

**UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL**

**THE STRATEGY DEVELOPMENT PROCESS AT WALTER SISULU  
UNIVERSITY: IMPLICATIONS FROM A COMPLEXITY THEORY  
PERSPECTIVE**

**By**

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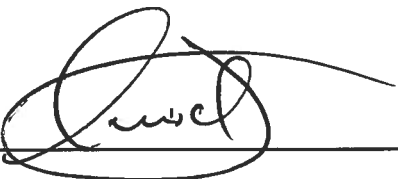
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A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Luthando', is written over a solid horizontal line.

Luthando Phillip Jack

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## **ABSTRACT**

The study was about the strategy development process at Walter Sisulu University from a complexity theory perspective as an underlying theoretical framework. The complexity theory was used to draw implications for strategy development from the perspective of this theory.

The principal rationale for the study was to comprehend the process of strategy development and to unearth the underlying theoretical paradigms that inform the strategy formulation process at the university. The study was moreover intended to look at available or possible models for strategy implementation. The research approach used to conduct the study was from a qualitative paradigm. However, when it came to data collection techniques, elements of the qualitative and quantitative paradigms were combined. The sampling method used was the purposive sampling which is one of the non-probability sampling types.

The study has found that in the main the approach the university used to develop its strategy is anchored on the traditional, positivist and modern approach to strategy. This is a progeny of the dominant theories of strategic management underpinned by classical and scientific management theories. There is however, awareness and consciousness in the university to the reality that the organisation operates in a turbulent and unpredictable world. This is premised from the understanding that today's organisations evolve and co-evolve with their environments and as such there is need to create an internal environment for agility, flexibility and innovation as well as self-organisation. The study also found that there is no clear model for the implementation of complexity theory in organisations. The study recommends that more studies on approaches, guidelines and techniques for the application of complexity theory be encouraged as a model may be an anti-thesis to the fundamental meaning of the theory particularly given the reality that the theory is also a subject of itself. The above recommendation is premised from the fact that there are few cases on the applied side of complexity theory. There is also need to embed the complexity theory in the academic content of strategy in the academia.

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# **1. CHAPTER 1 – INTRODUCTION**

## **1.1. Introduction**

This chapter's purpose is to give the background to the research problem I have identified as part of this study. It seeks to introduce, give background to the study and outline the statement of the problem. It also outlines the purpose of the study, the research questions, and their relevance as well as to why I thought that the questions are significant and needed to be responded to. The chapter also states the significance of the study both in terms of value addition to the academic discourse as well as to organizational strategy practitioners.

The chapter also delineates the scope of the study and also states delimitations as well as limitations of the study. Finally, the last sections focus on definitions of terms and a summary which provides a brief synopsis of the discussion of the chapter.

## **1.2. Background and Statement of the Problem**

Contemporary organisations continuously plan for survival and incessant value addition to their customers, stakeholders as well as to society. There is a common belief that in order for these organisations to sustain their survival and endure relevance, they need to engage in strategic planning and management. The formulation of organizational strategic plans is premised from diverse perspectives and philosophies. In the course of this, organisations use different models, tools and processes in engaging in strategy. In developing their plans they engage various business and management theories that the literature can offer to formulate strategy.

This research makes a review of the process of developing strategy at Walter Sisulu University. As a matter of course, Walter Sisulu University (WSU) is not in isolation from these influences. It has engaged in these kinds of exercises as well. It has developed its own Strategic Plan. The WSU's Strategic Plan takes a ten year life cycle. In reviewing literature on strategy it is apparent that organisations prefer different time cycles with respect to their strategy lifecycles. These cycles are informed by the manner in which organisations want to position themselves competitively and let me hasten to add that some are purely informed by general practice in that particular industry or sector. Strategic plan's life cycles range from

one year to ten years. There is also an emergence of 20 year visions that are mainly driven by governments. The South African government is a case in point in this regard.

The three to five year cycles are the most preferred. Very few organisations prefer ten year cycles. Ten year cycles are usually preferred by public sector and not-for-profit organisations. The for-profit organisations prefer one-year or three year cycles. This is so because of the nature of business they are engaging in which is about ensuring survival in a world that is characterised by stiff competition and turbulence. There is however, no prescription in the literature with respect to life cycles of strategic plans. The life cycles of strategic plans is also informed by the dominant philosophy of planning which views planning as a rational linear process that requires conscious efforts. On the other hand there are other views with respect to strategic planning life cycles. These views move from the premise that organisations are operating in complex environments that are continuously evolving. The environment is not static but dynamic in nature. The type of strategy that an organisation develops therefore has got to take into account this context. The view of this philosophy is that strategic planning is a continuous process that is not determined by life cycles. This argument is supported by the view that it is difficult and sometimes impossible to project into the future since the environment continuously changes in an unpredictable manner. This theory is rooted in complex adaptive systems. It is premised amongst others on the following principles: principle of co-evolution of organisations with the environment; principle of non-linearity; principle of self-organisation and on the principle of continuous renewal which means that organisations are involved in planning throughout their life cycle.

WSU planning processes were reviewed taking into account these strategy philosophies. It was assumed that the study will be able to perhaps discover the underlying planning philosophy of WSU. More-over the planning process (stages, cycles and approaches) of WSU were particularly reviewed within the context of complexity theory, with particular reference to complex adaptive systems. Complex adaptive systems view organisations first as systems. A system is a conglomeration of interdependent and interrelated parts. Systems thinkers deliberately look at organisations as the wholes that are made up of different parts. The parts of the

organisation are related and interconnected, they are not independent and as such they cannot exist on their own. This view is in contrast to classical management models of departmentalization and separation of tasks. The emphasis of systems thinking is that the parts seek to deliver on the broader vision of the organisation. Each part alone cannot be able to deliver on the vision. The different parts therefore due to the principles of interconnectedness and interrelatedness have to work together if the mission of the organisation is to be realised. This view is re-inforced by Jackson (2000) who emphasises that relationships between the parts are more significant than the parts themselves. Managing complexity therefore is about the management of this complex relationship between the parts.

Secondly, complex adaptive systems view organisations as systems that directly influence the environment and that are also directly influenced by the environment. The study therefore sought to review this process with a view to exposing and interpreting the kinds of implications that are there from a complexity theory perspective.

The complexity theory has therefore been used as a guiding theoretical framework to review the strategy development process at Walter Sisulu University. Inevitable this theory has also been to a certain extent contrasted (not the primary intention of the research) with traditional or dominant schools of thought in strategy development.

### **1.3. Purpose of the Study and Research Questions**

The intention of the research was to review the strategy development process at Walter Sisulu University. This review was undertaken using the complexity theory as a principal guiding theoretical framework. Complexity theory is a relatively new theory especially when compared to other (traditional and dominant) theories in strategy formulation.

The study was meant to unpack and comprehend the process of strategy development at Walter Sisulu University. It was important to understand the underlying philosophy behind strategy formulation. It was also the intention of the study to outline the key role players in strategy formulation and their value addition to the process. In other words did the process (strategy development) proposed, created or added value? Furthermore, the study also sought to ascertain as to

whether the process followed to develop strategy yielded the intended outcomes. The study also assessed whether are there any other alternative processes envisaged in strategy formulation at WSU.

Central to the study is also the documentation and exposition of various perspectives at WSU that inform strategy development. These perspectives, including their theoretical bases have been discussed in chapters 4 and 5. These have been discussed because it is important to understand the underlying theoretical framework that informs the strategy development process at WSU. Having studied these perspectives, implications were drawn for strategy development from a complexity theory point of view.

The last question the study had to respond to are the implications for strategy development from a complexity theory perspective. The study was intended to look at applied models for strategy formulation from a complex adaptive systems perspective. This question was premised from the criticism that complexity theory is a relevant theory, which is too difficult to implement.

The study was aimed at concretely answering the following questions:

- What is the strategy development process?
- What perspectives inform strategy development?
- What are the implications for strategy development from a complexity theory perspective?
- What are the appropriate models for strategy development from a complex adaptive systems perspective?

#### **1.4. Significance of the Study**

Given the plurality of literature in strategy development, it is important to study the underlying theories underpinning the strategy development process at WSU. This is particularly justified by the fact that there are relatively new theories that have emerged in the area of strategy for example the complex adaptive systems perspective of strategy. A critical examination of the organisation's strategy development process against these theories was paramount for purposes of

evaluating the value and the limitations of the emergent theories on strategy. As discussed earlier on, complexity theorists criticise the dominant theories on strategy development as having serious shortcomings. They base their criticism using the principles of complex adaptive systems perspective of strategy. It was imperative therefore to closely examine the dominant schools of planning against the emerging theories.

To a certain extent a contrast between the dominant theories on strategy formulation and the relatively new theories was made. The study did make to a certain extent this kind of distinction.

The findings do provide answers to some of the questions that organisations are facing especially in the context of managing complexity.

### **1.5. Scope, Delimitations and Limitations**

The study was meant to review the strategy development process at Walter Sisulu University; therefore the unit of analysis was Walter Sisulu University. The study was not intended to review the content of the strategy of WSU. It was not meant to review the usefulness, realism or potential outcomes of the strategy of WSU if implemented. Its intention was to inquire about the underlying planning theoretical framework and processes involved and informing the strategy development process at the university. This was motivated by the view that it is the process that leads to the production of the strategic plan. In this context, processes include (tools, resources, people, models and approaches) that have been employed by the university in formulating the strategy. These processes determine the acceptability, implementation and realisation of the strategy in organisations. Most significantly, the processes have been able to make one locate and draw contextually the applicable theories against the complexity theory.

The only limitation of the study was control over the willingness of the potential respondents to participate in the study. This was informed by the fact that managers sometimes tend to be bureaucratic with respect to their participation in studies of this kind which they may view as being sensitive.

## 1.6. Definition of Terms

The definition of terms used in the study is as follows and is not necessarily exhaustive. These are the terms that have been frequently used in the text of the dissertation. One has focused on key terms that may give different meanings when applied in different contexts. These terms are hereby defined in the table below:

Term	Definition	Author/s
Chaos Theory	'A study of complex, nonlinear, dynamic systems'	Levy (1994)
Complexity Theory	Complexity theory is about the study of social systems whose evolution changes overtime due to their nature which is complex. This is due to the fact that their interactions are not governed by certain constant rules.	Jackson (2000)
Complex adaptive systems	These are open systems whose agents with no directives network with others in the internal environment extending the connections and information exchanges beyond the system restrictions.	Cilliers,1998, McDaniel & Driebe, 2001 cited by Anderson <i>et al</i> (2005)
Co-evolution	It is about the movement and development of different systems or sub-systems in the organisation together through influencing each other. Through this development they end up influencing each other development.	Luoma (2006)
Non-linearity	The Complex Adaptive Systems are non-linear because there is no relationship between the cause and effect. The underlying principle between them is that of unpredictability due to the interconnectedness of parts from different re-inforcing cycles.	Luoma (2006)
Self-organization	It is about the spontaneous emergence of regulations within the system without any intervention for instance from management. In a self-organising system behaviours and structures emerge instead of being deliberately created. They emerge out of interaction amongst agents in the system.	Luoma (2006)
Core competence	It is a collection of unique and diverse skills and technology that enable an organisation to have a competitive advantage over its competitors through the provision of imitable services to its customers.	Prahald & Hamel (1994) cited by Ljungquist (2007)

Strategic management	It is about a purposeful management of an organisation towards the realisation of its strategic vision, mission and its long term objectives.	Witcher & Chau (2007)
Strategy	It is a consistent pattern of behaviour over time	Mintzberg et al (1998)
Strategy formulation/ Development	It is the real formulation of long - term objectives, corporate and generic strategies that are based on the mission statement.	Ehlers & Lazenby (2007)

**Table 1.1. Definition of Terms**

## **1.7. Conclusion**

The Chapter has given an outline to the problem the study sought to address, the rationale of the research and most importantly the research questions. The significance of the study has also been outlined as mainly twofold: firstly, add value to the academic discourse on strategy development for organisations and secondly possible or available models for strategy development for organisations operating in complex environments. This was intended to emerge from a thorough review of the literature available on complexity. These models should be seen as emergence as even the literature itself on complexity evolves and co-evolves with the development of the theory itself as informed both by practice and theory and vice versa. The point here is that one does not view this theory as a static theory. The Chapter ends with the scope, delimitations, and limitations of the study and definition of terms. The definition of terms purely serves as a guide of the meaning of terms that have been frequently used in the study. It is not necessarily an exhaustive list of terms that have been used in the study.

This Chapter therefore serves as a broad framework and introduction to the study and serves as an antecedent for the remaining chapters.



## **2. CHAPTER 2 - LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1. Introduction and Background of the Problem**

Modern organisations derive their life from a specific drive to satisfy in order to accomplish their mission of existence. It is out of a necessity for survival that these organisations engage in continuous planning. When looked at in this milieu a university or a non-profit organisation, critical in its survival is continuous relevance to meeting their goals and objectives as well as their purpose of existence as enunciated in their mission statements. There is a common acceptance that in order for these organisations to sustain their survival and continue to be relevant they need to engage in strategic thinking and development. This is done through the employment of different approaches and frameworks and this is largely informed by a strategy development paradigm dominant in that particular organisation. In the context of the study, WSU is equally affected by this context as it is not insular. Surely, its approach to strategy development was premised from a particular approach and paradigm of strategy management and this then informed and defined its own process of strategy development.

As stated in chapter 1, the overall purpose of the study was to review the process of strategy development at Walter Sisulu University from a complexity theory perspective. The objective here was to apprise the nature of implications that are there for strategy development particularly at WSU from a complexity perspective. As has been demonstrated in the analysis of literature below, it was significant to embark on this study using the complexity theory as a base theory of analysis due to the fact that complexity theory dismisses the notion that strategy in organisations can be developed in a rationalistic, linear and deterministic framework and approach. Its view is that organisations operate in turbulent, uncertain and unpredictable environment which makes long term planning impossible.

This chapter therefore makes a review of the applicable literature in relation to the purpose and the types of questions the study sought to answer. At the end of this chapter is a critical appraisal of the literature with some questions being drawn in terms of the salient issues the literature raises as well as some gaps.

## **2.2. An Analysis of Current Knowledge and Theories Relevant to the Problem**

The field of strategy has been well written about. The literature on this area ranges from strategy formulation or development, strategic management up to strategy implementation, monitoring and review. Literature has been evolving in these areas with times. The development of literature has been evolving with the definition of strategy as well. In this context, French (2009) is of the view that strategy definition is rather elusive. This view is supported by Stonehouse & Snowden (2007) who argue that the diverse nature of the roots and disciplines (behavioural science, psychology, economics, marketing, finance and military history) that led to the birth of strategy as an academic discipline make it not surprising that there are heterogeneous views about its basic conceptual frameworks. Smith (2004) defines strategy as the degree to which organisational objectives and the current range of services are able to meet its targets. On the other hand Mintzberg et al (1998) define strategy as a blueprint that couch together the organisations aspirations and policies into an interconnected whole. They also argue that when managers are asked what they actually did, they describe strategy as a pattern, or repetition of actions taken in previous years, that is subsequently adjusted to meet current criteria. Hence, strategy as a plan is looking forward and strategy as a pattern is looking backward. Other definitions of strategy are linked to strategic management. Strategic management then relates to how the organisation is steered towards the realisation of its core purpose or mission of existence. The mission of existence could be profit maximization in the case of a profit organisation or delivery of goods and services or maximise customer value in the case of public sector or non-profit making organisations. For instance, Witcher & Chau (2007) define strategic management as the manner of managing the execution of the long term strategic objectives of an organisation. This definition is also further elaborated by Ehlers & Lazenby (2007) who view strategic management as the process of integrating and aligning organisational goals and objectives to realise the organisations mission. Key to note in these definitions is an acknowledgement that organisations exist to fulfil a particular historical mission in their life cycle.

The literature also offers different views and perspectives with respect to strategy development as well strategy types. Kathuria et al (2007) observe that literature on strategy development has accepted strategy development as a process that is about

ensuring alignment between corporate strategy, business strategy and functional strategies in a hierarchical manner. This means that organisations begin strategy development at corporate level and go down to business and finally to functional level. In other words, they argue for a top-down approach to strategy development. Chakravarthy & Henderson (2007) agree with this observation; however they offer alternatives to this model. Their point of departure is that hierarchical strategies do not necessarily lead to improved performance in organisations. Their view is that hierarchical strategies cannot be viewed as independent but as 'interdependent networks' which they also refer to as heterarchy. Their view is that the fundamental problem to be overcome by these levels of strategy is that of sustaining relevance and responsiveness to continuous environmental changes.

Chakravarthy & Henderson (2007:p.650) make a contrast between 'a hierarchical view and a heterarchical view to strategy development'. The table below is a summary of their contrast.

<b>Strategy</b>	<b>Hierarchical View</b>	<b>Heterarchical view</b>
Corporate	Strategy development is a sole prerogative of top management and defines resource allocation and boundaries for each business.	Strategy is viewed as a continuous renewal process and a driver of transformation through partnerships
Business	Informed by corporate strategy and is intended to exploit industry opportunities. Top management approves strategy that is recommended by divisional managers	Strategy is informed whilst at the same time shapes corporate strategy. Strategy diversifies and exploits business opportunities. Strategy is seen as a process of continual renewal
Functional	The strategy at this level is about functional support. The value chain is aligned to business strategy. Functional managers propose and divisional managers approve.	The strategy is about functional excellence which is also tailored on business strategy. Continuous renewal and learning of best practices

**Table 2.1. Contrast between a hierarchical and Heterarchical view of strategy**

Hurtado (2008: p.160) on the other hand makes the following distinction between strategy process, context and its content:

‘The strategy process refers to the formulation process of strategy; strategy content refers to the actual strategic direction of the organisation as contained in the corporate, business or in the functional strategies and the strategy context refers to the environmental or situational context of strategy development and content’.

In my view this is a separatist, linear and logical view with respect to approaching strategy. It is a view that separates strategy development from implementation.

Mintzberg et al (1998) discuss in a detailed and comprehensive manner various schools of thought that inform and influence strategy development in organisations. These schools of thought have evolved over time in the development of the discipline of strategic management. They categorise these into three groupings that make ten schools on the whole. The first three schools are prescriptive, and are focused mainly on the models and approaches to strategy formulation. If such models or tools are not properly followed, the strategy emerging out of such a process will be wrong. The six schools that follow the first three are descriptive and their focus is on the actual formation of the strategy. The last grouping is an umbrella of all the nine schools. This school also referred to by Stacey (2007) as a synthesis school takes a clustered approach to strategy which includes strategy making process, the content and context of strategy as well as organisational structures.

These schools are described below in detail both from the works of Mintzberg et al and also from the works of other theorists, practitioners and authors on strategy. The justifications for this detailed description is that this is the most comprehensive and integrative work done on strategy especially approaching it from a dominant philosophical perspective of strategy. Put it differently, as to be demonstrated most strategy schools are based on the view of strategy in organisations as linear deterministic kind of process that helps managers have control over the organisation. Nevertheless some of the schools do lay an important foundation and building blocks towards a systems as well as complex adaptive systems view of strategy. This view will be discussed later once the rationalist and reductionist view of strategy has been reviewed.

Mintzberg et al's (1998) work on strategic management traces, compares, contrasts and most importantly also provide a critical appraisal of these various schools of thought in strategy tracing them back from the mid 1960's. My discussion of these schools will be in tandem with other views on strategy. In other words, I am using the ten schools as a framework within which to base and expand this literature review.

### 2.2.1. The Design School

This school's departure point is the conception process of strategy formulation conceived as a process of conception. This school has the SWOT as a framework of analysis. It advocates for the matching of business to its external environment. Strategy formulation has no formal procedures. The process of formulating strategy is dominated by the leadership of the organisation especially the Chief Executive Officer (CEO). According to Mintzberg et al (1998) strategy formulation should be premised on the following elements: that the formulation process should be deliberate and must be informed by thought processes which are led by management in organisations; the responsibility for strategic development rests with the CEO and that naturally the CEO is a strategist. This view moves from the theory that the CEO is most knowledgeable than everyone in the organisation. This is not necessarily true. This school is also of the view that strategy development should be simple and informal. This is so because in any case its development rests with the 'strategist' who is in this case the CEO. The school also contends that once strategy formulation has been completed, it is then that implementation can begin. It goes without saying that, once the life cycle of strategy has been completed, it will be reviewed.

The criticism of this school as mentioned earlier on is that it over- emphasises the role of the CEO in strategy formulation. This means that the strategy is imposed from the top and the employees may not necessarily understand and share and buy into the strategic path and direction of the organisation. This model suggests that others exist in an organisation primarily for execution purposes. There is therefore no connection between thinking and acting. This disconnection is very problematic if strategy is according to Bonn (2001:p, 65) about " ideas and the development of novel solutions to create competitive advantage ... *and the role of strategic thinkers... is to search for new approaches and envision better ways of doing things*" Clearly no individual can perform this task alone. Bonn (2001) further argues that strategy in organisations should be a product of dialogue amongst a group of senior managers in organisations. This view is supported by the belief that collective minds can produce a better product than a single mind. Even most importantly, a collectively

developed strategy will be easy to own up than a strategy developed by a single person.

### **2.2.2. The Planning School**

This school unlike the design school approaches strategy development as a formal process. It differentiates between strategy formulation and implementation. It has got such planning procedures on the formulation of the strategic direction (inclusive of the mission, vision, goals and objectives) of an organisation. This school accepts most of the design school planning premises. One notable difference is the fact that strategy development must be a formal process guided by a prior agreed framework or blueprint. This school also recognises other role players in strategy development and identifies the role of the CEO as that of signing off the strategy. In essence this school is premised on the following:

- Strategy is a product of a formal planning process which has been enabled by various tools, techniques and prior arranged steps.
- The responsibility for strategic planning is under the overall leadership and guidance of the CEO, whilst actually executed by the planning staff employed for this purpose.
- The outcome of this process is a strategic plan that will be supported by resource allocation so as to ensure that it is realised.

The product of this school therefore is an intended strategy. This is one of the dominant schools of thought on strategy development. Most organisations still use this as an overall guiding strategy development framework. This is particularly prevalent in public sector organisations. Surely this is not only applied as is, it is applied with the aid of various tools and techniques of the time. My initial contention is that WSU falls under this school.

Kachaner and Deimler (2008) re-inforces this view by for instance arguing that strategy development process should not repeatedly use traditional approaches (SWOT analysis which helps analyse internal and external environments of the company). These traditional approaches should be employed together with new ones that foster lateral thinking. They argue that organisations should engage in

planning processes that will inspire people to think strategically and minimize the boundaries between those who are at corporate, business and functional levels together with the associated stereotypes these bring to organisations with respect to employee contributions (value addition) to organisations. This type of planning espoused in this school is referred to by Assche and Verschraegen (2008: p. 265):

‘ ...as being driven by an assumption of guidance centre capable of implementing pre-established goals through purposeful planning and ‘social engineering’ and that these are based on old beliefs and assumptions concerning steering, predictability, expert knowledge and power’.

Some of the planning school’s tools with respect to strategy development is scenario planning. Scenario planning is about projecting and anticipating the future through an analysis of what is likely to happen using different options. Scenarios are usually employed when there is uncertainty in the environment. It is a tool that is used by organisations in periods of difficulties. Randall (2009) suggests that the use of scenarios in strategy development can help organisations anticipate the future and prepare themselves for appropriate responses.

The criticism towards the school is its inability to accommodate learning and emergence. It does not view strategy implementation as a learning process that can also enrich the process of strategizing as a continuous process.

### **2.2.3. The Positioning School**

At the core of the approach of this school with respect to strategy development is what one would refer to as an analytical process. It argues that strategy is about positioning the organisation to occupy a particular position or to have a competitive advantage in industry. French (2009) argues that this school is largely influenced by Michael Porter’s competitive forces analysis of industry. The school is premised on the following elements: that strategy should not be everything to everyone but should seek to identify and lead to a strategic competitive position in the industry and that the context of the strategy should be the economic environment and competition. The process of arriving at strategy should be analytical and that the process of analysis should be concluded at the level of management who exercise control over



the strategy process. Strategy produced by this process is then implemented. Stonehouse & Snowden (2007) equally acknowledge the significant contribution made by Porter to the development of what they refer to as the 'competitive positioning approach'. They argue that his work is primarily central to the development of this approach. In this context Porter then championed the development of the five forces model which are, risks associated with newcomers in the industry, threat of alternative goods and services, the bargaining strength and influence of consumers, the bargaining strength and influence of sellers and merchants, and competition amongst organisations. They posit that organisations can achieve a competitive advantage over other firms if it is able to analyse each of these forces. A proper analysis of the five forces may result to the development of a competitive strategy. The five forces model should be used as a tool to analyse the economic context of the firm. The outcome of this analysis then leads to the development of a generic strategy for the organisation. Mintzberg et al (1998) & Stonehouse & Snowden (2007) describe Porter's generic strategies as cost leadership strategy: an organisation striving towards becoming a low cost producer of products and services; differentiation strategy: an organisation aiming to produce unique products and services and building a strong customer loyalty through creating a perception that these products and services are superior to those of other competitors; and focus strategy: an organisation decides to serve narrow markets. This in a sense is about the use of cost leadership or differentiation strategy in a narrow sense.

Furthermore, organisations need to choose between these strategies as going for all of them will be setting the organisation for failure.

The critique of this school is that its context analysis is not broad enough to incorporate other factors like legislation, political and social factors. The too much focus on the economy is rather too narrow given the existence of diverse organisations with different missions and rationale for their being. Again learning is not built in the strategy process. This school also falls into the entanglement of viewing strategy as deliberate. There is therefore no room for emergence.

#### **2.2.4. The Entrepreneurial School**

The school envisages strategy formulation as a process of crafting a vision. At the center of this process is an individual with his/her personal unique vision or perspective. The process of formulation is intuitive, largely deliberate with emergent elements. This school is premised on the fact that strategy is driven by the leadership in a form of the CEO. Strategy for an entrepreneurial organisation focuses on the long term survival of the organisation. In this context therefore long term goals are developed and the CEO becomes an embodiment of the strategic horizon of the organisation. Strategy formulation from this viewpoint becomes intuitive, experimental and rests with the leadership. Since strategy is seated at the CEO's office, he/she then ensures that it is sold and bought by employees. Most importantly he/she closely monitors the implementation process so that where possible the necessary adjustments could be made. Since the entrepreneurial school forms part of the descriptive approach to strategy, one of its main attributes is that it has room for emergent strategy. Randall (2009: p, 27) argues that organisations cannot predict what the future holds as it is "the net result of so many complex and interdependent issues", so organisations should find ways of adaptation. So the entrepreneurs are always flexible to unpredictable change and easily adapt. Entrepreneurs usually identify a niche and focus on it. The entrepreneurial school is therefore focused.

#### **2.2.5. The Cognitive School**

The perspective of the school to strategy formulation is that this is a mental process wherein the source of cognition from leadership is passive or creative. Mintzberg et al (1998) argue that in this school the strategist determines strategy development processes in his/her mind. As a result of inputs through environmental analysis, strategy emerges in a form of perspectives. These inputs are drawn from the analysis of the environment.

#### **2.2.6. The Learning School**

According to Mintzberg et al (1998) this school is traced and based on various streams of research including emergent strategy, emergent sensemaking, strategic venturing, evolutionary theory etc. In this school strategy emerges and the leadership is responsive to learning both of self and others. The strategy evolves as

a result of unprecedented change. The school differentiates between strategy formation and strategy formulation. The school posits that the failure of strategy implementation must not only be attributed to a lack of understanding of strategy by those responsible for its execution, but it must also be attributed to its formulation (Mintzberg et al: 1998). They dismiss the notion of a deliberate strategy and believe that strategy is formed as a result of interactions of people at various levels of the organisation. Strategy then emerges out of this interaction sometimes consciously or subconsciously. Strategy formulation processes in a sense are meant to ensure that management has influence and certainty over the direction taken by the organisation. Equally strategy formation enables the organisation to open up itself to experimenting and thus strategic learning. Learning in this context then becomes a sporadic process. Lowe & Jones (2004) expands this perspective by arguing that the conceptualisation of strategy in this way is in tandem with the 'social constructionist' view of the organisation. A constructionist view does not see strategy formation as different to implementation. Strategy formation should always be seen and viewed as interconnected to the environment and subjected to its continuous test, interpretation and re-interpretation by various actors in the organisation.

The learning school therefore is premised on the view that the context within which strategy is formed is turbulent and unpredictable and as such it is difficult to exercise control over its formation. It must therefore be undergirded by continuous learning. It is a learning process itself. It dismisses the notion of the prescriptive school of thought that leadership should be the driver of strategy. Its view is that strategy emerges from interaction and as a result learning takes place through the organisation. Leadership also learns in this process. This process therefore leads to collective learning. Most importantly, leadership enables strategic learning to take place in the organisation and thus creating conditions for the emergence of strategy.

Lowe & Jones (2004: 1332) think that:

'Conceptualizing the development of strategy as an emergent process seems valuable and insightful'.

However, the learning school is criticised for not moving beyond the creation of a learning organisation. This school is not innovative and transformatory. It is only

about managing change and does not lead to the total transformation of an organisation. Chaharbaghi et al (2005) conceptualise transformation as different to alteration and adaptation. They view transformation as entailing non-linear creative processes. In this context their perspective of strategy is that of driving the process of organisation, disorganisation and re-organisation and as such their view is that it is dynamic.

The learning school therefore in my view creates a firm basis for the emergence of some of the complexity theory characteristics.

### **2.2.7. The Power School**

The power school is premised from the view that strategy is an outcome of negotiations. Stacey (2007) posits that this school sees the process of strategy development and its outcomes as political endeavour. Strategy formulation results from political and cooperative patterns and positions. The strategy in this context is either shaped by internal or external politics. Central in the process of strategy development is mediating in these political contexts. Strategy then emerges out of this process. There is no one who can claim that what emerged as a strategy is his or her original idea as it is likely that what emerged was a compromise. This is so because a lot of negotiation, bargaining and horse trading ensue before the strategy can emerge. The strategy is also approached at macro level through the formation of alliances with other organisations to achieve their own objectives.

Critiques of this school argue that the power play may take a long time and delay delivery on organisational goals. Negotiations can deliberately take a long time and thus sabotaging the organisation. The huge advantage of this school is that it forces everyone to engage on the direction of the organisation and thus appreciating the challenges and the difficulties the organisation faces. A meaningful engagement on the direction of an organisation leads to the emergence of a strategy that has got the backing of the majority of stakeholders in that particular organisation.

### **2.2.8. The Cultural School**

The approach of the school is that strategy formulation is an inclusive and all encompassing process driven by a collective. Strategy formation should be centered

more on a collectively agreed ideological position. The strategy formulation process is therefore cohesive and is meant to attain this particular ideology. The ideology serves as a rallying point and a product of social interaction amongst members of the organisation. Since ideology is a collection of values and beliefs that may be learnt, observed and taught over time, the creation of social interactions is paramount to the success of this strategy as it is rooted on shared ideological perspective. The pre-occupation of this school according to Stacey (2007) is how culture influences the stability of organisations from a strategic perspective. Nonetheless, culture is most of the time static and inflexible to change. Culture in this context is more of a perspective than simply referring to organisational culture as defined as a set of practices and prototypes of acts embedded in the organisational methods. This school therefore visions strategy as a conscious process. This school lacks creativity and innovation, and is rather vague. It promotes constancy and dampens required change especially when it encourages consensus decision making.

#### **2.2.9. The Environmental School**

The school's approach to strategy development is that it is a kneejerk process. This school takes a reactive form on strategy as it responds to the environmental challenges posed by particular actions. Stacey (2007) agrees with this view and suggests that primarily an organisations' strategy is a direct response to the demands of the environment. A strategy in this school is to a certain extent imposed and emergent. Strategy is therefore influenced essentially by the external environment. It propagates that organisations should always strive towards adapting to the environment if the organisation is to be sustainable. In this context the role of leadership becomes compromised.

#### **2.2.10. The Configuration School**

The perspective of the school is that strategy formulation is an engagement that is intended to transform the organisation. This school incorporates other schools into strategy making and as a result Stacey (2007) views it as a synthesis school. It views organisations as constantly occupied by the process of change in reaction to the environmental context so as to become relevant. This basically talks to organisational life cycles. Uncertainty, turbulence in the environment compels

organisations to reconfigure themselves. The challenge for strategy development therefore is to manage this turbulence or help position the organisation to keep floating or help organisations endure serious transformation in order to keep them in business. The type of school employed therefore in strategy development should be context based in response to a particular environment. The emergent strategies thus could be interpreted or have attributes of plans, positions, perspectives or ploys. An essential emphasis must be made that these are informed by particular contexts.

#### **2.2.11. Other Perspectives on Strategy Development**

There are also other perspectives to strategy development that do not find clear expression in the above mentioned strategy schools. For instance the resource based view (RBV) of strategy. Its assertion is that organisations survive or out-compete others due to the nature and type of resources they have. The RBV is about the relationship between the organisation's resources and its performance. The emphasis here is on resource endowments. These resources range from financial, technology, people, reputation, artefacts etc. Teece et al (1997) describe this approach as viewing organisations with strong systems and resources as being successful not because they put effort in strategic investments, but because they offer high quality products or lower costs. The emphasis of this perspective is about mastering and optimising the utilisation of available resources in the organisation. In other words the emphasis is on exploiting the organisations assets. The resource based view of strategy in a sense differs from Porter's positioning school of five forces model, generic strategies as well as value chain. The main difference is that the RBV advocates for the development of unique organisational specific and unique core competences that will enable them outperform competitors (Stonehouse & Snowdon: 2007).

Some criticism of the RBV of strategy is that even though its emphasis is that the organisations performance depends on the uniqueness, non-imitability, and rareness of its resources, it fails to answer the question as to what happens to the organisation's performance when its competitors have similar resources?

This overview of the evolution of the schools of strategy development then brings us to what I would refer to as other schools of thought in strategy. In any case

strategising is not attached to a particular school of philosophy as it draws from various views and academic disciplines (Stonehouse & Snowden: 2007).

In their critique of the learning school Mintzberg et al (1998) state that some view this school as non-revolutionary. These critiques think that chaos theory is an alternative approach to the learning school. Chaos theory provides a departure point from the rationalistic kind of strategy development. The rationalistic approach of strategy views organisations as linear systems that operate in a perfect and stable world. Its worldview is that organisations exist to adapt and engender minimal and incremental changes. The development of strategy is formalistic and organisational challenges are tackled on a cause and effect kind of model. The design of the strategy in this context is to help the organisation navigate through this path so that it can be able to attain its predetermined goals. According to Hayward & Preston (1998) the rationalist, deliberative approach to the determination of strategic choices is still perceived as the mostly germane one to strategic management. They argue that the whole notion of scientific management (regularity, rationality and predictability) is predicated on this school of thought.

On the other hand the chaos theory is predicated on futures thinking. Given the fact that the world is characterised by turbulence, unpredictability and difficulties to plan for the future, new ways of thinking are required in the discipline of strategic management. Chaos theory therefore questions the dominant and traditional theories on strategy development. In their characterisation of chaos theory, Hayward & Preston (1998) state that it takes a non-linear approach and actions can have more than one outcome. Chaos theory posits that human systems are complex such that they are sensitive to their initial conditions and thus making it difficult to exercise control. This is so because they never return to the exact same state.

To this end Levy (1994: p.168) defines chaos theory as the 'study of complex, nonlinear dynamic systems'.

He then goes on and argue that this theory questions deterministic positivism.

Chaos theory is in a sense an extension of systems thinking and as such some authors including Stacey (2003) do not view it as a new paradigm. Its sub-theories are complexity theory and complex adaptive systems.

According to Chunha & Chunha (2006) & McKelvey (1999) complexity theory is one of the theories that are insightful in the literature on strategic management and it is an important value addition to organisational science.

As an entry point with respect to this theory, it is important to explain some of the basic concepts and characteristics of complexity and complex adaptive systems. According to Jackson (2000) Complexity theory is about the learning of social systems whose development changes overtime owing to their character which is complex. This is due to the fact that their relations are not governed by definite constant rules. Harry and Cunliffe (2006: pp.330-331) identify the following as key characteristics of complexity:

- 'Each complex system is unique because it consists of different elements with multiple interactions and feedback loops as a result of continuous interaction and adaptation from the environment.
- Each element in the complex system responds to local information and not to broader system information.
- Interactions in the system are non-linear due to the fact that they have multiple elements and are not based on cause and effect relationships.
- Complex systems continuously change and evolve over time as a result of their non-linearity. In this context therefore complexity theorists also study how these systems emerge, a property known as emergence as a means of understanding them.
- Complexity theory is also about self organisation. The study of the emergence of order from chaos'.

There is acceptance in the literature on strategy that the planning and learning schools of strategy formulation have been dominant. Chunha & Chunha (2006) state that a new paradigm has developed which seeks to synthesise the two schools



mentioned above. The consequence of this synthesis is the emergence of a new paradigm which they refer to as the complexity theory of strategy, which posits that systems that are at the edge of chaos are very creative. They also argue that organisations need to be viewed as complex adaptive systems that:

- Self-organise in response to their environment.
- Co-evolve with their environment

Surely this assertion is a big departure from the classical paradigms of viewing strategy that have been alluded to earlier.

The study of literature particularly complex adaptive systems reveals that strategy (Levy: 1994 & Mintzberg et al: 1998) emerges ( a product of interaction and adaptation) in organizations as a result of complex, non-linear, dynamic and unpredictable interactions with the environment. The responsibility of management in this framework is to create conditions for the emergence of strategy as opposed to a linear and controlled process of strategy development, a practice that is prevalent in many organizations and a practice that is propagated by the dominant literature on strategy.

Complexity theory is of the view that organizations operating in environments of turbulence and unpredictability will find it difficult to engage in long term planning. The argument is that strategy emerges out of the environment as a result of positive feedback, through the organisations' interaction with the environment.

This view of strategy suggest that long term planning in organisations is an exercise of futility and that short term planning is preferable as it is easy to forecast. It also argues that models are just models (Levy: 1994). This is so because the chaos theory emphasizes non-linearity as opposed to linearity. Complex adaptive systems theory which is a theory derived from complexity views organisations as systems that continually adapt to their environments. Organisations do this adaptation through self organization and co-evolution with their environments. Strategic planning therefore should be about responding to real challenges that emerge in the environment on a daily basis. Levy (1994) supports this view as he sees organisations as complex, dynamic, nonlinear systems. This characterisation therefore suggests that

organisations are interlocked, intertwined, and interdependent and interconnected with the environment. This therefore creates space for social and strategic interactions to take place in the environment between the actors. In the course of this interaction organisations end up influencing and anticipating decisions to be taken by one another. The implications of the theory for strategy development are that organisations need to at least embark on short term strategy formation. In this context therefore, Levy (1994) suggests that organisations need to adopt user-friendly guidelines on strategy that would be able to provide a broad guide on decision making. These guidelines need not to be stringent but be subjected to continuous adaptation to the context within which they are applied. In other words they will inform and be informed by the environment. This is imperative as the principle of organisations co-evolving with the environment dictates that organisations inform their environment and equally they should be prepared to be informed by the environment they are operating in.

One of the key enablers of strategy formation under these conditions is the valuing and sharing of information. This is important for two reasons: firstly it helps and empowers employees in shaping the future of the organisation given the nature of strategising; secondly collective knowledge leads to organisational learning and this form of strategising surely depends a lot on the know-what and know-how of employees. This is because according to Beckstrom & Brafman (2007) the finest knowledge is in the edge of an organisation. They also aver that in an environment of distributed knowledge it is easy to achieve the incubation of ingenious, pioneering critical or passionate ideas. Embedding strategy development therefore in knowledge and social structures has a potential significant impact for its outcomes. Complexity in a sense takes a spontaneous and practice based view of strategy development. In other words strategy development process should be situation specific.

From the above review of complexity theory, it is quite clear that elongated forecasting and planning is impossible, but short term planning is possible as it is easy to forecast. This is a radical departure from the traditional and scientific view of management.

The existence of these two schools of thought with respect to strategy development clearly demonstrates a need for more work on the theory of strategy. In any case academic discourse is an unending venture.

### **2.3. A Critical Evaluation of the Literature and its Relationship to the Topic**

The evolution of literature has led to the development of what is now called schools of thought in strategy development. Mintzberg et al (1998) suggest that strategy development in organisations is influenced by various schools of thought that have evolved over time in the development of the discipline of strategic management. These schools of thought including the ten schools have been discussed at length in the above section dealing with the analysis of current knowledge and theories relevant to the problem.

These various schools of thought with respect to strategy development could be summarised as those that view strategy formation as a deliberate and intended process, whereas others view it as something that emerges because organisations are complex creatures. The former view is rationalistic, linear and deterministic, whereas the latter view is non-linear, dynamic and characterised by emergence and self-organisation. Both views have made a significant contribution to the organization of knowledge on strategy. The former view has been part of the strategy literature for more than three decades whereas the latter has been part of the literature in a more organised and consistent fashion in less than two decades.

A considerable point to underscore is that the reviewed literature builds on each other. For instance the prescriptive schools clearly build on each other. This therefore means that new theories are built on the bases of failures or weaknesses on existing theories. The learning school for instance in my view is built on the idea of a learning organisation, built on certain concepts of the systems thinking for example, team learning. This school has got elements of chaos theory as well. The fact that this theory dismisses the notion that strategy is deliberate is a confirmation of this assertion. The concept of emergence therefore is either borrowed from this theory by chaos theory or serves as a trigger or important foundation concept for the chaos theory as applied in organisational and management sciences. Whereas it is true that organisations operate in a complex and ever-changing world, it is equally

true that the traditional theories on strategy are dominant even in today's organisations in terms of application. As to whether they are working, or not remains unanswered and a big question. Maybe it is a case of intended strategy versus realised strategy. Literature also points to the fact that most strategic plans in organisations are not realised as they were intended. Unfortunately organisations do not ask themselves why it is the case. It is comprehensible that the complexity theory seeks to respond to these questions. The traditional management schools also use different terminologies on strategy. This terminology is used interchangeably and sometimes to mean different things. Most authors for instance use concepts like strategy planning, strategy formation, strategy development and strategy formulation to mean the same thing which I would characterise as the crafting of a strategy for the purpose of this sentence. This is particularly dominant in the prescriptive schools. The descriptive school particularly the learning school differentiates between strategy formation and strategy formulation. The distinction is that the former deals with the process that emerges out of interaction and embedded in it is learning. The emphasis here is that strategy is formed by strategic interactions amongst organisational actors. The process of formation has no blue print but is a product of strategic interactions which also lead to strategic learning by all including management. The latter on the other hand deals with a regulated controlled process. The process of formulating strategy is meant to empower management to exercise control over the direction of the organisation. Roles are clearly defined and the formulation process has to be in line with a particular blue print or framework.

The nonlinear, co-evolutionary and emergent school of thought on strategy is a radical departure from the other school. It dismisses the notion that the future can be planned, predicted and that organisation's resources could be channelled towards this in a linear, deterministic, cause and effect linkage paradigm. The premise of this school is that organisations operate in a turbulent and unpredictable world. The world is made unpredictable by the multiplicity of diverse social actors in the environment who continuously act in unbalanced ways. In light of this its view is that long-term planning is impossible to undertake in organisations. Organisations should at least draft broad planning guidelines that are flexible and will be easy to adapt to the environmental changes. They can only engage on short term planning as it is

easy to project. They must get used to the fact that strategy emerges as a consequence of agents interacting with their context or situation. The role of managers in this context is to create conditions for strategy to emerge. They must be able to exercise flexibility and completely discard the idea of control. Once this is abandoned then organisations will be able to self-organise. Therefore, leadership in organisations must create conditions for the emergence of a new culture, a free flow of diverse ideas or what some theorists call pluralism, diverse workforce so that self-organisation can be achieved.

This can only be created if organisations have got a leadership that is not obsessed with control, a leadership that gives space to the self-creation of teams that plan and execute the organisation's functions. Whilst exercising a very limited form of control, the organisation's spontaneous capability to incite and sustain a behaviour that meaningfully moves it in a given direction should be allowed by management.

Management therefore have to learn to manage organisations and at the same time create appropriate contexts for spontaneous self-organisation. The very nature of this paradox will then sustain the nature of interaction and will put the organisation in disequilibrium and thus sustaining itself. This therefore calls for new ways of managing and new ways of leadership. The leadership should not preclude its employees from developing into learning communities and communities of practice. In other words they must create conditions for the development of a community of leadership.

Luoma (2006) observes that the academic discourse in complexity is at its seminal stages. His view and conclusion therefore is that complexity cannot be called a different theory. He implies and somewhat suggest that complexity is rather more of an applied science whose definition and re-definition could emerge out of its application in business management. The description of complexity in business management contexts creates unique perspectives and ideas about complexity.

However, Price (2004:p.41) argues that:

‘Complexity as a science seems able to explain how emergent order, self-organisation, is a property of networks of interconnected agents each operating to consistent but simple rules’.

Hayward & Preston (1999: pp177-178) further argue that:

‘the development of chaos theory has questioned the idea that economics can proceed on the criterion of ‘correct prediction’, and its non-linear approach to decision making has encouraged the use of the firm as a unit of analysis. Chaos theory, then, has very real implications for the management of organisations. Thus, it is impossible to understand a non-linear system by the reductionist method of breaking it down’.

Even though the complexity theory offers exciting analogy about how organisations as systems need to respond to the challenges imposed by the wider systems within which they operate, the theory really falls short in giving practical examples on the success stories of its application albeit the fact that it correctly and eloquently explains the shortcomings of the dominant theory of management. Another criticism of complexity is that it builds on the systems thinking. Stacey (2003) is of the view that complexity has just changed in terms of form and concepts while its actual meaning and content remains systems thinking. He mentions the fact that for instance CAS uses systems concepts like boundaries. Another criticism from many theorists is that the adaptation of the theory from natural sciences is a limiting factor with respect to the translation of its concepts to social sciences and human contexts.

My view is that there is a distinction between complexity and systems thinking. First and foremost it is important to acknowledge that systems thinking have had a major influence in complexity. This should not be surprising as the scholarship of complexity could and should also be viewed as an interdisciplinary and multi-disciplinary study. Secondly a systems view to education should be that education’s purpose is to add value to society and as such creating boundaries between fields of study fails to recognise the fact that the complex world we live in requires multi-dimensional ways of resolving its challenges. Complexity seeks to close this gap.

Given these paradigms, I argue that there was a need for the review of strategy development processes at Walter Sisulu University. The research conducted indeed assessed and unearthed the type of planning paradigm(s) followed by the university in its strategy development processes. The paradigm(s) has been tested against the literature that has been reviewed on strategy. Most importantly there are signs on the extent to which complexity theory is or not applicable in a higher education environment. This question is motivated by Stacey's (2007) assertion that what is presented as disorder, disequilibrium and irregularity are nothing else other than a presentation of a crisis which has been caused by ambiguity in these terms as applied in human systems. The answers to the research questions of the study probably give insights into Stacey's assertion.

#### **2.4. Rationale for the Study**

Given the fact that there is a plurality of literature in strategy development, it was important to study the underlying theories underpinning the strategy development process at WSU. This is particularly justified by the fact that there are relatively new theories that have emerged in the area of strategy for example the complex adaptive systems view of strategy. It was as such critical to examine the organization's strategy development process against these theories so as to examine the value and the limitations of the emergent theories on strategy. To a certain extent a contrast between the dominant theories on strategy formulation and the relatively new theories was made. The study answered the following questions:

- What is the strategy development process?
- What perspectives inform strategy development?
- What are the implications for strategy development from a complexity theory perspective?
- What are the appropriate models for strategy development from a complex adaptive systems perspective?

## 2.5. Conclusion

The review of literature was helpful in creating a clear context for the study with regards to the available literature in the area of strategy. The review posed some questions with respect to the process of developing strategy in organisations. I chose to use the term 'development' as a way of acknowledging that perhaps it is a term that embraces all the prevailing perspectives with respect to strategy. Some emergent questions from the literature for instance are as follows:

- Is there a role at all for leadership and planning units in strategy development?
- Is it necessary for organisations to have strategy? If the answer is yes, how this strategy should be developed? If the answer is no, what is then going to happen to the organisation in the absence of strategy? In essence how can organisations survive without a strategy?
- Is there a correlation between strategy development and implementation?
- Does the critical mass have a role or an input to make in strategy development?
- When organisations develop their strategies, which schools should they choose as the relevant theoretical framework for the formulation of their strategies? What should be the bases for the choice of a particular theoretical framework?
- Is complexity theory applicable to organisations?
- Why organisations continue to use the rationalistic approach to planning even though complexity theory has been in existence for sometime?
- What is the importance of knowledge in strategy development?

These are vexed questions that have not necessarily been all answered by this study.



### **3. CHAPTER 3 - RESEARCH DESIGN / METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1. Introduction**

The purpose of this chapter is to give an outline of the research design and methods that were used to study the research problem. The context of this chapter is to broadly outline tools that have been used to conduct the study. It should nonetheless be borne in mind that the tools employed in the study should be looked at holistically. This is because this process should be viewed as one of continuous learning. This at the same time does not necessarily mean that tools to be employed have not been researched and borrowed from literature. The process should be seen as:

‘a creative and strategic process that involves constantly assessing, reassessing, and making decisions about the best possible means for obtaining trustworthy information, carrying out appropriate analysis and drawing credible conclusions, (O’Leary: 2004, p.1).

Whilst applying the tools the researcher also used creative and innovative ways to enrich the study without necessarily compromising the established research norms and standards. This was important because research is about the value addition to the existing body of knowledge. That body of knowledge also includes literature on how to conduct research. A case in point for instance is the parallel lines that the literature draws on the two approaches to research, namely, qualitative and quantitative,(Maree:2007). Much of the literature treats these as mutually exclusive. It is my view that certain elements of these could be combined depending on the nature of research and the research questions. In a sense the type of study should determine the approach to be followed as well as the data collection techniques which could be a combination of elements from the two approaches.

It must also be acknowledged that creative thinking especially in the context of investigating or seeking to measure a complex problem is quite demanding. O’Leary (2004) suggests that the creative thinking process often involves abandoning old ways of thinking and thus adopting new ones and thus emerging with new ideas. This allows for the surfacing of multiplicity of ideas and thus not accepting single ideas and answers as the truth.

This chapter specifically covers the background to the study as a way of reconnecting the chapter with previous chapters. The research questions will also be restated with a view to ensuring that there is a clear linkage and alignment between the research methodology and the research questions. This will be followed by a discussion of the research approach and paradigm, which will locate the study within a qualitative paradigm and will also outline the fact that the underlying theoretical framework of the study will be complex adaptive systems. The methodology, data collection instruments and data analysis will then be discussed. Finally a brief statement is presented on ethical issues that have been considered in the study in order to enhance its credibility. This will be followed by a conclusion of the chapter.

### **3.2. Background to the Study and Research Questions**

The intention of the research was to review the strategy development process at Walter Sisulu University (WSU). This review was undertaken using complexity theory as a principal guiding theoretical framework. The study sought to grasp the process of strategy development at Walter Sisulu University and with a focus in understanding the underlying philosophy behind strategy formulation.

Central to the study was also the documentation and exposition of various perspectives at WSU that inform strategy development. If there were various perspectives, what were they and what informed these perspectives? It was very important to understand the underlying theories that informed the strategy development perspective. Having studied these perspectives, it was crucial to draw implications from these questions for strategy development from a complexity theory point of view.

The last question the study responded to are the implications for strategy development from a complexity theory perspective. Given the fact that complexity theory posits that strategy is not deliberate in organisations, but emerges through continuous interaction with the environment, one hoped to draw some useful insights from the literature that may serve as strong building blocks for a model for strategy development from a complexity perspective. The significance of a model is crucial as complexity theory has been criticized for being a relevant theory, which is too difficult to implement.

The study aimed at concretely answering the following questions:

- What is the strategy development process?
- What perspectives inform strategy development?
- What are the implications for strategy development from a complexity theory perspective?
- What are the appropriate models for strategy development from a complex adaptive systems perspective?

### **3.3. Research Approach and Paradigm**

The study is based on qualitative paradigm. This is because the study is intended to understand a human and social problem. This approach is drawn from literature in research particularly social research. Mouton (2006) argues that the basic purpose of research is to solve empirical and theoretical problems.

Maree (2007) characterises qualitative research as studying real world phenomena, and notes that this real world does not exist independently of human knowledge and whilst at the same time human behaviour is influenced by knowledge of the social world. The essence of this is that by and large, social life is the outcome of human actions and the human mind. In this context, the research is carried out in real life situations. This is against a quantitative paradigm of research where there are hypotheses and a need for experimentation. The difference between the two could also be traced from the evolution of schools of thought in research. There are principally two schools of thought associated with the two approaches. One school is positivism and the other is post-positivism. Positivism puts emphasis on the classical scientific approach to research. The emphasis according to O'Leary (2004) is prediction and control of the forces around us. In the context of this school, research is viewed as a process that needs to follow a certain set of rules. In the course of conducting research the researcher must be objective. Its methodology is anchored on reproducibility, deduction and reliability. On the other hand post-positivism recognises the fact that research takes place within the context of a changing world

and conditions. Central in their belief is the fact that the world needs to be interpreted from various perspectives. Maree (2007: p.65) agrees with this view and states that:

'Post-positivist approaches assume that reality is multiple, subjective and mentally constructed by individuals. For the post-positivist researcher, reality is not a fixed entity and it is to a certain degree accepted that reality is the creation of individuals involved in the research. Post-positivists caution, however, that the constructed reality does not exist in a vacuum, but is influenced by context.'

The methods used by post-positivists are usually inductive, exploratory, dependable and auditable. In a sense this school of thought on research centers around the rigorous following of qualitative research methods and thus ensuring that at the end the study is credible and defensible.

There is, however, a need to be conscious and not draw a line between the two paradigms as some researchers could use what is called mixed methods in research. Critical in the choice of a paradigm are the epistemological or ontological assumptions informing the research problem. In the context of this study, the object of study is the institution of higher learning, namely the university. It is therefore a social entity made up by individuals. These individuals are then organised into groups in various forms (e.g. departments and faculties) by the university. The study focuses not only on individuals in this organisation but on the strategy development process these individuals as a collective have either put in place or experienced/ are continually experiencing at the university. The chosen research approach and paradigm seeks to respond to and has been informed by this context. As mentioned earlier, the qualitative paradigm is the overall guide. However, when it comes to data collection techniques one has combined elements of the qualitative with those of the quantitative paradigms. The justification for this approach with respect to data collection is that some information from the respondents had to be collected through the use of the questionnaire.

The study was located within the theory of complexity and as the problem investigated was a human and social problem, a nonlinear and non-deterministic perspective approach was used to conduct research. In particular, the focus on the

interrogation of strategy development process was from the lens of complex adaptive systems. This therefore meant that the underlying theoretical framework of the study was a complex adaptive systems within the broad milieu of systems thinking and strategic management.

### **3.4. Methods and Data Collection Instruments**

The sampling method used was the purposive sampling which is one of the non-probability sampling types. This is so because of the predetermined group the study was intended to focus on. The group were managers at Walter Sisulu University both at middle and senior management levels. A questionnaire was developed and sent to individual members of the senior and middle management of the university. This sample has been chosen because strategy development is the responsibility of this group in the organisation. The managers have been chosen therefore on the basis of their expertise. The assumption was that they are the ones who understand the “nuts and bolts” of strategy development. The size of the sample was fifty. This was the number of senior and middle managers at WSU. Whilst all of them were sent the questionnaires, it was anticipated that not all of them will return the questionnaires as a kind of a norm in research. The response rates (O’Leary: 2004) in research vary from research to research.

The data collection instruments that were chosen were carefully looked at with a view to ensuring that they led to the emergence of credible and defensible findings. The process of selecting data collection instruments was informed by the type of data needed to respond to the research questions. Essentially the data needed for the study centered on the understanding of the strategy development process at Walter Sisulu University. Critical therefore was the process of strategy development and the underlying philosophical framework behind the process of developing a strategy. This process may have been formally defined or may have been practiced without being written down. The choice of the data collection methods was able to source data from participants regardless of the prevailing contexts. The methods were also able to help the researcher to analyse and interpret the findings and then be able to draw an underlying theoretical framework within which strategy is developed at WSU. The justification for this was that the theoretical framework could only be figured out from the data collected. Surely this would be done in contrast and

comparison with the available literature. This has been dealt with more in the section that deals with data analysis.

The data collection methods used was questionnaires and interviews. The two types of data collection methods were used as a form of triangulation so as to reinforce and confirm key themes emerging out of the study as triangulation is about confirming the authenticity of the source. Triangulation also helped address the limitations of each of the two data collection methods used.

Questionnaires and interviews were chosen as data collection methods because they afforded the respondents privacy and confidentiality. This is important as according to O'Leary (2004) data collection must be accompanied and enabled by certain protocols so as to ensure credibility of the process.

Questionnaires have particularly been chosen due to the following reasons:

- The mode of distribution was through an e-mail and this could provide a quick response turnaround ;
- They are relatively low cost when compared with other methods and especially given the fact that the study was not funded;
- Questionnaires afforded me access to managers who were spread all over the four campuses of WSU. The geographical spread of the university is such that one travels no less than 1hour 30 minutes from one campus to the other. The uneven spread of management in our campuses would have made one spend a lot of time on travelling if I had chosen other collection methods. The methods chosen allowed respondents time to formulate responses.

The questionnaires comprised open ended questions that triggered short responses, with space to make comments and thus allowing respondents to add more views. This approach allowed respondents to truly express themselves and thus enhance the credibility of the study. This, in a sense, helped them justify the answers. The questionnaire is attached as **annexure 1**.

Interviews were used as a second data collection method. The interviews were a follow-up to the questionnaires. Given the nature of the research problem,

interviews had a potential to produce credible results. It afforded direct interaction with the participants. It also gave one an opportunity of explaining the purpose of the study to the interviewees.

The form the interviews took were one - on - one session with the interviewees. This was informed by keeping and ensuring that the participants are free to raise their views and at the same time this is intended to ensure confidentiality. The type of interviews that were conducted was semi-structured. Semi-structured interviews according to Maree (2007) are usually conducted for purposes of collaborating data from other sources. These types of interviews also allow for the observation of reactions of respondents and probing. Interviews have been chosen as an additional method because they enable quality and high rate of responses.

Interviewees were also selected from the same group of managers. Five interviews were conducted out of the potential fifty respondents. Seventy percent of these were from middle management and thirty percent were from senior management. The interview questioning strategy was such that it allowed for explanatory and descriptive answers. The questions were not intended to fully repeat the questions asked in the questionnaire. However, for purposes of collaboration and confirmation of the results of the questionnaire, most of the questions were repeated. Essentially that is the reason behind having interviews to reinforce the questionnaire. The form of recording of the interview was through writing down the answers. A list of questions asked to participants during the interviews is attached as **annexure 2**.

### **3.5. Data Analysis**

The analysis of data was undertaken through qualitative forms including thematic and content analyses. Mouton (2006) argues that in qualitative studies the overall meaning of data is more important than the meaning of its parts. The essence of this is to be consistent with the underlying theoretical framework of the study which is complex adaptive systems. The data was analysed through coding and grouping into various themes. These themes were then grouped according to the number of responses to various questions in the questionnaire and in the interview. This critical aspect of the study required one to be open minded about what was emerging out of this process. Emergent themes were then grouped together according to their

relatedness. Relatedness was judged on the bases of common responses whose messages are similar or mean the same thing when interpreted. This process was preceded by a thorough reading of the relevant literature by the researcher. This was helpful in understanding and contextualizing emergent themes and relating with the results. This was very important because if there is poor understanding of the underlying literature one could have employed data analysis tools that are incongruent with the research questions and objectives. The data was then grouped into various themes. Themes were then grouped according to key words and phrases that are used repeatedly by respondents. These words and phrases were looked at in context, which was the context within which respondents used them. These themes were then represented in a form of a rich picture. The rich picture helped establish interconnections and the viewing of the data in a holistic and systemic way. This helped in the drawing of and consolidation of interconnections, interrelatedness and relationships amongst the data. The advantage of using a mixed method of data analysis was that the credibility of data was enhanced. These were then followed by the process of interpretation and summarising of data so as to establish and distinguish what emerges as key findings from the study.

### **3.6. Ethical Considerations**

O'Leary (2004) points that ethics in research is one area that is consistently emphasised. Obviously this is the case due to the fact that the findings of the research have huge implications for the researcher, the academic institution in the case of academic research or the organisation commissioned that research in the case of contracted research. Most importantly in my view is the use of findings of the research. In other words research may lead to the taking of wrong decisions by organisations. On the one hand the body of knowledge needs to be enhanced through appropriate and value adding credible research. At the core of this matter is that of ensuring that the research process is credible from the seminal stages of research up till the end. The onus therefore is upon the researcher to ensure that ethical considerations are built in and upheld throughout the research process. At the core of this, it is the researcher who must guarantee the integrity of the research process.



In the context of this study one planned to uphold research through ensuring that this study was conducted within the norms and values of rigorous academic research. These values included the following:

- Acknowledging sources: one has acknowledged sources of information used in the course of conducting this study. This was very important so as to be able to differentiate originality from the work of others.
- Ensuring anonymity: participants in the study were assured of their anonymity. Their participation in the study was voluntary. Nobody was coerced into participating into the study through unacceptable ways.
- Participants in the study did so voluntarily and all completed the informed consent form. The form is attached as **annexure 3**

O'Leary (2004: p.53) state that informed consent by the participants implies that participants are:

- Competent – they have the intellectual capacity and psychological maturity necessary to understand the nature of research and their involvement in the study.
- Autonomous – they are making self directed and self determined choices.
- Involved voluntarily – they must be made aware of the research that is being conducted
- Aware of the right to discontinue – participants are under no obligation to continue their involvement, and pressure to continue should not be applied.
- Not deceived – researchers need to be honest about the nature of their research... and the intended use of their research.
- Not coerced – positions of power should not be used to get individuals participate in a study.

- Not induced – an offer of money or some other reward that entices individuals to participate in research that they would otherwise avoid is considered inducement. While it may be acceptable to compensate individuals for their time and effort, it should not be to an extent where it compromises a potential participant's judgement.

As part of ethical considerations, permission for the conducting of the study was duly requested from the university.

### **3.7. Conclusion**

The chapter has given a broad outline of the tools that were employed in the course of conducting research. The research questions have been restated. The research took a qualitative approach. Qualitative research methods were applied and the data collection instruments used was questionnaires and interviews. The data analysis was done through coding and grouping of data into related and common themes. The instruments used to conduct research have been attached.

## **4. CHAPTER 4 - ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS**

### **4.1. Introduction**

This Chapter discusses the analysis and findings of the study. It first gives a brief background about the purpose of the study and the research questions. This is followed by a description of how the data was organised and analysed.

A detailed discussion of the findings is then made and this is represented in various forms e.g. tables. The findings are then discussed separately with reference to the literature on strategy with a view to giving an exposition in terms of the underlying theory that informs a particular viewpoint or perspective.

The chapter is then concluded with a summary and conclusion.

### **4.2. Purpose of the Study and Research Questions**

The intention of the research was to review the strategy development process at Walter Sisulu University (WSU). The review was undertaken by means of complexity theory as a principal guiding theoretical framework.

The study was intended to comprehend the process of strategy development at Walter Sisulu University. Central to the study was the documentation and exposition of various perspectives at WSU that informed strategy development. If there was a plurality of perspectives, what were these and what informed these perspectives? Having studied these perspectives, it was then critical to draw implications from these questions for strategy development from a complexity point of view.

The final question the study had to respond to are the implications for strategy development from a complexity theory perspective.

The study was aimed at concretely answering the following questions:

- What is the strategy development process?
- What perspectives inform strategy development?

- What are the implications for strategy development from a complexity theory perspective?
- What are the appropriate models for strategy development from a complex adaptive systems perspective?

### **4.3. Organisation of Data**

The sampling method used to collect data was a purposive sampling. This was informed by the predetermined group the study focused on. The group was the Walter Sisulu University middle and senior management levels. A questionnaire was developed and sent to the respondents. The sample was chosen because strategy development is mainly the responsibility of this group in the organisation. The assumption here was that they are the ones who understand the “nuts and bolts” of strategy development. The size of the sample was fifty. The study used two data collection methods; questionnaires and interviews. The two types of data collection methods were used as a form of triangulation so as to reinforce and confirm key themes emerging out of the study as triangulation is about confirming the authenticity of the source. Triangulation also helps address the limitations of each of the two data collection methods used individually.

Questionnaires and interviews were chosen as data collection methods because they afforded the respondents privacy and confidentiality. This was viewed as important as data collection must be accompanied and enabled by certain protocols so as to safeguard the credibility of the process.

The questionnaire comprised open ended questions that triggered short responses, with space to make comments and thus allowing respondents to add more views. This approach allowed respondents to truly express themselves and thus enhancing the credibility of the study. This, in a sense, helped them justify the answers. Questionnaires were sent to all senior and middle managers at the university and forty four (44%) percent of the questionnaires were returned. Whilst the response rates in research vary from research to research, I considered this response within acceptable norms.

Interviews were used as a second data collection method. The interviews were a follow-up to the questionnaires. The form the interviews took was one on one. The type of interviews that were conducted was semi-structured.

Interviewees were selected from the same group of managers. Five interviews were conducted. The interview questioning strategy allowed for explanatory and descriptive answers. The form of recording of the interview was through writing down the answers.

#### **4.4. Analysis of Data**

##### **4.4.1. Background**

The analysis of data has been undertaken through qualitative forms including thematic and content analyses. Mouton (2006) argues that in qualitative studies the overall meaning of data is more important than the meaning of its parts. The essence of this is to be consistent with the underlying theoretical framework of the study which is complex adaptive systems. The data was grouped into various themes. These themes were grouped according to the number of responses to various questions in the questionnaire and in the interview. The responses from the interviews were integrated to those of the questionnaire. Emergent cognate themes were then grouped together according to their relatedness which was judged on the basis of common responses whose messages were similar or meant the same thing when interpreted. The data analysis was preceded by a thorough reading of the relevant literature by the researcher and this helped in understanding and contextualizing emergent themes.

##### **4.4.2. Analysis**

The respondents were drawn from all the campuses of the university. In terms of gender, the majority of respondents were male with 71% and 29% were females. This in a sense reflects the gender representation at the university at the level of management. The age group of the respondents was thinly spread with 62% of the respondents between the ages of 40-50 years. In terms of the number of years spent at the university an overwhelming 77 % of respondents were at the university for more than five years and 52% have been in management for more than ten years.

This perforce indicates the depth, knowledge and experiencing of the university by the respondents. It is important to state that this is an assumption as there is no linear relationship between a number of years in an organisation or in management and the experience and memory one possesses and accumulates.

The majority (86%) of respondents who led various divisions at WSU indicated that they had strategic plans in place. They also indicated that there is a formal process of developing a strategic plan in their respective divisions. In terms of how they have experienced the WSU planning processes, 90% indicated that they directly participate in the institutional strategy formulation processes. This means that they experience strategy development in their divisions as well as at the level of the institution.

The respondents answered in the following manner to various questions put before them:

#### **4.4.2.1. The role of leadership in strategy development**

In the main respondents were of the view that organisational leadership should play the role of facilitation and guidance in the process of strategy development. Those who felt that the leadership should play a facilitation role believed that such a role should be to guide the process so that all the stakeholders could buy into the strategy. They argue that leadership must unite and mobilise stakeholders behind the process. The strategy development process should motivate the organisation towards the achievement of goals and to embracing the emergence of new ideas. The feeling is also that leadership must serve as a resource and provide intelligent insight into the process. Through this it must bring about innovation and new ideas to the process through benchmarking. One respondent argued that the leadership must *use the vantage point in terms of bigger picture perspective for the necessary synergy, dependence, confluence and the management of possible contradictions.*

On the other hand another perspective argued that the role of leadership in strategy is to provide direction. Leadership therefore must provide the vision, set values and goals and ways to deliver on them. It must *model the way, give guidance and motivation towards the attainment of the organizational goals sets the direction, decide on values and mobilize commitment.* The argument behind this view is that

strategy is the role of leadership. This perspective therefore posits that leadership needs to provide frameworks within which divisions are to work from, supervise and monitor, lead and communicate the process. This perspective also stressed the position that it is equally a responsibility of leadership to mobilise and rally the entire organisation behind the desired state of the organisation. In summary therefore leadership must steer the process and keep it focused and productive. Finally, leadership must engineer strategic enactment in an organisation.

#### **4.4.2.2. Who should be Involved in the Process of Strategy Development?**

The overwhelming response was that everyone who will be involved in the implementation must participate in strategy development. Some respondents suggested the involvement of the Vice Chancellor and Principal, Executive Management, Senior Management, Staff Unions and Student Governance structures. The motivation behind this is for buy-in, ownership and risk management. Some were also of the view that strategy development should be seen as a partnership process in organisations. It is therefore imperative to ensure that the process of determining the direction of the university is all inclusive. Engaging stakeholders is also seen as an opportunity for the stakeholders to share the vision of the university and thus understanding the bigger picture. Emphasis is made in this regard that their involvement should become a fabric of the university. Most critically, their involvement will enrich the process as through their contributions especially students their needs will be known and incorporated. Labour unions also play a meaningful role in influencing the direction of the country and the world taken in the broader scheme of things. As an entity of power it is therefore critical to have unions part of the process. Some suggested that a model of engaging everyone needs to be developed. Such a model was referred to as a possible top down and bottom up approaches. It is a kind of a mixed or hybrid approach to strategy development. Emphasis though was made that each stakeholder must have a defined role in the process. One respondent made the following observation on this issue: *Whether top-down or bottom-up or both. It matters where you start and I recommend top-down, followed by bottom-up, because it starts and ends with the people responsible for driving the plan, while the trajectory itself improves buy in. It is a fallacy to think that the small people have nothing to contribute. Even their fears or sentiments (negative*

*or positive) and their small scope contributions have a place in planning. There is a danger of planning for all the grand milestones and not plan for the small people which often leads to grand plans without people at the coal-face to implement them.*

There was a strong view that also suggested that stakeholders with an interest in higher education, including community organisations, advisory boards, and all those who have an interest in the well-being of society should be involved. The basis for this is that since the university has to respond to community needs and address scarce skills, amongst other things, these can only be addressed in consultation with the stakeholders mentioned.

There are some respondents albeit in the minority who strongly felt that strategy is the competence of management and the rest can only just make submissions to the top echelon of the organisation. It is up to the top management to consider or reject those submissions. For instance the top management will focus on strategic issues, middle management on tactical issues and the general staff on operational issues. These should be aligned so that everyone can contribute. It should start at the top and filter down to the bottom.

On the role of the critical mass in strategy, there was a strong view that they need to participate through making submissions. Their role should be recognised as they are an important platform for feedback and gap analysis. They are the foot soldiers who must materialize the vision and mission without whom strategic planning will be in name only. In the final analysis ordinary staff members in an academic unit are the implementers of the strategic plans and therefore, it is wise for them to be involved at the planning stage so as to accept and own the strategic plan and be committed to implementing it and in meeting the set timelines. Their involvement will therefore provide the necessary support, namely the climate and culture conducive for the environment in which the strategy will be realised. Some respondents motivated their responses by arguing that the critical mass are *key partners who must have an insight as to where we are going, how and why and that these are the key stakeholders without whose participation the strategies cannot be implemented. And that their participation will generate the spirit of excitement and passion about the future; to help manage power dynamics which would be very complicated if such a*



mass feels left behind. One respondent summed it up by saying *unless people or their genuine representatives are involved; implementation at grassroots level will be difficult*. Albeit the overwhelming support for an inclusive process, there was a strong view that the critical mass be involved only at the implementation stage.

#### **4.4.2.3. What should be the role of the Planning Unit in strategy development?**

There were mixed responses essentially from two perspectives. Strategy should be an inclusive process. The first perspective argues that the planning unit should be responsible for the facilitation and co-ordination of strategy development processes at the university. In this context its role should be to provide university planning frameworks and guidelines. One respondent suggested that *the role of the planning unit should be to facilitate strategy development as well as integrating planning with the financial strategy and develop the implementation framework that supports the strategy...*It should play the consultancy role, guide preparations and give updates on what needs to be done continuously. At the core of its functions should be to also provide planning and implementation tools for the university. As part of facilitation, it should also ensure that there is alignment and provide channels for the flow of information for informed planning. This is important because *organisational strategy should be owned by all the players, hence their role become critical*.

Another perspective was that the planning unit should play a facilitation and development role. This perspective argues that if the unit were to play only the role of facilitation, the process may not lead to the desired results due to lack of interest and or poor response to the process. This perspective also argues that the planning unit needs to develop the university wide strategy and facilitate only at unit level for alignment. Clearly there are diverse views on the role of the planning unit in strategy development. This divergence is particularly more on the area of emphases.

#### **4.4.2.4. The perspectives of managers on the current WSU Strategic Plan**

The overwhelming majority (90%) of the respondents were of the view that the strategy is realistic and inspiring, especially given the operational context of the

university. However, they also stated that it needs to be properly resourced if it is to be realised. Operational plans therefore need to be resource driven.

Some found the learning and teaching, research and community engagement aspects of the strategy inspiring. Others argued that given the verity that not everyone owns the strategy, it is not inspiring.

Some said the strategy is both realistic and inspiring. One respondent supported this view by arguing that *WSU has taken a departure from common tradition in many respects. It is a developmental university for real. WSU is going to the community and not the community coming to it. WSU has developed a passion for rural development and now urban renewal.* The university has laid a solid foundation for the future, and planning was a well thought through process. One respondent cautioned and advised that *an organisation (WSU) is an entity that functions in an unpredictable environment. Therefore strategy should be flexible to unpredictable and uncontrollable forces.*

#### **4.4.2.5. The definition of strategy from the perspective of WSU managers**

The respondents mainly defined strategy from a traditional and dominant theory perspective. Strategy was defined as a structured process that defines the organisation's future. It is a plan to achieve future plans. It is an action road map and a forward looking plan. Some respondents particularly gave the following definitions:

*It's the direction and scope of the organization over long term and how best to allocate resources within a given environment that meets the market needs whilst fulfilling stakeholder expectations.*

*It is a clear approach on achieving institutional objectives based on a sensible allocation of resources.*

*It is about mobilizing and capacitating an institution administratively (HR, stakeholders) financially and politically towards optimum synergy and alignment to its declared vision and mission.*

*A strategic plan is a management game plan that gives direction to all the activities of the organization so that it can compete or out-compete its rivals and excel in service delivery.*

*The system of articulating the vision and mission of the organization or entity, against the PEST (political, economic, social & technological) factors, or SWOT (strength, weaknesses, opportunities and threats) analysis, which result in clear goals and objectives about key performance areas of such an entity, for the competitive advantage about the future, which must not just be survival, but excellence in the rugged and turbulent environment of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.*

Finally some defined strategy as the way the organisation chooses to function in order to realise its goals.

#### **4.4.2.6. Strategy Formulation and WSU Processes of Strategy Formulation**

The respondents are essentially of the view that strategy formulation is a planning operation to determine appropriate ways of realising the vision of an organisation. It is a process that involves analysis, choice and implementation. Strategy formulation is the practice of determining suitable choices of action for the accomplishment of institutional goals and thus realising the purpose of the organisation. It is also about the streamlining of respective inputs from stakeholders and harnessing same towards realizing the institution's vision, mission and objectives and gearing up towards realizing this given it's available resources and perceived constraints (SWOT; Planning-by-objectives; zero-based budgeting or whichever methods are employed. Strategy formulation is a consultative process considering the perspectives of all stakeholders in terms of developing the vision and mission of an organization, considering its role in an ever-evolving society. It is also a way of expressing not just how the identity of an organization will be crafted, but also determining its main pursuits and the trajectory to be followed.

Most respondents were also of the view that the process of strategy formulation at WSU is very clear. It is important to state though that 10% felt that it was not clear. Those who said it was clear described it as a *gamut of consultation from top to the bottom*. They described it as a transparent process that aligns university thinking on

its future. Some described it as an iterative top-down and bottom-up process. The top-down and bottom-up process ensures that there is consolidation and alignment.

Those who said it was not clear argue that the process is not transparent and it really depends on the unit as to which approach they use in formulating their strategy.

On other processes for strategy formulation some preferred the following approaches or methods:

- The process to be driven by knowledgeable people.
- The process to be a bottom-up approach.
- A broad consultative process that is top-down and bottom-up. It must be a process of conversing about the future of the organisation. In this regard scenario planning tools need to be employed.
- *The methodology of conversations: from the conversations of reflections, to conversations of listening, of potential, of planning, of action, of accomplishment and conversations of completion.*
- *Generally a facilitator guided process of management on listing the current situation, stating the vision, mission and values and then utilise strategic framework such as the balanced score card to identify the objectives that take us towards the vision.*
- It must be a linear process that follows Michael Porter's five forces model.
- A top down process, particularly in periods of turbulence.

Even though there was an overwhelming agreement that the process of strategy development at WSU is clear, nonetheless, only fifty eight percent (58%) of respondents said the process yields the desired results. Thirty seven percent (37%) were not sure and five percent (5%) said it did not. Some were of the view that the process needs to be improved by employing ways of measuring objectives and ensuring that the objectives are smarter. There was a view that the strategy of the university should be flexible and adapt to the non-static environment.

#### 4.4.2.7. The Time Horizons for Strategic Plans

The respondents were of the view that time horizons are very important for strategic plans. The basis for their responses was that to be on the *right track the strategic plan needs to be checked regularly for purposes of continuous improvement...A plan has to be flexible and be reviewed as part of an evolutionary process.* When asked about the time horizon for the WSU strategic plan, sixty two percent (62%) of them said it is ten years, twenty nine percent said it is five years and the remaining nine percent (9%) said it is three years. So in a sense thirty eight percent of managers did not know the time horizon of the WSU strategic plan. Given the fact that time horizons for strategic plans differ from organisation to organisation, the managers of WSU had the following preferences in terms of time horizons for a strategic plan as shown in table 4.1 below:

<b>Time Horizon</b>	<b>Response in terms of percentages</b>
Ten Years	19%
Five Years	67%
Three Years	9%
One Year	5%

**Table 4.1. Time Horizons for a Strategic Plan**

Table 4.1 above shows that the dominant time horizon of five years for strategic plans is still the most preferred. The perspective of those respondents who favoured ten years argue that it is reasonable for higher education as it requires long term forward looking. They are of the view that the issue of time horizons is not fixed as it allows room for review whenever it is necessary.

Those who supported the dominant time horizon of five years made the following arguments behind their preference:

- It gives the implementers ample time for roll-out as well as engaging on relevant reviews. It is easy to renew on an annual basis.

- It is a national benchmark. It is important for the institution to follow national trends for alignment purposes.
- It is relevant so that there is factoring in of environmental changes as change is a constant factor of the 21<sup>st</sup> century especially given the fact that we operate in a world that is very difficult to predict.
- Five years is correct as people need to see change and results as quickly as possible.

Those who prefer three years argued that this horizon heralds quick wins and confidence in the organisation. They also believed that three years position the organisation such that it can respond to the changes in its environmental context.

Some respondents though raised some critical commentary in relation to time horizons for strategic plans:

- The time horizons in the strategic plans depend on the life cycle of an organisation.
- The strategic plans should be seen as evolving and as a consequence the issue of timelines could be cascaded from an institutional, divisional and up to operational levels.
- The university should consider a more compact term for its plans. Its plans should be checked regularly for continuous improvement.
- The university should factor in flexibility and reviews in the planning process so that changes can be easily accommodated.

#### **4.4.2.8. Should the Strategic Plan be strictly followed once approved?**

The majority (81%) of respondents felt that the strategic plan of the university should be followed strictly once it is approved. The following reasons were advanced to substantiate this view:

- The plan must be followed so that the mistakes that have been identified can be corrected and a new plan put into place;

- It is an official and guiding document that gives a whole picture of what should happen in an organisation;
- It makes an organisation work towards the achievement of its objectives and as planning is done for purposes of ensuring that at the end there could be an evaluation on the road followed to deliver it, so If not followed it will be difficult to monitor and evaluate implementation.
- The data generated in monitoring will be unreliable if strategy implementation is allowed to fluctuate. It is therefore better to follow the plan very strictly and if a deviation becomes necessary it must be preceded by substantial analysis of the data collected in the monitoring processes and a strategy review to make allowance for the deviation, otherwise, there should be no planning if the plans are not going to be followed.

One respondent cautioned *that it will be a suicide if the university is contrary to its own plan. If it is not strictly followed then the desired goals will not be achieved.* The plan must be followed also for purposes of accountability. There was further caution though paradoxically that the strategic plan must be followed only if there are no variations in the environment. In this context, the plan should always be viewed as a guide.

Those who are against the strict adherence call in the main for flexibility. They argue that there are always unforeseen circumstances and uncontrollable forces. As result the organisation must have mechanisms in place to accommodate changes in the internal and external environment.

#### **4.4.2.9. The Link between the Strategic Planning Process and Implementation**

When asked as to whether the implementation of the strategy should follow after the approval of the plan, eighty three percent (83%) responded in the affirmative. This view is based on the notion that the strategic plan shall determine the course of implementation. One respondent felt that *the strategy should be developed, approved and then implemented and implementation should not take place when there is no strategy in place.* An implementation process that is based on the

approved strategic plan would counter haphazard execution of the plan. In this context, one respondent asked rhetorically: *the plan is your compass, how do you navigate without one?*

On the contrary, there was a strong view that the process of strategic planning should not be seen as linear. In reality it should follow a cyclical movement; should not be static and should respond to the dictates of the environment in which it operates. There will obviously be instances where WSU will literally have *to think on its feet* and adjust and adapt due to unforeseen developments in the educational sphere. It is therefore essential to recognise that the 'strategic analysis, strategic choice and strategic implementation is not mutually exclusive, that is one following another, a reverse route is often necessary to take. The answer assumes that a cyclic approach is adopted instead of a linear approach.

#### **4.4.2.10. Alignment of Strategy to the Daily Work of Managers as well as the**

##### **Adaptability and Flexibility of Strategy to the Environmental Context**

The frequency of alignment of the strategic plan to operations differed. Some (68%) said their daily operations are aligned whereas others said alignment is only checked on a monthly basis. One respondent stated that *unanticipated changes on the strategy should be documented and be motivated to be part of the plan. The changes should be properly authorized. Annual review enables our unit to fit into our strategy unanticipated changes in our environmental context.* Other respondents were of the view that this is not achieved in a linear way. They only built into their daily operations the imperatives of a particular day as circumstances dictated.

On whether strategy needed to be adapted to the environmental changes, the respondents provided the following responses moving from the basis that nothing is static:

- The strategic plan is a living document that requires annual reviews. This process is enabled by continuous environmental scans.
- A strategy is not cast in stone and should make allowances for unanticipated changes. If the strategy is inflexible it will fail as there is no one who is certain about the future.



- There is need to constantly revisit and review the strategic analysis, strategic choice and strategic implementation against changes in the environment. This should be an on-going process. Central in this is documenting changes ensuing in the environment.
- There is need for the conducting of quarterly reviews to the strategy and measurement of the impact of the changes. This is motivated by the fact that the process of strategy formulation always has blind spots and circumstances change and thus a need for flexibility in order to accommodate unanticipated events in the environment.
- There is need to respond to the environmental changes through the three symbiotic processes of process, emergence and co-aligning.
- There is need to deal with changes as they represent themselves and review action plans in the course of strategy execution. Unanticipated changes especially those that may impact negatively on departmental / university plans need to be dealt with urgently and prioritised.
- There is need for continuous adaptation, co-alignment and self-organisation through openly allowing lower level staff members to respond and adjust their operations to the environment.
- There is need in certain instances to use power to sort things out.

#### **4.4.2.11. The Frequency of Strategy Reviews and the Value Add of the Strategic Plan to the Business of the University**

The respondents provided mixed responses to the questions. The diverse views are a demonstration of contrasting perspectives, philosophies and praxis on strategy within the university. Table 4.2 below demonstrates such diverse and contrasting perspectives.

How often do you adjust your strategic plan to accommodate unanticipated changes in your environment, if any?	
Frequency	Response in Percentages
Weekly	9%
Monthly	9%
Quarterly	32%
Yearly	50%
How often should the strategic plan be reviewed once approved?	
Frequency	Response in Percentages
Quarterly	26%
Yearly	58%
Other: Biennially	16%

**Table 4.2. Strategy Review Time Lines**

Table 4.2 above shows that the majority of managers would essentially see strategy reviews done on a yearly basis. This view is however, followed by a strong view for quarterly reviews of the divisional strategic plans. The responses were also accompanied by a huge emphasis on the fact that the process itself should be viewed as continuous. Some were of the view that the whole issue really depends on the nature and period of the strategic plan.

As to whether the strategy added value to the university, there was unanimity (100%) that it has contributed positively to the business of the university. This unanimous response is justified by the following assertions from the respondents:

- The presence of the university is now being felt in a positive light as the university is perceived to be having a clear focus and direction. This is particularly so given the fact that WSU is a merged entity.

- Even though it is still *trial and error now, but the learning curve is progressive*. There are a lot of improvements required to make the plan a worthwhile tool. *It is difficult to say as yet, but there are signs to the positive direction*.
- It is used as the basis for budgeting and as a result, all WSU units are focused and the budget is aligned to the plan. The plan gives guidance with respect to university priorities. It serves as a road map that enables all the various units and faculties to see where the university is heading.
- *The advantages of synergy (collective action in pursuit of a common objective) speak for themselves in terms of WSU's measurable achievements*.
- It has led to the emergence of a new identity and brand. *WSU people know who they are and what they stand for, what they aim to do and the sense of urgency was growing. External stakeholders are beginning to watch this space and tongues are starting to talk about WSU, in other words there is improved confidence of the stakeholders. One hopes that this will soon translate to a new operational culture of delivery*.
- It has helped provide a *framework within which all role players function and thus steering a vehicle with a pre-planned direction and thus preventing it from going astray*.

#### **4.4.2.12. Does an Existence of a Strategic Plan guarantee Success to an Organisation?**

An organisation that does not have a plan is bound to fail. Fifty two percent (52%) of the respondents argue that the strategic plan does guarantee success of an organisation if it is properly implemented. Execution of the strategy therefore leads to the success of the organisation. Given the fact that you have a common road map as an organisation enables you to read from the same script and thus creating a possibility for a common vision and a shared perspective about the future. This common vision to the future though must lead to a commitment to implementation across levels in the organisation. One respondent argued that: *strategy does not guarantee success but it gives direction to what needs to be done in order to succeed in the business world. Research studies also prove that*

*the organizations that become successful are those that have strategic plans in place.*

Forty eight percent (48%) though felt that the existence of the strategy on its own is no guarantee to the success of the organisation. They argued that there could be a lot of intervening factors and chief amongst these could be the absence of an implementation, monitoring and evaluation mechanism. The human resource capacity, willingness and culture could be one of the inhibitors. The changes in the external environment could also be a negative factor.

The following was suggested as critical enablers for the successful execution of the strategic plan:

- Implementation must provide a measure of achievement of the deliverables through a monitoring and evaluation mechanism.
- As the plan points the way, defines the role players and outlines the terrain, walking the path to success requires enforcement and accountability as well as measuring performance.
- *Success depends on the multiplicity of factors such as implementation, response to unpredictable and uncontrollable forces, leadership, organisational culture, the learning ability of an organisation and resources.*
- The organisation must be ready to get out of comfort zones and embrace change.
- Stick to the strategic plan and provide the resources needed, monitor the process and provide corrective actions where necessary.
- Have a constant ear to the ground, knowing and being able to pre-empt changes and having a proactive approach. During the formulation stage all staff should be consulted to make inputs, this ensures understanding at inception stage.
- *Success depends on everyone to identify with and recognize the importance of making it work.*

- Improve on soft issues, as in staff recruitment, development and retention. Align the organizational structures. Develop good and sound policies. Develop working and cohesive teams, unity of purpose and ensure better management and effective leadership. Engage in continuous change management efforts that will lead to buy-in to the process.
- The university must be seen as a complex system.

#### **4.4.2.13. The necessity of a Strategic Plan in Organisations especially in Periods of Turbulence**

There was an overwhelming support for a strategic plan in the organisation. The main support for the strategic plan is as follows:

- It provides focus and direction; it must be realistic and achievable though. It is an action plan to realise predetermined purposes.
- It is necessary to have a strategic plan as *there is no other proven tool to measure performance; to secure funding and to encapsulate the very spirit of an institution. It provides for hindsight (past lessons learned), present (short-term and annual planning) and future projection to best serve and accommodate the community. It empowers, capacitates, innovates, validates, nurtures and nourishes its stakeholders (staff members, students, community-at-large) to guarantee upliftment. It is a ready instrument/tool for the change agents.*
- It is necessary and important as it motivates the members to do as directed by the plan and not as they please. It helps in enhancing the transparency of the activities done by an institution. It keeps the organization on its toes in order to improve its activities on a continuous basis as well as considering what the industry and government sectors require.
- It is imperative as the vision needs the strategy to ensure that the institution gets to the 'promised land' as steering a vehicle with a pre-planned direction will prevent the vehicle from going astray.

There is a caveat though that a strategic plan needs to be implemented,

reviewed, monitored, evaluated and adequately resourced if there is value to be derived out of it.

The respondents were also of the strong view that there is need for strategic plans during periods of turbulence. They felt that turbulence invites careful planning in order to offset and prevent it. Times of turbulence need special measures to cope yet the basis must be a preset strategic plan. The strategic plan could 'steer' an institution out of turbulence. One respondent stated that *circumspect strategic planning, correctly harnessed under astute leadership may arrest/dampen turbulence by anticipating, predicting and analyzing trends to absorb and cushion the impact of the unknown variable.*

The tracing of the origins of strategy from war is a compelling case for strategy during turbulent times as the military used strategy in turbulent periods of war. *In times of turbulence, every force of calm and focus is needed to counter the turbulence. When there is for example labour unrest, organisations need to review their strategic plans even more frequently and focus them even more sharply. We are in recession now – a form of turbulence. What must we do? Review our plans and refocus on fewer priorities and maybe even suspend some of our growth plans, in order to counter the recession... Things change, so amendments are necessary from time to time.* Finally, strategy should not be seen as a tool to respond in periods of turbulence but throughout.

#### **4.4.2.14. Should the Planning Process be Formalized and Documented?**

All the respondents felt that the planning processes at the university should be formalised, structured and documented. This is important as it ensures that planning is institutionalised. They argued that this helps measure the effectiveness of the planning processes of the university. Through this way the organisation is able to quality assure the process with a view to identifying gaps, setting priorities, doing performance audits and risk management. A formalised planning process also helps in aligning assumptions, gives clarity and provides certainty about what is to be done.

Plans that are not documented can be changed as they depend on institutional memory which goes away when people change allegiance or leave the institution.

Formalising and documenting the strategic planning processes will enable all the units and faculties to have easy access to documentation that will guide them when they want to plan. It will also enable them at any point to read and look at where the institution is heading and thus align their own planning processes. It should act as an *'experience manual', 'ready reference', 'historic record' or 'best practice' guide for present- and future strategic planning efforts; and,*

- Would facilitate an ongoing trends analysis;
- Provide statistics, e.g. student movements; profiles and operational guidelines;
- Facilitate ongoing 'tweaking/adjustments' in order to ensure a fine-tuned, and keenly honed management structure (be it lower, middle, senior, executive or council itself);
- Provide a sound springboard and referenced documentation for the Department of Higher Education and Training and for other funding purposes.

This will enable the entire community of the institution to refer to the documents and know that they are available for use. More so it gives a step-by-step process that guides the activities of the university which are important for all the members concerned.

Strategy documentation is an important imperative for purposes of institutional memory. It is also essential for purposes of monitoring, review and knowledge management. This will even help future generations avoid planning pitfalls. Without it being formalized; chances are that it cannot be taken seriously. It forms part of the institutional frame of reference; the mind map and institutional history.

#### **4.5. Discussion of Findings**

The findings as presented above clearly show that the university's main theoretical framework in terms of strategy development is within the realm of traditional theories

and models of strategy. As much as there are pockets of awareness to the reality of operating in a dynamic, agile and ever-changing world, there is a strong view for a traditional approach to formulating strategy. The traditional and linear approach to managing organisations has according to Preston and Hayward (1999) had a huge impact on the management of organisations.

This theoretical approach according to Kourdi (2009) is largely based on the definition of strategy as plans, choices and decisions made to create organisational success and a superior customer value. This definition of strategy is complemented by Herholdt et al (2007) who argue that strategy is a conscious behaviour people demonstrate in an organisation with a view to ensuring its sustainable survival.

This view of strategy sees strategy making as a planned, intended and managed process with clearly predetermined outputs and outcomes. In other words this view bases its approach to strategy on a rationalist, linear and predetermined perspective. This view can be located in the historical evolution of strategy and strategic management and how most organisations have been and continue to be managed.

McKean (2009) asserts that strategy is premised in the long held view of planning which begins with the definition and mapping of the strategic planning process. This view goes on to argue that the planning process is then followed by the process of defining the strategic context of the organisation through the definition of the vision and mission, the area of business the organisation is in, its competitive advantage, as well as the principles and values it espouses. Bititci (2007) whilst agreeing with the traditional definitions of strategy as mentioned above make a caution that the strategy expires on the date of its completion due to the dynamic nature of the business environment. He thus argues that strategy should be viewed as a set of broad rules of the game to guide the organisation in making good business decisions.

According to Herholdt et al, (2007), strategic conversations in organisations are informed by three different paradigms as informed by the evolution of the management theories. The three paradigms are classical, behavioural and systems.



The classical paradigm as represented by the works of Frederick Taylor and Henri Fayol is premised on scientific management and on the creation of order in organisations as a focal point of management. It argues that management must dominate in defining the strategic outlook of an organisation through performing the functions of planning, organising, commanding, coordinating and leading.

The behavioural paradigm focuses on the building and strengthening of human relations within an organisation. The emphasis is on group participation as opposed to emphasising on the individuals in organisations.

The systems paradigm views organisations analogically as biological systems that should adapt to conditions in their environment. Their premise therefore is that organizations' primary focus should be their survival. Key to this therefore is the understanding of inter-relationships between sub-systems that make the organisation. It views organisations as open systems that are receptive to their environment.

In furtherance of the above perspectives and approaches to strategy, Kourdi (2009) presents a more nuanced and diverse view on strategy. He argues that strategic conversations in organisations are driven by the following different perspectives which are summarily presented in the table below:

<b>Characteristics of the six perspectives</b>	<b>The Classic Administrator</b>	<b>The Design Planner</b>	<b>The Role Player</b>
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Top down planning and control.</li> <li>2. Operating in hierarchical structures.</li> <li>3. Formal planning and performance management.</li> <li>4. Prescriptive view of strategic management.</li> <li>5. Emphasis on efficient management.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Planning beyond short terms.</li> <li>2. Strategy is a product of a conscious and controlled thought process.</li> <li>3. Strategy helps organisations achieve long term competitive advantage.</li> <li>4. Strategy execution is driven by the classical administrator principles.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Critique of the Design Planner and Classic Administrator as they did not take the practical realities of organisations in terms of their functioning.</li> <li>2. Advocated a need for dynamism and hasty reaction to environmental and context changes.</li> <li>3. Management role in strategy should be the one of optimistically facilitating learning and supporting rather than control and authority.</li> <li>4. Strategy emerges in the context of human networks and not as a result of intended and logical planning process.</li> </ol>
	<b>The Competitive Positioner</b>	<b>A visionary Transformer</b>	<b>The Self-Organiser</b>
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The focus is on creating an economical advantage in response to the power of the marketplace.</li> <li>2. Espoused by Porter's five forces model.</li> <li>3. Building of core competencies in order to achieve a competitive advantage.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Vision key to strategic decision making.</li> <li>2. Organisations must have a vision, mission and values.</li> <li>3. Anchored in ensuring hierarchy, structure and control</li> <li>4. Vision to be realised through communication and pragmatism (listening, learning and acting).</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Advocates for self-organising businesses around emergent strategic issues and fluid development of an organisation.</li> <li>2. Accepted practices should be challenged constantly and revised.</li> <li>3. Encourages the development of learning communities. These are sets of connections of individuals working collectively without conventional top-down supervision.</li> <li>4. Emphases is on innovation and collaboration in a rapid changing environment</li> </ol>

**Table 4.3: Different Perspectives on Strategy Conversations (Kourdi, 2009)**

The different approaches to strategy development as demonstrated in the above table could be summarized as a contrast between what is called modernism and post-modernism in relation to strategy literature. The modernist approach is

represented and embedded in the following approaches: scientific management, administrative management, behavioural and positioning as represented by Frederick Taylor, Henri Fayol, Mayo and Michael Porter respectively.

The post-modernist approach to strategy however, is based on plurality of ideas and approaches. Most importantly, it rejects 'rationality and meta-narratives'. Herholdt et al (2007:p.7) argue that:

“Postmodern thinking accepts that multiple realities exist and that a uniform view of the world is being replaced by one based on ambiguity and local truths. Complexity (and the rate of change) is increasing exponentially resulting in the rapid death of conventions, truisms and dogma (even the dogmas of postmodernism)”.

Postmodernists therefore view strategy as an ever evolving concept due to the fact that we operate in a dynamic, flexible and a fast environment that requires sensitivity to change and new ideas. The world we operate in is a turbulent one. Mason (2007:p,11) defines turbulence as:

“...dynamism in the environment, involving rapid, unexpected change in the environmental sub-dimensions ... (it) is the natural state of the world”.

The dominant perspective on how strategy development should be conducted at Walter Sisulu University is therefore informed by most of the strategy theories alluded to above. It is also important to note that a particular construction of views and ideas is always informed by a particular management and philosophical paradigm. In the case of WSU, the dominant paradigm could be broadly referred to as modernist theories of strategic management. This dominant paradigm views strategic management as a function of leadership in organisations. Leadership should therefore provide vision and direction to the organisations. Whilst recognising the role of various players like staff in influencing strategy, an emphasis is made that the ultimate responsibility for the strategy is management. This view further suggests that the approach to strategy should be a carefully planned and formalised process that is based on thorough analysis. This is supported by the overwhelming response (about 80%) of the participants who said the strategy should be strictly implemented

once it is approved. It further argues that strategy development precedes implementation. Once implemented the organisation should then embark on a process of review and that such a process should be informed by predetermined intervals. In essence this approach to strategy is based on logic, rationality and linearity.

There are elements of consciousness to post-modernist paradigms though at the university. Some respondents did make reference to the effect that the organisation operates in an unpredictable and uncontrollable environment. This suggests that there is awareness about the existential fluidity, agility and dynamism obtaining in the operational context of the university. The mentioning of this suggests that some managers' worldview although operating in a modernist school of thought recognise that the university is not insular from its environment. There is therefore an understanding that it is influenced by its environment whilst it also influences the environment in a dynamic, unplanned but emergent way.

The post-modernist view seeks to acknowledge that organisations operate at a post-managerial society as espoused by Helgo and Karp (2008). They argue that a post-managerial or post-organisational society will operate on increased complexity meaning that:

- Organisations in the future and currently will operate in more complex environments.
- Linearity, cause and effect and systemic connections will be difficult to understand.
- Organisations will be rich in culture and diversity.
- Organisations will remain under construction in perpetuity.
- 'People together construct a future that is a function of their history, their identity and their own agenda, but which is always open to further shaping as people continue to communicate and interact', (Helgo and Karp 2007: p.32).

- Individuals in organisations persuade each other through the creation of dynamic relationships that exist amongst themselves in an ever-changing environment.
- People in organisations act and react in unpredictable fashions.

What the post-modernist and post-managerial paradigms instruct us to do is to shift in ways we view organisations. Clearly there is need for a new interpretation of organisations if we are to create adaptive, creative and resilient organisations. Wheatley (2006) argues that change is constant and needs to be accepted the way it is. She is also of the view that the turbulent world we live in makes mockery of plans and predictions.

Finally, the majority and the minority views on strategy development at WSU are backed by well-established theories as exposed here-in above.

#### **4.6. Summary**

The analysis of the findings of the study clearly shows that there is awareness, participation, reflection and strong views within WSU about the significance of strategic management at the university. There are strong views for a controlled, planned top down and bottom up approaches to the strategic management process of the university. The dominant philosophical paradigm to strategy is the contemporary or modern approach. In other words it is a traditional approach to strategic management.

There is however, some awareness to the reality that today's organisations operate in a non-linear, dynamic, flexible and ever-changing contexts.

#### **4.7. Conclusion**

The Chapter has managed to give a detailed presentation and analysis of the findings of the study. A theoretical exposition of the basis of the findings and their in depth discussion was made. What the study has found is that strategy development at WSU takes place within the realm of a traditional contemporary management perspective. This theory sometimes is referred to as a modernist approach or

paradigm. There is however awareness of the fact that the university operates in a dynamic and changing context and thus awareness to post-modern paradigms.

The final Chapter of the dissertation will expand on the above conclusions in concluding and presenting recommendations.

## **5. CHAPTER 5 - RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION**

### **5.1. Introduction**

This chapter builds on the findings on chapter 4. The chapter begins with the conclusions which are based on the research questions. This is followed by recommendations that are in terms of what needs to be done with respect to the underlying theory of the study. The chapter is then concluded with a summary and conclusion.

### **5.2. Background, Purpose of the Study and Research Questions**

The intention of the research was to review the strategy development process at Walter Sisulu University. The study comprehended the process of strategy development at Walter Sisulu University.

The study aimed at concretely answering the following questions in relation to WSU:

- What is the strategy development process?
- What perspectives inform strategy development?
- What are the implications for strategy development from a complexity theory perspective?
- What are the appropriate models for strategy development from a complex adaptive systems perspective?

The literature review in this research area has concluded that there are various schools of thought in strategy development. Mintzberg et al (1998) suggest that strategy development in organisations is influenced by various schools of thought that have evolved over time in the development of the discipline of strategic management, which could be summarised as those that view strategy formulation as a deliberate and intended practice on the one hand and those that view it as something that emerges because organisations are complex entities. The former view is rationalistic, linear and deterministic, whereas the latter view is non-linear,

dynamic and characterised by emergence and self-organisation. Both views have made a significant contribution to the organization of knowledge on strategy.

The literature review was helpful in creating a clear context for the study. It posed some questions with respect to the process of developing strategy in organisations. Some emergent questions that arose from the literature for instance are as follows:

- Is there a role at all for leadership and planning units in strategy development?
- Is it necessary for organisations to have strategy? If the answer is yes, how this strategy should be developed? If the answer is no, what is then going to happen to the organisation in the absence of strategy? In essence how can organisations survive without a strategy?
- Is there a connection between strategy development and implementation?
- Does the critical mass have a role or an input to make in strategy development?
- When organisations develop their strategies, which schools should they choose as the relevant theoretical framework for the formulation of their strategies? What should be the bases for the choice of a particular theoretical framework?
- Is complexity theory applicable to organisations?
- Why organisations continue to use the rationalistic approach to planning even though complexity theory has been in existence for more than two decades?
- What is the importance of knowledge in strategy development?

These are vexed questions that cannot necessarily all be answered by this study.

### **5.3. Conclusions**

This section of the study is predicated on the purpose and questions the research was intended to respond to. The conclusions are therefore premised on these questions and seek to provide a response to these. The bases of the conclusions are



the findings which have been covered in detail in chapter 4. Each question will therefore be discussed here-in below in detail.

### **5.3.1. The Strategy Development process at WSU**

The process of strategy development at WSU is a formalised process that is based on a planned, rational and linear process. The specific characteristics of the process can be described as follows:

1. It is a controlled process that is led by the leadership of the institution and is mainly driven from the top with the participation of all stakeholders.
2. It is a process that is driven by a thorough analysis of the internal and external environment using tools for developing strategy like the SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats) analysis and scenario planning.
3. It is a process that is driven by a pre-determined vision, mission and values of the organisation.
4. The outcome of the strategy development process is a strategic plan with goals, objectives and strategies.
5. It is a process that is also aimed at emerging with a set of performance indicators and targets to be fulfilled within a particular time horizon.
6. Time horizons to the strategy are used as a tool to measure success or lack of it in realising the strategy by the organisation.
7. The finished result of the strategy formulation process is action plans aimed at the realisation of the strategy. This process is followed by reviews at certain intervals as agreed by the leadership of the university.
8. The product of the process which is a strategic plan must then be approved by management and council before implementation could commence. Once approved, these must be firmly implemented. The need for approval is to give authority to the leadership of the institution to direct the implementation of the strategy.

9. Subsequent to the approval of the strategy, other organizational processes like organizational structure, budgeting and human resources are informed and aligned to the new strategic direction of the organisation.
10. Major reviews to the strategy once it is implemented are done in accordance with pre-determined intervals or when major changes in the environment have taken place.

The above synopsis of the characteristics of the strategy development process at WSU confirms that the change process at the university is managed, directed and authority driven by the leadership of the institution. This is in line with the view that organisations' leadership should give direction, lead and show the way.

### **5.3.2. The Perspectives that inform Strategy Development at WSU**

Whereas there is no overall homogeneity in terms of approach to strategy development at WSU, however, it is my conclusion that the dominant perspective that informs strategy development at WSU is what has been described in Chapter 4 as the traditional theory of strategy formulation. This view could be described as operating within a broad framework of modernist paradigms with respect to strategy. This paradigm is anchored on the prescriptive and rationalist approach to strategy development. According to Mintzberg et al (1998) this perspective is anchored on the combination of elements of the three schools of strategy which are design, planning and positioning. The three schools view the strategy development process as formulation, implementation and then control in a planned and controlled fashion. The organizational context for the application of this paradigm should according to Mintzberg et al (1998: pp. 43-44) meet the following conditions:

1. 'The principal driver of the strategy development process should be the leadership led by the Chief Executive Officer.
2. The process must be driven by a strategist who has the wherewithal with respect to the organizational knowledge and its aspirations'.
3. The pertinent information should be present ahead of the implementation of the new strategic direction. This should be done in a context of an environment that has got stability and predictability.

4. The strategy process is driven from the center and the organization should accept this as a norm and a way of doing business. The role of the rest of the organisation is to garner resources for the execution of a strategy that has been determined at the upper echelons of the organization.

The above conditions are further amplified by the following specific elements that serve as a basis for strategy development from a positioning school perspective:

1. Strategies are mainly aimed at carving a niche area for an organisation in the marketplace. It is about competition and gaining a competitive edge in the market.
2. Strategy development therefore as a product of analysis and forecasting should be about positioning the organisation in the market.
3. The process of formulating strategy at a technical level should be driven by analysts who present scenarios to management who will in turn make the final decision in terms of the strategic choices.
4. Emerging from this process are the strategies for implementation that are in response to the position the organisation wants to take as informed by market forces, (Mintzberg et al, 1998).

The above characteristic and approach to strategy is mainly based on Michael Porter's competitive analysis model. This model identifies five forces framework that influence organisations competitiveness.

This framework according to Snowdon & Stonehouse (2007:p.257) allows organisations to evaluate:

'...threat of substitute products, bargaining power of firm's suppliers; the power of buyers or customers; the power of suppliers; and the degree and nature of rivalry among businesses in the industry...On the basis of analysis of these forces ... an organisation can develop a generic competitive strategy differentiation or cost leadership, capable of delivering superior performance through an appropriate configuration and co-ordination of its value chain activities'.

The overall impression of this perspective is that the strategy process is a deductive and deliberate process. It is premised on the myth that organisations can and are able to manage change and stability concurrently. This negates the fact that organisations operate in changing environments. Smit et al (2007) argue that organisations need to fundamentally shift from traditional models of management.

The table below presents a summary of differences between “old” and “new” organisations:

<b>Table 5.1. Contrasts between “old” and “new” institutions</b>		
<b>Dimension</b>	<b>Old</b>	<b>New</b>
Critical Tasks	Physical	Mental (Knowledge)
Relationships	Hierarchical	Lateral
Information Flow	Vertical	Horizontal and Vertical
Decision making	Top-down	Where information resides
Systems and processes	Inflexible	Flexible
Levels	Many (tall structure)	Few (flat structure)
Boundaries	Fixed	Permeable
Competitive thrust	Vertical integration	Networked
Management style	Autocratic	Participative
Culture	Compliance	Commitment and results
Mindset	Ethnocentric	Global
Workforce	Homogeneous	Diverse
Strategic focus	Efficiency	Innovation

**Source: Smit et al (2007: p.442)**

The findings of the study in the main could be inferred from the above table as characterising WSU as an “old” organisation. This does not necessarily mean that there are no elements of the “new” organisation in WSU but it is predominantly characterised by the traditional management approach and paradigm.

It must be emphasized though that the linear, deterministic and rational approach to strategy at WSU is not a reflection of homogenous thinking to strategy development. There are those (albeit in the minority) who are of the view that the strategy development process needs to accommodate the following dynamics obtaining in today's organisations. Today's organisations:

- Are constantly changing and in transition.
- Need to embrace and encourage diversity.
- Must develop and hone global strategic skills.
- Need to design and implement flexible organizational structures.
- Must bolster organizational learning and instil and create conditions for continuous knowledge transfer.
- Must encourage collaboration, teamwork and effective communication.

The above argument and critique of the dominant theory of organisational management suggests that there is plurality of ideas with respect to how organisations must be managed in the present epoch. Such plurality of views also exists at WSU. There is a view that suggests that the university strategy process must reflect a dynamic and ever-changing context of the organisation. Allmendinger (2002) supports this view by arguing that any discourse and scholarly engagement is usually founded and characterised by diverse, competing and evolving ideas. Strategy literature is therefore full of 'theoretical pluralism' even though it has been generally (Cuhna & Cuhna, 2006) dominated by dissimilar perspectives amongst the 'learning' and 'planning' schools. A detailed discussion is made below in terms of the implications of the above perspective from a complexity theory perspective.

### **5.3.3. Strategy Development Implications from a Complexity Theory**

#### **Perspective**

The modernist, traditional, linear and positivist approach to strategy development as mainly applied at WSU and in many organisations whose management philosophy is premised on centralism, authority and control is in my view less relevant in managing

organisations in an era where change is a constant. Wheatley (2006) asserts that people have shifted in the ways in which they view organisations and therefore the way we interpret the world must change. The world cannot be interpreted using the old maps. She also brazenly argues that the present turbulent world makes a mockery of our plans and predictions.

The case for the continued use of the traditional theories of strategy formulation at WSU is perhaps backed by the fact that according to McKenzie et al (2009: p. 209):

‘managing strategic contradictions has not been at the forefront of organizational scholarship in the intervening years’.

This therefore suggests that the dominant literature on organizational management and strategy development in the South African context is still predicated on the traditional theories. Clearly, the majority of academic institutions subscribe to this notion and thus a reproduction of the status quo. In this case, theoretical pluralism is occurring within the broad dominant and traditional theoretical framework. WSU is therefore influenced by this outlook and context. This influence is happening at least at structural and formal levels where the leadership and management exercise power and authority.

There is, however, no scientific evidence to prove that the university in reality (at output and outcome levels), achieves exactly what it has planned. Even some respondents did acknowledge that their daily work is not always guided by their operational plans. In my view this is a subconscious admission that the operating context of the university is fluid and nimble. This in a sense confirms Cunha & Cunha’s (2006) view of strategy as a continual process of interaction, evolution and co-evolution between organisations and their environments. This, therefore, brings us to the question of a complexity approach to strategy development. Complexity theory first and foremost conceptualises organisations as dynamic, nonlinear and complex systems. Complexity theory according to Viacava & Pedrozo (2010) defines organisations as products of a complex relationship between individuals and they are endowed with qualities that are unknown to these individuals.

Strategy is seen by complexity theorists as principally established comprehensive guiding principles envisioned to effect choices and performance. These set of guidelines are constantly changed and adapted to environmental changes. Levy (1994) argues that the complexity theory is relevant to strategy and that the following are the implications for organisations operating in complex environments:

1. Planning for long term horizons is impossible and this has huge implications for organisations whose theoretical paradigm regarding strategy moves from the view that the future is predictable. Only short-range projections and calculations of prototypes could be done.
2. Organisations operate in an environment of disequilibrium and as a consequence, there is a frequent emergence of new complex organisational typologies. Due to rapid and unexpected changes, only those organisations that are nimble, agile and dynamic are able to survive.

Moreover, organisations operating in complex environments are referred to as complex adaptive systems. Cunha & Cunha (2006) describes a complex adaptive system as having the following structural characteristics:

- Involvement of a number of individual agents in a system.
- Rules for interaction (which are iterative, recursive and self-referential) are determined local through interaction amongst the agents.
- Interactions do not follow linearity but take a non-linear approach through continuous adaptation.

Essentially therefore a complexity theory approach to strategy is that organisations adapt, evolve and co-evolve with their environments. As a result of this it is very difficult to predict the environment. Strategy development should be therefore located in the character and context of continuous organisational learning, evolution and interaction with the environment. Of significant importance in this process is the creation of a dynamic and agile environment in organisations as well as devolution of power to where the information resides so as to fast-track decision making. The role of leadership in this context is that of creating an enabling environment instead of

control. In these types of organisations, strategy emerges as a product of interaction instead of being deliberate. Viacava & Pedrozo (2010) refers to this phenomenon as *adaptive management*. They aver that this creates an environment for learning.

It is therefore my conclusion that from a complexity theory perspective, strategy is meant to herald change in an organisation. Whilst change is constant, it is however, non-linear, unpredictable and context-responsive. Strategy development (Balogun & Johnson, 2005) is therefore an emergent process. It is not something that can be deliberately planned in a rational manner.

#### **5.3.4. What are the Appropriate Models from a CAS perspective for Strategy Development?**

Due to criticism of the complexity theory as just a fad by a variety of scholars, one question the study attempted to respond to is an appropriate model/s for strategy development from a CAS perspective. The basis of the criticism is on the belief that complexity theory is very difficult if not impossible to apply. There is no cogent evidence that complexity theory helps organisations realise their purposes and mandates. Graetz & Smith (2006) profess that complexity theory remains an elusive paradigm and its application is without evidence whilst its theoretical proposed value add is rigorous and attractive.

However, there is another view that suggests that the absence of an implementation model for the complexity theory is predicated on the foundation principles of the theory itself which are self-organisation and emergence. Furthermore, complexity theory cannot be modelled as its application in practice is unintentional. The principal mechanism that needs to be done to allow space for the implementation of the theory is the creation of conditions for emergence by management and this should be the central role of management in complex adaptive systems.

Graetz and Smith (2006) however, suggest that the practical implementation of the complexity and complex adaptive systems theory is through allowing the co-existence of the traditional and new organisational forms. They argue that order generating rules applied in new organisational forms can help inspire the circumstances for self-organisation and emergence to take place. This assertion is



based on the understanding that (Graetz and Smith, 2006), institutions that have adopted the principles of complexity would create enabling conditions for a co-existence of steadiness and volatility. This means the coexistence of red tape or bureaucracy with environment that gives freedom to the employees to be creative and innovative. It is this paradox of complexity that makes it impossible and ambiguous to apply it in organisational settings despite it being a good organisational academic construction.

So it is testing to purposefully fashion a model for the application of complexity as managers in complex adaptive systems cannot determine the content of self-organisation and innovation but can only create conditions for its emergence.

The only reference made to a model is by Cunha & Cunha (2006) in what they call 'a model of the complex strategy process'. This model is founded on the view that organisations are a product of continuous interaction inside, outside and at the boundaries of an organisation and its environment. Consequently, organisations' adaptation to the environment is not through analysis, conjecturing and reflection but through interaction and response. The model makes six propositions for a strategy process as represented in figure 1 below:

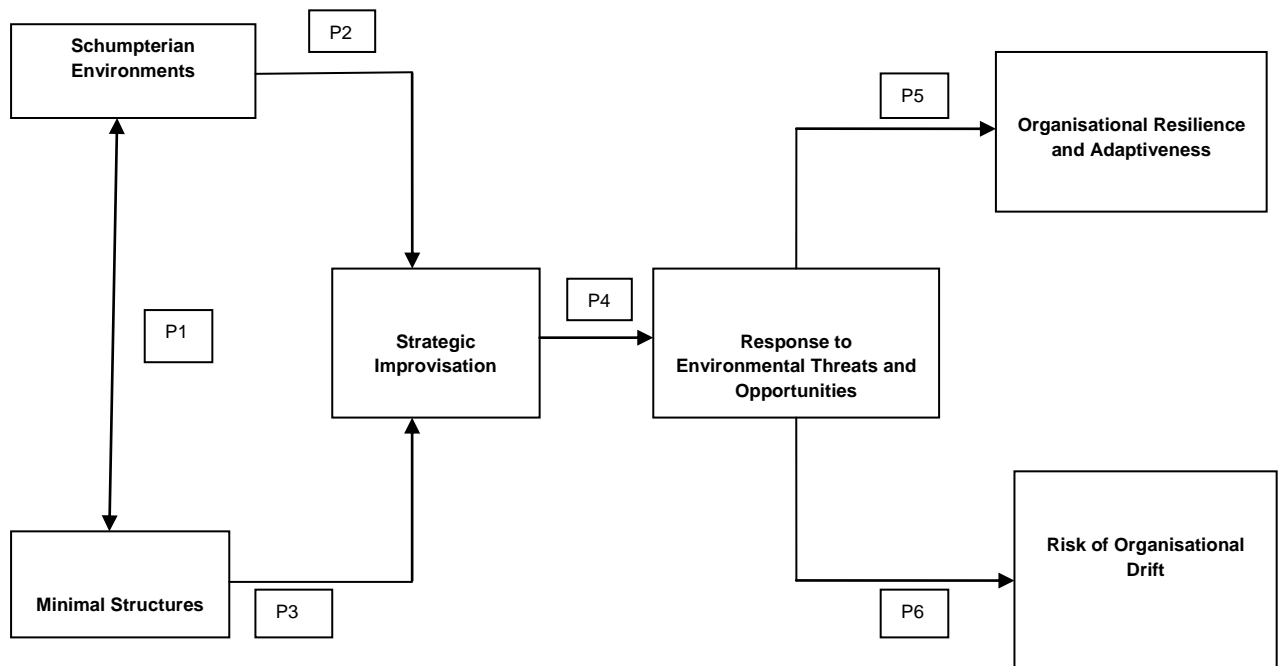


Figure 1: A Model of the complex strategy process (adapted from Cunha & Cunha: p.841)

The six propositions made by Cunha & Cunha (2006) with respect to the strategy process in a complex organisation as represented in figure1 above are briefly described below:

- Proposition 1: Rapid changing situations lead to the implementation of modest organisational forms and structures;
- Proposition 2: Rapid changing situations lead to advanced strategic creativeness;
- Proposition 3: Modest organisational structures are crucial for strategic creativeness;
- Proposition 4: Strategic creativity has a huge effect on the pace of organisational responses to changes in the dynamic environment;
- Proposition 5: Fast tactical reactions enhance institutional resilience;
- Proposition 6: Known limiting rules and fast tactical reactions enhance the danger of mission drift by organisations.

The essence of the model therefore is that organisational evolution takes place in non-conventional ways. This is attributed to the fact that organisations are not insular from their environments and do not operate within the framework of old strategy and management paradigms, but they are in consonant with the complexity theory paradigm of strategy.

In this context therefore Cunha & Cunha (2006) posit that strategic management is a continual process of enduring instability that is underpinned by action and learning with recursive feedback to each other. Consequently, strategy from the perspective of complexity theory is the ability to sustain the organisation in a paradox where choice and predetermined path mingle to create innovative outcomes.

The final proposition on possible models on strategy is made by Malik (2003). He theorises that organisations operate at different levels which are material, financial and conceptual. Organisations that operate at conceptual level have no boundaries

and are not bound by its past. Furthermore, organisations that have characteristics of complex adaptive systems are:

- Robust and have capacity to take advantage of the environment.
- Sustained by dynamic, alive and opportunistic energy.

Malik (2003) cautions though that any organisation that wants to be a sustainable complex adaptive system must acquire self-renewable energy. The anchor of such sustainability must be eagerness to want to herald change.

It is therefore clear in my view that there is no model for the application of complexity theory in organisations for the reasons that have been alluded to earlier on and central to these is the nature of the theory itself which is anchored on self-organisation and emergence. Let me hasten to add that the theory itself is a subject of itself. It is dynamic and co-evolving with the context in which it is applied and theorised. What the various authors that have been discussed in this section are pointing at is what could be described as tools and techniques for the application of complex adaptive systems and the complexity theory in its broader sense in organisations.

What they referred to as model/s in my view are suggestions on how the theory could be applied especially in relation to strategy making process. These propositions are chiefly a neatly packaged, synthesised, consolidated and aligned variety of complexity theory perspectives. On their own, they do not necessarily constitute a model.

As have been mentioned earlier on, these tools and techniques are helpful in guiding organisations operating in dynamic, agile, and fast changing environments. They therefore serve as an important analytical framework and guidelines for the implementation of the complexity theory.

#### **5.4. Recommendations**

The conclusions of the study opine that in terms of literature there are two principal theories of strategy. The first one is anchored on the traditional, positivist and modern approach to strategy. This is an off-spring of the dominant theory of strategic

management underpinned by classical and scientific management theories. The second theoretical paradigm of strategy is underpinned by the post-positivist theory of strategy and is anchored on chaos, complexity and complex adaptive systems philosophies.

The study has pointed out the sharp contrasts between the two theories. The former theory has been dominant in the literature on strategy as a consequence of the evolution of strategy and strategic management as a field of study. This has been largely informed by the theoretical and philosophical paradigm that had domination at the period. It is for this reason that the findings in chapter 4 pointed to the prevalence of this theory as a theoretical framework that informs strategy development process at WSU.

On the other hand, the latter theory is relatively new. This is due in part to little or absence of evidence for its success as an organisational theory. Even theorists and scholars who support it decry the fact that its applicability is rather abstract. To this end some complexity theorists have chosen to make differentiated emphasis. Some of these scholars propose what they call organisation dualities meaning a co-existence between the two theories in an organisation.

Given the two paradigms in terms of the findings of the study, in my view there is need for future studies in the following areas:

- There is a need for further studies on approaches, guidelines and techniques for the application of complexity theory. This is borne from the fact that literature is not conclusive in answering this question and there are no cogent reasons as to why there are very little if any case studies on the applied side of complexity theory.
- There is a need to look at approaches and studies on how complexity can be embedded in the academic content of strategy in business schools and in the rest of the academia. Some work has begun in this regard; however, few institutions and publishers have embraced this theory as having a meaningful contribution to the body of knowledge on strategy. This recommendation will have far reaching implications for academics given the current dominant

theoretical paradigm on strategy. However, this will be helpful to students as it will give them a balance and introduce them to a new dimension to the field of strategy.

- The theory is also very complex and difficult to comprehend. It is therefore necessary to have it translated into simple and easy to understand language especially in the context of it being an organisational theory. Perforce, one of the reasons why it is difficult to apply is due to its complicatedness. This complicatedness could be traced from its origins in the natural sciences.

### **5.5. Summary**

The chapter gave a detailed discussion of the conclusions of the study with particular reference to the questions and the purpose of the study. All questions were dealt with in detail with direct reference to the literature where necessary in support of the arguments put forward. The conclusions made it clear that the theoretical framework applied to develop strategy at WSU is predicated on the traditional, deterministic and linear theories to strategy. This is buttressed on authority, control, predictive and rudimentary planning approaches to strategy. There is however, a strong argument for the adoption of non-linear, lateral, dynamic and emergent approaches to the strategy process.

What is also clear from the conclusions is that there are currently no cohesive models to the strategy application from a complexity theory perspective. What is emerging are the tools, techniques and approaches to strategy process for organisations. This is an area that still needs further studies as it is a significant gap in the literature. It is equally an area of criticism from both the scholars of complexity and its antagonists.

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## 7. ANNEXURES

### 7.1. Annexure 1: Research Questionnaire

#### Research Questionnaire

#### Directions on completing the questionnaire

The purpose of the questionnaire is to draw experiences, views and impressions of Walter Sisulu University senior and middle managers on strategy development processes at the university. You are kindly requested to complete and return to me the questionnaire electronically within a week from its receipt. It should take you less than 30 minutes to complete the questionnaire.

The questionnaire has two sections. **Section A** focuses on personal questions. **Section B** focuses on strategy and strategy development processes. In the main the questions are open ended, and you are kindly requested to provide brief answers to each question. Please also put an “x” in the box provided next to each question where it is appropriate.

I hope that you will enjoy completing the questionnaire

#### Section A

#### Questions about yourself

1	Your Gender	Male	
		Female	
2	Your age group	20 – 30 years	
		30 – 40 years	
		40 – 50 years	
		50 – 60 years	
		60 and older	
3	How long have you been with the university?	Less than two years	
		More than two years but less than five years	
		More than five years	
4	How long have you been in a management position?	Less than three years	

		More than three years but less than five years	
		More than five years but less than ten years	
		More than ten years	
5	Does your Faculty/Division/Department/ Unit have a strategic plan?	Yes	
		No	
6	Is there a formal process of going about formulating a strategy in your Faculty/Division/Department/ Unit?	Yes	
		No	

## Section B

### Questions on strategy and strategy development processes

7	Do you participate in strategy development processes at WSU?	Yes	
		No	
8	If yes, briefly describe your role in this process .....		
9	What do you think is the role of leadership in strategic planning? Please explain .....		
10	Who should be involved in strategic planning from your perspective? Please explain .....		
11	Is it necessary to involve unions and students in strategic planning? Please explain.....		
12	What should be the role of the critical mass (ordinary staff members) in strategic planning, if any? Please explain.....		
13	Should the role of planning unit be to facilitate strategy development or develop the strategy for the organisation? Please elaborate your answer .....		
14	Do you think WSU has a realistic and inspiring Strategic Plan?	Yes	
		No	

		Not Sure	
15	Please elaborate your answer on 14 above.....		
16	How would you describe strategy in few words? .....		
17	What is your own understanding of strategy formulation? Please explain.....		
18	In your view is there a clear process of strategy formulation at WSU?	Yes	
		No	
19	If the answer is yes on 18 above, briefly describe the process (in terms of your experience) of strategy development at WSU.....		
20	Briefly describe other processes of formulating strategy that you know, if there are any.....		
21	Do you think that the WSU process of formulating strategy yields the intended results?	Yes	
		No	
		Not Sure	
22	What is the time horizon for the WSU Strategic Plan?	Three years	
		Five years	
		Ten years	
23	In your own view, what is the reasonable time horizon for a strategic plan?	No time horizon	
		One year	
		Three years	
		Five years	
		Ten years	
24	Please elaborate your answer on 23 above.....		
25	Once approved, should the strategic plan be strictly followed with respect to	Yes	

	implementation?	No	
26	Please elaborate your answer on 25 above.....		
27	Should strategy development precede its implementation?	Yes	
		No	
28	Please elaborate your answer on 27 above.....		
29	Is the daily work of your Division/Faculty/Department/Unit fully aligned and informed by the Strategic Plan of the University?	Yes	
		No	
30	How do you fit into your strategy unanticipated changes in your environmental context? Please explain.....		
31	How do you fit into your daily operations unanticipated changes in your operational context? Please explain.....		
32	How often do you adjust your strategic plan to accommodate unanticipated changes in your environment, if any?	Weekly	
		Monthly	
		Quarterly	
		Yearly	
33	How often should the strategic plan be reviewed once approved?	Quarterly	
		Yearly	
		Other ....	
34	Has the strategic plan added value to the business of the university?	Yes	
		No	
35	Please elaborate your answer on 34 above.....		
36	Does the strategic plan guarantee success of the university?	Yes	
		No	

37	Please elaborate your answer on 36 above .....		
38	What should be done to guarantee success of the university? Please explain.....		
39	In your perspective, is it necessary to have a strategic plan? Please explain.....		
40	Do you think that it is necessary to have a strategic plan in periods of turbulence?	Yes	
		No	
41	Please elaborate your answer on 40 above.....		
42	In your view should the strategic planning processes at the university be formalized and documented?	Yes	
		No	
43	Please elaborate your answer on 38 above.....		
44	Do you think the university should be flexible in the implementation of its strategic plan and accommodate unanticipated changes in its context?	Yes	
		No	
45	Please elaborate your answer on 40 above.....		
<b>Thank you very much for taking your time to complete the questionnaire</b>			

## 7.2. Annexure 2: Interview Schedule

### Interview Schedule

1. Please tell me about your position and your functions?

.....  
.....  
.....

2. What are your views about the current direction of the university?

.....  
.....  
.....

3. What is your understanding of strategy, can you briefly explain to me?

.....  
.....  
.....

4. What is your understanding of the process that WSU follows when developing its strategy?

.....  
.....  
.....

5. Is the process followed in your view effective?

.....  
.....  
.....

6. What are the weaknesses in the strategy development processes and how do you think it could be improved?

.....  
.....  
.....

7. In your view who should be involved in strategy development?

.....  
.....  
.....

8. Do you think that staff members have a role to play in the development of strategy? Please elaborate your answer?

.....  
.....  
.....

9. In your own perspective what is the ideal process of developing a strategy for an organisation?

.....  
.....  
.....

10. What do you think is the role of leadership in strategic planning? Please explain

.....  
.....  
.....

11. What should be the role of the planning unit in the development of the strategic plan?

.....  
.....  
.....



.....  
.....  
12. What do you think about the WSU strategic plan, do you think that if implemented it will take the university to greater heights?.....  
.....

.....  
13. In your own view, what is a reasonable time horizon for a strategic plan?.....  
.....

.....  
14. Once approved, should the strategic plan be strictly followed with respect to implementation?.....  
.....

.....  
15. Should strategy development precede its implementation?  
.....  
.....

.....  
16. How do you fit into your strategy unanticipated changes in your environmental context? Please explain.  
.....  
.....

.....  
17. How do you fit into your daily operations unanticipated changes in your operational context? Please explain.  
.....  
.....

.....  
18. Do you think that having a strategic plan guarantees success of the university?.....  
.....

.....  
19. In your perspective, is it necessary to have a strategic plan? Please explain.  
.....  
.....

.....  
20. In your view should the strategic planning processes at the university be formalized and documented?.....  
.....

.....  
21. Do you think the university should be flexible in the implementation of its strategic plan and accommodate unanticipated changes in its context?.....  
.....  
.....

### 7.3. Annexure 3: Letter of Informed Consent

#### UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL (UKZN)

#### LEADERSHIP CENTRE

Dear Respondent,

#### **Master of Commerce Research Project**

**Researcher:** Luthando Jack (047 401 6171)

**Supervisor:** Shamim Bodhanya (031 260 1493)

**Research Office:** Ms P Ximba (031 260 3587)

I, Luthando Jack an M Com student, at the Leadership Centre, of the University of KwaZulu Natal, invite you to participate in a research project entitled “**The strategy development process at Walter Sisulu University: Implications from a complexity theory perspective**”. The aim of this study is: to review the strategy development process at Walter Sisulu University. This review will be undertaken using complexity theory as a principle guiding theoretical framework. Complexity theory is a relatively new theory especially when compared to other (traditional and dominant) theories in strategy formulation. The study will seek to comprehend the process of strategy development at Walter Sisulu University from a complexity theory perspective.

Through your participation I hope to understand the process of strategy development at WSU from your perspective. The results of the questionnaire are intended to contribute to understanding strategy development from different theoretical perspectives.

Your participation in this project is voluntary. You may refuse to participate or withdraw from the project at any time with no negative consequence. There will be no monetary gain from participating in this survey. Confidentiality and anonymity of records identifying you as a participant will be maintained by the Leadership Centre of the UKZN.

If you have any questions or concerns about completing the questionnaire or about participating in this study, you may contact me or my supervisor at the numbers listed above.

The questionnaire should take you about 30 minutes to complete. I hope you will take the time to complete this questionnaire.

Sincerely,

Investigator's  
Date \_\_\_\_\_

signature \_\_\_\_\_

**UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL**

**LEADERSHIP CENTRE**

**Master of Commerce Research Project**

**Researcher:** Luthando Jack (047 401 6171)

**Supervisor:** Shamim Bodhanya (031 260 1493)

**Research Office:** Ms P Ximba (031 260 3587)

**CONSENT**

I..... (Full names of participant) hereby confirm that I understand the contents of this document and the nature of the research project, and I consent to participating in the research project.

I understand that I am at liberty to withdraw from the project at any time, should I so desire.

**SIGNATURE OF PARTICIPANT**

**DATE**

.....

## 7.4. Annexure 4: Ethical Clearance Approval Letter



RESEARCH OFFICE (GOVAN MBEKI CENTRE)  
WESTVILLE CAMPUS  
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22 SEPTEMBER 2009

Mr. Luthando Phillip Jack (203515277)  
Leadership Centre  
Management Studies  
Westville

Dear Mr. Jack

**ETHICAL CLEARANCE APPROVAL NUMBER: HSS/0545/09M**

I wish to inform you that your application for ethical clearance has received full approval for the following project:

**"The strategy development process at Walter Sisulu University: Implications from a complexity theory perspective".**

**PLEASE NOTE: Research data should be securely stored in the school/department for a period of 5 years**

I take this opportunity of wishing you everything of the best with your study.

Yours faithfully

  
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**PROFESSOR STEVEN COLLINGS (CHAIR)**  
**HUMANITIES & SOCIAL SCIENCES ETHICS COMMITTEE**

cc. Supervisor (Mr S Bodhanya)  
cc. Ms. C. Haddon