

GROWTH STRATEGIES AND IMPLEMENTATION IN A HIGHER INSTITUTION

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Abstract

The role played by higher institutions goes beyond education and research, but also procreation of new business ventures and solving current socio-economic problems. These social obligations of tertiary education serve as the underpinning for its actuality and existence. Strategy implementation, particularly in higher institutions, is one of the current areas of research and the importance of dynamic capabilities as a catalyst of growth imperatives is important. The aim of this research was to investigate the process of implementing growth strategies and how higher institutions can overcome inertia by enhancing transformation capacities. This research drew on dynamic capabilities theory, for clues as to how institutions become dynamic through bolstering transformation capacities. The study followed a qualitative approach, with a single case as the research strategy. Furthermore, it preserved the originality of interviewees' interpretation regarding the catalytic role of dynamic capabilities on strategy implementation. Content analysis was utilised to analyse the rich textual data generated from the semi-structured interviews conducted. The findings of this research seem to resonate with the general problems associated with implementation of growth strategies and it may be prudent for the institution to consider approaches that refine dynamic capabilities; particularly the transformation capacity. The conclusion reached in the study was that dynamic capabilities are catalytic in nature and therefore the implementation of strategy should balance the three capacities namely, sensing, seizing and transforming.

Keywords: growth, strategy implementation, private higher institution

INTRODUCTION

Despite the fact that several studies have endeavoured to offer insight into understanding incapacity during the implementation of growth strategies in the higher education sector (Fedato, Pires, & Trez, 2017:289; Lee & Puranam, 2016:1530); thus contributing to the strategic management body of knowledge, our understanding remains far from complete.

The field of strategic management has mounted an enormous effort to define and understand the relationship between growth strategies and dynamic capabilities. This yawning gap has triggered a flood of debate and discussion on the topic of growth strategy implementation vis a vis dynamic capabilities.

Dynamic capabilities were advanced initially in the private sector and are spreading into the higher education context to assist universities and colleges to anticipate and respond to their changing environments (Leigh & Teece, 2016:186). Empirical evidence from research in the private sector suggests that dynamic capabilities can play a catalytic role as a strategic tool to ameliorate incapacity during expansion. According to Leigh & Teece (2016:203) the few articles that have conjecturally subjected the concept of dynamic capabilities to a higher education context have used qualitative methodologies to proffer impressionistic insight into incapacity during implementation of growth strategies.

Therefore, a better understanding of how rapidly growing institutions through deployment of dynamic capabilities, successfully align and realign their resource base, to ascend to new spheres, structures, processes and value chains is needed (Felin & Powell, 2016:78; Pisano, 2016:3; Teece, Pisano & Shuen, 1997:509-533; Teece, 2007:1320). As a consequence, this study investigated the relationship between dynamic capabilities and implementation of growth strategies. Central to this focus was the catalytic role of dynamic capabilities on refining implementation of growth strategies in the South African higher education sector.

Competitive dynamics research (Smith, Ferrier & Ndofor, 2001:3) underscores three indispensable drivers of an organisation's ability to adapt, as follows: "awareness, motivation and capabilities" (Yi, He, Ndofor and Wei., 2015:19). Although awareness (sensing) addresses the necessity for change, and motivation the whys and wherefores for change, the ability to implement (transform) growth strategies predicates on the institution's capabilities (Ndofor, Sirmon, & He, 2011:640; Ouma & Gichinga, 2017:1390).

Building on competitive dynamics research, dynamic capabilities are disaggregated into three capacities as follows: sensing, seizing and transformation (Teece, 2007:1342). Successful implementation is made possible by institutions' capabilities to sense as well as seize prospects and to transform their resource-base to augment a better strategic fit with the changing business environment. If these capabilities are properly orchestrated, institutions are able to turn around growth strategies quicker.

Against this backdrop, the debate regarding strategy and organisational theory has shifted drastically from competitive advantage to capacity to manage strategic change (Boniface & Groenewald, 2016:266; Reeves & Deimler, 2011:135; Teece *et al.*, 1997:509; Teece, 2007:1342; Verona & Ravasi, 2003:578).

This capacity is encapsulated in the notion that there has to be an institutional ability to change as informed by strategic imperatives, an ability which is lacking in higher education contexts for the most part (Leih & Teece, 2016:189). To date, the researcher has not detected any study subjecting dynamic capabilities to the higher education sector in South Africa.

Pursuant to a deeper understanding of the need for dynamic capabilities as a catalyst for implementation of growth strategies, it is essential to explore a specific private higher education institution (HEI) undergoing strategic change in South Africa. The inexorable increase in demand for private higher education in South Africa has presented massive prospects for growth in the sector. As a result, a perennial leader in private higher education adopted an accelerated growth strategy through; inter alia, acquisitions, mergers, horizontal integration and market development (Douglas, 2017:1). To capitalise on the opportunity, the holding company merged two campuses that were operating under different brands, to form one private HEI. Because of the strategic shift, the carrying capacity trebled to about 9 000 students.

The holding company specialises in the delivery of a plethora of services including basic and tertiary education, development of skills, training, and recruitment services. The group is among the biggest private providers of tertiary education in South Africa, offering undergraduate and postgraduate degree programmes. The group functions through its subsidiaries geographically spread across South Africa.

The holding company has placed enormous responsibility on the newly established higher education institution (HEI) to dovetail with the existing growth strategy. According to McKelvie and Wiklund (2010:264), growth is a process and can be defined as the change of state amid two points in time. Since the colossal growth in the student numbers, the college has realised outstanding financial results and has contributed significantly to the revenue of the holding company. However, this unparalleled growth has not been without its challenges.

In other words, the lack of capacity to transform at the higher education institution (HEI) has presented an opportunity to examine sensing, seizing and transformation capacities, as critical components in the conceptual rendering of dynamic capabilities. This research draws on dynamic capabilities theory, for clues as to how organisations become dynamic as well as grow through bolstering sensing, seizing and transformation capacities

It is against this background that the subsequent research question was asked: What is the relationship between growth strategies and dynamic capabilities?

In line with the research problem, question, and purpose of the study, the subsequent section particularises the primary and secondary research objectives that guided the study:

Primary research objective:

To explore the relationship between growth strategies and dynamic capabilities in a higher education institution.

Secondary objectives:

- To determine the use of dynamic capabilities by the HEI to implement growth strategies
- To understand how organisations can overcome inertia by bolstering transformation capacities
- To determine possible challenges relating to dynamic capabilities when implementing growth strategies.

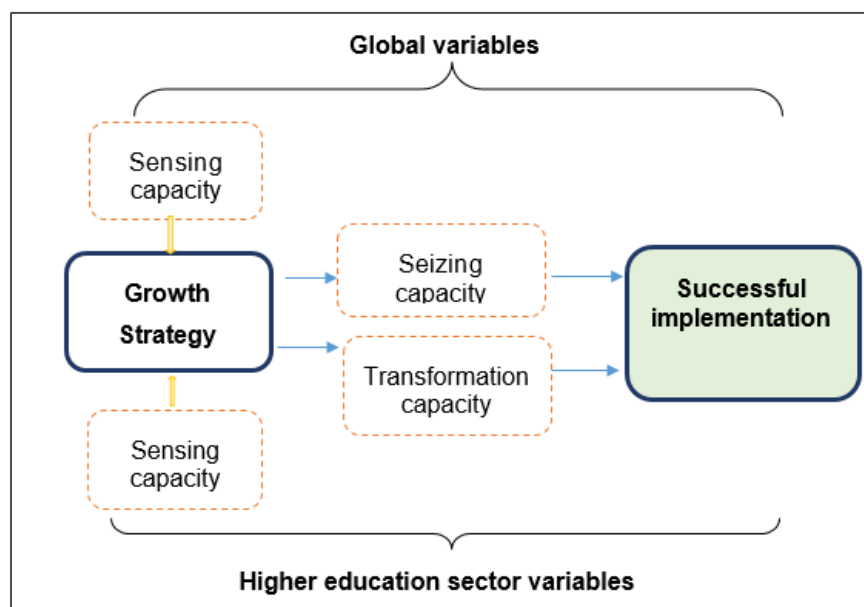
LITERATURE REVIEW

The review of previous research supporting this study casts strong evidence on the proposition that sensing, seizing, and transformation are critical capacities that will enable institutions of higher learning to reconfigure their resource-base during expansion.

The conceptual model of this study draws insights from incidental theoretical literature as well as empirical literature. The following assumptions underpin the theoretical model depicted below (Figure 1).

- a) The higher education institution (HEI) under study does not operate in isolation; the environment it operates in thus influences it as illustrated below.
- b) The holding company crafts a growth strategy which is then cascaded down to the higher education institution (HEI) (subsidiary).
- c) The initial resources required by the higher education institution (HEI) are provided by the holding company by way of capital injection or any other funding structure.
- d) Dynamic capabilities will then modify the resource base accordingly, thus giving the higher education institution (HEI) the necessary capacity as well as dynamism to dovetail the growth strategy.
- e) A lack of capacity is largely attributed to absence of dynamic capabilities especially during a strategic shift.

Figure 1: Conceptual model of the relationship between a growth strategy and constituent components of dynamic capabilities



Source: Own compilation

The conceptual model illustrates the need for the institution to scan its environment to pave a way for proper strategy formulation through to implementation. Global variables provide the macro-context that requires strategic focus while the immediate sector variables are critical for competitive advantage to be gained from strategy. The actual growth will accrue from the sensing and seizing capacity that the institution wields. This capacity will in turn stimulate a propensity to transform and the ultimate result will be the successful implementation of the strategy.

The interplay between dynamic capabilities and strategy

Helfat *et al.* (2008:32) argue that formulation and implementation research continue to exist separately with little intellectual intercourse between them. Rumelt, Schendel, and Teece (1994:1), in their recitation of the evolution of strategic management, postulate that the formulation-implementation dichotomy began to take shape in the 1970s when some researchers assumed a positivist philosophy in order to understand the interplay between performance and strategy. As a result, the formulation (the “what” of capability and resource change) and the implementation (the “how” of resource and change) were conceived. The researcher in an attempt to put a different complexion to this matter argues that dynamic capabilities provide a basis for the two constructs’ formulation and implementation to come together. Helfat *et al.* (2008:32) and Rumelt (2011:6) also reinforce this proposition.

Building on the discussion above, Rumelt (2011:6) argues that strategy, dynamic capabilities, and the market environment co-exist. According to Rumelt (2011:6), a solid strategy has three attributes namely: diagnosis, a guiding policy and coherent action. Rumelt’s (2011:6) trichotomy intermingles with the three capacities that make up dynamic capabilities (sensing, seizing and transformation). Table 1 hereunder depicts the triadic relationship of strategy, dynamic capabilities and strategy implementation. This linkage is critical to this study because it supports the proposition that dynamic capabilities play a pertinent role in strategy formulation and more importantly in strategy implementation.

Table 1: The linkage between strategy and dynamic capabilities

<i>Strategy kernel</i>	Diagnosis	Guiding policy	Coherent action
<i>Related dynamic capabilities schema</i>	Sensing	Seizing/transformat ion	Seizing/transformat ion

Source: Adapted from (Foss & Saebi, 2015:37)

In the same vein, Teece (2014b:328) using empirical findings from American universities, argues that organisations with strong dynamic capabilities have a special ability to reduce the gap between formulation and implementation, thus it quickens strategic change. Therefore, dynamic capabilities contribute to the implementation of strategies.

Seller (1993 cited in Foss & Saebi 2015:37) captured the essence of speed by quoting the former CEO of IBM Lou Gerstner, “You have to be fast at your feet and adaptive or else strategy is useless.” Implicit in this pronouncement is the catalytic role of dynamic capabilities on implementation of strategies. Yi *et al.* (2015:18) who empirically proved that dynamic capabilities enhanced implementation speed also echoed this notion of agility.

EXPLICATING FACETS OF GROWTH

According to Helfat *et al.* (2008:100-101) dynamic capabilities aid organisations to grow sustainably. Growth can take many forms including size (increase in student enrolment and infrastructure), relational as well as capabilities. From a dynamic capabilities standpoint, an organisation’s trajectory (path) of transformation is premised on the existing resources and organisational capabilities (positions), from which transformation or change proceeds (Helfat *et al.* (2008:100-101).

There are many strategies organisations can pursue to realise set goals. These strategies can be categorised into three (Lazenby, 2012:58) namely, growth, decline and corporate combination strategies. The three categories presuppose the responses an organisation takes in the face of environmental change. During organisational decline, the response vastly differs in focus from promptings that may inspire corporate combination as a business strategy. Of relevance to this research are growth strategies and their antecedents as delineated hereunder.

Size growth

Size growth implies a business focus that seeks transformational growth in size directed at specific business elements (faculties) within the micro-environment. Furlan and Grandinetti (2011:198) describe size growth as augmentation of the organisation's boundaries over time. According to Penrose (1959:1), this type of growth can be disaggregated into internal or external. McKelvie and Wiklund (2010:261) claim that internal growth is more organic because strategic business units are broadened through investments both in new products and markets or through Greenfield operations such as new commercial units. External growth occurs when two organisations merge to form one bigger organisation. Either way, internal or external growth will broaden the organisation's scope and operations. Evidently, size growth is dependent on strictures demanded by expertly formulated strategies.

Relational growth

In addition to size growth, McKelvie and Wiklund (2010:262) contend that collaboration among organisations in its numerous forms is a definite type of organisational growth. Shuen, Feiler and Teece (2014:6); Teece (2007:1342); Furlan and Grandinetti (2011:198); agree that this mode of growth is increasingly becoming pertinent as practitioners slowly move away from an "industry" mindset to an ecosystem mentality. Protagonists of the competitive forces approach such as Porter (1986, 1996:1) are being criticised for not considering the notion of ecosystems as well as complementors, especially when most organisations are forming strategic alliances to enhance their chances of growing sustainably. In this perspective, organisations through strategic relationships grow by accessing resources outside their boundaries.

Capability growth

Another mode of growth that has drawn the attention of researchers and practitioners is capability growth. This type of growth also forms a core interest of this research whose focus on dynamic capabilities underpins the central quest for business efficacy in HEIs. Furlan and Grandinetti (2011: 197) delineate capability growth as the development of novel organisational abilities over time.

The development of new abilities or capabilities is generally a function of learning that is not localised. Nonetheless, an organisation's past can deter the building of new capabilities that

enhance performance. This problem predicated on the supposition of path dependence (Pisano, 2015:9), which entails that current capabilities are dependent on yesterday's capabilities. Stated differently, deep-seated traditions can be counterproductive. To capture this notion, Levinthal and March (1993:106) coined the term "competency trap". Teece (2007:1325) notes that organisations with high path dependence have difficulties changing what they do, thus, compromising implementation of growth strategies. The notion of path dependence is reinforced by the fact that capabilities are a consequence of complex processes made up of accumulated small decisions and actions over a period, especially in scenarios of great uncertainty (Pisano, 2015:9).

To add on, Christensen and Overdorf (2000:6) argue that "processes are not nearly as flexible or adaptable as resources are - and values are even less so," especially, when harnessing capabilities to deal with change of a radical nature.

The reviewed growth typologies indicate the need to identify micro-conditions that make the organisation more dynamic and responsive to growth approaches. As such, strategy formulation, which represents one side of the coin, transpires in an ecosystem and the meticulous process of strategy formulation succeeds in the degree of specificity associated with the internal and external conditions under which an organisation operates.

STRATEGY IMPLEMENTATION: TRANSLATING GROWTH STRATEGIES INTO ACTION

The strategic management process outlines the process of formulation and implementation of strategies. Alexander (1991) cited in Alashloo, Castka and Sharp (2005:135) postulates that the strategic management process can be equated to a two-headed coin. On one side is formulation of strategy and on the other is strategy implementation. These two parts of strategy answer both, what the strategy (game plan) shall be as well as how it will be realised.

Hitt *et al.*, (2017:1) argue that to be competitive, organisations must not only formulate good strategies but also more importantly, realign values, systems, structure, culture and processes. Nevertheless, between the ideology of realignment and the realism of strategy implementation, lies a plethora of challenges (Beer, Eisenstat & Foote 2009:29). In other words, there is an aperture between the conception and the reality of strategic alignment. There is thus a gap "between knowing what to do and actually doing it" (Beer, Eisenstat & Foote 2009:29).

As organisations grow (size, relational, capability growth), executives must design a new structure or at least refashion the current one to achieve the needed evolutionary fitness (Chandler, 1962:14). The adjustment is twofold, first, the creation of the structure after the organisation's first major expansion. Second, the constant reorganisation of the newly created structure. Failure to align strategy with structure or at least to adjust the structure quickly enough may lead to economic inefficiencies because information needed to make decisions may be trapped in functional silos. In spite of the clear-cut causation between strategy and structure as well as an abridged theory of the relationship between the two constructs, executives still grapple with the multifaceted realities of a strategic expansion.

The lack of research interest around strategy implementation studies

Strategy implementation has received relatively little attention from researchers (Raps, 2005:141; Speculand, 2014:29). This problem has long been documented in strategic management literature (Wernham, 1985:632). Guohui and Eppler (2008:2) argue that a well-articulated strategy would only produce superior results when implemented successfully.

There seems to be no convergence as to why scholars have neglected strategy implementation. Researchers such as Noble (1999:119) contend that practitioners have a tendency of viewing strategy implementation as a mechanistic process. While, Day and Wensley (1983:86) argue that strategists have a predisposition of treating implementation as a strategic afterthought, scholars such as Alashloo *et al.* (2005:135) contend that implementation is not as glamorous as strategy formulation. Furthermore, some practitioners and academics tend to overlook strategy implementation because of a lore that anyone in the organisation has the capacity to implement (Alashloo *et al.*, 2005:135).

In the same vein, researchers such as Felin and Powell (2016:81) and Fedato *et al.* (2017:289) are of the opinion that most top executives get lulled in to thinking that a well-articulated strategy diffused across the organisation equals efficacious implementation. Other managers tend to approach implementation of strategies in a more placid and non-systematic way.

Above and beyond, the little research conducted thus far is mostly concentrated on commercial organisations rather than HEIs (Jiang & Carpenter, 2013:4; Shah & Nair, 2014:145). The need for research dealing with strategy implementation is as important for HEIs as it is for other purely commercial entities.

Empirical studies reviewing a lack of dynamism in universities and colleges

The central focus of higher education institutions globally is erudition, and the ancillary activities that relate to the process of knowledge impartation and acquisition. The new digitally enabled economy calls for a fresh account of how these institutions of learning should be strategically managed to remain relevant (Leih & Teece, 2016:183). Slaughter and Rhoades (2004:6) postulate that the higher education landscape and how it is altered by the new digitally enabled economy has impelled researchers to analyse how universities and colleges are responding. This process of responding (transformation) does not exist in isolation but within an ever-changing environment, as a result, responsive mechanisms should be an inherent part of the organisation.

In response to this gap, Slaughter and Rhoades (2004:1) in a seminal article titled: “Academic Capitalism and the New Economy: Markets, State, and Higher Education,” developed a theory of academic capitalism which accentuates the process of educational institutions’ integration into the new digitally enabled economy. The ambition of the theory is to create an ambidextrous university or college by expanding managerial capacity directed towards restructuring.

On the same note, Leslie and Fretwell (1996:1-298) studied how 13 universities and colleges in the United States of America, have been affected by discontinuous environments and how they have responded to the changes. In an attempt to assist institutions of learning to enhance their much-needed sensing capacity, Leslie and Fretwell (1996:1-298) recommended an array of signposts which they termed “Wise Moves.” In the same breath, Etzkowitz, Webster, and Healy (1998:1) talk of an academic revolution that involves the translation of institutions of learning into new enterprises.

Similarly, Burton (1998:5-15) published a book titled “The Entrepreneurial University: Demand and Response,” in an endeavour to answer a strategic question around how European universities are transforming in the face of an ever-evolving business environment. Burton (1998:5) proposed five commonalities, which he termed “transformation pathways” such as – a strengthened managerial core and entrepreneurial culture to assist universities and colleges to adapt. A year later, Tierney (1999:1) put out an article titled, *Building the Responsive Campus: Creating High Performance Colleges and Universities*, in a quest to understand the idiosyncratic innuendos incidental to capacity and adaptation.

Hay and Fourie (2002:115) argued that the lack of non-innovative strategic fiscal policies, unrealistic enrolment projections coupled with a lack of visionary planning are paralysing the sector. The unabated poor planning at both national and university level across most countries is also resulting in the ongoing unmet demand of students. The same can be said for the Australian higher education sector, the presence of failures can be attributed to a lack of dynamic capabilities. According to Shar and Nair (2011a) cited in Shar and Nair (2014:148) the absence of a solid higher education strategy implementation plan at national level has created massive opportunities for the private higher education sector to boom.

Leih and Teece (2016:183), who studied the role of campus leadership at American universities, namely Stanford and University of California Berkeley, contend that universities are generally at risk in a highly competitive higher education landscape partly because of management. Although some observers are unconvinced about the intrusion of strategic thinking in universities and higher education institution (HEI)s, the rate at which resources are being misappropriated is bewildering (Leih & Teece, 2016:188). Shar and Nair (2014:148) reached a similar conclusion, they revealed that in the Australian higher education sector, deficits of universities range between \$7 million united states dollars to about \$50 million dollars every year. Arguably, universities must use resources efficiently because the epoch of resource largesse and limited answerability is over in most HEIs (Leih & Teece, 2016:182).

From the discourse above, the premise underlying these seminal articles is that HEIs find it difficult to change what they do or do not have the capacity to do so. This assertion is fortified by Shattock (2003:121) who identifies the culture of educational institutions as one not necessarily residing in profit-oriented organisations. When educational institutions are called upon to employ vices that are engendered in corporate business contexts, their lack of familiarity becomes apparent. The nature of educational institutions require that they allow a shift in approach that favours a degree of dynamism especially in the context of continual transformation.

The point is made that matters of strategy naturally reside in businesses that have their primary focus on profits and growth indices that are revenue-driven (Leih & Teece, 2016:182). It is within this context that there is a realisation that it is not a simple task to infuse adherences to strategy formulations and implementation in institutions of learning that are not profit-driven. Slaughter and Rhoades (2004:1) argue that there is a lot of scepticism around corporatising institutions of learning.

Such scepticisms were amplified by Soley (1995:1) in his publication, “Leasing the Ivory Tower: The Corporate Takeover of Academia.” Soley (1995:1) unapologetically argues that institutions of learning are being subverted by external parties who are abusing resources in the name of corporatisation.

Against this background, Felin and Powell (2016:81) postulate that designing ambidextrous and dynamic organisations has presented enormous challenges for managers and academics. In this vein, the question that has proved to be elusive for most academics revolves around how contemporary organisations should be mapped onto the full diversity of their external environment, while employing processes, structure, culture and resources (Felin & Powell, 2016:81). This oxymoron is reminiscent of the coevolution theory, which underscores the importance of these endogenous variables to achieve evolutionary fitness as well as averting the organisation from decomposing into pandemonium.

Even though there are possible answers to the question of strategic alignment – such as mechanistic organisations for steady business environments and adhocracies (organic forms) for discontinuous environments, most managers still find these theories tautological (Felin & Powell, 2016:81; Beer & Eisenstat, 2009:29). This is because these concepts do not equip managers with pragmatic tools needed to bolster capacity to sense, seize and transform new opportunities. As a result, modelling organisations for dynamic capabilities has been a challenge.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill (2016:112-115) argue that there are five main types of philosophies as follows: pragmatism; interpretivism; post-modernism; critical realism; and lastly positivism. After a thorough consideration of the merits and demerits of these philosophies, the researcher adopted an interpretivist paradigm because by its nature it promotes the value of qualitative data in pursuit of knowledge (Chowdhury, 2014:434). The qualitative mode of inquiry is indispensable particularly to research that concerns dynamic capabilities because the conceptual elements germane to the construct are interwoven, complex and very difficult to measure (Eriksson, 2013:307).

The research seeks to adjust to the internal environmental settings of the higher education institution (HED); and the qualitative approach aids the identification of contextual settings as

they relate to dynamic capabilities and relational growth. Furthermore, it is important to collect data in naturalistic settings, without upsetting the status quo of operations and processes at the higher education institution (HEI). The use of a qualitative research approach makes this possible. Significant focus is accorded to dynamic capabilities as a variant of the broader organisational capabilities and a qualitative research approach allows the researcher to study dynamic processes through documenting sequential patterns and change processes at the learning institution.

Moreover, the qualitative approach provides an understanding and description of people's personal experiences regarding dynamic capabilities and the role they play in enhancing performance during a growth spurt. More importantly, it can describe, in pithy detail, the organisational capabilities embedded within the institution of higher learning. Since the input data is collected by way of a single case study, the use of a qualitative research approach enables an in-depth analysis of the relationship between growth strategies and dynamic capabilities. As such, an interview guide in which semi-structured interview questions were used to gain insights into the research problem was compiled.

The population of this study comprises all employees working for the higher education institution (HEI). Purposive sampling as well as convenience sampling was opted for because of the opportuneness drawn from the position of the researcher within the organisation. As noted by Bryman (2012) cited in Hennink, Kaiser and Marconi (2017:591), saturation is a reliable guiding principle that assesses the suitability of a purposive sample. Linked to the theory of saturation, particularly code saturation, nine interviews are usually sufficient to identify a wide range of codes as well as thematic nuances necessary to debunk the research problem (Glaser, 2017:61). In addition, Hennink *et al.* (2017:591) argue that 16-24 in-depth interviews developed around the objectives of the study are essential to reach meaning saturation. Thus, to satisfy minimum requirements of both code (hearing it all) as well as meaning saturation (understanding it all), the sample size comprised 16 employees. The sample constituted a four-tier hierarchical representation to include non-managerial, first-line, middle- and senior management as a way to have qualitative representation of the three conceptual elements of dynamic capabilities and how these intermingle with strategy.

Furthermore, the study utilised a content analysis method to analyse the primary data generated by the semi-structured interviews. This technique entailed identification of both overt and covert themes and patterns embedded in data. Content analysis is effective and widely accepted among dynamic capabilities circles, as observed in previous analogous research (Ravasi &

Verona, 2003:580). To supplement the primary data, the researcher used data triangulation, which means that data from multiple sources was used such as the higher education institution (HEI)'s website.

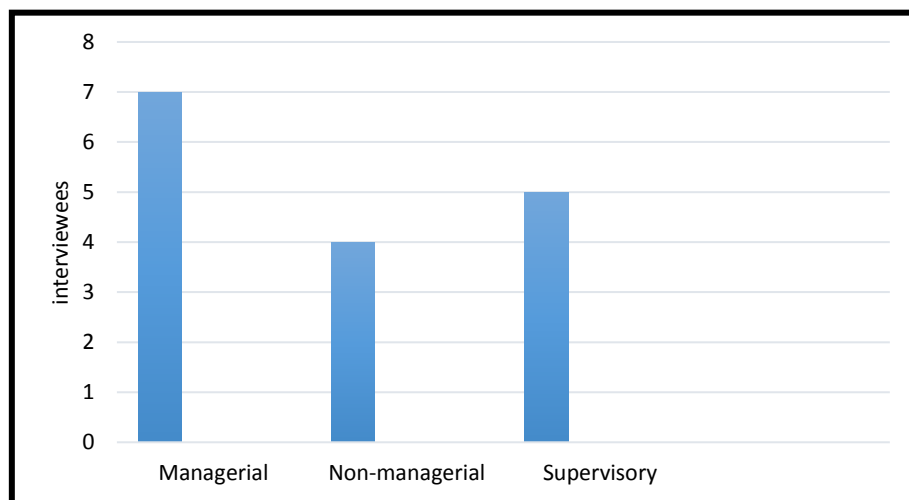
RESEARCH RESULTS AND FINDINGS

Section A provides descriptive information on the sample composition including, tenure, designation and hierarchy. Section B provides the requisite responses from interviewees in a textual and graphic format simply as rendition of received answers to interview questions, aimed at providing findings on the impact of growth and dynamic capabilities.

SECTION A

This section provides the positions held by interviewees. This is crucial to demonstrate the knowledge levels within the cross section of functionaries at various levels of the higher education institution (HEI).

Figure 2: Breakdown of positions held by the interviewees



The majority (seven) of the interviewees as illustrated by Figure 2 above were managers. Five interviewees were supervisors. The remaining interviewees were non-managerial.

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS FOR SECTION B

Section B reports on the findings and conclusions that emerged as per interview questions aligned to the objectives of the study.

To explore the relationship between growth strategies and dynamic capabilities

The objective of the research was to explore the relationship between growth strategies and dynamic capabilities. Emanating from the objective as stated was the question: What is your understanding of the relationship between dynamic capabilities, strategy and implementation?

Findings on the aspect of the coalescing influence of dynamic capabilities and growth strategies revealed that most of the interviewees were of the view that the relationship existed and was manifest in the institution's growth. Interviewees supported their accession to the necessity and existence of that relationship with the explanation that the visible competitiveness of the institution was testimony to the link that existed between dynamic capabilities and implementation of growth strategies. It is important that the interviewees formed part of the resources contributing to the growth and competitiveness of the institution. Furthermore, the interviewees' awareness of the salient relationship between growth strategy and dynamic capabilities would then translate as a contributory ingredient to the growth imperatives of the institution. Teece's (2014:1) assertion that the relationship between dynamic capabilities and strategy reduces the gap between formulation and implementation is thus affirmed by the findings of this research as interviewees ascribed strategic success to dynamic capabilities.

Research has established the relationship of competitive advantage with implementation of strategies that are driven by the concept of dynamic capabilities (Arend & Bromiley, 2009:75). This relationship is mediated by the institution's resources and other related capabilities (Eisenhardt & Martin, 2000:1105). The nature of this relationship has effects that are both direct and indirect. It is also established, in the reviewed literature, that dynamic capabilities have a positive influence on growth strategy implementation (Winter, 2003:992; Zott, 2003:91). Concerning the higher education case dealt with in this research, the phenomenal growth that was apparent was evidence of considered strategy and implementation, hence the investigation as to the catalytic influence of dynamic capabilities.

Furthermore, what was of interest to this research was to identify the existence or otherwise of the relationship between strategy and dynamic capabilities as a driver of growth. With the exception of one interviewee, all those asked revealed that institutional processes reflected the apparent existence of that relationship. In essence, the perceived existence of that relationship should be supported by the institution's resource utilisation approaches as well as its functional systems. The success of organisations such as Amazon, Apple, Discovery, Google, Facebook,

Xiaomi, Stanford University and University of California Berkeley referred to earlier in this study (Leih & Teece, 2016:183), indicated that a capacity to sense, seize and transform opportunities has a potential of revolutionising industries (Felin & Powell, 2016:4). This in turn resonates with the findings of this study in which the interviewees cited sensing abilities as an integral part of the manifest growth of the higher education institution (HEI) under review.

From an evaluation of the cognitive perceptions of the employees who were interviewed, the second objective, which was the exploration of the relationship between growth strategies and dynamic capabilities, was achieved. Responses established a sense of awareness by the interviewees, which was an indicator that the study achieved what it set out to do.

To determine the use of dynamic capabilities by the college to implement growth strategies

The findings regarding, if or not the institution was using dynamic capabilities to implement growth strategies, yielded mixed responses from the interviewees. A segment of the interviewees said that indeed the institution used dynamic capabilities to implement growth strategies. Another group of interviewees said that there was no use of dynamic capabilities in implementing growth strategies; while the remaining interviewees were not categorical about the use of dynamic capabilities. What this seemed to indicate was that there was a disparity in the level of institutional knowledge about growth strategies and their nature. Alignment of strategy implementation and dynamic capabilities did not seem to be readily apparent to the interviewees and this may be the reason why there were divergent perspectives regarding the use of dynamic capabilities concerning growth strategies. An element to consider is also the conceptual complexity of the relationship between growth strategies and dynamic capabilities, which left some of the interviewees unsure if the relationship existed.

Reviewed literature established the relationship between dynamic capabilities and institutional growth (Helfat *et al.*, 2008:37). The element of growth strategies was dealt with in the theoretical grounding of this study by simply exploring the typologies of growth, which included size growth, relational and capability growth. These were deemed important as they are driven by dynamic capabilities. It is, however, very critical to state that there are numerous growth strategies that any institution may choose to make part of its strategic thrust. Lazenby (2012:58) put forward a number of growth strategies that include, inter alia, market penetration,

market and product development, diversification, horizontal and vertical integration. Moreover, Lazenby (2012:58) also propagate the distinct differences between organic growth and acquisitive forms of growth. In this study, reference to growth strategies was made without identifying a specific generic framework to allow for an exploration that considered all the growth strategies employed by the higher education institution (HEI), which was being investigated. Besides the nature of growth strategies, the questions also solicited information related to rate of reconfiguration.

Manifest in the use of dynamic capabilities in aiding implementation of growth strategies is the rate of reconfiguration. In essence, the findings in this study revealed that the institution went through noticeable reconfiguration. This is consistent with what Ambrosini and Bowman (2009:30) referred to as transformation and recombination of assets and resources. Interviewees who supported the existence of dynamic capabilities in strategy mentioned the merger of two campuses and the reconfiguration of operational routines and processes to accommodate the growth in student numbers. Furthermore, the acquisition of a bigger asset in the form of the new campus to accommodate current and future growth, was also seen as a reconfiguration process that indicated the consideration of dynamic capabilities in the implementation of growth strategies. The variances in responses could therefore be an issue related to how these growth strategies were communicated within the institution as well as the adaptation pace. Interviewees provided adequate scope as directed by the four questions relating to the objective. It is in this regard that the objective of the study was met accordingly.

To understand how organisations can overcome inertia by bolstering transformation capacities

After establishing the alignment of dynamic capabilities and growth strategies, the next objective of the research was to assess the institution's capacity to overcome inertia by bolstering sensing, seizing and transformation capacities. It was also critical to establish the benefit of the alignment of the implementation of growth strategies to the principles of dynamic capabilities.

The interviewees unanimously, indicated that dynamic capabilities were acceptable as a strategic tool to implement strategy within the institution. Acceptance of dynamic capabilities speaks to the need of aligning the institution's culture, values and practices to support a milieu of enhanced strategy through sensing, seizing and transformation. Hitt *et al.*, (2017:1) and

Greer, *et al.*, (2017:137) ascribe institutional competitiveness to not only the formulation of good strategies but also the realignment of values, systems, structure, culture and processes. This would be the ideal for the higher education institution that was investigated. The fact that there was consensus that dynamic capabilities be used as a strategic tool, from all interviewees, indicates that there is a conscious acceptance of the efficacy of fundamental principles undergirding dynamic capabilities. This acceptance is essential for the development of cultural mores that support sensing, seizing and transformation that would lead to reconfiguration and innovative strategic behaviours.

In the same vein, the aspirations of employees, that dynamic capabilities can be used as a tool for strategy implementation, may have an effect on the institutional culture. Violinda and Jian (2017:142) claim that the institution's evolutionary fitness for sustainable renewal is critical and embedded in how effectively dynamic capabilities are used as a tool of strategy. Furthermore, they assert that the resource-based view's main tenet indicates that better performance as well as competitive advantage culminates from the fusion of dynamic capabilities and organisational culture. The keenness of the institution's employees for this to happen is apparent in the findings, where they all pointed to the appropriateness of dynamic capabilities as a strategic and pivotal tool to effect growth strategies.

Institutional culture as an innate element embedded in the functional sphere of the institution needs to continue to be monitored with a direct focus on dynamic capabilities innuendos. By unanimously acceding to the use of dynamic capabilities as a tool to overcome inertia the interviewees provided the basis upon which the study satisfied the fourth objective. The next section will focus on the challenges that the interviewees perceived to be inimical to the proper employment of dynamic capabilities in strategic processes.

To determine possible challenges relating to dynamic capabilities when implementing growth strategies

The final secondary objective of the research was to determine the possible challenges relating to dynamic capabilities when implementing growth strategies. Interviewees were asked a question that sought to determine the extent to which strategy implementation was driven by the principles of dynamic capabilities. Interviewees were therefore asked to respond to a question on the challenges encountered when implementing growth strategies from a dynamic capabilities perspective.

The challenges were wide in their scope and assumed different levels depending on each interviewee. This is why there was a variegated range of responses among the interviewees. The interviewees highlighted the institution's structure as problematic, especially concerning decision-making and general communication of strategy. Furthermore, bureaucracy that emanated from a centralised decision-making regime was identified as impeding the employment of dynamic capabilities in strategic processes. Some of the interviewees said that the leadership structure had a bearing on limitations relating to the impact of the implementation of strategy. Integration and coordination (social proofing) were also lacking resulting in a disconnection between various levels of the system, an aspect that interviewees saw as negating the gains of dynamic capabilities. The other challenge extracted from the findings related to resourcing and resource integration.

Furthermore, interviewees spoke elaborately on the dichotomy between revenue imperatives and the core business of the higher education institution (HEI), which is teaching and learning. This has a bearing on competitive advantage. Additionally, the dual focus of the institution would influence the quality of the sensing and seizing processes that are prerequisite to transformation, reconfiguration and leveraging. It was found that there were insufficient human and physical resources during the growth phase of the institution. This they said was worsened by lack of preparedness for change within the institution as well as poor people management. This could imply that there was not efficient communication of strategies or harmonisation of growth processes with resource needs. That in itself infringed on the quality of the employment of dynamic capabilities in strategic processes and in particular the transforming capacity.

The challenges raised by the interviewees are typical problems associated with the ecosystems of rapidly growing organisations. The ecosystem, as illustrated in Chapter 2, focuses on transformation. This transformation hinges on continuous alignment and realignment, fed into by loosely coupled systems; knowledge management; decentralisation and near decomposability; as well as co-specialisations critical in managing strategic fit. Implicit in this concept is the existence of a transformational ecosystem that has mutual dependencies that are secured by consistent alignment interventions. These thus constitute the micro-foundations that are supportive of the transformative imperative (Teece, 2007:1344).

Szalavetz (2015:44) states that managerial challenges caused by high growth have strong explanatory power and that refinement of dynamic capabilities and renewal of management teams may be an apt solution to typical problems associated with growth. The findings of this

research seem to resonate with the general problems associated with growth and it may be prudent for the institution to consider approaches that refine dynamic capabilities; particularly the transformation capacity. Szalavetz (2015:47) further states that although dynamic capabilities are idiosyncratic and contextual, there are certain uniform principles, which if employed in growth contexts; may assist in the refinement and sustainability of dynamic capabilities. It is therefore clear that the constraints cited should inform reconfiguration of the implementation of dynamic capabilities.

The interviewees were very articulate in delineating the range of challenges that the institution was facing. This was germane to this study in that it encapsulated the pith of the final secondary objective, which was to determine the challenges faced by the institution in implementing its growth strategy.

MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

Findings of the study identified management, decision-making, structural and bureaucratic encumbrances, as inimical to the successful implementation of dynamic capabilities in strategy. Alignment of functions, resource optimisation, leadership and strategy communication; were also highlighted as areas of concern which should occupy management in mapping strategies to eradicate gremlins in the integration of strategies and dynamic capabilities.

To maintain continual renewal and prospects for reconfiguration and leveraging of sensing, seizing and transformation; management should see to efficient adjustment of functional structures and maintain clear communication lines to minimise dissonance during growth.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

This qualitative study to investigate dynamic capabilities in a higher education institution (HEI) took the form of a single case design. Tellis (1997:2) alludes to the fact that the single case exploration normally does not easily lend itself to transferability. However, the authentic setting of the institution was redeeming.

CONCLUSION

The research set out to establish the workings of dynamic capabilities in a private higher education institution (HEI). The presence of dynamic capabilities was identified along with the challenges that emanated from rapid growth. The institution was found to be sensing, and seizing opportunities. There is, however, room to improve transforming capacity. The following conclusions were also arrived at in this study:

- Dynamic capabilities play a catalytic role during implementation of growth strategies.
- Transforming capabilities are lacking at the higher education institution (HEI).
- Strategic human resources management is important in developing and deploying dynamic capabilities since the majority of factors that affect organisational capabilities are people-related.
- Dynamic capabilities emerge when a company delivers on the combined competences and abilities of its individual employees.
- Resources and capabilities need to be consciously synchronised with growth strategies.
- The creation of an enabling internal environment is not enough to develop dynamic capabilities, particularly, transforming capacity. The transforming ecosystem that supports transforming capacity should be nurtured to support the development of reconfiguration capabilities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings of the research confirmed the existence of sensing and seizing capacity as well as identified the shortfalls of transforming capacity within the higher education institution (HEI). There is therefore a management need to attend to transformational issues since they were identified as inadequate. The following recommendations emanating from the research findings are provided:

- The higher education institution (HEI) should improve its technological innovation capability, capacity-building capability and resource mobilisation capability. Using an organisational capabilities improvement plan, the higher education institution (HEI) can adopt the results of this research in developing these capabilities.

The research examined the concept of dynamic capabilities as a functional element in the private institution of higher learning. In the exploratory study, matters of alignment kept on arising. This alignment related to resources, organisational culture and values. Two areas of further research were therefore identified as follows:

First, further research should focus on the question of aligning institutional culture with the use of dynamic capabilities in strategic processes. This would further clarify gaps regarding the relationship of institutional culture and dynamic capabilities. This relationship, which was not within the scope of this research, merits further investigation.

Second, the findings indicated that the institution is stronger in sensing and seizing and not as adept at transformation. Future research should therefore focus on an investigation of the balance between the three elements of dynamic capabilities.

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