter discusses the methodology used by this thesis.

## **CHAPTER 4 METHODOLOGY**

### **Introduction**

This chapter describes the methodology employed in studying academics' sensemaking of change in HEIs. It begins with an overview of methodological concerns for researchers and then highlights the approaches to studying organisational change. It reviews philosophical assumptions for research in organisations, discussing paradigms, epistemology and ontology and their implications for developing and answering research questions. The present study, grounded on a constructivist philosophy, follows recommendations on the significance of exploring meaning in organisational change studies. This philosophy acknowledges the influence of context on the understanding, practice and investigations of managing organisational change. This chapter also outlines the approaches to research and strategies for studying organisational change and sensemaking. It explains the study design and the instruments that make the study operationalisable.

Based on an understanding of Higher Education Institutions as pluralistic organisations that adopt shared modes of governance, this study investigates change from a sensemaking narrative-discursive standpoint. It was conducted within a qualitative strategy using case studies of three UK universities. The second part provides rationales and details of the practical approach taken by the present researcher to generate empirically-based findings. This section describes strategies for analysing

data and the justification for the analytical procedures adopted in the present study. The chapter concludes with a section on validity and ethics.

#### 4.0 DEVELOPING A RESEARCH STRATEGY

Methodology can be defined as a combination of philosophical assumptions; the researcher's assumptions on the nature and ways of studying reality and knowledge, and methods; the tools for studying reality and knowledge (deMarrais and Lapan, 2004). It encompasses the assumptions and practices for research which govern the range of strategies and procedures for studying the social world. This involves developing a picture of the social world, which is translated into the choice of the type of data and the form of interpreting that data in a way best suited to answer questions of the social world (Alasuutari *et al.*, 2008; Bryman, 2008). Bryman (2008) expands this commonly held view of methodology to include the practices of researchers within an area of research. He also suggests that there are contingencies associated with applying research methods. This stance implies that explanations of a study's methodology also include the research strategies particularly suited for answering specific research questions because they may address the particularities of the phenomenon or context. It involves addressing issues relating to the techniques and translations of research tools and how they were applied during the research process. As such, proper research can be seen as not methodology driven but problem-driven. An overview of this thesis's philosophical assumptions and methods is provided in subsequent sections.

Explaining research practice makes these considerations explicit. Research practice provides the specifics of the study design and methods and the progression from the research questions to data to research outcomes. One of the concerns of qualitative research is the question of validity, transparency and reliability. To overcome these concerns, researchers demonstrate the logic for adopting specific strategies (Morse, 2011; Ketokivi and Choi, 2014). As part of this, the researcher describes strategies and the rationale guiding their use. It involves specifying the reasons behind the selection of the case study sites and the individual participants and the procedures for analysing the data. The following sections are methodology and techniques for investigating how academics make sense of change in HEIs across different HEIs

## 4.1 Researching Sensemaking of Change in HEIs

The definitions by scholars researching organisational change within HEIs and outside HEIs suggest organisational change and its management comprises both cognitive and socio-discursive dimensions. Analysing academics' sensemaking of change in Higher Education Institutions involves considering and accounting for these different dimensions. This study applies an adaptation of the meso-approach identified by Rousseau and House (1994) to facilitate the analysis of the combined influence of both dimensions on organisational change. The application of the approach centres on specific characteristics of the Meso-approach. Firstly, it is helpful for studies that simultaneously investigate organisational processes across different levels. It applies to organisational processes, which by nature are both socioeconomic and psychological, processes in which individual factors are affected by organisational factors. Adopting a meso-approach overcomes the inadequacy of macro research to demonstrate the impact of individual-level variables on organisational-level outcomes and the weakness of micro theories to explain the interplay between individual attributes and situational factors (Rousseau and House, 1994).

Similar arguments in sensemaking explanations invoke the linkage between macro and micro, which can be captured through the meso approach. It depicts the macro as constructed within microinteractions, not distinct and emergent from micro-interactions. Organisational actors utilise macro and micro-interactions concurrently as they rationalise ambiguous events to provide plausible explanations and reduce ambiguity. The meso-approach, therefore, enables the exploration of these processes of interpretation by organisational actors.

Combined with a sensemaking lens to change, the structure and management of Higher Education Institutions make it a suitable context for applying a modified meso- approach. HEIs comprise groups or organisational levels and hierarchies: individual academics, departmental heads, faculty deans and senior university management exist. These levels are linked by events and routines, including procedures and observed behaviour, through social constructions, ongoing pattern interactions, and shared meanings (Rousseau and House, 1994). However, differences in group characteristics entail that these routines may mean different things at different levels. In the university, either group may initiate and implement change (Cummings *et al.*, 2005). Due to this characteristic, studies of critical

organisational processes such as change in organisations should reflect these circumstances. This part of the methodology chapter explains the strategies to explore the plurivocality of the change process and the meaning constructions of academics in HEIs implicated in change initiatives.

As demonstrated in the previous chapter, this thesis is an exploratory study of academics' sensemaking of change in HEIs, grounded on constructivist philosophy. The research questions were informed by recommendations of eminent scholars in the field of organisational change and sensemaking that studies of organisational change should explore content, context and process linkages (Pettigrew, 1987, p. 6; Van de Ven, 1987 in Chia, 1999). They are characteristic of an ecological style of analysis. This style of research is characterised by a promotion of complexity rather than a reduction; sensitivity to process, context, and time (Tsoukas *et al.*, 2003).

The research questions for this thesis are:

**RQ1.** How do different academic change actors define organisational change and managing change in UK HEIs?

**RQ2.** What resources do academics use to construct understanding of change in HEIs, and how do these resources shape their construction of reality?

**RQ3.** How do institutional contexts influence academics construction of change in HEIs?

The two major design strategies to answer these research questions are through the use of a multicase study of three different universities in the United Kingdom and the use of heterogeneous groups of actors. The next sections justify this choice.

## **4.2. Research Philosophy**

A study's research philosophy stresses what is of primary concern to the researcher. In other words, it addresses the foreground and background conceptions of the researcher. They are vital to understanding what constitutes knowledge and how to assess it. These assumptions influence the scholars' research design: the focus of study, what constitutes "data", the collection and analysis of the data, and the articulation and communication of research accounts (Duberley *et al.*, 2012 pg15).

This thesis adopts a social constructivist philosophy whereby the researcher seeks to facilitate understanding meaning rather than provide causal explanations. Unlike other research philosophies, such as the positivist philosophy, the notion that meanings are varied and multiple, and reality is seen as subjective, is at the heart of constructivism. Humans build interpretations around themselves from a choice of an indeterminate set of 'real' conditions. These constructions by social actors occur through complex social and cultural interactions, resulting in multiple versions of reality. Meanings and views of reality are constructed by individuals through social and cultural interactions, resulting in several versions of reality (Schwandt, 1998; Lincoln and Guba, 2000). Unlike natural structures, social structures have no independent existence. Instead, they depend on the activities they shape and people's (agents) view of that activity. Social structures vary across time and space because people are reflective, which leads them to change their actions based on their reflections (Marsh and Furlong, 2010).

The aim to explore academics' sensemaking of change in HEIs emanates from the essence of social construction. The thesis recognises organisations as context-dependent and historically and socially shaped with deeply interconnected processes (Tsoukas *et al.*, 2003). Consistent with this stance, this thesis's research questions and objectives are to understand the subjective experience of academics of change in HEIs and how they interpret this change experience which ultimately shapes their actions as they engage with change initiatives in their particular universities. Parsons (2010 pg 88) describes the concern for human agency and 'contingency' as the distinctive attribute of constructivism.

Change and managing change involve modifying the interpretative schemes of organisational members (Gioia and Thomas, 1996). Meanings are exposed to reconstruction when organisational actors encounter change. Scholars have suggested that for organisational change, researchers should employ alternative conceptions that consider the inherently dynamic complexities of organisational change processes (Ericson, 2001). One of these extensions pertains to conceptions of organisations as collections of cognitive individuals continually in flux with each other and the environment. (Chia, 1999). Subsequently, investigations and explanations of change management have become grounded in constructivist philosophies. This grounding would address concerns to recognise the relevance of context and temporality in organisational change.

Gioia *et al.* (2012) argue that understanding the world as a social construction is essential in social and organisational studies. "Enactment" is an integral component of the sensemaking lens, which



highlights the environment as a product of actors' construction of experience and their actions based on these constructions. The thesis reflects notions that there are variations in the sensemaking accounts of different academics. These narratives affect the interpretations and actions of academics towards change in HEIs. A research design guided by social constructivism makes it possible to consider and present those meanings identified during the research process. It allows the thesis to present the narratives that emerge as academics make sense of change in HEIs and the complexities of this process.

## RESEARCH PRACTICE

This section highlights the actions taken to achieve the research outcomes.

### 4.2. Research Design

The study's objectives, either for understanding or explanation and prediction, determine the choice of a research approach. The aim of the study to explore academics' sensemaking of change in HEIs lends itself to analysis using a qualitative approach. There is a view that choosing a research method depends on the research question; the researcher decides the most suitable research method to answer the research question (Bryman, 2007).

#### 4.2.1 Qualitative Approach

The present thesis employs a qualitative approach since the social world, unlike the natural world, cannot be understood "by the subsumption of social events under universal laws.....". Human actions are based upon, or infused by, social meanings: intentions, motives, attitudes and beliefs" (Fielding and Fielding, 2011, pg 54). A qualitative approach is used to investigate human experience, events and how people make sense of these events. Meaning arises from experience. The literature review indicates that meaning and interpretation are integral to organisational change. This makes a method that examines subjective research evidence appropriate. Organisations are and exist in politicised, social settings. Research suggests that organisational change and its implementation can best be analysed using subjective methods (Johnson, 1992).

Although some aspects of the research question, such as sensemaking resources, can also be studied through quantitative methods, these may not explain how and why they are significant. In other words, they are more suited to the “what” question. Existing studies have answered some “what” questions and subsequently used by the researcher to design the conceptual framework. To fully understand the relevance of these constructs to academics, the method should enable interactions and extensive questioning when necessary. Generally, this will answer the “how” question and explain how these shape sensemaking, which is missing in existing research. This requires a qualitative approach that can synthesise the various meanings attributed to change in HEIs by academics. This approach is consistent with existing organisational change studies. An advantage is that it allows for variance, so the researcher seeks participants' interpretations rather than imposing his/hers (Rentsch, 1990). This element is critical for the present study to explore the sensemaking of academics on change in HEIs since it highlights the voice of the participants.

### 4.3 Research Method

Traditionally, the research method is presented as influenced by the epistemological leanings and aim of the research and involves finding the right tool to explore the research topic and questions. According to Buchanan and Bryman (2007), this approach decontextualises method. The alternative for organisational research is to locate methods within the iterative and coherent research system of influences. This system recognises the social possibilities of data collection and the substantive nature of data generated (Buchanan and Bryman, 2009, pg1). This stance implies making explicit those other factors that determine the choice of methods. These include paradigmatic diversity and the interlinking of philosophies, organisational properties such as stability of research sites, and personal properties or resources like networks and relationships.

#### 4.3.1 Multi-Case Study

This study applies a case study method as it is suitable for investigating and understanding individual, group, and organisational phenomena within real-life contexts where the researcher has little control over events (Yin, 2009). Case study methods are particularly relevant in organisational change research. Nuances of complexity characterise change in HEIs, attributed to the uniqueness of their

environment. Change explanations adopting a sensemaking lens extend beyond the relationships between independent and dependent variables to an interaction between context and action (Barnett and Carroll, 1995; Weick, 1995; Armenakis and Bedeian, 1999) to make the explanation more holistic. This level of analysis is significant as this study views members' as active actors in the change process. In this regard, the relevance of context, as identified by Pettigrew *et al.* (2001), becomes relevant. It acts as a stimulus environment of nested structures and processes where the subjective interpretations of actors help shape the process. Subsequently, to understand the behaviour and thoughts of individuals engaged in change management, they must be studied within the context in which they act.

This research employs a multi-case study method. The multi-case study involves the investigation of a particular phenomenon in diverse settings. It takes the advantages of the single case study further by permitting a cross-case analysis (Darke *et al.*, 1998; Yin, 2009). It enriches findings and can enable the development of generic models, as demonstrated in Mills's (2009) study of the sensemaking of change communication across three organisations. A strength of using the multi-case study is that it allows the emergence of multiple explanations of the research question (Gilliam, 2010). From Flyvbjerg's (2006) analogy that the 'black swan may appear white', the multi-case study method, by exploring the research question under different circumstances, allows the researcher to explore beyond the obvious to the underlying meanings of a phenomenon. Since context shapes sensemaking, a multi-case study provides context-dependent knowledge. The relationship between context and sensemaking is becoming increasingly diversified, demonstrated by Lockett *et al.* (2014) and Rouleau and Balogun (2011) in their study of organisational change. As this thesis examines the moderating effects of different institutional settings on actor sensemaking, the multi-case study demonstrates the intricacies that different contexts confer on the sensemaking of academics within the unique environment of HEIs. It, therefore, allows the study to investigate Context as a resource for sensemaking.

#### 4.3.2 Case Selection

One of the criteria for case study research is the availability of a case. However, gaining access is often a challenging endeavour for the qualitative researcher. Saunders (2012 pg 36) attributes this to

factors such as constraints on the organisation to consent to the numerous requests for access by researchers. There are also issues concerned with the research's perceived intrusiveness or perceived value. These challenges in gaining access can lead to adopting an opportunistic approach to gaining access and making compromises in certain instances to the choice of participants. Despite this, Saunders (2012) suggests that case selection should not compromise methodological vigour. In order to achieve methodological vigour, This study adopts a typical case- heterogeneous sampling strategy. Heterogeneous cases illustrate each case's uniqueness and shared patterns that are important because they arise out of heterogeneity (Patton, 2002, pg 235). Exploratory studies facilitate the emergence of diverse and unforeseen aspects of organisational life. Therefore, embedding these differences in the selection criteria would illuminate interactions between the specific microelements of institutions and the sensemaking of change by academics within the university context.

The present study was conducted in the business school of three(3) UK universities with middle management, lower management and front-line academics. The study focused on only academics as their processes of interpreting change in HEI are relatively underrepresented in literature. The selection of sample cases was guided by the reasons outlined below and consisted of four(4) steps:

The first step applied a purposive technique to identify the universities in the UK and their locations. One example is that universities have witnessed an unprecedented pace of change over the last twenty years, including the increased use of performance measurement systems by external bodies to determine the level of funding available to institutions. It was deemed appropriate that a study on change in HEI would consider these influential factors on university management in selecting case study sites. Consequently, potential universities were identified from the list of universities which had participated in the most recent Research Excellence Framework, REF 2014. The decision to use REF as a reference point was that it was an event that had occurred recently, and it was shared across universities

The second step involved limiting the selection of potential case study institutions to Universities in England. Because data would be collected through face-to-face interviews, these criteria would limit the time and cost constraints associated with travelling to the site. Additionally, limiting the case sites would minimise potential biases due to slight variations in external regulations for English, Welsh and Scottish HEIs. It would also enable the adherence to cross-case analytic techniques of comparing data from different cases across a uniform framework.

The third selection criteria involved differentiating the particular institutions which would be used as case studies. Scholars of Higher Education reiterate the importance of university types, history and structure. The study by McCormack *et al.* (2014) on the impact of university management on performance suggests that significant differences in management scores occur across university types rather than academic departments. This study is highlighted because it includes managerial attributes such as leadership, one of the factors identified as a sensemaking resource in this study. However, because their data was analysed quantitatively, it was assumed that this would not reflect differences which would be apparent from qualitative data.

There are different ways of classifying UK universities. One is to classify according to mission types, including Russel group, Million+, University alliance and the disbanded 1994 group. Another system is to classify them according to when they were formed, such as Redbrick universities, Plate universities and New universities. However, these classification systems are ambiguous, and not all universities belong to a group. Universities do not classify themselves using these systems, except for the Russel group institutions. Therefore, this posed challenges in identifying representative institutions. Conversations with academics suggest they predominantly classify universities as Russel or non\_Russel group institutions and Pre and Post 1992 Institutions. This study adopts this alternative classification, consequently differentiating the universities as Pre and Post 1992 Institutions. Pre 1992 Institutions may also be differentiated into Russel group and non-Russel group institutions. The three case study institutions reflect the diversity of UK universities; one pre-1992 Russel group university, one pre-1992 non-Russel group university and one Post 1992 university. This classification incorporates the diversity of structure, governance and history, and institutional characteristics, which Kezar and Eckel (2002) suggest affect university change processes.

The fourth selection criteria included limiting the study sample to one faculty. Considering the number of universities in the UK, this would control the quantity of data and ensure the completion of a comprehensive analysis of data within the time frame for a PhD. Additionally, for interviews, this would avoid spreading the sample thinly across various faculties. A similar approach was adopted by McCormack *et al.* (2014), a study which measures the relationship between management and performance across universities.

Participants for interviews were limited to a frame of academic staff in departments of business and management or business schools. Within the case study universities selected, faculties were a

combination of different departments; for example, in IKP, the faculty comprised Law, Social sciences and Management departments. Schools of Management or Business Schools were therefore selected as a sample frame for all three universities as it was considered appropriate for ensuring uniformity in the characteristics of the participants. In research, uniformity is a criterion for ensuring reliability in cross-case analysis. Within this research context, the university environment, disciplinarity is seen as a site of intellectual and social practice, with implications for differences in academic staff behaviour and attitudes (Malcolm and Zukas, 2009). There are assumptions that it affects the culture inherent in higher education institutions, suggested by Bergquist (1992) when he identifies faculty and disciplines as a type of culture. Rentsch's (1990) work on culture and climate suggests that individuals that inhabit the same interaction groups attribute similar meanings to events. Jones (2011) reviews studies on the effect of disciplines on academic staff. He cites research by Kekale (1999) and Del Fevero (2006), which suggest a relationship between academic discipline and attitudes towards academic functions such as teaching and departmental functioning.

Additionally, it influences attitudes toward demonstrating and accepting different leadership styles. The decision to use a sample frame based on departmental differences was validated at the data collection point. Participants mentioned that the different faculties had different cultures, which were reflected in the processes of change within those faculties.

#### 4.3.3 Participant Selection/ Sampling

The outcome of studies in an organisational context depends on the selection and interaction with individuals who would contribute to the study. The rationale for participant selection in qualitative research is identifying individuals who can provide answers specific to the research question. Based on the research questions, non-probability purposive sampling was used. This form of selecting participants is critical for exploratory research to generate rich understanding and promote new insights for organisational phenomenon (Saunders, 2012).

Purposive sampling is a technique used to maximise the depth and richness of data based on criteria established by the researcher. The broader change and sensemaking literature and the specificity of the higher education institutions' context informed the criteria. Change literature traditionally associates actor roles with specific organisational structures and hierarchies. However, research by

Cummings *et al.* (2005) within a university context suggests that change initiation and implementation are not specific to any hierarchical level. Therefore, the aim was to develop a heterogeneous group of participants that would ensure maximum variation by representing the different types of academics. This criterion draws on academic identity and culture research. Organisational identity and culture are socially constructed beliefs that can be differentiated at different boundaries; hierarchical, organisational unit or professional affiliations (Corley 2004). Universities are exemplars of such organisations in which multiple identities exist. Staff, including academics, are grouped by rank, disciplinary or professional associations and by hierarchy, which have implications for change management (Harley, 2002).

The selection of participants took cognisance of these differences and utilised the following criteria (see fig 2):

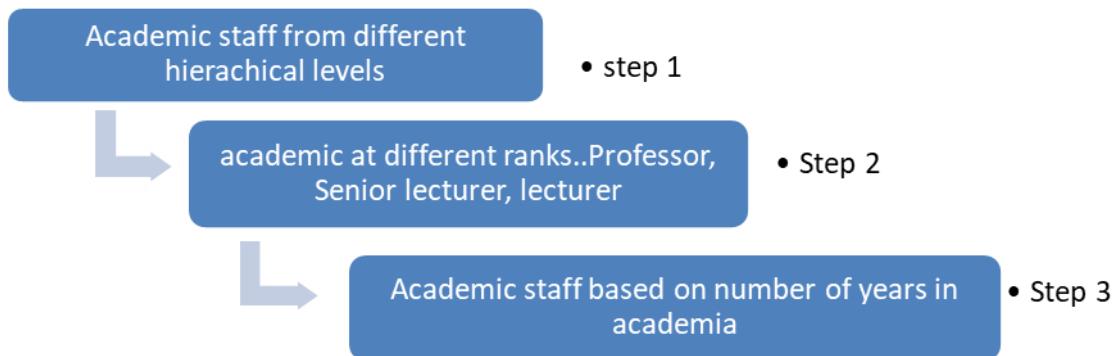
**First**, academic staff from the different hierarchical levels of the university: the individual academic staff engaged in teaching and research, middle management and, upper management, (hereafter referred to as front-line academics and manager-academics) were contacted via email, requesting their participation in the research.

**Second**, This included differentiation into different ranks; Reader, Senior lecturer, Lecturer, Professor, and Fellow. By basing this study on the use of hierarchical levels, it considers the university's structural organisation. These ranks were conceptualised as a reflection of experience and length of career as an academic. This ensured a mix of participants to facilitate the understanding of the research questions. Ensuring the diversity of the participants selected recognises the prevalence and importance of intracultural diversity (Maxwell and Chmiel, 2014, pg 543). Change scholars suggest a relationship between cognitive assessments of change and both group and individual behaviour (Govender *et al.*, 2005; Piderit, 2000; Kuntz and Gomes, 2012). Therefore, this research extends the group's understanding to include hierarchical levels and ranks. This decision was validated by the responses of the participants, which reflected this differentiation.

**Third**, the selection of the participants was limited to individuals who had been academics for at least three years and had spent at least two years in the relevant institution. There was one exception to this criterion, where the participant had been a member of the university for less than two years. This exception occurred because the academic had over 15 years of experience as an academic, had

moved from an institution that had undergone “big” changes and was presently actively involved in implementing a change initiative.

Fig 2 Participant Selection Process



The process resulted in the following mix, with a total of 27 academics:

In DBS and IKP, the faculty comprised of staff who indicated they had teaching-only contracts. These academics were also included in the mix of participants. The final selection of participants consisted of academics who occupied various positions in the faculty. This ranged from professors and readers to lecturers, heads of school and former heads of schools, and current and former committee/faculty board members. The participants also varied in the length of time they had been with the faculty, ranging from less than two (2) years to over twenty-five (25) years.

Access to the university and faculty academics was initiated by contacting the deans of the relevant faculty via email. The researcher explained the purpose of the study and asked for their permission to contact faculty academics. As they were also potential participants in the study, they were also asked if they would be willing to be interviewed for the study. There were positive responses from the deans, who gave the researcher permission to contact faculty academics. The deans also agreed to participate in the study, and therefore, suitable times for the interviews were scheduled. At University DBS however, because of the institution’s structure, the researcher was advised to contact the Head of school to inquire if they would be willing to participate in the study. This produced a positive response and also an agreement by the Head of School to be interviewed as part of the study.

From the faculty directories, the researcher assessed the contact details of the academics of the management faculty or school of the three institutions. These academics were contacted via email, explaining the purpose of the study and were asked to participate in the study. The researcher informed them that they were being contacted as actors of change, and not based on the expectation



to have experience of leading change. In the invitations, the researcher indicated that the interviews would be scheduled at their convenience but still within the researcher’s schedule for data collection. This would minimise the impact of the disruptions in the participants’ activities. This approach was justified as the majority of the participants expressed their preference to be interviewed towards the end of term when their teaching responsibilities had been reduced.

Both university IKP and DBS had lower response rates than initially anticipated, with seven (7) academics accepting to participate in the study. The researcher had initially planned to interview 10 academics from each of the three institutions to achieve a balance and maximise the benefits of adopting a multi-case study approach. This response rate affected the final distribution of the participants from the different institutions. This resulted in the final distribution of participants across the three universities as 7 participants with recorded interviews from IKP and DBS and 10 participants with recorded interviews, and 4 with unrecorded interviews from IUK. **Table 5: Number of participants and role in change process**

|                                     | DBS | IKP | IUK |
|-------------------------------------|-----|-----|-----|
| Total number of participants        | 7   | 7   | 14  |
| Manager-Academic                    | 1   | 1   | 4   |
| Manager Academic/Frontline Academic | 2   | 2   | 0   |
| Frontline Academic                  | 3   | 4   | 9   |
| HR                                  | 1   | 0   | 1   |

There was a fluidity associated with differentiating these academics into the roles of manager academic and frontline academic due to the cyclical nature of attaining management positions in universities. This was especially relevant in the case of DBS where some of the participants had assumed the role of manager- academics in the past and were currently regarded as frontline academics. In addition to the academics, the researcher interviewed the individuals in HR in two of the universities.

**Table 5: List of Participants and their institutions**

| IKP | IUK | DBS |
|-----|-----|-----|
|-----|-----|-----|

|                    |                  |                      |
|--------------------|------------------|----------------------|
| <i>Anna: FA-MA</i> | <i>Frank, MA</i> | Keith: MA            |
| <i>Joe: FA</i>     | <i>Ken, MA</i>   | Greg: MA-FA          |
| <i>Amaya: FA</i>   | <i>Ray, FA</i>   | <i>Masha: FA</i>     |
| <i>David: MA</i>   | <i>Jack, FA</i>  | <i>Julie: Fa</i>     |
| <i>Mike, MA-FA</i> | <i>Sarah, FA</i> | <i>Josh: MA-FA</i>   |
| <i>Judith, MA</i>  | <i>Jim, FA</i>   | <i>Connor: MA-FA</i> |
|                    | <i>Clark, FA</i> | <i>Philip: FA</i>    |
|                    | <i>Mary, FA</i>  |                      |
|                    | <i>John, FA</i>  |                      |
|                    | <i>Jo, FA</i>    |                      |

#### 4.3.4 Framing/Scope of the Study

One of the challenges of this research involved identifying the change for investigation in the study. The practice in studies of change applying multiple case studies is the comparison of similar change initiatives across different organisations. For example, Kezar (2013) examines successful strategies for institutionalising interdisciplinary programs as part of a project comprising 28 universities. In contrast to the present researcher, who is external to the case universities, those were already established projects in which those researchers had an existing association. Additionally, at the time of the research, the researcher was unaware of such projects involving a collaboration of select UK universities. This limitation required identifying an appropriate change to be examined using alternative sources. In practice, the initiation and implementation of significant change initiatives in organisations can coincide. These concurrent instances of different initiatives may limit the differentiation of the boundaries of the various initiatives, and therefore participants may be unable to distinguish sensemaking processes associated with the different change initiatives (Bartunek *et al.*, 2006). The present study considers this phenomenon in its design. It identifies and examines a common change initiative and adopts an emergent approach. While the identification of common events which will allow comparative analysis is promoted in change research (Isabella, 1990), the

value of researching significant events has also been articulated (Wiebe, 2010). This conceptualisation was strengthened by the suggestion that misalignments can occur between apriori conceptions of the type of change and the existing conceptions among the organisational members of a case study site (Dyck,1997). Similar findings demonstrate that sensemaking affects the way organisational members categorise the same change initiative; either as major organisational change or as minor organisational change (Jordan and Mitterhofer, 2010).

Identifying a change initiative common to the three case study universities was driven by searching policies on HEIs. The literature review identified that universities' response to governmental requirements triggers change in HEIs, and therefore, the researcher sought to identify such changes. This led to the identification of the then-ongoing Research Excellence Framework (REF), a quality assurance measure with expectations of compliance by universities and their academics.

Consequently, this study explored academics' sensemaking of change in HEIs through the REF initiative.

In identifying the conditions under which sensemaking can occur, Maitlis and Christianson (2014) highlight the importance of discrepancies which are "significant". Therefore, the researcher conceptualised that the interview would need to explore other "significant" changes to investigate the sensemaking of individual academics. Therefore, before the initial interviews, university websites were examined for news and events highlighting university change initiatives, especially regarding the REF. This technique would identify change initiatives which would serve as additional frames of reference for changes during the interviews. This procedure was only successful in one university, University IUK, which yielded one initiative that incidentally was recognised by the Higher Education Academy (HEA) and part of a HEA-supported initiative in a few other universities. In addition to university websites, the researcher contacted and interviewed a member of Human Resources at the first and second universities. The primary aim of interviewing these individuals was to identify change objectives which would be explored in the interviews with the academics that, because they were specific to their universities, could be more significant in triggering sensemaking. However, from the initial interviews of the academics, some participants indicated that they were not aware of the initiatives or were not affected by them. Subsequently, the researcher did not contact a member of HR from the third university. This finding required a further revision of the research process, which

would allow the present study to explore academics' sensemaking of change in HEIs while maintaining research rigour.

The researcher was particularly struck by Weick's statement that sensemaking researchers do not discount seemingly trivial events as they can have enormous consequences. Effective sensemaking research recognises the significance of varying organisational events and structures, including the "short moments", "small structures, relational, the oral, the particular, the momentary, the conspicuous, the large, the substantive, the written, the general, and the sustained" (Weick *et al.*, 2005 pg 410) in its analysis. Accordingly, the researcher employed an open interviewing strategy regarding the focus of the initiatives. In addition to discussions about the REF initiative, participants selected the change initiatives to be discussed in the interview. This allowed the participants to select and discuss events they considered critical incidents and therefore had significance and prominence. Critical incidents are value judgements made by individuals based on the significance they attach to the meaning of the incidents (Tripp, 1993 *in* Kain, 2004). This suggests that although they reflect objective events, they become critical incidents based on subjective interpretations of the significance of those events. The application of the critical incident technique is similar to the research approach in a study exploring how middle managers take a stance towards lived experiences of change through sensemaking by Antonacopoulou and Psychogios (2015). Their application suggests that this technique facilitates the exploration of multiple change events, which may trigger sensemaking in organisational actors in an environment characterised by multiple, frequent, or continuous introductions of distinct change initiatives. In their study, it was under conditions of financial crisis while in the present study, it is under conditions of tighter control measures by external bodies.

The table below highlights the incidents raised by the participants. This were subsequently translated into a composite of occasions for sensemaking – Policy changes, Changes in leadership and restructuring

| University | Roles | Critical incidents/ Episodes of sensemaking               |
|------------|-------|---|
| IUK        | MA    | Campus Relocation<br>REF<br>New VC<br>*Guiding* framework |
|            | FA    | Campus Relocation<br>REF<br>New VC/Dean                   |

|     |    |   |
|-----|----|---|
| IKP | MA | REF<br>New VC appointment<br>Exam Regulations modification<br>Student recruitment<br>Term restructuring |
|     | FA | REF<br>New VC appointment<br>Term restructuring   |
| DBS | MA | REF<br>Course restructuring<br>School expansion   |
|     | FA | REF   |

Table: Overview of universities, academics and critical incidents Source: Researcher

| Incidents  | Composite             | Universities      |
|--|-----------------------|-------------------|
| REF<br>Student recruitment   | Policy changes        | IUK DBS           |
|  |                       | IKP               |
| New VC appointment<br>New VC/Dean  | Changes in Leadership | IUK IKP           |
| Course restructuring<br>School expansion<br>Term restructuring<br>Exam Regulations modification<br>Campus Relocation | Restructuring         | IUK<br>DBS<br>IKP |

Table: Composite of occasions for sensemaking Source: Researcher

The choice to adopt these strategies was reinforced from the outcomes of the first four (4) interviews where the participants' responses to specific initiatives elicited responses of non-engagement. They indicated that the initiatives were not significant for them and were passive in their engagement of change. Such attitudes implied a lack of sensemaking with regard to those changes. Therefore since this thesis is concerned with "how" academics make sense of change and the process of change in HEIs to identify and explore the resources for sensemaking and the narratives produced and

producing sensemaking of change, an open and flexible approach was considered to be critical to understanding these micro-processes.

## 4.4 Interviews

Walsham (1995 *in* Darke *et al.*, 1998), suggests that participants' views and interpretation of events are best assessed through interviews, which is appropriate for this research's exploratory nature. The semi-structured approach emphasises the research question while allowing the flexibility to explore emerging unanticipated concepts. Following Woodside's (2010) stance on the complexity involved in the awareness and articulation of responses in interview situations and the dynamics between conscious and unconscious cognitive processes, this approach would produce data rich in detail. The questions would act as prompts for recall of those aspects of events which may be overlooked by the participants but would provide an in-depth exploration of academics' sensemaking of change in HEIs. This provides rich data, which, as Gillham (2010) explains, helps achieve a greater understanding of the concept under study.

### 4.4.1 Thesis Interview Structure

Based on the justifications in the sections above, the developed interview questions were a guide rather than a script. Through this process, the questions were asked in no particular order and skipped if responses to those had been provided in answering previous questions. A strength of this study is that adopting such an open-ended approach to the interviews allowed the participants' views and voices to emerge. Responding to questions, the participants employed certain words to explain their positions. This led to follow-up questions asking for clarification and the subsequent amendments incorporating those words in later questions. For instance, initial interviews asked participants to describe their experience of change objectives. However, during the process, the researcher realised that participants used the word change initiative and questioned this distinction. The participant replied that although they could not fully explain the difference in terminology, they

viewed organisational change as initiatives and not objectives. This finding is consistent with Charmaz's (2011 pg 65) observation that question-wording more or less determines what the participants say. Substitution of this word in subsequent interviews elicited examples without prior prompting. Similar experiences have been described in studies by Gioia *et al.* (2012), who suggest that avoiding or minimising the use of existing terminology allows vital aspects of how participants make sense of organisational processes to emerge.

Most of the interviews were face-to-face, in the participants' offices, to provide a confidential setting. The exception was three participants from DBS and IKP who requested telephone interviews due to availability issues and research timescales. The first series of interviews were carried out exclusively at University IUK in October 2013 because it was the first university to respond to the request for access. Challenges during data collection resulted in amending the original thesis design.

Subsequently, a second series of interviews were carried out at DBS and IKP from April 2015 to July 2015. Changes to the study design brought about the interval between the two series of interviews.

The duration of the interviews varied between participants from forty-five (45) minutes to two (2) hours, depending on the amount of detail provided by the participants and their time constraints.

Because of the semi-structured format of the interviews, the researcher was flexible in presenting the questions; they were introduced at a point and in a manner which seemed most natural or appropriate during the conversation. The language and format of questions were amended during the course of the interview as appropriate, taking into consideration the responses that had already been provided by the participants. In the majority of the interviews, the participants addressed some questions while answering other questions. Prompts were used when further clarification was needed. Some of the responses required additional prompts in order to improve the understanding of the participants' answers or to extend unexpected concepts which had arisen during the course of the interview. This resulted in data, providing, in rich detail, a deep understanding of the research context, the history and characteristics of the case study institutions and how academics made sense of change in their institutions.

Before the interviews, some participants had requested either a preview of the interview guide or the focus of the interview questions. These were emailed by the researcher with the understanding that the interviews were semi-structured and the questions were a guide to focus the interview. At the beginning of the interviews, the researcher asked participants for permission to record the universities. The participants expressed their willingness to be recorded with the exception of four participants in University IUK. Therefore, the researcher took notes in those interviews, including summaries of participant statements.

From the onset, participants were encouraged to speak freely, and most appeared to be very open and relaxed with the researcher. In DBS, most notably, the participants were very open in interacting with the researcher. One participant admitted that this was because they were aware that the Head of School had endorsed the study; an email had been sent to academics explaining the research area and their agreement to participate and encouraging interested school faculty to participate. This openness was in contrast to the other institutions where this level of access was absent. There were a few exceptions, particularly at the senior management level, where concerns existed for maintaining the institution's confidential information existed. Such instances were, in some cases, specified by the participant. This concern led to reframing the questions to maintain confidentiality without affecting the data quality. Some informants expressed their willingness and pleasure to



discuss their roles and experiences in the change process. They stated that this also allowed them to reflect on their attitudes and experience in the institution.

While maintaining the broad themes covered in this interview guide, the interviews were conducted using an abductive approach. Gioia *et al.* (2013) describe this approach as a sensitive and conscientious attempt to ensure the presentation of the participants' perspective and experience of the phenomenon under study. It implies an openness to incidental findings and the challenge of apriori conceptions. In theory elaboration studies, this practice allows contextually emergent themes to modify existing theories (Ketokivi and Choi, 2014). The strength of this approach is the ability to allow for more situational sensitivity and the possibility to change the course of the research (Hietanen *et al.*, 2013). In the present research setting, it would allow the participants to describe issues they felt were critical to their sensemaking of change in HEIs.

This thesis aims to bridge gaps in the understanding of sensemaking. Therefore, certain issues may not be apparent by sticking to questions designed apriori to the interview. This practice would allow the study to generate new insights and interpretations of academics' sensemaking of change in HEIs. This strategy also allowed the incorporation of emergent concepts into subsequent interviews and followed the practices of other case studies of sensemaking and change in organisations, for example, Currie (1999), and Gioia *et al.* (2012). The researcher started by explaining the purpose of the study because, in some cases, there were gaps between the initial email invitation and the actual interview. The researcher then explained that the focus of the interviews was to explore their experience of change in the institution. They were encouraged to use specific examples of change initiatives to discuss their experience. Research suggests that actors make sense of change in organisations along two key dimensions: the content of change and the process or strategies of implementation (Balogun and Johnson, 2004).

#### 4.4.2 Thesis Interview Questions

Events which provoke uncertainty within organisational members correspond to three categories: Environmental jolts and internal crises, which trigger interpretation as members seek to understand the effects of exogenous changes on different facets of the organisation, such as structure and routines, as well as issues which disrupt fundamental assumptions and generate the need for

explanations; threats to identity; and planned change interventions whereby the consequences of planned change initiatives such as the violation of expectations or modification of the purpose of the organisation trigger sensemaking. (Maitlis and Christianson, 2014). Although the incidents articulated above activate sensemaking, Weick *et al.* (2005) caution researchers against overlooking other seemingly mundane situations since interpretation can occur through the assimilation of subtle cues over time.

Dawson (2005) suggests that an analytic framework for investigating change should include the politics, context and content of the change. In the study of employee engagement strategic change implementation, Sonenshein (2012) indicate that aspects of the change process affect meaningmaking. Furthermore, he suggests that the limited understanding of actors' roles in the change process resulted in a one-dimensional view of the response to change. Interview questions corresponding to theme five below took this into account. It would also enable this thesis to address the research question and objective of exploring the various narratives that may emerge from the construction of meaning. This understanding influenced the adoption of the first three interview themes with questions around the steps to implement the change and the focus of the change initiatives. Based on these suggestions, the research questions, and the propositions highlighted in the previous chapter the interviews revolved around the following themes. The table below shows the research questions and the interview themes designed to answer them and is represented pictorially in the following figure. (See appendix 1 for the interview guide).

| <b>Research questions</b>  | <b>Propositions</b>  | <b>Interview Themes</b>  |
|--|--|--|
| RQ 1. How do different academic change actors define organisational change and managing change in UK HEIs? | P3. Manager-academics and front-line academics will produce divergent narratives using the sensemaking resources | Theme 1: The drivers for change in Universities<br>Theme 2: Academics perspectives of the rationale for specific change initiatives in the case institutions |

|  |   |  |
|--|---|--|
| <p>RQ2. What resources do academics use to construct understanding of change in HEIs and how do these resources shape their construction of reality?</p> | <p>P1. Manager-academics and front-line academics will utilise a combination of cognitive and discursive components as resources for creating meaning of change in HEIs</p> | <p>Theme 3: Understanding perceptions of professional characteristics which affected their perception and engagement with change initiatives, and the process of change implementation.</p> <p>Theme 4: Academics perceptions of the implementation of the changes</p> <p>Theme 5: Understanding of expectations, roles, involvement of academics in the change process;</p> |
| <p>RQ3. How do institutional contexts influence academics construction of change in HEIs?</p>  | <p>P2. : Academics narratives of change will be shaped by the expected context of their respective institution.</p>   | <p>Theme 6: Understanding perceptions of institutional characteristics which affected their perception and engagement with change initiatives, and the process of change implementation</p>  |

Table: Research questions and corresponding interview themes

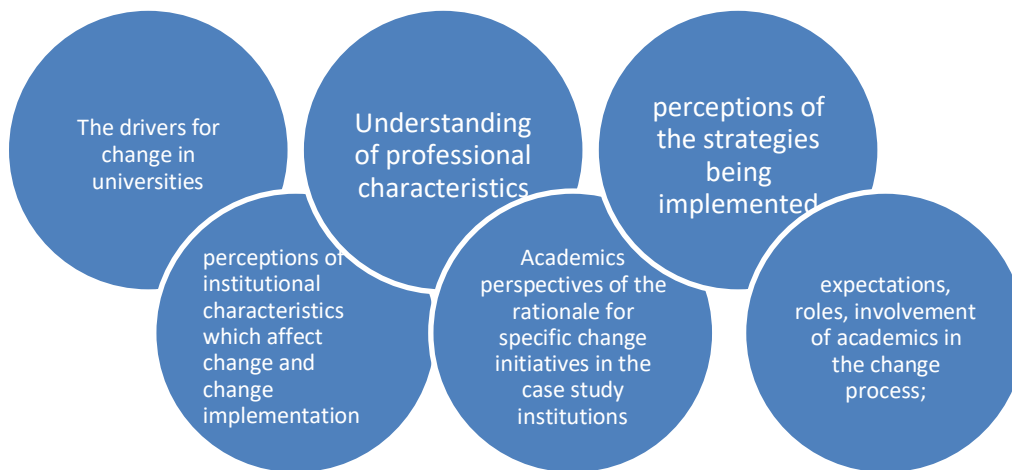


Figure of Interview guide

The figure above represents the key themes that were explored in the interviews. The key themes of the interview questions to explore these dimensions revolved around the participants' understanding of change in HEIs, the drivers and rationale for change in HEIs and the presence or absence of differences in initiating and implementing change in HEIs compared to other categories of organisations. The key themes for the questions exploring resources for sensemaking involved their understanding of academic identity and culture and the way it affects their interpretation of change in HEIs and the strategies for implementing change, and their perceptions of leadership activities. The initial question involved asking participants about their professional background, which allowed for the contextualisation of responses during data analysis. It also provided data to address the question of identity as a resource for sensemaking of change in HEIs by academics. This was followed by general questions to allow more specific questions to develop interactively depending on the issues raised by the respondents. For instance, some academics started by explaining how their professional background affected their interpretation of change in HEIs. Participants were asked to explain their understanding of the rationale for the change initiatives, especially in relation to their own positions in the initiation or implementation process. Participants were also asked to explain the roles of academics in the process of change in HEIs and within their specific universities in order to enable the understanding of their lived experience of change. The participants were encouraged to develop areas for exploration in their way through conversational rather than directive questioning. The questions were asked in a neutral manner to avoid “directing” or “leading” the responses. This sometimes proved to be a challenge. For instance, it was challenging to ask questions on the

motivation for engaging with change initiatives without using the word “motivation” and frame the question to elicit responses which would demonstrate a relationship between their motivation and sensemaking of change. The interview guide can be found in Appendix 1

#### 4.5 Data analysis

In line with case study methods, data analysis occurred parallel to data collection. This technique of iterative data collection and analysis is an emergent process which permits the continuous interaction between the theoretical issues and the data (Yin, 2009). The approach to sensemaking adopted by this thesis, the understanding of change provided in the extant literature and the research question determined the choice of the data analysis method. The literature review and conceptual framework chapters explain how this thesis incorporates discourse and narratives. Language is critical to change and results in constructing narratives on change by different organisational actors (Dunford and Jones, 2000). Analysis of data, therefore, requires methods capable of analysing language data. This thesis, similar to existing studies in sensemaking and organisational change (Balogun et al., 2014; Rouleau and Balogun, 2011; Sonenshein, 2010; Gioia et al., 1994), adopts narrative strategies for analysing the data.

Before commencing the analysis, the researcher transcribed the interviews with participants. The researcher transcribed the data personally, providing an avenue for greater immersion and familiarisation with the data. This was followed by the analysis of the interviews, aided by the use of NVIVO. One of the challenges of qualitative analysis concerns the rigour of the analytic process. This has resulted in debates on the relevance of formalisation or institution: set up clear rules or “just do it”, “find out what is interesting about the data.” There is also the realistic stance which combines both practices. (Flick, 2014, pg 12). The analysis involved a thematic, narrative approach modified by discursive undertones, adopting a realistic stance. According to Pereira (2016), applying considerations of discourse analysis components moves analysis from the descriptive and demonstrates the constructive process of knowledge and meaning of the study participants.

The data was subjected to different analytic steps grounded on the study’s constructivist philosophy. The data was grouped according to responses from manager academics and front-line academics which were subjected to similar analytic procedures. The first analytic step comprised the

deconstruction of the data based on the interview questions and the broad research themes. The data was coded according to participants' responses to the interview questions. For both groups of actors, the data was coded using apriori codes identified from the literature review and the researcher's conceptions of resources for sensemaking. The analysis also revealed emergent themes, which were coded accordingly. This second step in the analysis utilised two different, complementary analytical conventions: Gioia and associates (1991; 1996; 2013) narrative analytic approach to qualitative analysis and discursive techniques. The primary technique involved the narrative approach, supplemented by the underpinnings of the discursive approach. The "Gioia *et al.*" technique is demonstrated in Gioia and Chittipedi's (1991) and Gioia and Thomas's (1996) study of change in academia. Their analysis involves a categorisation and theme approach, resulting in outcomes that highlight the differences in interpretation of change within different groups and the use of language by top management to influence interpretation. This suggests that analysis of sensemaking can be improved using narrative analysis. Therefore, both analytic conventions were utilised to enrich the data analysis. For instance, adding a discursive dimension would generate findings pertinent to the context, which would otherwise be unavailable through a purely "Gioia *et al.*" or narrative, thematic technique.

The second analytic step comprised two levels of analysis; 1<sup>st</sup> order analysis and 2<sup>nd</sup> order analysis. In both levels of analysis, the focus was to emphasise the interpretation of the participants. Preserving the participant's subjective point of view and acknowledging the context generates constructs grounded in the subjective meaning of human action (Fereday and Muir-Cochrane, 2008). Because there had been no formal pilot test, the researcher first conducted a 1<sup>st</sup> order analysis of the first five interviews. The emerging terms and categories, including types of change and perspectives of culture from this analysis,, were integrated into subsequent interviews. The interview guide (see appendix 1) was expanded to include questions 4,12,21,23,24,19,22, and 23. This followed the form of prompts for the questions from the interview guide, which elicited those responses. Analysis of these and the remaining interviews followed the format described in the next paragraphs.

In the 1st order analysis, the transcripts were fragmented to extract participants' expressions which denote concepts from the participants. The focus was to emphasise the terms used by the participants, a process that yielded many terms and expressions. Following a discursive approach, the data were analysed within the situated meaning of terms/responses, analysing terms within the preceding and following parts. This reflects the notion that texts are meaningful from how they draw

on other texts (Philips and Oswick, 2012). This is similar to Weick's (2001 pg 316) argument that meanings do not reside in the words or labels attached to concepts but in the pattern in which the words are linked. These terms and word sequences were then reviewed to examine connections between them. Similar expressions from different participants were then grouped into categories under descriptive labels which was felt best represented the relationship between those expressions. The clustered terms in the categories were taken to denote elements significant to the participant. Dawson (2005, pg 393) supports this approach suggesting that "a useful way of tackling the problem of analysing complex change data is to construct data categories either around themes or around the various activities and tasks associated with change". The second-order analysis followed the firstorder analysis. Within the 2<sup>nd</sup> order analysis, the researcher developed concepts which could be used to explain the themes from the 1<sup>st</sup> order analysis as nodes and subnodes. These nodes were created using apriori themes derived from the conceptual factors developed during the literature review as an analytic framework. Coding at the general level, which reflects complex expressions were used to generate parent nodes while simple terms reflecting specific themes comprised the sub-nodes. Other nodes were constructed from a second set of themes which emerged inductively from the data. The categories from the 1<sup>st</sup> level of analysis was then grouped under the nodes and sub-nodes. For example, in the present study the nodes and sub-nodes include those reflecting aspects of leadership, actions which were taken during change implementation and the relevance of change to universities. This aspect of the analysis was, therefore, the association of the terms utilised by the participants to the apriori themes from the literature review and the emergent themes.

The focus of the analysis was to identify the common themes arising from the participants' constructions of change in HEIs and initiation and implementation strategies of change in their particular institutions and to explore the implicit assumptions and concerns used in their accounts. The aim was to understand the themes and rationalisations employed in conceptualising the content and process of change. This analysis of the reasons for their stances on change would serve as indicators of their sensemaking resources for change in HEIs such as context. According to Weick (2001 pg 12), actors rationalise sensemaking using pertinent features of the environment and the norms and expectations of the social context.

To explain the emergent themes, the researcher expanded the search criteria to ascertain the existence of these themes in literature, perhaps under different research areas, to evaluate their

relevance to change in HEIs and sensemaking. The researcher observed that certain understandings of the themes in the literature were not consistent with the interpretations emerging from the data. For example, culture was identified in the literature as a resource for making sense of change. Instead, data from the study suggests that academics explain the influence of culture on sensemaking in terms of dichotomies.

The researcher identified some overlap between the themes, and so the data were subjected to further analysis to determine if there were alternative ways of representing the data. At this point, the researcher realised these signalled narratives for interpreting change in HEIs. This resulted in the second step of the analysis, which involved identifying patterns used to construct narratives depicting the frames in use by the participants (Balogun and Johnson, 2004). Narratives may be self-contained, complete with plot, characters, actions and events, or in fragments of stories with bits and pieces that can reflect a pattern of themes (Dunford and Jones, 2000; Currie and Brown, 2007). The responses from participants reflected these characteristics; some provided elaborate explanations of their experience of change. These narratives were in fragments occasionally, but further analysis revealed relationships from which complete narratives could be constructed. The narratives were composed by reading the transcripts and identifying narratives which reflect the participants' perspectives of the interview questions. The development of the final composite narrative from the analysis included searching for overlaps in responses to different questions from the same participant to identify if they constituted elements of the same narrative. The narratives of different participants were also compared to identify similarities and differences.

A concept which emerged from this level of analysis was the framing of change by academics using the concepts of legitimisation and legitimacy. Adopting this mode of representing the findings increases the depth and boundaries of sensemaking studies (Fairhurst and Uhl-Bien, 2012). It draws attention to the frames through which academics make sense of change in HEIs. At the same time, it highlights the performative power of discourses in the sensemaking of change (Balogun *et al.*, 2014). This utilises the ability of narratives to tell the story of a relationship, including their sensemaking of events and how they define the context to explain the relationship, its history, and possible futures using interview data (Fairhurst and Uhl-Bien, 2012). It, therefore, demonstrates academics processes of sensemaking and the outcomes of their sensemaking of change in HEIs.



The findings of the study are therefore presented as academics' narratives of change in HEIs. In so doing, it demonstrates the "creative" power inherent in sensemaking and represented by the property of "enactment". In other words, by adopting a perspective in which the findings are presented as narratives, it demonstrates academics' processes of sensemaking and the outcomes of their sensemaking of change in HEIs.

Two fundamental reasons which were observed during participants' interviews validated the decision to adopt the method of analysis used in this research. During data collection and on reviewing the interview audio recordings, something became apparent. Of great importance was the repeated use of the statement, "I can't speak for other academics/colleagues/others, but only for myself", which suggests that there could be multiple interpretations. It highlights participants' interpretations as constructions which can be affected by individual specific factors.

This point is interesting, given the debates on the nature of sensemaking: individual or collective (Maitlis and Christianson, 2014). While exploring this distinction is beyond the scope of the present study, it suggests an area for future research in sensemaking. Secondly, the researcher observed that participants' perception of organisational change and the accounts of their response to strategic change initiatives was determined by their professional backgrounds and histories. They presented their perceptions and accounts of change by situating them within their roles in the organisation and their present and past experience in the study context. Some participants further contrasted their experience of change within HEIs and their present institution with their experience in other contexts. This made it imperative that the views and perceptions of the participants were represented as such.

Immersion in the data highlighted the ambiguities of change in universities. The narrative approach and the use of multi-case institutions allowed the emergence and presentation of this ambiguity. Concrete little details, the way in which academics position themselves, and the relationships between academics and the influence of organisational structures are embedded within and form the bigger picture. As will be demonstrated in the analysis chapter, understanding the nature of the university context and the ambiguities inherent within this type of organisation is essential for understanding change in this environment. The outcomes of the analysis are explored in detail in the next chapter, the presentation of findings chapter.

#### 4.6 Concerns for validity, generalisation and ethics

There are debates about applying the term 'validity' in qualitative research since such research aims to explicate the value-laden nature of the social or organisational world. However, they agree that this is a check for judging the quality of the study design, analyses and results. Recognising the differences in terminologies between qualitative and quantitative research frames the meaning of 'validity'. In contrast to quantitative research, where validity is determined statistically, qualitative strategies' validity is determined by internal and external verification, replication, and logic (Morse et al., 2011). Because it is related to the research paradigm; its philosophical foundations, it is applied in qualitative research using terms such as rigour, credibility, dependability or transferability (Golafshani, 2003; Cho and Trent, 2006). In case-study research, validity corresponds to the extent to which the study outcomes correspond to reality. For a constructivist-based study, the concept of reality refers to research participants' constructions of reality. Based on those debates, which are beyond this study's scope, the researcher utilised the term generalizability as a more appropriate indication of the concept.

This research uses generalizability because it incorporates comparisons against existing theories and checks for confirmability. Generalizability refers to extending concepts and theory to other situations with similar problems (Morse *et al.*, 2011). Statistical generalisation and analytical generalisation (Yin, 2003 pg 32-33 *in* Maxwell and Chmiel, 2014 pg 540) or empirical and theoretical generalisation (Hammersley, 2008 *in* Maxwell and Chmiel, 2014 pg 540) and transferability are strategies associated with generalisation in case studies. Empirical or statistical generalisation in qualitative research does not require statistical methods but rather the descriptive representativeness of the sample.

Analytical generalisation relies on comparing the case study results with previously existing theories. Transferability refers to transferring knowledge from a study to another specific situation (Maxwell and Chmiel, 2014 pg 540-541). This implies that ensuring generalisation involves an awareness of the implications of sampling issues on data analysis. The researcher adopted the following strategies to ensure generalisation.

Firstly, scholars highlight organisational change as a context-dependent phenomenon (Balogun and Johnson, 2005); therefore, from the onset, this had implications for the study design. There are different classifications of UK universities, and this was conceptualised as contributing to differences

in context for purposes of generalizability. Therefore, the researcher ensured that each category of UK university was represented during case site selection. This process was repeated in the selection of the participants.

Some participants in the initial interviews declined the researcher's offer to read the transcripts or interpretations to verify an accurate representation of their views. Therefore, the researcher used a member-checking process during the interviews by listening deeply to the participants. This form of listening is informed by the understanding of listening as an iterative process of receiving and interpreting information (Anon, 2012)

The analysis of the data included verbatim transcriptions of the interview. This was used to illustrate the themes arising from the data. Additionally, this approach assists the researcher to establish credibility by acting as an audit trail.

Where possible, *in-vivo* or terms used by the participants have been used during analytic activities. Their relationship to the development of categories is specifically indicated to maintain the narratives' integrity.

#### **4.6.1 Ethical Considerations**

Participants often share deep personal information, and therefore ethics exist to protect them from harm or distress due to participation in a study. It includes an awareness of links between the collection, quality and analysis of data and the interpretation and use of these findings. (Mertens, 2014). Principles which guide ethics in qualitative research include ensuring 'informed consent'; safeguarding 'privacy' as well as assuring 'confidentiality' and 'anonymity'; avoiding the use of misleading or fraudulent information for participants (Ramcharan and Cutcliffe, 2001).

In this study, the researcher observed that all the participants were concerned with the ethics of the study. They felt that they were sharing deep personal information. Therefore, they were concerned with how the data would be handled and how the information would be shared. All recordings, transcripts and traceable documents were anonymised to address these concerns with confidentiality. The researcher ensured that no personally identifiable information was used to present the data, such as individual and institution names. Initially, the researcher had planned to include the specific number of academic's years of experience as part of the participants' background

information. However, one of the participants highlighted that this was a piece of identifiable information since their colleagues had access to this information. The researcher also modified the gender of some participant as a way of maintaining anonymity. Scenarios were modified without detracting from the overall story so that neither the sources nor the institutions could be identified. Certain narratives explaining the context of the initiatives which could not be anonymised were used to expand the researcher's interpretation of sensemaking of change in HEIs but were excluded from the data.

## Chapter Summary

This thesis is guided by a social-constructivist philosophy whereby reality, knowledge and meanings are subjectively created relative to temporal and historical conditions. These constructions by social actors occur through complex social and cultural interactions, resulting in multiple versions of reality (Schwandt, 1998; Lincoln and Guba, 2000).

Change and the managing of change involve modifying the interpretative schemes of organisational members (Gioia and Thomas, 1996). Meanings are exposed to reconstruction when organisational actors encounter change. Scholars have suggested that in studying organisational change, researchers should employ alternative conceptions that consider the inherently dynamic complexities of organisational change processes (Ericson, 2001). This study elicits academics experience of change in HEIs through semi-structured interviews. The researcher's experience of the interview process supports assertions that the qualitative interview is described as an interactional process whereby meaning is created from co-interpretation and co-construction between the researcher and the participant (Lippke and Tanggaard, 2014).

The resulting accounts from an analysis using a modified "Gioia et al." technique are narratives demonstrating academics constructions of change in HEIs as well as explanations of the way context shapes these interpretations. These are presented in the subsequent chapter.

## CHAPTER 5 EMPIRICAL FINDINGS- PERSPECTIVES AND NARRATIVES OF CHANGE IN HEIs

### INTRODUCTION

This section explores the different perspectives of change in managing change to address research question 1, which is:

**RQ1** How do different academic change actors perceive organisational change and managing change in UK HEIs?

This chapter highlights the study participants' schema of change or their perspective of change. It identifies how participants in the study perceive change; what they understand change to mean. Exploring this aspect is essential, as Weick et al. (2005) suggest sensemaking is about exploring what an event means. This chapter also presents the data analysis on the narratives that comprise academics' sensemaking of change in HEIs using terms developed from the researcher's analysis of participant accounts. These narratives include Narratives of Ideological Transmutation, Narratives of Paradox and Narratives of Legitimation. In this study, academics' narratives of change develop through sensemaking frameworks associated with the nature and necessity of change in HEIs, the different types of change and the outcomes of these on the academe. The chapter also analyses the interplay of sensemaking of FA and MA on change in HEIs.

#### 5.1 Research Question one: Conceptions of change in HEIs

Exploring the different perspectives of change is critical since realities of organisational change emerge from actors' cognitive appraisal, understanding and social construction of episodes (Ford 1999; Oreg *et al.*, 2018). Interview questions two (2), four (4), twenty-four (24) and twenty-five (25) examined the varying perspectives of front-line and Manager-academics on change in HEIs. Across the three case study institutions, MA and FA academics describe change in HEIs according to the type of changes they have observed, highlighting the characteristics or properties of change in terms of its

pace and constraints. Integral to this is how the expectations of the different stakeholders influence the nature of change. Most participants translate change in HEIs in terms of its effect and implicate questions on the role of HEIs, and the impact on the culture of HEIs. The responses to these questions provide a background for understanding the narratives of change presented in this thesis from accounts of participants in this study. In other words, it demonstrates the links between the different constructions of the “*object*” of change in HEIs and the development of narratives of change in HEIs. The next section highlights these predominant conceptions of change which underlie the sensemaking narratives of change.

### 5.1.1 Rationale: Change in HEIs as Assimilation

Among the three case study institutions, MA and FA academics define organisational change as a response to environmental instabilities, which permeates different aspects of university governance and operation. They portray HEIs as nested within an environment that directs its activities, including those of their actors interacting with it. The requirements of the external environment mandate types of change initiatives and emphasize the kinds of expected behaviours required to respond to those changes. Over the last thirty years, particularly in the past fifteen (15) years, the environment has increasingly become turbulent. Consequently, there is an accompanying response in the form of different types and rates of change as HEIs have to adapt quickly, making change an essential component of institutional life.

*With the general economy... I think the university is in a state of upheaval; symptomatic of a turbulent environment (Mary, FA;IUK). The world's changing rapidly. In all kinds of ways that inevitably means you change or get left behind. So those kinds of drivers are just there, all those types of things are producing a changed environment and you'd expect the university to have to respond to that (David:MA; IKP). So we're often in a position, I feel where, we're playing a game in the football pitch, and halfway through the game, the rules change, but we're now measured under new rules that we haven't had time to learn" (Connor: MAFA;DBS)*

The findings of this study, where participants define organizational change in HEIs through reference to the relationship between the external environment and HEIs, are consistent with other studies.

Pucciarelli and Kaplan (2016) indicate the intrinsic role of external entities to change in HEIs. Ayres (2018) explains the impact of the environment within the context of the multiple forces which drive change in HEIs. Environmental influences include the increasing application of technology for teaching and learning, leading universities to increasingly invest in teaching equipment and aids described as 'modern'. Strategies for change implementation are utilized by universities to respond to and reflect the conditions in which institutions find themselves. At the operational level where academics are predominantly situated, this sometimes requires a modification of academics' teaching techniques.

There were similarities across academics from the three institutions in the cues for making sense of change in HEIs as externally driven. Monitoring and measurement is a major sensemaking cue embedded in participants' narratives, both implicitly and explicitly in the examples of university league tables and their correlation with REF. Diversification in the modes of interaction between HEIs and the external environment increases the influence of the external environment and affects how academics interpret change in HEIs. The diverse modes of interaction between HEIs and the external environment result in a duality of the nature of organisational change; as a reflection and a reaction to this instability. Most academics in this study report the diverse modes of interaction between HEIs and the external environment as a tighter coupling between the objectives of the external environment and HEIs, with HEIs constantly seeking to bring the requirements of the environment into its operations.

However, while most participants attribute change in HEIs to the environment, participants' responses suggest conflicting conceptions of the relationship between the external environment and HEIs. In the first narrative, the changed modes of interaction introduce a rigid range of options available for universities. This is seen in the way academics, predominantly MA, transfer responsibility for instigating organisational change towards the environment and away from institutions. Universities are faced with components of the external environment which cultivate certain responses regarding their operational activities and governance. In certain instances, strategic and change initiatives are indistinguishable from external requirements: external drivers become internal drivers. This group of academics is further divided into those that make sense of this practice as an *internalization* (of the external environment) (*Greg: MA/FA, DBS*), and those who describe this as a form of control of HEIs.

*I think there is an external pressure and that comes from the NSS, the National student survey, and the research assessment, REF now.... Research excellence framework, but it's been also recognized by the college and business school. if you look at the REF, business schools that did very well that's definitely influenced the position they stand, .....we want to aim to achieve a certain position in the ranking (Masha: FA; DBS)*

*In terms of this cycle of REF assessments, erm so that's an external pressure which is internalized within the apparatus of the department in terms of expectations; what you're expected to do and things .....So I think that the, I suppose the external environment has become much more visible and transparent (Greg: MA/FA, DBS).*

*There's been a lot of change in higher education since I started working within it. Most of it has been driven by government initiatives rather than by university themselves (Connor: MAFA;DBS), different impetuses and different implications for change in the university (Judith, MA;IKP) .... the environment is incredibly unstable for universities it has less levers in its own hands and less control over the timescale in which to respond, because its what the government or your own competitors are doing for you. (Jim, FA;IUK)*

*The main driver for internal drivers are external drivers...In the sense that the university has to perform. The university has to keep its research status. The university has to compete. And so those are set in a context..... from an external requirement to deal with NSS scores and so on to an internal driver which is the student experience... To a whole bunch of initiatives that are required to be put in place around it. (Mike, MA-FA;IKP)*

There are also contrasting narratives which adopt a diminished view of the influence of the external environment on HEIs. These suggest HEIs can mitigate the challenges of the environment. They achieve this by proactively seeking to achieve greater differentiation and modifying the speed at which they implement organisational change. For example, Jim (FA;IUK) suggests individual requirements also determines institutional patterns of response. Within his period of employment, IUK has both modified its staff structure and size and its academic portfolio. Some of this, he describes as innovation and the other as early long term planning instead of reacting to change, which is the response of some other universities at present.



*“This university in my 16 years here, certainly the business school has reacted very very quickly to change coming on. I think this university and certainly this business school is better placed than the many universities in the UK for all the changes that have hit in the last couple of years and now are hitting it because they got themselves sorted out quite early on.... they did a lot of work to balance staff to workload.... I think we're one of only 3 universities in the world that have got this validation exercise.... you get the feeling that some of these other universities are only just reacting; into changing their staff mix and staff cost” (Jim, FA;IUK).*

### 5.1.2 Effect: Change as a Modulator

Narratives from the previous section suggest participants in this study appraise change in HEIs in terms of its impact on the activities of institutions. Academics make sense of change in HEIs through its impact across the different levels of HEIs: The individual university level, individual academics and the general landscape of Higher Education. In answering questions on the relevance of change to HEIs, “Mike” identifies the changes with the greatest impact; “the big changes” both on universities as a whole and on academics. They are seen as changes which affect the fundamental or intrinsic activities of the academic and the institution. The first of these changes involves the introduction of the REF resulting in a modification in the core role of the academic and the introduction of performance measures and can be described as qualitative changes. The second change involves the introduction of new admission criteria resulting in the university engaging in activities viewed by academics as diametrical with the role of the HEIs and can be described as ideological changes

*The big influences since I first joined were, first of all, the introduction of now what’s called the “REF.”er....And how that has completely changed the way that research is approached. And particularly amongst older members of staff. And I think more recently, the change of student fees.....And that has had another...and, of course, the dropping of the quota system for.... So places like IKP when the quotas existed, we had a very easy life.....Because we knew that pretty much every undergraduate degree would fill up its quota absolutely, and we weren’t pushed into having to be marketing our degrees. So those were the two big changes I think that we have seen (Mike, MA-FA;IKP).*

Change in HEI has an impact on the systems, structures or policies of institutions, and the culture of HEIs and values of the academic. According to Edwards *et al.* (2007), external forces, organisational structures and individual attitudes and procedures and routines interact within HEI systems. Participants use words like “completely changed” to indicate the extent of the impact of change on academic practices and principles.

*“We all know that there’s a huge amount of game playing around, for example, the research excellence framework..... to a large extent we’re on a public relations game...” (Connor: MAFA;DBS)*

*The job has changed fundamentally. I think that the massification of higher education, alongside the implementation of tuition fees and the pressure that’s on academic staff to produce, not just research, but high-quality research and the competition that has come into the sector from young academics, just like yourself, erm, has actually made the job a lot, lot more pressurised (Joe: FA,IKP) .*

*So we have gone from universities being nationally focused, state-funded, relatively elite institutions, to universities being market-oriented, internationally focused, and again back to the massification. You know. The universities are much more inclusive than they were historically. So again each of those axis has different dimensions for change within... different impetuses and different implications for change in the university (Judith, MA;IKP)*

Despite the differentiation into “big” and “small” changes, academics make sense of the effect of change on the different levels of HEIs as a cumulative, using interconnective language in their narratives. In other words, academics in their sensemaking of change in HEIs do not differentiate between the effect of the change on the different levels HEIs. Instead, they suggest that change in HEIs such as the REF affects all levels of HEI simultaneously

*I think it’s really demanding now to be an academic, and it’s demanding in all sorts of new ways, and I hear that an awful lot from my colleagues. So we expect them to be excellent researchers, we expect them to be excellent teachers, we expect them to do research with impact, increasingly expect them to be international and to engage internationally. Now we’re*

worried about employability, and you know the demands on academics to deliver in multiple ways, many of which are new, erm is ever increasing. You know, we only need to read the Times Higher regularly to understand that and to understand that it's hugely demanding for the academics themselves. But it's also hugely demanding for the institutions that the academics and indeed the professional services staff are, also under new pressures in new ways but the institutions that we inhabit and create actually (Judith, MA;IKP) .

It becomes extremely difficult to persuade a young, ambitious, err research-active member of staff to do anything other than their minimal teaching and their research and their minimal administration...Because of course, anything else cuts into research. The research excellence framework (REF) governs not only their progress within the university but also their employability at other universities. So it's within their interests to essentially be very selfish. And just work on their research and try and do, you know, push anything else aside. So that's one of the unintended consequences of the REF-is that it has turned us away from a collegiate organisation...Into an individualistic organisation. And that is really very difficult because we're still trying to manage as a collegiate organisation.....Well (in a collegiate organisation), there's a sort of sense that people will feel it's their obligation, their duty to the department and to the school faculty to take on some of the jobs that need doing...We're not forced to do these jobs, but we do them because we work together and support each other and that sort of sense of 'if I do a little bit for somebody, somewhere down the track, they will do a little bit for me', and it works in a sort of nice way I think; quite a nice way of doing things, but we're losing that, and the biggest driver, reason why we're losing that I think is REF. (Mike, MA-FA;IKP)

The responses above illustrate the conceptions of the influence of the external environment on HEIs. Change is a response to pressure on universities: imperatives of the REF require universities to develop evaluation structures and procedures which then impact on the culture and values of academics as illustrated by the second and third paragraphs. REF challenges and violates the implicit obligations in social relationships among academics, and introduce new ways of working which academics adopt as they seek to comply with the requirements of the REF. For example, it alters academics' attitudes towards viewing the success of the faculty as a collective responsibility. These new ways of working exist in tandem with traditional ways of working and so for the Manager-academic, both effects introduce additional pressures as they try to navigate between two conflicting

modes of managing and leading. This understanding demonstrates the sensemaking of change as assimilation, incorporated in the participants narratives of change in HEIs that is explored in the next section.

## 5.2 Research Question 1: Academics' Sensemaking Narratives Of Change from Conceptions of Change

The previous section highlighted the conceptions of change, which forms the basis of the narratives of change described in the following sections of the thesis.

### 5.2.1 Ideological Transmutation

Participants in this study interpret certain change initiatives and strategies as representing different legitimating frames for the operations and role of HEIs in society. This analysis emerged as academics framed their explanations of changes in the landscape of HEIs on the differentiation of universities from other types of institutions. For example, the “focus” *to be a diverse but vibrant intellectual environment (Greg: MA/FA, DBS)* embodies the specificity and distinctiveness of HEIs. Using such analogies, participants stress that the different practices and activities which constitute the operation of HEIs are governed by the “focus” which is embedded within specific “ideologies”. In other words, it suggests the “focus” of HEIs is one manifestation of its “ideologies”. Such framing suggests this narrative underpins constructions on the definition of change in HEIs explored in the previous chapter, which highlights the impact of the changing expectations of external actors on HEIs strategies.

Adopting the position that legitimating frames are objectified using the concepts of “focus” and “activities” of HEIs, the present thesis refers to academics concerns around the alteration of the values of HEIs as well as their values and ways of working as narratives of ideological transmutation. According to the thesis data, MA and FA academics understanding of change as ideological transmutation is shaped by constructions of the justification for change in HEIs by externally mandated objectives. The impact of this external influence translates into ideological transmutation because institutions modify their structures, goals and focus in response to these external influences.

There are subtle differences in the use of this narrative among MA and FA academics interviewed for this study who express the narrative either as a shift or transformation of ideology or as a duality. Constructions of this narrative as a shift of ideology appear predominantly associated with FA academics while MA academics presents this as a duality.

Presenting the narrative of ideological transmutation as a shift, an FA in IUK discusses the change in thinking toward students

*The whole area of student engagement in the function of the university is politically much more prominent than it was five years ago. The reason for this prominence is the change in fee structure, and suddenly, students matter because, whereas historically, the majority of the income for learning and teaching came from the state, now it comes from the students. Now all sorts of people are interested in measures against which universities are judged. This is interesting because there is the issue about student as consumer rather than student as partner philosophy (Jeremy FA, IUK)*

Despite these differences in definition, FA and MA employ similar cues to construct this narrative. These differences are highlighted in the subsequent sections as they occur. In this study, the cues for the construction of the dimensions of the narratives of ideological transmutation include constructing change in HEIs as a “public relations game” reported by all three case universities. In IUK, for example, concern with the image of the institution with regards to its marketability.

The change in legitimating frames for the higher education sector evolved gradually. However, the pace of this change has intensified in fairly recent times, which from the study, appears to be within the last 14 (fourteen) years. Across the three institutions, participants describe different higher education reforms which distort the values of institutions and academics, as well as academics’ ways of working. For most participants, this includes the emergence of legislation with “commodifying” aims. A limited number highlights the global shift towards differentiation, both vertically and horizontally, in the higher education environment over the last twenty-five years. The accounts below from participants with varying lengths of experience in academia demonstrate the historical perspective, which underlines the narrative of ideological transmutation.

*It was not very entrepreneurial. So very bureaucratic, a bureaucratic structure and central admissions and no need to go out and get your own business, nothing like that (Julie: Fa; DBS)*

*Prior to that time (1991) it was fairly elitist and there wasn't a great deal of competition. I've seen the introduction of fees, increase in the number of providers, the changing focus of universities towards benchmark criteria, national standards, openness of what the University's doing, all that sort of thing has happened in that almost 30 years (Jack, FA;IUK)*

*If you're reading the academic literature about universities you would know it's New Zealand academics who begin talking about education as an industry (Judith, MA;IKP)*

The significance of this narrative becomes apparent when analysing data from academics with previous experience from non-academic organisations. Since this narrative is predicated on evaluations of the modification of HEIs due to external pressures, the arguments for this narrative are strengthened by the accounts of these participants on the differences in their experience of change within the two categories of organisation. Through their previous experience, they are positioned to evaluate the differences between both categories of organisations across time. For example, in responding to questions on these differences, a FA in IKP ascribes his motivation to switch to an academic career to the differing ideologies between HEIs and non-HEIs. He then recounts how current interpretations and enactments of change in HEIs have diminished these gaps:

*Erm, when I first started, it (the difference between HEIs and commercial sector) was absolutely huge, it was huge, the gulf was massive. I mean when I first left practice, I was amazed that people could get away with what we were getting away with, and it turns out 12 years later that we .... (laughing) and now we're under as much pressure as everyone else (Joe: FA,IKP).*

A similar narrative is observed in the accounts of another FA, this time in IUK, who joined the University after working in the private sector for over twenty years. He refers to change in HE being driven increasingly by pressures of the environment and, in his view, bridging the gap between academia and industry:

*"Hmm that's an interesting question I would have said until recently that the major difference would have been ..is commercial life, industrial life has been very much driven by the environment which it hasn't been in higher education until the last eleven or twelve years. And of course, the environment is changing significantly because, with tuition fees, competition in higher education, all the raft of changes, the environment is incredibly unstable for*

*universities. So in that sense, the University over the last few years is more like a normal private company in that sense” (Jim, FA;IUK).*

The accounts in the preceding paragraphs suggest that the narrative of ideological transmutation in the sensemaking of change in HEIs is defined by constructions on differences in the focus of HEIs as well as how academics are managed, resulting in the emergence of the dimensions *Commercialisation and De-professionalisation* respectively from data. Both pathways use arguments from the broader environment as cues, such as the changes around the distribution of funding for HEIs and the increasing application of league tables. These dimensions are explored in the subsequent sections.

#### 5.2.1.1 Commercialisation in HEIs

Explanations categorised under commercialisation centre around accounts which mention the relevance of “profit” in HEIs. The participants in this study express commercialisation narratives by referring to the role of HEIs and the motivation of academics working in HEIs. Participants use terms such as *“that’s what universities are about”* and *“getting involved in the generation of knowledge”* to discuss the rationale for change. The themes underlining this narrative include notions of intangible benefits of HEIs rather than readily quantifiable benefits as well as the principles associated with organising HEIs, with participants using terms such as *“subsidising other departments”*. For the majority of participants across all case study institutions, this was a significant concern when evaluating the content and processes of change in HEIs as evidenced in the accounts below

*“They will tell you every story there is to buy you into this agenda, every story there is; you know, increased student quality, increased research funding, increased staff blab la bla but the words that they’re scared to say is and we’ll make more money. It’s pretty transparent that that’s the absolute top objective” (Joe: FA, IKP).*

*I said, “it has nothing to do with teaching”. ‘HAHAHAHA, who cares HAHAHAHA’ and here’s two things that I was told by people on the “V” floor (IUK faculty management), a particular person on the “V” floor I was told ‘This is a business school with the emphasis on business’ and I said “I thought the emphasis was on school” “HAHAHAHA”, so that was laughed off. Just*

*saying. Now there was another person present when this conversation happened, so it's not a secret, it wasn't said to me in confidence or don't tell anybody this but we're here for the business, not the school, so I thought, 'Oh, this is the attitude, interesting' (John, FA; IUK)*

Conversely, some academics translate REF under narratives of commercialisation based on its interaction with broader change initiatives and the external environment rather than its specific rationalisations. It revolves around competition related to acquiring maximum funds from limited reserves. This interconnection results in the REF assuming greater relevance for the ideology of HEIs, explored further in the section on the narrative of legitimacy. The participants referred to the focus of HEIs to promote diversity rather than profit, which is in contrast to non-HEIs. They, therefore, viewed the introduction of changes such as REF as representing the modification of the focus of HEIs towards adopting business-like principles.

*There's a difference between things being economically viable and being profit maximising (Anna: FA-MA, IKP).*

*"finance is a key message in a lot of the changes we're doing" (Jim, FA;IUK)*

"Connor" illustrates the translation of REF as ideological transmutation using the metaphor "Game" to describe the responses of HEIs to REF which embody economic tenets. The sensitising cue is the elevation of the ranking of the individual institution by applying various benchmarks which include the Research Excellence Framework (REF). In response to those demands, universities suggest initiatives associated with image improvement. In this instance HEIs focus on distinguishing and announcing their REF performance against the performance of other institutions; "*A public relations game*". To participate in the game, institutions either develop new tactics or modify existing ones. The concern with the "public relations game" represents a shift from an ideology of scholarship towards a commercialisation ideology in HEIs.

*It's an example of how some institutions have responded to these pressures, with the view to then finding some measure in which they can claim they have succeeded in the research excellence framework and practically every university website in the aftermath of the Ref result of December 14 was crowing about their successes. So to a large extent, we're on a public relations game; a struggle for image, reputation erm that has less and less to do with real scholarship and more to do with Marketing, unfortunately. I mean, we all have objectives*



*that we want to improve our standing in these different league tables. And that's another thing that has come up in the past; league tables in general that we all now have to pay attention to. Again I think most of them are quite spurious. I say it's like mixing apples, oranges and bananas in the same criteria. We all do different things; all offer different whatever. But nevertheless, it, therefore, focuses the attention of universities on whatever it is that supposedly informs the creation of the league tables, and research obviously is one of the very big things that does that (Connor: MA-FA;DBS)*

*Erm it's become very much managerial now and less academic it seems like the driver for the business and it is seen as a business now, and the driver is about bringing money, and it seems like education and tuition seems to have taken a back-step so it's not about academic standards it's about business; commercial business and with commercial activity needs to cover its costs I think what's become less important in terms of its being an academic driven institution its more about business focus (Clark, FA;IUK).*

*The change of the culture towards what I would consider more of a commercial business culture (Jack, FA;IUK).*

The reduction in funding is also seen by some academics as a “big” change in HEIs and therefore forms a significant aspect of their sensemaking. This is because it introduces a different orientation towards students and by the relationships between academics and students

*The shift towards the 9,000 pounds fee regime was a very controversial and dramatic shift. It was a major sectorial shift, policy shift that the universities are now trying to adjust to (Judith, MA;IKP).*

Although universities have developed different avenues for income generation, they had until quite recently, been predominantly dependent on funding through government grants. HEFCE's policy on HEI funding through the fee-paying policy for students from 2011 has made universities adopt strategies to maintain economic viability and ensure the provision of facilities for students. Changes to the distribution of funding creates market-like operational environments for HEIs by transferring the responsibility of funding from the public to the student:

*And the money from the public purse is being reduced, reduced and reduced, so you know universities are having to operate in this more kind of commercial environment. Because*

*they're paying £ 9,000.00 a year of fees and they can choose whether to go to IKP or any other university in the country. And we also have to attract students from overseas; international students who are also paying vast amounts of money in fees (Anna: FA-MA, IKP).*

*The changes we are making to higher education funding will, in turn, drive a more responsive system. To be successful, institutions will have to appeal to prospective students and be respected by employers. Putting financial power into the hands of learners makes student choice meaningful (White paper 2011, Executive summary No.6).*

*The new funding changes do not mean that the Government ceases to fund higher education. On the contrary, total funding for higher education institutions is expected to increase by 2014/15. The public money that supports higher education courses should come predominantly in the form of loans to first-time undergraduate students, to take to the institution of their choice, rather than as grants distributed by a central funding council. We are reducing the block grant money that universities and colleges will get from the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) and increasing to a maximum of £9,000 the tuition loans that students can borrow from Government (Government white paper).*

Despite the suggestion in the policy documents stating these changes represent an overall increase in Higher Education funding, the reduction in the amount of public funding remains a significant sensemaking cue for academics. It corresponds to a change in the ideology of HEIs which manifests in the image of a "student". Commercialisation thus embodies the comprehensions that current student recruitment practices attach more importance to competition for students.

*Having to compete for students.... you know, historically IKP didn't have to compete for students. We got told how many students we were going to recruit, we got 17 applications for every 1 that we recruited, and we picked and choose, you know. That's not the case anymore, right. so what does that look like and how does that work through. How do we get smarter around marketing...what's marketing (In an exclamatory voice), branding...what's branding (in an exclamatory tone) and why do we have to do this and so they're all there..those conversations. Co-production of research; why do we have to work with external stakeholders to think about research, err grain challenging research and interdisciplinarity, you know all of that is part of that shifting terrain in terms of accessing both much more strategically focused state funding, and more diverse forms of funding (Judith, MA;IKP).*

This links in with the argument by an FA-MA in DBS where he describes the “game playing” strategies of institutions. “Anna” demonstrates these strategies as she narrates her involvement with the IKP’S recruitment committee. Rather than prioritising scholarly benefits, their external communication strategies involved placing more importance on the financial benefits of choosing IKP to the student:

*Another thing that..... I don’t take part anymore, I used to be part of the university student recruitment committee. That’s the really.....that’s the top-level committee in the University that looks attracting students, so that was very, very commercially driven... It had much more of that flavour of what we’re doing to market ourselves. It’s not that those things are inherently bad, it’s when the focus on those things starts to become greater than the focus on.....you know, what kind of learning environment? (its more) what qualifications can we give them to enable them to go out and fab job and drive a BMW?, which is how it feels a bit (Anna: FA-MA, IKP)*

The narrative above demonstrates the embedding of commercialised practices as acceptable and legitimate rationalisations of change for MA. Another participant, a MA-FA in DBS provides similar interpretations of the reshaping of ideologies as he narrates using *business speak* to legitimise changes as part of the preparations for participating in the REF

*Yeah, it was about diversification, it diversified the portfolio, again, that’s good business speak and the college said “yes, that’s a good idea, you’re over dependent on one or two, and it’s then about keeping up with the market or adding to or reinforcing our specialisms. We have quite a strong international focus, comparative focus, and I emphasised that (Greg: MA-FA, DBS).*

Academics description of the shifting purpose of HEIs is underlined by the disillusion and grief, which dominates their sensemaking of change through this narrative. The relationship with students is central to the identity of the academic and this feeling of grief at the loss of the focus of the institution is accompanied by a sense of helplessness at being forced to re-evaluate this relationship. “Anna” personalises this by emphasising the impact on IKP

*I think if you go back 20-25 years you would find majority of universities took that view. I think one of the sad things about universities is that it has become much more commercial. And for*

*IKP it's become much more commercialised too, when you've got.....it's become necessary to look at students as being more like customers than about being students (Anna: FA-MA, IKP).*

The narrative above arises from the other component of the funding policy underpinned by the notion of “competition” (*White paper 2011, Executive summary No.6*), which removes restrictions on student recruitment such that students exhibit “consumer” behaviour and then HEIs formulate commensurate strategies. Additionally, the concept of competition for students has been strengthened in higher education narrative by the emergence of private, for-profit organisations as providers of higher education.

*A company called RDI; Resource Development International they are the largest private provider of higher education in this country. Basically they have taken the OU model but cheaper. They have been a fast growing company over the last few years (Jim, FA;IUK).*

*We will tackle the micro-management that has been imposed on the higher education sector in recent years and which has held institutions back from responding to student demand. We must move away from a world in which the number of students allocated to each University is determined in Whitehall. But universities will be under competitive pressure to provide better quality and lower cost (White paper 2011 pg 2).*

Variations in the constructions of this narrative between MA and FA affects the extent to which this narrative differs within these groups of academics. Among FA, the shifting purpose is viewed as a transformation of the institution and is interpreted as having a substantial impact on the objectives and implementation of change. For MA, it represents the duality of HEIs which is characterised by competing priorities and has a moderate impact on the objectives and implementation of change.

This duality is reflected in comments of MA

*One of the challenges for the current University partly in this environment is how to do we continue to hold the spaces for collegiality and whole- of - institution thinking in a context where we have to be more strategic and make more professional decisions. So there is a tension, absolute tension that runs through this between collegiality and managerialism which I'm sure your project is all about because that's the tension in change management. In a context where it's not...Actually I do think we have to change because the external world around us has shifted (Judith, MA;IKP)*

*We try to listen to staff but we have to balance that with the need to implement certain decisions in a top down approach (Geoff, MA:IUK).*

Therefore, while FA academics approach changes embodying this narrative with severity, MA take a more lenient approach. For instance in an example provided by “Anna” in IKP in which marketisation was openly discussed at university level committee as the reason for its recruitment strategies, these reasons were not communicated to faculty academics. This view is echoed by other academics:

*“That’s the direction that I think universities are moving in; they are becoming businesses, in all meanings of that word, with....it’s the maximisation of.. in a nutshell, I don’t know who’s wealth, not my wealth, but it’s the maximisation of somebody’s wealth, rather than the maximisation of learning, you know, the maximisation of the student experience, the maximisation of you know, the opportunities to engage in community learning or wider social agenda. We are now focused...; all the meetings that we have always, our school meetings always start with gains summary of “this is where we stand in terms of gains and losses, this is where we stand in terms of surpluses and deficits, this is how many students we’re going to recruit, this is how many we’re short of target, (laughs), and you can feel it, the change is in the air” (Joe: FA; IKP).*

#### 5.2.1.2 De-professionalisation

This dimension of the narrative of ideological transmutation interprets change as something that modifies academic identity the nature of the academic role.

*There are more metrics, more ways in which performance is being measured because the University thinks it’s got to manage things more (inflection on “manage things more”)  
(David:MA;IKP)*

*If I think about the institution, DBS and how that’s changed since 1993. And I would say that in very, very broad terms, what’s changed is we’ve moved away from a very free-wheely, sort of individual almost amateur type role to becoming much more professional, centrally directed, almost controlling roles. So, this is a....and that’s been a big change (Josh: MA-FA; DBS)*

The narratives of both MA and FA across the three case study institutions demonstrates they base their interpretation on this assessment of the impact of change on the underlying principles of HEIs. The introduction and implementation of the REF, as well as other change initiatives based on monitoring and managing performance create a sub-narrative of the de-professionalisation of academia. Analysis suggests academics view this as a transmutation of ideology because these measures are predicated on principles associated with the commercial sector. They epitomise the quantification and idealisation of certain forms of research and publications. Introducing and implementing commercial characteristics modify the culture of HEIs in varying degrees:

*All notions of performance management they produce significant cultural change as well in... IKP hasn't had as much of that as many, but I know the universities where that's been really quite important in the whole culture of the place has changed (David:MA;IKP)*

Similar interpretations of control and the impact on behaviour are present in the narratives of other academics who describe an increase in the use of control measures through various forms spanning through the different levels within HEIs. This ranges from an institutional-wide effect such as the use of bureaucratic forms of systems of decision making to the activities of individual academics, such as an emphasis on the monitoring of academics, greater reliance on metrics and “formativity”

*“So it's become a lot more bureaucratic, a lot more formal, a lot more control to the centre as to what you can and can't do so it's a lot more checking and oversight than there used to be.... So you sort of feel like things have swung around from being very much decentralised where everyone has a sort of an equal say, to being much more centralised system of professional oversight” (Josh: MA-FA,DBS).*

*Its much more criteria about productivity in terms of papers and maybe grant getting, that kind of thing (Greg: MA/FA, DBS) .*

*“The job has changed fundamentally.....they've tried to do things to introduce systems which will make us behave like private sector employees, like the way we were back in practice. So like they've introduced this timesheet system” (Joe: FA,IKP)*

Reinforcing this view of the increased management of academics, the participant Joe in IKP describes the change in the practices of the University and the reasons which frame school meetings.

*I think what has happened is, if you went back to when I started here, about a decade ago, the whole school would turn up for school meetings, and because they were about a feedback process, and now because it's just a kind of a "this is what is happening session/ this is how much money we've made but we're not going to get access to it (laughs) which is the thing that kills us all. Then nobody goes anymore, I think there's a 100 academics in our school and I'd say about 10 turn up now, whereas before, there was about 60 of us, about 55 of us would turn up (Joe: FA;IKP)*

The concern with styles of management is also apparent in the narratives of paradox and explored in the next section.

### 5.2.2 Narrative of Paradox

The extracts below from MA and FA illustrate the key concepts characterising paradoxical interpretations of change in HEIs in this study. These are linked to: the structure of the University, hierarchy, dilemma and tensions from nested governance systems.

*Universities are large complicated organisations that are sedimented in multiple ways with different understandings about what the University is. You're making big controversial decisions, and I think one of the challenges for the current University partly in this environment is how to do we continue to hold the spaces for collegiality and whole- of - institution thinking in a context where we have to be more strategic and make more professional decisions. So there is a tension, absolute tension that runs through this between collegiality and managerialism. How do you reconcile collegial relationships and managerial relationships, overlaid on... sitting in a very complicated and rapidly changing external environment without a single view of what the future is going to look like, that's a challenging environment we're working within (Judith, MA;IKP).*

*Within the university structure...actually, changes are hierarchical; they are a construct of the top and are a commanding cascading system down. So the hierarchy decides and then cascades their command down (Ray,FA:IUK)*

Interpretations of change in HEIs among participants in this study may be seen to be negotiated in concepts of authority or power; control and freedom. It focuses on the ways that the distribution of authority/ power affects decision processes in HEIs. Josh in DBS categories change in terms of the way that it transfers power from the local level to the central level and seen as permeating through different aspects of academic life

*“power (from) being very much within the individuals, to being pushed down the centre, even very minor operational stuff is very heavily controlled” (Josh: MA-FA,DBS)*

and is reflected or made visible in the notion of “choice”. Further analyses suggest that making sense of change through and as the narrative of paradox is framed within constructions of voice; the ratification or the subjugation of the voice of academics as individuals and as a collective at the school level. “Voice” can be interpreted as a product of power and the ability to influence the direction of HEIs.

For both MA and FA, voice allows academics to consolidate power for the local or school level and therefore is an essential aspect of their translation about change in HEIs. MA recognise the significance of voice and enact their interpretation of the significance of voice in their discursive sensegiving activities, while FA enact this in the way they engage with initiatives.

For example, a former dean, Greg, narrates his strategies to generate legitimacy for a restructuring initiative. Here he demonstrates FA's expectation of voice and the outcomes when this expectation is unfulfilled.

*The faculty I sold that as a....the idea is getting more political influence at the centre. People were very sceptical and they will continue to tell me when they see me, we've got a faculty now but is the centre listening, I don't think they are, the dean's not very.... And I'll say that's down to the dean; he's not representing our interests, it's not about a problem of the faculty, at least we've got someone to go and shout at, they should be listening to us. (Greg: MA/FA, DBS).*

Providing a similar way but from the perspective of FA, Jo recounts her experience of undertaking a task and her subsequent apathy when her efforts were ignored:



*My head of department he said 'this is good, this is a good thing' but nobody was doing it, everybody's saying its a good thing but nobody's actually doing anything. I did great reports, figured out how we could do it, nothing. I mean they went to the right people, I guess the right people were busy. So you know, there's a lot of times, people feel like you have all these great ideas, but there's no way they're gonna happen (Jo, FA;IUK)*

The sensemaking of change in HEIs through the narrative of paradox by academics is particularly visible in descriptions of the implementation of change in universities who describe their governance structure as “collegiate”. An interesting facet of the narrative of paradox is the way some academics view change implementation as directive, aligned with managerial governance but at the same time still regard it as participative and aligned with collegial governance. Some academics such as FA-MA Anna respond to the direct questions on their interpretation of change using this narrative.

*I think, “oh no what awful thing are they’re going to impose on us now” (laughs) (Anna: FAMA, IKP).*

Academics in such institutions narrate a dilemma which emanates when they attempt to reconcile underlying interpretations of change with interpretations of appropriate ways of governing or managing in universities across different actors. The sensemaking of this dilemma constitutes a narrative of paradox for the implementation of change. Both manager academics and front-line academics offer similar interpretations of the constituent elements of paradox: domination and synergism, the former creating interpretations of the nature of change as directive, and the later change as negotiation. In other words, the constituent elements of paradox are answers to the questions: “Can I affect the outcome of this decision”; and “Do I have a choice”, with “Yes” representing synergism and “No” representing “domination”. In the first element of paradox, outcomes of university change objectives originating from the upper or institutional level are presented as rigid with minimal opportunities for alternative outcomes. This is seen in the use of sentences such as “push them out to schools”, “clear guidelines for implementation” and “monitoring” from examples of different initiatives. The second element of which contributes to paradox is the idea that decisions should be debated by academics before they are adopted. This

*So the idea is you're sharing. It's more collegiate. You're sharing the management of your department and your school and your University.*

*I don't know there's just been things where we say 'didn't we'. Two sides to this, one is 'didn't we talk about this didn't we say it was gonna be like this and it isn't and the other part of it is 'oh, when did that happen, you mean we're supposed to do this now', nobody asked us whether this was a good idea, they just said do it this way. (Jo, FA;IUK)*

Mike, a MA-FA in the example above indicates that schools are expected to conform to the stipulated guidelines from central management while at the same time, they are presented as subject to the interpretation and approval of the various committees which comprise the decision-making structures for faculties. Anna in IKP provides various examples where change initiatives were imposed despite undergoing a consultation process. She describes how change objectives are presented to academics as subject to discussion. However, the decisions arising from the consultation were ignored or dismissed, and the change initiatives were imposed.

*They just tell us, it's just that we've got a new process...., we've got a new way of doing this, and here it is and you have to get on and do it, there wasn't really any consultation about it. Things that come down say around teaching, so I used to be the Director of Graduate Studies for the school. So I was on the faculty graduate studies committee and someone somewhere used to come up with some flipping bonkers idea and it would come down to the faculties and we'd all discuss it, oh for heaven's sake and tell them exactly what was wrong with it and why it wouldn't work and it would all go quiet for a year and then it would come back again. ....So these sorts of things were all pointed out to the university how-but they just don't listen it's imposed on us and it's.... the reason for them doing this is the most ridiculous reason (Anna: FA-MA, IKP).*

Even with the seemingly directive implementation of change, there are discrepancies in processes for imposing change. Participants describe instances where strict specifications underlining prohibited activities for achieving change outcomes exist, but communication on acceptable activities and their change goals are unclear.

*We had to do things like do study skills or something like that, except that it was totally uncoordinated. It was totally unclear how the students were supposed to be enhanced. We were also told that this had to be of zero cost so it couldn't come out of anybody's teaching allocation because that's a cost (Anna: FA-MA, IKP).*

There are also examples of a double loop paradox in which initiatives are presented for consultation, the recommendations are ignored, and the initiative is imposed. For instance, a recent initiative was the introduction of a “veggie” week for students. It underwent a consultation process with the implication of being optional. Following the outcomes of the debate in which staff contested the change, the tone from upper university management then changed to one of enforcement. The following excerpt highlights a loop process of change where the practice of collegiality is seen in the consultation process, but a directive follows this. The final stage is a pseudo-autonomy where staff have a limited sense of control over the actual implementation

*So we're having a debate in the faculty at the moment about whether we should grow anymore or not. In the end, we're going to have to grow whether we like it or not. But you know, there are that people who don't like that, don't think it's the right thing to do but they've got the opportunity to say that. In the end, I think we'll still grow but we're having that discussion, we've got to have that discussion (Judith, MA;IKP)*

*In terms of the “Up” problem, although I guess here in the business school its the nth floor I don't know there's just been things where we say 'didn't we'. Two sides to this, one is 'didn't we talk about this didn't we say it was gonna be like this and it isn't and the other part of it is 'oh, when did that happen, you mean we're supposed to do this now', nobody asked us whether this was a good idea, they just said do it this way (Jo, FA; IUK).*

### 5.2.3 Narrative of legitimisation/legitimacy

Academics question the relevance of change for institutions and reference the validity and suitability of change initiatives for HEIs and its effect on its internal stakeholders, students and staff. They suggest that their response to REF and change in HEIs is heavily dependent on its justification and process of implementation. In other words, their response to the change in HEIs such as REF is an enactment of their sensemaking of its justification.

*I mean I have sat on things like faculty committees where..... we had this big thing;.....i mean it completely kind of like tipped the University up, shook everything up, and the place was in*

*chaos for about two years and then they put it back together and it wasn't any better than it had been before (laughs). And that had taken an inordinate amount of time, God knows how much it cost. Demoralised a lot of the staff, ..... and a lot of things are really no better than they were before, and in some cases worse. (Anna: FA-MA; IKP)*

*"It (Change/REF) needs to be sensible.....I think that a university would struggle to do major change without really bringing people-persuading people that it's a sensible thing to do..... I think resistance would be more upfront and more visible in a university to change something they didn't accept. And that could be a good thing because it could actually stop silly changes happening" (Mike, MA-FA;IKP).*

For both FA and MA participants, examinations of all aspects of change: the rationale or the objectives, the process or implementation of change initiatives, can produce narratives of legitimisation. Academics in this study used labels such as "sensible", "joke" and "silly" to describe their evaluation of types of change and their justifications.

*We did fantastically well on impact I think we were xx<sup>th</sup> in the country which quite frankly is a joke, we've got no idea why. We all think the whole thing (the REF) is a flipping big joke..... it's ridiculous. (Anna: FA-MA; IKP)*

*"We didn't want to base ourselves on the ABS journal guide (to decide staff inclusion in REF) , which we thought was a nonsense (Connor: MA-FA;DBS)*

The ways in which they constructed this narrative differed for the different aspects of change and is explored in subsequent sections.

Both FA and MA express a direct relationship between their understanding of the rationale of the change and their response to change in HEIs. Across the three case study institutions, academics reference the implicit purpose of HEIs and the obligations to their internal actors; students and staff. As both stakeholders and consumers of higher education, students are entitled to certain obligations. They suggest the aim of the University is to be an institution of learning, sites of diversified knowledge production and dissemination (Greg: MA/FA, DBS), to provide benefits for these stakeholders.

Promoting a similar interpretation of legitimacy, academics suggest the construction of legitimacy also extends to other change initiatives, such as the TEF, reinforcing the interconnectivity of change initiatives. The needs of the student is a driver identified both at the individual level, *Student satisfaction is really important (Ken, MA;IUK).*

*But things like NSS and the need to be able to have student demand for our courses and so on, is driving a whole bunch of initiatives around student experiences, which is impacting, on-you know everything from how we manage student inductions through to how we give feedback and so on (Mike, MA-FA;IKP)*

And in university documents. For example, it is one component of the University's strategic objective in IUK

*.....University's very strong commitment to student engagement and the notion of students being partners in academic endeavour. (IUK University publication)*

For the academics studied, legitimacy narratives revolve emerge when they assess the ability of the REF to achieve this purpose. FA question the necessity of the REF in terms of the capacity to provide advantages previously unavailable to students, including its impact on students. For example, Anna, an FA-MA in IKP in response to questions on discursive sensegiving activities for the REF labels the rationale as “*bonkers*” since it is not aligned towards benefits to the students.

Although this construction is shared by the different actors, it appears to have more relevance with academics who have direct relationships with the students. *For example, John, a FA in IUK, cites an initiative involving the modification of course structure by including content that would increase student employability within the department. He suggests academics adopted the initiative because of its potential to improve student success after graduation.*

*You know, we do get a lot of those (emails from students), and they get back to us and tell us they got a great job, and they are able to make the direct link with what we've been teaching them, and how they got the job, and what the job entails. And the feedback we get from employers, we feel like we're doing it right and that the good students are getting there and there's more and more good students and they're going out there and doing really good jobs, you know”.... (John,FA;IUK)*

In the extract above, John attributes academics' reaction to initiatives perceived as an enhancement of student development to the internal satisfaction for achieving the purpose of HEIs.

In addition, evaluations of the validity of the implementation procedures produce legitimisation narratives for both MA and FA. Perceived discrepancies in REF 2014 for example, highlight the unsuitability of its categories to evaluate performance. The following extract demonstrates academics' evaluations of the limitations in the process of implementation of the REF to represent the activities and capabilities of academics and institutions accurately.

*Because I don't think it sort of.....well things like the impact really shows it up to be ridiculous. We are a tiny department most of whom don't do things that have particular impact in the wide world. And yet somebody has managed to write a very good story so we've come out as being sixth. I mean It's crazy, really crazy (Anna: FA-MA, IKP).*

#### **5.4. Interplay Of Sensemaking**

The interplay of sensemaking refers to the interaction processes between different change actors. A view of change underpins it as consisting of the sensegiving and sensemaking process of the different academics; front line academics, manager academics or frontline/manager academics as they adopt different positions in the change process as initiators, implementers or recipients of the change. In other words, it delineates change as an evolving event requiring input from different categories of change actors; initiators, implementers and recipients. An implication of the organisational structure dimension of context is the blurring of boundaries allowing academics to be both “administrators” or managers and front-line academics and in certain institutions such as IKP and DBS where MA are situated in the same space as FA. The blurred boundaries result in an instance where the “change initiator” and “agent” can be the same person. This aspect of the context of HEIs can explain the enactment for the interplay of sensemaking observed in this study. For example, the perception of change in HEIs as an event that occurs within a context of blurred boundaries can shape the interpretation of change implementation practices.

*I believe that you don't get any change through unless it's accepted and people are happy for you to do it. Some things that you need...so it makes me begin any process like that with .....quite tentatively... Throwing it in as an idea, seeing how people might respond to it, picking up what the sort of resistances might be; and I've probably abandoned quite a few things as a*

*result of it seeing I don't think it will work..... But generally just testing around and then bringing it through sensitively, in the sense.....you know, listening to what the objections are going to be and trying to adapt to those and model something that can be workable. That is my approach to trying to make things happen differently. ... I don't present it as saying, "right from tomorrow, we're going to be doing something different and this is going to be a bit of a surprise to you." There's usually..... the whole that has been raised, discussed, put into the conversations so you could think it's going to spread around a bit that this is where I think we're going and then sensing the feedback, and as I've said, maybe abandoning it if it looks like it's going to really hit. (Mike, MA-FA;IKP)*

*So Law School growth plan: should our Law School grow, can't do that unless our Law School wants to grow. Appointment.... So you know working for big strategic things, appointment processes, no appointing people that schools don't want to have, you know you've got to have a process by which colleagues can see the applicants and feel like they've had some say in who gets appointed. Work load modelling, transparency in work load modelling, people might not like what they've been asked to do but at least if they feel that's fair and transparent, they're going to be more....So you know from the strategic, to the operational to the quite mundane, people are much happier in their jobs if they understand what's going on. They might not like it but at least they understand it. So you can't do things to people unless you take them with you, it seems to me. So we're having a debate in the faculty at the moment about whether we should grow anymore or not. In the end we're going to have to grow whether we like it or not. But you know, there are people don't like that, don't think it's the right thing to do but they've got the opportunity to say that. In the end, I think we'll still grow but we're having that discussion, we've got to have that discussion and out of that discussion, for me, there comes a much clearer understanding of: these are the things we're going to have to address and figure out how to do that; so it helps your decision making, you're not just doing it for the sake of doing it (Judith, MA;IKP)*

The narrative above suggests the interaction of sensegiving and sensemaking between change initiators and the recipients adopts two complementary forms: direct or diffused. Direct

sensegiving-sensemaking as the name implies, involves the vertical sensegiving and sensemaking between the change initiators and the recipients. Diffused sensegiving - sensemaking involves both vertical and horizontal interactions the interpretation between change recipients and change initiators of the sensemaking accounts between change recipients. Diffused sensemaking can be described as sensemaking of sensemaking since it relies on the efficiency of interpersonal networks and relationships. In this example, the focus for Mike is to harness the inherent sensemaking of actors to use as a tool for creating effective change initiatives. FA engaging in an interplay of sensemaking recognise the intrinsic emotional dimensions of the REF.

Similar to MA-FA, FA-MA view the interplay of sensemaking as a tool for reducing the inherent ambiguities of change in HEIs. The interaction among the different actors creates an environment for resolving tensions and arriving at workable solutions. Academics narratives suggests that the motivation to engage in the communal actions which result in change success is dependent on the sensegiving-sensemaking dyad. For example, on two separate occasions, “Anna” a FA-MA in IKP attributes the outcomes of change to the communal actions of academics, defining change as an event

*where things “go a muddle, and we all muddle on through. Then I expect that we get told to do these ridiculous things like the REF which nobody’s happy about. But somehow everybody pulls together and it sort of works in the end (Anna: FA-MA, IKP).*

FA also echo the interpretations of MA that the interplay of sensemaking comprises both vertical and horizontal interactions.

*So if you see that....you see something controversial is coming up you would go and talk to colleagues around-you would discuss it an undergraduate. And in graduate school, Graduate Studies Committee and you would also have conversations around with various people.....I could discuss with my colleague next door, or I would go and talk to the head of department about it or I would go and talk to the Department’s Head of Learning and Teaching (Anna: FAMA, IKP).*

Anna’s framing in the narrative above reinforces the emotional triggers and dimensions of sensemaking and the property of sensemaking as highly social. This suggests that an interplay of sensemaking is particularly significant in directive change implementation processes to reduce the



associated negative emotional impact on academics. While they may be various “controversial” change content arising in the University, these do not automatically trigger emotions leading to sensemaking. Academics attach more importance to change outcomes with an operational impact on their activities.

*Most of the time it's the day to day things. When it's the big strategic things ... It doesn't have much impact on me” (Anna: FA-MA, IKP).*

The participants' interpretation based on the framework of “voice” links the narrative of paradox with the interplay of sensemaking.

In IUK provide the interplay of sensemaking occurs horizontally between academics on the same level. FA participants suggest there is an absence of horizontal meaning construction between MA and FA.

The interplay of sensemaking recognises the role of other actors in the outcome of the change process. Participants who espouse this narrative describe change as a process that depends on other academics' actions. This can be seen as a convergence of sensemaking whereby the combined sensemaking of the diverse actors in the institution leads to the creation of a change outcome.

*I believe that you don't get any change through unless it's accepted and people are happy for you to do it. Some things that you need...so it makes me begin any process like that with .....quite tentatively... Throwing it in as an idea, seeing how people might respond to it, picking up what the sort of resistances might be; and I've probably abandoned quite a few things as a result of it seeing I don't think it will work..... But generally just testing around and then bringing it through sensitively, in the sense.....you know, listening to what the objections are going to be and trying to adapt to those and model something that can be workable. So again I think I'm speaking generally rather than specifically but that is my approach to trying to make things happen differently. ...”. (Mike, MA-FA;IKP)*

This narrative also translates to a recognition of the power of the collective and the contributions of other actors. It recognises academics as actors with identities, as autonomous, knowledge actors *Quite often it is the sense of, you know, that several minds thinking about something and because I will have, perhaps suggested something that has got...that hasn't been fully thought through And*

*somebody else fully thought through and exposes well, "If you get that here, there could be this real problem later on". (Mike, MA-FA;IKP)*

According to Mike, (MA-FA;IKP) a negative response; "resistance to change", is an expected reaction to proposals of change which are not self-originated. His use of metaphors, "hit a brick wall" to describe these responses to change either emanating from the top or from the bottom and "push against" to describe the counter-response suggests academics make sense of change in HEIs as an event whose boundaries are subject to modification through negotiation. This sensemaking of change through this narrative is highlighted in the following narrative, where he illustrates the strategies utilised by academics to effect change.

*When you're trying to change from the top downwards, is the further down you'd go the more resistance you'd meet because they don't own it. And it means that they are the ones who've got to actually change what they do on a day-to-day basis. So if they've got less inclination to what they have to do, you know, like as I say inertia resistance, things occur much more down. It also happens the other way round as well if it's coming from the bottom and then the inertia happens at the top. So we wanted to make a change to the regulations. So my predecessor in the role I'm in here, started to make a move and just hit a brick wall. When I took over, I put together a bunch of evidence from the exam board and then pushed it up the line with an argument, and managed to get the support at faculty levels that there was...we had a case for making a change. However, we just hit a complete brick wall going beyond the faculty. So the relevant committees that we had to persuade, they were saying no. But we just kept going. We just kept on providing more evidence. .... And 3 years down the track, we have eventually got the 'regs' changed.... So that's an example of going up and as you can see, you meet the resistance but you can push against resistance in the same way as coming down. You can push against it. (Mike, MA-FA;IKP)*

The strategies for "pushing against resistance" reflect active responses to change. Reports of an active response to change are mostly associated with MA-FA. FA-MA in contrast, describes employing passive approaches to challenging change

*That's the way resistance works, we don't march on management house with placards, we just quietly get on and do our own thing and ignore a lot of it (Anna: FA-MA, IKP).*

When FA-MA academics recognise that other actors may have different interpretations of the initiative, they view change as an event that occurs through negotiation, which introduces a need to justify the rationale for the change. For some academics, this is attributed to the conceptualisation of the response to change in negative terms and/ or the concept of legitimacy.

## **Chapter 6 EMPIRICAL FINDINGS: ACADEMICS SENSEMAKING RESOURCES**

This section explores the construct academics use to shape their understanding of change in HEIs to address research question 2 which is:

**RQ 2.** What resources do academics use to construct understanding of change in HEIs and how do these resources shape their construction of reality?

### **6.1 Research Question 2: What resources do academics use to construct an understanding of change in HEIs and how do these resources shape their construction of reality?**

The second research question explores academics' resources for sensemaking based on the assumption that individual and organisational "constructs" shape the interpretation as well as subsequent actions of organisational actors triggered by events and/or moments of ambiguity. In this thesis, these constructs correspond with the resources academics actively or consciously mobilise to construct the meanings that constitute their realities of change in HEIs. In other words, these resources may be said to condition the sensemaking of academics when they draw on them to generate accounts which render a change in HEIs meaningful. A priori and emergent themes of this study suggest these resources manifest as culture, identity, leadership and context among academics in HEIs. Consequently, they are interpreted as interacting social and self-situational constructs which embody the definitions of sensemaking.

Data from this study indicate these academics conflate these constructs to develop narratives of REF. It, therefore, presumes these resources collaborate to shape participants' constructions of meaning on change in HEIs. It is crucial to first explicate and understand what they mean to academics to understand how these constructs function to shape meaning construction. This is because they are themselves constructions (Brown and Lewis, 2011). Therefore, this chapter explains how academics articulate these resources and then explicates the process that confers the "status" of resources on them. This understanding then explains how academics create narratives of change in HEIs in subsequent sections.

Pseudonyms have been used to represent the participants rather than numbers or letters. This seeks to maintain the research methodology; people as opposed to numbers, to make them real, they are not just a statistic.

**Table 6 Sources of Data**

| Resources | Apriori Theme/Codes  | Emergent theme/Codes  |
|-----------|--|---|
| Context   | Operating model (Abolafia, 2010, Glynn, 2006)                  | Governance system   |
| Identity  | Distinct   | Eroding distinctiveness, distinct   |
| Culture   | Subjective, transcends institutions, variegated and collective | Subjective, Context/institutionally driven, variegated and individualistic, variegated and collective |

### 6.1.1 Culture in HEIs

Irrespective of their position as either MA or FA, academics in this study present culture in HEIs as multifaceted and complex. This is evidenced by the dilemma expressed by some academics when asked to highlight its relevance for change in HEIs. However, they did that as they responded to prompts and indirect questions designed to investigate their embedded interpretations of academic culture and change in HEIs. The responses to the direct question on the relevance of culture for implementing change in HEIs and responses to indirect questions, for example, the differences between implementing change in HEIs and non-HEIs, suggest that understandings of culture in HEIs shape their interpretations of change.

About half of the participants demonstrated an overt awareness of culture in HEIs and directly implicated the culture in/and of universities in explaining the change process in HEIs. They suggest it is significant because of its effect on the interrelationships between individuals and groups. For example, IKP and DBS academics talk about culture's impact on the perception of teaching-only academics by research-active academics. In other words, the distinction and integration between these two groups of academics. It also influences how academics think about the world and,

subsequently, how they respond to events. Within this group of participants, culture is an essential aspect of organisational life, as illustrated by the extracts below.

*I think it kind of stems from what you'll probably come back to, and I don't know, maybe I haven't talked about it enough, but I think it's about culture. In some institutions, there will be a culture where, and I think this underpins organisational behaviour as well, they'll be a culture of change, they'll be a culture of progress, they'll be a culture of advancement, they'll be a culture of collegiality (Joe: FA;IKP).*

*The overriding culture that affects change is about the nature of what the school stands for. (in order words) It's about the ethos we have as a university and as a school. So you could say in some organisations, change management is a lot more directive. I can't have a directive approach to change management if I'm also trying to produce a collaborative, cooperative, supportive free culture inside the school, then those two will conflict. So I've got to do my change management in the context of a culture that we have here (David: MA; IKP)*

In the accounts above, the participants use words which suggest culture is fundamental to all aspects of organisational practice. It influences the way academics think about the world and, subsequently, the way they respond to events. The use of phrases such as “*maybe I haven't talked about it enough*” and “*So I've got to do my change management*” emphasizes the centrality of culture in shaping the behaviour of actors in HEIs and the strategies. Other responses expand this view by highlighting its effect on the interrelationships between individuals and groups. For example, in IKP and DBS, institutions with substantial reference to the research component of academic's work, participants talk about the impact of culture on the perception of teaching-only academics by research-active academics. This emphasis is significant because narratives of change evidenced in this study are construed within the distinction and integration or disintegration between two categories of academics.

In contrast, other academics suggest that culture in HEIs comprises multiple components, which leads to multiple interpretations, a characteristic that hinders the ability to articulate it. For example, an FA in IUK suggests that although there is a culture, it correlates to the academic's career stage, resulting in differences across groups.

*There is one (a culture), but it's difficult to describe. It very much depends on which group of academics you talk to; their priorities are different, which then creates the culture. So, there is a culture, but it depends on which band you fall in (Sarah, FA;IUK)*

Another academic from IKP, an MA, analysing culture from a philosophical perspective, similarly describes the enigmatic nature of culture in HEIs.

*"Not in any straightforward kind of way. Being an academic is a particular kind of job: I think we all value the autonomy of an academic job. We're a social science faculty, so I think there is something about a deep commitment to social justice. But not even all my faculty colleagues will buy into that" (Judith, MA; IKP)*

This challenge expressed by academics to define culture resonates with arguments by Ivanova and Torkkelo (2018) on the existence of different perspectives of culture. It also reflects the components of culture identified by the academics in this study, which include roles, status, values, ways of working, and epistemological differences within various disciplines. It can be broadly identified as corresponding to the dimensions- values and identity, which overlap with each other.

The data from this thesis suggests academics think about culture in two broad ways: dependent or independent of specific institutions or universities. Narratives involving culture as dependent on the specific institution suggest that understanding of culture in HEIs is institutionally driven. In other words, academics in this study adopting this view describe culture as a product of specific institutional dynamics.

*Academic culture depends on the institution. It's something ingrained in policy or process, or it's dictated by policy and process, but it's ingrained in like the fabric and the fibre of the institution and its employees. It's something which is a consistent message, and it's beyond symbolic. We are not talking about simple symbolic cultural messages; we are talking about systematically employed cultural agendas. (Joe: FA;IKP).*

*I think we still have quite an old-fashioned, I think quite interesting culture in terms of the gap between senior management and operations staff, and I think that is part of the resistance to embracing change. Examples like this framework are seen as something that's come from somewhere and put on to other people (Mary, FA;IUK).*

Among the response from participants which align with the independent stance, there are also suggestions of a shared assumption or beliefs common to actors who identify themselves as academics and which transcends individual university contexts. This is reflected in the term “collegiality”. They suggest it is a consistent component of culture that represents values common to all academics irrespective of location or university context. Collegiality includes ways of managing academics and decisions making processes of HEIs and the commonality of purpose.

*And being a genuine sort of collegial actor, or part of the team, the wider team, I think that's important (Greg: MA/FA, DBS)*

Another dimension of culture which was described by academics in the three institutions, correlates to the perceived role of HEIs, and represents both values and identity. In contrast to other types of organisations where the goal is the promotion of economic advantages, the role of HEIs is the promotion of scholarship. The keywords in the accounts below “what no other institution is doing” and “its what we should be doing as academics and” “its what the university should be doing”. These serve to different HEIs as distinct cultures

*Innovation and writing and publishing, researching and discovering and doing things which no other institution in the society is doing (Greg: MA/FA, DBS).*

*When you've worked in a commercial organisation, it's very much more.... everybody's very much more sort of tied into what the commercial goals of the organisation are. We also understand.....i mean most academics understand that if you're running a teaching course, for example, that only attracts two students that are likely to be losing a shed load of money, then that's not economically viable. ...., but again, it's what we should be doing as academics, is to bring on the academics of the future and to encourage that kind of critical enquiry and intellectual pursuit. It's what the University should be doing, isn't it, it's being citadels of knowledge and pushing forward the boundaries of knowledge and all of that. Whereas if you worked for Unilever, actually it's about selling washing up liquid, isn't it (Anna: FA-MA, IKP).*

Another major component of culture is associated with the role of researchers and teachers, and which is also an element in the construction of identity for academics. However, its construction differed across academics in the three case study institutions; in the way, that prestige or social status



is intricately bound with the priorities and the role of the academic. For most academics in DBS and IKP, culture is predominantly associated with the research role. They attribute this understanding of culture to their affiliation with institutions that identify as research-intensive. In other words, they define their culture through reference to the institution's culture. This association of academic culture with institutional culture suggests that academic culture is embedded within the University's identity and therefore is context-dependent.

Academics in the study also described culture in HEIs through reference to a class system. The demarcation between research and teaching roles and the dominance of the research role resulted in an elitist system partially anchored on the institution's organisational structure.

*I'm trying to think how best to answer that question (the definition of culture). I mean, there is very clearly in a research-led University a sense of academic-and an academic what it is, you know, the importance of being an academic I suppose within the University. In the 16 years or so since I've been here, it's become less hierarchical, I think, which you see pockets of, a little bit where the teaching fellows are treated slightly second-class. So I'd say that traditionally, there's been more of an elite academic culture. What we're seeing much more now, I think, is a ... just simply an academic culture..... prioritising teaching and research.. You know, just being part of a body of people who are learning with each other and from each other sort of thing... (Mike, MA-FA;IKP)*

*I'm not so sure people saw me as an academic. I was employed as a university teacher, yes, but I think when you talk about academic (culture) the research component is important (Masha: FA.DBs)*

A few academics included differences in epistemological philosophies in their interpretations of culture and attributed the dimensions of culture to these epistemological differences. The academic culture within this conception corresponds to the varying academic disciplines.

*The sciences have different cultures from the social sciences; they've got a different kind of epistemological perspective haven't they? .....I mean If you walk over to the department of economics, the chances are that you would see a corridor of closed doors, whereas if you come to our department, you're much more likely to see a corridor of open doors. If people are in, they will have their doors open, rather than closed. We feel that we're far more collegiate and*

*helpful and open and friendly. And we don't..... for us, our teaching fellows are as valued a member of the department as the kind of research-active academic staff whereas for the department of economics, they don't mind if their research-active academic are all in that building and all their teaching people are stuck in another building over there because they are "just teaching people" (inflection added) (Anna: FA-MA; IKP).*

The way that academics employ culture as a resource for sensemaking varies for different aspects of change. The mechanism for shaping sensemaking about the definition of change in the HEIs differs from the mechanism for making sense of change implementation in HEIs.

Culture appears to be an instinctive resource of academics' sensemaking of change implementation in HEIs. This is the case irrespective of whether they portray an overt awareness of culture. In response to the question on the relevance of academic culture for implementing change in HEIs, academics such as Mike (MA-FA; IKP) mentioned a lack of awareness of a direct link between the two. Although he does not expand on this, he follows the statement by the observation of the impact of status, which this thesis identifies as a dimension of academic culture on the implementation of change:

*I can't see a direct link about that except that I think it's made it easier for change,...that .....what I've described; reducing the elite group separation has actually made it easier. It has made it more conducive to be able to change because I think if you've got elite groups, it becomes rigidly elite, and so, you know, they won't change. (Mike, MA-FA; IKP)*

A clearer articulation of academics' reference to culture to interpret change in HEIs was better articulated by academics

For 3 of the participants, change in HEIs is "culture bound". However, the response to whether there are differences between implementing change in HEIs and non-HEIs suggests that culture is a fundamental resource for the sensemaking of the REF for academics. Both FA and MA academics attribute the responsive actions during the initiation and implementation of the REF to the distinctive characteristic of HEIs of incorporating academic perspectives in the decision-making process.

*When you've worked in a commercial organisation, everybody's very much more sort of tied into what the commercial goals of the organisation are. So there's far more day-to-day management of people, on the whole. Whereas an academic culture is one where academics*

*have a lot of freedom and a lot of autonomy, and you're not managed on that kind of day-to-day basis so much. (Anna: FA-MA, IKP).*

Values appear to be the dominant dimension of culture, which shapes academics' constructions of the REF. Narratives suggest that academics make sense of change in HEIs by assessing its impact on their values and relationships. The outcome of such sensemaking results in the discourses of the transmutation of the ideology of HEIs, discussed in the subsequent chapter. For example, in assessing the influence of external pressures as drivers for change in HEIs, participants directly attribute the erosion of academic values to the outcomes of REF. They suggest that over time, more universities succumb to the pressures generated by policy changes

*No, I don't think it is unique to IKP. I think if you go back 20-25 years, you will find the majority of universities took that view. I think one of the sad things about universities is that it has become much more commercial. And for IKP, it's become much more commercialised too (Anna: FA-MA, IKP)*

The extent to which academics perceive this influence of external pressures is also dependent on the leadership of the HEI. The following section explores how leadership structures FA and MA academics meaning creation.

### 6.1.2 Leadership

Participants' responses suggest that leadership can also act as a trigger for sensemaking. It triggered sensemaking when it was perceived as an organisational event with the potential to introduce instability in the University. For academics in this study, the entrance of new leaders or changes in the composition of the management team creates ambiguity as they frequently signal a modification in the university's strategic focus. Such events compel sensemaking as academics seek to predict the intentions of the new leader and its implications for university goals and the activities of academics. In these instances, leadership can be thought of as organisational change, which provides "occasions" for sensemaking (Weick,1995). The following account from an MA in IKP exemplifies how leadership acts as a sensemaking trigger. In this instance, the appointment of a new Vice-Chancellor was an occasion for sensemaking for academics in the University:

We've got a new VC, and now there's a university-wide strategic review going on (*Amaya: FA; IKP*)

*This working group went away for a year and came back and recommended the status quo. It was just crazy, actually, and we have now dealt with it now (because) we'd had a change of senior leadership at that point as well, and it was in the new fee regime (Judith, MA; IKP)*

The first account suggests that the activities of the leader are also, by themselves, sources of sensemaking. Combined with other accounts in this study, these suggest leaders' accounts of change also shape their understanding and attitude to events. In other words, leader sensegiving "moulds" the kinds of interpretations and the subsequent attitudes academics develop in relation to change. The narratives around REF constructed by academics in this study exemplify this. The majority of participant responses present change in HEIs as modifying the fundamentals of HEIs (evidenced in the section on narratives of change), which includes the identity of academics and the ideology of HEIs. However, the responses from some academics in IKP highlight how the influence of leader sensegiving can generate contrasting perceptions of change in HEIs.

The participant Anna *an* FA-MA in IKP, makes the following statement as she tries to explain the overarching attitude of IKP to REF and the way she interprets it with the implication that it can be attributed to the stance of the Vice-Chancellor. The phrases from the example below, "*the REF isn't the be all and end all of being in university*" and "*Whether you've got 12 stars or you've 10 stars or you've got 9 stars everybody's contribution is valued*", suggests attempts to minimise the creation of narratives of change which focus on metrics. Participant responses suggest such framing enables academics to develop other interpretations of change in HEIs, which preclude the impact on the fundamentals of the ideology of HEIs and academic identity.

*I mean again IKP has taken a very mature I would say, attitude to the REF. Our current vicechancellor has always said that the REF isn't the be-all and end-all of being in University, the REF is a kind of tool. What it has is a symbolic importance in terms of league tables and getting research funding and other things. Nobody in this University has been threatened with say being put on the teaching only contract because they weren't submitted to the REF. He says, "Who gets submitted to the REF is not...it's a matter of tactics, it's the tactics of the university to try and maximise the beneficial aspects of the REF". Whether you've got 12 stars or you've 10 stars or you've got 9 stars, everybody's contribution is valued (Anna: FA-MA, IKP).*

*The dean of the faculty, he sits in the high-level college meetings, my sense is that they say, “its true we value you for the research you do but also do not underestimate the importance of the students for the college in terms of .....because we need to satisfy our students to raise,...to maintain our position, also in terms of resources”. So I think that the head of the school has also tried to kind of change; to promote the research excellence culture but also in a way that does not penalize the teaching part”. Because what would happen if we did not have the head of the school telling us what we are supposed to do: how we should interpret the results (of REF) (Masha: FA; DBS)*

The analysis in this thesis implicates the discursive ability of leaders, frequently manager academics, to influence the narratives of other academics around change. Participants referenced not only the overt verbal discursive activities exemplified in the preceding excerpts but also the leader's actions.

*Because you get somebody who is very respected and you know that they're not just.... like a director of graduate studies. I hope I was like this and I know the person who is doing it now certainly is, he's a very respected person, he's very open, very consultative, doesn't just like hand orders out on high. Yeah, that kind of person you would be more willing-is prepared to discuss something with you. So for that kind of person you know, you're more open and willing to try and make, to pitch in and help things work than if they were like this kind of Hitlerian figure who just told everybody what to do and got everybody's backs up—somebody who is open and reasonable (Anna: FA-MA, IKP).*

This study describes these manifestations of their personality in their activities and interactions with academics in the faculty as the relational discursive actions of the leader. This analysis coincides with Rouleau and Balogun's (2011) findings on leaders' social-psychological identity and Pye (2005) analysis that the actions of leaders have symbolic implications for sensemaking. While the verbal discursive activities influenced the constructions of discourses, academics utilised the relational discursive actions of MA to construct meanings of ways to act concerning the change. In other words, the verbal discursive activities are linked to the “interpretation” dimension of sensemaking while the relational discursive actions are linked to the “action” dimension. The narrative suggests the role of both categories of discursive activities in shaping the emotional components of sensemaking. Similar interpretations are provided by Greg, an MA-FA in DBS.

*So there's a sense that people have heard it all before, so there's a degree of cynicism about, "yeah, sure, wait and see". So I think I always say I'm not preachy, I'm kind of cynical as well, erm so I think you need that element of being close to your staff and being close to their views and then having been around for a while and being a.... I was sort of promoted from within, I'm not parachuted from outside, I'm not coming with some mission to change things, I'm as cynical as everybody else, so. but it doesn't mean I didn't want to change, I got change through, but I think I was pretty close to people. (Greg: MA/FA, DBS)*

The instance above suggests MA academic sensemaking is shaped by both leadership and identity. He utilises discursive sensegiving activities, which demonstrate his understanding of academic needs. While positioning his identity as MA, he also reinforces his connections with other academics, particularly FA. He suggests an element of his sensemaking derives from his affiliation with the institution and shared characteristics with other academics. These aspects point to the way identity: institutional and academic identity shapes sensemaking of change in HEIs, explored in the next section.

### 6.1.3 Identity

The data from this study suggests that identity comes to the fore as academics construe change using narratives underpinned by role redefinitions, direction and focus. The section on the conceptions of change, demonstrates how academics in this study articulate change through its impact on the identity of HEIs. Their emphasis on the unique attributes of HEIs as they elucidate the relationship between HEIs and external actors suggests identity is a fundamental resource for academics meaning constructions of change in HEIs. Participants in this thesis apply a blanket construction of "academic identity" which includes the differentiation of HEIs as particular types or forms of organisations, as well as the emphasis on the specific characteristics of actors associated with this type of organisation.

A few responses diverge slightly, presenting identity in paradoxical terms that comprise individualistic and collective attributes. For example, within the context of describing the strategy of DBS, "Connor" uses the statement (*this is*) *what universities are about* (Connor: MA-FA; DBS), which suggests a

unifying concept of identity for HEIs, but at a collective level. On the other hand, in explaining the legitimacy processes for DBS, Philip expresses individualistic and collective attributes of academic identity.

*I guess a commercial organisation would be saying what our points of distinction, where can we invest, so I find it quite ironic really. we don't .....we see ourselves as part of a system... It's a collective, really, (but) being an academic is a very individualistic role (Philip: FA; DBS)*

Philip's response suggests that, while identity is individualistic, it can align with the collective characteristics of the University where they are embedded. However, these are inherently characterisations of organisational and individual components of identity. Consequently, this study conceptualises and analyses identity as a dyad: identity at the organisational level; and identity at the individual level. The following section explores these components of identity.

#### 6.1.3.1 University identity

University identity in this thesis involves how academics participating in the present study interpret characteristics that differentiate their particular universities from other universities by their inherent qualities, such as research status. Here, both MA and FA academics portray the university as an actor.

The emphasis of these dimensions by academics across the three case study institutions in response to the questions exploring their conceptions and experience of various aspects of change in HEIs suggests they utilise university identity as a resource for making sense of change in HEIs. The extracts below illustrate the use of identity for meanings constructions among MA and FA academics

For example, in response to the questions exploring their conceptions and experience of change in HEIs, participants in this study highlight the drivers of REF and other changes in HEIs as externally driven.

*So the University like IKP the majority, (not all) but the vast majority of our academic staff will be hired because they have already demonstrated either research ability or very strong research potential. ....and because it's a university like IKP, there are relatively few people you know - so we had a relatively high, we submitted something like 91% of our eligible staff to*

*REF. So that tells you something about the degree of expectation around research activity and of the 9% that we didn't submit err, certainly in my own faculty, very, very few of those weren't research active at all, it was just they didn't make the threshold for one reason or another. So it's not a matter of introducing people to research, everyone knows the expectation is there for research, it's about how we foster and encourage a degree of research excellence that we think is appropriate in this University..... ensuring that our early-career colleagues are well mentored and know all those sorts of things erm this University is very good on, actually very strong on (Judith, MA;IKP)*

*If you're at the bottom of the pile, unless you're throwing a stack of money at it, you can't win. How do you beat someone in a highly competitive, saturated market where there are dominant players? You differentiate. (Ray,FA: IUK).*

*Universities and academics find themselves doing things these days; driven by external agendas that are fundamentally antithetical to the core purpose of the University, which I think is to ask critical questions of society, ideas, theories, models and business practices for that matter.....Academia is a funny thing, I think the more you attempt to measure it, the more you distort it. And of course, guidelines say you have to be accountable and so you do, of course. But we're not accountable by a bizarre number of activities, by a bizarre number of metrics and the more you do that, the more you damage the ability of people to think, speak and write freely and critically and therefore offer value to the society that pays our wages (Connor: MA-FA; DBS).*

The extract from Ray above suggests concepts of university identity, in terms of its position among other HEIs, shape evaluations of change strategies for academics. This stance ties in with other narratives which highlight the increasing relevance of league tables and their implication for the identity of HEIs

In the second statement above, Mike, an MA; FA in IKP, attributes the response of his University to REF to the defining qualities of the institution. It also indicates that maintaining or reinforcing the perceived identity of the HEI forms a focus on legitimacy discussions in getting support for change initiatives as part of the preparation for REF, primarily from senior management. Supporting the role of identity and narratives of legitimacy, Greg narrates:



*We have quite a strong international focus, comparative focus, and I emphasised that I was pushing that heavily. I saw that as one of our key identifiers (Greg: MA/FA, DBS).*

Although institutional identity forms a significant resource for academics' sensemaking, it often works in conjunction with professional identity, an element which is described in the next section

### 6.1.3.2 Professional identity

Professional identity refers to an individual level construction of self by the academics in this study using behavioural and role descriptions. It has also been taken the form of collective identities in the way that the academics differentiate themselves from other actor groups in HEIs. Most academics in this study interpret identity through characteristics representing their role in the University, as researcher- teacher and/or administrators. These two roles This study suggests the two aspects can be differentiated as creativity identity and accountability identity, which give rise to *separate forms of identity (Greg: MA/FA, DBS).*

*I mean I think because it's a creative job, it's a creative process being an academic (Anna: MAFA;IKP).*

Most academics in this study apply identity as a composite or pluralistic attribute when using it as a resource for shaping their interpretation of the nature of change and implementation processes. The composite manifestation of identity can be attributed to the context of HEIs, particularly the governance system, which creates academics with an interwoven range of roles through which they express their identity. For example, an MA-FA academic in IKP, Mike's interpretation of the nature of change and the processes of implementing change is shaped by an understanding of self as a member of a university committee. Diffused through his narratives of his experience of change in HEIs, he positions himself through this composite lens. *Mike's (FA-MA, IKP) description of two different change initiatives illustrates the two aspects of academic identity. In the first example, his identity is one where his allegiance is with the University, while in the second, his allegiance is with the school.*

*And then we hope that the schools do what we say sort of thing, and that's always a bit of a difficulty with, I suppose, making sure change happens to its completion. Is that all along the way what we asked for and what, you know, what the University asked for-me, sitting on the*

*university committee and saying "we can", but by the time it gets down to the schools....(Mike, MA-FA; IKP).*

*In this school, on the post-graduate level, we had a very clear need to change the regulations because we felt the regulations were very unfair to our students..... So we would push it up the line just to say, we have been forced to make this decision. It's daft but it is because we have to fit your 'regs' sort of thing. And sort of.... making that sort of theme. (Mike: FA-MA; IKP)*

These statements suggest a juxtaposition of fluid identities; where he identifies himself both as a member of the faculty and as a member of the university management, an identity seen by some as distinct from the academics who are non-members of the committee; an us and them situation. The “us” and “them” situation described by academics is a consequence of this differentiation of identities.

Within HEIs, actors with similar identities are connected by their expectations of organisational practices, creating a differentiation of identities. For the participants of this study, the predominant characteristics which define them as academics, actors engaging in teaching and research (*Greg: MA/FA, DBS*) influence their sensemaking of appropriate ways of managing, particularly for implementing change in HEIs. In the following extract, which demonstrates the perception of professional managers as non-member actors, academics describe how their position/identity as non-member actors can influence interpretation:

*“You know, once you let these professional managers (depreciating laugh/raised eyebrows) have a hand in it. They don’t really understand that academics aren’t the same as.....it’s not like working in a commercial organisation and that academics are used to having a lot of autonomy and freedom. I mean I’ve heard people say that trying to manage a bunch of academics is like trying to herd cats and things like that. and they don't... So They don’t really understand that, and they try to over-manage academics. (Anna: FA-MA, IKP)*

The identification as non-member actors also extends to academics who transfer to managerial roles, and are then seen as “*routine administrators*” as they no longer participate in research or teaching (*Greg: MA/FA, DBS*). Although the literature suggests that actors can possess multiple identities

(Beech *et al.*,2012), data from this study suggest that academics can undergo identity metamorphoses on exposure to contrasting experiential contexts or conditions. This is similar to the findings of Hoyer (2016), underlining the identity shift that occurs when actors migrate between careers. This phenomenon was observed primarily in IUK because of a policy developed by its management.

*“No we had a change maybe 7 or 8 years back now and the new Vice-Chancellor at the time pretty much deemed that if you were in a managerial role..... the people that are managers could well have been academics, but they are no longer..... that is not their primary focus anymore. You know they are spending their time purely on management activity whereas before it used to be a mix. We used to have a situation where even the dean would teach, but not anymore. I mean I can hazard a guess that the dean hasn't been in a classroom in a long, long time. I mean my manager doesn't teach anymore. He's been promoted. He was senior lecturer, he was senior academic before that, and he used to do significant amounts of teaching. Promoted now to a managerial post and no teaching” (Clark, FA; IUK)*

The structure and processes of change implementation in HEIs imply that change requires input from actors with different identities. In this instance, the “us” and “them” situation described above, which characterises the cues of actors in different groups, becomes significant. A significance of the differentiation of identities is a feeling of disconnectedness from the middle and top management, which characterises academics' sensemaking of change in HEIs. When questioned on why they had made the distinction between 'Us and Them', the participants compared it to a feeling of being from different camps.

*“You know I have to say there are times I feel like we're on two different camps. This was a while ago, but I remember one time we got an email that was something like 'Oh can everybody come to this seminar or this, so and so and it was like 2 hours in the middle of the weekday, right at the busiest time of teaching, I got back to the department and said, do they know what we do, what do they think we do, if you have a class, you're committed to that class time, its not like you can just say 'Oh, we'll do that tomorrow' I mean, you know It just seemed like they had no clue what it was we're doing. I've said over and over again I think every administrator has to be teaching a class, at least once, just to know what it's like and I think ideally they should teach 1st-year students that will give them a lesson, so they know*

*what's coming in. Cos I think they just lose touch with what we actually have to do in a day"*  
(John, FA; IUK).

Other academics attribute this to a difference in focus espoused by the University's management. University management fosters the segregation of groups in the institution and promotes a situation which, for some academics, is the secondary function of the academic and University. For such academics, it ties in with their sensemaking of change in HEIs as the modification of HEIs values.

*"I think that sends the message that you know it's more important to be managed than it is to be teaching. We do get this view that it's us and them. The academic group as a separate group to the University as such and the focus, and the focus tends to be more managerial activity than it is about developing learning for students"* (Clark, FA; IUK)

Therefore, for the academic, identity is a crucial resource for developing sensemaking narratives. For some academics, identity is linked to the development of the narratives of legitimacy. Associated with the implementation of the REF, it shapes their interpretation of appropriate actors responsible for implementing change in HEIs.

*"Actually this happens a lot in universities...when managerial roles become available, they've got a really hard choice to make...so like a school, do they promote a teacher to be a manager or do they bring in a manager who is a professional manager to come in and manage teachers...that's a bloody nightmare. I think they have to be credible in the role that they're put in. I think that the very first and foremost thing you need from a change manager or whatever role they're going to... in a management role where they have to manage change, they have to have experience with HEIs. I think it's absolutely fundamental. Because they got to know what the impact on us is going to be and too often you see change is really rushed through the system not understanding the impact"* (Joe: FA, IKP).

The mechanism through which identity shapes sensemaking of change in HEIs for academics is influenced by their outlook comprising: their *frame of reference* (Keith: MA; DBS), the definition of the external environment and consciousness of the influence of other actors. Participants describe this as associated with different positions in the institution as either MA or FA as well as in the university hierarchy. The influence of the frame of reference is reflected in participants' accounts of their involvement with change initiatives within their universities. Their responses detailing the outcome of change, whereby the version of change during the initiation of change differs from the

version of change during the implementation of change demonstrate the influence of different identities on sensemaking. These responses demonstrate that the enactment of sensemaking through different identities affects the substance of change initiatives, whereby the version of change during the initiation of change differs from the version of change during the implementation of change.

MA-FA Mike articulates how a change initiative developed at the institutional level; the introduction of “Welcome week” varied in significance between members of a school committee and nonmembers of the committee at the local level. He describes how his membership in the school’s committee introduces another dimension to his identity as an academic, which subsequently influences his interpretation of this initiative. This identity involves the committee’s role in developing strategic and operational guidelines for the school. Recognising this, the initiative was interpreted as an opportunity for improving the school rather than a disregard for the needs of the school.

*Just over a year ago, we had a notice come through saying that what was formerly called "induction" is now going to be called "Welcome Week." And Freshers Fair was now going to be called "Welcome Fair." Okay. And so people tended to laugh at that because it was a name change right at the beginning. but I happened to sit on a committee, a university committee, which is driving that, and taking from the university teaching and learning strategy -wanted to produce...wanted to engage excellent students; so 'recruit excellent students, engage excellent students, and produce excellent students at the end of their course' sort of principles has made us completely review what we're doing... (Mike, FA-MA, IKP)*

In the account above, judgments based on aligning with institutional requirements can become externally focused. Greg, a FA-MA in DBS who discontinued his role as Dean to return to faculty, provides a similar explanation. In his narrative, he differentiates between the position adopted by MA and FA:

*Yeah, I think that obviously higher up the tree, you're looking at the college finances... So I think at the Deanate, at the senior level you're looking at the bigger picture of the campus and the college and growth and how to maintain our reputation. And these days students, because they're paying more, demand more, expect more and your rivals, I... they're called rivals, your competitors' other universities are investing, and if you're not investing, you're falling behind.*

*So I think at the dean level, that's what occupying you, it's not just the everyday, it's thinking about the interests of DBS, and you may be seen as a representative of DBS and....so you're assuming more of a collective responsibility for the interests of the institution whereas as the head of department you're concerned about the interest of your department, and it's sort of one part of the department. Now obviously as the dean I'll be talking about the interests of "DBS business school", that would be expected, but I would also be thinking about and talking to the senior team about the interest of the University as a whole. And I think it's just simply being sucked into those wider interests and hearing all of the talk about those wider interests on a regular basis, whereas, at the departmental level, you're not really present to hear about all those discussions, it's not part of your daily routine, (Greg: MA/FA, DBS).*

#### 6.1.4 Institutional Context

Based on participant accounts, Context comprises the university's governance system and organisational structure. Following analysis of participants' descriptions of how they interact to influence academics' evaluation of change, the present study refines these as actor and system configurations, respectively. Participants accounts of their experience of change in HEIs and in their specific institutions suggest the interaction of the university's governance system and organisational structure shape their meaning constructions of change in HEIs with respect to its implementation. Using the university's organisational structure, academics indicate there are two levels with different objectives: the Institution, central level and the Local, faculty or school level.

The following account demonstrates the differentiation into levels and its impact on interpretation in HEIs

*In this school, on the post-graduate level, we had a very clear need to change the (exam) regulations. I put together a bunch of evidence from the exam board and then pushed it up the line with an argument, and managed to get the support at faculty levels but we just had a complete brick wall going beyond the faculty. So the relevant committees that we had to persuade, they were saying no. They said, "nobody else is calling for this change in the regulation. You are the only one who's doing it. So why do we have to make a change in regulation because you're the only one who's asking for it" (Mike, MA-FA; IKP).*

The response “*nobody else is calling for this change in the regulation*” from the central university body to the school’s request for a differentiated system suggests that this concern with the performance of postgraduate students was specific to the school of management. It supports arguments that certain processes may be specific to departments, and this specificity shapes FA and MA academics' sensemaking of change. The specificity represents one of the factors that affect the interpretation and implementation of change initiatives: “local constraints”. “Local constraints” is the suggestion of a variation of priorities at school level from the institutional level, highlighted by the use of phrases such as “*we had a clear need*”, with regards to their goal for separate examination regulations for undergraduates and postgraduates. As part of that conversation, the participant indicated they felt changing the exam regulations was necessary because it was affecting the success of their students, such that the majority questioned their ability to complete their course.

Another implication of the organisational structure dimension of context identified from this study is the blurring of boundaries allowing academics to be “administrators” or managers and front-line academics. This aspect of the context of HEIs is linked to the interplay of sensemaking, details of which are included in the section on the interplay of sensemaking. The university’s governance system also affects the way academics construct interpretations of dimensions of change. Decisionmaking at IKP is a collective process using committees at different hierarchical or organisational levels of the university. Context, therefore, shapes the interpretation of change as negotiation and the challenges of change implementation in HEIs

*First of all, it has to be sort of formalised through a series of committees. Will then go out to faculty...to the faculties. It will then be considered at graduate and undergraduate studies' boards at faculty, and the faculty will tend to adopt what's going on. But then within each faculty, there's probably 5 schools. And each of the 5 schools have their undergraduate and graduate studies' committees which will then need to take it onboard and adopt it. So, with a bit of argument, they'd probably say, “Yeah, okay. We'll do that.” So it gets minuted that this will be adopted. And then you got to make sure it actually happens. And there's no guarantee that that last bit really comes on until, you then have 6 months later or so on, and you start to have a quality review. Where they start checking it and people sort of all hurriedly make sure*

*that they've done all the bits that they've set. So the trickle down could be.....' (Mike, MA-FA: IKP)*

The previous section highlighted the two interrelated aspects of context implicated in the sensemaking of change in HEIs: the governance system and the organisational structure. Other studies of change in HEIs (Degn and Sørensen, 2015; Christensen, 2011) provide support for the arguments of this thesis on the role of actor and system configuration on the sensemaking of externally mandated change initiatives which in the case of this study is represented by REF. In contrast to other types of organisations, HEIs operate through a governance structure with academics performing administrative roles on a rotational basis, resulting in a fluid management system. Change events are characterised by the absence of a rigid demarcation and identification of change initiators, agents and recipients seen in traditional systems of change. With the introduction of non-academics in university management as a type of change in HEIs, this characteristic of HEIs is increasingly obscured. This results in a clear demarcation between managerial and academic roles and, by extension, identities. The following section now considers how Context shapes interpretation.

## **6.2 Constructing Interpretations Of Change in HEIs**

This section describes the way that resources shape the narratives that emerge from academics' evaluation of change in HEIs. It addresses research the second part of research question 2 repeated below:

**RQ2.** What resources do academics use to construct an understanding of change in HEIs, and how do these resources shape their construction of reality?



This study adopts the position that the narratives of change from participants in this study are presented in the previous chapter. It highlights the processes that create specific conclusions and realities on change in HEIs. The signals for developing stories of change provide insight into the resources which shape MA and FA academics sensemaking of change in HEIs in the present thesis. The subsections begin by highlighting the process for constructing these narratives before aligning them with the resources for change as identified in the conceptual framework and the data. It starts with the narrative of ideological transmutation and ends with the interplay of sensemaking. The table below presents the Narratives, the Resources which shape them and the keywords associated with them.

**Table: Narratives according to Resources**

| <b>Resources</b> | <b>Narratives</b>  | <b>Key concepts</b>   |
|------------------|--|---|
| <b>Identity</b>  | <b>Ideological transmutation<br/>Legitimacy<br/>Interplay of Sensemaking<br/>Paradox</b> | <b>Teaching, research, role definition, us and them ie management vs frontline academics, “the university is a place for generating knowledge, I am a researcher, academics as autonomous actors, locus/position of power</b> |
| <b>Context</b>   | <b>Paradox<br/>Ideological Transmutation<br/>Interplay of sensemaking</b>                | <b>government policies, regulations, structures: Relationships, roles with respect to others,</b>   |
| <b>Culture</b>   | <b>Legitimacy<br/>Ideological Transmutation</b>  | <b>Focus groups, newsletters, speeches, Rituals of change management (these are sometimes demonstrations of hypocrisy</b>   |

|                   |  |   |
|-------------------|--|---|
| <b>Leadership</b> | <b>Ideological Transmutation<br/>Paradox</b> | <b>Speeches, conversation,<br/>scanning the environment,<br/>providing alternative measures</b> |
|-------------------|--|---|

Source: Research Data

## 6.2.1 Constructing the narrative of Ideological transmutation

### 6.2.1.1 Culture and Ideological transmutation

There were similarities in enacting the dimensions of ideological transmutation: commercialisation, and de-professionalisation. These similarities can be explained in the way that academics link commercialisation and de-professionalisation through changes in the composition of HEIs

*“You tend to think or the consensus is that universities are about academics; it’s about people of learning, and it’s about seats of learning where people go to study and get a qualification. It’s now run pretty much like any other factory in as much that you’ve got managers who manage activities that bring in funding. So it’s pretty much about inputs and outputs...so that’s the focus inputs and outputs and how much we can make on this. And its driven by the administrative side of business rather than the academic side, and you just have to look to see how many academics there are, compared to the administrative staff, you’ll see that there’s a disparity. People tend..... the consensus is that universities are predominantly for the teaching staff or the researching staff but that’s not the case and that we’re now the minority so it’s very much an admin driven organisation” (Clark, FA;IUK).*

Cues for the narrative of ideological transmutation include the increasing financial rationalities and the types of changes they engender in HEIs. Academics in the study consider this to be a consequence of the growing impact of external financial influences on university operations and the general higher education environment. Reliance by universities on finance from private corporations in contrast to public funds creates requirements for universities to adopt tangible efficiency and performance

indices. HEIs are not exempt from financial obligations which require an income to enable facilitation. As one academic argues:

*You know we're not there to be on the stock exchange or anything, but we are still..., we do have requirements in terms of budgets, and we do have staff that need paying, so we have to have a strategy to make sure we have income coming in (Sarah, FA; IUK)*

*The money stops if you don't get students through the door, and if the money stops, you have to make people redundant..... given the fee regime in which we are now working both nationally and internationally, we need to be proactive about getting the students here (Judith, MA;IKP)*

Because of the coupling of REF to the allocation of funding to HEIs for research and the selection processes for the REF, the behaviour of both institutions and individual academics has become skewed. Academics have become preoccupied with research activity, sometimes to the exclusion of other activities. HEIs base their recruitment strategies on the staff eligibility for inclusion in REF submission. Additionally, as part of their strategies for REF, HEIs develop guidelines that narrow and skew forms of research, which result in the promulgation of particular, exclusive worldviews.

*So they're more focused then on trying to get published in Four-star Journals than do the kind of rounded job that an academic is supposed to do (Anna: FA-MA; IKP)*

*One of the problems that a big place like IKP has nowadays is that we recruit on research potential first and foremost, and then on teaching, and then on administrative potential (Mike, MA-FA;IKP)*

*More and more, it seems to matter where you publish and what you publish, and I think that has a damaging effect on scholarship..... But this is an example of how Universities and academics find themselves doing things these days; driven by external agendas that are fundamentally antithetical to the core purpose of the University, which I think is to ask critical questions of society, ideas, theories, models and business practices for that matter (Connor: MA-FA; DBS)*

A contrasting view of this narrative among a minor number of participants is in terms of accountability

*Yes. I think it has become much more managerial. Although I joined a very managerialist moderate research intensive university when I started my career, so it wasn't managerialist, certainly in terms of research, we were just left to get along with it, now in terms of research assessment; research excellence framework type things, that's forced the issue of research, forced management of research: so institutions want to know what the quality of the research that is being undertaken and for me, that's the most positive outcome. Because if you're using public funds to do research, you do need to make sure that there's some output from it. But some academics will say that's a very managerialist attitude. We should be entirely free to do whatever research we want, and we are not accountable to anyone because we have the right to be intellectuals, just to sit here. If you say to them, "do you have the right to draw your salary", "of course, we have the right to draw a salary". "But who's going to pay that", "well we have a right to be paid our salary", "yes, but taxpayers are paying". So some of those traditional academics don't quite get it; if resources are being used to pay their wages, those resources which could be used to hire more nurses in hospitals, for example, you have to be able to justify it. So I think there has been much more of a shift towards that: there's a recognition that we're accountable for the resources that we use. (Keith: MA; DBS)*

#### 6.6.1.2 Context and identity on the narrative of ideological transmutation

The cues in the preceding paragraphs with narratives of MA and FA academics across the three institutions indicate that identity and context shape their construction of change in HEIs as narratives of ideological transmutation. Participants' accounts of the outcomes of the last (2014) REF process provide an example of framing change in HEIs under narratives of ideological transmutation. The way in which they have been presented suggests that in developing this narrative, academics merge identity and context; both institutional and external, as a singular resource, with identity taking precedence rather than as two separate resources for sensemaking. By combining identity and context, both institutional and external, they create meanings for the relevance and implementation of change in HEIs. For example, despite their association with a university which deemphasises the REF, the behaviour of academics in IKP indicates sensemaking shaped by the context beyond their specific institutions, the external context. The intricate interconnection between the external and

internal contexts both at the institutional level and for individual academics reinforces this formation of meaning.

A contextually shaped narrative of ideological transmutation among the study participants is derived from the view of HEIs as institutions where other academics manage academics. However, certain changes in HEIs have resulted in a movement away from these systems of organising

*Management schools or business schools in other universities they have become-the management of them has become far more, one word for it would be professional, (laughs) in that they have got professional managers running them rather than academics (Anna: FA-MA, IKP)*

In the comment above, an MA-FA from IKP “Anna” contrasts the management of HEIs by professional managers rather than academic managers. The differentiation between the management of academics by professional managers and academic managers suggests the narrative of ideological transmutation also arises from the sensemaking of change shaped by the concept of a socially shared social identity centred on certain principles. In the characteristics which categorise professional managers, they are described as outsiders with different value systems. The incorporation of these principles results in different systems of organisation. New forms of institutions are in turn created: the “professional” institution. Within these circumstances, FA academics sensemaking of change in HEIs involves a narrative of ideological transmutation, from professionalisation to deprofessionalisation.

*..... Academics are used to having a lot of autonomy and freedom. ....And of course in higher education generally, there is much more of a focus on sort of like targets and league tables and the REF and the students. That's grown enormously even in just the 15 years I've been an academic. So that pressure is still there even though we're being managed by other academics but from what I can gather, it's even worse when you're managed by managers. Because a manager from the outside they're used to having these kinds of targets and whipping everybody into line to make sure that they're met and of course academics don't like that and actually I think respond very badly to it. (Anna: FA-MA, IKP)*

These accounts by the academics indicate variations between MA and FA using components of academic identity for sensemaking from which they develop negative meanings of change. Similar

statements reflecting this negativity is visible in the way participants describe REF using words such as “a joke”. The narrative below demonstrates value systems as the characteristic associated with academic identity. This component of identity heavily influences the emotional components of sensemaking of change in HEIs for front-line academics and the actions of academics.

*I mean I think because it's a creative job, it's a creative process being an academic, and I think all that kind of target setting and driving and breathing down people's necks just destroys that part of the creative process and really, really demoralises people (Anna: FA-MA, IKP).*

As a narrative which arises from interpretations of the impact of change in HEIs, deprofessionalisation involves the devaluation of principles associated with academic identity and life and the transfer of control away from academics. Connor, a MA in DBS, compares the theoretical impact of the REF with the actual impact of the REF. The aim of REF is

*Theoretically, to intensify the quality of what (research) they're doing; however, it hasn't necessarily generated concomitant improvements in the overall quality (Connor: MA-FA; DBS)*

The extract above suggests that there are frequently stated and unstated objectives of change initiatives. Rather than meet its espoused objectives, REF was interpreted as a form of control of academics. As a form of control, the potential for inclusion in the REF becomes the academic's sole target rather than a portion of their activity. In other words, rather than be a segment which enhances academic life, it has become the target of academic life.

As an identity-derived narrative, they suggest that the increased focus on metric systems of managing academics and the managing of academics by “professional” managers reinforces measurement systems that interfere with academic values. From this perspective, academics criticise the application of managerialist principles in HEI. For example, academics in IKP discuss the performance of the University and the school in the REF. Highlighting its top position in the REF compared to other universities and in contrast to their performance to the previous REF, they indicate that despite the minimal practice of managerialist principles, IKP excelled in the REF. According to “Anna”

*One of the really good things about IKP is that we are still given an awful lot of autonomy, and choice and freedom to pursue our own academic interests. The fact that IKP actually did very much better in the REF than they've done the last time: IKP is in the top something of the world universities, high up. this particular school and department did really well in the REF. so you*

*know it shows that you can go on and achieve those results without having somebody in a very kind of managerial way setting you targets (Anna: FA-MA, IKP)*

Narratives from the previous chapter suggest the type of changes associated with this narrative constitute increased use of metrics and managerialist principles in HEIs. Criticisms of managerialism within the landscape of HEIs corresponding to the increased use of metrics in HEIs permeate narratives across the three case study institutions. Drawing on identity, participants make sense of such initiatives in HEIs by evaluating its impact on the behaviour and activities that define or represent the academic identity. Participants across the three institutions continually reference the erosion of the identity of HEIs, which is underlined by a sense of the reversal and disintegration of the institution's focus. Their experience of the REF is of the shifting purpose of HEIs and the principles which govern institutional obligations.

*“But it’s when that starts to take precedence over all the other things that the university should be that it starts to make you feel a bit uncomfortable, really” (Anna: FA-MA, IKP).*

Consequently, this narrative represents a negative understanding of both the rationale and outcomes of change through their references to the detrimental impact of change on the identity of the academic. It creates one-dimensional academics who neglect other essential aspects which symbolise academic identities, such as contact with students or administrative activities, and affects the identity of front-line academics and also the identity of the institution

*I think it (REF) also distorts publications....because of the ABS Journal ranking list, “We must publish in the Four Star Journals, .....and I think that’s very distorting, it’s really distorting the people’s behaviour (Anna: FA-MA, IKP).*

*The research excellence framework (REF) governs not only their progress within the University but also their employability at other universities. So it's within their interests to essentially be very selfish. And just work on their research and try and do, you know, push anything else aside. So that's one of the unintended consequences of the REF-is that it has turned us away*

*from a collegiate organisation...Into an individualistic organisation. And that is really very difficult because we're still trying to manage as a collegiate organisation. (Mike: FA-MA; IKP).*

## 6.2.2 Constructing the narrative of paradox

### 6.2.2.1 Context and the narrative of Paradox

Academics utilise institutional context as a resource for their sensemaking of change in HEIs through the narrative of paradox. Sensemaking can occur through two mechanisms identified in this study as: institutional structure and actor orientation. Institutional structure refers to specific institutional context; defined by its approach to management and structure of governance. It also includes the way components of the institution interact with each other. For FA academics, paradox is a manufactured aspect of change in HEIs, predominantly associated with change originating at or mandated by the institutional level and an ineffective integration across institutional networks. However, while recognising the existence of paradox in the implementation of change in HEIs, academics privilege one element of paradox in their sensemaking of change in an attempt to reduce the ambiguities associated with the development of this narrative. For example Anna references processes at the local level; the school level to reinforce the role of institutional structure in shaping the narrative of paradox for sensemaking

*Because people have tried to move things on and have been worn down by the way the university functions, and you just start limiting the amount that you get involved in and the amount that you do. You're less innovative, and you're less inclined to get involved in things that maybe aren't free for all or aren't recognised (Amaya: FA;IKP).*

*Even though it has done things which we think are crazy and imposed them and not really listened but the general kind of ethos of the University is still.....I mean it still tries to be collegiate so everything has to go through this-and it tries to be collegial through its committee system I think. So something that gets decided at committee, that's not the last thing. It then has to go to a university committee, and then it goes to a senate, so there's this labyrinthine committee structure and that's where it sort of tries to be collegial rather than managerial.*



*There is kind of these lots of different pockets of representation, but it's just not terribly joined up somehow (Anna: FA-MA, IKP).... The collegiality of the school has to do with the fact that some of the processes, the way in which they try to reach the decisions are through the committee structures and day-to-day operational things at the school level that's far more collegial (Anna: FA-MA, IKP).*

It is interesting to note the way Anna in the second narrative above, references implementation processes at the local level; the school level to privilege one element of paradox in her sensemaking of change. It exemplifies how academics use the institution's ethos to create meanings about implementing change. In other words, they rationalise the University's implementation strategy by making the University's ethos the primary cue for their sensemaking of change. This implies that she equates the institution's structure to its ethos and identity. She then utilises a comparison of the ethos of the University and her ideology of HEIs to make sense of change in HEIs through the narrative of paradox.

Anna's narrative example is consistent with narratives from other academics on positional effect. They suggest that differences between the school and the institutional levels is one of the orientations of the actors at both levels. For FA, the format for change implementation is an indication that MA at upper levels operates from an individualistic position on change:

*"It came down from somewhere in Management 2" ("Management 2" is the administrative centre of the University). So someone in management 2 has some brilliant idea, (she said raising her eyebrows) and it then gets filtered down to the faculties who will say this is complete madness but then they just go ahead and do it and give really good reasons why (Anna: FA-MA, IKP).*

*Oh we went out for consultation; you got an email' You want to see how many emails I have, so I think there's that feeling that it doesn't matter what the little people think (Jo, FA;IUK)*

The individualistic position predisposes an indifference towards the perspective and contribution of other actors towards the change process. According to Hotho (2013), the individualistic position is an indication of the dominant narratives of HEIs which undermine the decision-making capabilities of academics, MA and FA alike. Her analysis supports the stance of this thesis that MA and FA academics' sensemaking of institutional practices of change implementation and the discursive activities of

senior management is linked to the constructions of voice described in the previous section. Change imposed from upper levels was described as originating from actors who've:

*got kind of, a vision of change that they want to take place..."(Anna: FA-MA, IKP).*

*whatever is in the plan is what they're going to do anyway (Ray,FA:IUK)*

Both MA and FA express their frustration with this dominance of the "voice" of change over the voice of academics, especially because they have to execute those changes (Greg: MA/FA, DBS; Jo, FA; IUK).

*They're not properly listening to the people kind of like at the cold face or the chalk face who've got to implement it and got to work with it. Because, like, say, the pro-vice chancellor for education, she hasn't stood in front of the class and talked for years. You just feel that they don't spend enough time genuinely listening to some of the concerns that are put to them They've just got this tunnel vision about like "this is what we're going to do, we're going to do it regardless, we'll go out consult but when the consultation comes back well actually we're just going to ignore it", so there's no point consulting us really because we do not feel we get properly listened to (Anna: FA-MA, IKP).*

The academics interviewed highlight the implications associated with the lack of voice for change implementation in HEIs. Linking context to change implementation, they suggest that the narrative of paradox creates disadvantages for achieving change outcomes. Reiterating the local school/departmental level's impact on change implementation, academics suggest that actors at the top level have a limited understanding of the challenges of operationalising change goals. Both "Big" and "smaller" changes would benefit from an intimate understanding of the local implementation context. The dominance of voice underutilises the expertise associated with being positioned at the local implementation level and intimately engaged with implementing change goals. For example:

*So there was this whole hu-ha across the University because they decided to change it (exam regulations). And I won't go into all the boring details, but it ended up with some students being in very very-we didn't feel it was fair, for a start. But they didn't take any notice of the kind of unfairness, or the anomalies or the actual impact on students, "No, this is what we're going to do". So it ran for a couple of years and of course, you know then students start to*

*appeal in droves and the sort of anomalies that we said would happen did happen it, it was blatantly unfair. So they've now gone back and they've started to tinker with it and change it and be a little bit more flexible. But if they had listened to what we had said, then that wouldn't.... it would not have happened (Anna: FA-MA, IKP).*

The responses of Manager Academics suggest an interpretation of change in universities as a controllable process facilitated by the use of monitoring tools. Consequently, paradox is regarded as an intrinsic aspect of change implementation in HEIs. The next section highlights the narrative of legitimacy

### **6.2.3 Enacting the Narrative of Legitimacy**

#### **6.2.3.1 Culture and identity on the Narrative of Legitimacy**

In the above explanation which forms part of a wider discussion in response to the role of culture for change in HEIs, Mike (MA-FA;IKP) links legitimacy, culture and response to change. He echoes views among the participants of differences between the process of change in universities and other organisations. Academics construct change in HEIs using a narrative of legitimacy when they operate from culture as a resource for sensemaking. For some participants, this role of culture is intensified by the specific context of the institution. The culture in HEIs of inclusion or participation in decision processes acts as a barrier, particularly in institutions with shared systems of governance or collegiality. Academics rely on the efficiency of cultural practices, which advocate consultation and cohesion to prevent the implementation of unacceptable change initiatives. MA-FA, in trying to introduce and implement change initiatives utilise their understanding of the context of HEIs and engage in actions which demonstrate their consciousness of the implications of cultural expectations of front-line academics.

Aligned with the role of culture in shaping sensemaking, legitimacy narratives are also shaped by interpretations of the impact of the REF on academic identity. Representing an individualistic perspective, this impact on identity translates to assessments of the REF to move beyond its scope in the way that it achieves a totalitarian effect on the roles and activities of academics

*it's also distorting the people's behaviour in that the REF has assumed an importance far beyond its actual impact. Performance in the REF is everything, so it means that people aren't willing to be collegiate and help and do things that don't count towards the REF, like, teaching, take on admin jobs....do the kind of rounded job that an academic is supposed to do (Anna: FA-MA, IKP).*

The following narrative provides a comprehensive explanation for this narrative of legitimacy as referring to the implications of the REF for academic identity. This is seen as a drastic impact, and consequently, the constructions of academics revolve around questions on the relevance of these changes since similar and sometimes better outcomes are achieved without altering academic identity.

*The fact that IKP actually did very much better in the REF than they've done the last time: IKP is in the top something of the world universities, high up. This particular school and department did really well in the REF. so you know it shows that you can go on and achieve those results without having somebody in a very kind of managerial way setting you targets, which then if you miss they're breathing down your neck. I mean, I think because it's a creative job, it is a creative process being an academic, and I think all that kind of target setting and driving and breathing down people's necks just destroys that part of the creative process and really, really demoralises people (Anna: FA-MA, IKP).*

In the extracts above, while FA questions the impact on individual academics, they also link this to the impact on institutions. However, this extended view is more evident among MA, who construct the narrative of legitimacy using the impact of REF on the school and the institution. They use this in conjunction with recognising the increasing interconnection between the objectives of the external environment and HEIs.

*In the sense that the University has to perform, the University has to keep its research status, the University has to compete. And so those are set in a context..... and a need for us to be producing for what we anticipate again to be the priorities of the next REF. But also from...and it goes beyond that actually to be fair to the University because we don't just look at the REF; we are looking at our.... because REF is UK. You know, so we're actually looking at our rating, our research rating, globally as well as more nationally (Mike, MA-FA;IKP).*

*So I think at the Deanate... at the senior level you're looking at the bigger picture of the campus and the college and growth and how to maintain our reputation. And these days students, because they're paying more, demand more, expect more and your rivals, I... they're called rivals, your competitors other universities are investing, and if you're not investing, you're falling behind (Greg: MA/FA, DBS).*

## **6.2.4 Enacting the Interplay of Sensemaking**

### **6.2.4.1 Identity and Context on the Interplay of Sensemaking**

The descriptions of change initiatives, for example, Mike's (MA-FA; IKP) narrative on the modification of exam regulations, indicate this narrative also emerges during the mobilisation of identity as a resource for sensemaking for academics. His description of the initiative to change the examination regulations for his school indicates his interpretation of change is shaped by an identity derived from his position on the university committee allowing him *"keep things on the agenda; refusing to let it get off the agendas and every chance I had to put it back on the agenda, I put it back on the agenda"*. This explanation of the elements of his strategies for achieving change when his dominant identity is as a manager-academic reflects how his assumptions of the enactment of this identity shape his sensemaking of the process of change.

Analysis of the data across the different universities suggests this narrative is also shaped by context as a resource for sensemaking. Inherent in this use of context as a resource is the concept of "the political university". In the case study institutions for this study, this narrative is visible in institutions with governance structures which adopt the format represented by IKP and the way they exhibit both top-down and bottom-up approaches to change. For example, Mike (MA-FA; IKP) demonstrates his understanding of the specific context of his institution; IKP is political in the way he utilises different arguments for different groups in his attempts to influence the decisions of higher committees in his initiation of change.

## Chapter Summary

One of the findings in this study is the way in which academics reference the concepts of identity, context and culture interchangeably as they apply these as resources for sensemaking. Responses suggest there are variations in the way academics in this study understand the constructs.

**Culture** was one of the most contested constructs in terms of the ability to articulate it. The understanding of culture was divided into actors who suggested it was easy to identify and articulate and those who did not. However, both groups suggest it influences how they act and interpret events. For example, it shapes the way they interpret the decision-making process within the respective institutions.

Culture was significant to both MA and FA in this study, and there was no differentiation in the ability to construct it.

In terms of the case study institutions, it appeared to be more significant to academics in IKP and DBS. Most academics in IKP and DBS suggest it is applicable at the group level while academics in IUK suggest it is individual specific.

**Leadership** was perceived by participants in the study as the responsibility for determining the direction of the institution. In that regard, there was a consensus on what constitutes leadership across MA and FA and across the three institutions. It was seen more as an active process and the participants highlighted the actions and communicative abilities of individuals. The participants in this study suggest the statements from leaders define how they view events, by identifying what is acceptable and what is not.

**Identity** was depicted as occurring on two levels; the individual level and the university level. The data from both MA and FA suggests identity is particularly salient for interpretations of change. They apply identity to differentiate between HEIs and other types of institutions and within groups.

Academics in DBS and IKP appeared to possess more consistent notions of identity in contrast to academics in IUK. In addition, academics in IUK suggest that how FA describe themselves differs from how MA views themselves. Data from this thesis suggests identity for academics can be interpreted as a subjective dimension that is determined by the academic's sense of belonging and allegiance.

The identification of academics who transfer to managerial roles as "*routine administrators*" (Greg:

*MA/FA, DBS*) and non-member actors find support in Winter (2009), who contrasts identities of “Academic managers” and “Managed academics” where skills, values and ideologies determine affiliation with either dimension of identity.

The sensemaking resources explored in this section can be seen as embedded in academics’ narratives of change in HEI. The next section explores these narratives of change in HEIs as they are shaped by the different institutional contexts.

## **CHAPTER 7 PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS: CONTEXT AND SENSEMAKING- CROSS -CASE ANALYSIS**

### 7.0 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings for the third research question, which considers context shapes meaning construction, and presents the findings to address research question 3

#### **RQ3. How do institutional contexts influence academics construction of change in HEIs?**

It identifies the conceptions of Context among academics in this study. It then presents how the context of the institutions IUK, DBS and IKP shape the descriptions of academics

### **7.1 Research question 3: How do institutional contexts influence academics construction of change in HEIs?**

#### **7.1.1 Case Description/ HEI Context**

##### 7.1.1.1 Institution UK (IUK)

The case study was carried out using a business school IUK. Following the reorganisation of faculties in the university in 2014, it became part of the faculty of Business Social Sciences and Law. The business school is a part of a post-1992 British university called IUK for this research. IUK is a multisite university that traces its origins to five individual colleges that were amalgamated to form a polytechnic between 1971 (1965-1975). The oldest of these colleges was established in 1843 and is recognized officially as the birth of the university. Facets of that college have evolved over time to become a highly nationally recognized faculty. In 1975, three more colleges were merged into the polytechnic. It became an independent corporation with charitable status in 1989 following the 1988 Education Reform Act. After the Further and Higher Education Act gave all polytechnics the power to adopt the title of 'university', the institution became a university in 1992. This new status was followed by a change of name approved by the Privy Council also in 1992. In 2001 and 2005, two further colleges were incorporated into the university. It currently has over 25,000 students from over 80 countries



The university indicates its aim to be a powerful force for learning, creativity and enterprise, promoting economic, social and cultural well-being in its recent version of its mission statement. It prioritises the provision of flexible and practice-based learning for employability. It bases its strategy on its immersion in the community, connections with business, the professions and the recommendation of the University's research and investigative practice centres. IUK positions itself as a leading educational provider fostering diversity and inclusion, particularly for students from less privileged backgrounds

The university can be described as an innovative university, one of the first UK universities to start student engagement projects, and one of the first UK universities to offer a 2-year undergraduate games development course. As part of its innovation strategy, it has periodically embarked on brand modifications; In 2007, there was a name change to create a strong new identity. In 2014 there was a logo change. As part of its strategy to improve the student experience, it embarked on a £180 million estates strategy and in 2014, announced a further £40 million estates investment. This would move it from a multi-campus university to a two-campus university. Although there is a consensus among the front-line staff that the move was imposed, there are varying reactions on the appropriateness of the move. There is a strong focus within IUK and certainly in the business school of reacting to changes quickly.

*....this university, in my 11 years certainly the business school has reacted very very quickly to change coming on. I think this university certainly this business school is better placed than the many universities in the UK for all the changes that have hit for the last couple of years and now are hitting it because they got themselves sorted out quite early on. zecause in the 11 years I've been here I think they've had 3 lots of redundancies, non recently but they've had 3 lots of redundancies; they did a lot of work to balance staff to workload and such like*

The differential activities of IUK indicated in the university's strategic plan have been to increase recognition and improve the profile of its professional and creative education and research. ....*they have been a university with professional bodies and tying it with professional qualifications. So there's been a lot of hours locking and tying of professional bodies, which has put this, certainly, the business school in a strong position. You get the feeling some other universities are only just reacting to changing their staff mix and staff cost (Jim)*

*.....But the other part of it, now this is just a marketing issue not so much a change management, but the brilliance is, calling it marketing, advertising and PR, I said why not call it marketing and communication, that's what people call it, he said "because when you go into UCAS" you know about UCAS and marketing, 'If you put in advertising, if you put in PR, you get us, now that's really smart, i do not know that we're the only university that ever did that but we were picking up students;*

The perception of these participants is significant because they have previous experience from other universities and can provide comparative overviews of strategies. The congruence between the organisational or corporate view and the operational level or front-line view suggests a university unified in its goals. IUK identifies transformation as the focus of its strategic plan, making it an appropriate choice for a case study in change management in universities.

#### 7.1.1.2 Institution UK (DBS)

DBS originated from the combination of two colleges established in the late 1800s. In the mid-1980's, the two colleges merged and became part of the University of London. At the time of completing this study, it remains a member of the University of London: a federal organisation of 18 self-governing colleges and ten other smaller specialist research institutes. Each college is an entity in its own right, with its distinctive community and character. As a member organisation of universities, it has the lowest student numbers of the case institutions and plans to retain numbers between 7000 and 15000. It is grouped into six schools, one of which houses the business school. It describes itself as a research-intensive university

*This is an old institution it started in 18..... it's a very traditional university which competes against Oxford and Cambridge. So it has a strong legacy, and you can see from the building, and it's got this with students throwing their hats in the air and things. So you can see there is a sort of physical representation of the past in the buildings, in the "Joly" building, it's an iconic building really, the campus is classified as one of the best in the world in terms of prettiness, it's a kind of beautiful campus. So all of that kind of makes you feel like there is a sort of err, strong identity (DBS)*

*They mainly come down through the exec, so because our executive board is made up of the key office holders, they are the ones...it's the exec and the head of the department that basically have day-to-day responsibilities. So initiatives coming from the centre are really discussed at the exec and then come down to the rest of the body of the school (Josh: MA-FA; DBS)*

*Major initiatives are discussed at the school board. We have.....it used to be the case that the school board would sit as a body, and they would go on and on and on, lots and lots of different agenda items, lots of administrative officeholders would be reporting to the school, giving a rundown of what's been going on, and we would be three(3) and a half hours, and we still haven't finished. So we moved to a system of an 'A' agenda and a 'B' agenda. So what happens is that the papers are circulated at least a week before the meeting; the scheduled meeting and most things are put on the 'B' agenda. So this is like: written reports from officeholders, like the admissions tutors, saying there's been so many offers made, that sort of thing, or from the director of teaching and learning that would say "this course is proposed to be amended in this fashion, as a committee, we're recommending it be amended in this fashion", so that's all on the 'B' agenda. We then have a system where anyone in the department that attends the school board can say I would like it moved from the 'B' agenda to the 'A' agenda, which means it's for discussion at the meeting. If things stay on the 'B' agenda, they're not discussed, they're just noted, and it's assumed that we've all read them and we agree with it. So that's it gone. So it's only things that are on the 'A' agenda that are discussed on the school board. And they tend to be things like electronic marking. One of the things in the last school board that we talked about was changes to our external degrees. So we run a degree program overseas, and we wanted to make some changes to it, so proposed changes would have implications in terms of course structures and workload, so those sorts of issues were discussed at the school board*

The business school of DBS was established in the early 1990s and evolved from a small centre established to support other schools to a large independent business school. Long-term academics of the school described it as a school characterised by change, including multiple program restructuring initiatives at the school level and a move of power from an individualised system to a centralised system of operation at the institutional level. *So it was always a moving environment, always a changing environment (Greg: MA/FA, DBS).*

### 7.1.1.3. Institution IKP

IKP derived its legal status from a royal charter in the early 1900s. It is the only university out of the three to make reports of its consultation process available on its website.

It has over 20,000 students from over 100 countries. The participants in IKP described IKP as a collegiate university. In describing the strategies for managing change, participants who had been involved with other universities suggested that in contrast to their previous universities, IKP could be described as a bureaucratic and traditional university. Decisions are made through a hierarchical committee structure comprised of local and centralised systems.

## 7.2 Context and Identity

The presentation of context from academics' narratives suggests that Context exists in tandem with identity. It is interesting to note how institutional context serves as a resource for sensemaking of change in HEIs in its own right but is also implicated in constructing academic identity. The constructions of identity are underpinned by the interpretations of the university's context and the landscape of HEIs and vice versa. In other words, there is an interrelationship between identity and context, such that context influences individual and collective (sector and university) perspectives of identity and vice versa. It shapes their sensemaking of change by acting as a way of differentiating between processes of change in HEIs and non-HEIs. This presentation through identity by participants can be seen as the framework for how academics implicate context in their sensemaking of change.

### 7.2.1 IKP

*But again he's going to do that in a consultative way. So, he's already said he's going to do a full consultation not just through this process but by running a whole series of cross cutting focus groups with the entire university community. So he's done his homework: he's saying you're a highly collegial institution, if I'm going to get my strategy right I'm going to have to consult widely, let's go out and see what ideas come to the surface. I'm sure he's got his own ideas. I mean these things are always top down meets bottom up. But I go back to what I said before, you can't do change unless you take people with you. Institutions that we have seen come acropa in this country have come acropa because they've had a hierarchical leadership who have not had the hearts and minds of the institution. You can't keep everyone happy all the time but you've got to convince your colleagues that what you're doing is the right thing in the circumstances within which we find ourselves. You can't be an effective university leader if you can't do that (Judith, MA;IKP).*

*One of the really good things about IKP is that we are still given an awful lot of autonomy, and choice and freedom to pursue our own academic interests. (Anna:MA-FA;IKP)*

In these comments, academics in IKP interpret the institution as a construct which reaffirms their identity. Individual, institutional context also influences how academic identity is seen as a composite attribute. It validates the ability of academics to transition between and practice both aspects of their role. The integration between context and identity is complex in that institutional identity can equate academic identity, and university context is used interchangeably with identity when constructing meanings of change in HEIs. In other words, the university context is identical to actors' academic identities and therefore plays a role in how sensemaking of change in HEIs varies across academics embedded within different institutions. The ways in which identity is integrated into context is linked to the ways in which academics perceive institutional values as corresponding to the values at the school level. When academics perceive discrepancies, the relationship changes and then the local school or departmental context becomes minimal, proportionate to or, in some instances, surpass the broader university context in influencing sensemaking. This construction of identity shapes narratives such as the narrative of paradox. For example

*Despite everything that I've said, I would still say that it was collegial rather than managerial..... more day-to-day operational things at school level that's far more collegial. (Anna: FA-MA, IKP)*

## 7.2.2 DBS

Participants describe DBS as an institution focused on research but, in contrast to other research-focused institutions, also recognises teaching only academic roles. They suggest a strong consonance between the identity at the departmental or school level and at the institutional level, which they attribute to the school (of management) being “*embedded*” in the university.

*Some management schools are float away from their institution, they are kind of standalone almost, and they have an identity independent from the institution around them. DBS is very much embedded within .....school of management is very much embedded within DBS as an institution, and we....I think we quite like that. That’s just part of our values and who we are. There is a sense of DBS values; this is an old institution; it started in 18....., it’s a very traditional university which competes against Oxford and Cambridge. So it has a strong legacy (Greg: MAFA, DBS)*

*So I think that can be considered as part of the School of Management identity and compared to other universities; at the time I was in “UNI”, we were “UNI” business school, and there was a strong identity, like a corporate identity as a brand, you know, “UniBS”, you know, I can’t see that here, I think we are a department, and we are part of the college though, we are very much driven also by the college strategy and policies (Masha: FA; DBS).*

This consonance of identity is promoted across the university and is not specific to academics in the school of management. For example, Greg a, MA, narrates the reaction of other actors, both academics and non-academics, to an incident when the school of management was perceived to be promoting a divergent goal and identity

*So I think you can’t be too much the big boy shouting about how...you also have to be interested in the life of DBS; they are very, very sensitive about that. ...someone put a banner up that said, “school of management, watch us grow”. And everyone hated that, and some senior manager said to me, “who put that there annoyed everybody” (in a tone suggestive of extreme displeasure) (Greg: MA-FA, DBS)*

DBS’s identity as a research institution and the values associated with this identity is a crucial component of their interpretive process. Most participants refer to the “research culture in DBS”,

and interestingly, this was found to be relevant for both research-active and non-research-active academics. As actors embedded in an institution described as research-intensive, academics in DBS construct the narrative of ideological transmutation predominantly along the de-professionalisation dimension. The cues which shape the sensemaking of academics in DBS as narrative of ideological transmutation of HEIs are the rationalisations and processes of REF. Academics in DBS describe the institution as one which prioritises scholarship and therefore seeks ways of minimising the ideological transmutation associated with REF.

*This one, which has a very, very sensible attitude to most of these questions (Connor: MA-FA; DBS).*

This process of sensemaking involves an interpretation of the application of REF outcomes by universities as contradictory to the principles of scholarship. Academics in this study describe how competition and commercial objectives underline the communication of REF results by institutions

*Practically every university website in the aftermath of the Ref result of December 14 was crowing about their successes. So to a large extent, we are in a public relations game; a struggle for image, reputation erm that has less and less to do with real scholarship and more and more to do with marketing, unfortunately (Connor: MA-FA; DBS).*

Participants also describe DBS as collegiate, characterised by an absence of directive management and decision-making processes, which encourage the involvement of both FA and MA during change. The institution's governance systems, various committees, school executives and school board are powerful structures and mechanisms for influencing direction. There was a lack of tension in relationships within the different structures and opportunities to control direction with participants, going as far as to describe their contentment as academics embedded in DBS in contrast to their experience in other universities

*Well, first of all, I think DBs is a very, very fine place to work. And I think the senior management in particular, here do a damned good job. And it's a very collegial, consultative atmosphere compared to what I know exists in many other institutions. And I often meet academics elsewhere who are very, very dissatisfied, but I very rarely meet any here who are.*  
(Connor: MA-FA;DBS)

*Well I'm not sure I would use the word required. I think they probably influenced the direction that we've gone in. because "required" is very much top-down (Keith: MA;DBS)*

*I think it depends on the style and the drive of the head of school how much those people really push through change. Essentially this is.....because of the democratic, devolved democratic nature of these things, people aren't wanting to do the bonkers, really radical stuff because they won't get support for it (Philip: FA;DBS)..*

Participants in this study suggest that the context of DBS consists of a devolved leadership and governance system. Although aspects of the narratives of DBS academics include narratives of control involving an increasing centralisation of processes, and the localisation of strategy development, the majority prioritise the synergism dimension of the narrative of paradox. The promotion of the value of the perspectives of academics and their ability to contribute to the development and actualisation of the institution's strategy is visible in the narratives of all the academics who participated in the study, irrespective of their position in the university's hierarchy.

Both MA and FA refer to the practice in DBS of consulting and debating strategies and the integration of decisions from FA at the local level, the school board, in implementing the REF strategy. Discussing their experience of change in other HEIs, most academics suggest DBS is unique in the way it involves academics in all processes of change implementation. The subterfuge associated with the legitimacy narrative around the change implementation process is absent from the narratives of DBS academics. Instead, there are concerted efforts to promote the involvement of academics at all levels of the university, with the academics participating in this study using words such as "genuinely open" to describe this process.

*Well, you see, like.... in DBS here, in the school of management, it is different from other institutions, there is a genuinely open discussion about these things, and people say what they really feel. So there was an exchange of views, and I would say it was quite a genuine overall majority was formed as a result of that. We are in a position where I think the academic voice I think is respected, where if you want to be involved, you can be involved and where academic opinions are taken the seriously by those who have to make strategic decisions (Connor: MAFA;DBS).*



*I mean, our place (DBS) is quite strongly against what they call managerialism; like targets and performance management, and we kind of rely on the older, kind of you're a professional, you know what you need to do, so get on and do it. So you know, those kinds of decisions and that kinds of cost-focused efficiency, it doesn't happen and actually, that's a nice environment to work in (Philip: FA; DBS).*

### 7.2.3 IUK

Academics in IUK report a dissonance of identity between FA and MA and between the school of management, faculty and the central university. In contrast to IKP and DBS, there are clear boundaries between both categories of academics in IUK. Some FA in IUK identifies this as a recent development in IUK following the intervention of the university's management to demarcate FA and MA roles.

*"No, we had a change maybe 3 or 4 years back now, and the new vice chancellor at the time pretty much deemed that if you were in a managerial role, the people that are managers could well have been academics but they are no longer.....that is not their primary focus anymore you know they are spending their time purely on management activity whereas before it used to be a mix we used to have to a situation where even the dean would teach but not anymore"*  
(Clark, FA;IUK).

As exemplified by the excerpt above, narratives in IUK contain significant reports of a differentiated identity between MA and FA. This differentiation can be linked to narratives of "them and us" which permeates the interpretation of most FA academics in IUK on the initiation and implementation of sensemaking of change in HEIs.

While some academics, as exemplified in the extract above by Clark, attribute the differentiation of identity between MA and FA to recent changes in policy, other FA such as "Mary" and "Ray" suggest this can be attributed to the culture in IUK which promotes the gap between the top and the bottom "a power distance culture"

## 7.3 CONTEXT AND NARRATIVE OF PARADOX

Data from this study as presented in the previous chapter, suggests that the interpretations of the narrative of paradox and the ways they privilege the dimensions of paradox: synergism and domination is attributed to the decision processes and systems and structures of the institution.

### 7.3.1 IKP

In IKP, the narrative of paradox is associated with the primacy of decisions from central university management which translates into a directive interpretation of change implementation. Similar to the findings in DBS, the narratives of the academics include codes relating to autonomy as well as control. However, there is more diversity in IKP, with narratives suggesting that while some academics privilege the synergism dimension, others privilege the domination dimension. This absence of patterns indicating the prevalence of a particular dimension of paradox corresponds with the narratives, suggesting there are hybrid undertones to IKP's governance structure. The Head of School's narratives demonstrate the competing allegiance to one dimension, although he tries to downplay the domination dimension by comparing IKP with other institutions. In the extract below David, the head of school defines the structure of governance or context of the institution along a continuum:

*There's an element of the university becoming more managerialist. That's clearly.... IKP isn't in the forefront of doing that, but we have some of that.... It is more (managerialist) than it used to be, but less than many. Yes. It's still more...if you had two ends of a spectrum where highly managerialist is one end and community of scholars was the other, IKP is more towards the community scholars than many and less than it once was. (David: MA; IKP).*

*So this is quite a democratic institution; err it's an institution that prides itself on its collegiality, and it's been quite a devolved institution historically. So it's not the kind of institution where the Vice Chancellor would say "jump" and we would say "how high", it just doesn't work like that. in fact if the Vice Chancellor was to say "jump" someone would quickly say...so you know that is both its strength and its weakness so, it's very devolved ,very collegial so it doesn't do change without multiple consultations at every level that you can think of. So those decisions would have been part of that wider institutional conversation if you like. Faculty board is the forum where heads of schools and faculty officers' talk. Heads of schools will have had*

*conversations within their schools. You know, at every level of the institution, there are discussions happening and decisions being taken (Judith, MA;IKP).*

There are similar interpretations of a hybrid structure of governance; collegialism with fragments of managerialism in its operations from FA in IKP as exemplified in the extract below:

*IKP is more bureaucratic and traditional. Very much hierarchical in the way that decisions are made and change happens. We have a... Academics are involved on committees...That runs throughout the university; and change tends to happen via these committees. But alongside those, it's kind of starting to get schizophrenic, I guess. Alongside that, there seems to be quite a lot of rules and regulations that control those processes, but it can be a frustrating game as far as I can understand. [Laughing] You know, yeah, you're dealing with people plus kind of the rules and the procedures. (Amaya: FA; IKP)*

*Somebody in "management 2", I don't know who, decided that this is a good idea. So sent it out to the faculties for consultation. I certainly know in this faculty, we said this is crazy, for these reasons; ABCD and sent it back. And then it goes quiet a bit and then they decide to do it anyway. So it comes out well, you're going to have to do it. So Directors then have to go back to their schools and start working at how they're actually going to deliver it. (Anna: FA-MA; IKP)*

In IKP, the significance of the primacy of central university management decisions for making sense of change in HEIs through the narrative of paradox is linked to the emphasis on the differentiation of context. Academics in IKP distinguish the local school context from the institutional context with confined authority and highlight the significance of the processes and structures for decision-making in the local context for implementing processes associated with REF.

Academics at the local level possess significant levels of authority to influence the direction of the school

*We make decisions at the management and team level and then we have school meetings where we discuss it and then we try and get to a point where there is a high level of consensus (David:MA;IKP).*

Drawing parallels between the processes at these levels, they suggest the attempt to navigate the dilemmas and tensions introduced by their differences and which creates ambiguity.

*We have the central services within the university that dictate and give out kind of a wider structure, and then we have local departments and schools. And the two things can function quite differently and sometimes can be in conflict. (Amaya: F;IKP)*

In IKP the cues for the narrative of paradox for making sense of change in HEIs are derived from the merging local and central priorities. In the first instance, academics talk about the *interplay of sensemaking* between the local school level and central university:

*We have a formal plan that was negotiated between us the faculty and the university.... The university seems to have a preference for systems that are uniform. Many of us who ran schools say, you can't do that, you finish up with one size fits no one. You've got to allow a bit of flexibility so that the conditions of different schools can be taken into account in the way we implement it. (David: MA;IKP)*

### 7.3.2 IUK

This narrative was constructed primarily by FA, with the majority alluding to the primacy of managers' views both at the local level and central level; "*dominating the voice*" of academics. The statements suggest the meanings academics in IUK attribute to change in HEIs prioritise the control dimension of the narrative of paradox. Decisions are made by MA and then filtered down to FA. Academics in IUK employed the word "*communicate*" and "*said*" to describe their awareness and contribution to the development of initiatives within the university. They imply a passive involvement in the decisionmaking process; in contrast to academics in DBS and IKP, who employ the words "*debate*" as they suggest an active involvement in the decision-making process.

For example, Sarah a FA discusses the communication for processes of change and Jim a FA compares his experience in IUK with his previous universities:

*I don't recall being invited (to a consultation) they just said this is what we're gonna do (Sarah, FA;IUK)*

*There certainly isn't any way the consultation here as there is at "Forum" university and usually consultation (in IUK) is done after the decision is made... they (FA) haven't been consulted*

*upfront, I think that thing of having people input in before the decision was made or while the decision was made would have made that a lot easier (Jim, FA;IUK)*

Although some academics suggest there are structures in the university developed for the inclusivity of academics, others counteract this translation and suggest its execution may be indicative of the adoption of rituals of managing change by the management of IUK. Because certain structures are expected and associated with “good practice”, the university incorporates mechanisms to conform to these expectations. For example, in addition to bi-monthly departmental meetings, the participants mentioned focus groups, open consultations for specific initiatives, overall briefs, quarterly meetings with the dean and yearly meetings with the VC but concluded by highlighting the futility of making suggestions. Consequently, academics in IUK using words such as “lip service” and “orchestrated” to describe these processes and mechanisms, suggest they are instances of control which embody the absence of power for the academic than they are of participation:

*Well, we make suggestions in these meetings, and like I said, a lot of them, we feel like we make the suggestions, and it doesn't happen .....(John, FA; IUK)*

*In reality, nothing really changes, lip service as they would say.....(Jo, FA;IUK)*

*I suppose the issue here is that the institution plays lip service to employee voice. you know, they try these staff satisfaction surveys, the open sessions with the vice chancellor or the dean when they tell you what's going on in terms of university communication. The meetings that are held by the vice chancellor are orchestrated. There's no opportunity for someone to ask a very pertinent question and get a straight answer; they are quickly silenced. And the same in meetings which are in the faculties. If you stand up and say I don't agree with what you're saying, I mean you're quite quickly singled out and silenced. You're pretty much told you'll do as you're told (Clark, FA; IUK).*

Descriptions of numerous incidences of “disregarding, silencing and labelling” the perspectives of FA academics in this study symbolise the control of academics. For example, a FA Jo describes incidences where the Head of Department “disregards” academics’ recommendations from departmental meetings. In a particular situation, *significant because he was absent for the majority of the meeting's duration, he (the Head of department) came in, negated everything, and then he was gone”* (Jo, FA; IUK).

Other academics provide examples of “*silencing and labelling*” where the views of FA are secondary to the views of MA

*The interesting thing about this institution is, if anyone questions the objectives with a view to saying well, actually they are not feasible or achievable certainly not smart, then you're labelled as someone who's a troublemaker, you're not with the program you're negative and that kind of thing so instead of listening you're automatically alienated, and sidelined*

In IUK, academics construct narratives of paradox around change in HEIs. A critical component of this construction is the demarcation of identities between actors adopting “*management*” and “*front-line staff*” roles in IUK, highlighted in the previous section is implicated in this interpretation of change through a narrative of paradox by academics in IUK. This is evidenced by descriptions of discursive activities which “*Silence*” other perspectives. Similar to narratives from DBS, academics in IUK make sense of change in HEIs as originating from an individualistic perspective.

*I can see why they've done it, it's not nothing new, and I think there are, I don't, you know, it's somebody's pet project (Mary, FA;IUK)*

*In terms of their REF objectives, again they've not been discussed in any detail with the people that do the work you've got this separate group of people who are the idea makers or the policymakers (Clark, FA;IUK)*

For some academics, cues for this narrative include the ratio of academics to non-academics which, according to Clark, favours non-academics. The position that FA in IUK therefore adopts is one of fear, fear of reprimand, and the consequences of being labelled “*troublemaker*” This is in contrast to descriptions from academics in IKP suggest that there are no sanctions for staff who disagree with change initiatives.

## Summary

This chapter explored the primary differences between the three case study institutions and how these directed participants' sensemaking. It began by highlighting the role of specific institutional contexts on academics' sensemaking of change. The findings from the data suggest that Context plays a moderating role with the other resources. This moderating role is seen in the nuances of the narratives of change present in the three case study institutions. It also affects the way with which

the other resources become salient during meaning construction for the academics embedded in those institutions. Some dimensions of sensemaking were observed across all three case study institutions, while some were limited to specific institutions. The second section indicates the narrative of paradox is pervades the sensemaking of change across the three case study institutions and identifies the pathway of sensemaking.

## CHAPTER 8: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

### Introduction

This chapter discusses this thesis's findings in relation to extant studies and its contributions to sensemaking scholarship. It begins with an overview of the research questions and conceptual framework. Next, it interprets and discusses the findings presented in the preceding chapters 5-7, structured around the research questions. The contribution to knowledge and the theoretical and practical implications of the findings follow this. These implications and contributions are discussed by framing them against the propositions introduced in chapter 3, the conceptual framework chapter. The chapter concludes with the limitations and recommendations for future research.

### 8.1 Overview of Research Questions and Conceptual Framework

This thesis explores how academics make sense of change and managing change in HEIs. It sought to enhance knowledge of how different institutional HEI contexts shape the outcomes of MA and FA academics. It contributed to the understanding of academics' sensemaking of change through the following set of research questions

- RQ1.** How do different academic change actors conceptualise organisational change and managing change in UK HEIs?
- RQ2.** What resources do academics use to construct an understanding of change in HEIs and how do these resources shape their construction of reality?
- RQ3.** How do institutional contexts influence academics construction of change in HEIs?

Sensemaking theory was selected as a theoretical perspective for its suitability to analyse key dimensions of managing change such as the influence of members sensemaking activities on implementation strategies and the outcomes of change management (Mills, 2003 pg 3). Following the understanding that organisations are sites of social activity and as such, organisational change is a social construction which may differ between academic actors. It addresses the influence of subjectivity and the use of discourse (Balogun, 2014).



A significant contribution of this thesis is the theoretical development and empirical investigation of a framework that consolidates the resources academics employ to make sense of change in HEIs and integrates these with sensemaking narratives. In its conceptual framework developed from the literature, it suggested Culture, Identity, Leadership and Context shape the kinds of meanings change organisational actors develop about change. This study was pertinent as only a few studies examined them explicitly in studies of change. In those, the explorations were based on different assumptions and questions. For example, Balogun *et al.* (2015) analyse leadership and culture as part of the context to explain the variations in interpretations among middle managers. However, their research is situated in a multinational company.

In contrast, Cox and Trotter (2016), who research policy adoption in HEIs, argue context is a part of institutional culture comprising structure, social culture and actor agency. Although the concepts of culture promoted in both studies differ from the findings of this study, they encapsulate a critical aspect of the participants' understanding of culture; the challenges of defining culture. Findings in this study suggest the indeterminate nature of culture in HEIs, even though the majority of the participants suggest it shapes their understanding is either explicitly or implicitly shaped by concerns with culture. These studies, among others, underline the importance of understanding how different factors shape the meaning of specific groups of actors.

Additionally, the findings show that MA and FA academics utilise similar resources based on cues and arrive at similar perspectives of change based on the relationship between HEIs and the environment. The empirical findings were presented in chapters 5, 6 and 7. The following sections discuss the findings in relation to existing literature.

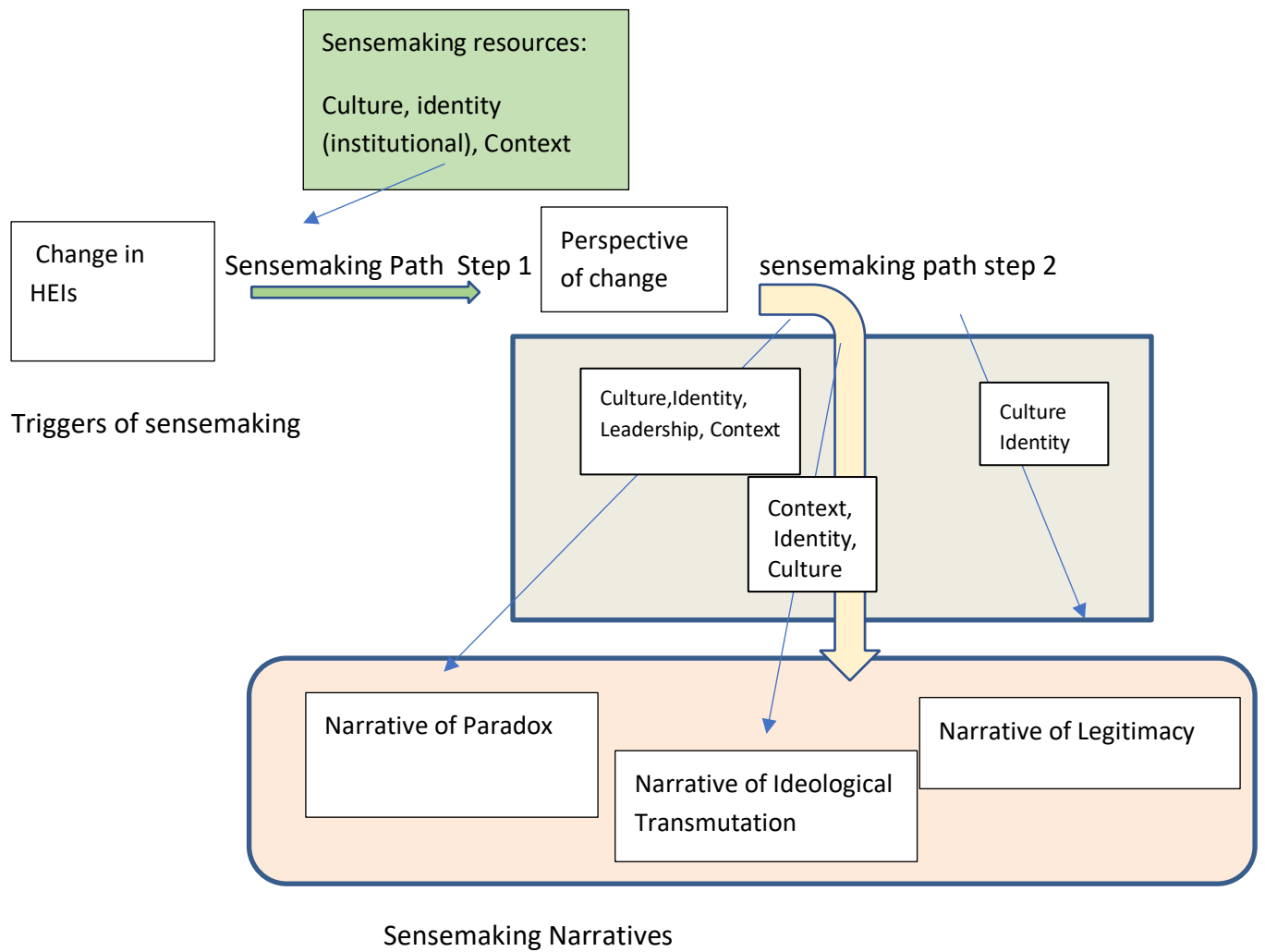


Fig 4 :Academics Process of Sensemaking

The figure above demonstrates the findings of the study. Occasions of change in HEIs trigger sensemaking. This sensemaking goes through the first pathway and is shaped by culture, identity, context and leadership. This leads to the development of the schema of change- their conceptions of change. This first pathway occurs because academics utilise the concept of identity in reference to university. A second iteration of sensemaking occurs, and several outcomes may emerge depending on the resource that the academic utilises. Fig 4 above shows these mechanisms.

## 8.2 Discussion of Findings

**RQ1-** How do different academic change actors conceptualise organisational change and managing change in UK HEIs?

The findings in this study highlight the contested nature of organisational change. However, one theme which unites the different perspectives is the locus and magnitude of the effect of change. This thesis describes these conceptions of change as the schemata of change.

The narratives of academics in this study reflect the debate and divide on choice and determinism in literature. For instance, *Jim* in IUK highlights the role of managerial choice on organisational change in HEIs, while for *Greg* in DBS, HEIs react passively to environmental pressures. Based on the interviews, this thesis identified two dimensions of MA and FA academics' schema of change in HEIs: *Change in HEIs as Assimilation* and *Change as a Modulator* linked to FA and MA academics' sensemaking narratives. The schema result from interpretations of the embeddedness of HEIs within the external environment and the impact of change on institutions and their actors for the latter. Through the themes of internalisation and control discussed in chapter 5, MA and FA academics across the three case study institutions highlight the tight coupling of HEI strategic goals to the demands of external stakeholders. The close coupling results in factors external to HEI beliefs determining the levers of change available to institutions. The findings of this thesis echo other studies which suggest the reconceptualisation of HEIs where the external economic and market demands subordinate institutional policies and governance (Pereira, 2016). The findings from the studies suggest blurred boundaries between HEIs and the environment.

Academics develop different perspectives of change by drawing on identity as a sensemaking resource. The way academics draw on these identities in making sense of change in HEIs differs according to the dimensions of change under evaluation. To construct the schema of change in HEIs, the study participants use the frame of the university as an actor. This was demonstrated in participants' responses defining change and the necessity of change. Here they first position the university relative to the environment, and academics ask: "who is the university?" "what actions can the university take?" This finding, where participants treat the university as an actor, reflects an evolution in the sector (Kruken,2011)

RQ 2 What resources do academics use to construct an understanding of change in HEIs, and how do these resources shape their construction of reality?

RQ 2a What resources do academics use to construct an understanding of change in HEIs

As discussed in the literature review, previous studies have bifurcated sensemaking as either a discursive process or a cognitive process. This thesis argues that this approach leads to unidimensional thinking with detrimental consequences. This thesis proposed that academics rely on cognitive and discursive resources to drive sensemaking and integrated this into its conceptual framework. For example, promoting the discursive aspects of the organisation neglects the role of cognition, which the present study considers to be a component that enables a deeper understanding of organisational actors' agency. It supports arguments that undertheorizing actor agency, an identity-related concept (Brown and Lewis, 2011), can hinder the usefulness of sensemaking as an analytical lens. This is significant as the findings from this thesis show Identity is fundamental to MA and FA academics sensemaking. Therefore, this thesis argues that to fully understand how actors interpret and construct the meaning of organisational change, it is necessary to view sensemaking as a double-helix of cognition and discourse. The cognitive underpinnings of sensemaking (Sandberg and Tsoukas, 2015) and its definition among individual scholars as a cognitive process (e.g. Reissner, 2008) make this possible.

Three key narratives emerged from the data. There are similarities between these narratives for MA and FA academics because they are constructed through similar cues. This thesis differentiates them based on the sensemaking resources which modify these cues and the subsequent sensemaking pathways that occur to create different narratives. In other words, when academics draw on one or more resources to find meaning, they create a different understanding of change in HEIs.

Before the data analysis, there was the assumption that sensemaking was a one-stage process. However, by seeking to understand FA and MA academics' different conceptions of change in HEIs, this thesis was able to identify how these conceptions were implicated in the development of sensemaking narratives. This is depicted in fig 2 below.

Sensemaking is triggered when MA and FA academics hear about change. This sensemaking goes through the first pathway and is shaped by culture, identity, context and leadership. This leads to the

development of the schema of change- their conceptions of change. This first pathway occurs because academics utilise the concept of identity in reference to university. This finding is consistent with studies which discuss HEIs as actors (Krueken, 2011; Elken and Rosdal, 2017). The second pathway occurs when the academics utilise the resources to interpret the schema of change further. This iteration of meaning construction leads to narratives of change. This pathway of sensemaking is depicted in the figure below.

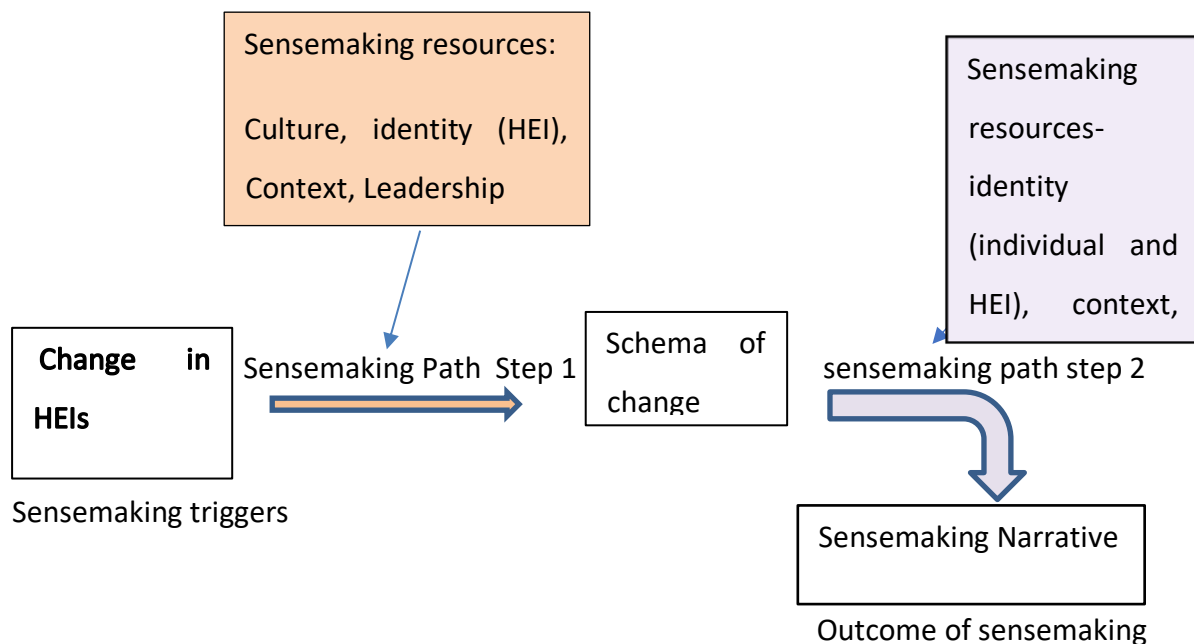


Fig 5 Pathway of Sensemaking for academics

### *Culture*

This thesis, drawing on the constructivist assumptions, suggests culture in HEIs shapes the way academics make sense of change in HEIs. One of the central components highlighted by scholars of change in HEIs revolves around the significance of culture for interpreting change and its implementation in HEIs. Surprisingly, the data for this thesis provided contradicting reports

concerning the understanding of culture in HEIs by academics. In response to questions to explain culture in HEIs and its relevance for change in HEIs, particularly the REF, some academics demonstrated an overt awareness of academic culture, describing culture as highly significant to their interpretations of change in HEIs in their sensemaking. Some participants expressed difficulty articulating culture and its role in their analysis of change in HEIs. This challenge expressed by academics to define culture resonates with arguments by Ivanova and Torkkelo (2018) on the existence of different perspectives of culture. It underpins debates on the extent to which frames of reference are shared, and individuals schemata intersect among organisational actors (Balogun and Johnson, 2004).

Schemata are data reduction devices particularly useful for negotiating ambiguous events. While the questions in interviews around academics understanding of culture were initially designed to explore the different types of cultures and how they differ across different groups of actors, MA and FA, they went beyond this by also explicating the composition of academics' schemata. This goes beyond the findings of other sensemaking studies researching the influence of culture on change. The data showed that for academics, the schemata revolve around systems of managing and interactions between groups. Most participants highlight expectations of collegiality; shared responsibilities to achieve a common purpose. The various schema denoted various levels of analysis consistent with three of the levels indicated by Kezar (2002), who suggests culture is a composite of different levels. As cultural analysis is beyond the scope of the thesis, the relevance of the different levels was limited to their ability to explain the development of different attitudes and responses to change in HEIs.

Responses to questions on the applicability of culture to sensemaking identify three dimensions which affect how they perceive change. These are consistent with the dimensions proposed by Schein artefacts, values: and basic assumptions (1990). For example, the latent nature of culture as a resource for sensemaking highlights the influence of basic assumptions and values on the sensemaking of change in HEIs. The basic assumptions guiding the formation of narratives relate to values. In contrast to existing studies, which suggest culture permeates the interpretation of all aspects of change in HEIs, this study identified culture as predominantly associated with narratives of Legitimation and, to some extent, narratives of ideological transmutation. However, this finding of limited use could be attributed to the way in which identity is implicit in the accounts of culture of

some participants. For both MA and FA and across the three institutions, culture appeared to be more active during assessments of implementation strategies, consistent with other studies of change in HEIs (Kezar, 2002; Hora et al., 2017). The application of culture as a resource for sensemaking of change in HEIs by academics suggests that different sensemaking process occurs when manager academics interpret and create meaning about change attributes such as the relevance of change or the nature of change and the implementation of change. This sensemaking process regarding the relevance or nature of change in HEIs implicates culture actively and consciously as a resource for sensemaking.

### *Identity*

Identity is intricately embedded in sensemaking. It links institutions, individuals and behaviours and influences the interpretation of external pressures and affects the understanding of what constitutes appropriate strategies (Weick, 1995, pg 79; Pitsakis *et al.*, 2012). Academic identity is associated with academic staff in HEIs.

Participants in the study suggest that change in Higher Education Institutions implicates two actors with different identities: Organisational identity, with the university as an actor and professional identity, with individual academics as actors. Organisational identity involves two aggregate dimensions. The first is constructed around the features that differentiate HEIs from other organisations. A subset of this dimension identity links to the relationship of HEIs to the external environment through the way they respond to pressures from different stakeholders, most notably, requirements of regulatory bodies. These two dimensions of identity reflect the differentiations of Organisational identity into identity in organisations or identity of organisations (Whetten and Mackey, 2002 pg 395). However, this thesis extends the growing emphasis of universities as actors (Stensaker, 2015). Academics apply the notion of the university as an actor when they interpret change in universities in relation to the external environment and how it responds to external pressures.

At the individual level, the thesis participants present identity as a composite or pluralistic attribute that refers to a subjective dimension which is determined by the academic's sense of belonging and allegiance. This can explain the identification of academics who transfer to managerial roles as

*“routine administrators” (Greg: MA/FA, DBS)* and non-member actors. It supports observations that in contexts such as HEIs where change involves different professional groups, identity is socially-relational constructed (Rovio-Johansson and Liff, 2012) using role expectations and positions.

Meaning production at the individual level through the lens of identity derives from the notion that academics in HEIs are autonomous actors with the capacity to drive the direction of the institution. This ability is not uniform across academics but instead is subjective and is dependent on the constructions of their identity. In making these assumptions of this ability, academics appear to utilize two frameworks of identity termed by this thesis as role identity and affiliate identity. The first, personal influence, is derived from their positions or roles within the university’s hierarchy and can be described as role identity (see Farmer *et al.* 2003). Personal influence emerges from an identity as a member of formally instituted positions; *“the academic team”, “member of committee”*

Some parts of the data demonstrate how academics personalize their understandings, and this personalisation has emerged in the analysis. While this understanding of the individual is a contested understanding of sensemaking, it has been presented in this thesis based on Weick’s notion of enactment (Tsoukas and Sandberg, 2014). Weick argues

*“Sensemaking is usually thought to involve activities of negotiations between people as to what is out there. Less prominent in these analyses is the idea that people, often alone, actively put things out there that they then perceive and negotiate about perceiving. It is this initial implanting of reality that is preserved by the word enactment”* (Weick, 1979, p. 165 In Tsoukas and Sandberg, 2014).

The subtle differences in participants’ accounts support Introna's (2019) arguments on the relationship between positioning and the kinds of interpretations and subsequent actions of members. His analysis of the actions of firefighters in the Mann Gulch disaster is similar to the findings of this study. The academics appear to base their explanations on their backgrounds and their roles in their particular institution. According to Lockett *et al.* (2014), an actor’s personal history and location in social structures shape their sensemaking in ways that create different points of view (Lockett, Currie, Finn, Martin, & Waring, 2014).

The findings of this study suggest that identity is a critical resource for sensemaking as it has been implicated in all four narratives that emerge from participant accounts. There appear to be references to identity in all narratives emerging from the findings of this thesis. Participants' responses suggest



REF and other changes challenge the core values of academia. Other studies (Whitchurch, 2010) provide similar analysis when they suggest identity becomes salient under conditions considered threats to core values of the academe, at both the institutional and the individual professional level.

### *Leadership*

While supporting the reports of other scholars (Rouleau and Balogun, 2011) on the impact of leader discursive activities on sensemaking, this study extends understanding of leader processes on sensemaking of change. A critical contribution of this study is its support for leadership as a trigger for sensemaking; proving a direct link between leadership and sensemaking. Maitlis and Lawrence (2007) identify the paucity of studies demonstrating the link between organisational change and leader sensegiving. An unforeseen advantage for this study was that at the time of the data collection, one of the case institutions was expecting the arrival of a new Vice-Chancellor and Head of School. Investigating the perspectives of the “led; findings from this study suggest that the entrance of a new leader can be analysed as the organisational change event which triggers sense giving and sensemaking. This study highlights both aspects of the sensegiving- sensemaking dyad, significant in the way it provides perspectives of the “influenced”. Previous studies have predominantly focused on investigating the “sensegiving” dimension, providing insight on the role of middle managers as “influencers” of sensemaking.

There are assertions that the recognition of the initiators and implementers of the change as academic staff facilitates the implementation of organisational change. In Rouleau and Balogun's (2011) study, the leader influenced other members of the organisation by identifying with their values and positioning himself as a member of the team. Blackmore and Sachs (2000) and Newton (2002) report a high rate of acceptance of change objectives when the message is coming from "one of us". The findings of this thesis are similar to the reports of these other scholars. A possible interpretation for this observation implicates values as a component of culture and suggests leadership works in conjunction with culture in the sensemaking-sensegiving dyad. This stance is consistent with observations that leadership is closely related to culture (Schein 1985 *in* Pye, 2005). Culture arises out of people's interpretation of history and symbolism, acting as a filter through which members of the institution perceive policies. For instance, by influencing the interpretation of organisational

functions such as leadership and communication, it influences the achievement of university objectives (Trowler, 1998; Davies *et al.*, 2007; Blackmore; 2007).

## RQ2b How do these resources shape their construction of reality

### *Narrative of Ideological transmutation*

One of the narratives of sensemaking that emerged from this study is the narrative of ideological transmutation. This thesis designates ideologies as combined cognitive structures of values, goals, beliefs and norms. The concept of ideology appears as both MA and FA academics describe their conceptions of change in HEIs. Adopting the position that the study participants objectify legitimating frames using the concepts of “focus” and “activities” of HEIs, the present thesis refers to MA and FA academics' concerns around two pillars as narratives of ideological transmutation. The first pillar is the alteration of the values of HEIs, and the second is academics' values and ways of working. The conclusion of this study that sensemaking of change in HEIs generates a narrative of ideology transmutation echoes the arguments of Broadbent (2011), who suggests that ideologies define acceptable techniques for performance management.

MA and FA academics produce this discourse using identity as a sensemaking resource. The data indicate that the narrative of ideological transmutation in the sensemaking of change in HEIs is defined by constructions on differences in the focus of HEIs and how academics are managed. This results in the emergence of the dimensions and the rise of commercialization and deprofessionalization, respectively. Hotho (2013), in her analysis of change as a narrative, provides support for these dimensions.

In the present thesis, the cues for constructing the dimensions of the narrative of ideological transmutation encompass the shifts toward branding seen in the depiction of REF as a “public relations game” reported by MA and FA in three case universities. Other cues include concerns with the institution's image regarding its marketability in the case study institutions IUK and DBS. The assertion of participants that the objectives promoted by changes such as REF 2014 validate or invalidate areas of research based on their economic viability. This echoes the findings by Pereira (2016), who describes how particular streams of research that had previously been considered

“unacademic” became acceptable because they were considered “financially and institutionally valuable.

Similar to the findings in this study, Pereira (2016) documents the reimagining of academics activity and institutionalization of evaluating academic work. In their analysis of the modification of academic values, they use the concept of “Performativity to describe the regulation of academic products to specific standards. Some aspects of performativity correspond to De-professionalisation, including the use of ranking and metrics identified in this study from participant quotes. While there are similarities in the features of their dimension, their term differs from the analysis in this study. In contrast to findings from Pereira (2016), analysis of the data suggests academics in this study interpret the regulation of academics’ work more as a de-professionalization than the logic of performativity.

### *Narrative of legitimacy*

Narratives of legitimisation developed when participants assessed the level to which the content of change was consistent with the basic assumption and values of HEIs. This finding corresponds with other studies of change in HEIs and organisational studies (Maclean *et al.*, 2012) and appears to be the dominant explanation for the relevance of culture for change in HEIs. Participants in the study assessed REF based on “valid” techniques regarding the application of the exercise. Narratives of legitimisation also develop from assessments of the change to meet the needs of the stakeholders.

This finding is consistent with others (Cha and Edmondson, 2006; Hora *et al.*, 2017; Desselle *et al.*, 2017) who suggest the likelihood of acceptance and engagement with change initiatives compatible with the values of the academia, for example, those targeted toward improving learning for students.

Outcomes from the study support findings in other studies on the importance of autonomy and recognition of professionalism, which are attributes consistent with culture and identity. The findings of this study suggest that both components frequently interact to generate narratives of change. This explains the stance that identity describes culture articulated by Macdonald (2013)

### *Interplay of Sensemaking*

The interplay of sensemaking is related but distinct from the use of consultation as a strategy for implementing change by virtue of the level of intensity in academics' expectation of inclusion in the decision-making process. A few studies (Weber *et al.*, 2015) express similar outcomes as the present thesis by describing the interplay of sensemaking rather than adopting the position of front-line actors and managers as sensemakers and sensegivers, respectively.

The interplay of sensemaking demonstrates a sensemaking process which this thesis describes as direct and diffused sensemaking. Diffused sensegiving- sensemaking refers to a circular form of interaction through informal means. In these interactions, the MA or change agent engages in the process of sensegiving -sensemaking with select academics and then relies on the subsequent interactions of those academics with other academics. The activities described by Mike in the data presentation chapter reflect "high sensegiving" (Maitlis, 2005) from the MA-FA. The findings of this study move beyond the processes of sensemaking described as fragmented, guided, restricted or minimal (Maitlis,2005). With diffused sensemaking, the MA seeks to explore the various understandings of change in order to create a vision of change which captures and accommodates the needs of the majority of academics. This application of sensemaking connects the interplay of sensemaking with the narratives of legitimisation

### **RQ3 How do institutional contexts influence academics construction of change in HEIs?**

Data from this thesis identifies three (3) components of context; governance, structures and ethos which FA and MA academics articulate to explain change in HEIs and how it is managed.

Participant accounts in this study suggest context includes the web of relationships emanating from the structure of the university and which affected how and with whom academics communicated the categories of academics. It has also been depicted as the background, histories, and organisational structures and roles of individual HEIs, consistent with the literature (Maitlis and Sonenshein, 2010). Descriptions of the academics' experience of change implementation highlight one of the specific characteristics of HEIs. It suggests that HEIs can be seen as multifaceted types of organisations and the concept that there can be various local levels with different constraints. Although the various

schools and faculties across the university can be seen to provide the same function; the provision and delivery of learning for students, there are working characteristics peculiar to individual faculties, schools or departments.

The finding in this study, whereby the university's context shaped the cues used by academics is consistent with the findings of Gioia and Thomas (1996). It also demonstrates the kinds of meanings that can emerge academics use context as a resource for their sensemaking. Systems of managing are grounded on philosophies and therefore, the modification of management structures, such as the utilisation of professional managers or tighter control measures, can be interpreted as a reshaping of the ideology of HEIs. The perceived bridging of the demarcation between academic and non-academic organisations applying differentiations in systems of management signals the contextually shaped sensemaking of change in HEIs as a narrative of ideological transmutation. It highlights the role of symbolism identified by Gioia *et al.* in their study of change in HEIs

In the UK, the operating framework for universities is determined in part by external policies. Academics refer to the market-like behaviour of students as cues for this narrative. Students' market behaviour was the result of increases in fees and the removal of restrictions on university choice. Although scholars (Henkel, 2005 pg 170) suggest the recognition of HEIs as businesses is not a novel concept, the participants in this study suggest providing an alternative view. The findings with the inclusion of the emotions of grief and disillusion, suggest an expansion of this view to account for the significance of emotion in sensemaking research.

Analysis of the discourse of paradox in IKP introduces the concept of a hybrid system (Mair et al 2015) of governance. To a lesser extent, it also includes narratives of paradox in DBS in which control is increasingly being transferred to the centre but at the same time, schools retain control. Conceptions of HEIs prevalent in HEIs literature identify them as pluralistic systems (Denis *et al.*, 2007). While there are similarities in the definitions of hybrid systems and pluralistic systems; both comprise of multiple stakeholders and are underpinned by multiple goals. However, while power is diffused in pluralistic organizations, this diffusion of power is deemphasized in hybrid systems. This finding suggests that they may be unexplored aspects of transformation in HEIs, which may be implicated within the discourse of Ideological transmutation, with the possibility to extend the understanding of the patterns of HEIs organizing to include a hybrid system. However, based on the limitations of data and the incidence of this form of governance from one case study institution, the redefinition of HEIs is

beyond the scope of this study as well as the objectives of this study. This gap may however be addressed in future studies of change in HEIs.

The reports of academics in this study of the frequency in which their views are ignored in favour of predetermined change objectives make the linkages between the narrative of paradox and the narrative of the ideological transmutation of HEIs apparent. These findings highlight the contributory role of ideology to the practices of change, which generate a narrative of paradox among academics. Although MA and FA academics in this study recognise there is a direct link between the narrative of ideological transmutation in HEIs and the narrative of paradox, the data revealed differences in their sensemaking mechanism. For MA, the ideological transmutation of the institution was external changes where the institution was conceptualised as having a cohesive ideology. While universities seek to maintain and transfer traditional modes of management to change implementation, the differences in the underlying principles of change create a dilemma for academics in HEIs engaged in the implementation of change, which corresponds to this narrative reflects the debates on change agency in change research (Caldwell, 2005).

Analysis of the discourse of paradox in IKP introduces the concept of a hybrid system of governance (Mair et al., 2015). To a lesser extent, it also includes narratives of paradox in DBS in which control is increasingly being transferred to the centre while schools retain control. Conceptions of HEIs prevalent in literature identify them as pluralistic systems (Denis *et al.*, 2007). There are similarities in the definitions of hybrid and pluralistic systems; both comprise multiple stakeholders underpinned by multiple goals. However, while power is diffused in pluralistic organizations, this diffusion of power is deemphasized in hybrid systems. This finding suggests that they may be unexplored aspects of transformation in HEIs, which may be implicated within the discourse of Ideological transmutation, with the possibility to extend the understanding of the patterns of HEIs organizing to include a hybrid system. However, based on the limitations of data and the incidence of this form of governance from one case study institution, the redefinition of HEIs is beyond the scope of this study as well as the objectives of this study. This gap may, however, be addressed in future studies of change in HEIs.

## 8.3 Conclusion, Contribution, And Limitations

### 8.3.1 Research Contribution

This thesis has enabled the researcher to examine how academics make sense of organisational change and managing change in HEIs. It set out to investigate how academic change actors conceptualise organisational change in HEIs, what resources they utilise as they develop meaning around change, why these meanings emerge, and how context affects meaning-making. Through a sensemaking- narrative lens using interviews from participants in three universities, it explains how academics bounded by different institutional contexts make sense of organisational change and managing change in HEIs. It identifies prominent factors which guide sensemaking, how they shape narratives of sensemaking and the outcomes of the sensemaking process. The subsequent sections discuss the contribution of this thesis to sensemaking and higher education literature.

A major contribution of this thesis is the identification of sensemaking as a cognitive and discursive phenomenon. The resources investigated by this thesis are discursive and cognitive constructs. Identity and Culture are cognitive constructs which academics call on as they make meaning of change in HEIs. Leadership is a discursive resource. A critical contribution of this study is its support for leadership as a trigger for sensemaking; proving a direct link between leadership and sensemaking. Maitlis and Lawrence (2007) identify the paucity of studies demonstrating the link between organisational change and leader sensegiving. An unforeseen advantage for this study was in the choice of a university which incidentally was expecting the arrival of a new Vice Chancellor and Head of School. Investigating the perspectives of the “led”; findings from this study suggest that the entrance of a new leader can be analysed as the organisational change event which triggers sensegiving and sensemaking. This study highlights both aspects of the sensegiving- sensemaking dyad, significant in the way it provides perspectives of the “influenced”. Previous studies have predominantly focused on investigating the “sensegiving” dimension, providing insight on the role of middle managers as “influencers” of sensemaking.

This thesis provides new connections between the factors that shape sensemaking in organisations, particularly HEIs. It identifies four sensemaking resources and the mechanisms through which these specific constructs shape sensemaking. Furthermore, it identifies the underlying mechanisms that support the creation of narratives from these resources.

It discusses how Front-line and Manager- academics view the different resources that shape their sensemaking processes. In particular, it demonstrates how academics, both MA and FA, implicate the core purpose of HEIs (the generation and dissemination of knowledge) to construct narratives around change. This study contributes to research which highlights the specificity of sensemaking in HEI. Thus, it adds to studies on managing change in HEIs (e.g., Kezar, 2003; Brown, 2012) by providing original insight into the schema of change developed by academics and the conditions for this.

It demonstrates how specific university contexts shape narratives which emerge as academics evaluate change using components of their institution. It moves scholarship away from the “constraining” view of context to demonstrate the nuances of the case study institutions which modified academics' narratives of change. It extends arguments on the role of formative contexts. According to Ciborra and Lanzara (1990), the formative context includes ‘the set of pre-existing institutional arrangements that actors bring and routinely enact in a situation of action’.

Another significant contribution of this study comes from its research design. It adopts a multi-level design, capturing different positions and different views. This thesis examines the perspective of academics under-researched in sensemaking studies of HEIs and change in HEIs. The outcomes, therefore, have significant practical implications for managing change in HEIs. This thesis suggests that FA and MA academics use

The thesis extends the literature on academic identity by identifying academic identity as a pluralistic/composite attribute. It complements the limited extant literature (Rosewell and Ashwin, 2019), which presents academic identity as having multiple meanings.

These contributions are discussed through the research propositions developed for the conceptual framework to analyse the data.

### **8.3.2 Theoretical and Practical Implications**

This thesis will discuss the implications of the findings of this thesis in relation to the propositions developed to support the conceptual framework and data analysis:



Proposition 1. Manager-academics and front-line academics will utilise a combination of cognitive and discursive components as resources for creating meaning of change in HEIs

Proposition 2: Academics narratives of change will be shaped by the expected norms of their respective institution.

Proposition 3. Academics use leadership actively for their sensemaking in contrast to "being influenced" as they produce visions and narratives of change.

### **P1. Manager-academics and front-line academics will utilise a combination of cognitive and discursive components as resources for creating meaning of change in HEIs**

One of the key contributions of this thesis is that it explains sensemaking by exploring the factors which shape how academic actors produce meaning about change in HEIs. One finding from this study is how the concepts of identity, leadership, context and culture are referenced interchangeably as academics apply these as resources for sensemaking.

Before beginning empirical analysis, one of the challenges for this study involved the limited number of studies evaluating the constructs analysed by this study as resources of sensemaking. The first proposition attempted to examine the factors that academics draw on as they construct meanings about change. This thesis considers sensemaking a cognitive-discursive phenomenon ( Maitlis, 2014; Wibeck and Linner, 2021) and proposes that these resources would be both cognitive and discursive. The findings confirm this proposition, treating identity and culture as cognitive resources and leadership as discursive resources.

Findings from this study suggest that identity is a critical component of academics' sensemaking of change. It is consistent with Weick's (1995) assertion that identity is central to sensemaking. It suggests that identity is a highly significant factor that shapes sensemaking since it emerged in accounts of all narratives of change in HEIs. Although there are allusions to this critical role of identity in the literature, the researcher found minimal evidence of empirical studies analysing how identity modifies interpretation. In their evaluation of identity and sensemaking, Vough *et al.* (2020) suggest four ways of conceptualizing the relationship and call for further research to explain this emerging area of study.

Theoretically, this thesis contributes to this area of study by providing empirical evidence that shows that identity and sensemaking are embedded and influence each other. Participants appear to articulate identity through their role as individual academics and also HEIs as a whole. They evaluated change initiatives based on how it corresponds with the perceived responsibility of academics and the function of HEIs; to promote knowledge. Consequently, they assessed the rationale of REF according to its ability to enable academics and institutions to maintain that purpose. This finding of the thesis is consistent with other studies which suggest identity is significant for understanding the impact of external policies and regulations on Institutions (Stensaker, 2015).

In practice, the findings have implications for actors involved in managing change in HEIs. Surprisingly, concerns about identity superseded concerns about culture. Considering the assertions in most studies of HEIs (Kezar, 2002; 2013) that culture is a critical component that affects effective change, this study demonstrates that the multifaceted nature of change limits its ability to shape interpretation through socio-discursive processes. Data from the study suggests that academics explain the influence of culture on sensemaking in terms of dichotomies. Consequently, the study argues the focus of sensemaking and giving efforts to achieve effective change should revolve around discussions of identity and designing strategies which take cognizance of academics' identity concerns.

## **P2. Academics' narratives of change will be shaped by the expected context of their respective institution.**

The findings from the thesis suggest that institutional context greatly influences the kinds of narratives that emerge from meaning construction. There continue to be recommendations to consider how context influences sensemaking. While most studies have identified the significance of context (e.g. Kezar, 2015 Hong and Lao, 2006; Weber and Glynn, 2006) but none have explicitly linked this to the narratives which emerge from sensemaking. The data on context emerged from institutions with three different styles of management and governance. By linking context to narratives, this study distinguishes between the two substantial components of sensemaking: the enacted environment and the actors who enact the environment. By making this differentiation, this thesis established the interaction process between the environment and its actors inherent in the sensemaking of change.

Theoretically, this thesis builds on sensemaking research by explaining how academics' perspective of change in HEIs links with the development of narratives seen in this thesis. The study findings illustrate scholars' view that perspectives of change shape how organisational actors engage with change (Sonenshien and Dholakia, 2012).

| Institution | Dominant Resources               | Dominant Narratives       |
|-------------|----------------------------------|---------------------------|
| IKP         | Leadership and Identity, Culture | Ideological Transmutation |
| DBS         | Identity and context, culture    | Legitimacy                |
| IUK         | Leadership and identity          | Paradox                   |

The table above summarises the dominant resources and narratives and differentiates them across the three case institutions as discussed in chapter 7.

### **P3. Manager-academics (MA) and front-line academics (FA) will produce divergent narratives using the sensemaking resources**

This thesis advances scholarship on explaining how actors bridge meaning during organisational change (Spee and Jarzabkowski, 2017). Following the findings on the notion of frames of reference (Sonenshein, 2010; and Balogun *et al.*, 2015), this study proposed that MA and FA produce divergent narratives. Additionally, this proposition emerged from the understanding that change is multiauthored (Dawson 2007). The findings of this thesis support the second proposition partially. The data showed minimal differences between MA and FA academics' sensemaking processes. There were instances where the FA and MA narratives converged and areas of divergence, although there were more areas of convergence. For example, in the Schema of change academics, predominantly MA, transfer responsibility for instigating organisational change towards the environment and away from institutions. This stance reflects MA schema of change suggestive of the duality of HEIs and the actors in them. Both MA and FA have similar constructions of ideological transmutation. However, commercialised practices are acceptable and legitimate rationalisations of change for MA in contrast to FA. Both FA and MA express a direct relationship between their understanding of the rationale of the change and their response to change in HEIs.

A component of identity, differences in these dimensions leads to the development of divergent narratives as it controls the extraction of cues (Weick,2005; Degn, 2015). In this thesis, the areas of divergence revolve around the rationale for change. Here, MA indicates they are “outward-looking” as they are responsible for ensuring that the institution remains successful. Unexpectedly, there were significant areas of overlap in the narratives of both MA and FA. This overlap was particularly evident in the narrative of transmutation of ideology. A potential explanation is the notion of nested identity suggested by MA and FA academics' responses. At the heart of academic identity is the concern for producing and disseminating knowledge. Since sensemaking meets actors' needs for selfenhancement, self-efficacy and self-consistency, the implication of identity in generating sensemaking narratives, as discussed in sections 6.2 and 8.2 may explain this finding. The minimal divergence in sensemaking narratives between MA and FA provides support for bridging the division between top managers, middle managers and other employees (Spee and Jarzabokwsi, 2017)

### **8.3.3 Limitations and recommendations for future studies**

Despite the contributions of this thesis, there are certain limitations and opportunities for further research. These have been combined into one section. This approach has been taken because other scholars who overcome the limitations of this study may contribute to the development of the field of sensemaking.

There are a few assertions in the study that the narratives academics construct of change affect the way they engage with change initiatives. However, the data was insufficient to explore this in detail. In line with previous studies, findings from this study support the stance that organisational change arises from the interaction or interplay of the sensemaking of different actors. However, this could not be explored due to the limited availability of participants at Manager academic level.

One of the study's limitations was the ability to explore culture as a resource for sensemaking fully. The data from the study showed that there are significant similarities between academic identity and culture. However, investigating the impact of culture would require immersion in a single HEI rather than multiple institutions.

This presents an opportunity to explore this in future research. Also, the responses suggest assumptions of culture are implicit. This understanding may be extended through an ethnographic study or one that allows for extended contact with participants. It will be interesting to see if a different mode of analysis will provide an alternative outcome.

An interesting finding from this thesis is the interplay of sensemaking. This thesis designated it as the recognition of the role of others in the sensemaking process. This is an area for future research as it implicates the power processes embedded in sensemaking. The effects of power remain poorly understood (Schildt et al., 2020) and exploring this would reflect a growing area of study.

A finding from this study which provides an opportunity for future research, is consistent with the developing area of emotions in sensemaking. Vuori and Virtaharju (2012) link emotional and cognitive orientations of sensemaking. Inductively derived from the data, the term “change fatigue” is employed by academics in this study to refer to the frequency of change and its effects on their psyche. In this study, the narratives of academics that reference emotion do so in the context of their discourses of sensemaking. There are opportunities to investigate if emotions can shape sensemaking.

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## APPENDIX 1 INTERVIEW GUIDE

1. How long have you been an academic
2. When you hear the term strategic/organisational change, what does this mean to you OR How would you define organisational change
3. How would you describe the type of change you have observed in the university ie drivers, types of initiatives, nature of change, scope of change
4. How would you describe the type of change you have observed in higher education
5. What role if any do you think academics should play with respect to strategic/organisational change
6. What place do you think it has in universities OR Do you think it is needed/necessary within universities
7. Could you describe your experience of strategic/organisational change
8. What actions were taken by the faculty/department
9. Which actions should have been taken
10. What sort of expertise should have been demonstrated
11. Who has the responsibility for managing strategic/organisational change
12. Does the identity or role of this person influence your perception of the relevance of the change objectives
13. What would you say are the important elements in change management
14. How would you describe academic culture
15. Is there an academic culture? How would you describe it
16. Does this have any relationship to the way in which change should be managed

17. Do you think there are differences between academics and other professionals eg accountants
18. Can the university be describes as political .....in terms of how decisions are made, the way people are promoted
19. Within the context of culture you have described, is there any difference between managing and leading change
20. Would you agree with the statement that the majority of planned strategic changes fail? Why do you think so
21. Has the identity of the change agent any effect on your perception of its relevance?
22. What do you think are the important elements affecting implementation of initiatives that should be addressed by the university/faculty/school
23. Do you think there are any characteristics of university/ school management that affect how change is managed ie the type of relationship
24. Are the challenges for change management in universities similar or different to other types of organisations

#### ADDITIONAL PROMPTS FOR CHANGE AGENTS/INITIATORS

25. Did you follow any steps in planning the change?
26. What issues did you consider before initiating the change?
27. Change management has been described as challenging in literature. Has this been your experience?
28. Did you have any prior conceptions of what these challenges would be? (depending on experience of change implementation)
29. Why did you think these issues would pose challenges?

30. How did you handle them?

31. How do you think other staff perceive your leadership skills 32. How did you arrive at this conclusion

33. What types of concerns have you encountered from academics when initiatives are communicated

34. Is there an avenue for knowing the concerns of those not present in the meetings

35. How do you manage conflict of interest

36. How would you describe your relationship with academics in the department.....how do you manage this relationship and your managerial role



APPENDIX 2 : ANALYSIS TABULAR FORM Themes  
and codes

Key concepts from the quotes are highlighted in bold.

| Key words/ 1 <sup>st</sup><br>order Codes | 2 <sup>nd</sup> order code | Themes/Aggregate<br>dimensions    | IUK (FA) | IKP (FA) | DBS (FA) |
|---|----------------------------|-----------------------------------|----------|----------|----------|
|   |                            | <b>Perspectives of<br/>change</b> |          |          |          |

| Key words/ 1 <sup>st</sup><br>order Codes | 2 <sup>nd</sup> order code | Themes/Aggregate<br>dimensions | IUK (FA) | IKP (FA) | DBS (FA) |
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| <p>Upheaval<br/>Instability<br/>Turbulence<br/>Symptoms</p> | <p>State of the<br/>environment<br/>Dynamic<br/>external<br/>environment</p> | <p><b>(Change as externally driven:</b><br/>These link the state of the environment to the activities (response) of HEIS</p> | <p><i>Commercial life, industrial life has been very much driven by the environment which it hasn't been in higher education until the last seven or eight years. And of course the environment is changing significantly... with tuition fees, competition in higher education, all the raft of changes, the environment is incredibly unstable for universities. (Jim, FA;IUK)</i></p> |  |  |
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| Key words/ 1 <sup>st</sup> order Codes | 2 <sup>nd</sup> order code | Themes/Aggregate dimensions | IUK (FA)  | IKP (FA) | DBS (FA) |
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|  |                            |                             | <p><i>With the general economy... I think <b>the university is in a state of upheaval</b>; with the amalgamation of faculties, changes in the management team. <b>It's symptomatic of a turbulent environment which is what we're in at the moment</b> (Mary, FA;IUK)</i></p> |          |          |
|  | Effect/ Impact of change   | <b>Change as modulator</b>  |   |          |          |
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| Key words/<br>codes  | 1 <sup>st</sup><br>2 <sup>nd</sup> code                      | Themes                                      | IUK (MA) | IKP (MA)  | DBS (MA)   |
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|  |  | Perspectives of change                      |          |   |  |
| <p>Upheaval</p> <p>Driven by/ Driver for</p> <p>Change or get left behind</p> <p>Adapt or die</p> <p>Marketization and internationalization happen</p> | <p>Driver</p> <p>Inevitable</p> <p>Survival</p> <p>Fatal</p> | <p><b>(Change as externally driven)</b></p> |          | <p><b>Universities are set in an environment which has changed quite considerably.</b></p> <p><i>The main driver for internal drivers are external drivers... (Mike, MA-FA;IKP)</i></p> <p><b>The world's changing rapidly. In all kinds of ways that inevitably means you change or get left behind.</b></p> <p><i>So those kinds of</i></p> | <p><i>And when I think of change in universities, that is the kind of thing that comes to mind; <b>externally imposed pressures.</b> There's been a lot of change in higher education since I started working within it. <b>Most of it has been driven by government</b></i></p> |

| Key words/<br>codes | 1st<br>2 <sup>nd</sup> code | Themes | IUK (MA) | IKP (MA)   | DBS (MA)   |
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|                     |                             |        |          | <p><i>drivers are just there. The world is moving on, things are coming in, the overseas market, growth, removing the cap on student numbers, all <b>those types of things are producing a changed environment and you'd expect the university to have to respond to that.</b> And that's probably driving most of the change (David:MA; IKP).</i></p> | <p><b><i>initiatives rather than by university themselves</i></b><br/>(Connor: MA-FA;DBS).</p> |

| Key words/<br>codes | 1 <sup>st</sup><br>2 <sup>nd</sup> code | Themes | IUK (MA) | IKP (MA)  | DBS (MA) |
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|                     |   |        |          | <p><i>So again we go back to this, the marketization moment happens, the internationalization moment, <b>you're much further down in the food chain.</b> So there is a kind of <b>adapt or die moment that happens</b> (laughs).<br/>(Judith, MA;IKP)</i></p> |          |

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| Different axis with different implications<br>State funded to market oriented | Different types of change have various impacts on HEIs | <b>Change as Modulator</b> |  | <i>So we have gone from universities being nationally focused, state funded, relatively</i> |  |
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| Key words/ codes | 1 <sup>st</sup> | 2 <sup>nd</sup> code | Themes | IUK (MA) | IKP (MA) | DBS (MA) |
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|  | <p>Effect of change/ Impact of change</p> |  |  | <p><i>elite institutions, to universities being market oriented, internationally focused, and again back to the massification. You know. The universities are much more inclusive than they were historically. So again each of those axis has <b>different dimensions for change within... different impetuses and different implications for</b></i></p> |  |
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| Key words/<br>codes | 1st | 2 <sup>nd</sup> code | Themes | IUK (MA) | IKP (MA)   | DBS (MA) |
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|                     |     |                      |        |          | <i>change in the university (Judith, MA;IKP)</i> |          |
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| Key words/<br>1 <sup>st</sup> codes | 2 <sup>nd</sup> code | Themes  | IUK (FA) | IKP (FA) | DBS (FA) |
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|                                     |                      | <b>Narratives/<br/>sensemaking<br/>Outcomes</b> |          |          |          |

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| <p>Voice within reason<br/>Can't challenge<br/>Some voices, troublemaker<br/>Doesn't make difference</p> | <p>Dominance<br/>Prerogative<br/>Labelling<br/>Silencing limited</p> | <p>Paradox</p> | <p>They have <b>meetings</b> from time to time; where you can <b>air your voice within reason</b>; you <b>can't challenge too much</b> because you're seen</p> | <p>So the idea is you're sharing. It's more collegiate. You're <b>sharing the management</b> of your department and your school and your</p> | <p>Synergism<br/><i>because of the democratic, devolved nature of these things, people aren't wanting to do the bonkers, really</i></p> |
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| <p>Key words/ 1<sup>st</sup> codes</p> | <p>2<sup>nd</sup> code</p> | <p>Themes</p> | <p>IUK (FA)</p> | <p>IKP (FA)</p> | <p>DBS (FA)</p> |
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| <p>Devolved<br/>Sharing Management</p>      | <p>Inclusive<br/>Power distribution/<br/>Distributed power</p> |                          | <p>to be a <b>trouble maker</b> and <b>within reason you can hear some voices</b>, but it <b>doesn't make</b> any difference.....Because <b>whatever is in the plan is what they're going to do anyway</b> and nothing ever changes (<i>Ray,FA:IUK</i>)</p> | <p>university (<i>Amaya: FA;IKP</i>)</p> | <p><i>radical stuff because they won't get support for it (Philip: FA;DBS)..</i></p> |
| <p>Effort,<br/>resources,<br/>advantage</p> |  | <p><b>Legitimacy</b></p> | <p>They (universities) don't lack the effort, <b>there's lots of teams, resources, efforts that are put into it</b> but comparatively, we <b>never get an advantage</b> out of it</p>   |  |  |

| Key words/ 1 <sup>st</sup> codes | 2 <sup>nd</sup> code | Themes | IUK (FA)   | IKP (FA) | DBS (FA) |
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|                                  |                      |        | <p>and what we do is <b>we raise students expectations</b> time and time again and then find it's <b>impossible to meet those expectations.</b></p> <p><i>(Ray,FA:IUK)</i></p> |          |          |

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| Profit centre not learning centre surpluses and deficits. | Profit maximizing | <b>Ideological Transmutation</b> |  | <i>They (universities) are becoming businesses, in all meanings of that word, with....it's the maximization of somebody's wealth, rather than the maximisation of learning. All the meetings that we</i> |  |
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| Key words/ 1 <sup>st</sup> codes | 2 <sup>nd</sup> code | Themes | IUK (FA) | IKP (FA) | DBS (FA) |
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| <p>Managerialist rather than Collegiate<br/>Sharing management</p> | <p>De-professionalisation</p> |                          |  | <p><i>have always: Budgets, benefits, surpluses and deficits, is the key focus. We're not calling them profits and losses, despite the fact that we absolutely are a profit centre rather than being a leaning centre, or a course centre we are absolutely a profit centre. (Joe: FA;IKP)</i></p> |   |
| <p>Telling: Steer</p>  | <p>Direction: Mould</p>       | <p><b>Leadership</b></p> |  | <p><i>I mean again IKP has taken a very mature I would say, attitude to</i></p>  | <p><i>Because what would happen if we didn't have the head of the</i></p> |

| Key words/ 1 <sup>st</sup> codes | 2 <sup>nd</sup> code | Themes | IUK (FA) | IKP (FA) | DBS (FA) |
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|  |  |  |  | <p><i>the REF. Our current vice chancellor he's actually retiring this year, but he has always said that the REF isn't the be all and end all of being in university, the REF is a kind of tool, it's a tool to dole out the money that the government has. And this amount of money is not like we can say, oh well, we don't care about that money we can do without it. But in terms of our overall income it's actually quite a small</i></p> | <p><i>school <b>telling us</b> what we are supposed to do: <b>how we should interpret</b> the feedback results</i><br/> <i>(Masha: FA; DBS)</i></p> |
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|  |  |  |  | <p><i>proportion. What it has is a symbolic importance in terms of league tables and getting research funding and other things. Nobody in this university has been threatened with say being put on the teaching only contract because they weren't submitted to the REF. He says, "Who get's submitted to the REF is not...it's a matter of tactics, it's the tactics of the university to try and maximize the</i></p> |  |
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| Key words/ 1 <sup>st</sup> codes                     | 2 <sup>nd</sup> code | Themes         | IUK (FA) | IKP (FA)  | DBS (FA) |
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|  |                      |                |          | <i>beneficial aspects of the REF". Whether you've got 12 stars or you've got 10 stars or you've got 9 stars, everybody's contribution is valued (Anna: FA-MA, IKP).</i> |          |
| Elite<br><br>Similar for academics and non academics |                      | <b>Culture</b> |          |   |          |

| Key words/ 1 <sup>st</sup> codes | 2 <sup>nd</sup> code | Themes  | IUK (MA) | IKP (MA) | DBS (MA) |
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|                                  |                      | <b>Narratives/<br/>sensemaking<br/>Outcomes</b> |          |          |          |

| Key words/ 1 <sup>st</sup> codes                                  | 2 <sup>nd</sup> code | Themes         | IUK (MA) | IKP (MA)   | DBS (MA)  |
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| <p>We have to agree</p> <p>Debate</p> <p>Bottom up not t down</p> | Synergism            | <b>paradox</b> |          | <p><i>It's not been agreed; nothing's been agreed. that's <b>why I was talking about a major bus stop because we are going to have to agree on something and nobody's going to like it, it's what we've all agreed on, nobody's going to like it (laughs) (Judith, MA;IKP)</b></i></p> | <p><i>Well I'm <b>not sure I would use the word required.</b> I think they probably influenced the direction that we've gone in. because required is very much top down (Keith: MA;DBS)</i></p> |

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| Imposed<br>Don't have much<br>option<br>No point<br>fighting | Control | <b>paradox</b> |  | <i>Some <b>change is imposed</b> on us and our response to it basically is, <b>we don't have much option.</b></i> |  |
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|                                  |                      |        |          | <i>Now I may or may not agree with them, but there's <b>little point trying to fight it, it's been decided across the university, it's a university wide policy, all the schools have to do it; therefore we're going to have to do it(David: MA;IKP)</b></i> |          |

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| Checks and balances |  | <b>Legitimacy</b> |  | <i>Because I think one of the important things about <b>those forums is that they work like checks and balances</b> don't they, so if something is going</i> |  |
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|                                  |                      |        |          | <i>wrong, these become forums within which <b>discontent can be expressed in an ideal world</b> (Judith, MA;IKP)</i> |          |

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| <p>Shift</p> <p>Much more diverse</p> <p>State funding to marketization</p> <p>University has to behave differently because of that</p> <p>University within environment</p> <p>Set in context</p> | <p>Shifted</p> <p>Reformed</p> | <p><b>Ideological transmutation: Marketization</b></p> |  | <p><i>they are internationally focused, you know international league tables, where are you in the QS ranking, who are your international networks, partners, you know. <b>That's the shift that's happened in the last 2 decades.</b> So that shift from being national to</i></p> |  |
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|  |  |  |  | <p><i>being international. Manifested in the horrible ubiquitous phrase of "world class". So the err, <b>state funding to marketization</b>; so you know obviously we are still seeing some forms of state support, you know we've just got our letter about QR funding, and HEFCE funding for some kinds of education but now we have you know students who are increasingly expected to pay for at</i></p> |  |
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|  |  |  |  | <p><i>least part of the cost of their own degrees, we have a <b>research terrain in which the forms of funding that academics are seeking are much more diverse than they were historically</b>. So we've moved away from state funding to a much more complicated heterogeneous funding arena. Erm and then the third thing I talked about was <b>massification</b>. So you will know the</i></p> |  |
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| Key words/ 1 <sup>st</sup> codes | 2 <sup>nd</sup> code | Themes | IUK (MA) | IKP (MA) | DBS (MA) |
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|  |  |  |  | <p><i>figures better than me, in terms of how many students in the UK went to university 20 years ago, in percentage terms to how many students went to university.. go to university now. But it's not just in numbers; it's also in terms of demography. So you know, more women, more people from BME backgrounds, more people through widening participation schemes in varying</i></p> |  |
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|  |  |  |  | <p><i>kinds of ways, you know <b>it's a much more diverse ecosystem.</b> It's still not diverse enough but it's a much more diverse ecosystem than it was historically and again <b>the university has to behave differently because of that..(pause) in positive ways in my view (laughing). We haven't reformed it entirely but you know, the university has shifted and changed over the last</b></i></p> |  |
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| Key words/ 1 <sup>st</sup> codes | 2 <sup>nd</sup> code | Themes | IUK (MA) | IKP (MA)                          | DBS (MA) |
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|                                  |                      |        |          | <i>few years (Judith, MA;IKP)</i> |          |



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|  |  | De-professionalization |  |  | <p>when you talk about academics...</p> <p>universities as sort of cultures of professionals. Over the last few years, we've been moving away I think, from a sense of.....there's a lack of trust in the professional.</p> <p>Whereas before, say, before 1997, probably started before 97 but certainly with the</p> |
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|  |  |  |  |  | <p>sort of the first labour government, so Tony Blair, I think we start to see from there, a sort of, you're not trusting the professions, now it's; "don't take our word for it, don't think that we are doing what we say we do", it's more about "how we get value for money, how we can show value for money" and the easiest way to do that is to have targets, objectives that are measurable. I think that's crept into</p> |
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|  |  |  |  |  | <p>universities, certainly, it's crept into medicine, it's crept into education in general; it's about targets, and that's what I meant by a lack of trust in the professional. It's about have you met these targets, really that's what's of interest, because the targets themselves are not....can they be set for things that you can actually measure?. So you can't measure interest in students,</p> |
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|                                  |                      |        |          |          | you can't measure engaging with students, but you can measure: have you ticked these boxes or not |

Appendix 3 ANALYSIS: TABULAR FORM

3.2 Narratives differentiated by Institution

|  | IUK | IKP | DBS |
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| Paradox | <p>Control Dimension: Fear of reprisals</p> <p>Disregarding <i>significant</i> because he was absent for the majority of the meeting's duration, where he (the Head of department) came in, <b>negated everything and then he was gone</b>" (Jo, FA;IUK).</p> <p>we make the <b>suggestions</b> and it <b>doesn't happen</b> (John, FA: IUK)</p> <p>Silencing labelling</p> | <p>because you know you're making big controversial decisions, and I think one of the challenges for the current university partly in this environment is how to do we continue to hold the spaces for collegiality and whole- of - institution thinking in a context where we have to be more strategic and make more professional decisions. So there is a tension, absolute tension that runs through this between collegiality and</p> | <p><i>Synergism</i></p> <p><i>Well I'm not sure I would use the word required. I think they probably influenced the direction that we've gone in. because required is very much top down (Keith: MA;DBS)</i></p> |
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|  | <p><i>if <b>any one questions the objectives</b> with a view to saying well actually they are not feasible or achievable certainly not smart then <b>your're labelled as someone who's a troublemaker</b>, you're not with the program you're negative and that kind of thing so <b>instead of listening you're automatically alienated and side lined</b></i></p> | <p>managerialism (Judith, MA;IKP)</p> <p>Control Dimension</p> <p>Disregarding</p> <p><i>You just feel that they don't spend enough time <b>genuinely listening</b> to some of the concerns that are put to them. They've just got this tunnel vision about like "<b>this is what we're going to do, we're going to do it regardless, we'll go out consult but when the consultation comes back well actually we're just going to ignore it</b>", so there's no point consulting us really,</i></p> |  |
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|  |  | <p><i>because we don't feel we get properly listened to</i></p> <p>Pseudo Synergism</p> <p><b><i>Somebody</i></b> <b><i>in</i></b><br/> <b><i>"management 2"</i></b>, <i>I don't know who, decided that this is a good idea. So sent it out to the <b>faculties for consultation</b>. I certainly know in this faculty, <b>we said this is crazy</b>, for these reasons; ABCD and sent it back. And then it goes quiet a bit and <b>then they decide to do it anyway</b>. So it comes out <b>well, you're going to have to do it</b>.</i></p> <p><i>(Anna: FA-MA; IKP)</i></p> <p>Synergism</p> |  |
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|  | IUK | IKP   | DBS |
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|  |     | <p><i>It's not been agreed; nothing's been agreed. that's why I was talking about a major bus stop because <b>we are</b> going to have <b>to agree</b> on something and nobody's going to like it, it's what we've all agreed on, nobody's going to like it (laughs) (Judith, MA;IKP)</i></p> |     |

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| Ideological transmutation |  | Commercialization<br><br>The question about <b>positioning around funding regimes;</b> well that's I think we've seen that work through at a |  |
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|  |  | <p>great rate of noughts. So again that sense of having to <b>compete for students</b>. you know, historically IKP <b>didn't have to compete for students</b> we got told how many students we were going to recruit, <b>we got 17 applications for every 1 that we recruited, and we picked and choose</b>, you know. That's not the case anymore, right. so what does that look like and how does that work through. How do we get smarter around <b>marketing...what's marketing</b> (In an exclamatory voice), branding....what's</p> |  |
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|  |  | <p><b>branding</b> (in an exclamatory tone) and why do we have to do this and so they're all there..those conversations. <b>Co-production of research;</b> why do we have to work with external stakeholders to think about research, err grain challenging research and interdisciplinarity, you know all of that is part of that shifting terrain in terms of accessing both much more strategically focused state funding, and more diverse forms of funding (<i>Judith, MA;IKP</i>)</p> |  |
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|         | IUK  | IKP                             | DBS  |
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| Culture | <p>Managerial</p> <p><i>I think quite an interesting culture in terms of the <b>gap between</b> senior management and operations staff and I think that's <b>part of the resistance</b> to embracing change, examples like this framework are seen as something that's <b>come from somewhere and put on to other people.</b> (Mary, FA;IUK)</i></p> | <p>Hybrid</p> <p>Collegiate</p> | <p>Collegiate</p> <p>I think its horizontal<br/>(Masha: FA; DBS)</p> |

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| Identity | <p>Singular identities<br/>Different/Discordant<br/>identities between MA and FA and between institution and school</p> <p><i>what we got is we got a <b>very separated group of people</b> I think it suits management where they're not actually united there's <b>no unity in the groups...</b> you've get this separate group of people who are the idea makers or the policy makers (Clark, FA;IUK)</i></p> | <p>Singular and Hybrid identities<br/>Consonant identity between MA and FA and between university and school</p> <p><i>you also have to be interested in the life of DBS, they're very, very sensitive about that....school of management is very much embedded within DBS as an institution and we...I think we quite like that. That's just part of the values and who we are. There is a sense of DBS values (Greg: MA-FA, DBS)</i></p> | <p>Singular and Hybrid identities<br/>Consonant identity but defaults to school identity. Certain elements of discordant identity between MA and FA</p> |
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| Context |  |  | <i>One of the really good things about IKP is that we are still given an awful lot of <b>autonomy, and choice and freedom to pursue our own academic interests.</b> (Anna:MA-FA;IKP)</i> |
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