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SHAPING AN AMBIDEXTROUS ORIENTATION: MANAGERIAL ACTIVITY CONFIGURATION & TOP MANAGEMENT INFLUENCE

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ABSTRACT

This study examines managerial activity configurations with a view to understand the influences on attention middle managers give to activities they carry out. The role of top management in orienting managerial work is a fundamental influence that mediates other aspects such as task environment characteristics and response to performance feedback. Enhancing managerial performance under varying task situations and iterative performance feedback calls for an evaluation of content, and of practice. This would entail looking within the remits of past experience with existing activity configuration to enhance effectiveness and/ or looking outside to explore novel approaches to improving activities and their mutual fit. The balance between exploitation and exploration while seeking to do well at both makes such calibration in activities being marked by what I call aspirations of ambidexterity. Reflecting on constructs like- managerial work environment characteristics, performance feedback, risks and benefits of pursuing ambidexterity, nature of activities, and the interaction between top and middle management, is not new to research. However, what remain missing is an empirical examination of top management influence on ambidexterity in managerial practice, and also, a focussed examination of how managers' scope and orient attention to activities that they do. From this perspective, the study situates the unit of analysis as activities carried out by individual managers, as in how the top management influences the ambidextrous orientation of subordinate managers'.

The study uses data collected through a semi structured survey instrument. This is complemented with data from meeting observation memos. The survey instrument has been rigorously pre-tested and modified prior to data collection from the study research site which is federated organisation with a rather flat structure hierarchically relative to others in the industry.

Several findings from the study contribute to both research and practice, and include: evidence for top management encouraging selective ambidextrous practice by looking at managers who do well; the strategic and operational alignment perception in middle managers affecting their propensity to make changes to their activity portfolios; evidence for the need for demonstrative inclusion of feedback for greater buy in by middle management; the mediation by and variation in work environment characteristics being an influence, among others. A behavioural and cognitive interface with influencing antecedents and consequences for how managerial work is shaped and evolves along aspirations of ambidextrous capability underpins the discussion in this study. The study provides support to and extends the conceptualisations along trajectories in research, primarily those that concern themselves with managerial attention, managerial activity configurations and ambidextrous practice in evolving what managers do.

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Acknowledgements

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I am indebted to my supervisors for their guidance and support through this journey and also for agreeing to review papers I worked on during my doctoral studies. I hope to continue this association in the future. I would also like to thank my examiners for their extremely valuable suggestions.

Declaration

I declare that the work contained in this thesis has not been submitted for any other award and that it is all my own work. I also confirm that this work fully acknowledges opinions, ideas and contributions from the work of others.

Any ethical clearance for the research presented in this thesis has been approved. Approval has been sought and granted by the Faculty Ethics Committee on 8th July 2015

I declare that the Word Count of this Thesis is 56,587 words

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Signature:

Date: 20 January 2017

Chapter 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1.   Overview of Research Interest and Directions

"We must describe managerial work more precisely, and we must model the manager as a programmed system. Only then shall we be able to make a science of management"

Since and probably prior to this quote by Henry Mintzberg (1971, p. 97), managerial activities have been considered central to how organisational systems make key decisions regarding programming the manager. The thesis takes this quote as a starting point for modelling managerial work, to add to the body of knowledge on managerial work in   a programmed system. This thesis is predicated on the importance of managerial activities in strategy formulation and execution. Managerial activity configurations comprise a collection of networked and inter-related activities that managers do, and are of central interest to this study.

The crucial sense-making and sense-giving role of 'top management' is at the forefront in what the study seeks to investigate. Subordinate managers and top management give attention to what is more important or critical for performance. Top management orient functioning through guidelines and directives for subordinates, and subordinate managers examine performance from their own perspective to negotiate alignment with such top management orientation. Essentially, both respond to feedback from performance to impact practice - delivered through managerial activities, thereby making activities an interesting and important unit of analysis to understand how they are configured at the level of individual managers. The importance of managerial attention to activities is crucial from two perspectives, first because attention is a resource and second, such attention allows one to gain insight into what is at the heart of creating a distinctive configuration.

In the first section below, I give an account of the above, which acts as a framework for establishing the research gap. Following this, I position my research using a rich stream of established literature. I put forward the research questions thereafter. I also note them here:

- *How do managers allocate attention to the activities they carry out?*
- *What is the effect of top management influence in shaping the propensity to deviate from, or alternatively, subscribe to prescribed activities?*

In the remainder of this chapter, I provide a detailed account of the variables and constructs, and an overview of my approach and methodology. Chapter 2 is a critical review of literature providing propositions considering the research questions for the study. Chapter 3 is a full account of the research methodology followed by analysis and findings in chapter. Chapter 5 provides discussion and contributions and chapter 6 carries the conclusions and my reflections.

My motivation for pursuing this research stems from my extensive practice experience in senior and top management roles. Over time, and even before commencing by doctoral journey, I have come across and read research literature and practice narratives to inform my understanding and decision-making. A research orientation emerged that went beyond simply drawing on such work, to critically analysing, interpreting and developing my own perspective on managerial practice. That I work in a Higher Education (HE) institution, a departure was easily made. Informal discussions on my critical reading of research with research active faculty members drew a very strong recommendation for me to pursue a doctoral programme.

 I thereafter looked for openings and opportunities to do this, seeking supervisors and institutions that had a track record of research in managerial practice, performance feedback and exploration – exploitation, as initial broad areas. Over the course of this doctoral

research my journey has been exciting but also tenuous. Overall I feel to have really delivered to my need for engaging with an examination of managerial work, its antecedents, and implications. I hope my work appeals to both scholars and practitioners.

1.2.   Identifying the Research Gap

There is a significant body of academic literature that tells us how feedback about performance can, depending on the gap between organisational objectives and reality, create reflection and dialogue, for modifications that are needed to organisational functioning. That dialogue can potentially result in choices being made about the modified range and prioritisation of activities, together with decisions on its timeliness. A preferred combination of how these are activities are carried out can also emerge. By extension one can talk about the total result in terms of a strategic configuration. This idea of a strategic configuration is about an interdependent, dynamic and evolving activity system working to align with the environment for superior performance over time (Albert, et al., 2015). The process of strategy formulation, and how it then drives towards intended goals being in a constant state of churn through evaluation and modifications, is well established in the literature, arguably a focal point of a large section of strategy research (e.g. Ansoff, 1985; Williams et al., 2007; Gavetti, 2012).

Existing literature informs us that activity configurations at the managerial level combine for an expression of the realised strategic configuration of the firm. Several scholars' (Bourgeois, 1980; Porter and Sigglekow, 2008; Mantre, 2008) have talked about the coalition of activity configurations at the managerial level, as an expression of the strategic configuration, thus connecting this strategic domain to managerial practice. If we think of firm level activity configurations as comprised of micro level configurations of activities that individual managers carry out, then understanding the managerial activity configuration is crucial (e.g. Miller and Mintzberg, 1988; Burgelman, 1984; Siggelkow, 2002).

It is also understood that direction for a strategic configuration is oriented by top management sense-making of 'value activities *"...there is no other group including the board of directors that has a greater potential for affecting the form and fate of an organization as the small group of senior executives [top management] residing at the apex of an organization..."* (Lubatkin, 2006; pp.665-666). This is with subordinate or middle managers' contextual experience comprising part of the overall feedback and information for such an orientation (Porter, 1996; Lubatkin et al., 2006) or feed forward to take place. Modifications based on performance feedback can result in a choice of conforming to past certainties versus exploring new offshoots (March, 1991). This is arguably the founding grounds of a popular concept called 'ambidexterity' in strategy research (e.g. Raish and Birkinshaw, 2008; Mei et al; 2014). Maximising both exploration and exploitation as per ambidextrous orientation is considered ideal but carries risks due to issues in integration and cohesion (Heavey et al., 2015; Kollmann et al., 2009). For instance, such risks arise with an attempt to integrate past certainties of performing activities with new activities as experimentations, where creating alignment challenges managerial functioning and can often lead to poor performance. The term ambidextrous orientation at the organisational level as a unit of analysis has been contextualised during the time this study was being completed and noted in a paper that was submitted by me (Heavey et al., 2015). The term ambidextrous orientation at the organisational level as a unit of analysis has been contextualised during the time this study was being completed (Heavey et al., 2015). The departure that I believe is significant, is in how this was taken forward. In my research, I have taken the unit of analysis to a micro level in examining managerial ambidexterity, rather than continuing to examine such orientation from the macro level of the organisational collective. I seek to bring the idea of ambidexterity by making such a departure and relating it more closely to managerial work.

Empirical evidence for the emergence of activity configurations is rather weak in research to date. Also, the link between what managers do and top management influence on managerial attention to activities, that subsequently relates to their balancing of exploration with exploitation i.e. ambidextrous orientation, is another area that lacks an empirical basis in research. I intend to address this gap by empirical research conducted in a multi-campus Business School. I discuss the conceptual basis of performance feedback, activity systems and ambidexterity in the following section.

1.3 Conceptual Foundations

Before presenting the research questions, in this section, I briefly elaborate on the key conceptual domains and theorisations that inform my research. Several variables of interest emerge from the discussion on activity configuration, managerial attention to activities they design and are held accountable for, and of performance based modification pressures. These include, top management influence and how managers seek to make sense of feedback, and consequently, how this feedback informs future practice and middle managers' own sense-making of performance needs (which could be partially aligned to the view of Top Managers).

The issue of conformance and alignment also comes to the fore with such multiplicity in sensemaking. This also leads to a need to keep in perspective the situational context, i.e. varying conditions that underpin the environment in which managers' carry out their roles. This would include relatively more difficult situations, and more complex and non-routine agendas to handle. These situational contexts are highlighted in literature, but only partly examined from a perspective of managerial attention to activities (e.g. Tengbald and Vie, 2015, pp. 165-167; Peters and O'Conner, 1980; Mintzberg, 1971).

The perspective of activity systems originates from the work of Semenov (1978) and cultural psychologists from the eastern bloc. These examined how the activity systems are shaped, by interactions between contextual specificities and actions. This conceptualisation came before Siggelkow and Porter (2002), and emphasised mediation by the work environment and the interface between the behavioural and the cognitive. In management research Mintzberg (1973) was probably the first to associate mental models with managerial practice. Only very recently, just as I am completing my thesis, have activity based theorists started looking at mental models and their applicability in different situational contexts. (Martignoni et al., forthcoming 2016). However, this research, does not look at the emergence of mental models as in orientation imparted through emergent influences, but relates with consequences of mis-specification. The research is also based on simulation. My work looks at real organisational data and, in part, looks more at what leads to (what they describe as) cognitive fit. The interest in this research trajectory is gathering momentum from multiple perspectives and is a strong validation for my work, from both a theoretical and empirical perspective. There are also strong practical implications for decision-making in organisations.

The consequence of making sense of feedback and contextual influences is likely to result in modification to the activities that managers do. What emerges at this juncture therefore is the classical choice paradigm of conforming to past certainties versus exploring new offshoots (March, 1991). This is arguably the foundation of a now popular concept called 'ambidexterity' in strategy research (e.g. Raish and Birkinshaw, 2008; Mei et al; 2014).

Ambidexterity typically means maximising both exploration and exploitation for innovation and keeping abreast of changes required for achieving and sustaining superior performance. However, one important caveat is about the risks of integration and cohesion. This is because managers have forward looking rationales which can sometimes countermine their attention to achieving a balance between exploration and exploitation (Greve, 1998). They could often

be too cautious or too exploratory depending on the situations and conditions they conjecture going forward. From this perspective, the managerial twofold managerial vantage point adds even for complexity i.e., that of top managers' and of middle managers'. Middle managers' influence on modification of those activities in their own portfolio is likely to be based on how they view these activities to have affected performance. The performance experience would include the contextual basis of nature of task-situations that they encounter, say for instance, what has been more useful in their experience for delivering to high pressure situations (Mintzberg, 1971; Wu et al., 2004). What middle managers' tinker with will be moderated by top managements' guidelines and their tolerance for subordinates to deviate from the prescribed activity as accepted practice[1]. The configuration of activities at the managerial level, both reflect and feed into organisational level understanding of value activities. As mentioned, while the idea of ambidexterity has been dealt in research cited mostly from an organisational level, this study examines managerial level sensemaking of their contexts to shape rationales for striking a preferred balance between exploration and exploitation.

However, as a caveat, it should also be noted that as activity configurations evolve, there is nothing to say that configurations at organisational and managerial levels will always be aligned. This perspective on modifications in activities and activity configurations re-emphasises the concept of ambidexterity, because, modifications can be based past certainties and/or non-path dependent ways of thinking (Garud and Karnoe, 2001). Lubatkin et al. (2006) have argued that the ability to influence the nature of deviations from set ways of

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[1] The idea of managerial practice is useful to distinguish from activities. I take practice as about how activities are carried out, for instance, the extent of flexibility deployed to enact different configurations, response to activity sets in different ways depending upon the nature of task-situation, among others. A combination of experience analysis and insight being manifested in informing activity execution in practice.

working is a fundamental capability and that if this capability is appropriately leveraged it is likely to yield superior results.

This brings me back to March's (1991) seminal exploration – exploitation paradigm, which establishes that superior performance levels are achieved when exploration (high deviation) and exploitation (low deviation – working to deliver based on past certainties) are both at their 'highest' (p. 664). As noted both exploration and exploitation should inform modifications to indicate an ambidextrous orientation (Raisch, et al., 2009, Chang and Hughes, 2014, p.13). For instance, exploration can be achieved by inducing novelty from beyond the organizational repository of experiences, or by sheer creativity. In contrast, exploitation is about leveraging and adjusting activities that have yielded superior performance, and are already in the organisational repository. Variation between top management and subordinate managers can potentially become a rich context for shaping superior activity configurations. However, as noted before, this can also make for misalignment between top and subordinate managers' perspectives, and therefore result in conflicted conditions in the evolution of activity configurations. It could therefore potentially yield undesirable consequences for management relationships (Simons and Peterson 2000), as well as poor performance. Ambidexterity is double-edged sword – despite the promise of high performance, enhancing ambidexterity may also yield integration and coordination pressures and research suggests make for considerable risks to performance (e.g. Kollmann, et al., 2009, p. 317). Whilst the literature suggests that ambidexterity should be facilitated and encouraged by top management, the realisation of benefits will be dependent on how well integration and coordination pressures are tackled.

The conceptual domains discussed so far are associated to several streams of research. These streams together form a rich background, which I summarise below, as I move forward to present my research questions. As previously noted, one perspective on the challenge for

modification in activity sets is provided in ***activity configuration theory*** (Siggelkow, 2002). In this theory firms are a set of tightly coupled value creating activities (e.g. activities involved in developing new products; human capital development; supply chain enhancements) which come together as a tight constellation and help create a configuration that can adapt to both changes in the external environment and internal inconsistencies. (Siggelkow, 2002). Researchers from the ***organization design*** research stream (Gresov and Drazin, 1997; Van Fenema and Van Glinow, 2009) have concluded that firms (as well as managerial mind-sets) may benefit from focus on understanding and reinforcing organizational interdependencies among objectives, tasks, structural units to develop a steady functioning system which adjust to external environment (Lampel and Bhalla, 2011). Therefore, the literature identifies that activities, their execution and the way feedback works to modify them are important in context of managerial practice. However, there is little research that examines the role middle managers' as 'subordinate' managers (distinct from top management) play in developing their own activity configurations.

There is some well-cited research on how ***institutional and work environment dispositions*** (for instance, managerial support systems, peer interactions, frequency with which they encounter difficult task situations) shapes the approach of middle managers towards activities that they do (Maitlis, 2005). Whilst work environment contexts can be very varied, the defining variable is the behaviour of top management that imparts a sense of how given activity sets are put in practice and calibrated based on past performance. Research such as by Gioia and Mehra (1996) and by Schmitt, Probst and Tushman (2010) clearly recognizes that there is a crucial 'sense making' and 'sense giving' role that top management plays in orienting and calibrating managerial activities as a response to feedback from performance. This is particularly crucial from a point of view of how some parts of the activity configuration get modified and others become embedded. This has implications for how and

why managers choose to give attention to certain activities as per the ***attention based theory*** (Ocasio, 1997). This also resonates with the classical exploration-exploitation paradigm (March, 1991). More recently, O'Reilly III and Tushman (2013) have explicitly ***linked the idea of ambidexterity to managerial ability***, and have indicated top management has an influence on such ability, by for instance, judiciously and differently sanctioning managers to deviate from set norms of functioning. Organisational level strategy formulation is partly explored in classical literature to do with performance feedback theory. This discusses how organizations and teams adjust activities based on their understanding of performance adequacy (Greve, 1998; Lampel and Jha, 2014; Yang et al., 2015).

To close this summary of research streams, it is useful to note how value activities emerge through the interaction of environmental influences and organizational level sense making of activity configurations and their effectiveness (e.g. Van Fenema and Van Glinow, 2009). Putting it another way feedback from feed-forward permeates across two links and three levels of interaction – environment and organisation strategic fit, and organizational level understanding of value activities-managerial level activity configurations.

What remains missing though, is research that provides the empirical evidence for the emergence of activity configurations. The link to managerial role and top management influence in shaping managerial attention to activities is another area that lacks a robust empirical basis in research. I examine this and thereby position this research at the micro-level of managerial activity configurations and its interaction with organisational level strategy, manifested through top management. This brings me to the research questions below:

The first research question tries to understand the influences on managerial attention from a more generic perspective to engage a wider set of perspectives including making sense of

feedback from performance, risks to performance and situational contexts:

- *How do managers allocate attention to the activities they carry out?*

The second question then focuses on top management influence as a factor and the nature of its impact on middle managers' propensity to see activity prescriptions as a given or, along a continuum of conformance to deviation, or as templates they may deviate from. The perspective on this will engage constructs of ambidexterity, while continuing to keep in focus issues to do with nature of top management practice when it comes to say, the nature of feedback generation and inclusion in decision making, providing sanction and support for middle managers:

- *What is the effect of top management influence in shaping the propensity to deviate from, or alternatively, subscribe to prescribed activities?*

Together these two questions help me analyse managerial work to inform developments in research on activity configuration, including perspectives on aspirations for an ambidextrous orientation. Research does not, yet, draw explicit linkages between how managers' shape and inform the emergence of their activity configurations in addition to the influence of top management within this remit. While focusing on an internal context in contrast to studies that pitch the idea of value activities more as inter-firm competition, the study also explores firm level work environment influences focusing on top management orientation as an influence on managing ambidexterity.

Figure 1.1. An Interim Framework

•*How do managers allocate attention to the activities they carry out?*

•*What is the effect of top management influence in shaping the propensity to deviate from, or alternatively, subscribe to prescribed activities?*

Influence

Top Management

Activity Configuration
of Middle Managers

Subscription and/or deviation
from prescribed
[Aspirations of Ambidexterity]

Attention to activities

Evaluate fit

Design and Evolve

Perceptions of Alignment

Shape and be shaped by

Sensemaking

Risk

Nature of task situations

Performance feedback

Organisational activity configuration

1.4 Overview of Approach and Methodology

The overall study approach is abductive with generous skew in balance towards a deductive orientation. The study delivers propositions from extant literature and gathers evidence considering these propositions. The first data collection part for this study has supported generation of further conjectures that are acknowledged as such when presented in the study. Thereafter these are taken forward to be examined as part of the overall set of propositions (most of which are generated purely from literature). The outcomes from the first stage of data collection and analysis also helped the survey instrument (Appendix A). This was adapted to the context of the research site, but with a perspective to support content and construct validity, and generalisability. The deductive inductive interface and cyclicality for some propositions (inductive outcome then tested forth in the second stage of data collection) thus makes for an overall abductive (both inductive and deductive) study design (Schvaneveldt, and Cohen, 2015).

The case study site is a federated organisation in the Higher Education sector with a flat structure comprising top management (typically campus deans) and subordinate managers (middle managers). The data has good proportionate coverage of subordinate management respondents (22 of a total of 28) in the survey instrument administration; meeting observations and notes thereof (memos) also inform the data. The federated structure of this global organisation, which is still in design a single case site, supports some generalisability which is for higher education institutions and global firms in the service sector with a flat structure. However, from another perspective the typicality of this institution as a specialist and relatively novel multi-campus educational institution also curtails generalisability. Analyses of qualitative data have been done through theme generation (Miles and Huberman, 2006). The main thrust has been on inter-rater assessment and reliability for ascribing and scoring themes that emerge in a context. This is as outlined in operationalisation related to

gathering evidence for the propositions. Quantitative part of the survey data has been analysed using techniques suitable for ordinal data given the nature of the instrument, Spearman correlations, Kruskal–Wallis test by ranks and ordinal regressions (as applicable for some parts of the analyses) are reported as techniques in analysis alongside qualitative comments to present findings.

1.5. Outline of the Thesis and Presentation of the study

The thesis introduces the study upfront in this chapter and then proceeds to discuss the literature continuing the perspectives developed in the introductory chapter to derive propositions. As mentioned, some of these propositions did not emerge strictly from the literature (propositions 6 and propositions 7b, two of twelve propositions including sub-propositions) and have been influenced/ informed also by the initial stage of data collection, thus having and inductive flavour which is noted (in methodology chapter and in section 4.6.3). These are also reported in the literature review as they are in part also then linked to literature to be taken forward for scoping evidence in the second phase of data collection. These two propositions relate to aspects of risk perceptions with top management in relation to tumultuous task situations and with regards performance risks they perceive from sanction for modifications. Initial memo taking i.e., passive observation activity yielded data that indicated such risk connotations as crucial, though some other aspects of risk from the perspective of ambidexterity and from the vantage point of subordinate managers were drawn from a discussion of extant research. At that stage I had not linked these two propositions to existing theorisations and research evidence. This is aligned with the emphasis on ethics in academic practice (Macfarlane, 2010). The approach of such presentation and combination between theory and data is acceptable in context of how the study has emerged to work towards the research questions (Langley, 1999, p. 691)

The mixed methods approach of the study, process of data generation and the overall abductive nature are primary agendas flagged in the methodology chapter that follows the literature review. There is also an account of the research site included in the chapter. The analysis and findings chapter deals with each of the propositions including the ones mentioned above that were partly informed by data. The findings focus on the survey instrument data for some propositions and qualitative meeting notes (memos) for others given the nature of enquiry required and the nature of access I had to managers. Qualitative comments from the survey have also been used for operationalisation and analysis. This chapter presents analysis leading to evidence for each proposition – including details on operationalisation. The survey instrument which has been pre-tested and refined works to generate responses to well understood questions from the respondents. I have then extracted embedded proxies for shaping measures that capture variables of interest for each proposition. The penultimate chapter discusses the implications of the results and identifies what interpretations can be taken forward. The final chapter concludes with an articulation of response to each of the research questions to complete the circle. In this closing chapter I also note contributions that this study makes and the trajectories it suggests for future research.

Chapter 2: LITERATURE REVIEW and PROPOSITIONS

2.1 Overview

Two theoretical research streams can be highlighted as founding thematic orientation of the discussion to introduce the study and present the research interest, directions and gaps. The first is attention-based view developed by Ocasio (1997) and the second is activity configuration theory (Siggelkow, 2002; Ocasio 1997). The *attention based view* argues that attention itself is a resource and that what decision makers do is dependent on what they give attention to (Cho and Hambrick, 2006) and; what they give attention to is driven by specific situations and on how the firm's rules, resources and relationships are distributed into processes and communications. This 'specificity of context' includes experience, top management orientation and guidelines to prescribed activities, and, the nature of 'task-situation'.

Upfront the idea of task situations as in relatively high pressure and relatively low pressure situations needs to be tabled. This is in how they are conceptualised in extant literature and going forward as a key conceptual basis for how this study contextualises managerial work. The nature of managerial work situations has been dealt with in extant research under multiple contexts. From a point to view of managerial work pressure the context has been two-fold. The first deals with crisis management and the latter with managerial work in high velocity environments. What has been missing is another dimension of managerial work pressure that occurs not only due to crisis or in high velocity environments but also during routine contexts that are by design marked with anticipated and scheduled high pressure times. Mintzberg in his work Managerial Work: Analysis from observation (1971) speaks of situations that are routine but could be more demanding and then this has been taken forward to discuss managerial work pressure but more akin to the idea of high velocity environments

(Carrol and Gillen, 1987). In this trajectory of thought, the idea of routine pressure situations that are known to appear say temporally like in educational institutions during admission times for administrative staff, and in a more generalised context new product launch, financial year closing has taken a back seat for what is considered tumultuous for managerial work contexts. The idea of crisis and a generalised high velocity based contrast between different industries or working cultures has dominated research on intensity or pressure contexts that relate to managerial work (e.g. Kahn et al. 2013, Mendonca et al, 2004). I define high tide or tumultuous work situations more inclusively as terms that include relatively more intensive times that are planned, and, unplanned and unanticipated crisis contexts. Low tide times in contrast are those which are relatively, slack and stable.

Context is recognised in cognitive modelling that examines behaviours and preferences of managers (Thomas and Velthouse, 1990). Managerial identity, task-contexts and experience in organizations are central to how the activity configuration performs and evolves, and the attention managers give to different activities, and any modifications made (Hales, 2002). Allocation of attention to different activities is a key indicator of managerial mind-set, which is underpinned by several contextual factors. These range from firm characteristics, managerial disposition linked to understanding of prior experience, and also situational contexts, both internal and external, impacting the interests of both managers, and of the top management (Scott, 1992).

With this backdrop, I present this literature review, which includes as a central strand, research in the area of *activity based view,* with one legacy in the conceptualization of *value activities* (Porter, 1996; Sheehan and Foss, 2009), and the other legacy in the generic articulation of activity systems (Semenov, 1978). I focus my take on the activity based view from a perspective of value activities. Thereafter, I draw on research in the area of managerial attention critically evaluating the view of attention as a resource, including a

perspective on factors influencing the consumption of this resource, making it a rather atypical resource - heavily contingent on experiential, aspirational and perceptual mediators (Ocasio, 1997; Weick, 1998; Williams et al; 2007; Micheli and Berchicci 2015). The factors associated with the distribution of attention as a resource, comprise a range of perspectives, ranging from change, operational difficulties, negotiating strategic direction, and also, understanding of strategic goals and the alignment of organizational stakeholders.

This review also reflects upon the influence of top management on managerial propensity for deviation from prescribed activity configurations. This is also examined from the perspective of aspirations and risks of an ambidextrous orientation (March and Shapira, 1992). Understanding top managerial influence on activities of subordinate managers and; how the activities that the latter carry out, are configured, modified and delivered as a consequence, is crucial.

Ambidexterity is an aspirational mandate of organisations striving for superior managerial performance and links into the idea of deviation and conformance to prescribed activities. Activities underpin managerial practice, practice in this context being a high order term that includes how the activities are carried out in terms of subscription, propensity and interaction. Ambidexterity has both activity level and practice level connotations: how they (managers) balance exploration and exploitation with reference to the prescribed activities (Lubatkin et al., 2006; Birkinshaw and Gibson, 2004). Putting it another, there is tension between needing to evolve the activity configuration for performance needs, but at the same time working with the configuration for short-term effectiveness. Organizational research has suggested that top management's intervention for cultivating synchronised routines; and reducing ambiguity while enhancing flexibility helps to create ambidexterity. Network effects of top management and social capital development at the inter-firm level in cohesive industry networks have been evidenced as conducive for ambidexterity (Heavy et al., 2015)

Top management influence how middle managers strike a balance between subscribing to, or deviating from prescribed activities, or in other words, pursuing ambidexterity. This is an area that has been only partially examined in research (Gibson and Birkinshaw, 2004: 223). Taking this forward is still a relatively open research area, in terms of informing knowledge and practice. In the sections to follow I examine research streams and the gaps, that I have highlighted.

2.2. The activity based view

2.2.1 Activities and the configuration

Organizational complexity has been examined from several perspectives. The starting point includes core technology, key competencies, structural characteristics, resources, activities or policies (Sigglekow, 2002, p. 125; Rivkin and Sigglekow, 2003; DeToni et al., 2016). Irrespective of the thrust of researchers' interest in one or more of these variables, very often *configuration* is the term used to visualise the complexity underpinning organizational functioning (Meyer et al., 1993). Various parts of the configuration (as in any system) are valued differently based on how critical they are to the system. Miller (1993) speaks of how a selection of high value parts of the configuration can emerge as tightly coupled, for example strong core capabilities such as, being able to respond with accuracy and high judgment, despite the need for speed, in the context of tumultuous task situations. Such rigid couplings may reduce the propensity to explore other capabilities and resources (which may or may not be important), for instance, not being able to give the required attention to team development issues, in shaping the ability of others to respond to this type of task situation.

The rigidity premise is also argued in terms of policies and norms that stifle organizational propensity to look outside as its focuses on internal cohesion and consistency in functioning

(Rivkin and Sigglekow, 2003). On the other side of the spectrum lie organizations that go overboard for adapting to external contexts and this can have a 'disruptive impact' on the configuration - reducing the net value generated from such adaptation (Lampel and Bhalla, 2011: 348). Overall, the contrasting research evidence suggests that evolving the configuration at any level and seeking benefits from it needs to examined and informed.

Activities have been recognised in literature as the basis on which the idea of key elements or 'core elements' are configured. However, activities themselves are also described as elements of the configuration (e.g. Sigglekow, 2012: 126; Romanelli and Tushman, 1994: 1147). By the same token, activities appear to be higher order elements (at this level – managerial practice is the next stage up in order as discussed before) representing manifestation of other elements, for instance, they consume resources, and are carried out under certain policies and procedures. They are even representative of the influence of culture, control and power systems in how they are carried out (Levinthal, 1997). A further validation for positioning activities as such higher order elements comes from the argument in research that activities comprising the configuration 'interact' creating (binding) reinforcement at times and conflict or compete for resources at other times (Siggelkow, 2012). However, the value of such interactions is contingent on how they are delivered, as sometimes two or more activities are needed together to form, for all purposes, a single activity. For instance, in numerous Mergers and Acquisitions this concept of coupling is amplified, as the organization tries to find synergies through creating, selecting and recalibrating activities across two different legacy or activity systems (as has happened to the research site during towards the closure of this doctoral work). When top management attention and orientation for activities at the strategic level or at the subordinate managers' level is not in sync with organizational needs, or is not perceived as such by subordinate managers, it yields poor value for all stakeholders (Kay, 1993; Glaser et al., 2015).

Therefore, the evolution of activities themselves, or evolution of the value system of which they are a part, is highly intertwined. For this reason, I use modification in activities and modification in the activity configuration as inter-changeable. The data also does not support dwelling into this distinction.

Top management disposition towards deviations from prescribed activity configuration needs to be seen in context of situations facing the organization, and, the legacy of orientation for deviations from normed activities, from the past (Costanzo and Di Domenico, 2014). Research suggests that a similar way of thinking may apply to subordinates. They would relate to their own task-situation, sanction from the top, and disposition from experience (Hadida and Tarvainen, 2014). Top management's demonstrative understanding of organisational needs and translating them into prescribed activities, and sanction for any flexibility around them, is crucial. Failure (by top management) in any one of these elements is more likely than not to lead to poorer performance (March and Shapira, 1992). For instance, top management was to be skewed towards overt flexibility for subordinate managers in terms of deviation from prescribed activities, while the actual need may of be more conformance at a given point in time or situational context, a resultant misalignment may be realised at the organisational level. There could also be a perceptual misalignment when top management priorities are not in line with what subordinate managers see from their vantage point. For instance, in cases of high requirements of conformance while the subordinate managers feel that the approach is not aligned with organizational priorities. Subordinate managers are likely to conform better to top management prescriptions if they perceive the top management to have a good handle on organizational priorities. This may of course also entail a misalignment in understanding of organisational priorities in the first place. This is a point from institutional logic literature with a perspective to understand heterogeneity in institutional logics that underpin managerial responses, behaviours and

subscription to top management orientation (Johansen et al., 2015). The proposition on explaining subscription by subordinate managers is thus as below

Proposition 1: *Stronger perceived alignment of top management priorities with organizational needs will increase subscription to prescribed activities by subordinate managers.*

The perception of top management's ability to work to organizational priorities is important for creating a follow through from subordinate management (middle management) i.e. their subscription to prescribed activities. This includes ideas about flexibility and rigidity within such prescription, or putting it another, is top management perceived as sharing organizational patterns of when to be flexible and when to be rigid. The case of Lufthansa when it was in dire straits with weeks of operating cash left is a case often cited in research (Bruch and Vogel, 2011). CEO Jurgen Weber's ability to salvage the situation through a cash injection and then working on a cost cutting and lean programme management exercise (that focused on flab other than people) was highly effective. It led to widespread subscription of the several programmes, which were initiated with very precise activities, to work through the recovery story. This is a story that continues to be cited more than two decades later.

2.2.2 Managing the dynamic configuration

As a precursor to Sigglekow's work, Porter (1996) conceptualised *value activities* when he presented organizational network of activities, with reflections on how critical activities could be isolated for focus, whether these were central parts of the system or, reinforcing activities that supported key activities. He went on to argue the role of leadership control and influence, but stopping well short of discussing the importance of (subordinate) managerial mind-sets as well as how these interface with top managements understanding of value activities. In this sentence, I encapsulate the complexity of dynamics at work, and establish this gap that is central to the thrust of this study.

The overall understanding of the complexity of activity configurations, in terms of key activities and their interactions, shapes managerial views about the relative value contribution of activities (Kor and Mesko, 2013). A high degree of heterogeneity in views (feeding into top management) can be useful as it creates more space for evaluating and reflecting upon the activity configuration (comprising the micro level managerial configurations). However, it can also create ambiguity and be costly in terms of organizational efficiency and pace of adaptation (Haunschild and Sullivan, 2002; Schmitt and Klarner, 2015). Feedback is thus often difficult to effectively evaluate, and also acts upon astutely.

However, difficult as may be, top management ability to demonstratively include of managerial feedback (whether it is heterogeneous or not) is crucial (Cho et al.,2006). Such feedback is often systemised but subordinate managers' may not see it being reflected in the actions undertaken by top management. Thus the feedback needs to be demonstrative so as to influence subordinate managerial buy in so that any change or continuity is seen to be appropriate. Inter-firm collaboration literature has looked at this, but no study to date has examined these dynamics within an organization (Webb et al., 2015). Subordinate managers'

perception of top management's ability to function by way of balancing deviations and conformance will be supported by the view of how effectively they include and deliver, to feedback received. This yields the following proposition that seeks a baseline condition of demonstrative inclusion of feedback in perceiving how effective top management is when it comes to balancing conformance with deviations.

Proposition 2: *Top management's ability to balance 'deviations and conformance' with prescribed will be more effective when complemented with demonstrative inclusion of middle management feedback.*

Past experience of top management's demonstrative (and timely) response to feedback received has been associated with higher quality of feedback that helps link firm characteristics with managerial competencies (King et al., 2001). For example, a timely and demonstrative response to feedback received about how to improve the screen view of syllabi to students in a Higher Education institution, led to increased richness and diversity of suggestions from multiple administrators. The attribution of this feedback to the appropriate individual was not only helpful, but also led to speedy adoption of the change. The point here is about emphasis on inclusion, wide and timely adoption and speedy improvement in performance.

2.3 Managerial attention as a resource and its mediating influences

Managerial attention is a key resource that ties in other resources for *processing* attention given to an activity (Siggelkow, 2002). An activity may draw more managerial time and also consume other resources as it is supported and emphasized in functionality and design.

Managerial attention is thus not only a resource, but also a resource attractor, in some ways, that defines consumption of other resources (Khnagaha and Volberda, 2014)

Research refers to task descriptions and role profiles as explicit markers of what managers should do (Maitlis, 2005). When managers perform tasks, they do so through lens of what is crucial for their own performance, and what is crucial for organizational performance. Whether or not these self and organizational performance perspectives are aligned, makes for greater (misalignment) or lesser (alignment) complexity. This alignment perspective that I have introduced is mediated by characteristics of the practice environment. Examples abound in research but are yet to be brought under one umbrella. For instance, Meier et al., (2015) speak of performance concerns, while Voinea et al., (2015) emphasis practice difficulties and communication difficulties, that would (by implication) impact managerial attention. In a federated organization, differences in the practice environment can contribute to how attention is allocated differently for the same tasks or situation. Also managers have a preference for certain characteristics of the work environment, which in the mind-set of subordinates directly impacts the way they function. For example, one top manager's predilection for technology has mediated subordinates way of performing key activities, and this may not be how the subordinates preferred to operate. What subordinate managers give attention to for performance may be shaped by their preference of practice environment characteristics.

Proposition 3a*: Managerial attention to activities in context of organizational performance will be influenced by characteristics of the practice environment they consider more crucial.*

Proposition 3b*: Managerial attention to activities in context of their own performance will be influenced by characteristics of the practice environment they consider more crucial.*

Arguably, unlike the Porterian view on value activities at a macro level, which refers to organizational activities, here the focus is on a micro sets of activities with reference to individual managers. While research has examined performance feedback quite extensively (e.g. Meyer et al., 1993; Miller and Shamsie, 1999; Jha and Lampel, 2014) this issue of attention of managers from dual performance perspectives, remains largely unexplored. It is also important to note the positioning of the concepts of performance feedback and attention, the former being a process and the latter a resource. The alignment between the two concepts lies in the *interpretative* orientation and *strategic choice* attributes that underpin them (Daft and Weick, 1984). Helfat and Peteraf (2015) have looked at the *micro foundations,* which they state, is at the level of the individual subordinate manager. Their contribution is about what managers are capacitated to give attention to as … "….identified specific types of cognitive capabilities that underpin dynamic managerial capabilities for sensing, seizing, and reconfiguring, and explained their potential impact…." (p. 845). Putting it another way, the characteristics of the practice environment will be strong mediators of how attention is allocated given a specific level of capabilities. The propositions above seek evidence for managerial attention from this perspective.

2.4. Sensemaking that underpins managerial attention

In the previous sections, I have discussed managerial mind-sets and the differing perspectives that contribute to managerial understanding and subsequent action, all of which requires interpretation, and evaluation of outcomes and processes.

The process that contributes to an interpretation of the action-outcome relationship is referred to as *sensemaking* (Weick, 1995). It becomes pertinent here as the schema deployed by managers to assess the value from, and consequently, the attention they give to activities (Ramírez, Österman and Grönquist, 2013).

Sensemaking is a term borrowed from psychology but finds appeal in underlining the emphasis on attention being an individual construct (e.g. Kaplan and Kaplan, 1977; Helfat and Peteraf, 2015). Sensemaking is seen as a "socio-cognitive process" (Resnick et al 1991) that has been used to connect human cognition to the environment, to also throw light on how people or actors partially produce the environment they encounter (e.g. Berger and Luckman, 1967; Pondy and Mitroff, 1979; Daft and Weick, 1984). Despite the individualised *psychology'* led basis of the concept, the idea of collective sensemaking, that has also been discussed in research, which would relate to feedback and feed forward congruence between the top management and subordinates (Dawson and McLean 2013; Crossan and Berdraw, 2003). Empirical evidence suggests that in situations of high environment complexity and uncertainty, organizations (top management as decision-makers) avoid cognitive pressures for making choices outside the existing configuration (e.g. Hammer and Champy, 1993; Miller and Shamsie, 1999). This would also associate with a difficulty in exploring subordinate managers' feedback to shape such sensemaking at the organizational level (i.e. feeding into top management's strategic orientation), potentially leading to poor utilisation of feedback. On the other hand when internal feedback is utilised appropriately, the advantages of working with heterogeneous inputs will be that there is likely to be greater congruence between subordinate managers' and top managements' view on the emphasis and organisation of the activity configuration for managers. Feedback from subordinate managers shapes the organisational level strategic configuration to then feed forward into orienting managerial activity configuration for greater congruence. The following proposition seeks to understand how such congruence is affected by deriving effective feedback from subordinate managers.

***Proposition 4:** Congruence between top management and subordinates' view on relative importance of activities will be enhanced when there is a favourable perception in subordinates about utilization of internal feedback by top management.*

Despite its conceptualisation by Weick (1979) as not only a metaphor, but as a concept sensemaking remains difficult to capture in empirical research. It's basis in human cognition have yielded some hybrid approaches in empirical strategy research (e.g. Porac, Thomas and Baden fuller, 1989; Anthony et al, 1993; Martins and Kambil, 1999; Johnson and Hoopes, 2003). The concept easily forms an important part of any explanation that is attributed to how managers allocate their attention to activities that they do. The combination of these approaches have also helped my understanding of the methodological perspective I develop in the following chapter.

Also, in Weick's construction of the idea, sensemaking is strongly "retrospective", as in making sense of past experiences. However, the role of *prospective* sensemaking is also recognized in literature (Weick, Sutcliffe, and Obstfeld, 2005). This sometimes links into the justification that managers provide about their strong performance i.e. that they made of sense in explaining what was achieved (Porac et al., 1989). This is partly based on retrospective analysis and partly based on envisaged alignment of their outcome aspirations from their differentiated attention across activities (Bowen and Ostroff, 2004). This comparative and contextual sensemaking for superior performance, and the interpretation of work environment signals is clearly at work in orienting managerial attention.

As introduced before, one way to think about managerial practice is the idea that managers attempt to create a consistent internal fit that matches, or achieves a synthesis with the work environment. Managerial activities, that come together to comprise managerial practice, ideally in a re-enforcing and symbiotic way, are central to this pursuit of an optimum fit

(Porter, 1996:70; Siggelkow, 2002). Activities are designed to align with task-situations encountering managerial work, and evolve based on managerial experience of using them. Managerial practice and its articulation along roles and functions have been widely discussed in research - making for a rather broad remit to understand what managers do and; how they do it? (E.g. Hales, 2001, 1999, O'Driscoll, 1991; Luthans et al., 1985; Mintzberg, 1975). Essentially, managerial practice can be taken to comprise activities as the fundamental building block. Activities are what managers execute to fulfil requirements of their roles, often aligned with different functional areas in an organization. Luthans (1988) and Hales (2001) provide strong a validation for this in their work on understanding the composition of managerial work and its influence respectively. Planning, information processing, monitoring, conflict management, and motivating subordinates, are some examples of areas under which managerial activities are described. For instance, managerial roles of monitoring under different functions like marketing, finance and production, will all potentially comprise *conducting performance reviews* as an executable activity. Relationships between activities constituting the activity configuration are as important to keep in mind as the composition of different activities. I tackle this aspect with less than desired rigour in this study, given data limitations. Managerial modifications in activities, both in the composition of activities, and in working inter-relationships between activities occur in tandem, supports the conjoint operationalisation in this study to some extent. This could be in giving relatively more importance to some activities, or executing them with modifications in content or in their networked linkages, in responding to task situations and varying in conformance to prescriptions from top management.

Modifications in activity configurations will demonstrate managerial propensity to *explore* or alternatively, be informed based on *past certainties* (March, 1991). The latter is through

examining the organizational repository of activity modifications to see if there are any templates that can be adapted and experimented with to inform modification requirements. Performance feedback from modifications in activities for managers has been argued to impact aspects such as, perceptions about their own competence in delivering an activity; understanding certain activities as being more important for their own performance (for real or perceived personal reward) and, perceptions about sanction for deviations from organizational norms in responding to task situations (Wiseman and Gomez-Mejia, 1998). From a top management perspective, the way they themselves influence managerial propensity to deviate from set norms is crucial. Such an influence of top management on subordinate managers' ability to modify their work templates is widely recognised in research spanning several decades (e.g. Qiang et al., 2013, Hales, 1999; Dill, 1958). What remains less explored is how this influence can be designed to promote superior performance through shaping an *ambidextrous* orientation in making such modifications, i.e. by enhancing both exploration and exploitation (Lubatkin et al., 2006).

As mentioned, prior work by Gioia and Mehra (1996) and by Schmitt, Probst and Tushman (2010) recognizes that there is a crucial role that top management plays in orienting and calibrating managerial work as a response to feedback from performance. There is no subsequent research, at the time of writing the thesis, that focuses on understanding top management behavior that influences managerial ambidexterity. This is particularly noteworthy given the strong links between ambidexterity, performance and risks that have been made in research to date.

2.5. Managerial view of activities and top management influence

Having made the case for understanding top management influence and outlined the research directions of ambidexterity, I now look at manifestation of behaviours that align with ambidexterity in tandem with biases and perceptions.

Managers carry out their roles through a range of activities including, generating information or engaging in consultations under organizational templates (e.g. Kotter, 1982; Woolbridge and Floyd, 1989). For instance, consultations in response to poor performance of service delivery personnel may comprise activity prescriptions like involving a certain set of colleagues to discuss and agree on the appropriate response. Over time, the manager may seek to modify the activity, by involving a wider set of colleagues, or alternatively, fast tracking through a niche group of colleagues. The managerial decision on which way to go could be based on experience where the outcome has been either very contested (in which case engaging colleagues to consider the situation), or in contrast, where outcome has been very standard (making consultations purely a legitimizing requirement at best).

Managerial work and its outcomes shape a perception about the robustness of the link between the decision and the outcome, and the value of this outcome (Smith and Tushman, 2005). Activities can yield uncertain outcomes, be directed at difficult-to-achieve objectives and even be prone to deliver *extreme consequences* for the manager or for the organization (Sitkin, 1992, p. 11). This suggests that a crucial variable that will affect propensity to modify activities is the *risk* in undertaking such modifications. Some managers will be prone to pursue modification in activities despite the risk associated with such modification, while others may seek to protect their perceived reputation and prior gains. With research evidence supporting both assertions (e.g., Thaler and Johnson, 1990; Dutton and Jackson, 1987) it stands to reason that top management's leading by example orientation with regards

to their own propensity to experiment is likely to be crucial in affecting risk perceptions in subordinate managers. Top management could do this by using an organizational repository of experiences (exploitation), or inducing novelty (exploration). In either case they would likely promote an environment (deliberately or subconsciously), which is in own their image, whether that image is about conformance or flexibility.

For example, a top manager who prefers to not have difficult HR conversations (non-conformance to organizational policies), for the fear of backlash and damage to personal brand, is likely to create an environment where subordinates are more likely to take on the same hesitancy in terms of all types of evaluation activities.

Proposition 5*: Risk perceptions in subordinates about modification to activities will be low when top management's own propensity to experiment is high.*

The nature of task-situations is crucial to keep in perspective when examining middle management disposition to deviate, or alternatively, conform closely to prescribed activities. There is a significant body of research that seeks to understand managerial work. This is with a view to understand how it evolves and how it is aligned with organizational interests (e.g., Cyert and March, 1963; Mintzberg, 1975; Siggelkow, 2002; Cho and Hambrick, 2006; Sheehan and Foss, 2009). Stability of task-situations aligns with overall environmental stability that characterises an organization. The more tumultuous the situation, the greater the need for out of box thinking, because prescribed activities may not be an appropriate response, in terms of the desired outcome. Research on environmental volatility that impact organizations explicitly evaluates costs and benefits of flexibility in managerial subscription to activities. This also points to time and resource constraints being amplified in such situations (Dutton and Jackson, 1987).

Given the need to manage performance, clearly more threatened in tumultuous times, top management sanction for modifications is likely to be coupled with a mandate for subordinates to execute activities in close alignment to the response the top manager expects or directs. In more stable times, modifications may be less tolerated, particularly if they do not yield superior performance. A view of such apparent contradictions and associated risk has been discussed in recent research, particularly in making arguments that relate to the idea of ambidexterity (Benner and Tushman, 2003). Another perspective on ambidexterity of top management teams themselves, (and not the influence on subordinates) has been provided by Smith and Tushman (2005), who conclude "...the conditions under which the senior team attend to and deal with strategic contradiction deserves to be more at the centre of our scholarship..."(p.534). This could relate to how top management is not able to guide subordinates, either due to lack of confidence in themselves and poor delegation abilities, alternatively see this as very risky in terms of sharing control (Lin et al., 2013; Schmitt, et al., 2010).

An example of such behaviours in perceived risky situations would be where top management do not provide clear guidance to subordinates in an external regulatory context, where rule change creates a tumultuous environment, requiring an explorative response, simply because they incapable of doing so. An alternative explanation could be that top management do not want to lose control, and would go for poor outcome instead.

***Proposition 6:** Top management's sanction for modification to activities will be reduced by perceived risks to performance.*

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2.6. Ambidexterity in Managerial Practice

Managerial modifications to activities, both in their composition, and in scoping inter-relationships between them are informed by practice experience, and by performance feedback. This could be, in say, giving relatively more importance to guidelines about keeping close to past ways of execution for some activities, and in contrast, executing others with more exploratory modifications. The combination of these modifications across activity sets will demonstrate ambidexterity at play i.e. balancing 'new possibilities' with 'past certainties' (March, 1991; Lubatkin et al., 2006). Ambidexterity cannot be taken to be the assured route for improved managerial or organisational performance. The complexity in integrating diversity with more certain approaches is often argued to be counterproductive (e.g. Kollman et al., 2009; Simsek, 2009; Mei, Laursen and Atuahene-Gima,2014). Top management's ability and influence to orient the right balance in terms of the integrative pressures managers' can cope with and the need to curtail resultant risks to performance becomes crucial from this perspective.

Performance feedback from modifications in activities has also been argued to impact aspects such as: perceptions about managers' own competence in delivering an activity; perceptions about activities that matter more for their own performance and; perceptions about sanction for deviations from guidelines in responding to task situations (Wiseman and Gomez-Mejia, 1998). From a top management perspective, the way influence is directed at managerial propensity to deviate from set guidelines or templates is crucial (Qiang et al., 2013, Hales, 1999; Dill, 1958). What remains less explored is how this influence can be designed to promote superior performance through imparting an appropriate and executable ambidextrous orientation (Lubatkin et al., 2006; Mei et al., 2014). Asking subordinates to largely remain within guidelines, for coherence and achieving consistency, whilst ensuring that at the same time they have and recognise that they have, the right markers for deviation, implies two

things. Firstly, that top management themselves possess the talent to recognise and execute enablers such as these (Ensley, et al., 2002). Secondly, subordinates have to recognise that a different mind-set is required in different circumstances, in itself something that requires shaping by top management. For example, in a case of a student complaint in a Higher Education institution, where the grievance is non-routine, understanding the context in terms of severity, together with an overriding need for a speedy response, will be strongly dependant on the orientation and mentoring ability of top management.

 Indeed, Lubatkin et al. (2006) have argued that ability to influence the nature and scope of deviations from set ways of working is a very fundamental strategic capability. Using March's (1991) seminal exploration – exploitation paradigm, they contend that superior performance levels are achieved when exploration (high deviation) and exploitation (low deviation - working to deliver based on past certainties) are both at their 'highest' (p. 664). Both should inform modifications to yield a performance enhancing orientation (Raisch, et al., 2009, Chang and Hughes, 2014, p.13). For instance, exploration by inducing novelty from outside the organizational repository of experiences or by sheer creativity, and exploitation by leveraging prior experiences from activities (including modifications made in the past) to reinforce and enhance strongly performing activities.

These insights needs to be extended through to assertions in research that follow the seminal work by Lubatkin et al., (2009) and others like Gibson and Birkinshaw (2004). These take a cautious view to include integrative pressures and capability limitations that go hand in hand with pursuit of ambidexterity, and whether and how will it transpire into superior performance (e.g. Simsek, 2009; Kollmann et al., 2009, Mei, et al., 2014). Such strong caveats to the benefits of ambidexterity in managerial practice make the need to examine influences on ambidexterity very topical.

Research argues that a fundamental role of top management is to derive value from managerial work: "*there is no other group including the board of directors that has a greater potential for affecting the form and fate of an organization as the small group of senior executives [top management] residing at the apex of an organisation*" (Lubatkin, 2006, p.665-666). Prior work by Gioia and Mehra (1996) and by Schmitt, Probst and Tushman (2010) also recognize that there is a crucial 'sense making' and 'sense giving' role that top management plays in orienting and calibrating managerial work as a response to feedback from performance. In this conceptualisation sensemaking is the feedback realised and assimilated by top management, to then orient strategic direction downwards, to guide managerial practice as a consequence i.e. sense giving.   During the course of this cycle, top management feedback and feed-forward can get disjointed, and there may not be agreement among the individual subordinates, as there is likely to be variation in their sensemaking. Addressing this issue of potential non-alignment is also thus considered important for how top management influence can yield desired outcomes (Yukl, 2002; Ou et al., 2014).

Bringing together, the need to control for risks in the pursuit of ambidexterity, and, the need to align subordinates in terms of their own sensemaking, presents a pertinent and amplified challenge for top management. This is because integrative pressures between exploration and exploitation can be high, and where capabilities to deliver to them are not adequate, this can lead to performance reversal (e.g. Simsek, 2009; Mei et al; 2014). The tension between exploration and exploitation and the ability to manage this tension is discussed in research, and therefore there is trade-off between the two, which should not be lost sight of. Simultaneously maximising both is not achievable given the mediation through managerial and organizational capabilities, as well as time and resource constraints (O'Reilly and Tushman, 2008; March 1991).

For instance, in a M&A situation, the joining together of two legacy systems offers tremendous opportunities of exploitation from the repositories of the two systems. However, the new entity will not be completely aligned with one or even both cultures of working. Also the Board's agenda in this instance and typically, is likely to be about coping with change. In essence, neither complete nor complete exploitation are going to support drawing synergies or ensuring performance.

In these circumstances, top management is required to make difficult judgements that would test their abilities at ambidexterity. The practice of ambidexterity, as I have discussed so far, is influenced by several factors. Literature that deals with ambidexterity in practice, notes quite explicitly: *"...beyond structural, contextual and leadership antecedents, behavioral antecedents arguably require examination"* (Chang and Hughes, 2014, p.13). This is not sufficiently inclusive, however, and does not include work environmental antecedents such as the nature of task situations. This is where I seek to plug a gap in research, by including task-situations as a variable in my empirical framing.

Task-situations maybe 'stable' or alternatively 'tumultuous' in nature and thereby may affect how middle managers respond to and are influenced by top management. Such relative deviance in conditions is widely recognised in research that deals with organisational behaviour and managerial response to discontinuities (e.g. Kwee et al., 2010; Schmitt et al., 2010). The reasons attributed to variation in conditions are internal or external to the organization or a combination of both. The exogenous context can be captured as the extent of external *environmental dynamism*, where research notes that ambiguity in making 'choices under increased uncertainty' would make for relatively tumultuous conditions (Stieglitz, Knudsen and Becker, *Forthcoming*, p. 2). Endogenous context are more embedded in

interests, power dependencies and capacity for action. This could potentially be a cultural

characteristic of the work environment that would encourage steady state perceptions about,

either tumultuous, or, stable situations (Greenwood and Hinnings, 1996, p. 1024).

Irrespective of their origins the more task-situations are perceived as tumultuous the greater

the perceived or actual amplification of time and resource pressures (e.g. Burgelman 1984;

O'Reilly and Tushman). This perceptual polarity in task environment conditions and its

consequences for shaping influences on managerial work are taken forward as a variable that

contributes to understanding risks in pursuit of ambidexterity. This perceptual polarity

amplifies the consequences of the differences in sense-making between subordinates, and

also with top management, that I have argued earlier.   Such amplification is likely to curtail

subordinate managers' propensity to deviate as it is likely to impart an understanding of high

risk. Top management own propensity to experiment in tumultuous times will make for

strong signals affecting such risk perceptions (Morrison and Milliken, 2000; Heavey and

Simsek, 2014).

To sum up, ambidexterity has been looked at across many domains, which focus on; benefits,

enabling mechanisms and risks of integration. However, a link with top management

disposition is weak in research emphasis, more so it is non-existent about task situations

where ambidextrous practice will manifest itself.

Proposition 7a: Risk perceptions about ambidexterity will be affected by top management's
own propensity to experiment.

**Proposition 7b:* When the task situation is relatively more tumultuous it will affect top
management's own propensity to experiment.

The nature of task-situations is crucial to keep in perspective beyond affecting the impact of

top management's selective experimentation. This is because stability of task-situations also

aligns with overall environmental stability that characterises an organisation; the more tumultuous the task situation, typically the greater the need for out of box thinking, because pre-ordained activities may not align seamlessly with requirements. Research on environmental volatility that impact organisations explicitly evaluates costs and benefits of flexibility in managerial subscription to activities, also suggesting that time and resource constraints are amplified in such situations (Dutton and Jackson, 1987).

Performance, by extension, is likely to be seen as more threatened in tumultuous times. Therefore, top management mandate for subordinate management is also likely to be about executing activities in close alignment with strategic directives from the top (Christensen et al., 2014). In these circumstances integrative pressures are likely to be eased. Putting it another way, when practice situations are highly tumultuous then sanction from top management to pursue exploration and exploitation with equal rigor is likely to reduced.

Proposition 8: *Relatively higher tumultuousness in task situations will reduce the sanction imparted by top management for an ambidextrous orientation in managerial practice.*

There is likely to be a repository of responses in organisational memory to draw upon for potential modifications in activities. This is the resource that supports exploitation based modifications, while it may itself comprise of both exploitation and exploration led prior modifications (Kor and Mesko, 2013). Such validation for modifications and the nature of modifications across networked activities will have greater scope to moderate risk concerns, as there is a muscle memory within the organisation, and with specific managers about how such things were dealt with in the past.

Shaping adaptive response in context of risk concerns is a capability to hone when it comes to the mandate of an ambidextrous orientation also implied in research that does not engage

explicitly with downsides of pursuing ambidexterity (e.g. Karats, 1998; Levinthal and March, 2003; Smith and Tushman, 2005; Lubatkin, 2006). Looking inside organisational memory to 'construct' suitable adaptive responses will enhance the ability to be ambidextrous (Edmondson et al., 2001). Organisational processes that work on diagnosis for supporting and rationalising modifications to activities may instil greater confidence in middle management, for undertaking modifications. This then comes across as an informed analytical choice between exploration and exploitation, rather than as more of a manifestation of individual dispositions and biases.

Proposition 9a: Initiatives that promote reflection on prior modifications in activities will reduce risk perceptions about future modification.

The time and resources for such initiatives is also likely to be a function of how much slack exists (Richter, Ahlstrom and Goff in, 2014; Mom, Bourne and Jansen, 2015). Clearly such slack is likely to be less during tumultuous times. Also the modifications made during tumultuous time that relate to both success and failure are likely to be more embedded in managerial memory (Ocasio, 2011), thus acquiring stronger attention in reflections during such initiatives.

Proposition 9b: Deliberated initiatives to reflect on modifications are likely to give more attention to modifications made during relatively more tumultuous times.

The review has drawn upon extant research to outline propositions that I take forward for analysis and evidence generation.

Chapter 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

The review of literature in the previous chapter relates to research that deals with managerial attention to the configuration of activities that they do, and influences that impact the shaping of such attention. There is an emphasis on the much acknowledged but not empirically examined role of top managerial influence on subordinate managers when it comes to how the latter carry out and then seek to modify the activities that they do. While prescribed activities, and associated task outlays stem from the top management, to be then delivered by subordinate managers, relative levels of deviations and/or conformance to prescribed activities are also sanctioned and legitimised by top management. Alignment in views on priorities and performance between subordinate managers and top management, risks and sanction for modifications (and nature of modifications) to activities are central aspects to note. Top management influence may be reflected in aspects to do with how they design initiatives to learn from and support deviations, and also their own *walk the talk* approach.

This brief outline of the conceptual underpinning is important to keep in context as I now present the research design and methodology for this study. In this chapter the epistemological basis, approach to enquiry and methods in data collection, and for analysis, are discussed with appropriate rationales. The chapter includes a profile of the case organization from which data is drawn for this study. Operationalization specific to the propositions is provided alongside findings in the next chapter for greater clarity in how variables and measures are configured for analyses.

The basis of this study's design in a social constructionist setting aligns with the overall mandate of the study. Social constructionist approach implies a recognition of the *hows* and *whats* of interactions and stimuli in the work environment (shaping managerial propensities)

being central to this study's remit. Arguments for adopting a social constructionist view are elaborated in this chapter. A mixed methods approach is used in this study. It comprises data from a semi-structured survey, in depth initial commentaries (from subordinate managers only) to also inform design and content of the survey, and meeting observation memos. This is discussed, both in terms of rationale and for development of tools for data collection and how it helped evolve the study. Methods used for analyses are also discussed in addition to reflections on methodological rigour and limitations.

3.2 Research Philosophy

The philosophical moorings of research are seen at two interconnected levels of discourse, the first is referred to as ontology and concerns with how the phenomenon is in existence: *is there a 'real' world 'out there' that is independent of our knowledge of it,* or alternatively another view such as *foundationalism* asks is the world (or phenomena therein) socially and discursively constructed (Marsh and Furlong, 2002, p. 18; Hay 2007)? Epistemological position is about "view of what we can know about the world and how we can know about it" (Marsh and Furlong, 2002, pp. 18-19). Again two perspectives come into play here; it is possible to generate knowledge about the phenomenon without any noise creating interferences and that alternatively, such objectivity is not possible because of social *construction of reality*, observations at the respondent level and by the observer creating further layers of subjectivity (Dieth, 2012). With such dualities in ontological (how does *it* exist?) and epistemological (how can we know about 'it'?) positions, that can exist, establishing the philosophical basis of a research study before moving forward, is useful.

The study has both interpretative and positivist connotations. The interpretative perspective also comes through from how measures are built forward, and then, a mix of propositions that include purely deductive propositions to propositions that emerge from data. Thus the study

is dominated by deductive reasoning but with some inductive orientation. This makes it abductive in its overall methodological disposition.

The thesis thus draws on theory to generate propositions and also delivers some emerging conjectures with support from data from the ***first phase*** of pre-testing, open ended commentaries from subordinate managers and meeting observation memos. The propositions partly derived from data are also discussed in the literature review as they are linked to literature in being moved forward for deductive reasoning (two of twelve study propositions). These are marked '*' to indicate that there is part influence of data in shaping them. The ***second phase*** of data collection comprised further meeting observations and the data from the survey instrument.

3.3. Social Constructionism and the Qualitative – Quantitative interface

Understanding social behaviour and drawing meanings from it (e.g. behaviours and perceptions related to them) disposes relativists (interpretivists) towards qualitative methodologies to focus on meaning from such perceptions and behaviours (Liberman, 2010). With this philosophical basis this study moves forward to deploy inherently perceptual and behavioural data using both semi- structured instrument that includes Likert scale based responses and discursive data.

There is an arguable divide between positivism and interpretivism that is subject of discussion in how and to what extent a study is disposed towards one or the other. The former is disposed towards quantitative methods and the later towards qualitative methods. The divide is often not very limiting in study design and should not be limiting for designing methodology: "*. can be easily overstated …. there is nothing inherent in the properties of different methodologies which prevents their use by researchers operating from different epistemological positions*" (Kura and Sulaiman, 2012, pp. 12). While social constructionism

speaks of determining reality rather than it being an interference free objective phenomenon, it does not dissuade the researcher from using varied and hybrid approaches. Objective measurement and subjectivity of context go hand in hand when examining behaviours and eliciting measurements for relative subscription to each by the respondents, such as, in a primarily Likert scale based instrument (Thorpe and Jackson, 2008).

Meaning is often said to be constructed, rather than discovered and such construction looks at interactions between respondents, and also, within the multiple measurements of different contextual behaviours and perceptions that come together to 'construct' an understanding of the reality (Crotty, 1998; Read and Marsh, 2002, p. 235). The claim in social constructionism that "*that meanings are constructed by human beings as they engage with the world they are interpreting*" underlines the value that can be derived from looking at rationales behind differences in perceptions that relate to different perspectives and engage multiple methods to triangulate and validate as this study does (Crotty, 1998 p.43).

This arguably helps generalisability discussions, and also, internal validity expressions. It would conform with the social constructivism premises and requirements of gazing meaning irrespective of deploying either or a combination of: a) purely qualitative data subjected to discourse and thematic (in context of operationalisation needs) analysis, and/ or numerically coded content analysis taken forward to quantitative analysis and; b). ordinal assigned perceptual and behavioural disposition data that is then quantitatively analysed.

Constructivism as a basis for meaning would come out of interfacing data from multiple respondents as sources (inter-relatedness) and by examining the inter-relatedness of their perceptual maps (Berger and Luckmann, 1967; Berger, 2000, p. 174; Simmonds et al., 2001). As indicated in the outline of the study context, there is a strong element causality involved in this study for instance by looking at, *what is the effect of stimuli*? across a range of aspects

from work environment to top management influence which also interact. It is thus about the construction of meaning as in what propels managers to deviate from and/or subscribe to given activity configurations, and scoping modifications to it.

Burr (2004) has sought to clarify causality analysis embedded in such *meaning* from a constructionist point of view and supports a complementarity of approaches that I note above. Critiques of social constructionism in practice have suggested care in incorporating measurements, interpretations and interactions between variables (individual characteristics of the self, personal attitudes and motivations). They also support creating a stronger case for their inclusion if the research questions are disposed towards a constructionist orientation, something that I do when I contextualise my propositions in the previous chapter and argue the nature of investigation to include both positivistic and interpretivist approaches here (Burr, 2004; Willing, 2001).

3.4 Mixed methods approach

For decades quantitative and qualitative purists have been debating whether the world in social inquiry perspective should be viewed objectively or should it be about constructivism alone because time and context free generalisations are not possible (Maxwell and Delany, 2004; Schwandt, 2004). However, realities of research have suggested that divisive approach between the two orientations is undesirable (Johnson and Onwuegbuize, 2014). This study is situated in the constructivist paradigm, however the logic of this positioning, as the mixed methods proponents would argue, does not differentiate methods in data collection or analysis. Putting it another way, epistemology and methodological dispositions are not really unitary in how they are linked (Phillips, 2004). Quantitative approach that works on data collection and analysis in conjunction with purely qualitative approaches for the same can strongly mitigate the problem of qualitative approaches "often remain private and unavailable

for [robust] inspection" (Constas, 1994). This is not only about making data available but also making it visible in a form that is synthesised for inspection. The availability of perceptual scales and more generally ordinal scaling of agreement and likelihood helps (in primary data collection) the respondent and such robustness in data overall (Onwuebuzie and Teddlie, 2003). Different combinations can exist in mixed methods approach; for instance qualitative data (opinions, views, perceptions) being translated into codified observation. Numerous examples from published research exist with a constructivist paradigm worked through to such an approach to data collection, operationalization and statistical analysis thereof (e.g. Castro et al., 2010). Looking at the typical mixed methods research process model proposed by Onwuegbuzie and Teddlie (2003) and then also discussed and supported further by authors like Biddle and Schafft (2014) in recent times, I draw strong validation for the approach and methodological disposition I use for this study.

3.5. Initialising Data collection

The challenge to give structure to the data collection exercise is helped by generic knowledge of the phenomenon from past research and also from knowledge of how these generic aspects maybe manifested in context of a given research site (Brynman and Bell, 2015, pp. 159-160). For instance, what would comprise top management's support for generating feedback from past experiences of modifications or deviations from the norm in managerial practice? This is typical of the kind of evidence sought in light of propositions developed through a review of literature. Literature also provides generic assertions about how these aspects have been related to in extant research. This is also noted in development of and discussion on the composition of propositions in the literature review (Hair et al., 2015, p. 231). My own experience of working at the research site and from pre-testing of the data collection instruments discussed later, also, and invariably, provides inputs into developing the data collection instruments. The researcher bias however is controlled by not including the top

management at the campus I worked in for any meeting observations. I also do not use any of the respondents from this site for data collection using the main survey instrument. Subordinate middle managers from the site I worked in were involved in pre-testing of the instrument and in providing open ended commentaries in the first phase of data collection, as I grappled with design of the survey instrument and get a deeper understanding of the study variables as they manifest at the research site to produce both an easily comprehendible and valid survey instrument, and organise aligned themes for my progressive exercise of observations of top management meetings.

3.6. Data collection

3.6.1. Semi Structured Surveys – rationale

Semi-structured survey using Likert scales and ordinal data are one form of data collection approach for this study. The discussion on mixed methods has dwelled in part on the rationale behind semi- structured surveys. Leading on from the discussion on the constructivist orientation of the study it may be prudent to note Burgess (1982, p. 107) who states clearly that "...*the opportunity for the researcher to probe deeply to uncover …. clues, open up new dimensions of a problem and …… vivid, accurate inclusive accounts that are based on personal experience."*. Further validation of 'structure' in surveys to probe perceptions and views is provided by Perakyla and Ruusuvuori (2011) who say that a large proportion of qualitative studies deploy structured approach to eliciting organisable and 'better' analysable, subjectively aligned behaviours, perceptions and even attitudes. The survey instrument I deploy in this study comprises Likert scales complemented with scenario based reflections and open ended comments. These allow respondents to input rationales and preferences as an extension of their responses.

3.6.2 Design, pretesting and development of the semi structured survey instrument

The survey instrument has been developed with the view to generate evidence for examining propositions. The initial instrument was designed in consultation with my supervisors and was ambitious in design. For instance, in using some bi-polar causal relationships relating to propensity to deviate or improvise from normed activities increasing or decreasing with top management sanction, among others (Appendix C). Terms like improvisation instead of deviation were used because in the pre-test based on my own initial perception of how respondents would relate to the word 'deviation' as being more challenging to organisational norms while it is just intended to capture variation. Discussions on whether it has any connotations for conceptual underpinnings were engaged in with the supervisory team before using it in the instrument. Other questions, like (items) in section 2 of the pre-test instrument in appendix C used terms like modifications when asking the respondents to relate with the extent to which they would like to suggest changes in the activity sets. Relatedness as in agreeing or disagreeing with statements on a Likert scale on how managers viewed their own task portfolio and the relative importance of activities therein, was also part of the pre-test instrument (e.g. question 1 and question 3 in the instrument in Appendix C).

The pretesting was done with three respondents after due respondent and organisational consent. The pre-testing revealed issues with the bi-polar ordinal scaling in question 6 and also some other items within statements eliciting agreement and disagreement. A discussion with and notes from pre-respondents revealed some issues in phrasing that could be conditioned for better uptake and understanding. Based on this a modified version of the instrument was designed. The revised instrument as taken forward for the study is in Appendix A.

The instrument taken forward to collect data at *Heus* starts with the profile information preceded by some more detail about what the study is examining or eliciting responses about relative to the pre-test instrument. Question 1 is improved over the pre-tested instrument in structure and making statements sharper. Question 2 which is about organisational needs as articulated by top management and then reflected upon by the respondent at subordinate (middle management) managerial level is enhanced, in terms of number of ordinal scaled sub questions being supplemented more by open ended articulations. This was given the felt need to qualify responses by the respondents in the pre-test. The interpretations respondents discussed were useful to show deviations in reasons behind their responses for this question that elicited suggestions on activities being carried out in relation to the top management mandate. Question 3 was reduced in terms of items deployed for engaging a response on perceptions about overall activities in the respondents' portfolio. This was mainly in terms of their efficacy of these activities and overall skew in relative importance. A rationale for this also came from the pre-test as in the need to remove ambiguity in some items in this question. Similar minor changes were required of questions 4 and 5, the former looking at issues of communications from top management, and how it was perceived in relation to activities carried out by the respondent. The latter provided scenario based elicitation of what would be the likely behaviour of senior management, indicating their own propensity to be varied and / or consistent in terms of normed responses. Question 6 that engaged bipolar responses (two variables together) in the pilot was replaced given cognitive difficulty in relating to the question. The main instrument instead has questions 6, 7 and 8 looking at influences on activity modifications, likelihood of modifications, and propensity to experiment outside the remits of existing activities, respectively.

The data from the pilot was valid for several questions and in association with the data from memos until that point in time (just after pre-test), and initial open ended commentaries by

some middle management respondents, helped shape a conference paper, which was later submitted for journal review and was in the revise and resubmit process at the time of writing the thesis (1st paper reported in appendix D).

3.6.3 Discursive data and Observation Memos

Initial middle management commentaries as open ended responses were elicited on (1) Behaviours with regards propensity to experiment with prescribed activity sets in middle managers; (2) What influenced such propensity during stable versus tumultuous times; (3) Prevalence and impact of initiatives that examine past modifications. This was part of the first phase of data collection. Observations from top management meetings were primarily along two themes: (1) own propensity to experiment and (2) performance concerns related to activity modifications.

At the onset as Hues expanded by opening campuses across the globe, from the initial campus, policy handbooks specified what managers should deliver. However, these handbooks did not specify the deeper and micro level activities, and how they were related to each other to make for the presumed effective configuration that should underpin practice. Putting it another way, the prescribed high level activity was not accompanied by a road map of micro activities and time scales. For example, the system of distributing of grades was described in terms of the document template of how students should receive their awards, but this did not include a timescale and the process by which grades should move from professor, administrator and student.

Two important things followed as a consequence; First, subordinate managers started to do things in their own way, and there was no coordination nor synchronization, across campuses. Second this non-coordination allowed a number of different practices to emerge, and

consequently good and less activities and activity configurations emerged across campuses. This lack of consistency was thus useful but also a concern.

Overtime, a conscious step was taken to harness the advantages with an implicit intention to balance how much was prescribed and how much was allowed to emerge at the activity level to feedback into a master template that started to have good practices and even activity level guidelines. This became routine as a key aspect around which several management meetings were set up to work on what are labeled as *playbooks*. The label signifying the intent to understand and specify activity prescriptions and activity modifications as a feedback and feed-forward process. Discussions at these meetings became exemplars of how top management reflected on subordinate managers' activities, and also, on their own orientation and approach to guiding managerial tasks. The observation memos refer to such top management meetings. Some anonymized screenshots of *Playbooks* from such meetings are provided in appendix E. These playbooks illustrate issues and outcomes from such meetings, demonstrating that these meetings were clearly pivotal to understanding and examining top management practice in relation to their own orientation and also activities of subordinate managers'.

3.6.4 Sampling and Access

Top management observation memos exclusive of the researcher's own campus (total of 4 sites). Three middle management respondents labelled mostly as subordinate managers through the study (of a total of 31 in the organisation) comprised the sample for open ended commentaries from the first phase and were from the respondent's own site. The sample for survey respondents was initially expected to be all the respondents that comprise the middle management of *Heus*. However, for reducing any bias that came forth due to the researcher being part of the organisation, these (22 making for about 70% of all middle – subordinate

managerial cadre) were drawn from the 3 campuses (sites) excluding the researcher's own site. The top executive board of *Heus* is not included for reasons that they are not coordinating managerial activities at operational level.

As noted a fairly comprehensive survey of middle management was possible given the cooperation from *Heus* President for this study. The sample is confined to a single case organisation but that it is a federated organisation with each campus being a separate performance unit; it seemed to initially help in alleviating some concerns about what would be typical limitations of a single case site in terms of generalizability. However, two factors: the condition of anonymising top management meeting memos (observations) at source and; the low numbers with the added reservation of not comparing sites were conditions to conform to in this study. The data were separated for the two phases. First comprising observation memos pre-launch of main survey and the open-ended commentaries from three respondents. The second comprising the observations memos to completion of data collection from the main survey. Organisational consent and support was helpful in such a turnaround but also, an impending merger that required data collection to be completed within the existing structural ambits.

3.6.5 Research Site

3.6.5.1 An overview

The research site for this study is a business school, pseudo named *Heus* registered as a not for profit private corporation. The school has federated structure with units operating in locations across three continents. The structure of *Heus* is rather flat with top management at each campus superseded by a board that govern and monitor strategy and operations across sites/campuses. The top management at each site administers a thin layer of nearly non-hierarchal Associate and Assistant Deans, and Registrars, that comprises the subordinate

middle managerial layer. Reporting hierarchies between the Associate and Assistant Deans are not formal; they work together with a reporting line that runs from each to the site top management. The total managerial cadre at *Heus* across campuses is about forty including the site Deans but excluding the board of directors. Also, faculty members are not considered as part of the managerial cadre though there is a minor overlap with some faculty members being in the Academic Board.

Despite a single case study setting and any disadvantages noted before, certain positives also need to be noted in this context. The relative cultural homogeneity between the four sites, due to being under a common umbrella helps control for the influence of national culture contexts, certainly to a good extent. The workforce is also multi-national at each site. The organizational and industry culture variables that often confound research stand moderated to a good degree in this study

A recent phenomenon of merger impacted *Heus*. This was post data collection and only as this study drew to a close. *Heus* has merged with another academic institution (pseudo-named) *Ares*. As aforementioned *Hues* is a multi-campus business school operating across the globe with a good spread in portfolio across younger students and mature students. *Ares* is based only in one country, where *Hues* also has one of its five campuses. *Ares* is more aligned to programmes for mature students and executive coaching making for an appealing synergy promise from this merger. That both business schools are independent of University affiliations is also something that has facilitated the merger by reducing complexity in negotiations. *Heus* has a strong presence global market presence while *Ares* comes with a stronger research profile and accreditation credentials. While upfront the case is easily made for this merger, it is common and strongly validated knowledge that post-merger integration is the most tumultuous; resource consuming and; when it goes wrong- most threatening for

synergy aspirations (Fiorentino and Garzella, 2015). It is also useful to note that drawing of synergies is contingent on not only what is done for integration, but also on how it is seen and received as fair or biased by organisational members from the two erstwhile legacy systems. Organisational attention to different behavioural preferences of the erstwhile pre-merger legacy systems are invariable crucial from this perspective. A paper in this direction looking at variation in knowledge creation preferences is under review and reported in appendix D. This is alongside another paper that is directly aligned with the work on this study also under revise and resubmit at the time of writing the thesis.

3.6.5.2 A typological perspective

To understand Heus as an organisation type which will have implications for generalisability of this study, I engage the taxonomy of organisational forms – a seminal classification that has stood the test of time fairly well despite emergence of novel organisational forms accelerating over the last two decades (Mintzberg; 1979; Mintzberg, 1992). There is a substantial body of work that relates strategy with structure that pre-dates the taxonomical classification also contributes to it (Chandler, 1962; Hage, 1965). Thereafter, substantial research in this area seeks to discuss this taxonomy in varying contexts, seeking to critique its continued applicability and relevance to find that it continues to appeal (e.g. Doty and Glick, 1994; Meijaard et al., 2005).

Heus is a service sector organisation and it is appropriate to say that the taxonomical classification allows it to be situated as a professional form. This form is different from others viz. the entrepreneurial, machine bureaucracy, divisional and innovative (adhocracy) forms, in one key sense, being comprised of highly specialised knowledge workers that are central to value activities (from an organisational level perspective) execution. However, Heus also has traits of divisional form as campuses are autonomous with centralised control, albeit without associating with another core trait of the divisional form that of much deviations in structure

across divisions. The professional organisational form is discussed in the original taxonomical as something that can draw on the efficiency benefits of the machine (bureaucratic) form by way of standardisation in rules and practices (Mintzberg, 1979).

The taxonomy of organisational forms does not pitch the forms as completely exclusive by drawing such relatedness between forms. This has allowed it to account for organisational forms over time in structure, and in how they function. In the case of Heus, a professional service organisation, we can see the traits from machine bureaucracy and the divisional form coming to the fore as well. The consequence for managerial work is potentially strong when we see this more specific (to Heus) amalgamation of characteristics for top management influence on the ambidextrous orientation of subordinates. There is an infusion in the pure professional form with some aspects of machine bureaucracy, and to a lesser consequent effect, that of the divisional form: There are set prescribed activities and the administrative control of the 'managers' as distinct from academics (the specialised knowledge workers) is put in perspective from such a form and also function typology perspective. This also explains how they deal with the professional autonomy space, where key professionals are the academics, carefully mediating it with routines, where experience in the higher education sector in particular, and professional organisations in general has shown that overt pursuit of efficiency through bureaucratic control reduces professional performance (Harvey et al., 2013)

The discussion on form and to some extent also function under the taxonomy shows that though a professional service organisation, findings for Heus may also have implications for machine bureaucracies and divisional forms. While the single case study context reduces generalisability the shared genealogy of form and function that finds some intersections with other organisational types moderates this reduction. The higher education industry can clearly draw implications from the findings of this study, though different or at least a good variation

across taxonomical intersections exist in the industry, and the multi-campus organisational form of Heus is just one that is gathering momentum.

3.6.5.3 A workflow perspective

<u>*The campuses and the central team*</u>

Activities at Hues can be lumped together into different buckets and require a great deal of coordination between the central team, campuses, and within campuses. In the central team the coordination function consists of coordinating procedures, timelines and activities relating to faculty, students and technology.

The model for faculty engagement, as the primary resource, is varied as well 3-4-year full time contract for some faculty, and in addition predominantly adjunct faculty. There is therefore a great deal of contractual work at campuses and at the level of the central team. Adjunct contracts are handled by the campuses and full time contracts are handled by the central team making for rather complex negotiations. Many faculty members have external interests and commitments and so this can be a back and forth process between deans and the faculty. Scheduling of faculty leading on from this adds to the complexity of negotiations.

Several of the faculty also teach on different campuses and fly around the world with competitive pressures of performance. Despite top-rated faculty that are very experienced and high calibre such competition exists and is a determinant of contract renewal for all faculty and teaching that may be assigned in the future particularly to adjuncts. This places significant demands on top management and subordinate managers' capabilities that need to be marked among other aspects by strong interpersonal skills. The managers implement the faculty handbook, call for syllabi review. They give feedback on syllabi primarily for alignment across campuses and with student schedules, hold pre-module faculty meetings by

programme for checking the full pattern of workload to ensure that peaks and troughs are put in context. Managerial attention gets right into the weeds at Hues

Timeline

Students are *recruited* all the way up to August starting September in the previous year. The campus Deans and nominated subordinate managers interview some students. There are also *weekend and open day events* led by campus management in coordination with the central team.

Students start in September – October every year. All of the programmes are one year except the executive MBA programme, which is a two-year weekend model. After joining students undergo a full day event called *orientation* which is by nature and design a tumultuous period of time. After this, *enrolment* takes place and students get access to learning management systems. There are additional bolt on operational aspects like student services, campus services etc. that are engaged at this point.

Thereafter students start on what is called *immersion,* where an initial set of preparatory work set comprising leadership type courses and simulations are undertaken by the students, with the involvement of not only faculty, but also the management.

Thereafter the first module – *module A classes* start in October. This is the first of five modules: A, B, C, D and E where faculty teach classes. Module A goes on till Christmas. Students are put in teams and managers *monitor the performance of student teams*. There are also frequent town hall meetings with the campus management throughout the year. Managers do student advising, releasing of grades, collate student feedback and monitor issues throughout the year and across all modules. Sometimes unexpected tumultuous situations can arise, such as if faculty members get very poor feedback, if grades are

incongruent with student expectations, if there is cheating in exams, if a career service event backfires, among others. There are many other such examples.

A *census is undertaken in module A* of where students would like to *rotate* from amongst the campuses of Hues. Module B and C follow the same pattern as A but i*n B the students make their final choices about campus rotation* later in the year for modules D and E when electives run, at which time the students are on rotation. The managerial role includes shaping of electives and hiring faculty for the electives. Attempt is made to deliver to student choices on rotation and courses making for a by design tumultuous time. Another feature of module B is that part of the student work is on a project, some issues crop up here also as students engage with external organisations and their experience of doing the project and comparisons with what peers are doing often requires *mediation and counselling by campus management.*

Unlike Module A and Module B which are ten weeks a piece, Module C is a shorter compressed six-week module. Module D and E are also six weeks each and comprise only electives. Over modules B&C a major task of *shifting and rotating the student body* begins that is realised in module D and E.

The Executive MBA programme embedded on a weekend basis through two years also faces similar issues. Given that these are more mature candidates and in senior positions in their organisations, the manner in which issues come forth, and the nature of inter personal interfaces required, are very different.

The end of the year *collation of grades*, checking and rechecking them and sending them to the *board for approval* is another tenuous exercise management have to undertake. From a management perspective the academic year finishes only in early August with all *awards being conferred* - just as students for the next year roll in.

3.7. Data Analysis

Content analysis of the memo data and qualitative comments in the survey instrument data was done and inter-rater scoring was used as per the operationalization elaborated in analysis and findings (Braun and Clarke, 2006). The first stage was to read through each descriptive text making note of initial key points. The second stage was about noting interim codes in terms of what the memo observation notes and instrument comments were relating to viz. risk issues, task-situation criticality aspects, successful past experiences of deviations which were highlights of top management support, or poor experiences of deviations and reasons thereof as per the themes discussed under the study mandate and made specific under the research framework. Isolating key dimensions was also helpful as a third stage to structure into what they related to for synthesising them into finding.

The analysis has done colour coding of text and then parallel synthesising using find and search and text and comment box functions in MS word. A foray with Nvivo and subsequent discussions with my supervisor brought me to a view that it was not really helping as data management required given the spread of my data set was limited. Nvivo was less useful in analysis for my data set on comparing sections of it and thus it was not carried forward.

For the survey data which comprised ordinal measures appropriate analyses techniques like rank order correlations, Wilcoxon rank sum test, Kruskal Wallis test and ordinal regressions analysis have been deployed. Suitable controls primarily from the profile information are applied in the model. It is crucial to note that the sample size is only 22 for the survey data. Therefore, a selection of controls with key variables relevant to a proposition have been run in analysis sets. This is because a rule of thumb is that at least 10 units of sample are required for each predictor in regression. The results for regression are affected by the small sample

size - resorting to Wilcoxon rank sum test and Kruskal Wallis non parametric test has helped for some propositions.

3.8. Reflecting on Methodological Rigour

Curtin and Fossey (2007) argue that methodological rigour can be achieved through delivering to five basic premises of 'congruence', 'responsiveness to the social context', 'appropriateness', 'adequacy' and 'transparency'. Though they argue it primarily in context of qualitative research, I take these forward to discuss methodological rigour in my mixed methods approach. The congruence aspect relates to the idea of fit between chosen methods and research issue. In this study the aspects of influence of top management and the deviations from prescribe activities have both cognitive and behavioural dimensions. Using a semi-structured survey and comments in the survey and observation memos together provides for not only triangulation but also a congruence in terms of what is sought and how it is operationalised (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011). The responsiveness to social context is high given that the semi-structured instrument was allowed to evolve based on pre-testing responses and the nature and kind of terminology that was comfortable for the respondents.

The sampling has been purposive (and comprehensive barring the need to leave out the researcher's site from the main – second phase of data collection). Though it has been helped by strong top management sanction and support, the study's nature and that it was not intended to have any performance attribution connotations for individual respondents, has also been effective in eliciting responses to the main survey. Observation memos and comments along survey instrument items have provided deep insights particularly into meanings of influence, modifications to activities, performance implications and work environment characteristics. As discussed before, there is a strong abductive presence in the study design stemming from the first phase of data that also goes well with the idea of

'appropriateness'. This is given the need to embed the methodology into how behaviour and perceptions elicited relate to the respondents' understanding and familiarity with how these exist in their work environment.

Data sufficiency is oft argued to be about the fourth aspect of methodological rigour that is termed 'adequacy'. Saturation in organisational research particularly in single case study settings like this case study has been said to be reached at around 6- 12 respondents (Saunders 1982, Guest et al., 2006). With a good spread between the two types of respondents in question and a high proportionate coverage of respondents in the organisation (70% of middle management directly through survey and 75% of top management from memo observation) the sufficiency of the study data is supported from this perspective.

3.9. Ethical considerations

Anonymity was assured to all respondents who contributed to the study. Some were keen to be named as well. However, they were informed that for uniformity all respondents in the study will remain anonymous, as would the organisation to an extent by using the pseudo name *Heus*. As discussed before, the condition of anonymity at source for observation memos at top management meetings has been respected and adhered to.

A major ethical concern in terms of the research process arose once some conjectures that were rather broad in terms of being delivered from a discussion of extant research earlier, firmed up as proposition after the initial round of data collection. While these could be then fitted in using arguments from extant research, to add to the set of propositions, the researcher felt it was important to label and acknowledge their abductive emergence.

Chapter 4: ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

4.1. Introduction and outline

In this chapter I provide a description of my analysis including the operationalization of variables associated with each proposition. I report results and note key outcomes that I will then take forward to assimilate and interpret in the discussions and contributions chapter. The chapter is organised with propositions being presented in clearly delineated sections with some grouped together for clarity given the associated operationalization. The approach to analysis is also discussed prior to reporting results.

4.2. Proposition 1: *Stronger perceived alignment of top management priorities with organizational needs will increase subscription to prescribed activities by subordinate managers.*

4.2.1. Independent variables

The operationalization of variables for this proposition comprises examining the response to comments under question/ item 2 (Appendix A) where respondents provide a critique to a hypothised organizational needs statement by a campus Dean. This is the first main explanatory variable. The qualitative responses to this statement were categorised/ coded on an ordinal scale: Agree: 1; Agree and emphasise: 2; Agree but with addition: 3; Disagree and emphasise an aspect: 4; Disagree completely and/or suggest a different direction

The scores go from high alignment to low alignment and the variable in terms of metrics is thus "perceived strategic misalignment"[2]

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[2] There was a choice to do it either way, i.e. work the array direction in the opposite way for low agreement to high agreement (and label it alignment). However, this was felt suitable given how the independent-raters insisted / felt it worked with their frame of interpretation.

The coding was done by the researcher and also two independent raters. Cronbach's Alpha score based on this content coding was 0.85, which is acceptable from an inter-rater reliability perspective. The scores (only 1 respondent) where there was a disagreement across all three raters (i.e. all three labelled a different score) was discussed to a resolution. In other cases unless the difference was more than one ordinal scale point, the score of the majority of the raters was taken forward, or else, it was again discussed to a conclusion for the ordinal scale score that should be used.

Another explanatory variable "perceived operational misalignment" is pitched at the specific context of the campus dean (again, hypothised) responding to an operational scenario and then the respondent recommending as to (if) how different would they propose the response to be for the narrated situation. The situational contexts used were partly generated through qualitative data, as to what would be suitable for use in the instrument. The scenario and decision aspects are something that all respondents could relate to with frequently encountered situations. The respondents were then asked to evaluate how different their response was from that of the top management on a Likert scale under question/item 5.8

(Appendix A part of a series starting 5.6). Given closeness to their own context, the self-evaluation was easier for respondents, as opposed to where agreement/disagreement was sought from the overarching positioning of needs in item 2 of the instrument discussed before (which were thus referred to a inter-rater assessment as described before). The pre-testing feedback also helped structure this operationalization.

Instrument extract item 5.8 showing the qualitative comments taken forward to interpretation

"*Teaching evaluation of a professor has dipped below HUES thresholds for two successive runs to just over 3.5 in a core course. The professor has two prior teaching evaluations of about 4 before these two dips in evaluation. Student comments indicate a lack of enthusiasm in the instructor and outdated content. The professor has stable ratings within the HUES threshold on another course at the same programme level (MBA)*".

IF YOU WERE ASKED TO ADVISE THE CAMPUS DEAN ON THE ABOVE SCENARIO, assuming that you had only as much information as provided in the situation, what would you advise …(if you need more space wish to say more please use an additional sheet, marking it as 5.6)

5.8. In your view, how significantly different is your recommendation in 5.6 - from what would be a perceived typical response from the campus Dean. [Please mark an 'X' on the scale point that best approximates your response]

Very Similar				Significantly different
1	2	3	4	5

Controls comprise a) experience of working at the campus and; b) experience of working outside the higher education industry. These would be associated with an experiential bias in interpreting alignment, and consequently likely to affect subscription.

4.2.2. Dependent variables

Respondents were asked to mark on a Likert scale how much would they need to modify their activity portfolio under question 2.1.2: Own AP (activity portfolio) modification need and; how much would other activity portfolios need to change in 2.1.1: Overall managerial AP modification need (the question is phrased for 'activity modification' for better respondent reception as per pretesting of the instrument). The first one examines subscription to prescribed in own context and, the other one to examine subscription on a wider plane of managerial activities by middle/ subordinate managers.

Instrument extract
To address organisational needs articulated by the campus Dean, do you think that…..
2.1.2…activities that are in your portfolio will need modifications
[Please mark an 'X' on the scale point that best approximates your response]

Not at all				Very Significantly
1	2	3	4	5

2.1.1… activities outside your portfolio will need modifications

[Please mark an 'X' on the scale point that best approximates your response]

Not at all				Very Significantly
1	2	3	4	5

Comments

These are as 'explained' by perceptions of top management alignment, with organizational needs noted in the independent variables section above. I first interpret correlation analysis (Spearman correlations) and then the two sets of ordinal regressions as per the above set of variables.

4.2.3. Results

The correlation results reported in appendix B show that there is a significant positive correlation between perceived strategic misalignment and experience outside the higher education industry (0.53). This suggests that more the experience of working outside the higher education industry, the more likely it is that a perception of strategic misalignment with organizational needs may manifest in tandem (associative relationship only of course).

A significant but negative correlation (-0.45) is noted between, experience of working at the campus and perceived operational misalignment. This suggests that working at the campus may be associated with an overtime conformance with a perception of operational alignment. No other profile variables show any significant correlations with the dependent variables for the proposition under purview.

Another set of crucial positive correlations are between the perceptions about strategic misalignment and the need to modify activities both for one's own (respondent subordinate manager's) activity sets 'and' for the wider portfolio across the managerial cadre (0.40 and 0.47 respectively). The correlations for operational misalignment are not significant however, when the respondents were asked to indicate if the 'additions they have suggested' will entail any changes to activities in **item 2.2.2**, a significant negative correlation with operational misalignment (-0.39) is noted. This indicates that there is a propensity for respondents to provide suggestions that would entail little and mostly confined modifications within the existing remit of activities that they currently do.

The correlation results provide some associative support for the proposition but mostly for perceived strategic misalignment being associated with lack of subscription with existing activities (i.e. demonstrated by enhanced need for modification). Below I present ordinal regression results for each dependent variable in relation to the proposition i.e. Own AP

(activity portfolio) modification perceived need and; overall managerial AP modification

perceived need, respectively.

Table 4.1: Ordinal regression results for Own AP modification

Dependent: Own AP (activity portfolio) modification need	Model1	Model2
	β(S.E)	β(S.E)
Controls		
Experience of working at Campus	0.02 (0.009)	-0.018 (0.009)
Experience of working outside HE sector	-0.01 (0.001)	-0.002 (0.0001)
Explanatory		
Strategic misalignment	**0.13+(0.05)**	-0.71 (0.12)
Operational misalignment	**0.21* (0.01)**	**-1.2+ (0.08)**
Interaction effect		
SM*OM		**0.41+(0.21)**
Chi²[df]	*7.7[3]+*	*7.7[4]+*
Nagelkere's pseudo R²	*0.32*	*0.20*

*Ordinal regression: Sample size 22, Regression Coefficients and standard errors (in parentheses). Unstandardized coefficients have been reported; +: p<0.1; *p<0.05*

Table 4.2: Ordinal regression results for Overall AP modification

Dependent: Overall managerial AP modification need	Model1	Model2
	β(S.E)	β(S.E)
Controls		
Experience of working at Campus	-0.52 (0.47)	-0.61 (0.59)
Experience of working outside HE sector	-0.41 (0.31)	-0.32 (0.23)
Explanatory		
Strategic misalignment	-0.33(0.18)	-0.47 (0.22)
Operational misalignment	-0.11 (0.09)	-0.31 (0.18)
Interaction effect		
SM*OM		0.22(0.10)
Chi²[df]	*2.8[3]*	*2.95[4]*
Nagelkere's pseudo R²	*0.08*	*0.067*

*Ordinal regression: Sample size 22, Regression Coefficients and standard errors (in parentheses). Unstandardized coefficients have been reported; +: p<0.1; *p<0.05*

Strategic misalignment and operational misalignment both come up as significant in the first model in table 4.1. This in the first instance indicates that the need of modification in one's own activity portfolio is high, where the perceived misalignment of top management with organisational needs is also seen to be high. This applies both to strategic and operational misalignment. Perceived alignment of top management priorities with organizational needs will affect subscription to prescribed activities in their activity portfolio by subordinate managers. When this misalignment is high it will have a dampening effect on subscription to prescribed activities, as subordinate managers will seek to modify the activities they do. Given the nature of operationalization the outcome essentially is that misalignment increases tendency for modifications, and by extension there is support for proposition 1 that: Subscription to prescribed activities will be enhanced by both strategic and operational alignment and their interaction (no significant effect on views of individual managers on overall subscription across subordinate managers' portfolio).

There were no significant results for the overall activity modifications spanning the managerial roles (i.e. perceived overall modification need for managerial activity portfolios across the organisation) making the support for proposition 1 confined to subordinate managers' own activity portfolio. The results are invariably affected by limited statistical power due to the number of respondents (being 22). As indicated in the first set of regressions suggests (table 4.1), when the interaction effect is introduced, despite marginal significance, the second model nearly drops out of significance (is significant at $p \leq 0.1$). Strategic misalignment effect (variance captured by) is absorbed in the interaction between strategic and operational misalignment. This is less than absorption of operational misalignment effect (which remains significant over the two models in table 4.1, demonstrated – not to scale in figure 4.1 below).

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Figure 4.1: Variance explanation and interaction effect: TM's strategic and operational misalignment ON propensity to modify activities in own portfolio by subordinate managers'
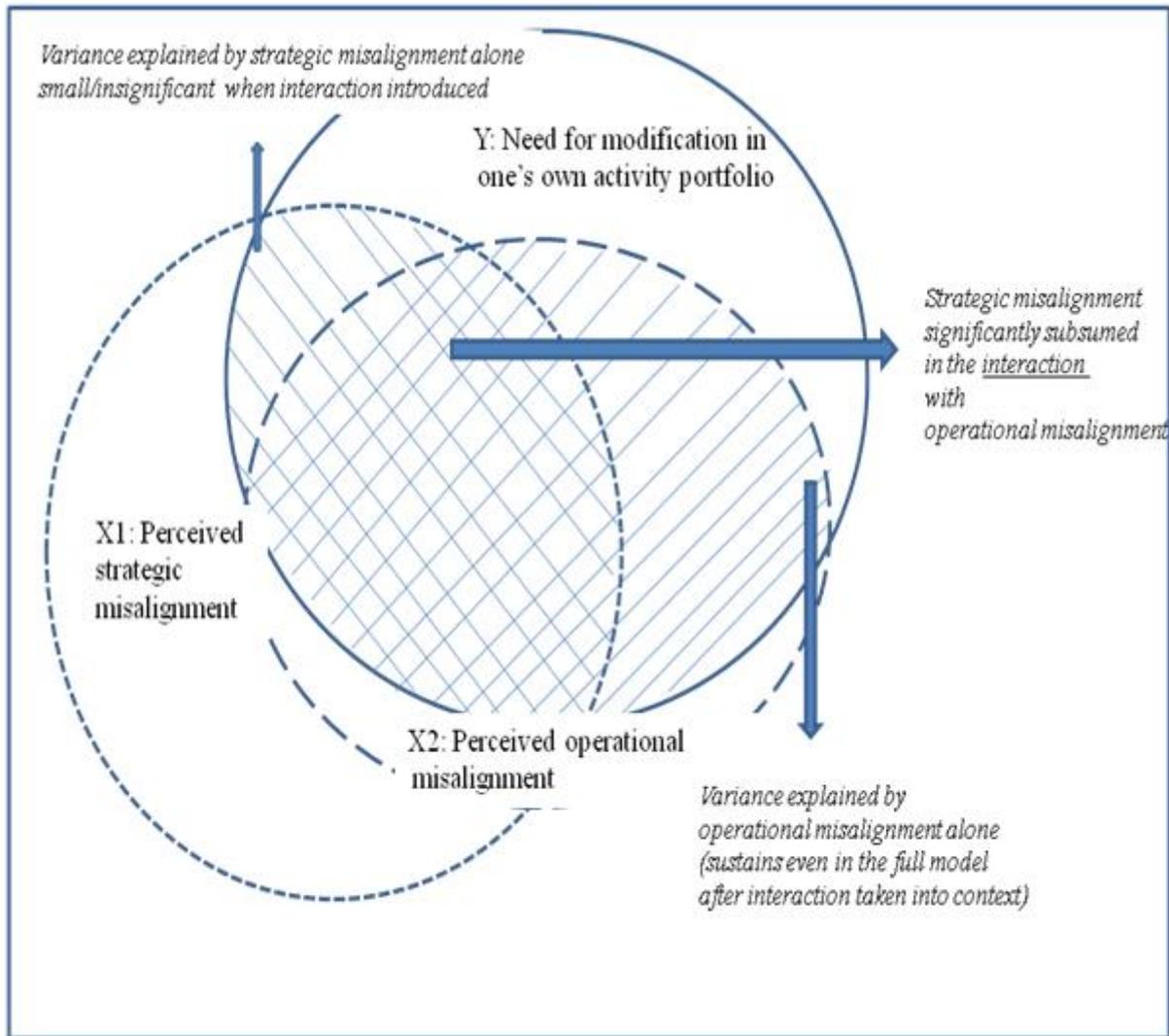
4.3. Proposition 2: *Top management's ability to balance 'deviations and conformance' with prescribed will be more effective when complemented with demonstrative inclusion of middle management feedback.*

4.3. 1 Operationalization

Items 5.7. and 5.8 in the survey instrument present a continuum along which the aforementioned ability perception can be coded. The first question (5.7) asks about the extent of predictability (pr) of an evaluated response to a situation by top management. The second

(5.8) asks about <u>how different (dr) would be the respondent in making decisions for</u> the same situation, thus respondents evaluating their own response in this part of the instrument.

- If 'pr' is high and 'dr' is low it means the top management ability is seen to be high but from a point of view of conformance to set practice.

- Similarly if 'pr' is low and 'dr' is low top management ability can be seen to high but from a point of view of effective deviations.

- However, if 'dr' is high, and 'pr' could be high or low, it means that there is an understanding top management lacking ability, in this context only.

- In a Likert scale design of 1-5 there is also middle value where ability to balance cannot be judged because predictability 'pr' is neither about conformance nor about deviation. A middle value also relates to the scoring of 'dr'. For 'dr' if the difference is labelled moderate (3) in relation to top management response, it can show that the subordinate manager response is to propose an innovative offshoot, but not really working to agree or disagree with top management response, or that there is no view with respect to difference between own view and top management's view. As noted in open ended comments where 'dr' was scored at a 3. For example, "*I would suggest that we can also try….", "there is some potential in looking at if we can…*".

- While 'dr' seems to be a defining variable for ability perceptions of top management benchmarked against what subordinate managers feel 'should be' if they were responding to the situation, we are interested in ability from a point of view of balance (AbB) between conformance and deviation. This as explained above also a function of 'PR',   AbB : f (pr, dr) . For AbB to be high 'dr' must be low indicating an inverse relationship. I thus *reverse the array direction* on Likert scale score for 'dr' (i.e. 1,2,3,4,5 becomes 5,4,3,2,1 respectively given the nature of query. The lower it is,

the more it conforms to ability of top management (in this context being high)). The 'pr' low scores of 1 and 2 are recoded as 5 and 4 respectively as well, with the existing 4 and 5 scores at the higher end remaining as such. The scores for 'pr' at a 3 is changed to 1 because it does not indicate a predictability quotient either way as mentioned before. Thereafter I take a product of 'pr' and 'dr', to code 'ability to balance deviation and conformance'.

Figure 4.2: Ability of Top Management (AbB) with reference to effectively balancing deviations and conformance to practice as: function of perceptions about predictability of response (Pr) to given situations and; the extent of difference in response to situation (Dr) from a middle management respondent

AbB α Pr^2 *1/Dr
AbB: z
Pr=x
Dr= v

Pr: Perception of predictability of response by top management (lower or higher it is, the ability for balancing conformance with deviation is likely to be high 'when' in conjunction with a low 'Dr'. At mid point it is likely to be a weaker contribution to the product function)

AbB: Top management ability to effectively balance deviations and conforman

Dr: Difference in response to action situation (higher it is less is the perceived ability)

Response to a given situation (Pr, Dr)

4.3. 2 Results

Inclusion of managerial feedback efforts is indicated in **items 4.4 – 4.8** in the instrument

provided in appendix A. These relate to understanding the extent to which top management at

a campus seeks to generate feedback about performance in relation to subordinate managers'

activity portfolio. A further set of statements also elicit agreement/ disagreement on a Likert

scale under **1.4 to 1.6. These items (both sets 4.4 to 4.8 and 1.4 to 1.6)** are progressive in

terms of low to high 'demonstrative' inclusion.

The Wilcoxon rank sum test (for difference of mean ranks between two groups) has then

been used to partially alleviate the problems of low sample size and for its advantages of not

depending on the form of the parent distribution, nor its parameters. The two groups are

relative higher 'AbB' and relatively lower 'AbB' under which respective inclusiveness of

feedback instrument item scores were listed and comprise paired comparison N=11 (total

respondents 22): AbB as operationalised before using data from items 5.7 and 5.8.

The results are shown in table 4.3 and indicate that significance levels were acceptable in

favour of: inclusion of feedback being an important complement for perception of high

ability of top management when it comes to balancing deviations with conformance in

practice. However, what is probably equally important to note and provides support for the

second proposition is that the items that came up as significant, as described above and

presented in table 4.3, were relatively higher on 'demonstrative inclusiveness'. The far left

column of the table shows this by profiling the 'inclusiveness of feedback' instrument items

(labelled from the instrument) in terms of demonstratively inclusiveness in expression,

relative to other items.

Table 4.3. Results of Wilcoxon Rank Sum Test Low AbB and High AbB groups comparison across each feedback expression (significant results highlighted at p<0.05 and at p<0.01 respectively).

1.4. ....I am expected to provide feedback on my experience of activities that I carry out.	Not Significant between high AbB and Low AbB	Relatively low demonstrative inclusiveness of feedback
1.5… feedback on my experience of activities is taken forward for any changes made to my portfolio of activities.	Not Significant between high AbB and Low AbB	
1.6....my feedback has been reflected in some strategic decisions made at the campus.	SIGNIFICANT : Result details: W-value: 12.5; Mean Difference: -1.45; Sum of pos. ranks: 12.5; Sum of neg. ranks: 53.5; Z-value: -1.8227; Mean (W): 33; Standard Deviation (W): 11.25; Sample Size (N): 11; The Z-value is -1.8227. **The p-value is 0.03438**.The W-value is 12.5. The critical value of W for N = 11 at p≤ 0.05 is 13.	To ↓ Relatively High demonstrative inclusiveness
4.4 …reflect an attempt to generate information about what has worked and what has not from prescribed activities.	Not Significant between high AbB and Low AbB	Relatively low demonstrative inclusiveness of feedback
4.5. …reflect an attempt to generate information about what changes to activity portfolios have worked.	Not Significant between high AbB and Low AbB	To
4.6. …reflect an attempt to generate information about what changes to activity portfolios have NOT worked	Not Significant between high AbB and Low AbB	
4.7. ... reflect an attempt to generate information about 'why' these have worked.	SIGNIFICANT: W-value: 15.5; Mean Difference: 2.73; Sum of pos. ranks: 50.5; Sum of neg. ranks: 15.5; Z-value: -1.5559; Mean (W): 33; Standard Deviation (W): 11.25; Sample Size (N): 11 The Z-value is -1.5559. **The p-value is 0.05938.** The W-value is 15.5. The critical value of W for N = 11 at p≤ 0.05 is 13.	↓
4.8... reflect an attempt to generate information about 'why' these have 'NOT' worked.	Not Significant between high AbB and Low AbB	Relatively High demonstrative inclusiveness

4.4 Proposition 3 (a and b): Proposition 3a: Managerial attention to activities in context of organisational performance will be influenced by characteristics of the practice environment they consider more crucial; Proposition 3b: Managerial attention to activities in context of their own performance will be influenced by characteristics of the practice environment they consider more crucial.

4.4.1 Operationalization: Dependent Variable - *Attention to activities*

Item 3.5 of the survey instrument (appendix A) relates to <u>'attention',</u> as a function of extent to which respondents agree or disagree (on a Likert scale) about "effectively delivering to some activities across the campus is relatively more important, when it comes to overall campus performance". **Item 3.4.** does the same for "… when it comes to my own performance assessment". These statements proxy 'attention'- from two performance perspectives: organisational and self. However, what they do not capture 'what is crucial for such (with reference to each vantage point) performance' - which is the explanatory domain for attention under these two propositions.

4.4.2 Operationalization: Independent Variable - *Important practice environment characteristics*

With reference to what is crucial i.e. – Item 6 of the instrument is comprised of Likert scale scores on a set of statements that have influenced the respondent's thinking about what characteristics are important. Given the difficulty in putting across specific activities characteristics was the way forward –this was partly informed by research site understanding gained from qualitative data from the first phase (Appendix C). The query to respondents is about **"….influenced your thinking about what activities should you pay more attention to" (6.1 to 6.11 of instrument Appendix A),** each item being scored on a Likert

scale (i.e. order the items in preference). Because of the number of items it was considered inappropriate to use rank order across items. Qualifying comments relating to responses also support operationalization of 'what is crucial', as they note *".... Transparency in terms of what peers do and get rewarded for is very important to address ... is a pressing need at campus..." ".... Clearly understanding what is being communicated is central to how we function and what we end up doing – absolutely bull's eye on efficiency and effectiveness ...".* These thus become the explanatory variables showing dispersion along key characteristics of the practice environment influencing attention that respondents' could identify with despite variation in their portfolios.

4.4.3 Results

Two of the variables under consideration as independents **(items 6.1-6.11)**, show a significantly negative correlation (items 6.5 and 6.6) as being important from the point of view organisational performance (item 3.5), others show statistically insignificant correlations. By correlation results at this stage of reporting, this provides some but weak support for the proposition 3a. Similar but weak support for 3b comes from correlations with items 6.1. and 6.2. Despite the low sample size there is validation of a differential in what characteristics are considered crucial from the two vantage points of performance (organisational and self).

- From correlation results for 'attention', from the point of view of organisational performance (attention) is found to be significantly and negatively associated with: 1. difficulty in execution of activities and with; 2. importance of activities in relation to one's own performance assessment.

- Attention from the perspective of own performance is found to be more comparative and is positively associated with performance of peers at campus and across *Hues*.

Table 4.4 Highlighted results from correlations

Spearman correlations *What is crucial (characteristics of the practice environment guiding attention)*	*3a) Attention in context of organisational performance*
6.5. Your direct experience with activities in terms of their relative difficulty.[Difficulty encountered in execution]	-0.66
6.6. Your direct experience with activities in terms of their relative importance for your performance assessment. [Importance for own performance assessment]	-0.41
Spearman correlations (significant at p<0.05 level) *What is crucial to give attention to*	*3b) Attention in context of own (self) performance*
6.1. Performance of my peers at this campus [Comparative performance of campus peers]	0.48
6.2. Performance of peers at other *Hues* campuses [Comparative performance of organisation wide peers]	0.45

(0.36 or higher significant at p<0.05 level N==22)

There is a negative correlation for attention as crucial for organisational performance with characteristic of 'activities in terms of their relative importance for your performance assessment' (6.6. in the table above). This suggests at first look that the dependents 3.4. And 3.5 (own performance and organisational performance guided attention) may also be negatively correlated. However this is not the case; there is no significant correlation between these two (Appendix B). It is important to note that item 6.6 as an explanatory variable is different from **item 3.4**. The former is about a practice environment characteristic

that drives attention (part of a set) i.e. 'how some activities are held important for performance assessment influences attention to them' and the latter is about attention from a self performance point of view i.e. 'when it comes to my own performance effectively delivering to some activities is crucial'. This was clarified upfront but is important to restate given the similar narrative of both items albeit, in different contexts.

Regression results were then attempted despite the low sample size. Campus experience was the only control used and correlations informed the selection used for explanatory variables. There were significant results (table 4.5) for proposition 3a but no significant results for proposition 3b (table 4.6)

Table 4.5 Regression Results 3a

Dependent: Attention to activities from organisation performance perspective	Model1	Model2
	β(S.E)	β(S.E)
Controls		
Experience of working at Campus	-0.02+ (0.03)	-0.01+(0.01)
Explanatory		
Difficult encountered in execution (DE)	-0.13+(0.12)	-0.28(0.21)
Importance for own performance assessment (IP)	-0.32* (0.18)	-0.36*(0.19)
Interaction effect		
DE*IP		-0.16+ (0.13)
Chi^2[df]	*7.9*[3]**	*7.10+[4]*
Nagelkere's pseudo R^2	*0.39*	*0.41*

*Ordinal regression: Sample size 22, Regression Coefficients and standard errors (in parentheses). Unstandardized coefficients have been reported; +: p<0.1; *p<0.05*

Table 4.6 Regression results 3b

Dependent: Attention to activities from self performance perspective	Model1	Model2
	β(S.E)	β(S.E)
Controls		
Experience of working at Campus	0.35 (0.40)	0.41 (0.39)
Explanatory		
Comparative performance of campus peers (CpC)	0.13(0.11)	0.42 (0.31)
Comparative performance of organisation wide peers (CpO)	0.22 (0.19)	0.53 (0.21)
Interaction effect		
CpC*CpO		0.18(0.15)
Chi²[df]	*3.3[3]*	*3.3[4]*
Nagelkere's pseudo R²	*0.1*	*0.12*

*Ordinal regression: Sample size 22, Regression Coefficients and standard errors (in parentheses).   Unstandardized coefficients have been reported; +: p<0.1; *p<0.05*

Figure 4.3: Activity characteristics as determinants of managerial attention from two

perspectives: Organisational Performance and Self Performance.
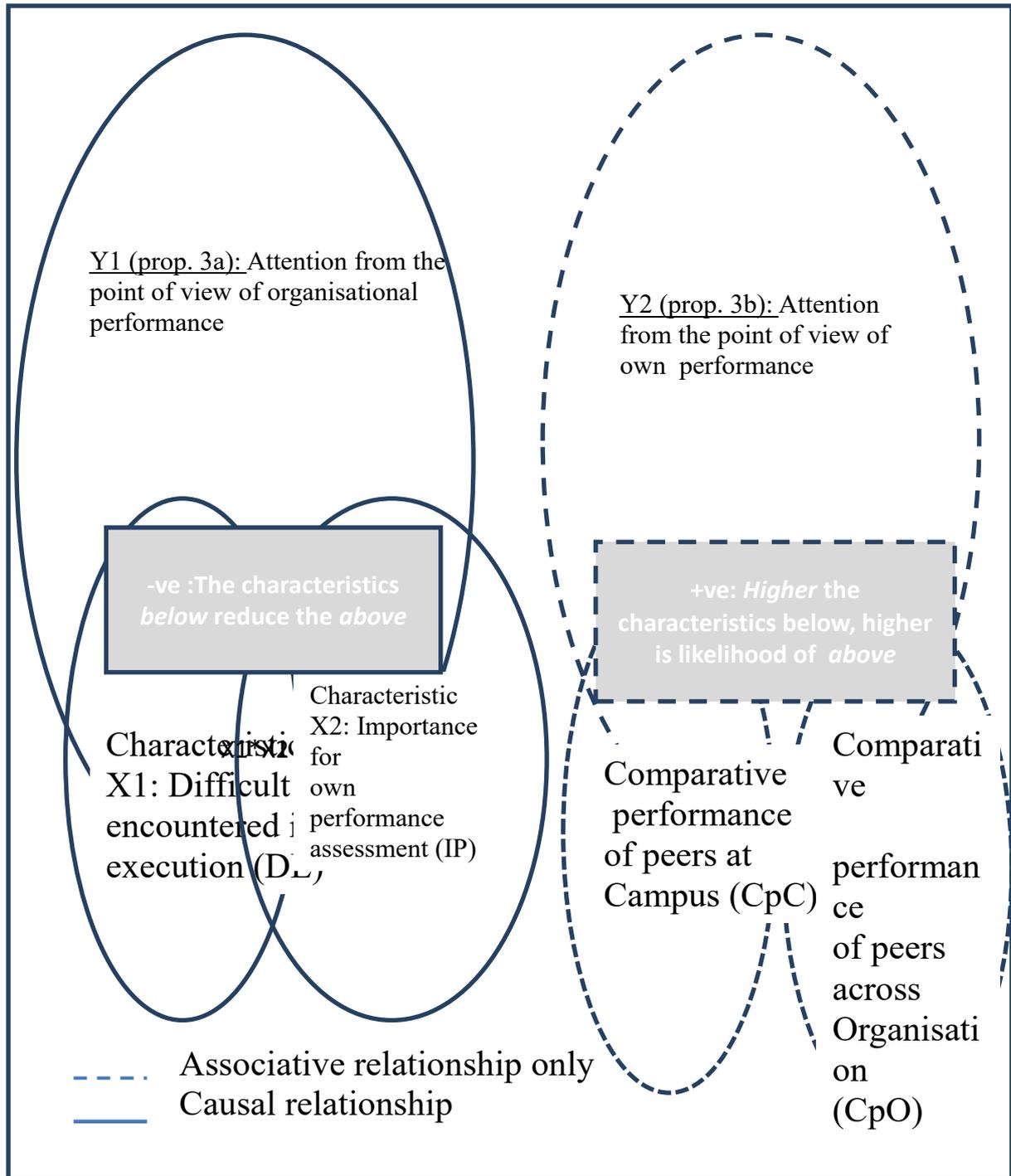
Results from regression analysis show good support for proposition 3a; Managerial attention to activities in context of organisational performance will be influenced by characteristics of the practice environment (for instance, this could be about their own experience dealing with difficult situations) that they (subordinates) consider important. If subordinates have difficulty in doing activities and, if they need to focus on some activities (which could be the same or different to the difficult activities) for their own performance, it is likely to have adverse consequences for attention to organizational performance. Putting it another way, subordinates will put their own performance ahead of organizational interests, where the two are not aligned. This is shown clearly in Model 2, table 4.5. There is an indication of difficulty in realising a strong interaction between: how important an activity is for own performance, and taking away attention from the organisational performance perspective. There is, however, no support for proposition 3b in terms of causality (influence), but only associative results for important characteristics with attention as shown.

4.5. Proposition 4: Congruence between top management and subordinates' view on relative importance of activities will be enhanced when there is a favourable perception in subordinates about utilization of internal feedback by top management.

Question 7 and sub items in the instrument asks respondents about their propensity to modify 'the relative importance' of prescribed activities under certain conditions, some of which are enabling (and others disabling) when it comes informing such propensity. For instance, when improvisations done have worked vs. when they have not worked in the past; when the top management encourages experimentation *provided* it works well (low allowance for failure) and when the experimentation is allowed to be more exploratory (and by extension allow for failure), among others. The higher the respondents' are on resorting to

modifications despite disabling conditions, the greater will be their incongruence with top management on relative importance of activities.

Internal feedback has been dealt with under proposition 2 when top's management ability to balance deviations with conformance was under purview. In this case it is been posited as an influencing variable on congruence. I examine at the onset all feedback items (**1.4 to 1.6 and 4.4 to 4.8)** and their correlations with items **7.1. to 7.8.** I also contextualise these by way of relatively low enabling (disabling) and high enabling conditions. As mentioned, when more disabling conditions exist, it is a proxy for lack of congruence, and, when enabling conditions exist during modifications (by contrast), the likelihood for greater congruence is assumed in this operationalisation.

Table 4.7: Relative efficacy of feedback and conditions

Relatively lower efficacy in feedback utilisation [Items 1.4-1.6 and 4.4 -4.8]	Relatively higher efficacy in feedback utilisation [Items 1.4-1.6 and 4.4 -4.8]
• *This split was done based on three raters including the researcher to arrive at the below from a relative context. The task was to split the items into two groups.* • *The highlighted are 'relatively' less enabling conditions for modifications and non-highlighted are 'relatively' more enabling conditions, showing correlations with the feedback efficacy items.* • *Underlined are items from question 7*	
1.4....I am expected to provide feedback on my experience of activities that I carry out. (no significant correlation with any of the [relatively] enabling or disabling conditions for modifications)	**1.5... feedback on my experience of activities is taken forward for any changes made to my portfolio of activities.** • Significant positive correlation with modifications when the Top management is fine with experimentation as long as it works (Low tolerance for failure) (0.36) • Significant positive correlation when the Top management encourages experimentation giving a lot of space for managerial discretion (0.41) • Significant positive correlation with when it is high pressure time (0.46)

4.4 …reflect an attempt to generate information about what has worked and what has not from prescribed activities. (no significant correlation with any of the enabling or disabling conditions for modifications)	**1.6....my feedback has been reflected in some strategic decisions made at the campus.** • Significant positive correlation with - when such experimentation that you have done in the past have generally 'NOT' worked well (0.43). • Significant positive correlation - when experimentation by colleagues in similar task situations have generally 'NOT' worked well (0.48).
4.5. …reflect an attempt to generate information about what changes to activity portfolios have worked. • Significant positive correlation with when the Top management encourages experimentation giving a lot of space for managerial discretion (0.42). • Significant positive correlation with when such experimentation by colleagues in similar task situations have generally worked well (0.54).	**4.7. ... reflect an attempt to generate information about 'why' these have worked** (no significant correlation with any of the enabling or disabling conditions for modifications)
4.6. …reflect an attempt to generate information about what changes to activity portfolios have NOT worked • Significant positive correlation with when the Top management encourages experimentation giving a lot of space for managerial discretion (0.41). • Significant positive correlation with when such experimentation by colleagues in similar task situations have generally worked well (0.52).	**4.8... reflect an attempt to generate information about 'why' these have 'NOT' worked.** (no significant correlation with any of the enabling or disabling conditions for modifications)

As mapped out in the table above, relatively less enabling conditions manifest with higher

efficacy of feedback. The correlations at first sight only establish that there is such a scenario

at the case site. Though associative the results can be extended to argue marginal support for the fourth proposition (not causal but associative as inferential models were not significant). Congruence here finds a proxy in relatively high enabling conditions. The associative-ness of these with nature of feedback and its utilisation is demonstrated by strong and significant correlations, albeit no causality could be inferred from further analysis, given the sample size and number of affecting variables. It seems that low congruence is marked by high efficacy in feedback. Though counterintuitive it suggests that high efficacy in feedback marks low congruence, the subordinates argue and critique top management orientation more, encouraged by their inclusiveness.

4.6. Propositions informed solely by qualitative data (5,8 and 9a and 9b)

4.6.1 Operationalization

Propositions 5, 8, 9a and 9b are addressed in this section. This is because these four in particular are supported by qualitative data. These are also presented here as they show conjectures that emerge and are stated as proposition 6 and 7b (discussed before as partly emerging from data).

Proposition 5: Risk perceptions in subordinates about modification to activities will be low when top management's own propensity to experiment is high.

Proposition 8: Variation in the nature of task situations will affect the sanction imparted for an ambidextrous orientation.

Proposition 9a: Initiatives that promote reflection on prior modifications in activities will reduce risk perceptions about future modification.

Proposition 9b: Deliberated initiatives to reflect on modifications are likely to give more attention to modifications made during relatively more tumultuous times.

As mentioned before in the methodology section top management views were drawn in relation to their (1) *own propensity to experiment* and, (2) *performance concerns related to activity modifications*. Subordinate management views are also elicited along the same trajectories (sample reported in appendix D). The data were tabulated to view responses in terms of their alignment within the two categories of top management and middle management and also the alignment between the two categories (Duriau et al., 2007). I use 15 purposively selected extracts from qualitative observations (C1 TO C15) in shaping

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findings. I also note overall trends across respondent categories with respect to the aforementioned numbered themes on which responses were elicited.

4.6.2. Data and results

Data from qualitative observations:

C1 *Adapted responses to the prescribed way of doing things* [comprising activities] *is accepted if it is culturally the norm. It is just the way things are done* [middle management].

C2 *Code of conduct* [activities] *is recognised and adhered to clearly in any discussions about how things were done. Being in line with the given process is important."* [middle management].

C3 *Generally there is no reference to the handbook to execute these activities. The code of conduct boils down to three things: 1. Taking a moment to listen to gut/instinct 2. Thinking about what worked well in the past and trying to make it work even better today. 3. Thinking about what did not work well in the past and trying to make it work well today. 4. Asking for advice when uncertain.* [middle management].

Observations of all six middle management personnel mapped on to the observations for top management. C4 *things are done in relation to the situation ....to have to hand the code of conduct is not primary, but at best, supporting as a tool to possibly prevent completely erratic behaviour.*

This provides support for proposition 5, top management's 'walk the talk' orientation with regards to modification in or conformance with activities that they do is closely shared by the middle management. There is also an indication of selectivity in contrast to what could have been a more generalised sanction for deviations in managerial activities.

<u>C5</u> *Some people would improvise more around set activities they have to do and then there are those who would not. The latter in turn then go ahead and try overt experimentation without consultation when there is a new situation that has to be played by the ear.* [tumultuous times, discontinuity]. *People who improvise in both stable and tumultuous situations are considered more balanced. There would confident in them to shoot off the hip in a crisis situation. They are likely not to overdo it, because they freedom to indulge in a more spaced out. Top management tend to usually make it clear which individuals they would expect to consult more with them* [top management]

<u>C6</u> Not *everyone can be allowed to come onto the freeway, some have done well and when it works top management likes it. When it does not work, it is sometimes unclear how top management would respond* [top management]

Another expectation in data from my memo notes is;

<u>C7</u> *Top management would rather look at situations themselves and send out broad guidelines as to how they expect them [Middle Managers] to carry out their activities. Being consulted even briefly is something that top management expect* [top management].

These were important assertions to note for when activity modification is likely to be considered favourably, but also seen to be risky. It also transpires that top management becomes selective in terms of task situations and also of people associated in handling specific tasks, in terms of sanctioning modifications. This provides some support for proposition 8.

Flexibility comes with the caveat of how deviation from prescribed activities are treated. For instance, managerial comments on this front indicate a low tolerance for poor performance when it comes to stable times.

C8 There is very little scope to make mistakes here improvisation takes place when it is not required. This is because, more often than not, improvisation can be seen to conflict with existing ways of working, where those ways have strong legitimacy [middle management].

C9 Poor results and mistakes in things that should work seamlessly are viewed rather negatively. When a different way of working provides strong results in terms of improving efficiency, the recognition is immediate as well [middle management].

C10 Outcomes are important. However, there is encouragement to experiment in certain types of situations. Typically middle managers would not experiment without discussions at least with peers. There are enough opportunities to experiment but generally with a self imposed caution. [middle management].

The link between sanction and validation is based more on who has a more balanced approach, than who makes a stronger case for making modifications. In stable times there seems to be an adage of 'reasonableness' in deviations from the established ways of working. Observations also show an interest in capturing modifications (they are called best practice, but a better term would be good practice) over time, indicating that support from experience of past modifications matters in delivering 'reasonableness' as against just a strong needs based case (i.e. with low support from past experiences) for making the modifications. Retrospective analysis seems to be key as against 'only' prospective venturing for modifications.

C11 There are surprises from the way the top management organises themes for surprise breakouts and handles his interaction like with [student recruiting] *agents. More often than not it is apparent that some of these are just trial and error based attempts to see if*

something works. Such experiences are shared at our campus and then between top managers into these away weeks [middle management].

It seems that deliberated interventions that encourage learning and feedback by the top management are conducted in more stable times. However, review of tumultuous task-situations and handling them seemed to be of keen interest during such site-based review events. Learning at sites (again colloquially called best practices) are also shared between top managers at regular off-site meetings.

<u>C12</u> *Work is often undertaken at tremendous time pressures and top management seem to take a very structured approach nevertheless. They often take suggestions and then discuss many of these with the middle management, generally during low tide* [stable times]. *Formal introduction of revisions is vital so that people know what suggestions are on the table and which are agreed* [modifications]. *However, in high tide* [tumultuous times] *there is no choice but to act quickly. Top management are usually happy to discuss and provide support in high pressure times* [top management]

<u>C13</u> *If disruptions are not anticipated, middle management tend to feel that they have not functioned properly. For instance, when a professor potentially comes to loggerheads with, in most cases, this can be anticipated and controlled for by initial feedback, before the situation comes to head. Many middle management initiate a lot of such conversations at the first sign of what may become a big problem.* [middle management]

Tumultuous task-situations were often seen as a failure of learning, in that they appear as a disruption. That top management and middle managers seemed to draw on past modifications primarily to validate the risk taken for activity modifications shows support for proposition 9a. It seems that validation through deliberated reflections is crucial. There is

also some support for proposition 9b from C5, C12 and C13 and further respondent observations implying that such events were dominated by what worked in crisis. Deliberated initiatives to reflect on modifications are likely to give more attention to modifications made during relatively more tumultuous times.

Sanction from top management to respond in novel ways during tumultuous task situations seemed to be useful for middle management. Reflections on modifications referred overtly to those that come into light because of failing or succeeding to respond to tumultuous task situations. There was an expectation of guidance and hand-holding for modification in activities during trying times.

C14 *Any novelty in ways of working in response to a crisis is strongly felt to be something that should be consulted with top management, as much for gaining legitimacy as for getting quality advice and motivation* [middle management]

It seems that expectations from the top management included their own ability to act judiciously at their own level. Seeking sanction during trying times seemed to make for additional burden to an already under pressure top management during tumultuous times.

C15 *Top management would typically expect a call to be made by middle management. It seems that cautious and iterative consultations could sometimes cause more harm than a chance that managers are able to respond judiciously at their own levels* [top management]

These responses provide further evidence to support proposition 9a. These point in the direction of a more thought required for designing interventions to validate and support activity modifications. Top management expectations for middle managers to be able to negotiate discontinuous task situations intelligibly and middle management requirement for clear sanction and hand holding for modifications need to be in sync. Ambidexterity as a key

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capability top management aspire for in their middle management may benefit from such

careful orchestration.

Table 4.8: Ambidextrous Orientation [comments noted c1-c15]

Task situation ———————————— *Top Management Orientation*	Stable task-situations (low tide)	Tumultuous task-situations (high tide)
Top management's deliberated efforts at inducing learning from modifications in activities	Review and breakouts are more likely. They usually tend to retrospectively analyse activity modifications made during tumultuous task situations - than those made during stable task situations [C2, C12].	Review and breakouts are not likely. Modifications during these times could capture the imagination of top management for reviews that take place during more stable times [C5, C12, C13, C11].
Top management's sanction for modifications in activities demonstrably through how they associate with task-situations.	Influence of such sanction on middle management may be moderated by strong views on modification failures – given that tested and well aligned activities exist [C6, C7, C13].	Influence of such sanction, often selective in nature, is moderated by 'intelligible' and 'judicious' nature of adaptive response expected of the middle managers by the top management [C1,C5,C3,C10].
Making modifications an analytical choice rather than a propensity	Top management disposition is aligned to middle management but within considerations of not trying to overtly disrupt tested activities for responding to continuous task situations [C4, C11, C14, C15].	Top management typically requires middle management to execute any activity modifications in line with any improvisations in overall strategy during these times [C12, C15].

4.6.3 Shaping further propositions

Two important aspects come to the fore from the above findings, firstly, the strong view on modification failures (experimentation is encouraged in some ways, but with a sense of limited licence to fail) and, secondly, the tendency to not affect day-to-day functioning (i.e. to not disrupt activities), whilst at same time seeking to improve. These suggest that there is likelihood that: Top management's sanction for modification in activities seems to be affected by their perceived risks to performance. Another perspective is about concerns of performance are amplified during high tide times. However, top management itself might not be affected in terms of their own experimentation during tumultuous times. Putting it another they often give themselves more latitude to experiment.

Though supported and linked with literature the emergence of such conjectures, as stated upfront, has been from data. I now take these (proposition 6 and 7b) forward to find evidence for them based on the survey instrument data that was administered to subordinate managers. Propositions 6 and 7b are evidenced in the perception of subordinate managers as per the sample unit of reference in survey data.

4.7. Proposition 6: Top management's sanction for modification to activities will be reduced by perceived risks to performance.

For this proposition, which emerges from the 1st phase of data collection, an implication with regards to impact of risks is seen. The second phase of data collection provides an opportunity to seek evidence from the perspective of subordinate managers'.

4.7.1. Operationalization and results

Sanction for modifications in relative prioritisation to activities is under items **7.1 and 7.2** (appendix A) with an increasing level of such sanction as 7.1 states that the sanction is rather conditional on the outcome (as long as it works) and 7.2 in contrast speaks of managerial discretion with lower performance connotations. These have been deliberately positioned one after the other and pre-testing of the instrument also informed the question items as such to relate top management sanction for modifications. The association and variation between these two items would provide an understanding of how risks to performance affect sanction. While these two items relate explicitly to modifications in prioritisation of activities, question 8 seeks to examine modifications as more explicit change as in experimentation from outside the scope of prescribed activities. This is also about modifications but more as in the activity configurations being informed by experimentation for such modifications. **Items 8.1 and 8.2** provide an analogues set of statements when the performance contingency is very strong and when it is low

Spearman correlations reported in appendix B show an interesting pattern to note

Table 4.9: Spearman correlations showing associative-ness of risk-sanction responses

	8.1. Sanction for changes by way of new activities (outside those prescribed) strongly mediated by performance concerns	8.2. Sanction for changes by way of new activities (outside those prescribed) with a weak interface with outcome concerns
7.1. Sanction for modification in activity prioritisation strongly mediated by performance concerns	Significant positive correlation 0.42: *Sanction for modification in prioritisation in activities with strong mediation by performance concerns is associated with such sanction for inducing new activities also under same concerns*	Not Significant

7.2. Sanction for modification in activity prioritisation with weak interface with outcome concerns	Not Significant	Significant positive correlation 0.59: *Sanction for modification in prioritisation in activities and low mediation by outcome performance concerns is associated with such sanction for inducing new activities also with low outcome performance concerns*

Another continuum of items is in **question 4 from 4.1, 4.2 and 4.3** where questionnaire items are ordered in terms of communications from top management;....reflect a need for alignment with prescribed activities; ...reflect a need to enhance organisational performance without a reference to prescribed activities, and;... reflect a need to experiment around prescribed activities. Clearly these are in order of low to high risk taking propensity of top management demonstrated by imparted sanction. I performed a Kruskal-Wallis test across the categories of responses.

4.10: Kruskal –Wallis test for risk propensity associated risks to performance

Risk taking propensity low to high items 4.1, 4.2, 4.3	N	Sum of ranks
4.1.	22	573
4.2.	22	732.5
4.3.	22	920.5
	Risk Perception	
Chi-square	6.620	
Df	2	
Asym Sing	**.04**	

The conclusions show that risk perceptions do affect modification sanction as in the perception of the subordinate managers. The proposition does not examine the direction of the effect, but given the above results. It seems that sanction for modification to activities in content and in prioritisation is characterised by risk perceptions of top management. In the correlations the indication is weaker. Lower risk for modifications, or for prioritisation of activities, and higher risk for either of these, tend to go together. This broad associative result is then taken forward using the Kruskal Wallis test where the result shows that there is a statistically significant difference between groups of scores for statements that are differentiated based on risks to performance.

4.8. Proposition 7b: When the task situation is relatively more tumultuous <u>it will affect</u> top management's own propensity to experiment.

4.8.1 Operationalization and results

Lack of predictability is a clear indicator of experimentation. **Item 5.7** of the instrument queries the respondents to evaluate how predictable top management response is in an evaluation they do of a scenario. However, tumultuous task situations (at high pressure times) have been examined **under 7.7 and 8.7** as how they would affect subordinates' propensity to modify, or experiment with completely new activities, respectively.

A proxy for top management's response to tumultuous task situations was not possible to be put in. Item 5.7 speaks of a rather routine situation, at least not classified as tumultuous / high pressure. With this limitation I look at 7.7 and 8.7 as proxies for tumultuous task situations and their effect on the propensity of subordinates to do modifications. On reflection and based on findings from the qualitative analysis in section 4.6 of this chapter (from where this proposition has partly emerged) suggests that it would proxy top

management's own propensity to experiment. For example, (from section 4.6): way of doing

is rather structured, suggestions are discussed with the staff during in low tide [stable times];

formal introduction of modifications is vital so that people know what suggestions are tabled

and agreed and; in tumultuous times there is an expectation to act at their [middle

management] level but top management is keen to guide and be consulted.

I find no significant correlations between items 5.7 **and 7.7 and 5.7 and 7.8** responses.

Grouping, across high to low, item 5.7 scores for a rank sum test also does not yield any

significant results. Overall the operationalization was difficult to work in, because

respondents often felt that this could be about evaluating the top management too directly.

4.9. Proposition 7a

Proposition 7a: Risk perceptions about ambidexterity <u>will be affected by</u> top management's own propensity to experiment.

Table 4.11: Perspective on ambidexterity of subordinate managers as from questionnaire items

	2.1.2 Campus needs articulated by the dean	2.2.2 Additions from you to need articulated by the dean
Activities that are in my portfolio will need modifications	Less so More so	Less so More
	--------Ambidexterity---------	--------Ambidexterity---------

If we look at ambidexterity as a disposition to balance conformance as against experimentation for subordinate managers in this case, the above expression from items 2.1.2 and 2.2.2 seems useful. Risk perceptions about ambidexterity are explicit items in question 7 and 8. Here the propensity to modify (from internal repository) and the propensity to experiment (in external sources) are both influenced by a range of factors. The higher the respondents' score on these, the greater the associated propensity. The interesting thing to note is that these factors also vary in relative severity. For instances 7.2 is the easiest condition to deviate from (top management tolerance and managerial discretion given considerable space). Items 7.1 and 7.4 provide for more conducive conditions for exploitation of certainties with conservatism of top management. I begin by looking at correlations between 2.1.2 and 2.2.2 with items under question 7 and question 8.

Table 4.12: Perspective (correlations) on modifications and change with severity of conditions for practice

Spearman correlations (significant ones at 0.05 are 0.36 and above are shaded)	2.1.2 Site needs articulated by the top management	2.2.2. Additions from subordinate management to needs articulated by top management
	...activities that are in your portfolio will need modifications	
7.1. When the Dean is fine with modification in emphasis (within the activity portfolios) as long as it works, i.e. treats outcomes as standard.	0.10	0.35
7.2. When the Dean is quite tolerant of such modifications in emphasis, i.e. gives reasonable space for managerial discretion.	-0.05	-0.08
7.3. When these *change in emphasis* improvisations that you have done in the past have generally worked well.	0.12	-0.19
7.4. When *such* improvisations that you have done in the past have generally 'NOT' worked well.	0.35	0.24
7.5. When *such* improvisations by colleagues in similar task situations have generally worked well.	0.15	0.03
7.6 When *such* improvisations by colleagues in similar task situations have generally 'NOT' worked well.	0.32	0.31
7.7 When it is high pressure time, like say, beginning of term (or as may apply to your role)	-0.17	-0.10
7 .8. When it is difficult to asks peers for help and support	0.18	0.31
8.1 When the Dean is fine with such experimentation as long as it works, i.e. treats outcomes as standard.	0.09	0.10
8.2 When the Dean encourages such experimentation, i.e. gives a lot of space for managerial discretion.	0.06	0.00
8.3When such *breakout experimentation* that you have done in the past have generally worked well.	0.00	-0.03
8.4 When such experimentation that you have done in the past have generally 'NOT' worked well.	**0.41**	0.34
8.5 When such experimentation by colleagues in similar task situations have generally worked well.	0.04	0.14
8.6 When experimentation by colleagues in similar task situations have generally 'NOT' worked well.	**0.39**	**0.54**
8.7When it is high pressure times like beginning of term (or as may apply to your role)	-0.14	-0.09
8.8 When it is difficult to asks peers for help and support	**0.45**	**0.55**

(shaded correlations over +/-0.36 significant at p<0.05 level)

Significant correlations, which are positive, are noted above and relate to mostly more difficult situations for deviations. This indicates that the need for modification seems to higher the more difficult the conditions. Putting it another way, deviations are more likely in more difficult conditions than conformance.

4.9.1 Operationalization and results

A correlations based perspective is used to examine the proposition under purview *Ambidexterity would need to be coded as high on both conformance and deviations. To this extent we need to recode the variables as 4,5 for scores of 1 and 2 and let 4,5 scores on the ordinal scale remain the same. This would apply to 2.1.2 and 2.2.2 after doing this I redid the correlations to see if there was a change*

The results in table 4.1.3 have indicated that conditions are strongly and positively correlated (all positively significant). However, there are some significant negative correlations to note with 2.1.2 and 2.2.2. Only high risk conditions come up as negatively and significantly correlated with 2.1.2 and 2.2.2 (Appendix B).

- *7.1. When the Dean is fine with modification in emphasis (within the activity portfolios) as long as it works, i.e. treats outcomes as standard.*

- *7.5. When such improvisations by colleagues in similar task situations have generally worked well.*

- *7.7 When it is high pressure time, like say, beginning of term (or as may apply to your role)*

- *7 .8. When it is difficult to asks peers for help and support*

We now need to examine the association with top management's own propensity to experiment. Lack of predictability is a clear indicator of experimentation. Item 5.7 of the

instrument queries the respondents to evaluate how predictable top management response is in an evaluation they do of a scenario.

Table 4.13: Correlations extract: Ambidextrous orientation in subordinate managers' and experimentation of top management

	5.70: Propensity to experiment in top management:	*2.1.2: Higher ambidexterity (perceived lower risk) in subordinate managers' with reference to mandated top management performance premises for the organisations*	*2. 2.2. Higher ambidexterity (perceived lower risk) in middle management with reference to self mandated organisational performance needs*
5.70	1.00		
2.1.2	**0.38**	1.00	
2.2.2	-0.14	0.21	1.00

(shaded correlations over +/-0.36 significant at p<0.05 level)

These show that a positive and significant correlation when it comes to high experimentation of top management and high ambidextrous orientation in subordinate managers. The results also show that ambidextrous orientation or propensity towards such an orientation is associated with more challenging times for subordinate managers. Ordinal regression set up using selected variables was not significant for evidencing this proposition any further.

4.10. Summary of findings by propositions

The following table summarise the findings as evidence for propositions examined

Table 4.14: Summary of findings

Proposition	*Finding*
Proposition 1: Stronger perceived alignment of top management priorities with organizational needs will increase subscription to prescribed activities by subordinate managers.	*Statistically significant causal evidence –* (ordinal regression) and by extension given the nature of operationalization (misalignment increases tendency for modifications): Subscription to prescribed activities <u>will be</u> <u>enhanced</u> by both strategic and operational alignment and their interaction.
Proposition 2: Top management's ability to balance 'deviations and conformance' with prescribed will be more effective when complemented with demonstrative inclusion of middle management feedback.	*Statistically significant distinction evidence -* relatively high demonstrative inclusiveness of feedback is an important compliment for perception of high ability in top management. This ability is about how top management balance deviations with conformance (Wilcoxon rank sum text)
Proposition 3a: Managerial attention to activities in context of organisational performance <u>will be influenced by</u> characteristics of the practice environment they consider more crucial.	*Statistically significant causal evidence –* (ordinal regressions). Managerial attention to activities in context of organisational performance <u>will be reduced by</u> characteristics of the practice environment they (subordinates)

	consider more crucial [difficulty encountered in execution of activities and; importance for own performance assessment].
Proposition 3b: Managerial attention to activities in context of their own performance will be influenced by characteristics of the practice environment they consider more crucial.	*Statistically significant but only associative evidence* - spearman correlations show association with environmental characteristics of peer performance
Proposition 4: Congruence between top management and subordinates' view on relative importance of activities will be enhanced when there is a favourable perception in subordinates about utilization of internal feedback by top management.	*Statistically significant but only associative evidence*- spearman correlations show that relatively enabling and relatively disabling conditions associate with the nature of feedback and its utilization by top management.
Proposition 5: Risk perceptions in subordinates about modification to activities will be low when top management's own propensity to experiment is high.	*Support from qualitative data* shows a map on between top management and subordinate manager. Top management's walk the talk orientation with regards modification or conformance is replicated in subordinate managers.
*Proposition 6: Top management's sanction for modification to activities	*Statistically significant evidence for a difference in sanction with increasing risk (not direction)*

will be reduced by perceived risks to performance. .	– by Kruskal – Wallis test for risk propensity (increasing - 3 group categories each had a response in the survey instrument *)*
Proposition 7a: Risk perceptions about ambidexterity will be affected by top management's own propensity to experiment.	*Statistically significant associative support –* spearman correlations high experimentation by top management is a proxy for lower risk perception and this is positively correlated with operationalized ambidexterity measure for subordinates
*Proposition 7b: When the task situation is relatively more tumultuous it will affect top management's own propensity to experiment.	*No support from ordinal survey data– part derived from 1st phase of qualitative data collection*
Proposition 8: Variation in the nature of task situations will affect the sanction imparted for an ambidextrous orientation.	*Support from qualitative data* shows that top management becomes selective in terms of task situations, and also, of subordinates associated in the handling of contexts.
Proposition 9a: Initiatives that promote reflection on prior modifications in activities will reduce risk perceptions about future modification.	*Support from qualitative data* shows that top management and middle management are both inclined to seek validation from past experiences of modification, though such an

	approach is seen to be compromised in high tide (tumultuous situations).
Proposition 9b: Deliberated initiatives to reflect on modifications are likely to give more attention to modifications made during relatively more tumultuous times.	*Support from qualitative data* shows that attention is drawn towards modifications made during tumultuous times more than it is towards those during routine times.

Chapter 5: DISCUSSION and CONTRIBUTIONS

5.1 Configurations, Alignment and Risk

The findings show an association between subordinate managers' experience and their perceptions about alignment that top management has with strategic and operational needs. Subordinate managers with higher experience outside the industry, and who have been exposed to legacy systems that are different, may find strategic misalignment more pronounced. In contrast, those working within the organisation for longer are likely to be concerned more with operational misalignment. There is also an emphasis on the different levels of understanding of activity configurations at subordinate managers level. As expected, and despite the experience effect in relating with the top management and the wider organisational perspective, the overall focus of subordinate managers is on their own activities. Putting it another way, their reflections are about activity configurations associated with and among their peers, and on the organisational level configuration. The need for modifications in one's own activity portfolio is influenced by both perceived strategic and operational misalignment, and also, by the interaction between the two.

My experience is in line with these findings; I have observed many instances where middle managers seemingly concerned with the organization's performance, in fact, after a longer conversation, it becomes apparent that they are more concerned with their own working environment and personal performance. This mismatch in what they often state initially at the surface level, and what they really want to pursue is intriguing.

The finding emphasises that organisational strategic configuration and associated perception of top management's alignment with organizational needs, affects individual managers' own propensity to modify their activities. Thus, top management alignment with strategic and operational needs is re-iterated as a crucial factor, not only as prescribing activities for middle

management, but also orienting the need in middle management about changes they induce/would like to induce at their level (proposition1).

Operationalization to do with activity modification, and that of strategic and operationalization alignment is quite novel. This is because I do not explicitly involve performance metrics. In most research that looks at links between strategic and operational alignment, this is a confining parameter in examining the impact on managerial practice and priorities (e.g. Joshi et al., 2003; Lindman et al., 2001). This is because enhancing conversations about performance would have seriously clouded perceptions about activity modifications. Indeed, performance conversations can result in biased responses, given the psychological impact respondents could feel about a topic which is linked to their careers (Weaver et al., 1999).

Glaser et al.'s (2015) much larger inter-organisational sample study that examines risk taking and organisational control, shows that higher risk propensity weakens the positive relationship between personal initiative tendency and job performance. While this can be argued, in my research the focus on own activity portfolio, is a very probable manifestation of Glaser et al's findings.

Continuing with the risk taking argument, my findings suggest that risk connotations are consequential in affecting the modification initiative in subordinates and may be reduced by, top management's own demonstrated propensity to experiment, and also, support through deliberated initiatives to reflect on prior modifications (proposition 5 and 9a).

Managers can be risk averse or risk taking, and research evidence about managerial propensity to pursue superior performance pulls in both directions (e.g. Thaler and Johnson, 1990; Dutton and Jackson, 1987). My study asserts that risk aversion is likely to be generally

more dominant. This however is also to be considered more in the context of the flat federated structure of the research site.

However, Glaser et al. and other aforementioned studies do not claim that risk averse behaviour is likely (or not) to result in superior performance overtime. Therefore, it is of further research interest to examine and contribute to some seminal research trajectories- the extent to which higher risk-taking behaviour may result in superior performance a link that has been reflected upon in research but in my view could do with more empirical basis. I emphasise this point in my conclusions.

5.2 Ambidexterity and Top Management Influence: Experiential Perspectives on Behavioural Decision Making

A propensity towards an ambidextrous orientation is marked by more challenging times. Middle managers may be affected by the promise of ambidexterity and also the risks to coordination it brings during difficult times (high tide/ tumultuous). Top management's own propensity to experiment can be supportive but 'not essential' to the link between tumultuous times propelling middle managers to be more ambidextrous. One reason for this could be that during such situations the search for solutions is rather disparate, and both exploration and exploitation come to the table because of such pressures. In my experience, the direction that middle managers choose in these circumstances is based on the complex inter-play of a number of factors, which go beyond the nature of the task situation itself. Top management influence is a pivotal factor. Other factors may include, middle managers own experience of success or failure in previous high tide situations, and also, crucially the number of simultaneous high tide situations, which may result in unavailability of top management for advice. These factors are also outlined in findings from qualitative data.

The link between top management influence, ambidextrous orientation and task situation severity, seems to have yielded useful links that can inform practice. Behavioural decision making, with the unit of analysis being managerial activities, and the nature of modifications, is illustrated by the study. Findings linking risk, task situations, and top management actions (deliberated initiatives for reflection and their own walk the talk orientation viz. experimentation) provide some contributions for practice as well.

Table 4.9 can be extended to practice connotations as in table 5.1 (propositions 5,8, 9a and 9b) This is because the issues outlined in table 4.9 are characteristic of the influence of top management on middle management for modifications in activities. Table 4.9 notes assertions from data in terms of top management orientation and situational contexts to provide good practices for top management in facilitating an ambidextrous orientation for middle managers.

Table 5.1: Good practices to enable ambidexterity (Mapped on from table 4.9)

Task situation ——————— *Top Management Orientation*	Stable task-situations	Tumultuous task-situations
Top management's deliberated efforts at inducing learning from modifications in activities	Review of past modification in activities during both stable times and during tumultuous times	Induce review events during high tide times to examine any past modifications during similar task-situations in the past.
Top management's sanction for modifications in activities demonstrably through how they associate with task-situations.	Pilot testing of proposed modification through champions (*champions: who have succeeded in performance enhancing modifications during*	Top management should participate directly or through mentoring (through champions) in supporting performance during such task-situations.

	both stable and tumultuous times).	Distant expectation directives will appear ambiguous during such times and should be avoided.
Making modifications an analytical choice than a propensity	The alignment between top management and middle management propensity needs to be challenged by simulated task situations where alternate behaviours are encouraged.	Analytical basis should include understanding any similar past modification experiences as through review events and assess novel modification in relation to them. This will provide validation and a level platform to balance exploration with exploitation.

Notably a marked distinction between propositions 5 and 7a was that the former did not explicitly operationalize ambidextrous orientation. However, the support for proposition 7a shows high experimentation by top management associated with a high experimentation by subordinate managers, and therefore provides for validation for findings of proposition 5 as well.

Examining the interface between top management orientation, performance feedback and task-situations results, has illustrated that the combination of these shape middle management's propensity to be ambidextrous. The gap in research on understanding these interfaces *"...beyond structural, contextual and leadership antecedents, behavioral antecedents arguably require examination"* (Chang and Hughes, 2014, p.13) is an important validation for this study and its findings.

5.3 Performance Feedback and Task Situations

As a backdrop to inducing good practices for ambidexterity, it must be noted that there is an expectation from middle managers to be able to modify activities for superior response to task-situations (Daft and Weick, 1984; Luthans et al., 1985). At the same time, top management seeks to control, support and orient such modifications. While controlling for the risk of bohemian or conformist biases at the individual manager's level, and seeking to enhance both at the same time, two crucial perspectives need to be kept in mind. The first is that inducing deliberated mechanisms allows for learning from modifications in activities during, both, low tide and high tide times. This will make such modifications acceptable and also better informed, to prevent overtly 'convergent', or overtly 'divergent' tendencies (Benner and Tushman, 2003). The second is about *managing the walk the talk* orientation of the top management. While this is useful for sense giving and validation, it, may also make it difficult for middle management to break-away from existing fit to explore for modifications in context of specific task situations that they encounter. Indeed, there is a difference between where middle managers undertake true, self-generated modifications, and where they are simply attempting to read the mind of the top manager (Dutton et al., 1997). The logical extension of this, associates with the power dynamics within an organization, as middle managers may simply be managing-up, retro-fitting, or pleasing the top manager, for personal gains, that do not have to do with performance. It is not to say that this is a typical behaviour, among some or many managers, but because it can lead to hugely dysfunctional behaviours, that if not immediately but over time, are more likely than not, to be counter-productive to organizational performance.

Performance of top management in managing the activity configuration at the organisational level relates with a perception of their ability to effectively balance deviations and conformance. When this is inclusive of subordinate managers' feedback the study has posited that this ability will be seen as more pronounced. Better inclusion of feedback matters for perception about top management's ability as to how the feedback was recognised and taken forward (proposition 2). This is a practice recommendation for top management.

I therefore make a contribution to performance feedback theory. This area of research concerns itself with performance levels, assessment of achievement in relation to thereof to calibrate search, and consequent modification (Cyert and March, 1963; Greve, 2003; Audia and Greve, 2006). The theorisation does not, to date, speak of the nature of feedback as in the efficacy of the process and its acceptance by originating stakeholder (demonstrativeness of feedback inclusion as perceived by middle management).

Investigation of whether congruence between subordinate managers' and top management is influenced by demonstrative feedback yields weak results. Though counterintuitive it suggests that high efficacy in feedback marks low congruence, the subordinates argue and critique top management orientation more, encouraged by their inclusiveness (proposition 4). The process efficacy perspective thus connects to the conditioning by environmental characteristics under which managerial practice takes place. The cultural disposition of an organisation or industry may influence how this link manifests itself.

5.4 Attention and the Decision Environment

The environmental conditions that impact attention comprise a range of factors, from say, feedback or support from peers about performance assessment. Sometimes theses pose difficulties, and reduce the attention to certain activities from an organizational performance perspective. There is a variation in how some characteristics matter more or less in

influencing attention. Some observations (though only associative results), such as the competitive influence of peer performance, are useful to note and may have been impacted by the flat organisational structure of the research site (proposition 3a and 3b).

The attention allocation process, as discussed before, in terms of performance realisation, is central to the tenets of attention based theory (e.g. Ocasio, 1997). The theory speaks of attention as a resource but in looking at variation in attention activities as a performance explanation premise, it does not to date look at conditioning variables of attention. Strategic management studies have interfaced with biological and cognitive brain functions to dwell onto how decisions makers switch between exploration and exploitation (Laureiro-Martínez et al., 2015). Other studies also have confined themselves to attention as an explanatory variable with scope to dwell deeper into the nature of the unit of analysis (e.g. Blettner et al., 2015). This study has for the first time explored the antecedents of attention by evaluating: perceived top management ability, orientation and sanction, task situations, risk perceptions and also conditioning characteristics of the work environment. The unit of analysis is managerial activity configurations at the level of individual subordinate managers in a flat structural setting where the interface with performance and feedback thereof is kept in context.

Managerial activity as the unit of analysis, which is a key proponent of the activity based view, Nicolaj Sigglekow notes in concluding his 2011 paper:

"... see a lot of potential for progress in the area of how managers can create processes to manage the growth and development of their organizations. This research would encompass the notions of interdependencies among the choices that need to be resolved, while taking into account organizational design as one lever, among others, to influences and guide the process, all in the context of acknowledging the cognitive boundaries of all decision makers

involved". Later works by Sigglekow and others in this area have maintained the unit of analysis and interest at the level of the organisation, functional silos and even inter-firm linkages. The most recent article in this domain by Martignoni, Menon and Siggelkow (ahead of print-forthcoming, 2016) speaks of mis-specification of mental models, the situations managers face, and a 'cognitive' fit between managerial work and the strategic remit. They look at choice variables and also how complex the decision environment may become. This provides some support for the extended operationalization this study has looked at. I have contextualised the nature of task situations, risk contexts, top management orientation and also performance connotations in tandem to understand how managers give attention to their activity configuration and make changes. This includes drawing an understanding of balancing deviations with modifications for an ambidextrous orientation. The strategic fit of the mental models i.e. influencers and an antecedent of attention that shape decisions is subject to complex modelling and contexts that this study has captured.

Chapter 6. CONCLUSIONS

6.1. Reflections on managerial work

Managerial work that delivers to programming and executing the organisational system has its origins in the classical activity theory (e.g. Engeström, 1999). Porter and Siggelkow (2002, 2011) subsequently developed the idea of activity configurations. Important characteristics such as sanction, contradictions between different constituents, where contradictions become a source of change and evolution, started drawing research interest. This trajectory is central to the positioning of my work in activity based theory, and how it is associated with allocation of managerial attention and consequent behaviour.

The nature of inclusion of middle managerial feedback by the top management in scoping its' own understanding of performance may show how these contradictions arise. The process by which feedback is collated, recognised and fed-forward, is crucial. This also relates to aspirations managers have in context of their work situations and performance feedback. An ambidextrous approach is affected by how it is sanctioned, evaluated and how risk taking is encouraged. Sanction will at the onset be a function of the dispositions of top managers' themselves to experiment or not. Such a disposition will encourage middle managers although there is also a need to enhance practice towards ambidexterity by dedicated initiatives to examine what worked well and how. These initiatives will often focus more on practice during tumultuous task situations, but will more often take place during generally the next low tide or stable period. The likelihood of more ambidextrous disposition during tumultuous times rather than stable times can be something that varies from organization to organization. While the study tests for modifications / deviations it does not lose site of the fact that ambidexterity is about seeking both exploration and exploitation. This is clearly demonstrated in data collection. There is also the cautioning notion on the pursuit of

ambidexterity, from Lubatkin et al., (2006) and Gibson and Birkinshaw's (2004). Further research also suggests that pursuit of ambidexterity may be counterproductive if integrative pressures and demands on managerial capability are not kept in perspective (e.g. Kollman et al., 2009; Mei, et al, 2014; Heavey and Simsek, 2014). Integrative and capability issues are particularly amplified when time and/or resource constraints are relatively more pressing as in tumultuous task situations. The limitations of data being generated from a single organisation have been flagged but with the caveat that it does allow to control for organisation specific structural, cultural, experiential and market contexts, and so allowing a focus on the fundamental relationships of interest.

The study is limited in design for explicitly capturing downturns to performance when ambidexterity gets out of balance and creates integrative pressures that the organisation cannot cope with (Kollmann et al., 2009, 316; Liang et al., 2007). However, the study provides some cues for top management when it comes to influencing the nature of ambidextrous practice by subordinates. For instance, I find evidence that top management sanction is quite central to orienting ambidexterity at the middle managerial level. I also find support for top management's propensity to examine capabilities for ambidexterity, as selectivity in terms of which managers are encouraged or alternatively, not permitted to experiment. Further evidence rests in the concerns about integrative pressures associated with ambidexterity. It is apparent that past performance is a crucial determinant of selection of more capable individuals with licence to experiment. Findings suggest that deliberated interventions, where reflections on past modifications are initiated, are useful to enhance such capabilities. The role of top management's own demonstrative behaviour and its impact on middle management practice is supported by the findings as well.

In essence, there is always an expectation from middle managers to be able to modify activities for superior response to task-situations (Li et al., 2013; Zimmermann, Raisch and Birkinshaw, 2015). At the same time, top management seeks to control, support and orient such modifications. Putting it another way, top managers very confound themselves by desiring great outcomes, but denying the required support, in this specific context. This study provides explicit guidelines for top management in managing ambidexterity. This is an attempt to complement the bottom up approach of ambidexterity that recent research has argued. It is partly because the assumptions of senior or top management responsibility for managing ambidexterity have not been distilled to more precise assertions (Zimmermann et al., 2015).

From the perspective of controlling for the risk of bohemian or conformist biases at the individual manager's level, and seeking to enhance both at the same time, two highlights from suggestions for practice (table 1) are noted here: The first is inducing deliberated mechanisms that allow learning from modifications in activities during both, relatively stable and tumultuous times. This will make such modifications acceptable and also better informed, to prevent overtly 'convergent', or overtly 'divergent' tendencies (Benner and Tushman, 2003). The second is about managing the walk the talk orientation of the top management. While this is useful as a validation for sanction and scope of ambidexterity, it may also make it difficult for middle management to break away from top management roadmap and think more effectively about modifications in context of the specific task situations that they encounter.

6.2. Limitations

- One conceptual simplification has been to examine modifications and deviations in activities that managers do, but without distinguishing between modification in inter-relationship between activities or the content of activities themselves. The initial, memoing and also the pre-testing showed that this distinction was not operationalizable.

- Strategy research in general, and research that includes top management in particular, is typically characterized by difficult access and low number of respondents. This issue applies to this study also, but is partly reduced in its impact by the comprehensive access to the research site.

- The study is situated in the higher education industry and implications can be drawn for the same given nuances of administrative and managerial functioning across hierarchies. These are becoming ever more crucial given resourcing control and coordination issues in the industry where core professional spaces (that of academic knowledge workers) cannot be compromised beyond a point. The industry shares one common phenomenon with other industries – quite generic over the last two decades, that of multiple business models and organisational forms creating hybrids, as discussed in section 3.6.5.2. These are creating a fresh wave of arguments on strategy, structure and managerial role in context of professional organisations where professional autonomy becomes a crucial space to protect and draw value from. The value is also seen from an administrative control and coordination point of view which brings issue of routines based control into play making for a tough balancing act between administrative control and professional autonomy. As discussed, Heus itself shares the traits of a bureaucratic form despite being a professional services firm- a professional bureaucracy in a very typical sense (Mintzberg, 1979). This

arguably moderates the generalisability of the study in being confined to professional services firms on the one hand, but on the other, also implies the need to customise it to professional services firms as it would not always map on closely enough. Heus carves a space in this single case study context that has some implications for bureaucracies where administrative mangers seek to carefully (i.e. not overtly) control professional spaces, and divisional forms that bring standard practices into play for service delivery. The implications from this study can be taken forward but with careful contextualisation to the form and functioning of the organisation or industry. Generalisability is more diffused across traits of organisational types and in a limited since applies to the niche organisational type of professional services, and more so professional bureaucracies.

- The small number of respondents though comprehensive in relation to the research site makes for generally low levels of significance in inferential statistics deployed. However, comprehensive accessibility to the research site has made possible much deeper insights which draw upon qualitative data as well.

- It is also important to note that the study has been conducted with the researcher being in active employment at the research site and in the managerial cadre. However, while this does create a bias it has been controlled for by not including any of the respondents from the researcher's own campus (one of four sites of Heus) for main data collection. An important aspect to note is that qualitative comments, as is standard, but more important in this case, have been subjected to robust inter-rater reliability processes alongside themes for operationalisation.

- The window for data collection for the study was rather precise. This aided quick data collection (once permission was sought), and subsequently helped the speed with which the study could be brought to completion. It also impacted access to follow up

survey data. The main reason for the tight window for data collection was that an impending merger with another organization, could have quickly led to structural changes which would have meant that the data would have lost its rigour and accuracy.

6.3 Future research

Future research could investigate how the hypothesised practice interventions are viewed by top management across sectors and firms, both in terms of a fit with their organisational contexts and in context of implementation issues. The applicability of the conceptual framework introduced and validated in this study could do with more generalizability and empirical support from other sectors and more hierarchically disposed organisational structures.

Another strand of research, which I have already highlighted relates to the extent to which higher propensity to take risks, by managers, could yield superior performance. This is in acknowledgement of research on risk and performance, but in my view, this strand has not received due attention.

The study situates itself in the professional bureaucracies' context, at a time when austerity drive in the higher education sector, and mushrooming forms to balance structure and strategy are bringing administrative coordination and control to the fore. This in many ways comes in direct conflict with the professional autonomy space that is crucial for professional organisations. Academics as key knowledge workers seek to enhance performance beyond the foremost administrative parameters of returns to efficiency. Research in this area is something I would like to propose: how managerial – administrative spaces can deploy the ambidextrous orientation to support striking an effective balance between professional spaces

and managerial coordination. Business models and potentially managerial routines that can support this balance may find a useful search, consolidation and diffusion process through research.

Caveats and considerations about exogenous and endogenous factors shaping managerial work environment, may also be useful to unpack. This would contribute to a holistic understanding of middle managerial ambidexterity as a strategic capability, and as something that can be better influenced by top management. The study also has examined risk perceptions, but arguably falls short of explicitly and comprehensively dealing with distinctive risks that stem from ambidexterity itself. A case study approach or another appropriate research setting to examine such manifestations of risks i.e. in how they originated, and how they were successfully or unsuccessfully addressed, may add value to the mushrooming research in this area.

6.4 Reflections

Ongoing industry level dynamics have been quite motivating for the link I want to make between theory and practice for taking this study forward. My interface with top management at other business schools that fall in the competitive frame of reference for Hues has yielded further observations to validate the significance of areas central to this thesis. Specifically, the managerial attention to activities that they do, and of the role that an ambidextrous orientation (with caveats) can have in pursuit of superior performance. The idea of conformity in relation to resource sufficiency, pursuit of performance benchmarks and regulatory requirements is a given for most industries, and is no different for the global business education sector. However, this is by itself is at loggerheads with the mandate of distinctiveness, that is a driver to attract students from competitors.

Such distinctiveness is very important for visibility of superior value propositions, and by extension, superior competitive performance. Different strategic goals from *personalizing education*, *focusing on niche sector*s, *drawing partnership based synergies*, *focusing on research rich teaching*, among others, seem to be pursued, but without a complementary focus on *how* these will be supported. This is essentially from two perspectives, the first is that of managerial effectiveness and alignment with what they are expected to do, and what they actually do, given their understanding of top management orientation and performance goals at different levels. The second is the ability to be ambidextrous and the support for the same from top management. In essence, experimenting with distinctive ways of doing things from past repository of organizational and industry experience, and at the same time, also in complete breakthrough ways. The distinctiveness in managerial effectiveness for execution, where the goals that are easily adoptable is at the heart of achieving superior competitive performance.

Arguably, what needs to be done in terms of effective managerial execution is also a function of not keeping still but trying to work on exploration and exploitation on a continuing basis, as good / best practices are fickle in terms of the advantage they offer. Capability to continuously reinvent ways for superior execution effectiveness is something that has to be owned by top management, including their facilitation and orientation of subordinate managers' activities and practice. My study has emphasized this aspect to understand the relationships that matter for such effectiveness with two key stakeholders - top management and subordinate managers. The reflections for practice in context of my research site are generalizable to practice given such widely shared concerns about effective managerial practice based distinctiveness, to support easily mimicked strategic goals, often set with lesser regard for execution capabilities and their facilitation as plans are set in motion.

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Appendix A: Full *post* pre-test instrument

Managerial Activities and Practice at HUES

Thank you for taking part in this study. This data is being collected for research into managerial practice at HUES.

We refer primarily to managerial "activities" in this survey instrument.

Activities can be seen to comprise various tasks that you perform for planning, controlling, and decision making. They also include aspects like communication and networking among others. In essence, what you need to do, to fulfil expectations from your role.

<u>Profile Information</u>

Name (optional)	
Campus	
Designation	

Duration of experience:	
…of working at this campus (Years.Months, e.g. 2 years 11 months is noted as '2.11 ')	
…of working at HUES	
…of working in the Higher Education Sector	
…of working in the corporate environment outside the Higher Education Sector	

Disclaimer*:* Your identity will be kept confidential. Any email / other communication on this research data collection exercise will not be revealed to third parties.

1. Please indicate your agreement with the following statements

[Please mark an 'X' on the scale point that best approximates your response]

Statement *In my view .....*	**Strongly Agree**		**Strongly**		**Disagree**
1.1.....the *portfolio of activities* that I carry out in my role is much *customised* to what HUES requires, relative to being *generic* in terms of what it would be at a similar organisation (e.g. a direct competitor) in the sector.	1	2	3	4	5
1.2.....my *portfolio of activities* is much *customised* to what this HUES campus (where I work) requires, relative to being *generic* in terms of what a role such as mine would be at any other HUES Campus.	1	2	3	4	5
1.3.....my *portfolio of activities* does not require much modification to improve my contribution to the campus.	1	2	3	4	5
1.4.....I am expected to provide feedback on my experience of activities that I carry out.	1	2	3	4	5
1.5.... feedback on my experience of activities is taken forward for any changes made to my portfolio of activities.	1	2	3	4	5
1.6.....my feedback has been reflected in some strategic decisions made at the campus.	1	2	3	4	5

A statement of contemporary organisational <u>needs</u> at this HUES Campus from the Dean is as follows

<u>"We need to maintain our superior student satisfaction ratings and make sure that we keep ahead of the developments in the sector. These developments include e-learning innovations, and also, in class technology enabled delivery. While staying ahead on such macro -trajectories we have to also make sure that we do not lose track of our important value drivers. These are that of efficiency in administering courses, sourcing and retaining quality professors, and continuous innovation in content".</u>

2. If you were to add to this and/or, emphasise something as relatively more important, what would you say

2.1.To address organisational needs articulated by the campus Dean, do you think that…..

2.1.1… activities outside your portfolio will need modifications

[Please mark an 'X' on the scale point that best approximates your response]

Not at all				Very Significantly
1	2	3	4	5

Comments

(Which activities in particular, and why? OR why the activities are quite apt if that is the case)

2.1.2…activities that are in your portfolio will need modifications

[Please mark an 'X' on the scale point that best approximates your response]

Not at all				Very Significantly
1	2	3	4	5

Comments

(Which activities in particular, and why? OR why the activities are quite apt if that is the case)

2.2. To address organisational needs articulated by "your addition" above upfront in section 2, do you think that…..

2.2.1.… activities outside your portfolio will need modifications

[Please mark an 'X' on the scale point that best approximates your response]

Not at all				Very Significantly
1	2	3	4	5

Comments

(Which activities in particular, and why? OR why the activities are quite apt if that is the case)

2.2.2... activities that are in your portfolio will need modifications

[Please mark an 'X' on the scale point that best approximates your response]

Not at all				Very Significantly
1	2	3	4	5

Comments

(Which activities in particular, and why? OR why the activities are quite apt if that is the case)

3. Please indicate your agreement with the following statements [Please mark an 'X' on the scale point that best approximates your response]

Statement	Strongly Disagree				Strongly Agree
3.1. In my experience, activities that comprise my role - consume relatively different amounts of time.	1	2	3	4	5
3.2. In my experience, activities that comprise my role- demand relatively different levels of rigour (effort) in delivering them.	1	2	3	4	5
3.3. In my view, activities that comprise my role - draw relatively different levels of attention from the Dean.	1	2	3	4	5
3.4. I believe that effectively delivering to some activities that comprise *my role* - is relatively more important - when it comes to my own performance assessment (i.e. some are seen as more crucial than the others).	1	2	3	4	5
3.5. I believe that effectively delivering to some activities *across the campus* is relatively more important -when it comes to overall campus performance (i.e. some are more crucial than others).	1	2	3	4	5
3.6. There is a different set of activities that I have considered as 'relatively more important' than others for 3.4 and 3.5 above.	1	2	3	4	5
3.7. In my view, I have often gone beyond protocol activities to improvise when the situation has so demanded.	1	2	3	4	5

4. In your view communications from the Dean at your campus, usually …..

[Please mark an 'X' on the scale point that best approximates your response]

Statement	Strongly Disagree				Strongly Agree
4.1….reflect a need for alignment with prescribed activities that I am expected to do in my role.	1	2	3	4	5
4.2….reflect a need to enhance organisational performance without reference to prescribed activities.	1	2	3	4	5
4.3….reflect a need for experiment around prescribed activities.	1	2	3	4	5
4.4 …reflect an attempt to generate information about what has worked and what has not from prescribed activities.	1	2	3	4	5
4.5. …reflect an attempt to generate information about what changes to activity portfolios have worked.	1	2	3	4	5
4.6. …reflect an attempt to generate information about what changes to activity portfolios have NOT worked	1	2	3	4	5
4.7. ... reflect an attempt to generate information about 'why' these have worked.	1	2	3	4	5
4.8... reflect an attempt to generate information about 'why' these have 'NOT' worked.	1	2	3	4	5

If you would like to – please provide any qualifying comments for one or more of the responses above

5. Please rank order the following scenarios in their most likelihood of occurrence (1: most likely, 5 least likely).

THE SCENARIOS ARE RESPONSES by the campus Dean for the following situation:

"*Teaching evaluation of a professor has dipped below HUES thresholds for two successive runs to just over 3.5 in a core course. The professor has two prior teaching evaluations of about 4 before these two dips in evaluation. Student comments indicate a lack of enthusiasm in the instructor and outdated content. The professor has stable ratings within the HUES threshold on another course at the same programme level (MBA)".*

The campus Dean will….

Scenario	RANK Order (1: most likely / 5: least likely)
5.1...ask the professor to up their act pointing to feedback received, and tell them that they will be offered just one more run on the course unless the rating goes back to being at 4 or more.	
5.2…ask the professor to take a break from this course while continuing on the other where his/her ratings are holding for two runs at about '4' i.e. discontinue from the course.	
5.3….ask the professor to speak with the global lead for revision of materials and also discuss why the lack of enthusiasm has occurred - to suggest and emphasise how student perception about the course and instructor can be improved.	
5.4….speak to the students, and potentially middle management involved, to discuss the feedback issues before speaking with the professor as per 5.2.	
5.5….speak to the students, and potentially middle management involved to discus feedback issues before speaking with the professor as per 5.3.	

5.6. IF YOU WERE ASKED TO ADVISE THE CAMPUS DEAN ON THE ABOVE SCENARIO, assuming that you had only as much information as provided in the situation, what would you advise …(if you need more space wish to say more please use an additional sheet, marking it as 5.6)

5.7. To what extent would you say that YOUR campus Dean's response marked for the scenario predictable (i.e. more-o-less similar across such scenarios).

Of course this predictability assessment is *assuming* that considerations like how long the professor has been with the campus or HUES, and his or her international profile are not too different across scenarios ?

[Please mark an 'X' on the scale point that best approximates your response]

Not at all predictable – can vary a lot				Very predictable
1	2	3	4	5

5.8. In your view, how significantly different is your recommendation in 5.6 - from what would be a response from the campus Dean. [Please mark an 'X' on the scale point that best approximates your response]

Very Similar				Significantly different
1	2	3	4	5

If you would like to – please provide any qualifying comments for one or more of the responses above

6. **With reference to in the portfolio of activities that you carry out in your role**, to what extent have the following **influenced your thinking about** – 'what activities you should pay relatively more attention to'

[Please mark an 'X' on the scale point that best approximates your response]

Factors	INFLUENCE None Strong				
6.1. Performance of my peers at this campus	1	2	3	4	5
6.2. Performance of peers at other HUES campuses	1	2	3	4	5
6.3. Discussions with peers at this campus on carrying out different activities and experience thereof	1	2	3	4	5
6.4. Discussions with peers at other HUES campuses on carrying out different activities and experience thereof.	1	2	3	4	5
6.5. Your direct experience with activities in terms of their relative difficulty.	1	2	3	4	5
6.6. Your direct experience with activities in terms of their relative importance for your performance assessment.	1	2	3	4	5
6.7. Your interpretations of changes in the Higher Education Sector	1	2	3	4	5
6.8. Your interpretation of views expressed by students.	1	2	3	4	5
6.9. Your interpretations from discussions with teaching faculty.	1	2	3	4	5
6.10. Your interpretations communications to the management from the Dean.	1	2	3	4	5
6.11. Your interpretations of organisational wide communications from the Global HUES office.	1	2	3	4	5

If you would like to – please provide any qualifying comments for one or more of the responses above.

7. How likely are you to **modify the relative importance you give to different activities that comprise your role, as against what is prescribed for relative emphasis on different activities**? <u>Please respond in light of the assumptions stated below</u>. They may not be true in your specific case but please consider the mentioned context when responding. [Please mark an 'X' on the scale point that best approximates your response]

<u>ASSUMPTIONS</u>	LIKELIHOOD Low High				
7.1. When the Dean is fine with modification in emphasis (within the activity portfolios) as long as it works, i.e. treats outcomes as standard.	1	2	3	4	5
7.2. When the Dean is quite tolerant of such modifications in emphasis, i.e. gives reasonable space for managerial discretion.	1	2	3	4	5
7.3. When these *change in emphasis* improvisations that you have done in the past have generally worked well.	1	2	3	4	5
7.4. When *such* improvisations that you have done in the past have generally 'NOT' worked well.	1	2	3	4	5
7.5. When *such* improvisations by colleagues in similar task situations have generally worked well.	1	2	3	4	5
7.6 When *such* improvisations by colleagues in similar task situations have generally 'NOT' worked well.	1	2	3	4	5
7.7 When it is high pressure time, like say, beginning of term (or as may apply to your role)	1	2	3	4	5
7 .8. When it is difficult to asks peers for help and support	1	2	3	4	5

If you would like to – please provide any qualifying comments for one or more of the responses above

8. How likely are you to experiment **with new activities i.e., those outside the prescribed for your role, as against keeping within the remits of prescribed activities** ? Please respond in light of the assumptions stated below . They may not be true in your specific case but please consider the mentioned context when responding [Please mark an 'X' on the scale point that best approximates your response]

ASSUMPTIONS	LIKELIHOOD Low High				
8.1 When the Dean is fine with such experimentation as long as it works, i.e. treats outcomes as standard.	1	2	3	4	5
8.2 When the Dean encourages such experimentation, i.e. gives a lot of space for managerial discretion.	1	2	3	4	5
8.3 When such *breakout experimentation* that you have done in the past have generally worked well.	1	2	3	4	5
8.4 When such experimentation that you have done in the past have generally 'NOT' worked well.	1	2	3	4	5
8.5 When such experimentation by colleagues in similar task situations have generally worked well.	1	2	3	4	5
8.6 When experimentation by colleagues in similar task situations have generally 'NOT' worked well.	1	2	3	4	5
8.7 When it is high pressure times like beginning of term (or as may apply to your role)	1	2	3	4	5
8.8 When it is difficult to asks peers for help and support	1	2	3	4	5

If you would like to – please provide any qualifying comments for one or more of the responses above

Appendix B:

Spearman Correlations

(correlations above 0.36 significant at p<=0.05 level)

5.2	5.3	5.4	5.5	5.7	5.8	6.1	6.2	6.3	6.4	6.5	6.6	6.7	6.8	6.9	6.10	6.11	7.1	7.2	7.3	7.4	7.5	7.6	7.7	7.8	8.1	8.2	8.3	8.4	8.5	8.6	8.7	8.8
1.00																																
-0.44	1.00																															
-0.14	-0.28	1.00																														
-0.76	0.20	0.22	1.00																													
0.11	-0.07	0.60	0.11	1.00																												
0.22	-0.10	-0.55	-0.42	-0.42	1.00																											
0.24	-0.21	-0.12	-0.21	0.03	0.24	1.00																										
0.20	-0.18	-0.35	-0.24	-0.21	0.29	0.62	1.00																									
0.45	-0.43	-0.05	-0.35	-0.07	0.07	0.79	0.61	1.00																								
0.18	-0.14	-0.14	-0.05	-0.27	-0.13	0.29	0.42	0.54	1.00																							
0.26	-0.27	-0.06	-0.21	-0.25	-0.20	0.15	0.37	0.64	0.55	1.00																						
0.04	-0.18	-0.05	-0.15	-0.29	-0.23	0.12	0.55	0.41	0.26	0.71	1.00																					
0.19	-0.25	0.29	0.03	0.17	-0.55	0.01	0.17	0.29	0.27	0.42	0.59	1.00																				
0.41	-0.27	-0.13	-0.03	-0.13	-0.14	0.22	0.57	0.55	0.64	0.52	0.44	0.61	1.00																			
0.24	-0.48	0.40	0.05	0.14	-0.20	0.00	0.00	0.37	0.24	0.57	0.27	0.59	0.45	1.00																		
0.27	-0.11	0.27	-0.07	0.21	-0.03	0.38	-0.06	0.41	0.12	0.13	-0.09	0.02	0.13	0.35	1.00																	
0.28	-0.10	0.09	-0.19	0.28	-0.09	0.41	0.37	0.55	0.23	0.29	0.25	0.42	0.53	0.35	0.55	1.00																
0.02	0.11	-0.40	0.05	-0.12	-0.21	0.05	-0.02	0.21	0.10	0.19	0.23	0.40	0.30	0.06	-0.06	0.17	1.00															
-0.14	0.05	-0.46	0.12	-0.23	0.02	0.03	0.36	-0.02	0.20	0.03	0.28	0.37	0.42	-0.06	-0.57	-0.13	0.54	1.00														
0.22	-0.16	-0.29	-0.25	0.16	0.08	0.23	0.23	0.16	0.05	-0.02	0.26	0.34	0.22	-0.27	-0.32	0.11	0.43	0.60	1.00													
0.22	0.02	-0.22	-0.21	0.16	0.19	0.05	-0.19	0.18	-0.09	0.10	-0.07	0.25	0.07	0.20	0.16	0.29	0.40	0.05	0.31	1.00												
0.14	-0.18	-0.37	-0.21	-0.22	0.10	0.29	0.49	0.48	0.24	0.45	0.52	0.40	0.48	0.09	-0.39	0.19	0.43	0.54	0.71	0.26	1.00											
0.23	0.02	-0.06	-0.20	0.19	0.19	-0.07	-0.22	0.09	-0.20	0.02	-0.18	0.00	0.00	0.15	-0.04	0.19	0.20	-0.09	0.16	0.90	0.19	1.00										
0.25	-0.42	-0.13	-0.20	-0.25	0.02	0.09	0.52	0.25	0.11	0.39	0.69	0.58	0.53	0.23	-0.39	0.17	0.31	0.51	0.40	0.12	0.54	0.15	1.00									
-0.01	-0.22	0.16	0.13	-0.14	-0.23	-0.30	-0.24	0.07	0.13	0.46	0.35	0.58	0.22	0.43	-0.24	-0.05	0.40	0.21	0.21	0.22	0.47	0.38	0.46	1.00								
-0.26	-0.05	0.12	0.23	0.09	-0.30	-0.13	-0.07	-0.28	-0.27	-0.22	0.21	0.47	0.09	-0.09	-0.33	-0.14	0.42	0.59	0.47	-0.15	0.25	-0.19	0.45	0.31	1.00							
0.26	-0.48	0.39	0.03	0.37	-0.21	-0.10	-0.21	-0.18	-0.25	-0.17	-0.05	0.53	0.25	0.25	-0.03	0.03	0.06	0.12	0.31	0.13	-0.04	0.17	0.32	0.33	0.49	1.00						
-0.11	0.11	-0.23	0.26	-0.16	0.17	-0.04	0.12	-0.15	-0.10	-0.12	0.25	0.23	0.28	-0.14	0.02	0.34	0.45	0.40	0.33	0.21	0.15	0.09	0.41	0.10	0.29	0.26	1.00					
0.11	-0.09	0.35	-0.16	0.50	-0.12	-0.06	-0.44	-0.03	-0.23	-0.11	-0.21	0.27	-0.27	0.19	0.13	0.10	-0.04	-0.24	0.23	0.66	-0.02	0.62	-0.19	0.29	-0.06	0.25	-0.13	1.00				
0.24	-0.29	0.07	-0.22	0.17	-0.09	0.09	0.24	0.16	0.01	0.10	0.21	0.25	0.27	0.19	-0.39	0.12	0.04	0.39	0.47	-0.19	0.61	0.06	0.41	0.27	0.29	0.27	-0.19	-0.01	1.00			
-0.01	0.07	0.41	-0.02	0.24	-0.20	-0.27	-0.42	-0.20	-0.40	-0.10	-0.18	0.21	-0.29	0.20	-0.09	-0.05	-0.09	-0.23	-0.05	0.45	-0.13	0.66	-0.10	0.36	0.00	0.24	-0.13	0.83	0.06	1.00		
-0.12	0.03	0.05	0.29	-0.12	-0.10	-0.01	0.26	-0.16	-0.03	-0.15	0.26	0.36	0.42	-0.11	-0.07	0.19	0.03	0.24	0.20	0.23	-0.04	0.49	0.44	0.57	-0.19	0.15	-0.04	1.00				
-0.20	-0.22	0.65	0.40	0.40	-0.49	-0.22	-0.53	-0.17	-0.25	-0.07	0.03	0.43	-0.23	0.25	-0.02	-0.03	0.11	-0.09	0.14	0.17	0.00	0.19	-0.05	0.57	0.40	0.48	0.06	0.53	0.10	0.65	0.14	1.00

Appendix C:

Pre-test Instrument and Data notes from the initial run with subordinate managers

<div align="center">

PRETEST INSTRUMENT

Managerial Activities and Practice at HUES

</div>

Thank you for taking part in this study. This data is being collected for research into understanding how strategic orientation at HUES relates to managerial practice.

Your identity will be kept confidential. Any email / other communication on this research data collection exercise will not be revealed to third parties.

<div align="center">

Profile Information

</div>

Name (optional)	
Campus	
Designation	
Duration of experience:	
…of working at this campus (Years.Months, e.g. 2 years 4 months is noted as '2.4')	
…of working at HUES	
…of working in the Higher Education Sector	
…of working in the corporate environment outside the Higher Education Sector	

1. Please indicate your agreement with the following statements

[Please mark an 'X' on the scale point that best approximates your response]

Statement	Strongly Disagree				Strongly Agree
2.2. My current tasks portfolio is much customised to what this HUES campus (where I work) requires, relative to being rather generic in terms of what a role such as mine would be in *this higher education industry sector.*	1	2	3	4	5
2.3. My current tasks portfolio is much customised to what this HUES campus requires, relative to being rather generic in terms of what a role such as mine would be at *any other HUES Campus.*	1	2	3	4	5

2.4. The activities that I am 'expected to undertake' (prescribed for my role) do not require much modification to improve my contribution to the campus.	1	2	3	4	5
2.5. I am expected to provide feedback on my experience of activities that I carry out.	1	2	3	4	5
2.6. I believe that feedback on my experience of activities is taken forward for any changes made to the prescribed activity portfolio.	1	2	3	4	5
2.7. I believe that my feedback has been reflected in some strategic decisions made at the campus.	1	2	3	4	5

A statement of contemporary organisational <u>needs</u> at this HUES Campus from the Dean is as follows

"We need to maintain our superior student satisfaction ratings and make sure that we keep ahead of the developments in the sector. These developments include e-learning innovations, and also, in class technology enabled delivery. While staying ahead on such macro -trajectories we have to also make sure that we do not lose track of our important value drivers. These are that of efficiency in administering courses, sourcing and retaining quality professors, and continuous innovation in content".

3. If you were to add to this and/or, emphasise something as relative more important, what would you say (100 words max)

3.1. To address organisational needs articulated by the campus Dean, do you think that…..

2.1.1…overall, activities at the campus management need modifications

[Please mark an 'X' on the scale point that best approximates your response]

Not at all				Very Significantly
1	2	3	4	5

2.1.2…activities specifically in your task portfolio/role need modifications

[Please mark an 'X' on the scale point that best approximates your response]

Not at all				Very Significantly
1	2	3	4	5

2.2. To address organisational needs articulated by "your addition" above, do you think that…..

2.2.1.…overall, activities across the campus management need modifications

[Please mark an 'X' on the scale point that best approximates your response]

Not at all				Very Significantly
1	2	3	4	5

2.2.2.…activities specifically in your task portfolio/role need modifications

[Please mark an 'X' on the scale point that best approximates your response]

Not at all				Very Significantly
1	2	3	4	5

3. Please indicate your agreement with the following statements

[Please mark an 'X' on the scale point that best approximates your response]

Statement	Strongly Disagree				Strongly Agree
3.1. In my view I have often gone beyond set task activities to improvise when the situation has so demanded	1	2	3	4	5
3.2. I believe that such deviations have yielded positive results for the Campus	1	2	3	4	5
3.3 I believe that such improvisations have contributed to recognition of my managerial acumen in the organisation.	1	2	3	4	5
3.4. I believe that encouragement for improvisations is not overtly affected by the risk associated with them.	1	2	3	4	5
3.5. In my experience the peer environment is conducive for improvisations in activities to take place.	1	2	3	4	5

4. In your view communication from the Dean at your campus, usually …..

[Please mark an 'X' on the scale point that best approximates your response]

Statement	Strongly Disagree				Strongly Agree
4.1….reflects a need for alignment with prescribed activities that I am expected to do in my role.	1	2	3	4	5
4.2….reflects a need to enhance organisational performance without reference to prescribed activities.	1	2	3	4	5
4.3….reflects a need for improvisation around prescribed activities.	1	2	3	4	5
4.4 …reflects an attempt to generate information about what has worked and what has not from prescribed activities	1	2	3	4	5
4.5. …reflects an attempt to generate information about 'what/ which' improvisations have worked.	1	2	3	4	5
4.5. …reflects an attempt to generate information about 'what/ which' improvisations have NOT worked	1	2	3	4	5
4.6. ... reflects an attempt to generate information about 'why' improvisations have worked.	1	2	3	4	5
4.6. ... reflects an attempt to generate information about 'why' improvisations have NOT worked.	1	2	3	4	5
4.6….reflects an intention to encourage peer interactions for enhancing activities beyond their prescribed remits	1	2	3	4	5

5. Please rank order the following scenarios in their most likelihood of occurrence (1: most likely, 5 least likely). THE SCENARIOS ARE RESPONSES by the campus Dean for the following situation

Teaching evaluation of a professor has dipped below HUES thresholds for two successive runs to just over 3.5 in a core course. The professor has two prior teaching evaluations of about 4 before these two dips in evaluation. Student comments indicate a lack of enthusiasm in the instructor and outdated content. The professor has stable ratings within HUES threshold on another course at the same programme level (MBA) that he /she is doing.

The campus Dean will….

Scenario	Likelihood (1 most / 5 least)
5.1...ask the professor to up their act pointing to feedback received, and tell them that they will be offered just one more run on the course unless the rating go back to being at 4 or more.	

5.2…ask the professor to take a break from this course while continuing on the other where his/her ratings are holding for two runs at about '4' i.e. discontinue from the course under purview.	
5.3….ask the professor to speak with the global lead for revision of materials and also discuss why the lack of enthusiasm has occurred - to suggest and emphasise how this perception can be arrested in students.	
5.4….speak to the students, and potentially middle management involved to discus further the feedback issues before speaking with the professor as per 5.2.	
5.5….speak to the students, and potentially middle management involved to discus further the feedback issues before speaking with the professor as per 5.3.	

5.6. IF YOU WERE ASKED TO ADVISE THE CAMPUS DEAN ON THE ABOVE SECNARIO, assuming that you had only as much information as provided in the situation note here what would you advise …(100 words max)

_____

5.7. To what extent would you say that the campus Dean's response marked for the scenario is typical, <u>barring</u> some considerations on how long the professor has been with the campus or HUES, and his or her international profile?

[Please mark an 'X' on the scale point that best approximates your response]

Not at all typical – can vary a lot				Very typical
1	2	3	4	5

5.8. In your view, how significantly different is your recommendation in 5.6.from what would be a response from campus Dean.

[Please mark an 'X' on the scale point that best approximates your response]

Very Similar				Significantly different
1	2	3	4	5

6. In the x/y axes schema below, please mark how the"factor "mentioned on x axis *would influence* your "propensity to improvise beyond prescribed activities" for your role (Y axis). The first template is a sample. **THIS SAMPLE SHOWS**: In your perception an increase of 1 unit in the factor on X axis (i.e. what will always be the adjacent column give one unit increase on X axis) would yield a change of 2 unit increase in your propensity to improvise ($ to $$). The initial marker '$ ' is an approximation of how you perceive the to improvise' current level of 'propensity (on Y axis) to be affected by this 'factor' (on X axis)

Your propensity to improvise beyond prescribed activities for your role	1,10				5,10					10,10
				$$ (4,9)						
				$ (3,7)						
Y – axis										
					5,5					
	1,1									10,1

-----------------X axis-------------

Factor: SAMPLE factor for graphical demonstration

- as how it relates **now** to your propensity to improvise beyond prescribed activities in your role (that is the y axis) [Mark an $]
- as to how propensity to improvise on Y axis (higher or lower, in this sample it is higher) **would change if this factor was to increase by 1 unit** [Mark $$] .

Please mark $ and $$ respectively on each of the templates below. This is as re-iterated along with X axis labelling for the first of these factors in 6.1. "$"would be the initial marker as a status indicator of how you perceive the current level of propensity to improvise (Y) to be influenced by the factor on X axis in the as in the sample template. "$$" would then be a mark to indicate your perception of how the factor being enhanced /increased subjectively by one unit (IMPLYING say a small but noticeable intervention to enhance it, which we assume to be one unit) would affect propensity to improvise.

6.1. Your perception of the influence of sanction from campus dean on improvisation in

activities ….[Mark two points $ and then $$ at a suitable level in the adjacent column as explained]

Your propensity to improvise beyond prescribed activities for your role	1,10									10,10
Y – axis										
				5,5						
	1,1									10,1

⟶

-----------------X axis-------------

FACTOR: **PERCEIVED SANCTION FROM THE CAMPUS DEAN TO IMPROVISE**

[Mark $] to indicate s how sanction from the Campus Dean relates now to your propensity to improvise beyond prescribed activities in your role.

[Mark $$] as to how propensity to improvise would change if perceived sanction was to increase by 1 unit say, for example, through some increase in explicit communication encouraging improvisations .

Any additional comments for 6.1:

6.2. Your perception of the influence of recognition of such improvisations in your performance evaluation….[*Mark two points $ and then $$ at a suitable level in the adjacent column as explained in sample before*]

	1,10									10,10
Your propensity to improvise beyond prescribed activities for your role										
Y – axis										
				5,5						
	1,1									10,1

---------------→

----------------X axis-------------

FACTOR: **RECOGNITION OF SUCH IMPROVISATIONS IN PERFORMANCE EVALUATION.**

(Say by notes in your record/ annual evaluation that 'appreciate' this, as now $ and if this was to go up by 'some' extent coded as an increase of 1 on X axis '$$')

Any additional comments for 6.2 [OPTIONAL**- to explain what you see as comprising the small (assumed 1 unit) increase in X over existing levels, and /or, why this would impact Y to the extent labelled] :**

6.3. Your perception of the influence of recognition of such improvisations in your performance evaluation….[*Mark two points $ and then $$ at a suitable level in the adjacent column as explained in sample before*]

	1,10								10,10
Your propensity to improvise beyond prescribed activities for your role									
Y – axis									
				5,5					
	1,1								10,1

-----------------X axis-------------

FACTOR: **OUTCOMES OF SUCH IMPROVISATIONS IN TERMS OF HOW WELL THEY HAVE WORKED IN THE PAST IN YOUR DIRECT EXPERIENCE OF DOING SUCH IMPROVISATIONS.**

Any additional comments for 6.3 [OPTIONAL- to explain what you see as comprising the small (assumed 1 unit) increase in X over existing levels, and /or, why this would impact Y to the extent labelled] :

6.4. Your perception of the influence of recognition of such improvisations in your performance evaluation….[*Mark two points $ and then $$ at a suitable level in the adjacent column as explained in sample before*]

Your propensity to improvise beyond prescribed activities for your role	1,10										10,10
Y – axis											
					5,5						
	1,1										10,1

-----------------X axis-------------

FACTOR: **OUTCOMES OF SUCH IMPROVISATIONS IN TERMS OF HOW WELL THEY HAVE WORKED IN THE PAST IN YOUR OBSERVATION OF COLLEAGUES ENGAGING IN SUCH IMPROVISATIONS.**

Any additional comments for 6.4 [OPTIONAL- to explain what you see as comprising the small (assumed 1 unit) increase in X over existing levels, and /or, why this would impact Y to the extent labelled] :

6.5. Your perception of the influence of recognition of such improvisations in your performance evaluation….[*Mark two points $ and then $$ at a suitable level in the adjacent column as explained in sample before*]

Your propensity to improvise beyond prescribed activities for your role Y – axis	1,10									10,10
				5,5						
	1,1									10,1

----------------X axis-------------

FACTOR: **SUPPORT FOR DEVIATION IN 'NORMED' ACTIVITIES FROM PEERS**

(Say how positive are the vibes when you engage in such improvisations, and then, what if they were to improve – by what is a subjectively labelled 1 unit on X axis)

Any additional comments for 6.5 [OPTIONAL- to explain what you see as comprising the small (assumed 1 unit) increase in X over existing levels, and /or, why this would impact Y to the extent labelled] :

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6.6. Your perception of the influence of recognition of such improvisations in your performance evaluation….*[Mark two points $ and then $$ at a suitable level in the adjacent column as explained in sample before]*

		1,10										10,10
Your propensity to improvise beyond prescribed activities for your role												
Y – axis												
					5.5							
		1,1										10,1

-----------------X axis-------------

FACTOR: **STABILITY OF THE TASK ENVIRONMENT i.e. low pressure times**

For example, high pressure : beginning of term time ,

low pressure: non-term times

(OR as may apply for you given your specific role and associated task responsibilities)

Any additional comments for 6.6 [<u>OPTIONAL</u>**- to explain what you see as comprising the small (assumed 1 unit) increase in X over existing levels, and /or, why this would impact Y to the extent labelled] :**

6.7. Your perception of the influence of recognition of such improvisations in your performance evaluation….[*Mark two points $ and then $$ at a suitable level in the adjacent column as explained in sample before*]

Your propensity to improvise beyond prescribed activities for your role **Y – axis**	1,10										10,10
				5.5							
	1,1										10,1

-----------------→

-----------------X axis-------------

FACTOR: **EXPLICIT INITIATIVES AT CAMPUS/HUES-WIDE TO PROMOTE REFLECTIONS ON PAST EXPERIENCES FOR HOW TASK SITUATIONS WERE DEALT WITH**

Any additional comments for 6.7 [OPTIONAL- to explain what you see as comprising the small (assumed 1 unit) increase in X over existing levels, and /or, why this would impact Y to the extent labelled] :

6.8. Your perception of the influence of recognition of such improvisations in your performance evaluation….[*Mark two points $ and then $$ at a suitable level in the adjacent column as explained in sample before*]

Your propensity to improvise beyond prescribed activities for your role **Y – axis**	1,10									10,10
				5,5						
	1,1									10,1

-----------------X axis-------------

FACTOR: **CAMPUS DEAN'S 'LIKELIHOOD' TO BE EXPERIMENTAL IN HOW HE/SHE DOES THINGS**

Any additional comments for 6.8 [<u>OPTIONAL</u>- to explain what you see as comprising the small (assumed 1 unit) increase in X over existing levels, and /or, why this would impact Y to the extent labelled] :

6.9. Your perception of the influence of recognition of such improvisations in your performance evaluation….[*Mark two points $ and then $$ at a suitable level in the adjacent column as explained in sample before*]
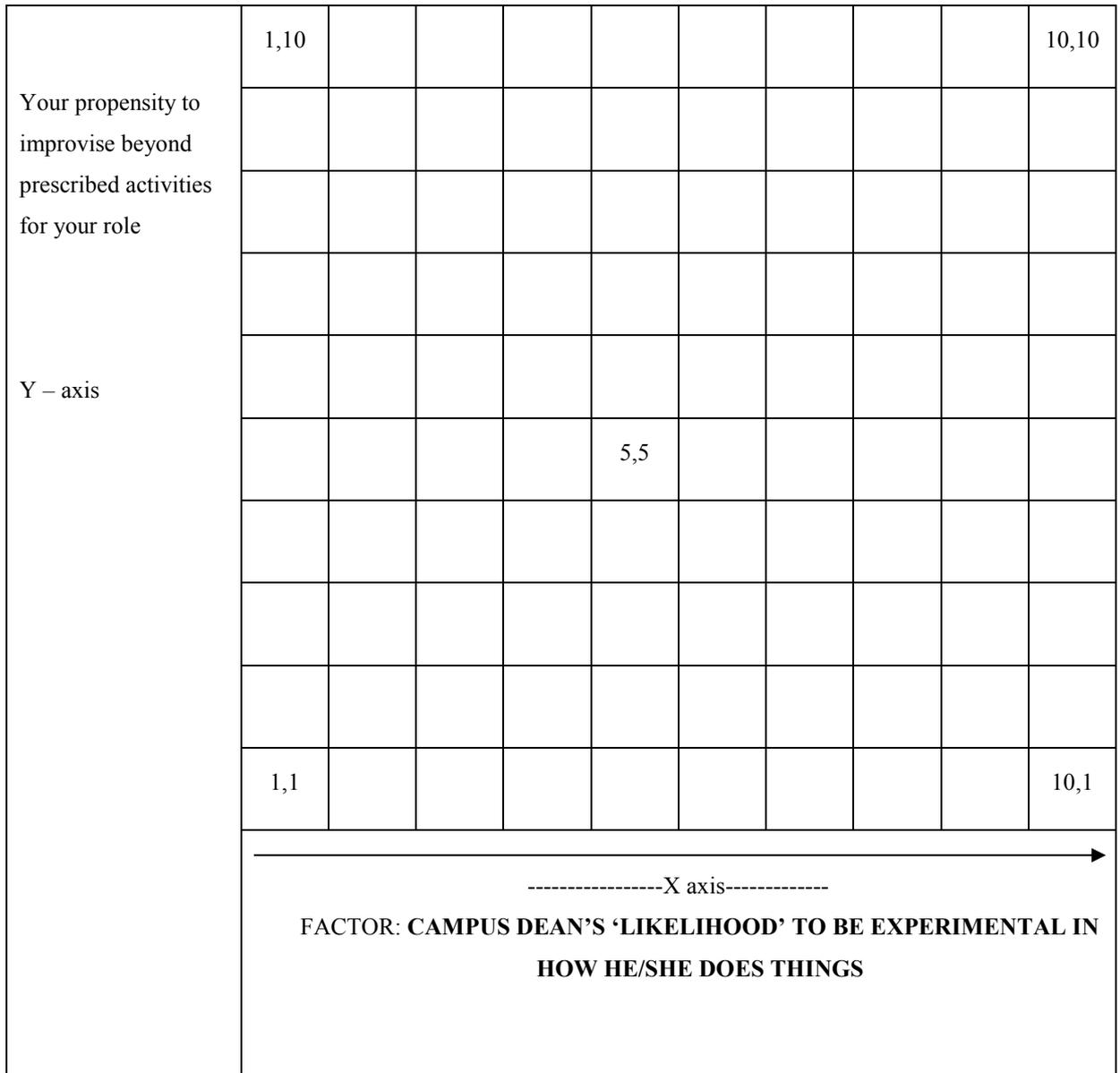
Your propensity to improvise beyond prescribed activities for your role	1,10									10,10
Y – axis										
					5,5					
	1,1									10,1

⟶

-----------------X axis-------------

FACTOR: **CAMPUS DEAN'S 'LIKELIHOOD' OF BEING EQUALLY DISPOSED TOWARDS EXPERIMENTATION DESPITE STABILITY OF THE TASK ENVIRONMENT AT CAMPUS AS A WHOLE**

For example, high pressure : beginning of term time ,

low pressure: non-term times

Any additional comments for 6.9 [OPTIONAL- to explain what you see as comprising the small (assumed 1 unit) increase in X over existing levels, and /or, why this would impact Y to the extent labelled] :

*The data collected through these questions is for research purposes only. In no instance will your name or identity be revealed. **PLEASE DO NOT BE CONSTRAINED BY THE SPACE PROVIDED BELOW EACH QUESTION AND EXPAND AS APPROPRIATE***

Data Notes from subordinate managers (selected 3)

Role – Designation: **Associate Dean**

Experience (number of years) in the role: 1.5

A

1. **Please list** some activities that you have carried out in response to specific situations **'that do not happen on a predictable basis'**. Potential examples of these situations will be: student complaint about an instructor which is 'not to do' with quality of the lectures or module organisation, students being aggressive with instructors, among others that you may feel to be representative of such situations?

    1. Student complaints about teaching or a professor require several actions and activities, including: meeting with the student(s) to identify the specific source of the complaint or problem; meeting with the professor (or tutor or TA) to understand another perspective; meeting with one or both to identify problems, issues and interests, and collaboratively agree a way forward

    2. Students who are not living up to their obligations in terms of e.g., ethical behaviour or teamwork, especially when this impacts on other students; action involves meeting with the student(s) involved, considering the evidence, and determining a course of action in line with established policies and governance.

    3. Scheduling, logistical or operational errors or omissions that require immediate corrective action; action involves focussing on customer service first, by finding, communicating and implementing an immediate solution of the highest quality possible, and then determining the root cause of the problem before identifying and putting in place a robust and lasting solution to prevent a recurrence.

    4. A student or colleague in distress or crisis, e.g., a family or personal issue, being taken suddenly ill or injured, or exhibiting emotional distress; action is immediate and responsive, and varies according to the nature of the problem and other resources available.

    5. Professors seeking advice on issues arising in the classroom, administrative matters, and so on.

2. Any code of conduct that exists for such a response- **please explain briefly in** your own words? If so, *then in your view*- is it more tacit (understood through verbal communication/orientation) than explicit (documented)?

    Guidance is available through the HUES Student Handbook, course syllabi and various policies available on shared network drives. Guidance is also available from colleagues in various positions and departments or, indeed, other campuses who may have specific knowledge or experience.

    However, although some tangible resources are available, much of the guidance is not explicit but is rather anecdotal – what people have done in the past and in similar situations. Whilst this is generally helpful, applicable advice and guidance, occasionally – particularly in situations that do not occur regularly – decisions may be based on outdated or abandoned guidelines that are no longer in use. This can be far more prevalent than imagined in a fast-moving organisation that is changing rapidly and does not have a deeply imbedded written culture or tradition.

    Updates, changes or revisions to accepted practice are often not well communicated; as well, new practices are often implemented without considering the "unintended consequences", resulting in additional challenges – often time-sensitive – that need to be dealt with urgently.

*   Overtime, **have you** adapted your response to around 'any code of conduct' type guideline that exists even if tacitly? Yes/ No - **Why**

I think this may be true. Many things about how we operate at HUES are not written down or codified in any way, it is "just the way we do it". This is probably not dissimilar from the way in which many organisations work, but is different from my experience in other universities.

I think this is so at HUES because we are still very much focussed on change (quite different from most universities) as part of the challenge to capture market share in a very competitive landscape. The culture is more in line with that of a start-up enterprise than that of a university, and I think this is why we tend to just get on with things; if something works well, we just continue doing it as generally accepted practice.

B

Please list some activities that you do 'on a day to day basis'. For instance, releasing grades to students; informing /organising with instructors on timetables; dealing with complaints about teaching; calling briefing meetings, among others, that you may feel to be representative of such routine activities?

- Discussing curriculum and courses with professors

- Discussing student issues with professors

- Responding to student questions, concerns and issues

- Reviewing course feedback and discussing with professors

- Dealing with complaints (from faculty and students)

- Planning upcoming curriculum

- Meeting with faculty members on numerous issues related to curriculum, student performance and administration

- Meeting with the Dean

- Confidential administration – e.g., preparing faculty contracts, liaising with Payroll on faculty pay, advising and assisting faculty with various administrative matters (e.g., travel claims)

- Organising key functions of the academic year, such as final examinations

- Troubleshooting

- Organising various activities that add value to the academic life cycle (e.g., Dean's Scholars)

- Organising and planning various administrative activities such as faculty meetings, programme planning meetings, and so on

How easy or cumbersome is the code of conduct for these activities in your view? Describe in your own words. For instance, do you have to often to look at a procedures handbook/ refer it other parties that relate to the activity?

I am able to draw on 25 years of experience in senior academic administration in carrying out many of these tasks, so many of my actions and decisions are based on an implicit understanding of what is required and how to work within parameters. However, policies invariably vary from one institution to another, so it is important to refer to various guidelines (e.g., the Student Academic Handbook) when advising a faculty member or student on a particular code of conduct, particularly if the issue is one that is not commonly handles.

There are few written administrative policies, and very little consultation when devising new policies, so there is sometimes confusion or differences in opinion of how certain things should be done. This can result in wasted time and having to re-do work again when something changes or a new policy is implemented.

Many HUES norms are discovered by accident or by making an error. Many of these discoveries are very small – for instance, faculty are only given the title "professor" when they teach a 3-credit course (I have no idea where that information rests!) – but others are more significant; for instance, the inclusion of undergraduate students in a postgraduate Action Project was not communicated until the very last minute, resulting in additional work and cost, "fire-fighting", and dissatisfied students. When the organisation was smaller, communication was easier and everyone knew what was happening; but the administrative "code of conduct" has not grown with the organisation, resulting in sometimes cumbersome repetition and redoing of work – which is at odds with an organisation that is nimble.

Narrate one instance where you think such an activity could have been done more diligently by yourself (i.e. was not executed as you would liked to), and the consequences in that instance on operations and your development. For instance, overall response of superiors (including to help salvage the situation), more training and mentoring, among others.

- Several key new changes were introduced leading up to the start of the Academic Year in 2013-14. These included a new operating team structure (changes in roles), last-minute additions to the curriculum, and a new policy on lateness. These 3 changes were all positive, and, taken on their own, would have easily been incorporated by the Academic Team. However, the cumulative effect of these three changes resulted in unintended consequences and a domino-effect impact on other activities.

  The decision to introduce an additional 2 courses to the curriculum was made by the central academic team late in the year, and was therefore "non-negotiable" in terms of whether or not the London campus would adopt them. The implications of the additions meant that academic schedules, planned well in advance by London, had little room to accommodate additional programmes; as well, because the information relayed from the central team was not completely clear and was incomplete, the capacity required to incorporate the additions was neither available nor sufficient, resulting in knock-on effects in terms of pedagogical logic and integrity and logistics.

  The changes to team structure were sensible and necessary, given other parameters, and are generally positive. However, the full impact of this change was not completely thought through, resulting in assumptions made around responsibility for various aspects of programme activity and a certain number of assumptions made that "things were being looked after".

  The implementation of a new policy on lateness was encouraged and enthusiastically supported by the team. In practice, it requires between 4 and 6 hours of staff time be dedicated every single day to physically monitoring all classrooms to manage late students. The initial understanding was that classroom monitoring would end after 2-3 weeks with occasional spot checks, but the reality has proven that door checks must continue.

  As noted above, any one of these changes could have been dealt with by a team that has proven itself to be flexible, adaptive and nimble; indeed, 2 of the 3 could have been incorporated with only minor upheaval. But the combination of all three at the time of the year that has the greatest draw on resources resulted in a plethora of unforeseen consequences. This was exacerbated by the influx of treble the number of late-arriving students, adding a further demand to already stretched resources.

The key factor in "tipping the balance" was, I believe, the introduction of two additions to the curriculum at virtually the last minute in terms of an academic year. Although the additions were well-intentioned, the process was not well-considered or clear in terms of impact, the explanation and communications were not clear, many key details were missing at the early planning stage and, above all, the people required to implement these new additions at the campus level were not involved in the early planning stages when some of the right questions could have been asked.

Had those key people been involved in the central decision-making process – Registrars, Assistant and Associate Deans – I believe that the implementation could and would have been significantly improved. However, the planning and communications needed to have taken place much earlier in the academic year – at least 12 months prior. Decisions to change curriculum need to be considered and consultative. HUES's business philosophy is refreshing and agile; however, what worked effectively for a start-up trying to break into the market will not continue to work effectively for a School that has grown exponentially and is now a serious player. Whilst we want to continue our nimble and responsive approach, this has to be tempered with the impact of hurried decisions on quality, resources and the people who have to deal with the consequences.

Since August, the stress levels of all members of the Academic Team have been incredibly high, mistakes have been made, and individuals have questioned their ability to continue at the pace demanded.

<u>C</u>

[IF YOU RELEVANT HAVE INDIRECT EXPERIENCE   FROM / CONVERSATIONS WITH COLLEGAUES AT OTHER SITE]

- Leading from your response <u>under section A</u> if you are able to – please reflect on the extent to which response *to non- routine activities* are relatively less or more bound by procedures **at other HUES sites**. You may choose to provide an example / conversation with a peer at such a site - that validates your view. You may want to draw a comparison with one or more site

- Leading from your response <u>under section B</u> if you are able to – please reflect on the extent to which response to less than optimal execution of *routine activities* is **different at other HUES sites**. You may choose to provide an example / conversation with a peer at such a site - that validates your view. You may want to draw a comparison with one or more site

The HUES London campus is generally nimble and proactive. Planning takes place much earlier in the academic cycle, scheduling and faculty are confirmed many months ahead of other campuses, and administrative details are completed in a timely manner.

Routine activities are organised according to various timetables and guidelines – the "Faculty GPS "and "Academic Playbook", for instance, outline key deliverables and timeframes. My "gut feeling" and anecdotal feedback lead me to believe that other campuses are driven solely by the timeframes outlined in these two documents, and do not always consider what it takes in preparatory work and tasks to deliver a product that is fully formed and as error-free as possible.

This could be for several reasons. Firstly, there seems to be a significant amount of "churn" in terms of staffing of key posts, and some of those individuals in key posts such as Associate Dean do not have a great deal of experience in similar roles on which they can draw; at this level, individuals need to be able to step back, look at the big picture, draw the map and then connect the dots, always starting with the end in mind. Without this ability to draw on programme development experience, there is little choice other than to follow the timelines outlined in the 2 documents above.

Secondly, the pace of change at HUES is fast and unrelenting. The two documents above provide a roadmap to make sure that the critical events are completed, whilst trying to carve time out of the day to deal with the unexpected and the unknown. Until there is a better system, these two documents provide a safe pathway to follow.

The data collected through these questions is for research purposes only. In no instance will your name or identity be revealed. ***PLEASE DO NOT BE CONSTRAINED BY THE SPACE PROVIDED BELOW EACH QUESTION AND EXPAND AS APPROPRIATE***

Role - Designation	Associate Registrar

Experience (number of years) in the role	1

A

- **Please list** some activities that you have carried out in response to specific situations **'that do not happen on a predictable basis'**. Potential examples of these situations will be: student complaint about an instructor which is 'not to do' with quality of the lectures or module organisation, students being aggressive with instructors, among others that you may feel to be representative of such situations?

Advised students who felt that they were addressed in a rude way when spoken to by the Professor who taught them. Feedback was provided by students on two occasions for different Professors. Both Professors were British and students felt that the tone used by the Professors came across in a rude way which they had never experienced before. For example, students felt that one Professor's emphasis on the way he spoke came across as though they were being spoken to as if they were children. The other Professor's tone came across as being offensive as he corrected the way in which students pronounced certain words. Students were advised that it may appear as if the Professors are coming across as being rude to them when in fact it could be a cultural difference which may take time adapting to.

Dealt with a troublesome student during the registration process who mentioned disturbing comments and as a result raised alarm bells. The student's behaviour became disruptive during lectures to fellow colleagues and Professors. The student did not inform their family that they were studying for a degree abroad. Additionally, the student bullied colleagues, borrowed money from some colleagues and did not have permanent accommodation. There was an incident where the student got into a physical altercation with another student which was quickly broken up. The student was portrayed as aggressive and threat to students and staff. The student was closely monitored by all members of staff and provided with extra care and assistance. The student was advised to visit a doctor and/or counsellor due to their erratic behaviour and comments. The student refused to see a doctor and/or counsellor. The student was later detained by the UKBA for providing false information in their visa application and had to be sent back to their home country. Once HUES was informed of this situation, the student was withdrawn from the program.

- Any code of conduct that exists for such a response- **please explain briefly in** your own words? If so, *then in your view*- is it more tacit (understood through verbal communication/orientation) than explicit (documented)?

Inappropriate student behaviour is a code of conduct violation that should not be tolerated. Such behaviour is disruptive to the learning environment of other students and also creates additional work for staff and management. It is tacit through verbal communication as well as being able to back up what is verbally communicated by having explicit documentation that can be referenced to in the Student Handbook for example.

I also feel that during the orientation of students it should be mentioned that unacceptable behaviour will not be tolerated and students should not at any time disrespect any member of staff, faculty, the student body or external visitor. Likewise staff will equally abide the same set of behavioural rules as stated in the code of conduct.

- Overtime, **have you** adapted your response to around 'any code of conduct' type guideline that exists even if tacitly? Yes/ No - **Why**

Yes, only when necessary. The reason being is that the code of conduct is a written guideline that explicitly states the rules and regulations students, staff and faculty must abide by. If such rules and regulations are violated then there are consequences that will follow and be applied accordingly.

For example, one scenario might be that there must not be intimate relationships between faculty and students. If there were to be such a situation then the faculty member could be accused of unfairly favouring the student with a higher grade or assisting the student with their assignments and exams. According to the code of conduct the repercussion of this scenario would result in the student and faculty member being expelled.

B

- **Please list** some activities that you do 'on a day to day basis'. For instance, releasing grades to students; informing /organising with instructors on timetables; dealing with complaints about teaching; calling briefing meetings, among others, that you may feel to be representative of such routine activities?

Activities include:
- Providing attendance rosters to Professors for each class throughout the academic year
- Releasing grades to students
- Liaising with Professors to organise and book in their teaching availability
- Invigilation of student exams
- Producing grade, attendance and matriculation reports as well as any other specific academic reports requested by staff locally and globally
- Completing education verification requests from external organisations for alumni students
- Assist Alumni Affairs team with data, reports and other various requests pertaining to alumni students
- Organisation and coordination of ensuring end of class surveys are sent out to students and completed with a high response rate
- Providing Professors with end of class survey feedback
- Prepare class schedule so prospective students can sit in on a class whilst they have a campus tour
- Arrange for class materials to be printed for Professors to use in class or uploaded to the online myCourses academic platform such as PowerPoint slides, exams, case studies, teaching notes for case studies, text book solution manuals, articles and other miscellaneous class preparation exercises
- Dealing and advising with student issues in relation to grades, class schedules, transcript requests, exams, course assignments, student letters (e.g. Proof of study, council tax, bank and visa letters), booking lecture rooms for student club/society meetings and staff events (i.e. guest speakers) and an array of many other queries.

- How easy or cumbersome is the code of conduct for these activities in your view? Describe in your own words. For instance, do you have to often to look at a procedures handbook/ refer it other parties that relate to the activity?

The code of conduct for each activity listed is straightforward and as a result a procedures handbook is not often referred. If a student were to challenge their grade, attendance or any other policy this is an example of when a procedures handbook such as the Student Handbook would be referred to. In order to resolve the issue at hand referring to the Student Handbook would provide a student with a concrete and a reliable explanation that would prevent further questioning with regard to the issue the student initially challenged. If necessary the reference to the Student Handbook may also be forwarded in an email to other parties that have to get involved to resolve the issue if it were to be escalated.

For instance, an explanation to a student challenging their grade or attendance would be to refer to the Student Handbook on the exact page which states the specific policy pertaining to grades and/or attendance.

- **Narrate** one instance where you think such an activity could have been done more diligently by yourself (i.e. was not executed as you would liked to), and the consequences in that instance on operations and your development. For instance, overall response of superiors (including to help salvage the situation), more training and mentoring, among others.

An activity that could have been done more diligently was ensuring that student classes, exams, quizzes and other extracurricular activities were all input into the student calendar on the myCourses academic platform. As this was not entered properly mistakes were made, however they were corrected immediately.

Consequences were that some events had to be rescheduled and students noticed the mistakes which made our department look unorganised and unprofessional. To make matters worse my superior had to justify the mistakes to students, apologised for the mistakes and took the blame for it on my behalf. My superior was not pleased with the whole situation and was extremely disappointed.

I was equally disappointed as I do not like to make mistakes. I should have been much more diligent, which would have prevented this from happening in the first place. To ensure this would not happen again my superior and I as well as another one of my colleagues had a meeting to discuss what went wrong and implemented a plan of action to avoid a relapse of the situation.

<u>**C**</u>

[IF YOU RELEVANT HAVE INDIRECT EXPERIENCE   FROM / CONVERSATIONS WITH COLLEGAUES AT OTHER SITE]

- Leading from your response <u>under section A</u> if you are able to – please reflect on the extent to which response *to non- routine activities* are relatively less or more bound by procedures **at other HUES sites**. You may choose to provide an example / conversation with a peer at such a site - that validates your view. You may want to draw a comparison with one or more site

Unacceptable student behaviour is one non-routine behaviour that is relatively bound by procedures at another HUES site based on a conversation with a peer. A student at another site was found to have an illness that endangered students. As the student tested positive for the illness it could have been transmitted to other students. Additionally, there were also legal ramifications in the country for the illness that the student was studying in. When such information was discovered the student was withdrawn from the program.

As mentioned in section A, action taken and the outcome achieved with this dilemma is similar, consistent and was bound with the procedure we faced when a student at our campus had unacceptable behaviour.

- Leading from your response <u>under section B</u> if you are able to – please reflect on the extent to which response to less than optimal execution of *routine activities* is **different at other HUES sites**. You may choose to provide an example / conversation with a peer at such a site - that validates your view. You may want to draw a comparison with one or more site

Routine activities which are different at other HUES sites with activities mentioned in section B is monitoring attendance. Unlike our HUES site, all other HUES sites do not currently have to take attendance as they are not monitored by external regulation bodies. At out HUES site attendance is mandatory and needs to be taken for accreditation and visa purposes.

From having discussed this issue with my colleagues from all other HUES sites is how this difference came to be known. In the near future however all other HUES sites will be required to take attendance.

Role – Designation: Associate Dean

Experience (number of years) in the role   3

<div align="center">

A

</div>

- **Please list** some activities that you have carried out in response to specific situations **'that do not happen on a predictable basis'**. Potential examples of these situations will be: student complaint about an instructor which is 'not to do' with quality of the lectures or module organisation, students being aggressive with instructors, among others that you may feel to be representative of such situations?

1. A student needs to withdraw due to family issues back home, or thinks he/she might need to withdraw // When the former happens, the student often leaves very quickly and so the normal withdrawal protocols – filling out the form and having it signed by various departments, including Visa Services if appropriate -- are not always met. Normally, a member of the academic team will have a brief discussion with the student about his or her options. These options could include going home for a brief period of time and then returning. If that were possible (perhaps the student is not 100% sure how sick the relative is, or how dire the family issue is),the academic team would work with faculty to make sure this student was able to make up work that she missed over the course of the 1.5-2 weeks she was out of school. If the student will be gone longer than that, it is difficult to make up the missed work, and so we would advise the student to come back next year. We would reassure the student that we would work with her to make sure she does not have any problems coming back next year. Another option is asking the student to be in touch while she is at home so that if anything changes, we can step in and try to assist from an academic perspective. In these situations, it is usually up to the academic staff to inform the student's team of the situation and then, possibly, support that team which now much operate with fewer people. In these last minute situations, it is often up to the staff member to inform the recruiter, finance and the visa team as well.

   Any code of conduct that exists for such a response- please explain briefly in your own words? If so, *then in your view-* **is it more tacit (understood through verbal communication/orientation) than explicit (documented)?** Regarding withdrawals, it is always best to get the student to follow protocol and fill out the withdrawal form. If that is not possible, however, it is tacitly understood that the staff members will be as supportive as possible, while keeping the door open to the student returning to HUES in the future.

2. Students being aggressive with staff // While most students are very respectful, some have a hard time controlling their emotions – especially when they are stressed out. This can lead to a student being rude or aggressive to a staff member. This is a difficult situation for a HUES employee, either teaching staff or administrative, to be a part of. HUES students are treated like customers, and sometimes come to feel that their opinion is the most important opinion. HUES cultivates this feeling from the time that the student begins the application. When the student is on campus, however, there are many times when "No" is the only answer because academic integrity must come first. This leads to some frustration. So not all students can go home whenever they want and still pass, not all students can get their grade changed quickly through appeal, etc. As mentioned, most students are respectful and accept the parameters of academic policy. They are ready to be a part of intensive MA program and find their own way through it. If these students are rude, they will come back to apologize. A few, however, internalize the "no" or the "Well, actually you have to do it like this…." and chafe at the lack of compromise. This can result in an

aggressive email or a verbal attack at the staff member's desk. This happens sometimes with students who are not used to accepting women's authority.

The actions that would follow are 1. If the staff member fears for his or her mental or physical safety, he or she can pass the matter on to another staff member to deal with. 2. If the staff member feels that the student is just being immature in how he is dealing with stress or an unwanted response, the staff member can ask the student into a quiet room, perhaps with another staff member present, and try to talk through the issue. It is wise to get someone to witness these discussions as often these aggressive students are also somewhat over-emotional. This taints their memory of their interactions with the staff person. A witness would be able to support the staff member in these situations, and also make sure the staff member is safe.

Any code of conduct that exists for such a response- please explain briefly in your own words? If so, *then in your view- is it more tacit (understood through verbal communication/orientation) than explicit (documented)?*

This is a tacit code of conduct. I think the first response should always be that the staff member needs to protect him or herself physically and emotionally. If the staff member is not in danger, the code of conduct is then to rise above the student's abuse by either not responding (passing it on to another member of staff for social probation review), responding briefly "I do not think you are acting professionally/appropriately" and then passing it on to another staff member for a potential social probation review, or by taking a deep breath and attempting to engage the student in a calm, professional discussion – ideally with a witness present.

3. Student with mental issues we are not aware of at the start of the program // Every year, HUES enrols students with ADHD, students who fall on the autism spectrum, students with serious anxiety, and students with other mental issues. Sometimes these issues are reported ahead of time. Often they are not. Often the students were on medication back home but cannot find that same medication or care in the UK. This makes it difficult for staff members to interact with these students in the proper way, and ensure that they students are supported in a way that gets them through the program with minimal stress.

Because we know that these mental issues can affect how someone reacts, I have started to ask student who display somewhat erratic behaviour in their interactions with me , "Is everything going ok at home? Are you finding anything difficult here in the UK? Is there anything you want us to know?" I would do the same if a team member or classmate reported strange behaviour – I would call the student in question down to see me to discuss the "background" and try to get to the bottom of the story in a respectful way. When we do find out that a student may need extra support, we would ask the student what we could do to make his or her experience better. This might mean suggesting counselling or support outside of school, or – upon receipt of proper documentation – allowing the student more time on tests and exams. Often it helps the student to just know someone is listening.

Sometimes students have such serious mental issues that we cannot help them. These issues can lead to absenteeism or abuse of other students and staff. If this happens, we would speak with the student, try to support him and give him perhaps one more chance to behave appropriately. If the abuse is serious – for example physical abuse – the student would be withdrawn from the program.

Any code of conduct that exists for such a response- please explain briefly in your own words? If so, *then in your view- is it more tacit (understood through verbal communication/orientation) than explicit (documented)?* This situation results in a tacit code of conduct - up to a point. Once we find out that a student does have a mental condition, though, there would be a more explicit code of conduct we should follow to assist that student through the program or through the withdrawal process.

4. Team members dating and then breaking up very badly, affecting the dynamic of their team // There are some situations where HUES needs to act humanely and colour outside the box. We had a situation once where a couple dated and broke up in a spectacular fashion. They absolutely could not work together, but they were on the same team. The academic team had a serious discussion about what to do, and in the end we decided to separate the two students. Luckily this issue happened at the beginning of a term, so there was no major disruption to team dynamics. Moving students like this is very rare, and somewhat risky, as the rumour mill will start churning and other students could make up stories to get out of bad team. But every day staff members are asked to make decisions using their best judgement and analysis of both sides of the situation.

Any code of conduct that exists for such a response- please explain briefly in your own words? If so, *then in your view*- is it more tacit (understood through verbal communication/orientation) than explicit (documented)? This is a tacit code of conduct. By moving a student to another team, we are actually breaking the team rules. We move the student anyway, however, because we know through experience that in this particular situation it is the best thing to do.

5. A student needs to transfer to another campus due to family issues // This is another problem the creeps up every now and then. Normally if a student wants to transfer before Module D, the answer is no. We have students who might be homesick during the first module, or who have buyer's remorse during the first module and they want to transfer. The answer to those students has to be "no". We cannot open those flood gates. We once had a student, however, who was allowed to transfer because his wife became pregnant (surely you wouldn't get pregnant that just to leave London!). That was the humane thing to do. There are other situations – for example a seriously ill parent – where it is appropriate to allow a student to transfer rather than withdraw. Along with making this decision, the staff member must think about how this move would affect the student body's trust in academic policy. When a student is allowed to do something that we have said "no" to before, communication is crucial. All staff members should know what the "script" is regarding this issue so that when they are approached by other students, they can talk about the issue appropriately. Often the "script" is simply "This was a very personal matter and I ask the you trust we would only make a decision like this if it was the humane thing to do. I'm sorry I cannot get into the detail with you as that would not be appropriate."

Any code of conduct that exists for such a response- please explain briefly in your own words? If so, *then in your view*- is it more tacit (understood through verbal communication/orientation) than explicit (documented)? Again, this is a tacit code of conduct. By allowing a student to transfer, we are actually breaking HUES rules. We allow this to happen anyway, however, because we know through experience that in this particular situation it is the best thing to do. The school is not a machine and has to react as humanely and rationally as possible while attempting to ensure academic integrity. It isn't always easy!

- Overtime, **have you** adapted your response to around 'any code of conduct' type guideline that exists even if tacitly? Yes/ No - **Why**

Yes, I think the longer you do the job, the easier it is to trust your instincts when it comes to making decisions that go against explicit guidelines. For example allowing a student to transfer or switch teams. These are risky decisions which are best avoided whenever possible, but I am much quicker to come to a decision now, and do not immediately discount it. Working in these types of situations naturally makes you a more flexible academic professional over time.

B

- **Please list** some activities that you do 'on a day to day basis'. For instance, releasing grades to students; informing /organising with instructors on timetables; dealing with complaints about teaching; calling briefing meetings, among others, that you may feel to be representative of such routine activities?

- o Scheduling tutorials

- o Responding to student queries regarding academic issues

- o Door check

- o Reaching out to students in the hallways

- o Solving customer service problems related to a class, professor or poor communication

- o Helping to solve logistical problems related to a schedule

- o Reaching out to students who are not doing well

- o Reaching out to students who are not attending

- o Thinking about ways to make the processes tighter for next year

- o Making teams/cohorts

- How easy or cumbersome is the code of conduct for these activities in your view? Describe in your own words. For instance, do you have to often to look at a procedures handbook/ refer it other parties that relate to the activity?

Generally I do not have to refer to the handbook to do these activities. My code of conduct boils down to three things: 1. Taking a moment to listen to my gut 2. thinking about what worked well in the past and trying to make it work even better today. 3. Thinking about what did not work well in the past and trying to make it work well today. 4. Asking for advice when I am uncertain // This becomes a little *less* true in the summer when we have resit exams, and when we have ASC cases. These tasks are more "rule" based. But generally I think on the London campus we try to be as practical as possible while maintaining academic integrity. This has kept us on the right side of the law in almost all situations.

- **Narrate** one instance where you think such an activity could have been done more diligently by yourself (i.e. was not executed as you would liked to), and the consequences in that instance on operations and your development. For instance, overall response of superiors (including to help salvage the situation), more training and mentoring, among others.

I have an example that merges a daily task with the challenges borne from working for a quickly growing institution. The EMBA program doubled this year, and we are trying to provide the same tutorial assistance to them (which they have asked for) as we provide to the other programs. We are working out the process as we go and so we have had to rely on tutors like Bill Ryan to be very flexible. Generally everything is going great, but some tweaks had to be made along the way regarding how we reach out to the EMBA students to inform them of the tutorials, which hours we offer, and how we prepare the tutors for working with students who are doing all of their learning in one weekend as opposed to over 10 weeks. Now that we have gone through this process once, it will much more smoothly organized next time.

C

[IF YOU RELEVANT HAVE INDIRECT EXPERIENCE FROM / CONVERSATIONS WITH COLLEGAUES AT OTHER SITE]

- Leading from your response <u>under section A</u> if you are able to – please reflect on the extent to which response *to non- routine activities* are relatively less or more bound by procedures **at other**

HUES sites. You may choose to provide an example / conversation with a peer at such a site - that validates your view. You may want to draw a comparison with one or more site

This is an interesting question. I would never use the word "Bound" in these situations. Each assistant Dean might handle these ad-hoc situations in a slightly different way, but I do not think any other Assistant Dean would feel like she did something wrong, or that she would need to change her response, if she found out another Assistant Dean was responding to these non-routine activities differently. Instead we simply appreciate learning how another AD responds on another campus. It's incredibly useful. We can then put that into our toolbox to help the students as effectively and efficiently as possible on our own campus. In addition, sometimes the responses on other campuses would not work in London, or what works in London would not work in Dubai, etc. etc. due to visa situations, or other campus-specific issue.

- Leading from your response under section B if you are able to – please reflect on the extent to which response to less than optimal execution of *routine activities* is **different at other HUES sites**. You may choose to provide an example / conversation with a peer at such a site - that validates your view. You may want to draw a comparison with one or more site

Not all campuses have the EMBA program, and not all campuses run the tutorials in the same way, so this is a difficult comparison to make. I think generally, because London has had all of the programs, other campuses are more willing to listen to our experience and apply our solutions to problems that arise over the course of the year.

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Appendix D:

Brief of a paper associated with the doctoral research:

prepared and under review during the course of the doctoral programme

TOP MANAGEMENT INFLUENCE & ASPIRATIONS OF EFFECTIVE AMBIDEXTERITY

Abstract

Top management influence on subordinates is often discussed in research that deals with managerial and organisational performance. Ambidexterity as a 'strategic' and 'capability contingent' opportunity to enhance and optimise both exploration and exploitation has also drawn significant attention in research. Recent research in the area has been concerned with the sufficiency, scope, and also, the appropriate level and nature of ambidexterity given integrative pressures on resources and capabilities. Bringing together the domains of top management influence and ambidexterity in managerial practice is argued as a gap in research in this paper.

How does top management influence the ambidextrous disposition of subordinate middle managers?-is the central question that this paper addresses. The paper takes variations in nature of task situations that managers' encounter as a mediating variable in examining this influence. Data in the paper comprises observation memos from top management meetings and qualitative comments from middle management personnel at a global business school. The paper makes a contribution by relating top management influence to ambidextrous orientation in subordinate managers, validating a conceptual framework it generates from extant research. Potential interventions by top management in context of the findings are hypothesized with caveats regarding generalisability.

Keywords: *Task situations, Ambidexterity, Top Management, Middle Management.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Managerial practice is influenced by several factors that shape conditions under which managers execute activities for desired outcomes. One of these factors is the influence that top management may have on the extent and nature of modifications managers make to the activities they do (Lubatkin, 2006; Gioia and Mehra, 1996; Schmitt Probst and Tushman, 2010). A mediation of top management influence is likely by nature of the task-situation i.e. in context of outcome severity, and associated time and /or resource constraints. These make a task situation relatively less, or alternatively, relatively more tumultuous (Lubatkin and Shrieves, 1986; Kinicki and Vecchio, 1994; Bakker and Demerouti, 2007).

A range of cultural, structural, experiential and also, industry and market related antecedents have been contextualised in numerous studies as underpinning the 'nature' of top management influence (e.g. Benner and Tushman, 2003; Li, Maggitti, Smith, Tesluk and Katila, 2013). The complexity in engaging these antecedents goes in tandem with the promise of enriching analyses. However, given that this paper deploys the case of a multi-campus business school with considerable homogeneity in such antecedents, and also limited scope in the data to examine these antecedents, the focus is on a controlled examination of: *How does top management influence the ambidextrous disposition of subordinate middle managers?* Co-evolutionary and organisation specific nature of these antecedents have been useful to control by virtue of data from a single organisation, albeit with some constraints on generalisability to managerial practice across sectors and contexts.

One generic way to think about managerial practice is the idea that managers attempt to create a consistent internal 'fit' that matches, or achieves a synthesis with their work environment. Managerial activities, that come together to comprise managerial practice, ideally in a mutually re-enforcing and symbiotic fashion, are central to this strived for 'fit' (Porter, 1996, p.70; Siggelkow, 2002). The achieving of the fit is subject also to managerial disposition to evaluate prescribe activities in terms of value enhancing deviations. If "learned and stable patterns of collective activities at the organisational level… modify an organisations' way of working…." (Pentland, et al., 2012, p. 1488) – then, managerial level configuration of activities are the micro building blocks of such organisational level functioning. By extension, orienting and influencing the strived for 'fit' and nature of modification across activities by managers, thus becomes crucial to the eventual shaping of how the organisation functions. It is thus an arena top management is likely to seek an influence on.

Examining top management influence in context of how it affects the propensity of middle managers to seek ambidexterity, encounters the notion of 'capability contingency' i.e. the ability to deal with integrative pressures such a pursuit of higher levels of both exploration and exploitation may bring (Kollmann, Kuckertz and Stöckmann, 2009). The outcome severity, time/and or resource constraint premises mentioned are taken to be manifested in high pressure or, alternatively, low pressure situations, as managers would typically describe such variations in their work environment (Marshall and Cooper, 1979; Osterman, 2013). In this paper, the relative dichotomy in task-situations   is depicted as being characterised by 'relatively tumultuous' versus 'relatively 'stable' conditions. These mediate the fundamental relationship of interest – top management's influence on middle managers' ambidextrous orientation.

2.   Ambidexterity in Managerial Practice

Managerial modifications to activities, both in their composition, and in scoping inter-relationships between them are informed by practice experience, and by performance feedback thereof. This could be, in say, giving relatively more importance to keeping close to guidelines and past ways of execution for some activities, and in contrast, executing others with more exploratory modifications. The nature of such modifications across activity sets will demonstrate ambidexterity at play i.e. balancing 'new possibilities' with 'past certainties' (March, 1991; Lubatkin et al., 2006). Ambidexterity is not considered to be a sine-qua-non for improved managerial or organisational performance. The complexity in integrating diversity with more certain approaches can be counterproductive (e.g. Kollman et al., 2009; Simsek, 2009; Mei, Laursen and Atuahene-Gima,2014). Top management's ability and influence to orient the right balance in terms of the integrative pressures managers' can cope with and the need to curtail resultant risks to performance becomes crucial from this perspective.

Performance feedback from modifications in activities has also been argued to impact aspects such as: perceptions about managers' own competence in delivering an activity; perceptions about activities that matter more for their own performance and; perceptions about sanction for deviations from organisational norms in responding to task situations (Wiseman and Gomez-Mejia, 1998). From a top management perspective, the way it influences managerial propensity to deviate from set norms or, in other words, from guideline templates for responding to task – situations, is crucial. This is for being able to affect the manner and extent to which such perceptions shape managerial work (Qiang et al., 2013, Hales, 1999; Dill, 1958). What remains less explored is how this influence can be designed to promote superior performance through imparting an appropriate and executable ambidextrous orientation (Lubatkin et al., 2006; Mei et al., 2014).

Lubatkin et al. (2006) have argued that ability to influence nature and scope of deviations from set ways of working is a very fundamental strategic capability. Continuing with March's (1991) seminal exploration – exploitation paradigm. They contend that superior performance levels are achieved when exploration (high deviation) and exploitation (low deviation - working to deliver based on past certainties) are both at their 'highest' (p. 664). Both should inform modifications to yield a performance enhancing orientation (Raisch, et al., 2009, Chang and Hughes, 2014, p.13). For instance, exploration by inducing novelty from outside organisational repository of experiences or by sheer creative impetuses, and exploitation by leveraging prior experiences of activities (including modifications made in the past) in the organisation - to reinforce strongly performing activities if not improve them further.

However, as noted before, this needs to be extended through to assertions in research that follows the seminal work by Lubatkin et al., (2009) and others like Gibson and Birkinshaw (2004). These take a cautious view to include integrative pressures and capability limitations that go hand in hand with pursuit of ambidexterity, and whether and how will it transpire into superior performance (e.g. Simsek, 2009; Kollmann et al., 2009 , Mei, et al., 2014). Such strong caveats to the benefits of ambidexterity in managerial practice make the need to examine influences on ambidexterity very topical.

3.   Influencing Managerial Practice
Extant research pitches the role of top management as fundamental to deriving value from managerial work: "there is no other group including the board of directors that has a greater potential for affecting the form and fate of an organization as the small group of senior executives [top management] residing at the

apex of an organisation" (Lubatkin, 2006, p.665-666). Prior work by Gioia and Mehra (1996) and by Schmitt, Probst and Tushman (2010) also recognise that there is a crucial 'sense making' and 'sense giving' role that top management plays in orienting and calibrating managerial work as a response to feedback from performance. In this conceptualisation sensemaking is the upward feedback realised and assimilated by top management to then orient strategic direction downwards, to guide managerial practice as a consequence i.e. sense giving. During the course of this cycle, top management feedback and feed forward can get disjointed from the individual managerial level sensemaking from performance feedback and its feed forward as sense giving from self-reflection. Influencing this alignment is also thus considered important for how top management influence can yield desired outcomes (Yukl, 2002; Ou et al., 2014).

However, and as aforementioned, there is no research that explicitly focuses on understanding top management behaviour that influences managerial ambidexterity. If guiding managerial practice were to include guiding the nature deviations from prescribed activities guidelines it becomes even more crucial. This is given notions about carefully managing the pursuit of ambidexterity- lest it create performance reversals if integrative pressures between exploration and exploitation are high, and associated capabilities to deliver to them not adequate (e.g. Simsek, 2009; Mei et al; 2014). The tension between exploration and exploitation and the ability to manage this tension is oft cited in research but also lost sight of when maximum exploration and maximum exploitation is seen as the goal. This is usually not achievable given the moderation by managerial and organisational capabilities, and time and resource constraints (O'Reilly and Tushman, 2008; March 1991). If top management behaviour has an impact: either in moving the exploration-exploitation frontier forward and/or in controlling progression to an unmanageable and risky level of both where integration becomes counterproductive it is surely a lever that needs research attention. Literature dealing with ambidexterity in practice notes quite explicitly: *"...beyond structural, contextual and leadership antecedents, behavioral antecedents arguably require examination"* (Chang and Hughes, 2014, p.13).

As per the discussion before, task-situations maybe 'stable' or alternatively 'tumultuous' in nature and thereby may affect how middle managers respond to and are influenced by top management. Such 'relative' deviance in conditions is widely recognised in extant research that deals with organisational behaviour and managerial response to discontinuities (e.g. Kwee et al., 2010; Schmitt et al., 2010). The reasons attributed to variation in conditions being endogenous, or exogenous, and also, a combination of both. The exogenous context can be captured as the extent of external 'environmental dynamism', where research notes that ambiguity in making 'choices under increased uncertainty' would make for relatively tumultuous conditions (Stieglitz, Knudsen and Becker, *Forthcoming*, p. 2). Endogenous context are more embedded in 'interests, power dependencies and capacity for action' and would potentially be a characteristic of the work environment that would make for more steady state perceptions tumultuous or stable situations that mangers' encounter (Greenwood and Hinnings, 1996, p. 1024). Irrespective of their origins the more task-situations are perceived as tumultuous the more will be the amplification in time and resource constraints (Burgelman, 1984). The perceptual polarity in task environment conditions and its consequences for shaping influences on managerial work are taken forward in this paper as a mediating variable.

4. **STUDY PROPOSITIONS**

Managers carry out a varied range of networked activities. One example of such an activity could be consultations in response to poor performance of service delivery personnel and may comprise activity prescriptions of involving a certain set and say a minimum number of colleagues to discuss and agree the appropriate response. Over time, the manager may involve a wider set of colleagues, or alternatively, seek fast tracking through a niche (tick-box) group of colleagues. In the first case it can be understood as an explorative modification. In contrast, in the latter case, it can be very standard, making consultations a legitimising requirement at best and modifications being essentially efficiency seeking and exploitative in orientation. The more varied such choices across the networked set of activities (some more explorative others more exploitative), the higher is the ambidexterity in managerial practice. For instance, a closely networked activity to the above would be organising training for personnel. While it could be clearly exploitative based on outcomes from consultation with modifications such as how the training is spaced out within the year using existing providers of such training, it could also be explorative where new providers are sought outside the prescribed ones and training is customised to new requirements rather than remain in pre-ordained categories under which they are to be delivered. If the activity of consultation is exploitative and efficiency seeking, and the activity of organising training is explorative the integrative pressures between the two will be more as against both following the same trajectory. Such integration

would be difficult and time consuming. On the other hand, a very widely explored consultative activity to produce a wealth of information then delivered through an exploitative orientation in training would waste organisational resources as well and/or again impose on time to fit the wealth of information on service delivery personnel needs into set silos of training categories and provider materials.

 Thus enhancing ambidexterity brings forth integrative pressures that would constitute a risk to performance (Kollmann, et al., 2009, p. 317). Such pressures can, in part, find a proxy in say time and/or resource pressures during tumultuous task situations. For middle managers to be able to experiment selectively and allow such variation in how they choose exploration and exploitation for working on the design of activities that they do, they will be looking for acceptability signals from top management (Morrison and Milliken, 2000; Heavey and Simsek, 2014). A demonstrative 'walk the talk' orientation will be a clear signal in terms of the top management's own propensity to selectively experiment (i.e. explore), more so if this is during tumultuous times.

Proposition 1a: Risk perceptions about ambidexterity will be affected by top management's own propensity to experiment selectively.

Proposition 1b: When the task situation is relatively more tumultuous it will enhance the impact of top management's own propensity to experiment selectively.

The nature of task-situations is crucial to keep in perspective beyond affecting the impact of top management's selective experimentation. This is because stability of task-situations also aligns with overall environmental stability that characterises an organisation; more tumultuous the situation, more is the need for upfront – for out of box thinking, because pre-ordained activities may not align seamlessly with requirements of response. Research on environmental volatility that impact organisations explicitly evaluates costs and benefits of flexibility in managerial subscription to activities, also suggesting that time and resource constraints are amplified in such situations (Dutton and Jackson, 1987).

Performance by extension is likely to be seen as more threatened in tumultuous times. Therefore, top management mandate for middle management is also likely to be about executing activities in close alignment with strategic impetuses devised at the top (Christensen et al., 2014). These impetuses will curtail integrative pressures and slippages due to middle managers striving for a high level of ambidexterity i.e., a very varied explorative and exploitative orientation in activities.

Proposition 2: Relatively higher tumultuousness in task situations will reduce the sanction imparted by top management for an ambidextrous orientation in managerial practice.

There is likely to be a repository of responses in organisational memory to draw upon for potential modifications in activities. This is the resource that supports exploitation based modifications, while it may itself comprise of both exploitation and exploration led 'prior' modifications (Kor and Mesko, 2013). Such validation of modifications and the nature of modifications across networked activities will have greater scope to moderate risk concerns.   Shaping adaptive response in context of risk concerns is a capability to hone when it comes to the mandate of an 'ambidextrous' orientation also implied in research that does not engage explicitly with downsides of pursuing ambidexterity (e.g. Kraatz, 1998; Levinthal and March, 2003; Smith and Tushman, 2005; Lubatkin, 2006). Looking inside organisational memory to 'construct' suitable adaptive responses will enhance the ability to be ambidextrous (Edmondson et al., 2001). Organisational processes that work on diagnosis for supporting and rationalising modifications to activities may instil greater confidence in middle management, for undertaking modifications. This then comes across as an informed analytical choice between exploration and exploitation rather than as more of a manifestation of individual dispositions and biases.

Proposition 3a: Initiatives that promote reflection on prior modifications in activities will reduce risk perceptions about future modification.

The time and resources for such initiatives will be a function of how much 'slack' is there to commit to them (Richtnér, Ahlström and Goffin, 2014; Mom, Fourné and Jansen, 2015). Clearly such slack is likely to be less during tumultuous times. Also the modifications made during tumultuous time that relate to both

success and failure are likely to be more embedded in managerial memory (Ocasio, 2011) - thus acquiring stronger attention in reflections during such initiatives.

Proposition 3b: *Deliberated initiatives to reflect on modifications are likely to give more attention to modifications made during relatively more tumultuous times.*

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Insert Figure 1 about here

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DATA & METHOD

Data from qualitative comments from middle level managers and observation memos from top management meetings at federated multi campus business school pseudo named *Heus*, *is* used to examine propositions. The structure of *Heus* is rather flat and allows for two broad classifications. Under the site top management, there is a thin layer of non hierarchal associate and assistant deans that comprises its middle management. It is an autonomous business school, and at the time of data collection clearly outside the conventional university system. Managerial roles are confined to this set of administrators in the structure comprising dean, associate and assistant deans.

About 25% of the organisation's middle managerial cadre comprise the study sample. 75% of the top management comprise the observation memos data across meetings over a three month period. The actual number of respondents is low overall and particularly for top management. No site specific attribution for relatively superior or inferior performance is intended at this event, agreed conditions of access required that the paper also does not seek to do so. Qualitative data comprises observations (top management meetings) and comments (middle management) related to : (1) *perceptions and behaviours with regards propensity to experiment with prescribed activity sets in middle managers*. The middle manager comments also related to (2) *what influenced such propensity during stable versus tumultuous times?* Views on the (3) *prevalence and impact of initiatives that examine past modifications* were also elicited. Top management meeting observations focussed more specifically on views were drawn in relation to their (1) *own propensity to experiment* and, (2) *performance concerns related to activity modifications*. The data were tabulated to view responses from middle management and meeting observations in terms of their alignment within the two categories of top management and middle management, and also the alignment between the two categories (Duriau et al., 2007). I use representative comments (C1 TO C16) in structuring findings and discussion that follow. I also note overall trends across respondent categories with respect to the aforementioned numbered themes on which responses were elicited.

5. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Data from discussions with middle management showed a variation in how flexibility in routine activities is perceived across the sites.

C1 *Adapted responses around code of conduct* [comprising activities] *are accepted, it is just the way it s done.* [middle management].

C2 *Code of conduct is recognised and adhered to clearly in any discussions about how things were done-being in line with the given process is important.* [middle management].

C3 *Generally one does not have to refer to the handbook to do these activities. Code of conduct could boil down to three things: 1. Taking a moment to listen to one's gut 2. Thinking about what worked well in the past and trying to make it work even better today. 3. Thinking about what did not work well in the past and trying to make it work well today. 4. Asking for advice when uncertain. The top management would and does support this approach and more so when situations are not typical* [middle management].

Perception from middle management personnel mapped on to the memo observations from top management at their sites. For instance, the first response (C1) above met with a corollary observation:

C4 *Things are done in relation to the situation. the code of conduct is not primary but at best supporting as a tool to possibly prevent completely erratic behaviour, and help thinking about work* [top management: memo note/ observation].

A corresponding observation to the third middle management response (C3):

C5 *Guidelines are not strait jackets and it is important to not ignore any good suggestions more severe the situation the more important it is work one's own instincts in* [top management: memo note/ observation].

The map on between observations from memos and the middle management provides **support for the proposition 1a**: Risk perceptions about ambidexterity will be affected by top management's own propensity to experiment selectively. Top management's own practice in relatively tumultuous times and the propensity to work on modifications outside guidelines (C3-C5) seems to also **provide support for Proposition 1b:** When the task situation is relatively more tumultuous it will enhance the impact of top management's own propensity to experiment selectively.

Top management's 'walk the talk' orientation with regards modification in or conformance with activities that they do is closely shared by the middle management. There is also an indication of selectivity in contrast to what could have been a more generalised sanction for deviations in managerial activities.

C6 *there are people who would improvise more around set activities they have to do and then there are those who would not. In my experience the latter in turn then go ahead and try overt experimentation without consultation when there is a new situation that has to be played by the ear* [tumultuous times, discontinuity]. *They take their exploration license and put it all on one side. People who improvise in both situations I feel are more balanced I would be keen ...confident with them to shoot off the hip in a crisis situation – they will not overdo it, their freedom to indulge is more spaced out. I make it clear to individuals who I expect to consult with me more given this .....what you may call my classification"* [top management: memo note /observation]This view was shared to a good degree as per other notes in meeting observations

C7 *Not everyone can be allowed to come onto the freeway, some have done well and when it works it is good* [top management observation].

Memos from top management meetings also seemed to outline some expectations in this context :

C8 *Being apprised and consulted even if briefly is something that is expected and broad guidelines from the top management are essential* [top management: memo note/ observation].

These were important assertions to note for when activity modification is likely to be considered favourably, but also seen to be risky. It also seemed that the top management becomes selective of task situations and also of people associated in handling it for sanctioning modifications. This provides some support for the **second proposition**: Relatively higher tumultuousness in task situations will reduce the sanction imparted by top management for an ambidextrous orientation in managerial practice. Flexibility comes with the caveat of how outcomes from deviation to norm (prescribed activities) are treated. Managerial comments on this front are indicate a low tolerance for poor performance when it comes to stable times, providing support for the second proposition with respect to stable times as well.

C9 *There is very little scope to make mistakes when improvisation is done whilst it is not required, the reason is that it may conflict with existing way of working and needs to be driven down and understood and consumes* time [middle management] .

C10 *Poor results and mistakes in what should work seamlessly are viewed rather stringently. When a way to work at things differently provides strong results on efficiency the recognition is immediate as well* [middle management].

C11 *Outcomes are important and there is encouragement to experiment. We would not do it unless it was well thought out and discussed though, especially for what one should be doing in sleep (automated).*

There are enough improvisation opportunities anyway. One cannot start tinkering with everything " [middle management].

The link between validation and sanction is based more on who have a more balanced approach than who provide a stronger case for making modifications. In stable times there seems to be an adage of 'reasonableness' in nature and scope of deviations from ways of working. Discussions also show an interest in capturing modifications over time- indicating that support from past modifications does matter in delivering 'reasonableness' as against just a strong case (i.e. a case with low support from past experiences) for making the modifications. Retrospective analysis seems to be crucial as against 'only' prospective venturing for breakaway modifications.

C12 *There are surprises in the way top management organises themes for surprise breakouts and handles his interaction like with say recruitment agents. More often than not it is apparent that some of these are just trial and error based attempts to see if something works. Sharing such experiences converges upwards into these away weeks* [middle management].

It seems that deliberated interventions that encourage learning and feedback by the top management are conducted in more stable times. However, review of tumultuous task-situations and handling them seemed to be of keen interest during such site based breakouts and review events.

C13 *Top management works under tremendous time pressures and the way of working is rather structured. Taking take suggestions and then discuss with the staff during in low tide* [stable times] *is useful. Formal introduction of revisions is vital so that people know what suggestions are up to the mark*]. *However in high tide* [tumultuous times] *there is no choice but to act quickly, calling up top management to discuss is good practice, they can help even if they do not have all answers* [[top management: memo note/ observation].

C14 *If one cannot anticipate most disruptions – at least most of them, it is basically lack of astuteness and performance. When a professor comes to loggerheads with a student on the conduct of either this is something that in most cases can be seen and controlled for by initial feedback- before the situation comes to head. One can initiate a lot of such conversations at the first sign of what may become a big problem. Trying to find ways later is of course not a challenge to revel in but a problem in work is done, anticipating the 'what if' is crucial.* [middle management]

Tumultuous task-situations in the first instance were also seen as a failure of learning - for them to appear as a disruption, or for time and resource constraints to seem overbearing. That the top management seemed to draw on past modifications– primarily to validate the risk taken in activity modifications there is support for **proposition 3a:** Initiatives that promote reflection on prior modifications in activities will reduce risk perceptions about future modification. It also seems that validation through deliberated reflections is crucial.

C15 *Any novelty in ways of working respond to say a crisis as far as possible should be moved through the top management- experience and confidence both help "* [middle management personnel]

The sanction from top management to respond in novel ways during tumultuous task situations seemed to be useful for middle management. Reflections on modifications referred overtly to those that come into light because of failing or succeeding to respond to tumultuous task situations. There was an expectation of guidance and hand-holding for modification in activities during trying times but at the same time these seem to draw much more attention for reflections post practice. This provides support for **proposition 3b:** Deliberated initiatives to reflect on modifications are likely to give more attention to modifications made during relatively more tumultuous times.

Expectations from the top management included their own ability to act judiciously 'at their own levels'. Seeking sanction during trying times also seems to make for an additional burden for an already under pressure top management during tumultuous times.

C16 *Results are paramount if something has to be done off the cuff. A call needs to be made, cautious maybe but cyclical consultations overall cause more harm than a chance that managers are able to respond judiciously and innovatively at their own levels* [top management: memo note/ observation]

These responses provide further evidence to support the third set of proposition and point in the direction of more careful orchestration of deliberated top management interventions to validate and support activity modifications. Top management expectations for middle managers – to be able to negotiate discontinuous task situations 'intelligibly' and middle management requirement for 'clear sanction' and 'hand holding' for modifications need to be in sync.

Ambidexterity as a key capability top management aspire for in their middle management may benefit from such careful orchestration. Table 1 below captures interpretations from findings in a succinct manner, highlighting key characteristics that in turn provide a basis for suggestions for practice articulated thereafter in the table. These are labelled hypothesized intervention suggestions 'potential interventions' (PI) as they are in context of findings supporting propositions and associated observations made from this single federated organisation. However, their applicability can be explored for the higher education sector and for professional service sector firms that have flat hierarchies similar to *Heus*. As per profile description, *Heus* has characteristics of both.

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Insert Table 1 about here

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6.   CONCLUSIONS : CONTRIBUTIONS AND LIMITATIONS

In this paper a contribution has been made to research that deals with influences on ambidexterity. This is by providing an understanding of how top management influence can orient ambidexterity in middle managements approach to the activities it carries out. The nature of task situations as a mediating influence is supported. This also indicate that top management's influence on ambidextrous practice will be mediated by the work environment pressures. This also aligns with the cautioning notion on pursuit of ambidexterity that has come forth in quick follow through to Lubatkin et al., (2006) and Gibson and Birkinshaw's (2004) seminal works on ambidexterity in managerial practice. Such research suggests that pursuit of ambidexterity may be counterproductive if integrative pressures and demands on managerial capability are not kept in perspective (e.g. Kollman et al., 2009; Mei, et al, 2014; Heavey and Simsek, 2014). Integrative and capability issues are particularly amplified when time and/or resource constraints are relatively more pressing as in tumultuous task situations.

The limitations of data being generated from a single organisation have been flagged at the onset but with the caveat that it does allow to control for organisation specific structural, cultural, experiential and market contexts- thereby allowing a focus on the fundamental relationships of interest (figure 1). As mentioned, in introducing table 1, generalisability limitations in this single case study design would make suggestions about practice intervention more conducive for top management in the higher education sector, and also, professional service firms with a flat structure. These would benefit from further research to refine and test their applicability across sectors and firm contexts.

The study is limited by design and by data for explicitly capturing downturns to performance when ambidexterity gets out of balance and creates integrative pressures that the organisation cannot cope with (Kollmann et al., 2009, 316; Liang et al., 2007). However, the study provides some cues for top management when it comes to influencing the nature of ambidextrous practice by subordinates.

For instance, I find evidence that top management sanction is quite central to orienting ambidexterity at the middle managerial level. I also find support for top management's propensity to examine capabilities for ambidexterity, as is manifested in evidence for it encouraging selective practice by some managers and not others. This aligns with concerns about integrative pressures that come with enhancement in ambidexterity - making past performance a crucial indicator of such selection of more capable individuals with a licence to be more ambidextrous than others. Findings suggest that deliberated interventions where

reflections on past modifications are initiated are a useful to enhance such capabilities based on learning from past ambidextrous practice in the organisation. Role of top management's own demonstrative behaviour and its impact on middle management practice is supported as well indicating that these could be designed to desired impact.

In essence, there is always an expectation from middle managers to be able to modify activities for superior response to task-situations (Li et al., 2013; Zimmermann, Raisch and Birkinshaw, 2015). At the same time, top management seeks to control, support and orient such modifications; this paper has worked towards providing a more explicit role description for top management in managing ambidexterity. The study thus complements the focus on bottom up approach to ambidexterity that recent research has argued, and partly because the assumptions of senior or top management responsibility for managing ambidexterity have not been distilled to more precise assertions (Zimmermann et al., 2015).

From the perspective of controlling for the risk of bohemian or conformist biases at the individual manager's level, and seeking to enhance both at the same time, two highlights from suggestions for practice as 'hypothesised potential interventions' (table 1) maybe noted. The first is inducing deliberated mechanisms that allow learning from modifications in activities during both relatively stable and relatively tumultuous times. This will make such modifications acceptable and also better informed, to prevent overtly 'convergent', or overtly 'divergent' tendencies (Benner and Tushman, 2003). The second is about 'managing' the 'walk the talk' orientation of the top management. While this is useful as a validation for sanction and scope of ambidexterity, it may also make it difficult for middle management to break-away from the top management roadmap and think more effectively about modifications in context of specific task situations that they encounter.

7. SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could investigate how the hypothesised practice interventions are viewed by top management across sectors and firms, both in terms of a fit with their organisational contexts and in context of implementation issues. The applicability of the conceptual framework introduced and validated in construct more so than in terms of generalisability also could do with empirical support from other sectors. Resulting caveats and considerations about exogenous and endogenous factors shaping managerial work environment noted upfront, may also be useful to unpack for a holistic understanding of middle managerial ambidexterity as a strategic capability, and as a domain that can be better influenced by top management.

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Appendix E:

Snap shots from Playbooks at Hues: *A view of activities and their evolving interface (anonymised time frames and participants)*

Process/Item	Lead	Action	Timeframe
Request feedback from student association reps	Asst. Dean	This should be informal feedback 'Hi, how are things going? How is class XYZ, etc"	After 3rd class session
Mid-Course feedback	Faculty (with help from TAG)	Faculty is invited to do a short survey. Use polling Critical to get feedback from whole class.	After 35-45% of course is over
Class Visit	Associate Dean	Must schedule class visit for new or underperforming faculty. Must schedule with faculty member (no surprise visits)	Before 30% of the class has been taught
Feedback to Faculty	Associate Dean or Dean	Faculty must receive feedback on all a, b, and c. A very important factor is to look for feedback consistency in order to identify the type of support/coaching the professor needs.	Within 48 hours so immediate adjustments can be made in course

Process/Item	Lead	Action	Timeframe
Module Kick-off Meeting	Dean	• Reinforce Academic Journey • Present alignment of course deadlines • Emphasize Interconnected Program • Present courses and their aim in the program • Tell students that module materials are ready, courses are available on LMS	Same meeting as end-of-module Wrap up

End of Module Wrap-up	Dean	• Use this to assess whether learning outcomes were met and prepare to recover in next Module
		  • "Name 3 learning outcomes of the module"
		  • "Identify issues you expected to learn but did not learn in the module"
			Last week of Module, before end of Module party

Meeting Format	Dean	Same format as Town-halls. These should be optional for students.	

Category	What	Owner	When
Materials	Material Submission Guidelines Sent to Faculty Ensure faculty access to HBSP	Registrar	Within 1 week of Contract
Materials	Course Materials Submission	Faculty	7 weeks before Module
Materials	Course Materials - Post for next Module Planning	Registrar	Within 2 weeks of Materials Receipt
Syllabus	Syllabus Template/Guidelines to Faculty	Assoc Dean	Within 1 week of Contract
Syllabus	Syllabus Submission	Faculty	6 weeks before Module
Syllabus	Syllabus Check and Follow-up with Faculty	Assoc Dean	Within 72 hours of syllabus submission
Syllabus	Workload Balance Check	Asst. Dean	5 weeks before Module Start
Schedule	Create Excel Schedule Tracker	Registrar	8 weeks before start of module
Schedule	Review Schedule Tracker	Asst. Dean	Within 1 week of Module Schedule Draft
LMS	LMS Course Content Uploaded by Faculty	TAG	5 weeks before start of class
LMS	LMS Courses Student Enrolled and Published	Registrar	3 weeks before start of Module
LMS	LMS Class dates entered	Registrar	3 weeks before start of Module
LMS	LMS Pre-Course Checklist	TAG	4 weeks before start of class
LMS	LMS Ensure all Deliverables/Assignment in Calendar	Assoc Dean	4 weeks before start of class
Mid-Course Check	Classroom visits	Assoc Dean	Within 3rd Class Session
Mid-Course Check	Pre Mid-Course Check (student association)	Asst. Dean	After 3rd class session
Mid-Course Check	Mid-Course Check (in-class)	Faculty	Within 35-45% of completed sessions
Mid-Course Check	Mid-Course Check (Feedback)	Assoc Dean	Within 48 hours of mid-course check

Courses Publication (LMS)

Course Publication (LMS)

Goal:

Assess quality and publication statuses of courses for students 3 weeks before term starts

Winning Process:

Dean relationship with faculty is required years and months prior to Associate Deans asking for syllabi. Many, perhaps most faculty will simply ignore any Associate Deans requesting syllabi and action on syllabi until the Dean has established a relationship in terms of

1. Good reasons that we ask for early syllabi production
2. Classroom tactics.

This is the Dean's responsibility and the way that the Dean adds value. Also faculty want to know what the Dean's vision is for the campus.

This is an activity that cannot be delegated to the Associate Deans.

Critical Factors & development areas:

No other critical factor than establishing a credible relationship with faculty.

Measurement (When):

3 weeks before start of term (not earlier than 5 weeks before):
Term 3: 16 Dec
Term 4: 10 Mar
Term 5: 28 Apr
Term 6: 16 Jun