Full Length Research Paper

Exploring academics' experiences of a merger in higher education: The reflective experience of mergers (REM)-framework

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In contrast to most mergers and acquisition literature which focuses on merger activity in the business world, this paper examines the University of Johannesburg (UJ) merger, which is typical of transformation in South African Higher Education. This merger does not conform to the norm, as it is ideologically motivated and thus the ideal base to study individual experiences of large scale change. Following a qualitative, case study approach, 40 academic employees from UJ were interviewed. Findings indicate that academics relay their experiences and perceptions of the merger in three discernable timeframes, each with its own dynamic. Collectively, these timeframes constitute the reflective experience of mergers (REM) framework, which examines how merger experiences of academic staff shape their perceptions of and attitudes towards the merger over time. The REM-framework reiterates the temporal nature of change, its effect on the emotional and psychological wellbeing of individuals, and the role of leadership during a merger.

Key words: Merger experiences, change, institutional predisposition, organisational culture, job satisfaction, grounded theory.

INTRODUCTION

Mergers and acquisitions have become a common occurrence in the organisational landscape (Papadakis, 2005; Panchal and Cartwright, 2001) and now regularly feature on managerial agenda as a strategic option. Their popularity is grounded in their apparent effectiveness as an adaptive response to an operating environment that is becoming increasingly competitive, integrated (global) and fast paced (Miller, 2004; Schabracq and Cooper, 2000). Mergers are considered as a fundamental means of organisational change and restructuration (Capron et al., 1998), as a quick and efficient means of enhancing growth (non-organic), improving synergy and economies of scale, diversifying and expanding into new markets, diluting and spreading risk (Cartwright and Schoenberg, 2006; Papadakis, 2005; Lynch and Lind, 2002), making them a means of considering sustainability in otherwise challenging operating circumstances.

Despite this generally optimistic view of mergers, there is substantial evidence to suggest that mergers and merger-related activities are not as successful as they were intended to be (Cartwright and Schoenberg, 2006; Fulop et al., 2005; Lundback and Horte, 2005; Knapp et al., 2005; Eriksson and Sundgren, 2004). Reported success rates for mergers are surprisingly low, and the incidence of failure varies between 40% and 80% (Knapp et al., 2005; Papadakis, 2005; Panchal and Cartwright, 2001). The majority of mergers essentially fail to satisfy the original intention behind their initiation. Mergers lead to operational re-organisation (Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, 2000), which leads to disruptions in functional teams and confusion surrounding reporting lines, with people losing their "mental maps" of how the workplace functions (Fulop et al., 2005; Lundback and Horte, 2005).

Any form of corporate combination has very real human resources (HR) implications (Papadakis, 2005; CIPD, 2000). Failing to address HR issues leads to consequences such as stress, fear, anxiety, depleted

productivity levels, increased absenteeism, declining job satisfaction, resistance to change and a feeling of defeatism, (Fulop et al., 2005; Du Plessis, 2004; Eriksson and Sundgren, 2004) factors collectively referred to as "merger syndrome." However, there seems to be a trend to actively seek for areas where value will be added in a merger (Eriksson and Sundgren, 2004; CIPD, 2000) to guard against demoralising staff and destroying knowledge capital (Cairncross, 2003; Collins and Porras, 2000) and to actually create employment in a merger (Eriksson and Sundgren, 2004; Ensor, 2003). This notwithstanding, there is still a general sentiment that HR related issues are not receiving enough attention in a merger (Papadakis, 2005; Lessing and Maritz, 2001).

The 2000 Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development survey on the people implications of corporate combinations (CIPD, 2000), suggests that HR-related issues receive much attention during the merger planning and merger negotiation phase, but the importance of HR issues seems to dwindle during and after the merger process. This is, in part, due to the fact that most companies fully explore the legal and financial aspects of the merger, but often fail to consider thoroughly how the new organisation will be operated and managed after the deal. Therefore, successful implementation of a merger process is dependent on a sound merger plan that takes cognisance of not only financial objectives and strategic aspects, but also the organisational and cultural alignment, management style and expectations between organizations (Mitleton-Kelly, 2006; McDonald et al., 2005) which includes HR managment (Papadakis, 2005; Peterhoff, 2004).

The HR-related issues that emanate from corporate combinations are many and varied, and range from (Fulop et al., 2005; Peterhoff, 2004):

1) Mechanistic issues, such as HR evaluation, organisational architecture and payroll.
2) Issues to be negotiated, such as conditions of service and disciplinary code.
3) Implementation approaches to integration.
4) "Soft" issues such as staff development, wellness and change management.

Of particular interest is the notion of change, as any corporate combination strategy implies change. With mergers – as a specific corporate combination strategy – the change is vast, as the whole essence of the organisation shifts. Schweiger et al., (1993) contend that the major changes which often occur during merger implementation are: the elimination or shutting down of units that become redundant or that lack certain functions or activities; combination of units; and the creation of new interrelationships among units which never had to interact in the past. Just as people have different perceptions as far as the meaning of change is concerned, so too do they bring baggage along with them into a change arena

(Eriksson, 2004; Pearse and Amos, 2004). This in turn has the effect that people view change events as being personal, giving rise to their own expectations and interpretations of change (Rovio-Johansson, 2004; Van Tonder, 2004a). This can be potentially damaging to the successful roll-out of any change orientated intervention.

Leadership plays a vital role in implementing organisational change successfully. A smooth transition and the successful roll-out of change in the organisational setting is definitely (although not solely) dependant on firm strategic leadership efforts. Here institutional management has a pivotal role to play, as subordinates look towards their management team for direction in times of uncertainty (which typifies any period of change). For UJ, the executive management team has to fulfil this leadership role. With the uncertainty that staff members face as the merger rolls out, the efforts of these institutional leaders are likely to have a long-lasting effect on the way staff at UJ perceive the merger they are experiencing.

Notwithstanding the extensive existing body of literature on the topic following various theoretical perspectives such as institutional, learning, evolutionary and agency theories (Beckman and Haunschild, 2002; Ahuja and Katila, 2001), most studies have focused on the business world. In contrast, this study focuses on a higher education merger which deviates from the norm of mergers in the business world. The transformation of higher education in South Africa, which was initiated in 2002, brought to the fore a type of merger that was not grounded on economic or financial motivation. Higher education mergers were initiated solely on the basis of redressing imbalances of the past, which essentially makes them mergers based on ideological motives. These mergers are forced mergers and simply have to succeed; failure is not an option for the institutions involved. The emphasis of this paper is therefore to attempt to shed light on the new phenomenon of an ideologically motivated merger. The focus of this paper is thus the context of higher education and how these mergers differ from conventional, or economically motivated, mergers. Hopefully, this study can deepen understanding of the complexities of mergers in general, and specifically in terms of the experiences of those involved and affected by a merger.

THE RESEARCH SETTING

During the past five years some eight mergers between Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) have taken place in South Africa. This paper is concerned with a particular merger that was announced on 31 May, 2002, and which forms part of this restructuring of the higher education landscape (TWR, 2002a).It entailed the merging of the Rand Afrikaans University (RAU), the Technikon Witwatersrand (TWR) and two campuses of Vista

University (the East Rand and Soweto Campuses). In the interest of clarity this comprehensive merger process is referred to as the 'UJ merger'.

Both TWR and RAU were opposed to the merger (TWR, 2002a), but TWR changed its stance in June 2002 (TWR, 2002b). The DoE advanced that the merger would take place in two parts (TWR, 2003a). Vista would be incorporated into RAU by 1 January 2004 and RAU and TWR would merge on 1 January 2005. RAU changed its position in February 2003 (TWR, 2003b) and the stage was set for planning the proposed merger. 2003 was spent "gearing up" and forming merger-related structures (Goldman and Coetzee, 2004; TWR, 2003a); and RAU was also preparing for the incorporation of the Vista Campuses. By 1 January 2004 the "gearing up" phase was completed and the consultative phase was about to commence. In this regard, a host of merger structures and forums were created in 2003 and 2004. The Joint Merger Steering Committee (JMSC) was the highest authority for merger issues (Goldman, 2005; Goldman and Coetzee, 2004). The JMSC comprised 5 members from each institution's Merger Steering Committee (MSC), and was jointly chaired by the Chairs of Council of RAU and TWR (Goldman, 2005; Goldman and Coetzee, 2004). The MSC of each institution developed institutional position and the JMSC deliberated these and made decisions (Goldman, 2005). JMSC and MSC were provided of input by management teams of their respective institutions and internal stakeholder forums (at RAU, this was the Institutional Forum (RAU IF); at TWR, the merger forum (TWR MF)) (TWR, 2003c). The RAU IF and TWR MF received input from ten functional task teams, equally represented from RAU and TWR under joint chairs (Goldman and Coetzee, 2004).

The UJ merger marked the establishment of the largest residential university in South Africa; spanning 5 campuses with some 40 000 students and employing close on 3 500 permanent staff. The DoE made it clear that this would be a merger of equals, and that no party was to dictate proceedings during negotiations. They furthermore laid down a merger timeline, stating that 2005 and 2006 would be an interim period, using current capacity to fill executive positions. In 2006 a permanent executive management structure would be approved, and permanency in terms of this executive management structure would be achieved by 2007.

Purpose of the study

The reasons advanced by the South African government for the mergers in higher education suggest that these mergers were politically and ideologically motivated. These mergers are seemingly different to conventional, economically motivated mergers, not only in their motives, but also in their planning. The central research question that consequently informed this study and directed its focus, design and execution was: *How did academic staff experience the UJ merger?* The study aimed *to enrich our understanding of how employees deal with change associated with a merger*. Secondary to this, the study also endeavoured to highlight the major differences between ideologically motivated and economically driven mergers.

RESEARCH METHODS

The nature of the research question suggests a qualitative study, as qualitative research attempts to unravel interesting and/or novel patterns in the data (Mouton, 1996). Because the research was conducted within a specific, narrowly defined setting, implying a very characteristic dynamic, the decision was taken for the study to follow a case study design, as case studies investigate phenomena as "bounded systems", or social entities, that can be demarcated by parameters and that possess a specific dynamic (Babbie and Mouton, 2004; Henning et al., 2004; Cooper and Emory, 1995). Data is solicited from within these parameters in various ways, including interviewing and observation (Van Der Velde et al., 2004). In this study, the focus was on change in a highly contextualised setting – UJ. Thus, UJ was seen as the bounded system, or case, under investigation in this study as it had clear parameters and a unique and specific dynamic.

The study focused on experiences of individual academics at the level of individual feelings, attitudes, views, and understandings of the merger; the latter being personally and socially constructed, thus fitting an interpretive research paradigm (Neumann, 2003). Epistemologically, first-hand accounts of how the merger was experienced (obtained directly from those who experienced it) were most suited as a vehicle of knowledge. These first-hand accounts, along with personal involvement in the merger[1], afforded an ideal opportunity to interpret these accounts, as merger involvement lead to familiarity with the research setting (Bogdan and Taylor, 1975).

The research population comprised all full time academics in the employ of UJ, as they are a challenging and diverse research population which will most vividly reflect the cultures of the merging institutions and the emergence of a new culture will be more visible in this population. Also in academics the University directly impact the stature and performance of the institution. As with most qualitative studies, non-probability sampling was employed in this study. However, for reasons such as the different cultures of merging institutions, variation in campus locations and differences in faculties, it was felt that the sample should be elaborated to allow for greater diversity in merger experiences and perceptions. The sample size was structured on a purposive basis which would ensure participants from all faculties, across all campuses. This resulted in the selection of two research subjects per faculty, per campus (except where the faculty had a presence of less than 10 academics on a campus, where one participant per faculty per campus would suffice). In this manner a sample of 40 research subjects was arrived at, as summarised in Table 1. Personal involvement in the merger also leads to a large network within the

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[1] I was a student at RAU and an employee of the TWR, where I became involved with organised labour (NUTESA – National Union of Tertiary Employees of South Africa). I was Vice-Chair of NUTESA between 2001 and 2005, and Chair from 2005 – 2007. I also served on the following merger committees: TWR MSC, TWR MF, TWR HR Task Team, Joint HR Task Team, various sub-task teams reporting to the TWR Academic Task Team and TWR HR Task Team. After the merger date, I was involved with Harmonisation Imbumba (a forum tasked with negotiating harmonised Conditions of Service for UJ), the Remuneration Policy and Pension Fund Dispensation Task Team, Interim Trustee of the UJ Pension Fund and UJ IF. all levels. This has an influence on data quality, as respondents are.

Table 1. Interview subjects selected per faculty and campus.

Faculty	Campus					Total
	Bunting road	Kingsway	Doornfontein	East rand	Soweto	
Art, Design and Architecture (FADA)			2			2
Economic and Financial Sciences	2	2				4
Education	1	2				3
Engineering		2	2			4
Health Sciences	1	2	2			5
Humanities	2	2	1	1		6
Law	1	2			1	4
Management	2	2	1	1	1	7
Natural Sciences	1	2	2			5
Total	10	16	10	2	2	40

University; which was used to solicit data from all campuses and on more likely to "open up" to a familiar party.

The main data collection method employed in the study was semi-structured interviewing, which involves taking individual respondents through predetermined issues and topics captured in a pre prepared questioning agenda (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005; Lancaster 2005).

The questioning agenda used in this study presented three broad themes[2] to which the research subjects were asked to share their experiences, feelings and perceptions. Despite an extensive personal network at UJ, six interview subjects had to be "cold canvassed" from certain faculties on certain campuses. Subjects were contacted telephonically and asked if they were willing to participate in the study. All subjects who were contacted exhibited a willingness to participate. Before embarking on fieldwork, an interview schedule[3] was drafted which acted as a database and progress report for the fieldwork. Upon meeting with a subject, the interview session was preceded by another short brief. Some subjects had certain specific questions concerning the study, others just wanted to be reminded what the interview was all about. Permission was requested to record the interviews. All agreed, except for one subject who requested to respond in writing. This person was presented with a copy of the questioning agenda and the person proceeded to write a solicited essay. Interviews were recorded in electronic (WAV) format onto a laptop and varied in length, lasting between 17 and 75 min, and averaging 41 min. Recorded interviews were screened and edited where necessary, which involved digitally enhancing the sound quality of the recordings where needed. Upon completion of the editing, the interviews were transcribed verbatim. Field notes taken during interviews were included in the transcripts as points of clarity at applicable points. Field notes pertained to interesting non-verbal cues that were observed during the interviews. Transcription was done in the language the interview was conducted in and translation from Afrikaans to English would only apply to those sections selected for presenting evidence.

In this study, gathered data was subjected to a variation of Grounded Theory (GT) (as method of analysis as opposed to design), as it allowed for the reality – or theory – pertaining to the UJ case to inductively, and iteratively, emerge from the gathered data. Although GT was originally developed as a particular research design, it can also be applied as a method of qualitative data analysis within the parameters of an overarching research design. The motivation behind using GT as a method of analysis as opposed to a design lies in the research setting itself. As discussed, the understanding of academics' merger experiences conforms to the parameters of a case study. Edwards (1990) points out those case studies do not rely on statistical inference to establish validity; they rely on inductive processes for this purpose (such as GT). One could argue that the merger experiences of academics could be analysed by means of more conventional qualitative content analysis (QCA). However, Kohlbacher (2005) argues that QCA is built upon the systematic development of categories or themes from qualitative data. GT also revolves around a systematic coding procedure that allows categories to emerge from the data, but it is an approach to theory-forming (Catherall, 2006), whereas QCA leans more toward a theory-guided approach to data analysis (Kohlbacher, 2005). Thus, it was decided to employ GT to analyse the data, as the notion of theory- forming is, as suggested by Catherall (2006), more appropriate to a context that is not very clearly understood; which is the case with the broader context of mergers in higher education.

The process of GT analysis proposed by Strauss and Corbin (1990) was used in this study, which entails three rounds of coding. Open coding entails careful inspection of the data with the goal of breaking down the data into units of meaning (or categories) (Burden, 2006; Urquhart, 2000). This occurs through close examination of the data and ascribing labels (that constitute categories) to concepts as they present themselves in the data (Babbie and Mouton, 2004; Strauss and Corbin, 1990). Axial coding involved putting data back together in innovative ways by making connections between the categories (Burden, 2006; Henning et al., 2004; Neuman, 2003). One is concerned with making connections between categories in addition to unpacking the concepts that each category represents. Axial coding, therefore, does not only look at the nature of each category, but also sheds light on the degree to which categories traverse and link with other categories (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). Selective coding implies the selection of a core category that relates to all other categories, thus selecting the essence of what is being investigated (Burden, 2006; Babbie and Mouton, 2004). The emergence of a core theme, and the resultant integration of major categories with it, marks the naissance of theory from the gathered findings (Burden, 2006). Strauss and

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[2] The three themes were: (1) Reflecting on restructuring in higher education (How do I feel about HEI mergers in general?) (2) Personal feelings and experiences surrounding the merger (How did I experience the merger?) and (3) Reflections on how others experienced the merger (How did those around me experience the merger?).

[3] This interview schedule contained the following information for each research subject: Reference number, Name, Job title, Faculty, Campus, Years service to the institution, Contact details, Gender, Race, Interview date, Duration of interview.

Corbin (1990) mention that core categories must relate to all other major categories, must appear regularly in the data, and the explanation that evolves from linking the categories should be logical and consistent, not contrived.

The choice of applying the study to academic staff at UJ limits the outcome of the study to one particular constituency. Although academic staff represents the backbone of any university, including the views of administrative and service employees of UJ would have presented a fuller, albeit more diverse, and at times conflicting, picture of the merger experiences. The sample size, although a definite strength of this study, proved a logistical limitation as problems were encountered with analysing such a vast volume of data. With so many labels ascribed to codes, the boundaries between labels blur and one is found pondering exactly where the code should be designated. This also inhibits the search for new labels.

FINDINGS

It was decided that the essential narrative of academics' experience of the UJ merger would be built around the temporal reflection of research subjects, that is, the time perspectives of how the process unfolded. The process of reduction from the initial 49 labels to the 3 temporal stages can be seen in Annexure 1. For the purposes of brevity, a limited number of the most poignant annotations from interviews will be included with the findings.

Key observations emerging from the past perspective

The past perspective can be divided into two parts, which will be elaborated upon.

Individuals' initial reaction to the merger

Immediately after announcement of the merger, academics reacted overwhelmingly from an emotive frame of reference, which supports van Tonder's (2004b) argument that cognitive processes may be less prevalent during reaction to a change event, thus more of an immediate response. In this study, these emotive reactions appeared to be fuelled by five variables which, seemingly, had not consciously been associated with each other. Thus, these variables are seemingly not interconnected in terms of cognitive process. This does not necessarily mean that these variables do not have an effect on each other; the individual has not cognitively considered their connection. The five variables are:

Reasons given for the merger: As the merger was ideologically and politically motivated, disagreement with the reasons provided by the government abounded and gave rise to negative reactions amongst academics.

Let us be honest, the old RAU was the bastion of

Afrikanerdom, not so? And many people share my opinion that the old RAU is paying for the sins of the past. I am not judgmental about that, but in that respect they could just as well have merged Wits University with the TWR. Not true? What is the difference? But Wits University was the place where people traditionally revolted against apartheid, so they are getting the benefit of their past. Um…transformation in higher education, rationalization…I can't see the need to have fewer universities, or tertiary institutions (Lecturer: Faculty of Humanities, former RAU).

At the same time, I must say that I think the reasons given by the government as to why we should merge were window dressing. I mean…to me it was clearly a political agenda of, um…of transformation (Angela: Faculty of Natural Sciences, former TWR).

Albeit a minority, those who agreed with the reasons provided by government, exhibited immediate positive reaction to the proposed merger.

And so you have got the best of both worlds; you have got the best of…what was the technikon and a university, bring them together and you've actually got everything at your doorstep (Senior Lecturer: FADA, former TWR).

Literature also presents evidence of staff being at odds with the reasons given for a merger. Erikson and Sundgren (2004) found this same response in their study of the merger between the pharmaceutical companies Astra and Zeneca.

Fears: As a merger gives rise to uncertainty, an overall lack of information directly following the announcement to merge leads to certain unfounded fears (Fulop et al., 2005; Papadakis, 2005; van Tonder, 2004b). In the case of UJ, these fears were manifested in fear of the unknown – leading rise to uncertainty in terms of job security, concerns about autonomy, status, standards, identity and comprehensiveness.

I sensed much uncertainty, people worried about losing their jobs, or that they will be redeployed; that they will be sent to another campus that they do not necessarily want to go to (Senior Lecturer: Faculty of Education, former RAU)

UJ is Vista, Wits Tech and RAU; and by imposing a new culture from the top down…you destroy the existing culture amongst staff, amongst students and in the community the campus is rooted in (Lecturer: Faculties of Humanities, former Vista).

There was no evidence forthcoming from the interviews to suggest any correlation between these fears and the degree to which people agree, or disagree, with the reasons given for the merger. The degree to which

Annexure 1. Emerged themes and reduction of themes.
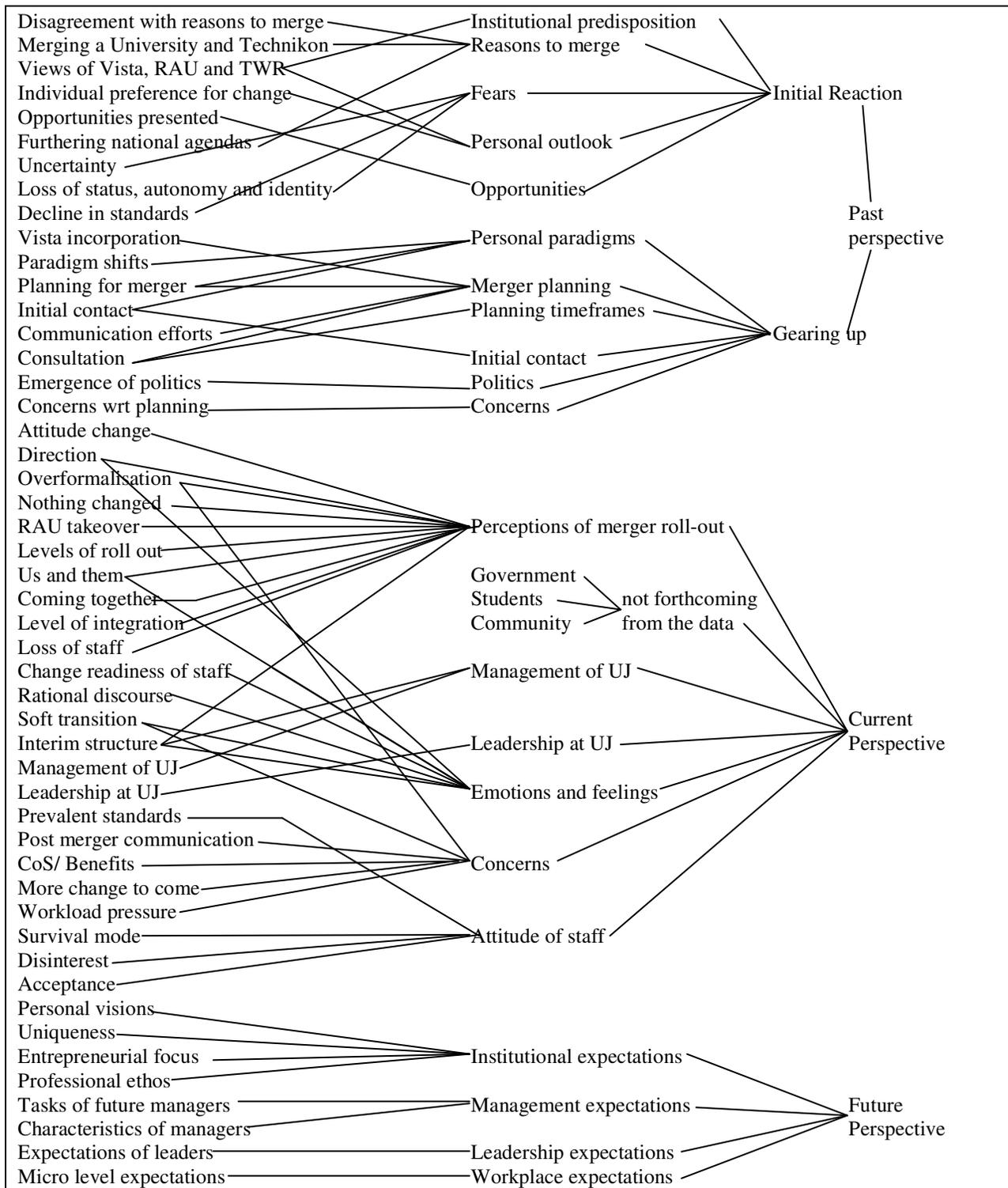
individuals harbour these fears could potentially contribute to the reaction exhibited by the individual.

Personal outlook: Although not much evidence thereof

was forthcoming, there were participants who cited their personal preference for, or fear of change, which suggests that a certain predisposition to change is present in certain people (van Tonder, 2004b).

Look, maybe I experienced it differently to most other people, because I am somebody that welcomes change, and, um...you know, if things continue on the same old monotonous way then something's wrong (Bert: Faculty of Health Sciences, former TWR).

From the interviews, appears that a positive predisposition to change contributes to the individual's change-readiness, which is the degree to which people are willing to accept change, often the product of having experienced change events in the past (Darling, cited in van Tonder, 2004b).

Opportunities presented by the merger: Participants, both positively and negatively disposed to the merger, tended to see opportunities in the merger.

...here and there are things that I say, okay, this will be better; more people will have...access to a greater variety of programmes, those types of things (Lecturer: Faculty of Humanities, former RAU).

Although evidence that this variable is strong enough to sway, for example, a person with a negative personal outlook to react positively to the merger has not been observed in this study, it is reasonable to assume that this variable would have the potential to only marginally influence individuals' reactions. Although no literature was forthcoming to support or dispel the effect of opportunities presented by a merger on individuals' attitude towards it, there is evidence that mergers are often seen as providing opportunities for shared learning and collaboration, growth and healing (van Tonder, 2004b; Leroy and Ramanantsoa, 1997).

Institutional predisposition: One of the most pertinent variables to shape individuals' reactions is forthcoming from the individuals' predisposition to the institution they hail from.

And you were left, circumstances were created, computers were supplied, office space was supplied for you to be able to do your work (Professor: Faculty of Education, former RAU)

Because the technikon was going one way, and that was downhill (Ilse: Faculty of Health Sciences, former TWR).

But it functioned pretty well. It was a well oiled machine. However, financially, after it was taken over by certain individuals, a lot of finances started to dwindle (Lecturer: Faculty of Law, former Vista)

Some authors tend to view this institutional predisposition as part of merging the cultures of merging institutions (Fulop et al., 2005, Robbins, 2001), however it transcends culture. It refers to how individuals feel about the institutions they hail from, and what affect this has on

their eventual buy-in to the proposed merger. Evidence suggests that the organisation forms an integral part of people's social identity, and identification with a specific grouping becomes more salient in a merger situation (Anstey, 2006; Shin, 2003). The concept of organisational predisposition links this salient social identity to actual attitude towards a merger. This concept is mentioned by Haunschildet al. (1994) and Shin (2003), but no distinguishable terminology was employed. How academics perceived the institution they hailed from influenced their levels of job satisfaction. Generally, those negatively predisposed toward their historic institution (former TWR staff) were less satisfied with their jobs than those positively predisposed (former RAU and former Vista staff). Thus, the more favourable this predisposition, the less favourable academics tended to view the announcement of the merger. It can also be argued that people with a very positive predisposition will be less change ready and more fearful of a merger. The interviews showed that the future prospect presented by the merger is compared with status quo within the merging institution, and how the individual perceives this status quo. This reminds strongly of the "primary framework" notion (Goffman, 1974), which is background conception person employed to make sense of what is going on. In the case of the London Metropolitan University merger, the variable of institutional predisposition was described as having much the same impact as in this study (National Association of Teachers in Further and Higher Education, 2005).

From the discussion, it can be deduced that employees' initial reaction to the merger was the product of (predominantly) self-debate on these five variables. It is reasonable to argue that this initial reaction is very much an uninformed response to a change event, in the sense that employees are not always privy to the total picture of a merger. It would not be prudent of organisational management to dismiss these initial reactions, employees are not expected to be "in the loop" of all developments – this is the realm of top management (Goldman and Nieuwenhuizen, 2006), and the emotive (albeit ill-informed) response would thus dominate.

The merger preparation stage

The findings revealed that the outlook of academic staff members during the merger preparation stage seemed to differ considerably from their initial reaction to the announcement of the merger. In sharp contrast to the reaction stage, the planning stage is typified by heightened rationality. Six interrelated variables have been identified that shape academics' outlook and attitudes towards the merger during this stage:

The merger planning process: As time progressed, participants gradually came into contact with

merger-related information, primarily in the form of formal communicative efforts by the merging institutions. This was deemed not to be as effective as academics would have preferred, but served a purpose in getting information to staff. Supplementing formal communication where information forthcoming from the media, peers, trade unions, merging partners and personal contacts privy to information, which has helped shape academics' outlook on the merger. Along with more information, the merger also became more visible to academics, as merger structures emerged to facilitate the planning of the merger. The consultative approach called for staff at all levels to become involved in the process. However, participants feel that this consultative approach was taken too far at times and thus resulted as a major contributing factor in merger planning events being perceived as slow paced. The value of this all inclusive approach is not to be undermined in that it heightened awareness of merger related-issues, thus contributing to more rational discourse.

You know, the amount of information that came my way was so insufficient that I cannot have an informed opinion. In any case, I would not know who to ask ...we received the e-mails and that e-merge publication; everybody said the same that it told us nothing (Lecturer: Faculty of Humanities, former RAU).

It can be that there is a terrible sensitivity that does not want...well I think terrible sensitivity would be wrong, but sensitivity about the complexity to get everyone involved. In other words, it sprouts from a paralysis not to offend anyone and to have this thing roll-out smoothly; and you need to have sympathy for that (Gert: Faculty of Law, former RAU).

Discussions with members of senior management at the precursor institutions revealed that the consultative nature of the planning phase was deemed to contribute to interaction between merging parties and a heightened sense of awareness of merger related activities and, as such, essential for the successful implementation of the merger, a view echoed by Du Plessis (2004) and Robbins (2001). Literature supports the idea that communication is imperative for the success of any merger, and a lack of communication contributes to fears and uncertainty (Papadakis, 2005; Eriksson, 2004; van Tonder, 2004b). Inadequate communication in times of change also contributes to staff losing their mental maps of how the institution functions (Lundback and Horte, 2005; NATFHE, 2005), as they are not informed of what is happening and not afforded the opportunity of gaining the big picture (Bourantas and Nicandrou, 1998). The views of academics regarding communication at the London Metropolitan University resemble the perceptions of communication by academics at UJ (NAFTHE, 2005). The slow-paced nature of the merger is not unique to UJ, as also reported in the merger research of Eriksson and

Sundgren (2004). The UJ scenario does differ from that of the London Metropolitan University, where staff perceived too little consultation and participation in merger activities (NAFTHE, 2005).

Personal paradigms: The passage of time, heightened rationality, and exposure to the beginnings of the merger process seems to have resulted in attitudinal change amongst academics when compared to the initial reaction to the merger.

So, I experienced a process taking place. I think many of the emotions have been toned down, I think, um...but that's time; time heals many things (Johan: Faculty of Health Sciences, former RAU)

This change could simply be ascribed to personal transition over time, which is a sequential process through which people come to terms with change (Van Tonder, 2004b). This attitudinal change at UJ seemed overwhelmingly positive, even to the extent that individuals moved from negative to positive about the merger. It is reasonable to conclude that these paradigm shifts affected the quality of merger planning efforts positively, as individuals who underwent such shifts were focused on the interests of the merged institution. This attitudinal shift was lacking in the merger between Astra and Zeneca (Eriksson and Sundgren, 2004).

Planning timeframe: Literature suggests that merger planning has to be afforded the luxury of time to ensure successful roll-out (Eriksson, 2004; Swanepoel, 2003). Sufficient time affords the opportunity of thorough deliberation to seek optimal solutions to merger challenges and issues. UJ was not afforded this luxury, a source of much aggravation for academics. Issues not resolved in the planning stage inadvertently filtered through to the merger implementation phase, or were resolved hastily for the sake of expediency. This, in turn, resulted in disappointment in the merger process and this disappointment was further aggravated by the perceived lack of progress during this stage as a result of over-consultation.

Okay, well my personal opinion is that the planning was left much too late (Nick: Faculty of Financial and Economic Sciences, former RAU)

...I personally think that at the end of the year there were too many compromises, I think there was too much that they wanted to...just to expedite the process and to say, we will enter 1 January 2005 with an academic structure, an admin structure, with this, with that. There were too many compromises (Bert: Faculty of Health Sciences, former TWR).

Initial contact: The planning stage was typified by formal contact between future colleagues for the first time, but they did not welcome each other with open arms. Initial

contact was stormy, filled with apprehension and suspicion of counterparts from the merging institutions. This would not be reason enough to negatively dispose staff members to the merger, but such experiences could have a negative impact on planning efforts as it creates an opportunity for political undertones. Furthermore, it can, and in the case of UJ seems to have, strengthened stereotypes of the merging partners.

There are always those that, that have attitudes of superiority, um…and, and surprisingly, not always – as the perception would be – from the RAU people, I have seen it equally from the ex TWR side (Angela: Faculty of Natural Sciences, former TWR).

Um...there is still a degree of this 'we look down on our colleagues' and scathing comments that are passed toward lecturers that have joined from the other campuses (Senior Lecturer: Faculty of Education, former RAU).

This phenomenon is not unique to the UJ merger, as evidence of this type of interaction was found in the merger between Volvo Aero and Norwegian Jet Engine (Jonsson et al., 2004). However, Vermeulen (2005) points out that this type of interaction is necessary and should be viewed as an effort to re-examine old methods and routines.

Politics: The findings of this study reveal that although not everyone was involved in political manoeuvring, the existence thereof was perceived by the majority of staff. The mere existence of political game-playing, at whatever level, was a source of further disappointment for staff members at the University.

...I think something that continues throughout is the political games people play. Um…initially there were a lot of political agendas. This got diluted over time as people started realizing that there is more than politics at stake here. The importance to save this institution and make a success of it started hitting home at middle…tactical and operational level. But I think politics is still rife at top management level; somewhere between the executive management and the council. One hears the corridor gossip and the comments of people (Andrew: Faculty of Management. Former RAU)

In the case of UJ, political manoeuvring lead to perceptions of people acting in own interest; acting in the interest of perpetuating the historic institution (and thus not acting in the interests of the merged institution), lobbying for a specific position and acting clandestinely; a relatively common occurrence in large-scale change (Eriksson, 2004; Robbins, 2001), as people want to cling to known conventions, albeit daily routine and operating procedure, access to information, control over resources

or power. The frequency – be it high or low – of this type of behaviour does not detract from the fact that perpetuating an old status quo is a debilitating factor in any merger (Anstey, 2006).

Concerns: The findings of this study indicate that whereas the reaction stage was typified by emotive, and often irrational, fears, the rational nature of the planning stage gave rise to concerns based on individuals' experiences. These concerns were based on the process as it was unfolding. In some instances, these concerns supported the initial irrational fears people possessed, but in general these concerns were extrapolated to a future implication on the individual and institution.

So, they wanted to create an impression that things were consultative, with all the merger forums that took place, but I think…it, it once again never went down to grass roots level (Lecturer: Faculty of Humanities, former RAU).

We were always formally invited to provide input if we had any to give, but at the same time we were informed of 'our' intentions, implying that there was already a solid strategy in place to see the negotiations through, and input was only required as far as it supported the plans / strategies of the spokespeople.
   It is true enough that we did not merge as a department, because the egos of individuals got in the way (Senior Lecturer: Faculty of Management, former TWR).

However, be that irrational fears or grounded concerns, these anxieties are part and parcel of the process, at all stages (Fulop et al., 2005)

As the merger preparation stage in this study is seemingly associated with greater rationality than in the initial reaction stage, the six variables discussed tend to be interrelated; which could indicate that staff members were also gradually starting to see some type of "big picture", although the "big picture" that they possessed might not have been as clear as they would have liked it to be.

Key observations pertaining to the current perspective

The current perspective represents the current nature of the status quo as experienced by participants. The transition from pre-merger to merger implementation, from past to current perspective can be pin-pointed to a definite point in time: the effective merger date, which in this case was 1 January 2005. Although interviews revealed that many participants felt that there was no change operationally, institutionally there was change afoot, albeit in aspects such as name, logo, corporate

colours, a new council and senate and new (albeit interim) management structures. It would appear that the mere fact that institutional change has occurred does not automatically imply personal change or transition.

This perspective is described in terms of participants' experiences and perceptions of how the merger rolled out. These experiences and perceptions are largely influenced by perceptions of and experiences with management and leadership at UJ during this time. These opinions of how the merger is rolling out, coupled with the perceptions of management and leadership, are shaping academics attitudes towards the merger, and toward UJ.

Academics' perceptions of the merger roll out

Merger implementation saw the merger moving from something distant to something that academics were part of. As such participants started gaining a greater appreciation for what the process demands, which is a possible explanation for the greater degree of understanding exhibited by subjects. By far the largest source of dissatisfaction during this phase can be ascribed to the interim nature of the merger. This interim nature of the merger was perceived as the greatest stumbling block in the way of proper integration of the historic institutions into a coherent whole. Operational problems due to lack of proper integration, and problems with academic integration were directly attributable to the interim phase. Participants viewed the inefficiencies and shortcomings of management and leadership as largely attributable to this interim phase; and were critical of the following in terms of merger roll out:

1) No visible direction; both in a management and leadership sense, which is detrimental to any merger (Anstey, 2006).
2) Uncertainty was rife at all levels and this manifested itself in a definite degree of over-formalisation and task orientation. However, uncertainty seems to be present during most (if not all) mergers (van Tonder, 2004b).
3) Limited operational change and there was still a very prominent "us and them" syndrome; which in turn lead to parties from the merging institutions trying to perpetuate conventions from the historic institutions in the new institution.

I am amazed by…how business as usual it actually is this year. You know, I never expected it (Lecturer: Faculty of Humanities, former RAU).

Um...one thing that concerns me is that we are terribly busy formalising things into policies (Professor: Faculty of Education, former RAU).

And to chuck three institutions together and…now there

is no central set of rules…or mission, or…nowhere to go. It makes things difficult (Elmarie: Faculty of Economic and Financial Sciences, former RAU).

I am concerned about the fact that people…still think in the RAU mode, the TWR mode and the Vista mode, these are people in the same department (Nick: Faculty of Economic and Financial Sciences, former TWR).

These anomalies were seen as the result of not being able to create anything permanent. In this study, the merger progress can thus be said to be inversely proportionate to the time span of the interim phase. Blazejewski and Dorow (2003), corroborate this, purporting that organisational change requires the rapid establishment of a new, valid framework for the change to be effective. A lack of strategic direction was also evident in mergers in the health care sector in Britain (Fulop et al., 2005); which also reported a perception in the initial stages of merger implementation which very little had changed operationally. Interviews also revealed that the merger roll out had also lead to resignation of staff, which was viewed as negative of the merger. The frequency of resignations is low, and does not involve top rated academics and thus not viewed as a mass exodus. A mass exodus of staff could have raised serious concerns amongst academics as to the future of the institution, which could lead to even more resignations. The interviews further revealed that, despite the pertinent "us and them" syndrome, the roll out stage has definitely seen a coming together of staff. Politics (at operational and tactical level) is perceived to be non-existent or disappearing fast as individuals come to terms with the gravity of the situation they are faced with. Literature also highlights the effect politics had on mergers (Eriksson and Sundgren, 2004), where politics was seen as contributing to employees focusing on day-to-day activities.

Perceived role of government, the community and the effect on students[4]

Childerhouse et al. (2003) identify five barriers to effective change, one being industrial barriers, where the government plays an active role in complicating change. As consumers of UJ services, students can also be seen to form part of these industrial barriers. Furthermore the

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[4] These three factors were not raised by the participants interviewed, partly because these factors are peripheral to academics direct experience of the merger. These three factors cannot be seen as empirical, primary data forthcoming from the study. Rather, they represent gaps in the data. This became evident during the analytical process and it was felt that it would be best to include these in the discussion for purposes of completeness.
Although participants did reflect on the government (in the form of the DoE), these reflections were coupled with initial reactions to the merger and not on the role of government during the merger.

obligation an organisation has toward its community can also be seen as part of these industrial barriers to change.

The role of the government as initiator of the restructuring in higher education, as main source of funding for HEIs and as guardians of education in South Africa, cannot be ignored. The degree to which the objectives of the restructuring in higher education are met, will ultimately determine the role the government plays in the roll-out of the merger, which will in turn affect individuals' perceptions of how the process is unfolding. Similarly, the expectations and demands forthcoming from the community (such as supplying graduates, beneficial research and establishing partnerships) could have a profound effect on how the merger rolls out and should, therefore, not be ignored. Also, the merger will have a definite, if not largely unknown, effect on students. As the merger rolls out, operational and strategic changes could cause confusion, uncertainty and discontentment amongst students as consumers of the university's services. The ability of the institution to deal with student experiences and expectations will have an effect on the roll out of the merger process, as student unrest can negatively impact on the merger.

Fulop et al. (2005) reported on the fiscal and process role of the government in mergers in the British health care sector, and Greenwood and Lachman (1996) report on the role governments play in mergers between professional service organisations in North America and the UK, where factors such as resource allocations, budgets, and ideological persuasion were issues of governmental intervention. The effect of mergers on consumers was identified in Balsinde and Beardsley's (1999) study on telecommunications mergers in Europe.

Perceptions of management

Interview subjects viewed institutional management as having a profound effect on their perception of the roll out of the merger. Interviews further revealed that management not only affects the way in which academics perceive the roll out of the merger process, it also has a direct effect on attitude towards the merger. This could be ascribed to the fact that management represents the starting point of any chain of command, thus people would be directly influenced by the efforts of management. Participants also viewed management as being over- democratic in their approach (in contrast to the London Metropolitan University merger where management was seen as authoritarian (NATFHE, 2005)), task orientated, lacking of dynamic, innovative and strategic leadership, indecisive, and not exhibiting an understanding of the 'big picture' of the merger. Yet, interview subjects are of the opinion that the University, despite these shortcomings, is being managed quite well, especially when compared with other HEI mergers.

Interview subjects also feel that management is doing the best they can under the circumstances, taking into consideration the interim nature of the roll out. Interestingly, negative sentiments forthcoming are not only raised against management as a team, but also against the situation that has to be dealt with by the management team. However, the empathy for the plight of management during this interim period does not detract from the realities of the situation, that these shortcomings are perpetuating uncertainty amongst academic staff, which in turn, is a cause of emotional stress.

But as long as we have this interim phase, for as long as we have long decision making channels and…and you…have to consult everyone, we are only going to create a bureaucracy (Andrew: Faculty of Management, former RAU).

And also sometimes trying to be too democratic. I just sometimes think that management…do not understand properly what their role is and they…because of that it paralyses them and they don't make decisions (Angela: Faculty of Natural Sciences, former TWR).

There were times when things should have been decided and it did not happen (Lecturer: Faculty of Health Sciences, former TWR).

Um…up to this point, as we sit here, management has not made a firm decision as to whether they will integrate with us or not (Gert: Faculty of Law, former RAU).

Firstly, in terms of leadership, I have seen nothing and nobody (Lecturer: Faculty of Law, former Vista).

And, um...in general I think this thing [the merger] has been well managed...um…I got the idea that we are going well. There are many problems, but we are handling them (Ryno: Faculty of Natural Sciences, former RAU)

Perceptions of leadership

Research participants indicate, very pertinently, that leadership directly affects academics. Especially in times of uncertainty, people look towards leaders for guidance. As with management during merger implementation, leadership is perceived to suffer from many shortcomings at UJ, but academics direct criticism for lack of leadership effort pertinently towards individuals. Yet, in stating this, there was also a sentiment that the reluctance on behalf of some individuals to exhibit appropriate leadership is attributable to the interim nature of the merger roll out, where the sense of self protection seemed to dominate. Leadership efforts are viewed as fragmented, with

isolated incidence of appropriate leadership, thus no conscious, consolidated leadership initiative exists.

Leadership, um…I think the leadership, and maybe because it was so participative, I think the people are not focussed in their approach (Lecturer: Faculty of Health Sciences, former TWR)

These guys are good managers but not necessarily good leaders. They are task oriented; look, they say a leader must be passionate. I have yet to find someone who is passionate; creative, flexible, inspiring. Nobody is inspiring us, we just get told what to do (Senior Lecturer: Faculty of Management, former Vista).

That created vacuums, the leaders were not there, they were always in meetings and they were never…those day to day issues, you see what I am saying? (Reggie: Faculty of Management, former RAU).

There is evidence to suggest that such a situation cannot realise the full potential of leadership in an organisation (Nissen et al., 2005), as the task of leadership is greater than any one person. It is an emergent event, the outcome of rational interactions between agents and not the domain of isolated individuals (Lichtenstein et al., 2006). Leadership at UJ is further viewed as suffering from a lack of vision, direction and firmness, being too accommodating, displaying poor communication and not being visible. All of these are incongruous with what literature proposes as sound or good leadership (Anstey, 2006; Nissen et al., 2005). The London Metropolitan University merger (NATFHE, 2005) presents a very similar picture to UJ of management in their capacity as leaders. Thus, interview subjects associate the current point in merger implementation with a lack of leadership of any form. The shortcomings of management were viewed as a product of the current situation; however, shortcomings in leadership tend to be ascribed to the individuals who occupy leadership positions. Participants, therefore, accept that those in leadership positions are sometimes constrained from performing their managerial tasks, but see leadership efforts as separate from situational constraints. Literature seems to provide support for this position. Nissen et al. (2005) state that leadership outcomes are immediate and very important, especially on the short term.

Attitudes of academics

Attitudes towards the merger are dependent on how academics perceive the roll out of the merger, direct managerial efforts and leadership exhibited by those in positions of leadership. Although interview subjects still tend to exhibit positive sentiment toward the merger and are willing to meet the challenges laid down by the merger, they seem to be losing interest in the process, due in part to the slow pace at which the process is being rolled out, but more directly, due to academics focusing attention on their tuition and research.

But in the meantime, we have large lecturing loads, and many of us fear that we are going to have to do double-work at…one of the other campuses and on this campus. And I am not necessarily going to receive recognition for it, because I have not published (Senior Lecturer: Faculty of Education, former RAU)

But it causes people to be on edge, and eventually it can lead to you only…you are only going to do the minimum, to the detriment of the institution (Professor: Faculty of Education, former RAU).

I can cope, I do not care…what…if they want to change stuff, and then do it, as long as I have a job in the new institution. I just do not want to be disrupted in this new institution (Lecturer: Faculty of Humanities, former RAU).

But now, I think…listen, we have accepted it. There is nothing we can do about it. There is no need fighting the system; you have got to go with it. And I think now…most of us feel differently about it (Mark: Faculty of Health Sciences, former RAU).

In a study by Arnolds and Boshoff (2004), low levels of organisational commitment, but high levels of professional commitment, were observed in the early stages of another merger in higher education. The UJ situation reflects this in the behaviour of academics, placing professional commitments above the organisation and letting the merger go its course. Coupled with this professional commitment is the notion of entering a survival mode as it were, where academics do what is expected but stay clear of unwanted attention directed toward them, a view also mentioned by van Tonder (2004b). Academics also feel they are experiencing an increase in their workloads, an occurrence that has also been reported by Fulop et al. (2005) in their study of health care sector mergers in Britain. However, the general attitude of interview subjects towards the merger is surprisingly positive, especially when viewed against the negative perceptions of managerial and leadership efforts. It is apparent that attitudes are positive, not only in terms of the future of UJ, but also in terms of how the merger is rolling out, despite the fact that academics might be disinterested in the merger process, and despite unsatisfactory managerial effort and a perceived lack of leadership. Literature suggests that a lack of sound leadership can be damaging to the morale of staff, lead to dissatisfaction and could be dooming for the change initiative at hand (Nissen et al., 2005). This is seemingly not the case at UJ. It is viewed by numerous people at various HEIs to be the benchmark HEI merger in South

Africa, morale is seemingly high and academics are content with the merger.

Emotions and feelings of staff during this phase

Interviews revealed that emotions and feelings were present (albeit not verbatim) when reflecting on the current roll out of the merger. In essence, feelings of uncertainty, abandonment, frustration, sacrifice and being short-changed are associated with the roll out of the merging process. These feelings seem to stem from the demands placed on staff as the merger roll-out process takes effect. The fundamental shake-up of peoples' once familiar environments, coupled with and compounded by the interim nature of the whole merging process, has led to psychological stress amongst academics. Bourantas and Nicandrou (1998), studying acquisitions, obtained similar findings, stating that post acquisition is typified by low employee morale, decreases in satisfaction and commitment, unproductive behaviour and sabotage. Somers and Bird (1990) found that the immediate post-merger period can be psychologically debilitating for staff members, but add that most of this initial anxiety and confusion disappears within two or three months, if open and honest two-way communication has been established. At UJ, the data was collected 18 months after the effective merger date, and emotional stressors were quite apparent. Nikandroue t al. (2000) states that employee commitment, trust in management and a general positive outlook are high directly after a merger or acquisition, but this tends to wane as time passes. The protracted interim phase coupled with an indecisive management style has caused optimism about the merger to dwindle, and instead academics seem to be merely going through the motions of adapting to the merged institution. Although interviews revealed that staff morale was generally quite high, it seems markedly lower than it was just prior to merger.

Concerns forthcoming from this period

Merger implementation is also associated with concerns forthcoming from academic staff members. These concerns are the result of what individuals experience and perceive in terms of management, leadership and the roll out of the merger process. At UJ, most of these concerns centre on the shortcomings in the roll out of the process, management and leadership; which should be of prime interest to management, as it has the potential of evolving to sources of discontentment and dissatisfaction if not acted upon.

Key observations relevant to the future perspective

This perspective represents what academics want to see unfold in the future with regard to the UJ merger. Views on the future solicit aspirations, irrespective of whether this is attainable or not. These aspirations, if paid heed to, could contribute to job satisfaction, and could also foster a more positive outlook amongst academics towards the UJ merger as a whole. Interviews revealed that current shortcomings, uncertainties and demands created by the merger, appear to be unpleasantries that will culminate in something better. However, this tentatively optimistic stance should be seen against the sentiment that certain expectations should be addressed, which in turn influences how academics see the future of UJ as a whole.

Visions of the institution

Personal visions have emerged due to the lack of direction which are varied, fragmented and cannot be regarded as shared. It could be argued that the existence of such visions could be problematic, especially when at odds with formal organisational direction, but they seem to have fulfilled a purpose in the case of UJ, as they represent individuals' ideal state for the university. This vision acts as a guiding force for current and future behaviour of academics.

I would like to think that the institution would eventually emerge as the top university in SA – it certainly has the potential to do so (Senior Lecturer: Faculty of Management, former TWR).

We must build capacity within our departments and sections to generate funds within their respective environments and apply these funds to the advantage of the university ... funds that resort within departments which are entrepreneurially driven; that third stream income. Therefore I want us to strongly focus on the entrepreneurial nature of this university (Johan: Faculty of Health Sciences, former RAU).

These fragmented visions echo Ghoshal and Bartlett's (in Anstey, 2006) sentiments that effective organisations do not emerge from restructuring, but are the product of changed mindsets and behaviours of those who work within them. Although these visions are constructed in the current circumstance, their application appears to be future orientated. For the University to achieve this ideal state visualised by academics, definite managerial and leadership inputs are required, a sentiment shared by Anstey (2006), stating that visions represent emotional an political rallying points for employees

Expectations of management

Participants strongly that the management should be comprised of people of sound character, create an

atmosphere conducive to academic excellence, adopt a consultative approach, possess the ability to set a strategic direction and make decisions, and be able to communicate effectively with staff. These expectations of management are echoed – almost verbatim – by Swanepoel (2003), stating that during a merger, management should be honest, sound leaders, sensitive to culture, visible and firm, and effective communicators.

If a manager cannot inspire confidence, such a person does more harm than good, just being there. Apart from basic management skills, managers must also employ a solid set of professional practices and professional conduct (Senior Lecturer: Faculty of Management, former TWR).

Less centralisation, decentralise, break it right down to the department. Keep the departments accountable for outputs. Do not try and monitor every single process in a policy or whatever you want to call it. A university should actually leave room for creativity and innovative thinking; they should actually not restrict you (Professor: Faculty of Education, former RAU).

Someone must carry the can, you know. Someone must say, now we are moving forward (Senior Lecturer: Faculty of Management, former Vista).

Sapienza (2005), in a study of the expectations of managers, came to similar insights citing that management was expected to be effective communicators, listen well, be well organised, solve conflicts, and be good role models. It is fair to assume that the expectations held by academics towards the University, are dependent on expectations of management.

Expectations of leadership

The variable of leadership was viewed as crucial for the future of UJ, a point also stressed by Swanepoel (2003). Interview subjects expect leaders at UJ to be inspirational, professional and to possess sound people skills, characteristics deemed crucial in literature (Anstey, 2006; Goldman and Nieuwenhuizen, 2006). Participants also have an explicit desire for inspirational, charismatic and transformational leaders that can meet the challenges of higher education in South Africa and take UJ forward. This indicates that academics at UJ exhibit a need for sound strategic leadership, thus creating the impression that leadership is a more important task than management at present.

Look, I think…what we need now is, we need…um…somebody with a fair amount of vision…um…somebody that is understanding of people

and fair, but is prepared to be unpopular if need be (Angela: Faculty of Natural Sciences, former TWR).

There must be a champion that drives the whole thing, you know. Otherwise too many people have inputs and at the end of the day the whole thing derails, or has the potential to derail. People with personality that can inspire you. Charismatic leaders have easiness with people, you know. And that is maybe something we need in this whole situation (Senior Lecturer: Faculty of Management, former Vista).

Thus, the future of the University starts with the style of leadership currently exhibited. This was typical of the merger mania in the accounting profession in the late 80s and early 90s (Sommers, 1989), where a specific "tone at the top" would set the direction for how these merged accounting mega firms would be run in future. The role of leadership is a cardinal one at UJ, as the future outlook of academic staff (and their satisfaction with their working environment) is largely dependent on leadership and their ability to create an environment in which personal visions of individuals can be attained.

Workplace expectations

This label has been assigned to all other expectations individual staff members hold that have not been discussed. It was evident that a vast array of different expectations exists amongst academics at UJ, and none of them warranted inclusion as a pertinent category. These expectations deal with specific wishes expressed by academics pertaining to their immediate working environments. These include issues such as the wish for a social gathering place, more office space, salary harmonisation, incentivisation and a uniform language policy.

My wish list would simply be that we forget about the politics (Ryno: Faculty of Natural Sciences, former RAU).

The other thing they must sort out as soon as possible is the language issue, as it is a cause of discontentment in both camps … from administration, I really hope rationalisation takes place and that we get people that actually know what they are doing (Katya: Faculty of Law, former TWR).

Literature makes little mention of such expectations in mergers, although Bourantas and Nicandrou (1997) state that expectations refer to beliefs regarding a persons future status, irrespective of the desirability thereof. As such, expectations can be seen as a function of rewards and costs resulting from affiliation with a particular organisation. In this study, both reward and cost dimensions of expectations were conveyed. It is

possible that these workplace expectations are shaped by the current attitudes academics have toward the merger, although no direct evidence thereof is forthcoming. Similarly, it could be possible that these workplace expectations contribute to the expectations academics have of institutional management and leadership and help form their visions they hold of the future.

AN INTEGRATED FRAMEWORK: THE REM-FRAMEWORK

The three perspectives discussed represent different moments in the UJ merger as experienced by academics, and need to be drawn together in a collective whole. Thus a theory emerges in respect of academics' experiences of the UJ merger. One of the most salient features of this theory is that it adopts a temporal perspective to the experience of the merger, thus allowing changes in these experiences over time to surface. This integrated theory of academics' experience of a merger over time is depicted in Figure 1. The findings of this study have been used as point of departure for the REM-Framework and indicate the factors and variables that shape individual disposition in different phases of the merger.

As already discussed, the past perspective spans the time from merger announcement to the date that the merger takes effect, and comprises two discernable stages. Firstly, the emotive *reaction stage* depicts how academics' outlook and perceptions of the UJ merger were shaped directly after the announcement of the merger. This stage is shaped by five variables: *non-acceptance* of the reasons provided for the merger, *fears and concerns* associated with the merger, *opportunities* presented by the merger, *personal outlook* towards change, and *institutional predisposition.* The second stage of the past perspective – the *preparation stage* – comes about over time as academics are exposed to merger-related initiatives and enter into rational discourse and self debate. The transition from reaction stage to preparation stage cannot be attributable to any specific point in time (hence the dotted line between these two stages in Figure 1). The preparation stage is shaped by initial contact with merging partners, concerns forthcoming from merger preparation, personal paradigms, the merger planning process, politics, and planning timeframe.

The second perspective, the current perspective**,** spans the period from the date of the merger to the current point in time, and represents currency in terms of status quo rather than currency of time, as the current status quo could have persisted for a period of time.

Here, the attitudes of academics toward the merger are shaped by a complex interaction of: perceptions of roll-out, (influenced by the role government; students and the community play in the merger), *perceptions of management and leadership* (collectively referred to as institutional management) and have an impact on the individuals' perception of roll out, but are also shaped by concerns resultant from roll out, roll out of merger implementation is associated with concerns about the process, *feelings and emotions* of academics permeate through this perspective and have an influence on their attitudes towards the merger.

The future perspective investigates the *expectations* that individuals have toward the future of the merger (and of the University), and is shaped by *visions* of the future for the institution, future expectations of management and leadership*,* and workplace expectations (also impacted by the attitudes of staff from the current perspective).

As academics move through these perspectives, emotive reaction gives way to more rational thought, familiarity with the merger environment, and eventually even demands in terms of future expectations. The disposition held by academics in the past plays a large role in shaping current attitudes, perceptions and outlook which, in turn, will have a profound effect on future expectations. When viewing the REM-Framework in Figure 1, the points in time indicated directly below the model are dependent on the merger plan for the University. "Merger announcement" represents the point in time when the merger was announced (31 May 2002). "Merger date" represents the date when the merger officially took effect (1 January 2005). "Current point in time" does not represent a fixed point in time, but is indicative of the relevant data used. This does not mean that the variables used to describe the current and future perspectives were outdated at the time this paper was finalised, but it does mean that they might be described slightly differently as the merger process unfolds.

MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

The study has shown that the UJ mergers (and all other mergers in South African Higher Education) do not represent a conventional merger, as they are not commercial in nature. This is an under documented niche of merger research and necessitates further investigation, especially in the light of the currency of mergers between HEIs in South Africa. This study has revealed the following about ideological mergers in SA Higher Education:

1) Merger planning was dictated by government and not by the merging partners.
2) Change, and thus merger progress, was protracted by the adoption of an interim phase directly after the effective merger date.
3) Negatives such as lack of direction, long decision-making time frames, lack of visible leadership, poor communication and staff entering survival mode can all
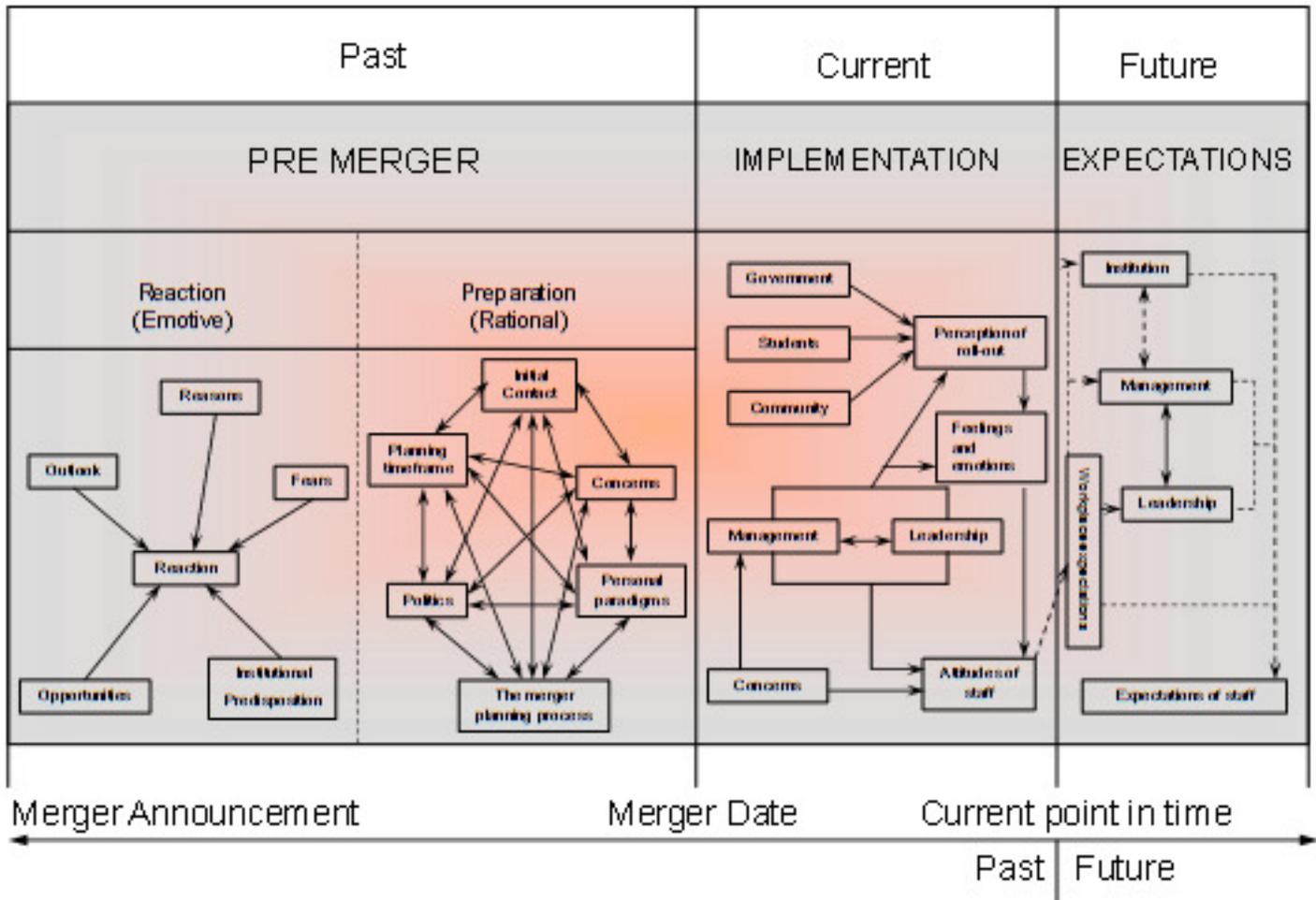
Figure 1. The reflective experience of mergers (REM) framework.

be seen as a result of the interim phase in which current organsitional capacity had to be utilised.

Existing HEI merger literature tends to be philosophical, reflective and speculative, with precious little empirical knowledge. Although this study has shed some light on the merger experiences of academic staff at UJ, the knowledge base needs to be widened and deepened for these mergers to roll out as successfully as originally intended.

The study also underpins the distinction between management and leadership. Further to the long-standing scientific debate surrounding the fundamental differences (or equality) between management and leadership, the study has shown that academic staff perceives these as two discernable, yet interrelated, variables. The study further indicated that, although shortcomings in management are perceived as a function of the current operating environment, shortcomings in leadership lead to more severe critique. Leadership shortcomings were also directed at people, and not the situation. This reiterates the importance of leadership effort in a merger. Leadership plays an important part in the REM-Framework and is vital in understanding how academics' experiences, attitudes and perceptions of the merger are influenced. This study therefore bolsters the call to make sure that, further to a sound merger plan, managers recognise that a merger is not merely dependent on their ability to manage the merger process, but also, and maybe more importantly, on their ability to lead staff members through difficult times of large scale change.

Although the REM-Framework was not intended as a model of strategic management, there is definite strategic management application of the REM-Framework. The REM-framework fits in with the learning perspective to strategy as it recognises the importance of context for change that has to take effect within the parameters of a process – such as a merger agenda or plan. The

application of the REM-Framework in the strategy implementation stage of the strategic management process model is quite apparent.

The experiences of academics also illustrate the importance and effect of institutional predisposition of staff during a merger. Although literature supports these findings, it is primarily forthcoming from the literature base concerned with social identity, and not enough emphasis seems to be placed on this concept in merger and acquisition (M and A) literature.

Consistent with M and A change literature, this study also emphasises the complexity of change, as is evident from the myriad of variables (and the complex relationships between them) presented in the REM-framework. It has also touched on the role of expectations in a merger, an under documented area of M and A literature. Nonetheless, this study has indicated that the expectations of the future roll-out of a merger are dependant on people's current (and past) experiences of the merger.

CONCLUDING REMARKS AND AVENUES FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

To date, the extant literature appears to have directed scant attention to individual experiences of a merger. This research contributes to the existing body of knowledge by proposing a new theoretical framework – the REM Framework – to enable a more detailed analysis of how individuals experience a merger with the objective of assisting managers in tailor-making change management interventions to negate the effect of these often overlooked human aspects of large-scale change, and facilitate more effective execution of the merger.

This research also provides a better understanding of merger processes within HEIs, particularly as HEIs worldwide are experiencing change. HEI mergers have occurred in the UK, Germany and Belarus. German-speaking countries are experiencing changing academic rules and regulations, and HEIs in New Zealand are in a state of restructuring. This explains the international application of this research. Although not a conventional merger due to the ideological motivation behind it, the UJ case has relevance to mergers in the business context, as at the end of the day employees react to change, not the reason for the change.

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