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Implementing the research quality framework: an analysis of change and identity in academia

Gregor Zelle
University of Wollongong

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Implementing the
Research Quality Framework:
An Analysis of Change and Identity in Academia

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements
for the award of the degree

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

from

UNIVERSITY OF WOLLONGONG

by

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March 2012
I, Gregor Zelle, declare that this thesis, submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, in the School of Management and Marketing, Faculty of Commerce, University of Wollongong, is wholly my own work unless otherwise referenced or acknowledged. The document has not been submitted for qualifications at any other academic institution.

Gregor Zelle

21 September 2012
Abstract

This thesis investigates the attempted implementation of the Research Quality Framework (RQF) policy in the Australian higher education sector. With the RQF the Australian Federal Government aimed to introduce a national research quality assessment exercise to Australian universities that at a later stage was to inform selective, performance based funding of university research. In particular the study focuses on the impact of the discourse of the early development and implementation phase of the policy on the occupational identities of academics affected by the RQF. At the centre of the investigation is an exploration of the responses of academics to the policy - how they expected it to change their workplace. The study also addresses how the RQF attempted to reconstruct academic identities at macro (government policy), meso (organisational), and micro (individual) levels of discourse, and how identity (re)-constructions at these different levels relate to each other.

The thesis uses a case study approach that investigates academics in different career stages and from different disciplines at a regional Australian university. The approach is grounded in established qualitative research methods involving the coding of textual data through several readings, combined with more recent methods of discourse analysis based on Positioning Theory. The fieldwork consists of data collection through in-depth semi-structured interviews with academics as well as managerial and administrative staff of the university. Furthermore, additional data for analysis is provided through documents such as internal reports, emails, newsletters, government publications, public media, and academic journal publications among others.
The findings of the study draw a complex picture of academic identity in the context of significant organisational change within universities. The evidence suggests that many academics committed to the change and showed signs of adaptation and the development of new identities that are more compatible with their changing environment. However, there is also evidence for strong traditional academic identities which show few indications of adaptation and little attitudinal or behavioural change as a result of the RQF policy. The findings indicate that career stage and affiliation with specific academic disciplines may play significant roles in how individual academic identities are affected by change. Findings also show that the implementation of research quality assessment is not viewed as an isolated event within the academic community. Rather the RQF is found to be embedded in a complex network of storylines and unresolved issues in higher education that predate research quality assessment. Furthermore, the findings show that discourse across the macro, meso, and micro level of analysis has an important role in identity construction as positions, both within and between levels, inform each other and through positioning and counter-positioning identity constructions are negotiated.

These findings have a number of important implications for the field of organisational studies, the management of organisational change, and the implementation and conduct of research quality assessment exercises. The approach taken in this study demonstrates how discourse analysis based on Positioning Theory can provide an important tool for analysing and managing organisational change. The study shows how planned changes may have unexpected and varied effects on occupational identities, generating resistance and disengagement which in turn threaten the successful implementation of change. Future research assessment exercises should take into account how high levels of unproductive stress and anxiety among academics may be reduced through
complementary support mechanisms and guidance for academics during transition periods as well as the development of policies and assessment systems that emphasise support for academic integrity and valued professional identities rather than external motivators of incentives and punishments.
Acknowledgements

First and foremost I am thankful for the support and encouragement of my supervisors Dr Karin Garrety, Prof Sara Dolničar, and Dr Peter McLean. Without your resilience and tireless reassurance this thesis would not have been written. Thank you for the many hours spent discussing the problems, reading chapter drafts, and all the motivation and inspiration you provided. Your support has been invaluable to me both academically and personally. I could not have asked for a better team to help me push through what turned out to be the most challenging time of my life thus far.

Thank you to the many academics and other university staff who found some time in their busy schedules to participate in the interviews upon which this thesis is based. Especially during the turbulent times of the RQF implementation this was not taken for granted and is most thankfully acknowledged.

Finally, big thanks to my family. Although you are thousands of kilometres and several oceans away your never tiring encouragement and support meant a lot to me. To know that there was always an open ear to turn to on the other end of the phone line, no matter how difficult or frustrating the situation, has been a tremendous help and motivation.
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List of Abbreviations

ARC ________________ Australian Research Council
AUQA ______________ Australian Universities Quality Agency
AVCC ________________ Australian Vice-Chancellors’ Committee
CAE ________________ College of Advanced Education
DEET ________________ Department of Employment, Education and Training
DEST ________________ Department of Education, Science and Training
DETYA ______________ Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs
ERA ________________ Excellence in Research for Australia
IGS ________________ Institutional Grants Scheme
IMHE ______________ Institutional Management in Higher Education
KPI ________________ Key Performance Indicator
NASA ______________ National Aeronautics and Space Administration
NPM ______________ New Public Management
OECD ______________ Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
RQF ________________ Research Quality Framework
TEQSA ______________ Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency
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Chapter 1

Introduction and Context of the Study
1.1 Introduction

This thesis investigates the attempted implementation of the Research Quality Framework (RQF) policy in the Australian higher education sector. With the RQF policy the Australian Federal Government aimed to introduce a national research quality assessment exercise to Australian universities that at a later stage was to inform selective, performance-based funding of university research. The study focuses on the impact the discourse of the early development and implementation phase of the policy had on the occupational identities of the academics affected by it. At the centre of the investigation is an exploration of the responses of academics to the changes the policy is expected to cause in their organisational environment and workplace with a focus on the occupational identities of academics. Furthermore, the study addresses questions regarding identity constructions across macro (government policy and public discourse), meso (institutional), and micro (individual) level discourse and how identity constructions at these different levels relate to each other.

Chapter one introduces the study and provides background and contextual information. The chapter starts with the rationale for the study. After a brief background on the Research Quality Framework policy, the research questions are introduced. This section is followed by a discussion of the aims, significance, and originality of the research. After some remarks on the structure of this thesis the chapter continues with the most significant developments in the Australian higher education sector since the 1980s. A more detailed introduction to the so-called Dawkins reforms, higher education policy during the era of the Howard government, and further key issues of higher education up to the more recent past, provide vital contextual information and situate the subject of the thesis, the RQF policy and its
impact on academics’ identities, within ongoing broader trends and developments in
Australian higher education policy. These strategic issues are of significance to
university research and university management in general and in particular in the
context of the implementation of the RQF policy.
1.2 Rationale of the Study

1.2.1 The RQF - A Brief Background

The 2006 announcement of the implementation of the Research Quality Framework (RQF) by the Minister for Education, Science and Training made certain a policy that had been developed and discussed for several years – an assessment framework for the research output of Australian Universities (Bishop 2006). The RQF was to be a measurement tool to assess the impact and quality of research output at Australian universities. It was meant to assist the government in making informed decisions on resource allocation to university research.

The Australian federal government was expected to implement the RQF in 2008. However, a change in the federal government from the coalition of Liberal Party and National Party to a Labor Party government in 2007 led to some uncertainty regarding whether or not the RQF policy would be amended or implemented at all in its original form. Initially the new Labor government announced that it would keep the current schedule for the implementation. Further announcements by the Labor government indicated that it may revise the RQF but not abandon it completely (Carr 2007; Macklin 2006; Smith 2007). This was confirmed by an email announcement in late November 2007 by the Acting Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research) of the regional university investigated here. The university expected possible changes and delays to the planned RQF but assumed that a research assessment exercise would be implemented. Finally, in late December 2007 the Labor government announced that the RQF was cancelled because it was ‘fundamentally flawed’ (Rout & Knott 2007).

My thesis focuses on data collected between April and October 2007. At the time interviews with academics were conducted the looming implementation of the
RQF was at the forefront of discussion and speculation within the academic community, preparations for the assessment exercise were in full swing, and organisational change within universities became apparent. The announcement of a new policy called ‘Excellence in Research for Australia (ERA)’ (Carr 2008) only shortly after the RQF was abandoned makes clear that research assessment exercises were here to stay.

ERA maintained many of the principles inherent to the RQF. ‘Measuring’ research quality as a basis of information, which would inform improved planning of research, remained the foremost priority. The assessment of research outputs as a quality measure as well as the introduction of a prescriptive list that ranks academic journals by their quality and the potential coupling of government research funds allocation to the outcomes of the exercise were retained in the ERA policy. Other controversial issues such as the notion of discipline clusters, ill-defined allocations of sub-disciplines spanning more than one such cluster and the debate around appropriate metrics for specific disciplines plagued ERA just as they did the RQF.

However, there were significant differences between the abandoned RQF and its successor. ERA shifted the focus from a reliance on qualitative ‘measures’ of quality to a system design largely based on quantitative metrics and statistical analysis of research outputs. More importantly the controversial concept of ‘research groupings’ as the unit of analysis was abandoned and data collection for ERA would take place at a higher level of aggregation by discipline. This distinction is significant in the light of the present study. The RQF’s ‘research groupings’ and their potential to identify and label individual performance or lack of performance are expected to have more significant impact on the occupational identities of academics than the aggregate statistics produced by ERA (Clarke 2008; de Lange et al. 2010; Cooper & Poletti 2011).
The RQF constituted an important first step in the evolution of research assessment in Australia. Insights and implications from the findings of this study of the attempted RQF implementation can inform the design of future assessment exercises, in Australia and elsewhere, help avoid mistakes of the past, and contribute to the development of research assessment that is mutually beneficial to the governments who fund research, the academics who conduct research, and ultimately industry and the wider community as end users of research outputs.

The RQF design was characterised by a number of key features that presented challenges and in some cases were cause for controversy. Among others these were the attempts to measure not just research quality but also the impact of research outputs, the assessment of so-called research groups rather than an aggregation of research outputs of entire disciplines, discipline specific issues such as hard to assess outputs in creative arts and some social science and humanities disciplines, the ability of universities to choose who would be included or excluded from the submission of assessable outputs to the exercise, the introduction of a journal quality ranking list, and the increased pressure on universities from the coupling of the assessment to future funding allocations. These more technical features of the assessment are of contextual significance due to their influence on the academic workplace. In preparation for the RQF, to cope with these technical challenges, universities started to undergo some organisational change that was soon to be felt by most academics. The emphasis of the present study is on the effects that this change in the workplace had on the occupational identities of academics.

The organisational change triggered by the implementation of the RQF was expected to impact on the management of the universities and in turn on the academics they employ. Universities find themselves in a new even more competitive funding environment where resource allocation is based on the quality
of research outputs. Academics have to cope with changes to how their work is assessed, which may not just question but even alter perceptions of the professional identity of academics and their role in the university. These developments however do not come as a complete surprise; they constitute the continuation of a trend towards increasing managerialisation of universities combined with growing governmental interventions that have been going on for several years (Lafferty & Fleming 2000; Meadmore 1998; Lines 2005).

Managerialism, the application of management techniques, practices, and systems previously only common in the private sector, has been an increasing trend in the administration of universities over the past few decades. It is characterized by a stronger focus on effectiveness and efficiency, a greater emphasis on market orientation, the introduction of performance indicators, quality assurance procedures, and accountability requirements (Anderson 2006; Lafferty & Fleming 2000; Meadmore 1998). Driven by growing government demands for financial efficiency and accountability to tax payers as important stakeholders of university funding the development of the RQF constituted but one more phase in the manifestation of this ongoing trend towards increasing managerialism.

Neither managerialist tendencies nor the introduction of research quality assessment are isolated, domestic occurrences confined to Australia. Research assessment had been previously introduced in countries such as the UK, USA, and New Zealand among others (Clarke 2005b; Hicks 2009). For the study of occupational identities, more important than the shared common features of these assessment exercises however are the local contexts of the different national higher education systems that have to adapt to increased scrutiny by their governments. The intricacies of different higher education systems shape how their universities
respond to research quality assessment. This in turn influences the effects assessment exercises may have upon the academics these universities employ.

1.2.2 Aims of the Thesis and Research Questions

This thesis sets out to investigate and understand how academics respond to and are affected by the implementation of a research quality assessment exercise in the Australian higher education system. In particular the study focuses on the impact of the RQF on occupational identities of academics. Occupational identity in the workplace shapes the conduct of members of an organisation and may have significant behavioural implications. Hence an understanding of identity effects can help explain success or failure of the implementation of research assessment exercises more generally and the RQF in particular.

Although literature regarding research assessment exercises comparable to the RQF, in particular on the RAE (Research Assessment Exercise) in the UK, does exist it has paid little attention to the effects of such exercises on the occupational identity of academics. Even less of this work is grounded in empirical data (Johnston 2006; Hall 2006; Cheek 2006; McNay 1998, 2005, 1997; Worthington & Hodgson 2005; Morley 2005; Elton 2000; Greenbank 2006; Talib 2001; Talib & Steele 2000; Saunderson 2002). The majority of this literature presents general critiques of research assessment exercises based on opinion, commentary, and in some cases speculation or suggestions regarding potential future scenarios. While in some cases backed by meta-analysis, it demonstrates a lack of original empirical research. It also shows a focus on past experiences specific to the situation in the UK, which only inadequately applies to the intricacies of local research assessment exercises such as
the RQF. However, this body of literature indicates that the RQF may not just have led to the intended effects of improved quality of research output but may also have side-effects such as the development of “teaching-focused” or “teaching-intensive” academic positions (Illing 2007a; Rout 2007), negative effects upon teaching quality (Greenbank 2006:108; McNay 2005), distress, alienation, fear, resentment, and damaged identities (Morley 2005:86; Worthington & Hodgson 2005:99), lead to increased levels of job stress in academic staff (Winefield et al. 2008), affect the attractiveness of academia as a profession (Coates et al. 2009), and may have negative implications for the retention and rejuvenation of an aging Australian academic workforce (Bexley, James & Arkoudis 2011). Thus, the first research question to be asked to address this gap in the current knowledge and understanding of the effects of the implementation of research assessment exercise is:

**Research Question One:** What are the responses of academics to research quality assessment and what effects do research assessment systems have on the occupational identities of academics?

The announcement of the RQF by the Australian federal government stirred up a significant discourse regarding the exercise and its potential implications. At a macro or societal level this discourse was led by ongoing government announcements regarding the policy, its development and implementation but was supplemented by public statements from the National Tertiary Education Union.

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1 A comprehensive discussion of the literature on the RAE is beyond the scope of this thesis. For a more inclusive but not exhaustive list of reading on the RAE refer to: Barker (2007); Bourke (1997); Broadbent (2010); Broadhead and Howard (1998); Butler and McAllister (2009, 2011); Coate, Barnett and Williams (2001); Curran (2000); Deem (1998); Harley and Lee (1997); Hicks (2009); Higton (2002); Howie (2005); Kelly (2012); Kinman (1998); Lee (2007); Mace (2000); McKenna (1996); McNay (1999, 2003); Otley (2010); Paul (2000); Piercy (2000); Strathern (1997, 2000); Tapper and Salter (2003); Taylor (2011); Tomlin (1998); Whitchurch (2006).
(NTEU), news and media coverage of the topic as well as some academic publications commenting on the issue. This discourse soon became a noticeable part of the communication and management practices within universities as well as conversations among the academic community, representing the meso and respectively micro level of the discourse surrounding the RQF. Therefore, this thesis also seeks to understand how discourse at and across these three levels contributes to and affects the identity constructions of academics by addressing a second research question:

**Research Question Two:** (a) How do identity constructions and responses to identity constructions vary at different levels of analysis – macro (government and policy / societal rhetoric), meso (organisational / institutional practice), micro (individual academics / conversations)? (b) How do identity constructions and responses to identity constructions at different levels of analysis interact and influence each other?

Scrutiny of the RQF in the light of organisational change and through the lens of identity is a particularly interesting approach as it provides (a) a more detailed explanation and understanding of the proclaimed effects that the Australian government hoped to achieve with the implementation of the RQF, namely improved quality of research output; and (b) further understanding and explanations of potential unintended side-effects. These include the development of “teaching-focused” or “teaching-intensive” academic positions (Illing 2007a; Rout 2007) or in more drastic cases negative effects upon teaching quality (Greenbank 2006:108; McNay 2005), distress, alienation, fear, resentment, and damaged
identities. Such effects have been reported in the UK (Morley 2005:86; Worthington & Hodgson 2005:99).

1.2.3 Significance of the Research

The investigation of the two research questions outlined above leads to several significant contributions to current knowledge in the areas of research quality assessment exercises, the occupational identities of academics in situations of research assessment and organisational change more generally, as well as the functions and relationships of the macro, meso, and micro levels of the social world in identity constructions.

The study contributes to knowledge about academics’ responses to research assessment exercises in general and the RQF in particular. This knowledge could facilitate the management of the implementation process of future quality assessment systems and assist organisations in coping with potential problems that may occur during the implementation period.

The thesis adds to the understanding of the effects of organisational change on professional/occupational identities. Understanding the effects of the RQF upon the identities of academics can help to prevent or prepare for potential negative effects. Knowledge regarding these effects can also facilitate a more successful implementation of change. Better understanding of how change is perceived, responded to and what effect it has on members of an organisation can provide insight into resistance to change. This knowledge of whether or not, why and to what extent resistance occurs is vital in change implementation and management.

Furthermore, the research presented here adds to the knowledge on discourse and the impact of discursive interactions on identity processes. This
knowledge will provide a better understanding of the role of communication and its limitations in guiding change processes. It can also contribute to the improvement of communication during change.

Finally, the thesis contributes to a better understanding of the complex relationship between the discursive levels of socially constructed reality. Through the analysis of data representing discourse not just at the micro level of individual academics but also the meso level of university practices and communication as well as the macro level of societal rhetoric regarding the RQF the thesis makes an important contribution to the small amount of empirical work currently addressing this topic. This knowledge is significant not just for the field of organisational studies but also for social science in a wider sense.

1.2.4 Structure of the Thesis

The thesis is structured into five main chapters. Each chapter covers a distinct section of the thesis. It comprises of an introduction and relevant contextual information, a review of the existing literature that establishes the theoretical underpinnings of the thesis, the design of the study and the methods used for analysis, the presentation of the findings of the study, and finally a discussion of the findings and conclusions of the thesis. Chapters are subdivided into sections covering the broader argument of the chapter. These sections are again subdivided into the main points of the argument where necessary and appropriate. Long text passages that do not justify a subdivision under this structure are interrupted by topical headlines to increase intelligibility of the particular section.

Chapter one introduces the research project by outlining the background of the study, presenting the rationale for the proposed research questions, stating the
Chapter 1
Introduction and Context of the Study

The aims and purpose of the project, demonstrating the significance and originality of the research, as well as an outline of the structure of the thesis. Furthermore, the chapter provides a detailed account of the context of the study. It presents an overview of significant developments in the Australian higher education system since the 1980s including a discussion of the Dawkins reforms, and higher education during the era of the Howard government. The chapter concludes with a number of key issues in the lead up to the implementation of the RQF policy.

Chapter two presents a review and discussion of the literature relevant to the research project. The major fields reviewed comprise concepts of the self and identity, Positioning Theory, and a review of theories of occupational identities in the literature. The first section tracks the development of concepts of self and identity through the literature. It begins with the foundations of contemporary perspectives of the self and continues through the notion of the ‘situated self’ (Goffman 1983) to conclude with more recent interactionist contributions to the study of self, identity and roles. This is followed by a section dedicated to Positioning Theory, the main theory underpinning this thesis. A thorough discussion of Positioning Theory introduces the concepts of positioning, conversations, and situations, followed by an introduction to social interaction, agency and modes of positioning. Furthermore, the section covers an introduction to context, situation and types of intentional positioning, followed by a discussion of the ontological assumptions underlying Positioning Theory. The section concludes with a review of the application of Positioning Theory in empirical research. The last section of the chapter focuses on theories of occupational identity in the literature. It covers fundamental issues of occupational identity, reviews models of occupational identity in the current literature, and closes with a discussion of occupational identity in academia.
Chapter three covers the research design and methodological underpinning of the thesis. The chapter presents the theoretical rationale for the research design and methods to be used in the analysis. Chapter three covers when, where and how the research is conducted. It provides details on techniques, procedures, and approaches as well as sampling and data requirements of the research project. I introduce the case study approach used for this thesis. Furthermore, the chapter provides information on the types of data collected, triangulation of data, and data analysis as well as a statement regarding the role of the researcher and the issue of reflexivity in qualitative research.

Chapter four presents the findings of the thesis. It starts with a thorough description of the analysis. The structure of the findings including storylines, themes and positions is introduced. This is followed by a comprehensive overview of the findings. The main storylines that emerged in the analysis are divided into themes. Each theme comprises of a number of positions. These positions are made accessible by thick descriptions of the aggregated data and illustrated with relevant quotes.

Finally, chapter five concludes the thesis. It comprises the results and discussion sections of the thesis. Results of the data analysis are discussed in the light of the existing literature and the research questions of the thesis. The first section of the chapter provides a thorough discussion of the research questions. Each research question is addressed with cross-references to the data from the findings as well as relevant cross references to the theories presented in the literature review. The second section of the chapter covers concluding remarks, implications, and recommendations. It discusses the significance of the findings for the field of organisational studies, implications for management practice, and limitations as well as recommendations for future research. The conclusions of chapter five demonstrate how discourse analysis grounded in Positioning Theory
provides an important tool in change analysis, shows how planned change may result in unexpected and unintended effects on occupational identity, and offer some suggestions to inform the development and implementation of future policy and assessment systems.
1.3 Developments in the Australian Higher Education System

1.3.1 The Dawkins reforms

The so-called Dawkins reforms, a number of major interventions in the higher education sector by the Australian government through higher education policy during the late 1980s and early 1990s, form the starting point for this review of the context of my study for a number of reasons. First, these reforms mark the beginning of what is now called the New Public Management (NPM) in the Australian higher education sector (Marginson & Considine 2000). These developments were marked by increasing government demands for accountability of universities as well as unprecedented government intervention in the higher education sector. Second, the Dawkins reforms had a key influence on the shape of the current higher education sector by transforming the university landscape through mergers and amalgamations. Former colleges/institutes of advanced education achieved university status and joined the traditional, older ‘sandstone’ universities\(^2\) in the competition for increasingly scarce teaching and research resources and government funding (Anderson 2006). Third, the Dawkins reforms aimed to transform the higher education sector into a more market-like system where increased competition between institutions was meant to function as an incentive for improvements in teaching and research quality. Key issues in higher education policy stemming from the Dawkins era, for example, an emphasis on greater accountability for government funds and the concept of performance based funding, remain significant in current Australian higher education policy (Meek 2003:260).

\(^2\) ‘Sandstone’ universities is an informal term referring to Australia’s oldest universities, most of which were established during the colonial era.
The reforms began in 1987. John Dawkins became minister for the newly created ‘megaministry’, the Department of Education, Employment, and Training under Bob Hawke’s Labor government (Bessant 1996:112; Knight & Warry 1998:186; Meadmore 1998:29; Marginson & Considine 2000:27; Symes 1996:134). Dawkins brought with him the background of his former position as minister for finance into a political climate that was characterised by high unemployment, economic recession, and inadequate fiscal resources (Knight & Warry 1998:184; Symes 1996:134). Dawkins’ move into education symbolised a new direction in Australian higher education policy. It represented the dawn of the New Public Management approach for higher education in Australia (Marginson & Considine 2000:25). The new Department of Employment, Education and Training under the direction of Dawkins was characterised by ‘a clear economic orientation’ and ‘a microeconomic approach to reform’ (Marginson & Considine 2000:30). Under this perspective of ‘economic rationalism’ and ‘top-down corporate management’ universities were viewed as instrumental in providing the state and the economy with a well educated workforce that possessed skills leading to employability rather than academic knowledge (Bessant 1996:112). ‘The intent was to ensure an economically competitive nation in the global marketplace’ (Knight & Warry 1998:184).

New Public Management constituted a paradigm shift in higher education policy. ‘Structuring management to ensure efficient and effective decision making’ was ‘at the heart of the Government’s approach to reform in the higher education system’ (Dawkins & DEET 1987:47). At the centre of the new approach were increasing demands on universities for accountability and performance measurement, which shifted power to bureaucrats and administrators (Knight & Warry 1998:187; Marginson & Considine 2000:26). Changes to the funding
structure of the higher education sector, such as the shift from free universal higher education in the 1970s and 80s to the Higher Education Contribution Scheme loans for domestic students and full fee paying international students, increased the pressure on universities to monitor and report quality and outcomes. (Knight & Warry 1998:189; Meek 2003:264).

This push for accountability was further emphasised by Dawkins’ Green and White Papers which implemented a mode of government funding and resource allocation based on institutional profiles negotiated between the government and individual institutions (Vidovich 2001:251-252). These institutional profiles consisted of a number of goals a university committed to in exchange for guaranteed base-level funding (Dawkins & DEET 1987:43-44). Resource allocation was a tool to achieve higher accountability under ‘a funding system that responds to institutional performance and the achievement of agreed goals’ (Dawkins & DEET 1987:41). Central to this instrumental use of funding to stimulate change in higher education was the development of ‘reliable performance indicators’ (Dawkins & DEET 1987:41). However, the government was aware of the difficulties and issues that the development of commonly accepted performance indicators, in particular regarding the measurement of research performance, would pose. Peer review was suggested as an interim solution to forestall those difficulties (Dawkins & DEET 1987:41-42).

These developments and reforms in the course of NPM led to conflict in universities. New management practices with their inherent corporate, top-down disposition challenged traditional academic values and identities. Changes to the management structure of universities were perceived as a threat to ‘academic-institutional autonomy, academic freedom and collegiality’ (Bessant 1996:116). Although the government claimed that their policies ‘need not imply a conflict with the maintenance of academic freedom and institutional autonomy’ (Dawkins &
DEET 1987:47) it was also clear that it viewed universities as public counterparts of large business organisations and wanted them to be managed as such:

Many higher education institutions are extremely large, managing budgets equivalent to large business organisations. For example, there are 27 institutions with annual budgets over $30 million. Institutions are accountable to governments (State and Commonwealth), employers, students and the community, and their managers are required to show strong leadership through fostering efficiency, setting priorities, promoting a client orientation and undertaking corporate planning and review. ... Committee systems have an important role to play in institutional management by advising on policy, but they should not function to dilute the management power of the chief executive or to restrict appropriate delegation to those who should have responsibility at others levels (Dawkins & DEET 1987:50-51).

This perspective adopted by the government constituted a threat to the traditional management structures and prevailing practices of universities based upon collegial decision making and committee work (Bessant 1996:116). Furthermore, concerns surfaced about a loss of academic freedom through government/management-led decisions regarding the contents of teaching and research. This unease among academics was fuelled by perceptions that research grants were more likely to be won if applications were aligned with the national priorities list set by the government (Bessant 1996:116; Mahony 1994:125).

In line with the economic rationalist approach of NPM towards a more effective and efficient higher education system and a political agenda that fostered mass higher education, allowing access to a broader spectrum of the population, Dawkins embarked on even more substantial changes to the Australian higher
education sector. The transformation of the former binary system, which divided higher education institutions into Colleges of Advanced Education (CAE) and the traditional universities, to a Unified National System altered the structure of Australian higher education significantly. Through a number of mergers and amalgamations between 1987 and 1994, 19 former universities and 54 former CAEs encountered an overhaul that resulted in a national system of 39 universities and the demise of the CAEs (Bessant 1996:114). This structure remains largely unchanged to the present day. The aims of the restructured system, economies of scale through larger institutions and less duplication in course offerings and administration as well as specialisation and market-like competition among higher education institutions, reflected the broader goal of a mass higher education system (Bessant 1996:114; Dawkins & DEET 1987:28; Marginson & Considine 2000:30).

However, the introduction of the Unified National System was not without obstacles and difficulties.

The Dawkins reforms achieved the goal of coercing the former universities into taking up some of the characteristics and practices of the former CAEs, which were traditionally run in a more managerial way (Bessant 1996:113, 114). The post-Dawkins universities, in particular those consisting exclusively of former CAEs, on the other hand, had to face their own challenges in developing a profile that more closely resembled that of a traditional university. In order to catch up with the traditional universities former CAEs had to cope with a considerable burden regardless of the assistance made available by the government. Research was minimal or nonexistent, qualifications of academic staff varied widely between former CAEs and universities and not all staff were happy to take up research. Undergraduate and postgraduate courses had to be adapted or developed (Bessant 1996:114-115; Knight & Warry 1998:188-189). Furthermore, under the Unified
National System traditional universities and post-Dawkins universities would encounter the additional challenge of directly competing for students as well as government and other funding sources in a quasi-market higher education system (Bessant 1996:119). However, Marginson’s³ (1997a) highly critical analysis of the Australian higher education sector in the course of marketisation under Dawkins concludes that these developments posed a greater challenge to some institutions than others.

The main points of Marginson’s (1997a) analysis are the shortcomings of the rudimentary higher education market, inequality in the starting conditions, and the difficulties created by higher education as a ‘positional good’ that threaten the successful installation of a market-like system in higher education. First, the marketisation of the higher education system led to a ‘quasi-market’ that only resembles some features of a fully developed economic market but not all. In a quasi-market influences other than consumer choice and supply and demand affect the success of a player in the market. Although some competition was introduced into the higher education system, decisive factors such as ‘funding of tuition costs, and the planning of student load ... degrees and academic standards’ remained under the regulation of ‘universities, public authorities or by custom and decree’ (Marginson 1997a:6).

Second, Marginson (1997a) notes that the conditions under which players started off in the new market after the creation of the Unified National System were characterised by inequalities. Not all the newly formed universities possessed the ‘material resources’ or ‘qualities that enable ‘competitiveness” to successfully

³ Simon Marginson is one of the main commentators on Australian higher education policy and contemporary issues in higher education. He has published numerous articles and books that focus on the analysis of the Australian higher education sector in a national as well as global context. Marginson is among the most frequently cited authors in the field (Marginson 1997a, 2002, 2003, 2004, 2006, 2007b, 2008; Marginson & Considine 2000; Marginson & Rhoades 2002).
commence in a market competition (Marginson 1997a:6). Although the former CAEs were provided with 'some funds' to establish a research infrastructure, the distribution of research grants based on quality and track record left the traditional ‘Sandstone’ universities in a much stronger position. Funding based on research performance perpetuated imbalances in the system where 'success bred success and failure bred failure' (Marginson 1997a:10).

Finally, Marginson's (1997a) main argument for the unbalanced accomplishments of marketisation in Australian higher education is its nature as a positional good in a segmented market. This protects the top end of the market from competitive pressures and allows competition only at the lower end. Positional goods in higher education are 'status goods, places in education that provide students with relative advantage in the competition for jobs, social standing and prestige' (Marginson 1997a:7 [emphasis in original]). The traditional 'Sandstone' universities occupy these status positions. Two unique features of positional goods help these universities maintain their oligopoly/monopoly status. First positional goods are absolutely scarce. Second, competition in higher education takes place not only between institutions but also between students. Absolute scarcity is achieved by limiting supply in a sellers' market. Though demand by students may rise, the number of goods remains constant, assuring a perceived superiority due to the good's unique positional advantage. In higher education this positional advantage is further reinforced due to the limited number of positions of social leadership within the society served by the education system. Hence, just as the entry barriers into the upper echelons of society whose members attend and support the elite segment, the barriers that guard the higher education elite are not just economic. Traditional, socioculturally grounded perceptions of 'quality education' shield the top segment from market competition. This hierarchical system in a segmented market, based on
the symbolic value of an education rather than actual content or quality, has disarming effects on the elite/quality claims of new institutions. Room for new entrants to the elite segment may only come into sight in a far-off future (Marginson 1997a:7-8). Marginson’s analysis draws a picture of few short-term prospects for equality in a competitive higher education system:

The existing elite institutions have established their credentials in a long, slow accumulation of social investment, reputation and cultural authority, and they are not about to vacate their hard-won ground. Nor are people from the most powerful and wealthy social groups and professions likely to welcome the devaluation of their past educational credentials.

It is only at the bottom of an education market-system that competition operates as the textbook suggests (Marginson 1997a:8).

1.3.2 Australian Higher Education and the Howard Government

In 1996 the coalition between the Liberal Party of Australia and the Australian National Party under the leadership of John Howard gained power at the Commonwealth level. The Howard government remained in power until late 2007. Dawkins’ coalition successors were well aware of the magnitude of the reforms he initiated and although representing an opposing political camp they had no intentions of reversing his direction. The opposite was true. Under the Howard government the marketisation of higher education and more managerial approaches to university administration were continued. Continuing change would take ‘the higher education system beyond that envisaged in the Dawkins reforms’ (Pick 2006:229). The Howard government is described at least in some respects, such as labour market policy, industrial relations and enterprise bargaining, as ‘more
“extreme” than the previous regime' (Knight & Warry 1998:190). Marginson (2004:216) even labels the higher education environment during Howard's time in office as ‘the most difficult since the modern university system was founded ... in the 1960s’, 'a largely negative force', leaving universities 'less competitive in world terms than before'.

Marginson’s (2004) short history of higher education under Howard divides this time into three distinct phases: 1996 to 2001, when the focus was on decreased funding and increased economic pressure to foster marketisation, 2001 to 2003, which was characterised by the Innovation Statement and a partial research funding boost, and 2003 to 2004, during which the so-called Nelson report fostered further steps towards higher education as a market-like system. One may add to this periodisation a fourth phase: 2005 to 2007, which featured the planning, development, and attempted implementation of the Research Quality Framework (Cheek 2006; Rout & Knott 2007).

Increasing economic pressure on universities and cuts in government funding marked higher education policy between 1996 and 2001, the first years of the coalition government. The new government demonstrated even greater interest than the previous Labor governments in the transformation of public higher education into a system that more closely resembles a market competition. The first budget in 1996 cut public funding of universities and increased student contributions (Marginson 2004:223). The so-called ‘Vanstone cuts’, named after Howard’s first Minister for Education, Training and Youth Affairs, lead to a reduction of 5 to 12 per cent in public contributions to universities operating costs, depending on the extent to which individual institutions relied on public funding. Universities were able to absorb some of the impact through efficiency improvements. However, the consequence of the cuts was growing pressure on costs and quality. This was
reflected in larger class sizes and increased casualisation of teaching staff, the so-called "throw-away" academics" (Marginson 2004:224).

Between 1996 and 2001 the higher education system’s funding structures underwent radical change. Total funding from public sources declined from 58 to 46 per cent, student contributions to university funding increased from 19 to 32 per cent, and funding obtained from full fee paying international students moved from $580 million up to $1148 million (Marginson 2004:227-228). Universities across the board, even the well-established ‘Sandstones’, were forced to develop strategies to generate income from non-core activities, such as international education and consultancy. The development of 'strategic management' approaches led to intensified managerialism in university administration, further deterioration of academic work conditions and cultures, and in some cases the closing down of whole departments (Knight & Warry 1998:194; Marginson 2004:225-226).

Although universities were able to partially compensate public funding cuts with other income sources there was an increasing downward pressure on quality. Other income sources that are vulnerable to market fluctuations could not provide the funding stability of government operating grants necessary to assure consistent teaching and research quality. Extra funding based on research performance was mostly absorbed by the top eight universities, making it hard for post-Dawkins universities to develop a research profile (Marginson 2004:230). Furthermore, commercial activities did not just create income but also additional costs for the marketing of higher education. New squads of managers paid at corporate rates were employed in functions such as marketing and student recruitment, financial and asset management, and quality assurance (Marginson 2004:228, 231). The costs of marketisation took their toll on higher education quality and the working conditions of academics. The student-staff ratio skyrocketed from an average of 15.6
in 1996 to 20.4 in 2002 (Marginson 2004:229; Murray & Dollery 2006:487-488), an increase of 30 per cent. Investments in libraries, computing facilities, and basic research suffered under budgetary constraints. Declining quality did not just affect domestic students but also full fee paying international students. This constituted a threat not just to the reputation of Australia's education abroad but also to a vital source of income. The government’s response was the introduction of a national quality assurance system in 2000. Universities were now left with less public funding and more government pressure to produce quality (Marginson 2004).

The second phase of higher education policy under Howard, between 2001 and 2003, saw a short pause in the spending cuts. The looming election of 2001, the opposition’s critique of higher education policy in the light of the developing global knowledge economy, and the negative perception of the Vanstone cuts in public opinion provoked the government to shift direction. An innovation task force was set up resulting in the publication of an *Innovation Statement: Backing Australia’s Ability* (Marginson 2004:234). This policy package included the doubling of funding for competitive research grants by 2006, research infrastructure funding, funding for industry collaboration, biotechnology and information technology investments, tax incentives for industry research partners, as well as a loans scheme to support the fee paying postgraduate market (Marginson 2004:235). However, the most pressing issue of operating grants to restore and strengthen higher education research infrastructure was not addressed. The government also failed to provide additional support for the development of early career researchers who represent the future quality research capacity. Further evidence of the deterioration of quality in higher education surfaced in 2001 in a paper by policy expert Linda Butler, who reported a decline in the quality of research publications. This was mainly due to a funding regime that fostered quantity rather than quality. Publications in easily
accessible low impact journals attracted the same funding as their higher quality, more difficult to access counterparts (Butler 2003; Marginson 2004:235-236).

In 2003 the report ‘Our Universities: Backing Australia’s Future’ was published. This so-called Nelson report (named after the Minister for Education, Science and Training, Brendan Nelson) marked the beginning of the third phase of higher education policy under the coalition government. In the light of the Dawkins reforms Pick (2006:232) describes the implications of the Nelson report as a second major shift in higher education policy direction since the 1980s. The report claimed to recognise the need for more public funding of higher education (Nelson 2003:3). However, at the core of the policy package was further marketisation of the Australian higher education system through the restructuring of ‘undergraduate education as a demand-driven market’ (Marginson 2004:237). Its aims were to turn universities into ‘self-reliant, economically efficient ‘businesses’ competing with each other in a ‘free-market’ (Pick 2006:232). This was to be achieved by further deregulating the fees universities can charge domestic students and the introduction of a new loan scheme (FEE-HELP) for full fee paying domestic students. These loans would also be available to students in private universities, introducing the foundations for the development of a private higher education industry in Australia. The offer by the government to provide universities with $400 million in additional operating grants in exchange for the abandonment of collective bargaining found little positive reception in universities. A renegotiation of the policy package in late 2003 resulted in the decision that universities will not be forced to give up collective bargaining (Marginson 2004:237-238).

The policy package of the Nelson report constitutes a major shift in higher education policy not so much for its short-term impact but for its long-term implications. It established the foundations of a policy framework that in the future
would allow the government to further withdraw public funding from the university system to drive the emergence of a ‘free market’ (Marginson 2004:238-239; Pick 2006:236-237). Marginson (2004) postulates a two tier universities system in the future. Only the eight so-called ‘sandstone’ universities would be able to deploy and maintain the financial power necessary to emerge as winners in a post-Nelson system. Only those ‘elite’ institutions would have the means to ‘leverage long-standing social status’ for their degrees and ‘buy world-class academics’ to achieve ‘superior research performance’ (Marginson 2004:239). The other universities would be confined to niche markets or struggle with the few public funds available.

Equity in resource allocation and the possible re-emergence of a stratified university system in a post-Dawkins higher education environment remained important issues on the higher education agenda over the years from 2005 to 2007 and fuelled the debate regarding the development and implementation of the Research Quality Framework.

The year 2005 saw the publication of two important papers by the Expert Advisory Group for the RQF. The papers published in March and respectively September 2005 were endorsed by the Minister for Education, Science and Training, Brendan Nelson (Expert Advisory Group for the RQF 2005a, b). The rationale for the RQF is described as the absence of ‘mechanisms or procedures in place to consistently assess the quality of publicly funded research in Australia or the impacts and benefits that result from the public investment in that research’ (Expert Advisory Group for the RQF 2005a:11). Among others ‘excellence’ and ‘contestability and accountability’ (Expert Advisory Group for the RQF 2005a:12) are named as guiding principles of the RQF based on previous government papers on higher education. Later additions to the underlying principles included among others ‘Acceptability: broad acceptance of the approach and measures’ and
‘Encourages Positive Behaviours: improving the quality and impact of research and further developing and supporting a vibrant research culture in Australia’ (Expert Advisory Group for the RQF 2005b:8). The stated objectives of the RQF were the measurement of both quality and impact of ‘all publicly funded research conducted within Australia’s university sector and Publicly Funded Research Agencies’ (Expert Advisory Group for the RQF 2005b:7).

Furthermore, the papers outline assessment eligibility. Universities are given the opportunity to nominate research outputs of academic staff level B and above for submission to the assessment exercise. Academic staff are to be sorted in so-called ‘research groupings’ (Expert Advisory Group for the RQF 2005b:11). These groupings may represent groups of researchers who work together or if necessary are created for the purpose of the RQF assessment. Groups may include researchers working together on cross-disciplinary research. Nominated research groupings are to submit so-called evidence portfolios for each individual researcher. Individual researchers are required to produce at least four research outputs over the assessment period, no more than four outputs are to be submitted for assessment (Expert Advisory Group for the RQF 2005b).

Research outputs submitted for assessment were to be evaluated by discipline-based RQF Assessment Panels. These panels should be composed of 12 to 15 members, at least 50 per cent international experts and at least two experts representing users of research per panel. Rating scales would be applied to both quality and impact of research outputs. Quality would be rated on a scale from 1 to 5. Impact would receive a rating of either limited, moderate, or high. Reporting of RQF ratings took place at the level of research groupings; ratings at the level of individual researchers would not be reported. RQF ratings or assessment outcomes
would be tied to the distribution of existing funding schemes (Expert Advisory Group for the RQF 2005b).

### 1.3.3 Key Issues in Australian Higher Education

A number of key issues characterising the Australian higher education landscape emerged or intensified during the late 1990s and early to the mid 2000s: ‘quality’ increasingly became part of higher education discourse and policy, there were more frequent reviews of higher education and changes to funding structures, as well as increased reliance on global rankings and the promulgation of managerialist approaches to university administration. These key issues are relevant for the context of the present study and therefore warrant a discussion in more detail.

*Changing Funding Structures*

Since the 1980’s there have been increasing tendencies to allocate funds according to performance measures in Australian higher education. Already in the course of the Dawkins reforms a small share of the overall higher education funding contribution of the government was allocated according to performance in a limited number of research priority areas (Gallagher 2000:9; Marginson 1997b:73). Research investigating performance-based funding mechanisms in 11 OECD countries at the end of the 1990s found that performance-based funding played a minor role in the overall funding schemes of most governments including Australia. Although most countries were found to employ an outcome oriented funding
approach for research rather than teaching, overall there was little use of performance indicators for higher education funding. Instead, governments used ‘a somewhat soft approach to performance enhancement’ (Jongbloed & Vossensteyn 2001:141).

In 1998-99 in Australia only 8 per cent of public revenues of universities were allocated through research councils, which considered past performance in their allocation decisions. In comparison, countries such as Denmark, France, Japan, and the United States allocated between 20 to 30 per cent through research councils (Jongbloed & Vossensteyn 2001:131). The study found Australia to be input oriented in its performance orientation in the allocation of core funds for teaching, while a mix of input and output orientation was found in the allocation of core funds for research (Jongbloed & Vossensteyn 2001:134). Funds for teaching were allocated based on the number of student places in individual universities. Only a small share of public funding for research was performance dependent. About 4.5 per cent of operating grants were allocated based on the success of individual institutions in securing competitive research grants from public and private sources, number of publications and awarded higher research degrees (Jongbloed & Vossensteyn 2001).

However, an ongoing trend to focus higher education policy towards outputs and moves towards quality assurance led to a stronger interest in performance based funding models (Sharma 2004:109). An examination of higher education reports, reviews and policy documents demonstrates that performance-based funding developed as a key issue over several years before it became one of the central concepts of the Research Quality Framework. A number of examples of documents from the period between 1996 and 2003 demonstrate this trend.
In 1996 the Higher Education Council report *Performance-based Funding of Universities* was released. The report investigated performance-based funding in Australia and overseas and found that ‘its actual use is quite limited’ (Anderson, Johnson & Milligan 1996:59) and no ‘proper evaluations’ (Anderson, Johnson & Milligan 1996:60) of the approach were available. Furthermore, the report found a number of difficulties that warranted caution in the development of a performance based funding system such as: extra workload for institutions, misuse of publicly available assessment data, limited impact on academic staff not directly involved in measurement, counterproductive behaviour such as lowering standards to reduce students’ drop-out rates, cost, complexity and verification problems, neglect of important activities that are not measured, and issues with precision and validity of measures (Anderson, Johnson & Milligan 1996:60-61). Resulting from this investigation the report developed four options for performance-based funding strategies for the Australian higher education system.

These options were: First, an option covering performance-based research funding only, based on the limited existing performance-based funding mechanisms. A second option suggested performance-based funding of teaching and learning by replacing funding based on enrolment load with funding based on successful student load, the number of students actually graduating. The third option was structured competition. That is, teaching and research performance evaluation in a system that allows only the most research intensive universities to compete for performance-based research funding. The remaining institutions would compete for performance-based teaching funds. And finally, steering by profiles, in which an internal performance-based resource allocation would be made a condition for institutions to obtain operating grants from government sources (Anderson, Johnson & Milligan 1996:64-73). Although the report demonstrates the increased
interest in performance-based funding, none of the aforementioned options were
directly translated into government policy.

Only one year after the report on performance-based funding, in 1997, the
National Board of Employment, Education and Training in conjunction with the
Australian Research Council and the Higher Education Council released a report
titled: *Evaluating University Research: The British Research Assessment Exercise and
Australian Practice*. The paper assessed the British approach to performance-based
funding against the Australian Research Quantum, a mechanism that allocated a
small share of overall public funding based on an institution’s success in obtaining
competitive research grants, with the aim of stimulating discussion about
alternative funding approaches (Bourke 1997:iii, 4-5). The report concludes that
although a replacement for the Australian Research Quantum is desirable, due to its
shortcomings in rewarding research quality and volume as well as a lack of
effectiveness as an instrument of research policy, an adaptation of the RAE with its
focus on university departments is not recommended for Australia (Bourke
1997:25, 28). Neither does Australia possess the necessary structures to resemble
the research panels of the UK exercise for the assessment of quality, nor the
required number of academics to fill the positions in these panels. Furthermore,
there were concerns that a shift from the simplistic Research Quantum to a
sophisticated, complex assessment exercise could only be made with considerable
care and over an extensive transition period. Difficulties with regard to the diversity
of the Australian university system, overemphasis on research over teaching, and a
distortion of institutional management were further arguments against a
recommendation of an RAE-like funding approach (Bourke 1997:25-28).

*Knowledge and Innovation: A Policy Statement on Research and Research
Training* was released in 1999 by the Minister for Education, Training and Youth
Affairs, Dr D. A. Kemp. The statement proposed among other changes performance-based funding of university research activities, transitional arrangements to ensure effective competition, and quality verification underpinned by 'Research and Research Training Management Plans' (Kemp 1999:iv). With reference to Australia's competitiveness and growing competition between nations in the global knowledge economy the statement identified a number of deficiencies to justify changes to current funding arrangements: current funding mechanisms did not adequately stimulate 'diversity and excellence', insufficient concentration in areas of strength, unpreparedness of research degree graduates for employment, and 'unacceptable wastage' of resources due to long completion times and low completion rates in research degrees (Kemp 1999:2).

Amongst other changes, for example accountability and quality assurance measures, the Knowledge and Innovation Statement proposed performance-based funding as one approach to deal with these deficiencies in higher education system. Two performance-based schemes were introduced, one covering general research and research training infrastructure through institutional grants and another scheme covering research training scholarship in institutions (Kemp 1999:15). The Institutional Grants Scheme (IGS) replaced the former Research Quantum. Under the IGS institutional performance was measured by success in attracting research students (30 per cent weighting in the allocation formula), research publication output and quality (10 per cent weighting in the allocation formula), and similar to the Research Quantum success in attracting research income from various sources (60 per cent weighting in the allocation formula) (Kemp 1999:15). Funding for research training scholarships was allocated based on a weighting formula as well: number of research degree completions (50 per cent weighting in the allocation formula), research capacity measured by research income (40 per cent weighting in
the allocation formula), and research output measured by a publications index (10 per cent weighting in the allocation formula) (Kemp 1999:19).

The Knowledge and Innovation Statement became one of the most significant political building blocks in the development of the groundwork for the performance-based funding approach that was to form one of the underlying principles the RQF. These developments were underscored further by the findings presented in the 2001 Senate report Universities in Crisis. The inquiry by the Employment, Workplace Relations, Small Business and Education References Committee investigated among many other education policy issues the adequacy of funding arrangements in the higher education sector. The committee reported that it had received several submissions suggesting the implementation of an assessment and funding system similar to the United Kingdom’s RAE. That was seen to assure that funds would flow to disciplines and departments based on assessments of standards of excellence and foster the highest quality of research. This approach was endorsed among other by the Australian Academy of Sciences and mooted as a resolution to problems associated with the Research Quantum and IGS funding schemes (The Senate 2001). The committee concluded that ‘this proposal has much merit’ but also acknowledge that the feasibility of such a system in the Australian context needed further examination due to its costly and labour-intensive nature (The Senate 2001:196).

The 2003 policy statement Our Universities: Backing Australia’s Future continued the debate about performance-based funding and emphasised ‘a framework for research in which all Commonwealth funding is either competitive or performance-based’ as a future direction for the higher education sector (Nelson 2003:11). There were plans to use performance-based funding as an incentive for universities to differentiate their missions. The suggested approach was not limited to research but aimed to provide incentives to achieve improvement in a broad
number of issues such as ‘learning and teaching, equity, workplace productivity, collaboration and quality’ (Nelson 2003:11, 13). Together with the discourse on quality and quality assurance that was discussed earlier, performance-based funding later re-emerged in higher education policy as one of the key concepts incorporated in the RQF.

Quality and Quality Assurance

Quality and the discourses on excellence standards, quality monitoring, quality assurance, and quality improvement were key issues in higher education over the past few decades. Quality and measures of quality assurance have been instrumental in fulfilling increasing government demands for more accountability since the early 1990s. The quality debate remained important in higher education policy to some extent until its re-emergence as a key issue in the discourse regarding the Research Quality Framework (Vidovich 2001:249). Vidovich (2001:250) identifies three main discourses that shaped the quality debate in higher education policy over the last two decades: ‘excellence standards’, ‘quality assurance’, and ‘quality improvement’. In 1991 the Commonwealth Labor government introduced the first ‘official’ quality policy. It was a means to address the perceived decline of higher education quality in the course of the transition to a mass higher education system resulting from the Dawkins reforms. A financial incentive for achieving or maintaining ‘excellence standards’ was provided to universities, which could choose to participate in a quality programme. The aim of the programme was to selectively inject money into the higher education sector and thereby regain a status of ‘excellence’ across the board (Vidovich 2001:252). Quality
as such was not clearly defined and there was little emphasis on quality assurance processes. Peer review prevailed and quantitative performance indicators were not viewed as an adequate substitute for peer judgements at this time. However, this early attempt to establish quality as an instrument in higher education policy marked a shift in focus from inputs to outcomes (Vidovich 2001:253). An ongoing quality debate developed.

While the academic community and students favoured a quality discourse focused on improvement, the Higher Education Council’s advice to policy makers pushed for a process oriented approach to quality. This was mainly due to a lack of a generally accepted definition of quality (Vidovich 2001:253-254). The assumption was that a thorough quality assurance process would lead to high quality outcomes. It was argued that an approach focused solely on outcomes could favour established universities due to their superior resources. The quality debate continued to fluctuate between a process and an outcomes oriented approach until 1995. However, during this time quality discourse and policy remained rather ‘soft’ (Vidovich 2001:255). It was characterised by respect for institutional and academic autonomy and ‘qualitative peer judgements prevailed over quantitative assessments’ (Vidovich 2001:255).

Although the time between 1996 and 1999 is described as a ‘quality vacuum’ in terms of higher education policy, the new Howard government introduced ‘harder-nosed approaches’ which shifted the discourse away from ill-defined quality towards quantitative performance indicators (Vidovich 2001:255). Regardless of the Howard government’s quality rhetoric, the effects of its higher education policy such as the earlier mentioned 'Vanstone cuts' contradicted any proclamations of a high quality education system as a priority objective of this government. Policy recommendations by the Higher Education Council during the late 1990s were
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marked by an increasing focus on quality improvement. By the end of this period the
Higher Education Council was dismissed and policy regarding quality became the
responsibility of the Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs (DETYA)
(Vidovich 2001:256). Minister Kemp, at the helm of the department at the time,
announced a new Australian quality assurance framework for university education
and the foundation of the Australian Universities Quality Agency (AUQA) as an
independent authority in 2001 (Vidovich 2001:256).

AUQA opened a new chapter in higher education quality policy. The
government realised the significance of higher education as an ‘export industry’ and
its importance for ‘Australia’s competitive advantage’ in a globalised economy
(Vidovich 2001:257). The submission of quality audits to AUQA became compulsory
for all higher education institutions receiving funds from the Commonwealth
government. Institutions not meeting the quality requirements faced the threat of
accreditation and funding being withheld. However, these early policy outlines were
redefined and AUQA’s power did not extend to matters of accreditation of higher
education institutions. Nevertheless, AUQA was met with considerable criticism.
There was fear that the audit data could be used in an ‘attempt to construct league
tables’ (Vidovich 2001:257). These would foster uniformity rather than diversity
and drive the stratification of the higher education system. Furthermore, critics
highlighted a lack of incentives to achieve improvements in teaching quality, the
absence of adequate performance indicators for teaching, and a general lack of
outcome orientation due to an overemphasis on quality assurance processes. The
apparent contradiction in government policy of increasing pressures towards
quality in the light of cuts in public funding fuelled criticism of the AUQA policy
(Guest & Duhs 2003:40-42). AUQA quality audits constitute the last significant
higher education quality policy by the Howard government before the introduction
of the RQF. AUQA continued to operate until it was superseded by the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA) established based on recommendations following the 2008 Bradley Review of Australian Higher Education (Burdett & Crossman 2012:207-208; Long 2010:458).

Frequent Reviews

Wood and Meek (2002) argue that between the late 1980s and early 2000s Australian higher education has been subject to a significant number of government policy reviews. These numerous reviews and consequent policy decisions and changes have contributed to and failed to resolve issues of inadequate funding – described by some as a funding crisis (Haslem 2001; Wood & Meek 2002:9). The analysis Wood and Meek (2002:14) conducted only focuses on a small fraction of reviews and reports released between 1997 and 2001. However, the publications section of the website of the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations reveals a far greater number of reviews and reports released over the last two decades (Department of Education Employment and Workplace Relations 2009). Close scrutiny of the reviews analysed by Wood and Meek (2002:14, 15-20) shows variable outcomes but also a number of common themes: inadequate funding (the absence of sufficient funds to retain operation at current standards), inadequate funding structures (current funding structures do not or not sufficiently provide incentives for pursuing policy goals such as quality assurance and improvement), quality and quality assurance, performance as well as accountability and management.
The interrelated nature of these themes demonstrates the paradoxical character of Australian higher education policy. While the funding cuts of the mid 1990s cast a long shadow (Wood & Meek 2002:9) increasing government demands for accountability, quality assurance and improvement and the implementation of new management structures to support these goals constitute substantial investments of money and effort for universities, requiring funds that are insufficient or not available. In consequence Australia was left with an ‘over-reviewed’ (Wood & Meek 2002:7) and underfunded higher education sector. Not only did the flood of reviews and policies fail to resolve or at least mitigate the critical issues of higher education funding and quality, but also in addition participation in and response to these exercises brought little benefit to universities and devoured financial and intellectual resources (Wood & Meek 2002:15, 21). The Australian Vice-Chancellors’ Committee demonstrated its critical position towards the government’s approach to higher education policies in a 2001 statement:

Universities are not antagonistic to proper accountability. But we must recognise that too many people in universities already spend too much time responding to changed rules, supplying statistics, adjusting, applying endlessly for the basic funds we need simply to do our jobs, responding to frequent reviews or requests for information...while all the time, more and more funds are tied or project-driven or supplied in packets in the name of accountability. We are slowly being made average (Australian Vice-Chancellors Committee 2001).
Global Rankings

A recent worldwide trend that has also affected the Australian higher education sector and developed into a key issue in many countries is greater attention to global rankings of universities (Marginson & van der Wende 2007:326). In conjunction with the developments of continuous globalisation and the trend towards a global knowledge economy governments worldwide and in Australia have recognised the significance of the knowledge producing higher education sector for their national competitiveness in a globalised market economy. Thus university rankings have gained in significance not just for a nation's reputation but also its economic success (Marginson & van der Wende 2007:309). This development has led to an increased significance of global rankings in higher education policy decisions at a national level. A number of policy implications from these rankings as well their shortcomings are identified in Marginson’s analysis of global rankings (2007b, a; 2007).

The Times Higher Education Supplement and the Shanghai Jiao Tong University produce two of the most influential rankings (Marginson 2007b, a). They both focus on a particular type of higher education institution, namely the comprehensive research university (Marginson 2007b:123; Marginson & van der Wende 2007:308). This focus has implications for higher education. With the increasing popularity and significance of rankings in policy decision making a normalising effect could emerge that would disadvantage any institution not fitting the category of comprehensive research university. As a result a convergence of higher education institutions towards the model preferred by the rankings could occur, threatening diversity in higher education and loss of distinctive institutional

Global rankings emphasise vertical differentiation among universities and drive increased competition. The consequences are stronger trends towards stratification not just globally but also within national higher education systems and a greater concentration of research and research staff to maintain or develop top scoring institutions (Marginson & van der Wende 2007:324). If such trends are reflected in national policy, in the form of reallocation of resources, the development of a few high ranking institutions may come at the expense of all other universities within a national system. ‘This would seem to constitute little gain in national capacity overall’ (Marginson & van der Wende 2007:324). How far direct links between global rankings and national initiatives to improve research quality, accountability for public funding, and the allocation of public funds are possibly linked remains unknown. Further research into the subject matter is needed (Marginson & van der Wende 2007:326).

Global rankings are not without shortcomings in the methods they apply to arrive at the ordered lists of which they are composed. These lists represent the status of a university within a global higher education system. The ranking exercise and thus the interests and bias of those who conduct the ranking, at least partially, constitute this global system itself. Although rankings are often presented and perceived as being an accurate, ‘objective’ representation of the reality of global higher education, they are as much rhetorical devices feeding into a global discourse that shapes and constructs higher education. There are potential dangers that this may lead to the strengthening of a particular type of higher education institution, namely the formerly mentioned comprehensive research universities, while other higher education institutions could be marginalised and left behind (Marginson &
van der Wende 2007:308). A detailed analysis of the methodological shortcomings of and bias in global rankings is beyond the scope of this discussion. However, a comparison of scores of Australian universities within the two major rankings mentioned earlier demonstrates one of the main difficulties: there is not one objective or generally accepted ranking and there may never be one to achieve general agreement (Marginson 2007a:139; Marginson & van der Wende 2007:319). Due to the potential normalising effects of a generally accepted ranking the merits of such a global hierarchy for national higher education policy remain questionable at best. The recent announcement of the European Union to develop its own ranking in response to the perceived shortcomings of the two aforementioned rankings indicates more diversity in global rankings in the future rather than convergence towards a single generally accepted hierarchy (Slattery 2009).

Marginson's (2007b, a) analysis of the ranking of the Times Higher Education Supplement and the Shanghai Jiao Tong University ranking show very different results for Australian universities when the two are compared. In 2005 the global ranking of the Times Higher Education Supplement depicted Australia as the third strongest university nation with 12 universities in the top 100. Again in 2006 Australia scored a third place in the ranking, however only 7 universities maintained a place among the top 100 (Marginson 2007b:119, 2007a:135). The Shanghai Jiao Tong University ranking draws a different picture of Australian higher education. The 2005 and 2006 rankings saw only two Australian universities within the top 100. Australia's strength as a nation was ranked eighth in the world (Marginson 2007b:122, 2007a:135). The differences in the results of rankings are due to the differences in the methods they employed. The ranking of the Times Higher Education Supplement attempts to achieve a comprehensive evaluation of teaching and research activities. It relies heavily on reputational surveys with academics and
employers complemented by internationalisation indicators (the ratio of international students and staff of an institution) and proxy teaching quality indicators (the student-staff ratio of an institution). Research output represented by citation statistics is only weighted with 20 per cent. The Shanghai Jiao Tong University ranking measures research performance only. Its main data sources are citation statistics complemented by the presence of Nobel Prize winners within an institution (Marginson 2007b:120,122).

Higher education rankings remained a significant issue in the higher education sector and the literature on higher education beyond the relevant context leading up to the RQF. Examples of the literature published after the demise of the RQF in late 2007 include but are not limited to Deem, Mok and Lucas (2008), Harvey (2008), Stolz, Hendel and Horn (2010), Bowman and Bastedo (2011), and Altbach (2012).

Managerialism

Managerialism has emerged as a key issue in the higher education literature over the last decades. Although briefly mentioned earlier in this chapter, its impact in higher education in particular but also in general on the public service sector in Australia and other western countries warrants a more detailed examination. A review of the literature shows that general agreement regarding the definition of managerialism is emerging. Most definitions of managerialism make references to the spread of management practices common in private sector organisations to the administrative procedures of public sector organisations (Parker & Jary 1995:320; Barry, Chandler & Clark 2001:89; Brunnetto 2002:5; Deem 1998:49-50). Or as
Painter (1997:39) puts it, ‘practices that have their origins in modern private sector management (or rather, in textbooks that purport to condense management principles)’. Among these ‘new’ management practices are treating departments as internal cost centres that compete for resources, the encouragement of competition between employees, marketisation of public services and inter-organisational competition, measurement of outcomes, monitoring of effectiveness and efficiency, appraisals of individual staff performance and performance related pay schemes, as well as structural reorganisation and hierarchies that increase managerial power through budgetary control over resource allocation (Deem 1998:50; Painter 1997:40; Parker 2002:320).

However, some authors argue that managerialism has a profound impact on public sector organisations that goes beyond the simple implementation of ‘new’ management practices. In this view managerialism in fact resembles an ideological and cultural change rather than a simple change in administrative practice (Deem 1998:50). Unlike a pure change of practices and procedures, cultural change, which may however start out as a change in practices, in the long term can profoundly affect the identities of organisations and subjectivities of their members.

The RQF may well have been a further step to such cultural change in academia. However, whether or not the RQF had the magnitude to affect or change occupational identities in academia remains unclear. Answers to the research questions of this thesis shed some light on the subject by showing how academics respond to the implementation of research quality assessment and how it may impact the processes through which they construct their identities.
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1.4 Chapter Summary

Chapter one provides the rationale as well as the relevant background and context information of the thesis. Attempts by the Australian federal government to implement a national research quality assessment exercise, namely the Research Quality Framework, raise questions that cannot be answered based on the knowledge contained in the existing literature on the topic. How academics may respond to research exercises and in particular potential impacts on the occupational identities of academics remain an under researched subject.

Furthermore, tracking the RQF discourse through its macro, meso, and micro levels can provide inside into the social construction of occupational identity and help understand how such a policy can impact or even change identities.

The local, Australian, context of the thesis is shown to be of vital significance. The relatively young current structure of the Australian higher education system that resulted from the Dawkins reforms leaves some universities in a disadvantaged position when it comes to assessing their research output. This may be one factor which fuelled speculations of far reaching consequences of the RQF. The formal establishment of a new hierarchy of universities and relegation of academics to second tier institutions could most certainly impact on their occupational identities.

Furthermore, the situation is presented to be more complex when taking the context of recent key issues in Australian higher education into account. This shows that the RQF was but one step, although an important one, in an ongoing trend towards managerialisation of universities. As such the RQF may have provided this continuous development with the necessary momentum to achieve the deep cultural change that could not just impact but thoroughly change who academics take themselves to be in the workplace - their occupational identity.
Chapter 2

Theoretical Underpinnings of the Study
2.1 Introduction

The following literature review provides an overview of the theoretical underpinnings of the thesis. It assists the investigation in forming a framework that helps to understand and explain the complexity of the research situation. The concepts of identity and the self are introduced to demonstrate their centrality and importance in the organisational context. Identity plays a major role in shaping the motivation and behaviour of people and consequently their performance and organisational outcomes. Theoretical conceptions of the self and identity are reviewed in the light of the different approaches past research has taken. In particular the review distinguishes the more static models based on roles and the hierarchy of identities from the more dynamic alternative models based on narrative, and discourse.

The literature review presented in this chapter focuses on theories of self and identity that account for its dynamic nature. The chapter starts with a broad review of the foundations of contemporary perspectives on the self and identity and demonstrates the development of theories of the social self. It continues by contrasting interactionist approaches to theorising the self with more static models based on the concept of roles, and moves onto more recent discursive approaches that facilitate investigation of fluid, dynamic selves. The second section of the chapter focuses on one of these approaches, Positioning Theory, which is well suited to an investigation of the research questions at the heart of this thesis.

Following a structure that reviews the literature from a broader towards a more specific point of view throughout the chapter the last section concludes with an introduction to theories of occupational identity. The section covers fundamental issues in the study of occupational identity, introduces models of occupational
identity, and finally concludes with a discussion of the literature on occupational identity in academia.
2.2 The Concepts of Self and Identity

2.2.1 Foundations of Contemporary Perspectives on Self: George Herbert Mead

Who one is or who one takes oneself to be and who others take one to be can be some of the most trivial yet most complex questions to ask (Jenkins 2004:3-7). The concepts of self and identity have been theorized widely and scholars from a number of social science disciplines have left a rich heritage of theoretical and empirical work. Anthropologists, psychologists, philosophers, sociologists as well as scholars of social psychology and more recently management and organisational studies have taken an interest in the topic. One may trace the roots of our theories regarding the self back as far as 2000 years to the classic Greek philosophers Plato and Aristotle (Gergen 1987:53). Such a comprehensive discussion of the self and identity is clearly beyond the scope of this literature review.

The following literature review does not claim completeness. It merely serves the purpose of discussing major theoretical developments in the field and how these led to the theoretical underpinnings of the present thesis. Positioning theory, which will be discussed in detail in subsection 2.3, is preceded by a number of important theoretical advances regarding the social self over the past two centuries. With reference to these advances, the literature review focuses on the most influential contributors to the field and those most relevant to the present research. Most of the literature discussed over the following subsections falls into the symbolic interactionist strand of theorising. This bias is not accidental. It reflects the theoretical framework the research aspires to and underscores my conviction that all social reality is inherently dependent upon the continuous process of human
interaction. I begin with a review of the work of George Herbert Mead and Erving Goffman demonstrating how their contributions led to a stream of theorising which focuses on the social aspects of the self.

These two key contributors to the study of self and identity provide many of the major building blocks for contemporary theories of the self and identity. Among their most important contributions are Mead’s concept of the social nature of the self and its constitution in social interaction through the vehicles of language, conversation, and discourse in interaction. Mead was also among the first to theorize the multiplicity of the self by introducing the conceptual constructs of the “I” and the “me” into his theory of the self. Furthermore, his theory contributed the concepts of role taking and “the generalised other”. Goffman took up the concept of role taking and used it in his influential descriptions of socially situated selves in every-day life.

The self conceptualised by Mead is essentially social (Mead 1925:262). Its development depends upon the ‘language process’ (Mead 1934:135). The emergence of a self is contingent on the individual’s participation in the ‘process of social experience and activity ... as a result of his relations ... to other individuals within that process’ (Mead 1934:135). Mead places further emphasis on the language process by relating it to ‘thinking or intellectual process’ (Mead 1934:173). Thinking in this sense is the internal equivalent to the external conversations in interactions with others - a reflexive conversation with one’s self or self-consciousness (Mead 1934:141-142).

4 Questions regarding the editorial bias in Mead’s posthumously published work, in particular the most frequently cited book Mind, Self & Society, have been raised and discussed by a number of scholars (see Cook 1993; Dodds, Lawrence & Valsiner 1997; Farr 1996). Comprehensive scrutiny of this discussion is beyond the scope of the present literature review. However, to address potential bias, the present review of Mead’s work does not solely rely on Mind, Self & Society. Instead, it follows the recommendation of Dodds, Lawrence, and Valsiner (1997) and makes use of a number of journal papers published by Mead between 1910 and 1925 as complementary sources. Furthermore, some more recent interpretations of Mead are taken into account.
Mead’s approach to this ‘essential psychological problem of selfhood’ – the development of self-consciousness - is to pose and address the question: ‘How can an individual get outside himself (experientially) in such a way as to become an object to himself?’ (Mead 1934:138) or does self-consciousness imply the ability to objectify one’s self? The answer to this question lies in the individual’s experiences gained through the interaction with other individuals. The individual cannot directly experience its self or ‘get outside himself’. Instead the individual objectifies its self through a learning process involving the indirect experience of one’s self through the response and attitudes displayed by other individuals in interaction and conversation. Thus, to develop a self the individual needs to become ‘an object to himself just as other individuals are objects to him or in his experience’ (Mead 1934:138).

Furthering his conceptual account of self-reflexivity or self-consciousness, through the continuation of external communication into an internal process, as a requirement for the development of a self, Mead integrates the concepts of the ‘I’ and the ‘me’ into his theory. Mead extends the theoretical analysis of these concepts based on earlier contributions of William James and Charles Horton Cooley (Garrety 2008; Holstein & Gubrium 2000; Mead 1930, 1934). Particularly important for Mead’s work was William James’ earlier distinction of the self as subject or self-as-knower (Mead’s ‘I’) from the self as object or self-as-known (Mead's ‘me’) (Leary & Tangney 2003:7 cited in Garrety 2005:71). Mead describes the ‘I’ and the ‘me’ as two instances of self, as two phases of the self in continuous conversation with each other (Mead 1934:179, 192-200). The ‘I’ is the site of subjectivity or ‘that with which we do identify ourselves’. It is developed as a result of an individual’s responses to the attitudes of others experienced in interaction (Mead 1913:374, 1934:174-175). The ‘I’ as a subject cannot objectively evaluate itself in the light of the responses it
receives from others. The ‘me’ on the other hand is the self as an object. The individual can only consciously experience its ‘I’ as a ‘historical figure’, as ‘for the moment it [the ‘I’] is presented it has passed into the objective case’ thus become a ‘me’ (Mead 1913:374, 1934:174). The ‘me’ constitutes a vehicle for the ‘I’ to look at itself as an object. Mead describes this process as ‘a man’s reply to his own talk’ (1912:405). This objective ‘me’ allows the individual to view itself as if it were an ‘other’. It provides one the ability ‘to experience himself as he experiences other selves’ (Mead 1912:405). The self becomes self-conscious through the ongoing process of response of the ‘I’ to its multiple ‘me’s’ created in social interaction with multiple other individuals or selves. Mead conceptualises this self-consciousness as ‘socially organised by the importation of the social organization of the outer world’ (Mead 1912:406). The consequent multiplicity of the self, represented in the phases of the ‘I’ and the ‘me’ (or ‘me’s’), allows the individual to compare itself to other individuals in the community and to consequently develop a (social) self. For an individual to be able to reflect upon itself as an object and through this process to develop and further a self-consciousness – a social self embedded in a community - both the ‘I’ and the ‘me’ phases need to be present and in ongoing dialogue.

Mead’s discussion of the ‘I’ and the ‘me’ as interrelated instances of the self supports the argument that for a self to function in society a state of multiplicity is necessary. However, before turning the discussion towards the concept of role taking, which lends further strength to the argument for the significance of a multiple self, another closely related concept needs to be considered – Mead’s notion of the ‘generalized other’.

The generalized other is a concept that constitutes a mental, internalised representation of the amalgamated attitudes of all the members of a community or group an individual interacts with (Mead 1922:161-162, 1925:268-272, 1934:154).
The individual needs to acquire an understanding of its role or position in the community or society as well as an understanding of its relationships to others and their roles in order to function in the group. This developmental process is achieved through the individual's internal conversations between its 'I' and its 'me' ('me's'). The internal conversation provides the individual with a mechanism for self-reflection that helps the individual to develop an understanding of his or her role in the group in the light of the attitudes of others. The generalized other has an important function in these internal conversations as it provides the developing self or selves of the individual with a sense of unity (Mead 1934:154). If the individual in its reflections on the attitudes of others would consider every other person it interacts with separately a multitude of 'me's' would result. Over time and with increasing quantity and complexity of interactions the resulting self would become increasingly fragmented and unstable (Jenkins 2004:41). Rather than taking the numerous roles of individual others in the development of the self one assumes the role of the generalized other. Thus, the multiple 'me's' become united in the internal representation of the generalized other. The generalized other constitutes ‘a special case of role-taking’ (Dodds, Lawrence & Valsiner 1997:498), which allows the individual to reflect upon and interpret its social environment in a simplified way. It is a coping mechanism that balances degrees of multiplicity with degrees of unity of the self, both of which are required for the individual to successfully understand and interact with its social environment.

Role taking and the multiplicity of self are fundamental for the development of the individual’s self. But these concepts also have a significant function in everyday interactions. Role taking influences the behaviour or social conduct of the individual within the group or community. It allows the individual to control its own responses in the interaction with others. The responses the individual receives from
others provide clues regarding their attitudes thus allows the individual to adjust its conduct accordingly (Mead 1934:254-255, 261). In everyday interaction the self that finds expression in a situation is not the ‘complete’ self. Role taking makes available to the individual the ability to be ‘one thing to one man and another thing to another’ (Mead 1934:142). Depending upon the specific situation encountered an individual can express or emphasise certain facets of its self over others. The different people an individual interacts with, the different relationships to different people and their roles in the social group as well as particular contexts can lead the individual to develop different selves for different social interactions and situations (Mead 1934:142-143). Role taking enables the individual to function within the multiple demands of a complex social environment, minimising the risk of losing its self to fragmentation. One can be oneself and still take the very different roles of ‘the affectionate father of home life … alongside the strait-laced martinet who commands the office’ (Holstein & Gubrium 2000:30).

The fundamental contributions to the understanding of the self by James, Cooley and Mead set a point of departure for two different lines of thought in symbolic interactionism over the last century. While one stream focuses on structure, the other focuses on process. The structure stream, or so-called Iowa school, places emphasis on social roles and role identities, which led to the development of multiple role frameworks of identity. Identity theory and the contributions of Stryker and Burke will be briefly discussed as one example of this stream over the following subsections. The second, the process stream or so-called Chicago school, includes the symbolic interactionism of Herbert Blumer and Erving Goffman’s analysis of everyday life as theatre (Ashmore & Jussim 1997:10; Holstein...
The ideas of the process stream are more closely aligned to Positioning Theory, which has inspired the methodology adopted in the present thesis. Goffman’s contributions exemplify this second stream and will be discussed in the next subsection.

2.2.2 Erving Goffman and the “Dramaturgy” of the Situated Self

Erving Goffman developed the concept of role taking further, focusing on the situational self in specific social contexts. Goffman was much less interested in the development of the self than Mead. The fine-grained observations and analyses of social interaction that Goffman pursued focused on self-presentation in situations of everyday life. Goffman’s analysis is based on the metaphor of life as drama or theatre. He puts the self on a stage where it is presented in different roles, giving performances in response to the different settings of the unfolding drama and the roles occupied by other actors as well as the audience. Even though Goffman was criticised for failing to establish a link between the micro-interactions of everyday life and social structures, his work being ‘merely descriptive’ and falling short of developing a ‘systematic body of theory’ (Jenkins 2004:68) his theoretical legacy contains a number of metaphors, themes and concepts which remain influential for current theorising on the self and identity.

Goffman’s unit of analysis is the encounter. This is important as it stands in contrast to other units of analysis of social interaction, such as the group. Whereas a group can still be a group, and studied as such, even if its members become temporarily separated, an encounter requires the physical presence of the

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5 The literature on Goffman provides different interpretations and there is no general agreement on categorising him as a Chicago school symbolic interactionist. Goffman preferred to avoid any labelling that comes with sociological “isms” including symbolic interactionism (Holstein & Gubrium 2000:235; Turner 2002:22-23; Verhoeven 1993:317-319).
individuals involved. The study of encounters focuses on face-to-face interaction, although, Goffman later included telephone and mail as 'reduced versions' of social encounters (Goffman 1983:2). Goffman defines encounters as focused interactions. Focused interactions are distinguished from unfocused interactions as they require the participants to agree on 'a single focus of cognitive and visual attention' (Goffman 1961:7) sustained over a time. Examples of a focused interaction could be a conversation or a game of chess. In contrast unfocused interactions only require the physical presence of two or more individuals (Goffman 1961:7-8, 1983:6-7; Turner 2002:22). Encounters are vital to Goffman's dramaturgical approach to social analysis as only face to face gatherings 'can fit a shape and dramatic form to matters that aren’t otherwise palpable to the senses' (Goffman 1983:9). In other words Goffman's analysis goes beyond the analysis of gestures, language, conversation or discourse as interaction. His socially situated self is shaped by factors other than just the individuals involved in a situation and their behaviour. Costume, bodily alignment, the scene, the stage and the props in use influence the situation and thus the behaviour and selves presented by the individuals involved (Goffman 1983:9; Holstein & Gubrium 2000:35).

Encounters between selves are spatially situated. Goffman distinguished two main regions for encounters to take place – the front-stage region and the back-stage region. The front-stage is a public place. It requires the individual to give a certain performance to the specific audience of the situation or encounter. The performing individual needs to address expectations of the audience and the other actors involved as to who they take the individual to be and the role played - the expected situational self of the individual. For the individual this front-stage performance is intended to present a certain self or certain aspects of the self while other aspects may not be presented or even suppressed. In contrast the back-stage
is a private region. It allows the individual to escape from the ongoing scrutiny of the audience, to reflect upon its performance, the responses received from the audience, and to prepare for the next front-stage act (Goffman 1959:92-122). Goffman’s notion of the multiple self in spatially situated encounters draws some parallels to Mead’s multiple self constituted in the ‘I’ and the ‘me’. On the front-stage the ‘I’ performs an act based on its knowledge of the expectations of the audience. Only the self as subject, the self-as-knower is able to perform and present the act in the expected manner. The ‘I’ achieves this in the light of the knowledge gained from previous performances and the consequent process of self-reflection and evaluation of past performances. To gain the knowledge necessary to perform the expected act the self needs a place for reflection. It needs to evaluate itself as an object and thus achieve the degree of self-consciousness needed to perform. The back-stage provides this place for self-reflection. In the back-stage region the front-stage subject ‘I’ becomes an object ‘me’ through the process of reflection and internal conversation. The back-stage allows for the self as object, the self-as-known.

The concept of role was regarded by Goffman as one of the most important concepts of sociology. His study of face-to-face encounters aimed to develop a broad and more systematic approach to role analysis as a sociological tool. For this purpose role is distinguished from role performance or role enactment. Role in this sense has a normative connotation as it defines a set of activities an individual has to engage in to fulfil a certain role. Role performance or enactment on the other hand is ‘the actual conduct of a particular individual while on duty in his position’ (Goffman 1961:85) or role. Roles are enacted in the presence of so-called role others or relevant audiences. The sum of these audiences relevant for a particular role is called a role set. There are norms that guide the relationship of a role performer to each specific role other in the role set. These are termed role sectors. Goffman uses
the example of someone performing the role of a doctor. In this example the role set would contain colleagues, nurses, patients, and administrative staff. Doctor-nurse or doctor-patient relationships would be two different examples of role sectors. These distinctions are of analytical significance as changes to the role set or role sectors of a particular role can be indicators of social or organisational change (Goffman 1961:85-86). Trends towards managerialisation or marketisation of higher education institutions in Australia and elsewhere constitute examples of role sector changes. Here the traditional role sector lecturer-student is gradually being replaced by a lecturer-customer role sector due to a more managerialist approach to the running of universities.

For a role performer to be successful more than enacting the activities the normative role prescribes is required. One also needs to display the personal qualities of the self, which are expected by the role others. Thus ‘a judge is supposed to be deliberate and sober; a pilot, in a cockpit, to be cool; a bookkeeper to be accurate and neat’ (Goffman 1961:87) and so on. The role performer in this sense is presented with a virtual self or ‘a me ready-made’ to meet the expectations of the audience (Goffman 1961:88). As everyday life requires individuals to perform several different roles, ‘each individual will, therefore, have several selves’ (Goffman 1961:90).

Goffman’s analysis of the self in role performance goes beyond the normative perspective. He acknowledges that a ‘typical role must of course be distinguished from the actual role performance of a concrete individual’ (Goffman 1961:93). Situated activity systems are Goffman’s conceptual vehicle to achieve a depth of analysis that considers the individual self in role performance:
Given any individual's sequence of regular activities in a social establishment, one regular activity involving a situated system can be singled out for study, since this provides the student with a context in which he can get as close as he is able to raw conduct. We deal, then, with "small group" phenomena in a natural setting (Goffman 1961:96).

The concept of situated activity systems leads Goffman to develop the notion of situated roles. Situated roles are the emergent product of the ongoing repetition of activities by the individual involved within a situated system. These situated roles are different from (normative) roles as they are dynamically constructed in face-to-face interaction. The individual actively participating in the situated system inevitably brings aspects of his/her self into the situation, which display the self beyond the activity requirements of the normative role (Goffman 1961:96-97). Thus performing a role leads to the emergence of the situated self, which is presented to the relevant role others.

The situated self emerging from the activity system may however not coincide completely with the self image of the role performer. In this case the individual may display behaviour that indicates role distance. Role distance behaviour can take the form of attempts by the individual to isolate or detach him/herself as much from a situation as possible. Or the individual may attempt to ridicule the situation by presenting a childish self, behaviour giving the impression that the situation is not serious or only a joke (Goffman 1961:110). Any such behaviour of an individual indicates 'that some disaffiliation exists between himself and his role' (Goffman 1961:116). People engaging in role distance behaviour will not entirely embrace their situated roles and selves. They lack the ability, desire or will 'to disappear completely into the virtual self available in the situation' (Goffman 1961:106).
Role distance is only one variation among a range of possible role performances and attempts to manage impressions. The impression management behaviours Goffman identified can result in role performances of various forms for a particular role. While role distance behaviours deliberately cause disruptions to one’s expected role behaviour the aim of other impression management behaviours is the opposite. Their purpose is to avoid disruptions to one’s expected role performance (Goffman 1959:183). They help the performer to keep face and to prevent damage to the presented self image. People engaging in a role performance can go beyond taking up a ready-made me or virtual self provided by the situated activity system they are involved with. Individuals in pursuit of their self-interest and other strategic goals can also engage in self-enhancing behaviours as a form of impression management.

Goffman identified three categories of impression management practices that support the preservation of an expected role performance: defensive measures by the performer, protective measures by the audience, and measures by the performer that enable protective measures by the audience (Goffman 1959:186-187). Defensive measures available to the performer(s) are dramaturgical loyalty, dramaturgical discipline, and dramaturgical circumspection. Dramaturgical loyalty requires the performer(s) to keep the ‘secrets’ associated with their roles(s) and the performance as a whole as if it were a moral obligation. Between performances one must not reveal secrets to the audience that might spoil the performance of other actors involved (Goffman 1959:187-190). The clerk working at the social welfare office must not use his coffee break to reveal to the clients in the queue that the actual reason for the long wait is the inefficiently administered file archive. Dramaturgical discipline refers to a performer’s ability to stick to his/her role during a performance. It requires the performer to exercise self-control to allow
him/her to respond to unforeseen contingencies, restrain emotional outbursts, and avoid tactlessness. The dramaturgically disciplined performer possesses the ‘presence of mind’ to gloss over arising disruptions to the performance immediately and preferably before their actual occurrence. If a disruption is inevitable the performer can turn the situation around by providing reason, humour, or apology (Goffman 1959:190-191). Goffman uses the term dramaturgical circumspection to refer to the prudence and foresight performers demonstrate in planning and staging a performance. A lack of preparation makes disruptions to a performance more likely. On the other hand performances that are too carefully planned may stifle the spontaneity required to utilise emerging dramaturgical opportunities and the flexibility to respond to unforeseen contingencies (Goffman 1959:192).

Impression management success depends on the behaviour of the audience as much as it depends on the skills of the performer(s). The audience can engage in protective practices that make disruptions to the successful staging of a performance less likely. Tactful audience behaviour helps the performers to keep up their act. One such protective measure by the audience is to avoid intruding into the performer’s backstage region. Or if intruding the backstage is inevitable the performer will be given a warning in advance. The audience furthermore helps sustain an act by demonstrating attention to the performance as well as holding back performances of their own, which may lead to disruptions, contradictions or divert attention. The tactful audience overlooks small mistakes and accepts any excuse(s) provided by the performer(s). The audience may even go further and in situations of crisis act in ‘collusion’ with the performer(s). Performers who the audience knows to be new to their role may enjoy even more protection due to their beginner status (Goffman 1959:201-204).
It is in the performer’s self interest to adjust his/her behaviour in a way that enables protective measures by the audience. The performer should be alert in order to notice the subtle clues the audience may provide in regard to the acceptability or appropriateness of the impression he/she is giving. If these clues are overlooked and no changes to inappropriate performances are made the audience may not be able to sustain a tactful attitude towards the performance. Thus attempts by the performer to manage the intended impression may fail. Furthermore, the performer has to exercise even more care if the chosen course of action indicates that it may lead to a situation of unavoidable misrepresentation in the light of the norms of the stage/situation. If a performer’s stage manoeuvres culminate in a position beyond what Goffman calls the ‘etiquette of misrepresentation’ even the most favourable audience and the humblest apology or sincerest excuse will not be sufficient to uphold the intended impression (Goffman 1959:206-207).

Goffman concludes that the study of the way one presents him/herself to others, the way impressions are managed by the individual, facilitates the analysis of ‘the very structure of the self’ (1959:222). Though Goffman uses the term structure, his ‘structure’ of the self is not static but continuously emerging from the ongoing drama and dynamic interaction of performances on the stage. This very structure Goffman describes as the division of the individual into two essential parts: the performer and the character. The distinction of the performer and the character again emphasises the notion of the multiplicity of the self. The self-as-performer is the individual who is more than the sum of the numerous characters one has to play in everyday life. It is the individual who is capable of learning and development based on the experience of ’intimate interaction with the contingencies of staging performances’ (Goffman 1959:224). The self-as-character is described by Goffman
as 'somewhat equated' with one's self yet 'this self itself does not derive from its possessor' (1959:222-223). It is a self/character-image the audience holds of the situated individual in interaction. The situated self, the performed character, is 'imputed' to the individual by 'the whole scene of his action ... is a product of a scene that comes off, and is not a cause of it' (Goffman 1959:223). The emergence of the situated self takes more than the performance skills of the individual. The 'interpretive activity' of the audience is necessary for the joint creation of a complete scene (Goffman 1959:223). Goffman's emphasis on the self as a product of ongoing, dynamic interaction involving an entire scene demonstrates the focus of his theorising of the self as a process rather than a structure.

Goffman's later work introduces two more concepts - frames or framing and the interaction order. Encounters between individuals can take place on different stages, which can be equipped with different sets. The context of a specific stage and setting indicates implicit or explicit, informal or formal norms and scripts, which guide the individuals' behaviour in the unfolding interaction. Detailed understanding of what is expected to happen on a certain stage or in a particular setting may differ from individual to individual. Frames are a point of reference for the individual that help define a situation. Frames provide individuals the lowest common denominator of meaning under the particular circumstances of a situation, on a certain stage, or in a specific setting (Jenkins 2004:69-70). The widely shared meanings contained in the frame are available to all participants of an encounter. Thus framing a situation allows the interaction to continue without disruptions due to misunderstandings or misinterpretation. Specific frames allow particular situated selves to be presented while others may be rendered inappropriate. Frame

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6 This is applicable only insofar as the individuals involved in an encounter share a common cultural background and thus a common understanding of the culturally specific frames. Different cultures may frame similar stages, settings, and situations differently.
analysis therefore can provide insight into how situations shape the selves presented by individuals. But individuals are more than passive recipients of a self prescribed by the situational frame. Individuals can try to create, change, break, or shift between frames in ways that serve their self-interests and strategic goals (Turner 2002:23). Such manoeuvres will affect the collective interpretation of the encounter and thereby the self presentation and selves of those involved.

Goffman summarises the aspirations of his work in the notion of interaction order, the domain of interaction between physically present, socially situated individuals presenting selves in a specific environment or context. In his own words the interaction order reflects his concern for the ‘acceptance of this face-to-face domain as an analytically viable one’ (Goffman 1983:2). Goffman cautiously avoids specific implications to how ‘orderly’ an interaction order would be. However, he introduces a view of interaction order that includes ‘systems of enabling conventions, in the sense of the ground rules of a game’ (Goffman 1983:5) which guide behaviour during encounters. These ‘rules of the game’ in turn are the result of a ‘normative consensus’ (Goffman 1983:5), a working consensus of interaction norms based on a moral commitment (Rawls 1987:142). In this sense the interaction order does more than facilitate coordinated interaction – it constitutes ‘social contract and social consensus’ (Goffman 1983:5). It is a moral order that informs those involved in encounters of their involvement obligations and those of others. The interaction order thereby provides the means to protect the self in interaction as well as the means for protection of order from the disruption by the self interest of individuals (Rawls 1987:139-145).
2.2.3 Self, Identity, and Roles – Interactionist Contributions to the Study of Self & Identity

There seems to be little general agreement in the literature as to who belonged or belongs to the aforementioned so-called Chicago School of symbolic interactionism or the so-called Iowa School of symbolic interactionism. Over the last decades symbolic interactionism has developed into a broad research paradigm consisting of a number of streams or schools. What is relevant to the present work is the difference between symbolic interactionists who theorise the self as process and those who focus on the self as structure. The contributions of Sheldon Stryker and Peter J. Burke discussed over the following paragraphs are examples of the latter mentioned stream of work.

Identity theory developed by Stryker and Burke since the late nineteen sixties (Stryker & Burke 2000; Stryker 1968; Burke 1991; Burke & Stets 1999; Stryker 1994; Burke & Cast 1997; Stryker 2001) constitutes a theoretical framework representative of the stream of symbolic interactionism that builds on the fundamental contributions of Mead but emphasises structure over process. Stryker and Burke both made significant contributions to identity theory. Nonetheless, their theoretical approaches developed largely independently and parallel to each other. In their more recent joint journal article on past developments of, present knowledge of, and future approaches to research on identity theory Stryker and Burke (2000) emphasised the complementary nature of their individual theoretical contributions.

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7 How these schools may be categorised is disputable. In his historical overview of symbolic interactionism Norman Denzin even raises doubts as to the validity of a distinction between a Chicago and an Iowa school. For Denzin the distinction is based on ‘biased reading’ and ‘myth’ (1992:18-19). A thorough discussion of this matter would lead too deeply into ‘the politics of interpretation’ and is thus beyond the scope of the present work.
Stryker’s major contribution to identity theory is the concept of the salience hierarchy of identities (1968). His theory states that the self consists of multiple identities and roles, the latter being the behavioural manifestations of identities in interaction with others. A self’s various identities are ordered in a hierarchy of salience. Stryker defines the salience hierarchy of identities as ‘the probability ... of a given identity being invoked in a variety of situations’ (1968:560). The higher the salience of a particular identity in the hierarchy the more likely or probable it is that the particular identity will be invoked and that behavioural choices will be consistent with this particular identity.

For a person to maintain meaningful relationships with others it is necessary to demonstrate behaviour that is consistent with the expectations attached to the roles one occupies in these relationships. The meaning attached to external expectations of the role behaviour has to match the meanings internalised in the identity. These are the so-called ‘identity standards’ or a ‘set of (culturally prescribed) meanings held by the individual which define his or her role identity in a situation’ or provide guidance as to who one takes oneself to be (Stryker & Burke 2000:287). The higher one’s commitment to a particular role relationship the more important becomes the identity that is needed to maintain this relationship. Thus commitment to a role relationship determines the rank of an identity in the salience hierarchy (Stryker 1968; Stryker & Burke 2000).

There are several explanations as to what determines commitment to a role relationship and in turn the salience of the identity needed to maintain this relationship and the behavioural choices following from the identity. Stryker defines commitment to a role relationship as ‘the “costs” of giving up meaningful relations to others should alternative courses of action be pursued’ (1968:560). For example one could be rather committed to a role relationship with one’s employer. The loss of
this relationship due to an inappropriate ‘course of action’ and consequent costs of unemployment increase one’s commitment to the role. Furthermore, the goals or “wants” of an individual can increase commitment to a role relationship, the more this role relationship contributes to the achievement of goals the higher the commitment (Stryker 1968:560-561). To return to the aforementioned example of the relationship between employer and employee, the goal of job security would increase the commitment of the employee to his or her role while an employee more focused on goals not related to his or her job may be less committed.

The larger the network of relationships that require a certain identity the more likely it is that commitment increases and this identity becomes highly salient as it is reinforced through frequent interaction. The more the role expectations of those one interacts with are matched by the behaviour based on a particular identity that is evoked in the interaction, the more likely it is that commitment to the role relationship is reinforced (Stryker 1968:561-563).

Stryker’s notion of a hierarchy of salience of identities, which constitute the self, demonstrates his view of the self as structure. However, this view cannot sufficiently explain how the self, as a static structure, may develop or change over time. This shortcoming of the self as structure could only be addressed by introducing a process affecting the self and thus alter its hierarchy of salience of identities/roles over time. Such a process, namely the identity verification process, is introduced in Burke’s theorising of the self (Burke 1991; Burke & Cast 1997; Burke & Stets 1999; Stryker & Burke 2000).

Burke’s concept of the self-verification process of identities is based on the assumption that the self is a structure but as such made up of identity processes continuously changing and developing. The basis of identities is the internal self-perceptions and attached meanings a person holds of his/herself, the so-called
identity standards. These are based on the individual’s interpretations of the role expectations put forward by others in interaction. To maintain an identity that is consistent with the expectations of others in the environment one seeks situations where an identity can be expressed to others and receives responses in a social situation. These situations can involve extensive negotiations and symbolic or discursive interactions. If responses to identity claims are positive the identity is confirmed and reinforced. Its position in the salience hierarchy is confirmed and may even increase through further reinforcement in the long term.

If an identity is not confirmed behavioural adjustments may occur. Altered behaviour becomes more likely the more the discrepancy between environmental responses and the individual’s self perception is recognised as distressing to the self. A self-adjusting feedback loop, consisting of iterations of behavioural alterations, continues until either the identity is confirmed or the repeated failure to match external expectations and the subsequent distress of the self lead to the activation of a similar lower level process. This lower level process impacts the self on a deeper level and can alter the position of identities in the salience hierarchy.

The degree of experienced distress can vary depending on how severe the received feedback is, the salience of the identity affected, the commitment to the identity, and the significance of the source of the feedback to the individual. The lower level verification process works similarly to the higher one. However, the lower level process triggers adjustments to the identity standards rather than just behavioural changes (Burke 1991; Burke & Cast 1997; Stryker & Burke 2000). Alterations or adjustments occurring at the lower level self-verification process directly affect the role identity of the person or can alter ‘who one is in the role or situation’ (Burke & Cast 1997:278). This can have significant impact on the identity
and its rank in the salience hierarchy of identities. Thus the salience of the identity is likely to decline and other identities become more salient (Stryker & Burke 2000).

An example of these two processes may be given by the experience of a student changing from primary school to high school. At primary school the student's performance achieved reasonable success. Thus responses from his environment indicated that his identity is one of an “average student”. However, high school requires higher performance and the student’s usual role behaviour fails to achieve similar success. In response the student begins to alter his behaviour. However, success is still not forthcoming and the environmental responses remain negative. Over time the student comes to believe that he may not be the “average student” he thought himself to be. In the long term his identity standards may change, thus he will adopt the identity of the “failing student”. The “student” identity may diminish in rank in the salience hierarchy and eventually may be replaced by another identity.

Approaches to theorizing the self from a structure perspective such as Stryker and Burke’s identity theory have been criticised for overemphasising static roles. The consequent shortcoming of this stream of work is that identities become fixed to roles and the prescribed, scripted behaviours attached to them. Thus these models cannot adequately explain the implications of self and identity for the behavioural choices of individuals and their resulting social and organisational behaviours. Harré criticises models of the self based on the static concept of roles (van Langenhove & Harré 1999). He and his colleagues have developed Positioning Theory as an alternative approach to overcome the shortcoming of more static models. Positioning Theory allows for dynamic identities that can adapt to situations and changes in their environment. Hence, this approach is more applicable to the current study in its focus on a changing higher education
environment and subsequent effects on those working in this environment. Therefore, Positioning Theory forms the core theoretical underpinnings of this thesis. The following subsections provide an overview and detailed discussion of the literature on Positioning Theory.
2.3 Positioning Theory

2.3.1 The Concept of Positioning

Positioning Theory is a relatively recent approach in the development of theories on identity and the self. The concept of positions and positioning was introduced into the social sciences by Hollway (1984) in her study on gender differences and the production of subjectivity (van Langenhove & Harré 1999:16; Boxer 2001:67). In the early 1990s Davies and Harré (1990) began to develop positioning into a theory that constitutes a dynamic alternative to the more static models of identity which are based on the concept of roles. The early theoretical work on positioning was further developed by Harré and Langenhove (1991, 1999), and Harré and Slocum (2003b). One of the earlier applications of the concept of positioning can be found in marketing theory (van Langenhove & Harré 1999:16). Marketing utilises the concept of positioning in the development of communication strategies that aspire to distinguish a product or brand from its competitors. This is achieved by discursively establishing a position towards certain criteria which are unique, or at least claimed to be unique, to the specific product or brand. Similarly people take positions within communications that allow the presentation of a certain identity, or certain aspects of an identity, in a particular context or situation.

The specific self-positioning, or responses to positioning by others, of an individual may be temporary in nature and can change in the short-term. Positioning theory can therefore explain aspects of human behaviour that are neglected by the more static models of identity based on long-term role behaviour. Fluid and changeable behaviours that could otherwise only be explained as deviations from one’s role may be understood in terms of temporary positions one takes in response to situational circumstances. Positioning theory also allows
research to explore the intricacies of identity construction beyond the segregation lines set by static roles. Critics of theories based on the concept of role have identified its ‘inability to examine complexities across roles’ (Given 2002:132) as one of the limitations of the role theory approach.

Positioning is the discursive process by which, through the construction of a personal story, an individual establishes a location within conversations, a process by which one's actions become meaningful to oneself and others (Harré & van Langenhove 1991; van Langenhove & Harré 1999). The meanings attached to a certain position provide oneself and others with the clues as to who one takes oneself to be in a specific context or situation and thus are constitutive of a certain self or identity. The positions available and their meanings arise from processes of social or symbolic interaction with others within one’s social environment. One acquires meaning by learning the categories that include some and exclude others, e.g. male/female or teacher/student. Through participation in conversations the individual learns the characteristics of and meanings attached to these categories. In turn through identifying oneself as someone possessing certain characteristics and not others one begins to position oneself (or is positioned by others) in certain categories and not others. Thus a sense of self, a perspective on the world from a specific position develops (Davies & Harré 1990:47). Reflected in one's specific position or personal story are the personal attributes and morals that were developed throughout the ongoing learning process, the progressively unfolding personal story (van Langenhove & Harré 1999:17).

The available positions one may choose from in a certain situation are limited and restrict one's room for discursive manoeuvring or possible action. Certain situations and contexts may restrict the availability of some positions altogether. For example, someone positioned as completely illiterate will find it
impossible to gain admission to enrol in a course at a tertiary education institution. The meanings one has learned to attach to a certain position have implications for the rights and duties that come with a position. Rights and duties in turn set limits to what actions are socially possible. Social context and moral order, defined by the other participants in the conversation/situation, their personal stories, and their positioning (which in turn have implications for one’s own possible positions), of a particular social episode dictate what distinguishes ‘logically possible’ from ‘socially possible’ performances and thus set the boundaries of one’s ‘repertoire of socially possible actions’ (Harré & Moghaddam 2003a:5). To return to the previous example, someone who has gained access to a tertiary education institution and is positioned as a student is limited in his/her socially possible performances due to the rights and duties that come with this position within the moral order of the higher education system. Thus, claiming illiteracy as an excuse for failing an exam may be logically possible but it would not be a socially possible discursive action in the given situation.

Harré and Moghaddam (2003a:5) further emphasize the importance of situational context by distinguishing between action and act. While an action is what one does, an act is what this action comes to mean in the social context. In other words, the when, what, and how, the circumstances of the action influence how it will be interpreted as a social act. Whether the interpreter of the action will view the perceived act as socially possible or appropriate in turn depends on the position of the one performing the action, the interpreter’s position, and the moral orders the conversation or situation is embedded in. The one performing an action, the intended audience of the action, and non-participating spectators may all have different understandings of the meaning of the action. Regardless of the actor’s
intentions, the action only becomes a meaningful act through the ‘joint production of all concerned’ (Harré 1991:57, 2002b:145; Varela & Harré 1996:323).

2.3.2 Conversations, Situations and Positioning

Conversations consist of the mutually determining triad of positions, storylines, and social forces/speech-acts (van Langenhove & Harré 1999:18). Positions, by means of rights and duties that are attached to them, set the boundaries of socially possible actions within a conversation. The storyline of the conversation represents the context or situational contingencies of a conversation. It provides clues as to which scripts to follow or what the established patterns of behaviour in a situation may be. How exactly a conversation unfolds depends on the dynamic aspects of a social incident. Speech acts are those actions that qualify as being of social significance to a given situation. An action becomes socially significant by providing meaning to the unfolding conversation (Harré & Moghaddam 2003a:5-6).

How a conversation unfolds depends on all three elements of the ‘Positioning “Triangle”’ (Harré & Moghaddam 2003a:5) – position, storyline, and speech-act. Someone positioned as an expert in a certain field, for example by means of a title or degree, may be able to demonstrate the social significance of his/her actions within a storyline regarding his/her field of expertise. Thus, the expert position can enable one’s action to become an act that possesses the social force to shape the outcome of the conversation/situation. The same person confronted with a conversation regarding a field of expertise completely unrelated to one’s own may find him/herself in a position that makes the achievement of a social act that shapes the outcome of the conversation very difficult. Thus a change of the storyline affects
both position and speech-act. While the conversation unfolds other participants may challenge the positioning of the first converser and by means of their own positioning give the storyline a new twist. In turn an altered storyline can affect the initial social force of the achieved speech act and therefore shape the conversation and thus its outcome into a different direction. These are the dynamic aspects of positioning theory that distinguish it from other theoretical approaches to explain human behaviour based on the limitations set by the more static concept of roles as the determinant of behavioural choices.

2.3.3 Social Interaction, Agency and Modes of Positioning

Unlike brands or products in the marketing application of positioning, human beings possess agency and therefore not just the capacity to be positioned but also to position themselves and others. This enables what Harré and van Langenhove (1991:395; van Langenhove & Harré 1999:20) describe as different ‘modes of positioning’. The different ‘modes of positioning’ can be distinguished as ‘first order and second order positioning’, ‘performative and accountive positioning’, ‘moral and personal positioning’, ‘self and other positioning’, and ‘tacit and intentional positioning’ (Harré & van Langenhove 1991:395-399; van Langenhove & Harré 1999:20-23).

First order positioning is the use of storylines and categories to locate someone within a moral order. One can position oneself or others this way. As long as the first order positioning is accepted and remains unchallenged no further negotiation is necessary. If the first order position is questioned or challenged by a participant of the conversation second order positioning takes place, the storyline
may change and the original positioning is renegotiated (Harré & van Langenhove 1991:396; van Langenhove & Harré 1999:20).

Similarly performative positioning constitutes an unchallenged first order positioning resulting in an immediate effect or performance/act. The performance of the act implied by the positioning constitutes a symbolic confirmation of an accepted or legitimate (first order) positioning. If the person a performative positioning was aimed at continues the conversation by replying to the first order positioning in a reflexive or challenging manner rather than engaging in the expected performance accountive positioning occurs. Accountive positioning or 'talk about talk' can take place either within the same conversation as second order positioning, or in another conversation outside the original conversation as third order positioning (Harré & van Langenhove 1991:397; van Langenhove & Harré 1999:21).

Positioning can occur as moral or personal positioning. The roles people occupy set the boundaries for possible meanings of their behaviour within the moral space determined by their role. Thus expecting a fire fighter to enter a burning building would be a legitimate (moral) positioning within the boundaries of the moral order attached to his/her role. The fire fighter refusing to do so based on claims of high levels of distress caused by recent events in his/her private life would constitute an example of personal positioning. This form of positioning takes place when there are references to 'individual attributes and situations' (Boxer 2001:73) or 'individual particularities' (Harré & van Langenhove 1991:397; van Langenhove & Harré 1999:21).

The discursive practice of positioning can be performed to either position oneself or somebody else. Harré and van Langenhove (1991:398; van Langenhove & Harré 1999:22) emphasise that any 'positioning constitutes the Self and the others
in certain ways’. Thus any positioning of the self implies/requires a positioning of
the others and vice versa to be meaningful to the participants of a conversation.

Positioning can be tacit or intentional. As positioning is part of our day-to-
day discursive practice most first order positioning proceeds unintentionally in the
form of tacit positioning. First order positioning can be intentional, e.g. when people
are lying or behaving in a ‘Machiavellian’ way. Other forms of intentional first order
positioning, such as impression management (Goffman 1959) fall into the categories
of deliberate self-positioning or forced self-positioning which are discussed in the
following paragraphs. Second and third order positioning constitute active thus
conscious responses to earlier first order positioning and therefore are always
intentional (Harré & van Langenhove 1991:397; van Langenhove & Harré 1999:21).

2.3.4 Context, Situation and Types of Intentional Positioning

Depending on the specific context or situation intentional positioning can
take place as one of four different types. Table 2.1 provides an overview of the types
of intentional positioning. The contingencies of a specific conversational situation
are established by the moral orders that frame the situation. Moral orders ascribe
the rights, duties, and obligations of the participants of the discursive process. Thus
moral orders set limits to the positions available to each participant of a
conversation (Harré & van Langenhove 1991:399; van Langenhove & Harré
1999:23).
Chapter 2

Theoretical Underpinnings of the Study

Table 2.1: Types of Intentional Positioning

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<th>Performative positioning</th>
<th>Accountive positioning</th>
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<td><strong>Self-positioning</strong></td>
<td>Deliberate self-positioning</td>
<td>Forced self positioning</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Other-positioning</strong></td>
<td>Deliberate positioning of others</td>
<td>Forced positioning of others</td>
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*Source: Harré & van Langenhove (1991:400)*

In situations where a person intends to portray a personal identity, deliberate self-positioning will take place. Harré and van Langenhove (1991:400-401; van Langenhove & Harré 1999:24-25) state that there are three distinct ways of achieving this. First, 'stressing one's agency' by positioning oneself as making a decision among various possible behavioural choices, second, by emphasising one's unique perspective, and third, 'by referring to events in one's biography'. In discursive practice the use of the first person singular, the pronoun 'I' provides the means to establish oneself in one way or another as a unique individual. Successfully portraying a personal identity in turn allows one to provide personal explanations for behaviour (Harré & van Langenhove 1991:400-401; van Langenhove & Harré 1999:24-25). Thus one's identity or who one positions oneself to be in a situation allows oneself and others to interpret behaviour in the light of the meaning derived from that identity. Meaning in this sense stems from a positioning with reference to one's specific powers, rights to exercise these, and one's personal history and experiences (Harré & van Langenhove 1991:400-401; van Langenhove & Harré 1999:24-25).

Harré and van Langenhove (1991:400-401; van Langenhove & Harré 1999:24-25) argue that deliberate self-positioning implies the pursuit of specific goals and therefore 'could be called strategic positioning'. Strategic positioning
allows for an element of intentionality. Intentionality, due to the mutually
determining relationship of the positions, storylines, and social forces/speech-acts
triad, opens the potential for deliberate positioning of oneself or others as an
indirect intentional performance aimed at affecting not just positions but also
storylines and speech-acts (Harré & van Langenhove 1991:400-401; van
Langenhove & Harré 1999:16-18, 24-25). Goffman’s (1959) concept of impression
management can be viewed as behaviour that resembles such strategic positioning.

Forced self-positioning is similar to deliberate self-positioning. However, in
the case of forced self-positioning, positioning is initiated by an external cause
rather than oneself. The force behind the demand for this type of self-positioning
can range in strength from a simple question to a formal appeal by a representative
of an institution. Formal appeals by institutions can take the form of directives or
even implicit threats, if the institution has the legitimate power to apply sanctions as
a consequence of noncompliance. Such institutional forced self-positioning can take
place in two different situations: first, an institution may make use of its legitimate
power to judge people external to the institution, e.g. the criminal justice system. Or
second, the institution demands people inside it to position themselves, for example
an annual performance appraisal conducted by the HR department (Harré & van

The RQF constitutes an example of both these situations of forced self-
positioning. First, by introducing the RQF legislation the government lends
legitimate power to an external agency. This power is achieved by coupling research
funding to performance assessment, thus the possible threat of sanctions in the form
of reduced funding. Universities are forced to take a position regarding their
research performance in the context of the assessment exercise. Second, similar to
the annual performance appraisal the RQF constitutes an institutional exercise that
requires members internal to universities, namely academics, to prepare research performance statements for their institution to submit to the RQF exercise. Academics find themselves in a situation of forced self-positioning due to the implications the performance review may hold for their careers.

Furthermore, deliberate positioning of others constitutes a distinct type of positioning. This type of positioning can be further subcategorised by distinguishing situations where the other, who is to be positioned, is present and situations where this is not the case. If the other is present during the conversation this type of positioning functions to construct 'a place in the speaker's storyline' for the other (Harré & van Langenhove 1991:403; van Langenhove & Harré 1999:27). Harré and van Langenhove (1991:403; van Langenhove & Harré 1999:27) restrict their discussion of deliberate positioning of others in their absence to the phenomenon of 'gossiping', though there may be occasions for deliberate positioning of others in their absence other than gossiping. As Harré and van Langenhove (1991:403; van Langenhove & Harré 1999:27) point out, positioning others also reflects on one's own position in the conversation, thus constitutes an indirect self-positioning. This behaviour may occur for purposes other than just gossiping. Thus indirect self-positioning through the deliberate positioning of absent others can be viewed as a form of strategic positioning (Harré & van Langenhove 1991:400-401; van Langenhove & Harré 1999:24-25) or impression management (Goffman 1959).

The concept of indirect positioning is taken up by Harré and Moghaddam (2003a) in their more recent work on positioning theory. Indirect positioning or 'presumptive positioning' is described as a method to 'establish and occupy the moral high ground' by positioning others in a morally unfavourable way 'with respect to oneself and one’s interests' (Harré & Moghaddam 2003a:6). This implies that indirect positioning is a practice to achieve goals that serve one's interest and is
thus a form of deliberate or strategic positioning of others either in their presence or absence (Harré & van Langenhove 1991:400-401; van Langenhove & Harré 1999:24-25). If for some reason the interests of the parties involved in a strategic positioning 'game' contradict each other and a conflict emerges 'malevolent positioning' can occur (Harré & Moghaddam 2003a:7). This means for one party to achieve a position of 'the moral high ground' in pursuit of their interests may have destructive effects on the opposing party.

Forced positioning of others is another category of intentional positioning that may occur with the other being present or absent from the conversation. Harré and van Langenhove (1991:403-404; van Langenhove & Harré 1999:27-28) utilize the example of the criminal trial to demonstrate how an institution can request or 'force' people to position others.

Boxer (2003a:261; 2003b:55-58), based on earlier research by Ling (1998), extends Harré and van Langenhove’s (1991:399; van Langenhove & Harré 1999:23) distinction of four types of intentional positioning into a 'positioning analytical framework' as shown in Table 2.2.

Table 2.2: Positioning Analytical Framework

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Deliberative Positioning</th>
<th>Deliberate Positioning</th>
<th>Forced Positioning</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Self-Positioning</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Deliberative Self-Positioning Deliberative Intent</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Deliberative Positioning of Other Parity</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Other-Positioning</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Deliberative Positioning of Other Parity</td>
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<tr>
<td>Deliberative Positioning of Other Personal Power</td>
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<tr>
<td>Forced Self-Positioning Forced Intent</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Forced Positioning of Other Institutional Power</td>
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The ‘positioning analytical framework’ shown in Table 2.2 adds deliberative self-positioning and deliberative positioning of others to the four types of intentional positioning developed by Harré and van Langenhove (1991:399; van Langenhove & Harré 1999:23). Deliberative self-positioning is defined by Boxer (2003b:56) as ‘A collaborative repositioning of self ... to arrive at a position for the manager that is mutually accepted.’ Deliberative positioning of others is described as ‘a merger between positioning of self and positioning of others’ resulting in ‘not just consensus, but a sense of collaboration’ (Boxer 2003b:57).

It can be questioned whether deliberative self-positioning and deliberative positioning of others actually constitute additional types of intentional positioning. Both types can be deconstructed as sequences of first, second and/or third order intentional positioning that may lead to collaboratively constructed or negotiated positions of the self or others. As such deliberative positioning would not constitute an additional type of intentional positioning in the sense of Harré and van Langenhove (1991; van Langenhove & Harré 1999) but merely be the outcome of the process of negotiation of position through the discursive actions of intentional positioning and repositioning in a particular situation or context.

2.3.5 Positioning Theory and Criticisms of Social Constructionism

Positioning Theory owes many of its underlying assumptions and theoretical underpinning to what has come to be called ‘discursive psychology’. It therefore falls into a category of approaches to social science research that, over the past two to three decades, has been most widely referred to as ‘social constructionism’ (Burr 2003:1,16-17). As a social constructionist theory Positioning Theory is subjected to the same scrutiny as social constructionism and critical voices contesting it need to
be addressed. Over the following paragraphs I discuss some of the major criticisms that have persisted over the years in the light of Positioning Theory and their implications for the present study.

Social constructionist theories had to face a number of criticisms and challenges over the past decades. This brief discussion focuses on the most prevalent ones. Some critiques of social constructionist theories such as Positioning Theory, among others Bradley (1998), Sampson (1998), and Cromby and Nightingale (1999), have claimed that constructionist theory reduces the world to discourse and denies a reality beyond representations. Hence, social constructionism challenges the assumption that ‘reality is both prior to and independent of representation’ (Edley 2001:435). Edley (2001:434) exposes these claims for what they are – ‘pervasive misunderstandings’.

Edley points out that of particular importance to the constructionist response to such claims is the distinction of the ontological and epistemic notions of social construction. It is the interpretation of the epistemic sense of social construction that is the focus of most critics. In this sense all attempts to generate knowledge of or describe the world or reality necessarily are constituted through their representation in discourse. In this sense reality cannot exist outside the medium of language. The aforementioned misunderstanding these critics are prone to is to interpret this epistemic sense as an ontological argument or as Edley (2001:437) puts it, to be ‘a claim about what the world is actually like’. This conflation of the ontological and epistemic sense of social construction thus leads to a contradiction where for one to claim the absence of any reality outside of discourse one would have to be able to somehow know or prove this to be the case. In other words, in an epistemic sense our knowledge of a tree, what it looks like, how it grows, and so forth, is a construct, a representation of reality. Whether this
representation is accurate and fair in an ontological sense, whether there may or may not be a reality beyond representation one cannot know nor prove without making use of the medium of language or discourse (Edley 2001:437). It follows that under this perspective constructionists can neither claim the existence nor the absence of a reality beyond representation. As Edley (2001:437) points out, ‘it is actually very difficult to find occasions where social constructionists have explicitly denied the existence of an extra-discursive realm. More often than not it is an opinion that others (i.e. realists) have attributed to them.’

On the other hand the ontological sense of social construction represented in most constructionist theory would appear far more conceivable to most critics and invite less criticism. In this sense there are socially constructed, abstract concepts that are widely accepted as parts of our reality and to most people are just as ‘real’ as a rock, an apple or their noisy neighbour. Such concepts blur the ‘dividing line between words and the world or between the material and the symbolic’ (Edley 2001:438). To give an example of one such concept one might point to money. Money to the vast majority of people is a very ‘real’ part of their daily struggle throughout their lives. However, how money reflects the value of the work performed to earn it or how it and therefore the value it represents is distributed among the population is as much a socially constructed representation as it is shaped by more ‘concrete’ artefacts of reality. To some this construction of value may be a confirmation of their achievements but to others it may appear rather arbitrary. The ontological notion of social construction does not deny that there are extra-discursive forces that influence and shape our perceptions of the value manifested in money and its distribution. Power and access to assets, material resources, demand and supply are an extra-discursive reality that is just as
important in shaping our daily lives as the somewhat arbitrary, socially constructed norms of value distribution.

As Edley (2001:439) remarks in his conclusions, no social constructionist would drive down a road expecting Nottingham to appear ‘because it says so on the page’ or ‘spring into existence at the moment it is mentioned.’ Even in social constructionist theory language is not the only reality. The present study, although reliant on Positioning Theory and its social constructionist underpinnings, employs an interpretation of social constructionism that acknowledges that there is a reality outside of discourse and symbolic interaction. It does not challenge the notion of a reality of budgetary constraints on university funding or the increasing role of international competition in university research. This however is not the focus of the present study. Rather it focuses on how representations of extra-discursive reality are constructed and negotiated through discourse and positioning and how these representations may affect the occupational identities of the academic workforce.

2.3.6 Ontological Assumptions and Epistemological Opportunities of Positioning Theory

Harré and van Langenhove claim that positioning theory is grounded in the ontological assumptions of a ‘new ontological paradigm’ (1991:393; van Langenhove & Harré 1999:14). This paradigm does not consider the common distinction of people, institution, and societies as the fundamental strata for the study of social phenomena but instead introduces an ontology based on the constructionist assumption that the social is constituted by three basic processes: conversations or symbolic exchanges, institutional practices, and societal rhetoric (Harré & van Langenhove 1991:394; van Langenhove & Harré 1999:15). The
epistemological implications of this ontology are thus that to gain knowledge of, understand, and explain social phenomena one has to investigate the specific societal rhetorics, institutional practices, and conversations that constitute those phenomena. Local narratives, the storytellers and audiences, and the situation a story occurs in diminish in meaning if they are not tied to the ‘underlying cultural-historical fabric’ (Brockmeier & Harré 1997:266). The ‘broader cultural set of fundamental discursive orders’ linked to locally occurring phenomena need to be taken into account to gain a deeper understanding (Brockmeier & Harré 1997:266). Research inspired by positioning theory, and thus actively buying into a ‘new ontological paradigm’ (Harré & van Langenhove 1991:393; van Langenhove & Harré 1999:14), has only made limited use of the opportunities it provides to explore social phenomena in the light of all three processes. This call for a multilevel research approach is supported by a number of scholars, among others Abbey and Falmagne (2008; 2004).

The work of Abbey and Falmagne (2008; 2004) provides a supporting argument for the investigation of self/identity phenomena with the help of a multilevel approach. It is argued that any account of subjectivity calls for an analysis at the broader societal-level, the level of local discursive processes, and the level of the person (Abbey & Falmagne 2008:96; Falmagne 2004:823). The phenomenon of identity construction hinges on the interlocked nature of the multiple level processes that constitute it. While societal and local discursive processes have a role in shaping individual subjectivity, the subject through its actions and positioning in discourse influences these same processes (Falmagne 2004:823-824). Falmagne’s (2004:824) critique of recent approaches to the self in psychology points to one common limitation – ‘a failure to place the processes they describe within a societal level analysis’.

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Chapter 2
Theoretical Underpinnings of the Study
A closer examination of the empirical work that has used positioning theory indicates that researchers have not fully explored the links between the different layers of social phenomena. The present research attempts to address this gap in the current literature by investigating the introduction of a research quality assessment system into the Australian higher education sector. The implementation of such an exercise presents an exceptional opportunity for research as it is shaped by societal-level discourses. These discourses in turn reflect back upon the management and practices of universities. At the individual level both societal rhetoric and local institutional practices will have an effect on the professional identities of academics. Yet academics are not viewed as obedient, passive recipients of a top-down change. Through individual choices of particular positions towards their changing environment academics possess the ability to exercise agency and resist or (re-)negotiate the imposed changes.

2.3.7 Applications of the Positioning Theory Framework to Empirical Research

Gender differences in the construction of subjectivity were one of the earliest topics examined through the lens of social positioning (Hollway 1984). Hollway's (1984) investigation is most frequently cited and referred to as the original work introducing the concept of positioning into the social sciences. Her empirical work demonstrated how people position themselves in relation to others, taking up or rejecting positions provided in the local and broader societal discourses regarding gender. She showed that ‘practices and meanings have histories’ and that ‘these histories are not the product of a single discourse’ (Hollway 1984:236). This suggests that a thorough investigation of a social phenomenon needs to link the
analysis of individual level conversations to local practices and societal level
discourses.

Since the 1980s Positioning Theory has been applied to empirical research in several different fields. The empirical investigations that make use of positioning theory are scattered over different disciplines. The applications of positioning theory as a research framework appear to be to some extent fragmented in nature. Though most research makes references to Harré and van Langenhove’s (1999) theoretical and empirical work, the results of empirical studies outside an author’s immediate discipline are rarely considered by individual authors. Some examples of empirical work most relevant to the present research will be discussed over the following paragraphs.

Gender and its relationship to subjectivity and identity remained a topic of positioning theory research. Examples are Jorgenson's (2002) paper on the construction of the professional identities of female engineers and the investigation of gender and managerial identities in universities in England and Sweden (Barry, Berg & Chandler 2006). Anthropological research used Positioning Theory to explore topics such as the development of students’ classroom identity, social performance and cultural beliefs in the Taiwanese bridal industry, and class-specific identities in working-poor Americans among others (for a review see Holland & Leander 2004). In the field of psychology research investigating development, femininity and masculinity, abuse, stigmatisation, and self subordination used positioning theory as ‘a rich resource for re-telling psychological stories of human subjectivity’ (for a review see Morgan 2002). Research on information seeking behaviour used positioning theory for an investigation in a pregnancy and midwifery care context (Pamela 2004). Earlier research explored the information seeking behaviour of mature age students in a Canadian university (Given 2002).
Given's (2002) research examines how the personal identity construction of individuals influences their information seeking behaviour. This study, based on in-depth interviews with 25 students (Given 2002:134), is informed by ‘the broader discourse of what it means to be a university student’ (Given 2002:130) and ‘the ways that institutional discourses affect their constituents’ (Given 2002:129). However, data collection and analysis in the study are limited to the individual level.

An edited collection of research, titled ‘The Self and Others’ (2003b) introduces some recent work within the positioning theory framework. Among numerous theoretical contributions, some work based on empirical research is put forward. The use of emotion discourse and the subsequent construction of emotional subject positions is investigated by analysing data collected from group discussions on the subject ‘men and emotion’ (Walton, Coyle & Lyons 2003:49). The empirical data analysed were derived from conversations conducted at a micro level. The data were interpreted in context but no data facilitating the investigation of specific links to institutional practices or societal rhetoric were examined. This may in part be due to practical difficulties of collecting broader discursive data, which can be specifically linked to the topic of emotions. In another work Wetherell (2003) introduces a psychological reading of interview data in the light of positioning theory. In this inquiry the analysis also emphasises the level of the person and links to wider discourses are not grounded in empirical data.

Conflict and disputes have been a topic of an investigation informed by positioning theory, in a case of a conflict between a university and its host community (Harré & Slocum 2003b, a). Though no specific information on data collection is provided, the authors of this study claim that attempts were made to collect data covering the broad public discourse as well as more private discourse. One of the practical issues for the researcher arising from this approach is to
determine the boundaries of data relevant to the specific phenomenon under investigation (Harré & Slocum 2003b:112, 2003a:130). The integration of multilevel discursive data in this case allowed the analysis to arrive at a more comprehensive understanding of the positions, interests, and goals of the parties involved and consequently to demonstrate alternatives for conflict resolution.

Boxer’s research applies positioning theory to a number of different topic areas. In addition to sustainability and how senior management deals with this issue (Boxer 2003b) his work also covers issues of organisational change management (Boxer 2001), and the assessment of quality systems (Boxer 2003a). For the investigation on quality systems data collected through interviews constituted the basis for analysis. Interviews with staff and management allowed Boxer to gain insights into individual positions as well as the wider institutional practices at the site chosen for the case study (Boxer 2003a:263-264). The focus of this study was limited to a specific local problem – the business model of a particular organisation (Boxer 2003a:262). Thus the collection of additional empirical data covering broader societal rhetoric might have been beyond the boundaries of data making a relevant contribution to the case analysis.

Research into organisational change and resistance to change constitutes another field for the application of positioning theory. Two examples are research by Argaman (2007) and Thomas and Davies (2005). The first investigates change efforts at an Israeli school. The analysis is based on interviews with the staff of the school – the principal, assistant principal, and teachers. In an effort to gather contextual data staff meetings were observed and institutional texts documenting the change collected (Argaman 2007:381). Argaman’s (2007:381-382) analysis focuses on root metaphors and how these reflect the positions towards change taken by the interviewees. The strength of this study lies in its attempt to link
individual and institutional level data. However, broader societal level discourses are largely left aside in the collection and analysis of data for this study. Thus, no links between local and wider discursive data were established as a result of the research.

The second example examines resistance to change in the context of the New Public Management (NPM) in the UK. The study is based on interviews with ‘a middle-ranking police officer, a police civilian manager, a social service manager and a head teacher’ (Thomas & Davies 2005:684). Thomas and Davies (2005) do not make direct reference to positioning theory. However, the foci of their investigation are ‘firstly, the meanings ascribed to NPM by these individuals, and secondly their own positioning within these meanings’ (Thomas & Davies 2005:684). The findings highlight the dynamic nature of identity as proposed by positioning theory. The authors demonstrate how the context of a changing environment affects the subject positions of those involved in organisational change. However, they also show that ‘there is no single uniform and coherent meaning to NPM … and … individuals are not passive recipients of discourses’ (Thomas & Davies 2005:700). These findings indicate that there is a need for more research to gain better understanding of the complex relationship between individual identity work and the effects of institutional practices and societal discourse on the process of identity construction.

Several researchers have taken up the topic of a changing environment in higher education and made use of positioning theory for their investigations. Boxer’s (2005) research into change and leadership in a higher education institution is one example. Boxer (2005) used positioning theory to demonstrate how personal agendas of the different stakeholders affected by organisational change can lead to positions that are challenging for change management efforts. Another example is research recently conducted in Sweden and England, which examined the effects of
increasing managerialisation of universities on academics. It demonstrated how academics use a variety of identities and positions to manoeuvre within the constraints of a changing environment. Academics coped with a number of sometimes contradictory demands by assuming situationally specific positions (Barry, Berg & Chandler 2006). Both these examples of recent research applying positioning theory exhibit the current focus on micro-level data collection and analysis in the empirical work. However, both approaches considered the respective contexts in their interpretation of the data. Nonetheless, the emphasis of these analyses remained on the individual level.

Recent research in the construction of individual and organisational identities in a university environment made use of positioning theory to complement a narrative framework approach to identity (Garcia & Hardy 2007a, b). The work of Garcia and Hardy (2007a, b) makes references to positioning theory but only partially utilizes its theoretical and methodological potential. The research was informed by ‘a number of public documents’ (Garcia & Hardy 2007b:367) to provide the investigators with an understanding of the context. However, researchers were particularly interested in the ‘micro-dynamics of identity construction’ (Garcia & Hardy 2007b:367) and did not fully explore possible links between societal rhetoric, institutional practices, and individual identity work.

Dixon’s (2006) research into globalisation and international higher education investigates the case of an Australian university offering an offshore doctoral course to staff of a higher education institution in Thailand. Unlike most other research that uses the positioning theory framework, Dixon’s (2006) work links the broader societal discourse of globalisation to the practices at the involved institutions and the local conversations at the sites investigated. The analysis complements individual level data collected through interviews with macro level
data obtained from documents, both at governmental and institutional/departmental level (Dixon 2006:321). This approach allows the analysis to achieve a more in-depth examination and understanding of the researched phenomenon by integrating ‘broader social discourses that connect and open out possibilities for alternative readings of the lived experiences of participants’ (Dixon 2006:322). The present thesis builds upon this approach by integrating multi level data into the analysis.
2.4 Theories of Occupational Identity

2.4.1 Fundamental Issues of the Study of Occupational Identities

What one does for a living, one’s occupation, profession, or position in an organisation can have significant implications for one’s self-perception and how one is viewed by others. ‘... a man’s work is one of the things by which he is judged, and certainly one of the more significant things by which he judges himself’ (Hughes 1971:338). Thus one’s work or paid occupation can function as ‘a defining statement about who one is’ (Unruh 2004:290). In turn it can be assumed that changes to one’s occupation or work environment can affect one’s identity or self and consequently one’s behaviour, choices, and decisions. Although there seems to be recognition of a significant link between occupation or work and identity and self, the literature on the topic appears scarce, fragmented, and scattered over a number of disciplines such as sociology, organisational studies, and more recently occupational therapy (Unruh 2004:291). The following subsection will provide a brief review of this literature with an emphasis on the link between the study of occupations and the study of the self and identity.

Everett C. Hughes and his students conducted the pioneering groundwork for the study of work, occupations, and careers in the early and mid twentieth century. Hughes and his successors developed what started as a broad approach to the study of ‘life histories’ into a more focused theoretical framework comprising the concepts of role, self, identity, institution, and career. Unlike more recent work these earlier contributions to the study of careers did not define the term narrowly in conjunction with the notion of occupation. A broad approach to the study of careers prevailed, which did not discriminate marijuana users from engineers as potential subjects for the study of careers (Barley 1989:43-45). Barley (1989:49)
identifies four main themes resulting from the research of Hughes and the Chicago sociologists of work: first, a blending of the objective and subjective aspects of work and occupations through the notion of career, second, a division of careers into successive status passages, third, careers as collective properties, and finally, careers as a link between the individual and social structure.

Occupational careers are characterised by a duality of the objective and subjective. On the objective side they consist of ‘more or less identifiable positions, offices, statuses, and situations’ (Barley 1989:49) that guide the individual’s path within the social world of a particular occupation. On the other hand, there is the subjective side comprised of the unique experiences of individuals on their path through an occupational career. This subjective side is composed of the meanings people impute to their occupations over time. Both the subjective and the objective contribute to the development of occupational identity and affect who one takes oneself to be in a career - one’s self. This dual concept of career is relevant to the present research project as the implementation of a national research quality assessment exercise can affect the subjective and the objective side of academic careers. A quality assessment that couples outcomes to future research funding may alter the objective side of careers by changing access to funding, redirect career paths, and the requirements for upward mobility. These developments in turn can affect the subjective experience of the individual academic within a changed system. Thus academics would have to re-evaluate their position within a new system and may reconsider their occupational identity in the light of these changes. Changes to the subjective side of a career may in turn be reflected in behavioural changes such as changing commitment and motivation.

The second theme introduces careers divided into successive status passages. These status passages may occur in an orderly way where the individual
passes through a number of positions in a hierarchy within a certain time frame. This approach can be formalised so that career progression unfolds according to a career plan developed and prescribed by a human resources department. On the other hand there are emerging or unexpected status passages – ‘... a physician suddenly realizes that for years he has been functioning as more of an administrator’ (Barley 1989:50). Other examples of unforeseen status passages in a career can be caused by events such as recession, war, and other forces leading to political or organisational change (Barley 1989:50). Status passages define an individual's occupational role transitions throughout a career. They constitute 'fundamental change in an individual's identity, an alteration in the person's conception of self' (Barley 1989:50). Changes to a person's self concept find expression in behaviours, interactions with others, and in self presentation. However, Hughes and his students did not view status passages as mere shifts between static roles with prescribed behavioural patterns. Rather roles and the passage from one status to another are viewed as emergent in a continuous process of negotiation. This process allows for the subjective experience of the role by the individual and to 'develop a [individual] repertoire of behaviors and attitudes' (Barley 1989:50).

Thirdly, careers are collective properties. Though the individual may choose between different occupational careers, different paths through a particular career, and may through subjective experience bring one's own interpretations and attitudes into the conduct of a certain role, careers are always subject to the limitations of the 'contextually defined possibilities' inherent within them (Barley 1989:51). These possibilities are by large shaped by the collective, society, or group the individual belongs to and may change over time. However, career as a collective property constitutes a necessary prerequisite for legitimate occupational identities.
Specific occupations and careers only develop over time ‘when a number of individuals have followed the same path’ (Barley 1989:51). In other words ‘socially meaningful careers’ can only exist with reference to a group that defines career paths, the requirements for career progression, and establishes the models of the roles that shape occupational identities. Careers in this sense are the ‘enacted attributes of the collectives to which individuals belong’ (Barley 1989:51).

The fourth and final theme looks at careers as the link between individuals and social structures. Under this perspective careers manifest a relationship characterised by reciprocity between the individual and the institution of occupations. This relationship underscores the mutual dependence between individuals whose lives, identities, and selves are cast in the moulds of occupational roles and the participation and involvement of these individuals for the very existence of the institution (Barley 1989:51).

Hughes (1959:447-452) underscores the significance of occupational careers as the link between individuals or selves and institutions through the concepts of license and mandate. License in this sense refers to the legitimate claims of a group of individuals who engage in specific tasks for a living. These tasks define an occupation and are conducted by the particular group and not others. Hughes does not limit his view of license to the narrow sense of legal permission or accreditation by a specific authority to conduct a particular set of activities. Rather license refers to a broader process of legitimisation through societal discourse and negotiation over time. This process determines the expectations society holds regarding the work of a particular occupation. It also defines the activities people belonging to the occupation are allowed to engage in while other members of society are not (Hughes 1959:447). Occupational license links occupational
identities of individuals with the wider social structure as legitimate identity claims can only be achieved within the limitations and expectations set by the host society.

However, members of an occupation are not passive recipients of social norms imposed on the conduct of their work. The concept of mandate provides the occupation and its individuals with agency to influence the setting of standards of conduct and the rules of engagement of their particular occupation for themselves and others. Mandate allows the individuals representing an occupation to have a significant effect on the institutionalisation of their work. Thus mandate constitutes another link between institutions and selves as it provides individuals with a position that makes their voices more likely to be heard, allowing them to play a significant role in shaping the broader discourse, the ‘modes of thinking and belief ... in their occupational domain’ (Hughes 1959:447). Hence mandate allows individuals to be significant agents in the process of negotiation that determines how an occupation becomes institutionalised and develops over time.

Hughes (1959:447) notes that professions in particular and more so than other occupations ‘claim a broad legal, moral, and intellectual mandate’. It is this broad mandate that makes people working in a profession firm believers that they are the best judges of their own competences, the quality of their work, and the performances their clientele and other stakeholders receive (Hughes 1971:346). Furthermore, the history of an occupation or an occupation that ‘long had a name, a license, and a mandate’ as Hughes (1959:453) puts it, provides it with a strong sense of identity and attachment to its traditions. These qualities make more historic occupations and professions more resistant to change. Resistance can be expected even more so, if forces external to the occupation attempt to change or regulate activities, contents, or norms of the occupation (Hughes 1959:453-454).
Academia is a historic occupation with a wealth of traditions. Although the history and specific traditions of academic conduct, such as research methods or publication outlets, may differ between the numerous disciplines most academics hold a sense of identity and attachment regarding their occupation. The implementation of a research quality assessment exercise that does not consider the histories and traditions of specific academic disciplines may be met with considerable resistance by members of the academic profession. Equally, an implementation that bluntly attempts to overwrite the mandate of the occupation to evaluate its own standards and quality of work by external authority and without appropriate feedback from within the occupation may be met with considerable mistrust and resistance.

However, although academics may claim a mandate to be self-determining and autonomous, Kavanagh (2008) has shown that universities throughout their history had the status of dependent institutions bound to sovereign institutions, which asserted influence over academic conduct through control over vital resources – namely the funding of teaching and research. In the early stages of the development of the academic occupation an affiliation with the church shaped the curriculum and academic activities. Later on the state or the nation took over the role of the sovereign institution. More recently funding received from institutions such as the military, the professions, and corporations poses constraints on the capacity of academics to resist externally induced changes to their license and mandate (Kavanagh 2008). Hence, how far academics will be able to protect their traditional occupational identities and selves in the light of the ongoing managerialisation of universities in general and in particular resist unwelcome effects of a research quality assessment exercises coupled to future funding prospects remains a subject that requires further empirical research.
2.4.2 Occupational Identities and Self-meaning

Berger (1973:215) states that occupation or work is more than a ‘means of livelihood’; it is a ‘source of self-identification’. However, trends towards an increase in the division of labour, in particular fostered by the Industrial Revolution and its notions of efficiency and rationalisation, have led to a degree of fragmentation in the production process that can render the work of the individual meaningless (Berger 1973:213-216). Berger underlines his argument for the loss of meaning due to increased fragmentation and division with the example of the assembly line worker. All that the worker knows is, he/she contributes parts to the production of ‘precision machinery’ unaware whether the end product may be a medical instrument or a nuclear weapon. Berger does not view fragmentation and consequent loss of meaning as the exclusive domain of manufacturing operations. The effects of assembly-line principles do not exclude white-collar occupations such as lawyers, physicians, and scientists (Berger 1973:214). A consequent development of the loss of meaning and identity is what Berger termed ‘one-upmanship’ (1973:216). Occupational identities that become increasingly ‘fluid’ and ‘insecure’ provide less room for self-identification and in turn encourage manipulation and the projection of biased self-portrayals for the protection of one’s social and economic status (Berger 1973:216). Furthermore, individuals may develop a ‘pseudo-identity’ (Berger 1973:217). Similar to Goffman’s (1961:106-116) concept of ‘role distance’ individuals demonstrate attitudes and behaviours which indicate that while they play their occupational role for one reason or the other it does not reflect their personal perceptions of their “true” or “real” selves.

Based on these assumptions and observations, Berger (1973:218) proposes a threefold categorisation of work or occupations according to the degree of meaning, self-identification, or ‘human significance’ they provide. In the highest
category one finds occupations that still provide ‘self-identification and self-commitment ... or ... “fulfilment”’ (Berger 1973:218-219). ‘Professions and the upper-echelon positions in the various bureaucratic apparatuses’ are located in this first category. The second category holds a middle position between two poles. It is characterised by being free of either fulfilment or oppression. People holding occupations in this category rationalise the lack of meaning and self-identification with other benefits or necessities, such as earning an income. They may seek self-meaning and fulfilment in their private lives. Berger (1973:219) states that the majority of both blue- and white-collar work can be found in this second category. Finally, there is the third category which is described as consisting of work that is ‘a direct threat to self-identification, an indignity, an oppression’ (Berger 1973:219). This category defines the so-called unskilled work or what Berger calls “the basement” of the industrial system’ (1973:219). He concludes his observations by remarking that there is a trend towards growth of the second category, while occupations in the first and third categories are on the decline (Berger 1973:219).

Berger’s (1973) concerns for a diminished or even lost self-identification and self-meaning of occupations due to ongoing rationalisation, fragmentation, and division of labour remains highly relevant to the present research. While I do not want to suggest that the ongoing trend towards a managerialisation of Australian universities described in Chapter 1 will have similar effects on the occupational identities of academics as Weber’s notion of rationalisation (cited in Berger 1973:224) had on blue-collar work during the Industrial Revolution, developments such as the implementation of a national research quality assessment exercise may not leave academics’ occupational identities undisputed. Issues arise regarding the development of a fair and objective system, communication and implementation, and specific features such as grouping and categorisation of individual work, or
rankings of publication quality may influence how such an exercise would be received. An ill-conceived implementation could lead to unexpected and unintended side effects. Academics who are neither sure who they are anymore nor who they ought to be under a new system may retreat to a form of what Berger describes as ‘one-upmanship’ (1973:216) for their self-reported submissions to the assessment exercise. Such developments would defy the purpose of an ‘objective’ quality assessment. Furthermore, symptoms of role distance behaviour or ‘pseudo identities’ (Berger 1973:217) with their negative consequences for motivation and commitment may result.

2.4.3 Models of Occupational Identity

Research conducted by Becker and Carper (1956a; 1956b) investigated the development of identification with an occupation based on data collected from interviews with graduate students in physiology, psychology, and mechanical engineering. The research identified occupational titles and their associated ideologies, task commitments, commitments to particular organisations or positions, and significance for one's position in the larger society as four main elements of identification with an occupation.

The title of an occupation constitutes a label laden with symbolic meaning, indicative to the self and others of the characteristics and capabilities of those belonging to a particular occupational group. As such a title holds a dual function. It does not just specify a particular ‘area of endeavor’ and its location in a wider field of activities. It also provides those identified by the title with legitimacy to engage in the ‘area of endeavor’ specified by the title (Becker & Carper 1956a:342). Through their attached symbolic meanings occupational titles are instrumental in the
evaluation of occupational identities. The result of these title evaluations can range from attachment to avoidance. Thus one may identify with the particular area specified by the title, or emphasise the wider field, and vice versa, or both (Becker & Carper 1956a:342).

Task commitment can reach from attachment to a specific set of tasks to a complete lack of task commitment. Thus a person may define his/her occupational identity by a number of specific tasks or as 'the kind of person who does this kind of work' (Becker & Carper 1956a:343). On the other hand a lack of task commitment may be defining for an occupational identity. For these occupational identities 'there is no kind of task which is impossible' (Becker & Carper 1956a:343).

Commitment to particular organisations or positions constitutes another element of identification with an occupation. Similar to task commitment people may restrict their occupational identities to affiliations with a narrow range of specific organisations and positions within organisations (Becker & Carper 1956a:344-345). People working in very specific positions in unique organisations, such as a specific, unique position with NASA (National Aeronautics and Space Administration), may even restrict their occupational identity to one particular organisation/position. On the other end of this continuum there are people who perceive their occupational identity as less specific. Thus these people could engage in the same work within a great number of organisations and positions without significant effects upon their occupational identities. Becker and Carper (1956a:345) also note that people form occupational identities in relation to others within an organisation, such as colleagues and clients, who are crucial for career success. Thus 'identifications vary in the degree to which they reflect dependence on informal systems of sponsorship, recommendation, and control' (Becker & Carper
Presence or absence of such key others within an organisation may affect one's occupational identity.

Finally, Becker and Carper (1956a) found that the implications of an occupation for one's status in the wider society form an element of occupational identification. Most significantly, occupational identities hold an 'implicit reference' to one's social class membership and in turn to the likelihood of possible class mobility (Becker & Carper 1956a:346). Any event or phenomenon capable of significantly affecting and altering one or more of the four elements of identification with an occupation would inevitably affect one's occupational identity and alter one's self-perception, self-presentation, and in turn affect the behavioural patterns associated with an occupational identity.

More recent research has shifted focus to the processes by which occupational identities develop and change over time. As a result more sophisticated models of occupational identity have emerged. Ibarra (1999) investigated the professional careers of junior consultants and investment bankers. The model of identity development that resulted from her research is shown in Figure 2.1.
Ibarra’s (1999) study demonstrates that occupational identities change over the course of a career. This is achieved through a process of adaptation of one's identity to the varying requirements of the different roles one occupies while passing through a number of career stages. The process is described as a ‘negotiated adaptation', which is shaped by an ‘interplay of internal and external influences', its results depending upon the subjective interpretation and enactment by individuals ‘as a function of their self-conceptions' (Ibarra 1999:765-766).
Drawing on a so-called adaptation repertoire of possible selves the individual experiments with a number of provisional selves until an identity that fits the new role expectations is found. The adaptation repertoire is continuously modified through the three basic tasks of observing role models, experimenting with provisional selves, and evaluating the outcomes against internal and external standards. Individuals may engage in these tasks in a sequence or simultaneously (Ibarra 1999:773).

Research that investigated the construction of professional identities of medical residents largely confirms Ibarra’s findings (1999). Pratt, Rockmann and Kaufmann (2006) came to similar conclusions regarding the adaptation of professional identities to the varying demands of one’s work. However, no evidence for an adaptation process based on experimenting with a repertoire of provisional selves was found (Pratt, Rockmann & Kaufmann 2006:255). Instead the findings led to an alternative model of identity construction based on ‘work-identity integrity assessments’ (Pratt, Rockmann & Kaufmann 2006:253) as shown in Figure 2.2.
This model is based on two intertwined learning cycles – the work learning cycle and the identity learning cycle. While people proceed through the work learning cycle continuous comparison between one's work and one's identity is made. This comparison is backed by social validation or external feedback. If this comparison or integrity assessment results in a violation of the integrity between one's work and one's occupational identity, people engage in a second learning cycle, the identity learning cycle (Pratt, Rockmann & Kaufmann 2006:253).

In the identity learning cycle one engages in identity customisation to restore a fit between one’s work and one’s identity. Pratt, Rockmann and Kaufmann (2006:254) identified three types of identity customisation: enriching, patching, and splinting. Identity enrichment results in ‘a more nuanced understanding of identity’ (Pratt, Rockmann & Kaufmann 2006:254). Identity patching involves adding to a strong, existing identity foundation ‘to explain a broader range of tasks’ (Pratt, Rockmann & Kaufmann 2006:254) by combining two or more identities. Identity
splinting entails 'a previously learned identity to serve as a splint to protect the growing professional identity' (Pratt, Rockmann & Kaufmann 2006:254). Which type of identity customisation is made use of depends on the strength of the current identity, the degree of job discretion and the magnitude of the violation of work-identity integrity the individuals perceive or experience. People with a higher degree of job discretion are more likely to engage in enriching as they possess more leeway to change their work rather than their identity. However, a severe violation of work-identity integrity is more likely to lead to patching or splinting. While people with a strong current identity are more likely to adopt patching, less developed professional identities will be customised through splinting (Pratt, Rockmann & Kaufmann 2006:254).

Pratt, Rockmann and Kaufmann (2006) conclude that identity change can proceed more incrementally than previously theorised. Rather than being a drastic, abrupt passage from one static identity to an entirely different one, identity and identity change appears to be a continuous, dynamic process evolving over time through temporary steps of enriching an existing identity, the patching of several identities, or making use of another identity as an interim aid (Pratt, Rockmann & Kaufmann 2006:256).

Although the models of occupational identity described here were developed based on research that focuses on people in the very early stages of their career, the negotiation of occupational identities or identity work is an ongoing process that does not end after the initial socialisation into an occupation (Kreiner, Hollensbe & Sheep 2006:1032). The explanations these models offer regarding the processes of identity construction and development may be equally relevant to explain and understand the effects organisational or societal change may have on occupational identities. Similar to the changing demands, expectations, and requirements that
lead people to adjust their identities while proceeding through the stages of a career
with its different roles, other forces may affect expectations of who one is or ought
to be at work and hence require the adjustment of occupational identities.

2.4.4 Occupational Identities in Academia

Since the early nineteen nineties an increasing number of researchers and
social scientists have been interested in the topic of occupational identities in
academia. In 1991 Wilson noted a ‘tendency towards proletarianisation’ of
university academics driven by increasing managerialism, caused by rising funding
pressures. Four years later Parker and Jary (1995) published an article with the
provocative title: ‘The McUniversity’. Their article expresses concerns that changes
in the political, institutional, and funding environment of higher education increased
the power of management and diminished the autonomy of academics (Parker &
Jary 1995:319). Academic identity and autonomy also form a focal point for Henkel's
(2005) work. Harley and Lee (Harley & Lee 1997; Harley 2002) investigated the link
between research selectivity (the selective funding of research projects according to
an assessment of ‘excellence’ of the project by the department’s funding council) and
academic identities. The influences of an increase in contract based employment on
the occupational identities of social science researchers is addressed by Collinson
Australian university. Her findings demonstrate the heterogeneous nature of
academics’ occupational identities. These and numerous other publications (Ylijoki
2005; Anderson 2006; Barry, Berg & Chandler 2006; Garcia & Hardy 2007b) form a
growing list of empirical and theoretical work that demonstrates the importance of
occupational identities of academics for the management of universities and the
work of academics. The following paragraphs discuss contributions to this list most relevant to the present thesis in more detail.

Wilson’s (1991:250) observations of changes to the UK higher education system, although focused on the overarching issue of change in general rather than academic identity specifically, are a strong indicator of a link between changes to the academic workplace and academic occupational identity. In particular his notion of the ‘proletarianisation’ (Wilson 1991:250) of the academic workforce points towards a conflict between the traditional academic identity based on collegiality, consultative decision making, self governance, professional autonomy, and professional values that foster a commitment to research and teaching and a changing workplace shaped by tighter management control, increased division of labour (e.g. between teaching and research academics or full time and contract academics), more formalisation and bureaucracy, taller hierarchies and less autonomy (Wilson 1991:253-255). Although Wilson’s (1991:261) conclusions point out that ‘proletarianisation’ as he uses the term is limited to a description of changed work conditions rather than a changing social class location of academics, ‘proletarianisation’ is unlikely to proceed without affecting the occupational identities of academics.

Parker and Jary’s (1995) somewhat polemic and highly critical article describing the results of changes to the UK higher education system in the early nineteen nineties as the ‘McUniversity’ documents observations similar to those of Wilson (1991). They too observe a shift in power from academics towards university management, standardisation of academic work, increased bureaucratic control and surveillance, diminished academic autonomy, rising ‘marketization’ of and ‘managerialism’ in universities in the UK (Parker & Jary 1995:333). However, their assumptions and predictions regarding the consequences of these changes for
the subjectivity or identity of the academic are more specific. Parker and Jary (1995:328) note that it is not in the interest of the [traditional] professional academic to please university management, as academic reputation and status are achieved in other relationships, namely those with students and peers. They suggest that the rationalisation of the university based on close scrutiny and assessment of teaching and research quality could lead to the development of a new more instrumental and rationalised academic identity. This ‘new academic’ would be an ‘organisation person’, his/her identity based on career progression through performance appraisals, quality ratings, and comparison with the widely circulated ratings of others (Parker & Jary 1995:329). The ‘organisation person’ gains its sense of identity from relationships different to those that were important to the traditional academic. Thus relationships with university managers and others conducting quality assessments become more important than those with colleagues and students. Furthermore, this ‘new academic’ would eventually adapt to the expectations of those conducting the surveillance and deliver the responses that lead to reward. Even more, activities that aren’t assessed by the system and thus not rewarded, such as ‘public policy interventions, journalism, paper refereeing, collegiality, having an open door to students’, may eventually be abandoned altogether and not form part of a ‘new academic’ identity anymore (Parker & Jary 1995:329).

Despite the shared shortcoming of not producing evidence based on empirical research, both of these articles provide observations of changes to the UK higher education system that indicate a changing academic identity in the light of the wider changes to the higher education system and the university.

More recent work by Henkel (2005) also focuses on academic identity in the UK higher education system but overcomes the lack of evidence by presenting an
analysis of interview data from two research projects. Henkel (2005:173) concludes that ‘major changes in the funding of research and the contexts in which it is carried out have not created major disturbances in academic values or academic identities’.

Although focused on biological scientists and therefore limited in their generalisability the studies found little evidence to support the emergence of a ‘new academic’. The notion of ‘strategic research’, a major goal of government policy to align research agendas with national economic goals and foster planned, applicable and more predictable research outcomes and quality, has not been adopted in academic discourse. ‘Blue skies’ research remains the ‘primary defining activity’ of researcher identities in academia (Henkel 2005:164-165). The discipline an academic is affiliated with still constitutes an important source of identification due to early socialisation through discipline-based doctoral education and the increasing significance of a consistent ‘track record’ to obtain and retain competitive funding (Henkel 2005:167). Changes in research funding have done little to ‘undermine the discipline-based reputational system’ and ‘disciplinary … forms of knowledge production are well defended’ (Henkel 2005:168, 169). Academic autonomy continues to be a constitutive component of academic identity through ‘the idea of the individual controlling his or her own research destiny and acquiring a distinctive identity and reputation’ (Henkel 2005:172).

Nonetheless, there is some evidence to support two assumptions regarding the emergence of a ‘new academic’ identity, namely changes to significant relationships and adaptation to altered assessment and reward systems. Henkel (2005:163-164) states that universities ‘have become multi-professional organisations’, leading to struggles between interest groups over issues that used to be the sole domain of academics. Research quality, for example, is not only subject to academic scrutiny and peer review but under a performance based funding system
has increasingly become a focal point of interest for professional university administrators and managers. As the ‘right to research’ becomes increasingly ‘conditional on attracting income’ and meeting ‘demanding evaluative criteria’ (Henkel 2005:165-166) the management of relationships with industry partners and university management becomes part of the academic identity if not a necessity to maintain a researcher identity. Academic autonomy, though still important for academic identity, cannot be taken for granted anymore. More and more academic identities depend on negotiation. While those who possess the ‘scientific and/or academic capital’, i.e. the ability to attract funding, succeed in maintaining a researcher identity, others may have to rely on collaborations with those who can attract funding. Thus academics report that ‘their capacity to determine the nature of their work’ and hence their professional identity is diminishing (Henkel 2005:172).

Harley and Lee (2002; 1997) conducted two empirical studies investigating the effects of the UK Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) on the identities of academics. Their findings draw a complex picture and demonstrate a multitude of possible consequences of the RAE for the individual academic. The first study focusing on UK economists centred on the hypothesis that a list of core journals in the discipline of economics, which favour mainstream research (defined as work that is located within a well-defined neoclassical core), achieved higher RAE ratings than non-mainstream publications. Thus the RAE could potentially marginalise the identities of non-mainstream economists as these would find it increasingly difficult to acquire what Henkel (2005:172) calls the ‘academic capital’ necessary to legitimise their academic identity under the RAE criteria. In this sense the RAE constitutes a threat to academic freedom and diversity (Harley & Lee 1997:1431).
The findings of the study show that although economists are aware if not concerned about the threat to academic diversity and hence research quality, many give in to departmental or peer pressure, adopting the practice of short-term research projects and publication in mainstream journals for the sake of the ranking exercise (Harley & Lee 1997:1454). These behavioural changes may not confirm an actual identity shift away from non-mainstream economist identities. Yet they provide supporting evidence for Parker and Jary's (1995:329) assumption that academics adapt to an altered system of reward and punishment. Furthermore, Harley and Lee (1997:1455) conclude that differences in age, rank, and the extent to which one's work is established in the field may explain the differing degree of individual resistance to or compliance with the RAE system. This observation in turn constitutes a strong indicator for a link between individual occupational identity and the degree of agency an academic can exercise in the context of the RAE.

Harley's (2002) more recent follow-up investigation of academic identities in sociology/psychology and marketing/finance/accounting confirms the findings of the 1997 study. Again the paradox of a widespread disagreement with the RAE's violation of traditional academic values and a high degree of compliance with the demands of the assessment exercise is reported. The findings demonstrate that for some the exercise may be an opportunity to reinforce a research identity, i.e. those academics employed in the predominantly old, well established, and high ranking 'Oxbridge' type institutions. For others the RAE even constitutes a new opportunity to establish a research identity, i.e. academics employed in the former, primarily teaching based polytechnics that gained university status in the nineteen nineties. For the majority of academics however, due to its standardising and normalising effects on what is considered quality research within a discipline, the overall long-
term consequence of the RAE may be to foster mediocrity as a virtue of academic identity more than ever before.

Occupational identities in the UK higher education sector are also at the centre of Collinson’s (2004) research. However, rather than investigating academic identity in general her research focuses on the experience of fixed-term contract researchers. The findings demonstrate that an increase in casual and fixed-term employment is detrimental for a positive occupational identity of researchers. Fixed term academic staff experienced alienation and marginalisation within their employing institutions (Collinson 2004:325). This status of inferiority of their occupational identity is manifested materially (e.g. lower salaries, less access to pension plans) and symbolically (e.g. sub-standard working conditions/facilities, exclusion from social events and peer networks) (Collinson 2004:320). To maintain a confident occupational identity subjects had to engage in ‘identity work’ more frequently. These attempts to retain an academic identity took the form of interaction with peers who share a strong discipline based identity, the involvement in teaching activities, and keeping up with the latest developments in the field by reading academic papers (Collinson 2004:324-325). Although not part of the job description of a casual researcher/academic, these activities constitute a form of resistance to the erosion of an academic identity under the conditions of fixed-term contract employment.

An investigation of the occupational identities of academics in an Australian university demonstrates that in the light of the changing higher education environment of the last two decades academics had to compromise their occupational identities. Developments such as marketisation of higher education and increasing managerialism in universities have affected individual identities differently leading to a heterogeneous picture. Churchman (2006:5-6) finds that
'different aspects of academic work are understood as being of different value to individuals ... and ... there is not one academic identity shared by all academic staff'. However, she identifies three main clusters of partly overlapping discourses that shape academic identity: a moral discourse characterised by 'making a difference', a relational discourse emphasising social interaction, and a pragmatic discourse of corporatism (Churchman 2006:9).

Academics in the moral discourse cluster maintain and defend a more traditional identity. Their terms of reference are marked by being 'true to the "purity" of academic pursuits' (Churchman 2006:9). Although these academics are aware of the changes happening in higher education and their institutions they reject them especially if manifestly aligned with largely profit seeking activities. The identities of the members of this group rest on notions of knowledge creation, contribution to their disciplines, and the education of the next generation (Churchman 2006:9). Notions of the new, more managerial university do not match their identities and can be met with open rejection. Churchman (2006:10) reports the example of an academic who perceived a new management information system as a threat to his academic autonomy resulting in boycott behaviour.

Individuals of the second discourse cluster emphasise notions of collegiality, academic community, and a joint effort towards a common cause (Churchman 2006:10). Churchman (2006:10) describes the identity of this group as 'the antithesis of the apparent objectives of their institution’s management'. A 'corporatized university' that calls for an individualistic and competitive approach to academic work is in stark contrast to the identities in this cluster (Churchman 2006:10). Not surprisingly, these academics are the most disappointed among the study sample. They communicate feelings of isolation, betrayal and 'a sense of dis-identification with the dominant, managerial discourse' (Churchman 2006:10).
Finally, the third discourse cluster constituting a pragmatic corporatism is representative of an academic identity that embraces new, managerial work practices and the opportunities for those willing to adapt to changed expectations and rewards by the management (Churchman 2006:11). These findings again partially support Parker and Jary's (1995:329) assumption that academics adapt to an altered system of reward and punishment over time. Churchman (2006:11) states that academic identities in the third cluster are characterised by ‘entrepreneurial overtones’ which find expression in behaviours that are aligned with the managerial discourse of ‘expediency, utility, efficiency, practicality, cost-effectiveness, and minimal involvement’. These academics seek information on behaviour that leads to reward and adopt it. Their identities are dominated by pragmatic values that aid in the pursuit of ‘efficiently meeting promotion criteria’ and free of notions of idealism, a traditional academic role, and references to the ‘good old days’ (Churchman 2006:11).
2.5 Chapter Summary

Chapter two provided an overview of some different approaches in the literature to theorizing self and identity. It shows how our understanding of the socially constructed self has developed and changed over the decades. The literature from Mead and Goffman to the later interactionist approaches demonstrates a widely accepted understanding of the self and identity as socially constructed concepts. However, there are differences in how these theories conceptualise change and adaptation of identities. Positioning Theory is shown to overcome some of the shortcomings of earlier more static models. It allows for explanation of not just long term changes to identities but also more short term adaptation to a given context or situation. Furthermore, the ontology underlying Positioning Theory provides an opportunity to further our understanding of relationships between macro, meso, and micro levels of the social world.

These however are not the only advantages of Positioning Theory. Through the analysis of conversations, storylines, positions, and speech acts in discourse data it also provides an important set of tools for empirical research. Although the theory of positioning is well developed and documented in the existing literature, its application as a tool in empirical research or method of analysis is less well developed. Most authors working within the Positioning Theory framework appear to develop their own somewhat individual approaches in applying it to empirical work. Positioning Theory alone does not provide a rigid set of methods nor should it. Therefore, for the purpose of this thesis it is combined with more established methods in qualitative research in the development of a research design for this study. This research design, the analytical approach, and the methods used are discussed in more detail in the following chapter.
Chapter 3

Research Design, Methods and Analytical Approach
3.1 Introduction

The research design of this thesis is developed to facilitate the investigation of the research questions outlined in subsection 1.2.2 of chapter one. Question one asked for the responses of academics to the proposed research quality assessment exercise. In 2007, when the data collection for this research began, there were very few data or reports of experiences regarding research assessment exercises in the Australian higher education system. Information to build a research design based on quantitative methods was sparse. These circumstances suggested that an explorative question would be appropriate. The design should do justice to the nature of the research question by eliciting data that allow for rich, thick, in-depth descriptions and analysis of the responses of a range of different individual academics to the proposed introduction of the RQF.

Furthermore, the research question also asks about the effects of the implementation of the RQF upon the professional identities of academics. This question is best approached with a qualitative research design. Identity, as argued in chapter two, is a dynamic, ongoing, somewhat fluid and sometimes unpredictable process. It is co-created by the individual and its social environment. Therefore, even a researcher with a plethora of pre-existing information would find the limitations of developing a quantitative research tool to explore questions of identity difficult. The complexity of identity due to the links of ongoing identity construction and social co-creation of identity is best researched with qualitative methods that allow for an in-depth investigation of individuals and positions from the micro to the macro level of the social realm. That could not easily be achieved quantitatively.
The identity process is as individual as the subjects it creates. Therefore, an individual psychological process specific to the investigated subjects calls for research methods that appropriately address the required depth of data collection and analysis of such an investigation, or as Harré (2002a:617) puts it ‘One cannot consistently insist that psychological phenomena occur at the level of isolated individuals and use statistical methods to try to find out what those phenomena are!’ Qualitative methods are more suitable for research on identity to capture the subjectivities of individuals. The qualitative approach allows the subjects the expression of subjectivity and provides them with a distinctive voice within the wider discourse.

No one single qualitative research method is adapted by the letter in the research design of this thesis. Instead the design and methods applied here are inspired by and draw on a number of sources and readings on qualitative research. The main methods, techniques and approaches that warrant further discussion in this chapter, are the case study approach, the application of interviews for data collection, the levels of analysis that form part of the research design, the application of storylines, themes and positions in the data analysis, and some remarks on data coding, grounded theory, and qualitative analysis in general.
3.2 Research Methods, Techniques and Approach

3.2.1 Case Study Approach

The research design is based on a case study research strategy. This strategy represents a suitable approach to my research questions, as it is applicable to both theory generation as well as theory testing (Yin 1981; Eisenhardt 1989). It is applicable to research problems where the phenomenon of interest cannot be easily separated from its context (Yin 1981). As discussed earlier in this chapter identity as one of the main objects of inquiry is a process of co-creation between the individual and his/her context or environment. Identity research thus cannot separate the phenomenon of identity from the context in which it develops. The case study approach has been successfully employed in recent research on identity by studies such as Garcia and Hardy’s (2007b:367) investigation of narratives of individual and organisational identities in an Australian university. In her study of student identities, Given (2002:134) found that ‘Restricting the study to one site offered many benefits: common informational services and resources; a shared context for academic requirement; and a common social context for examining student identity’.

Case study approaches have also been shown to be applicable to the study of change processes (Eisenhardt 1989). Due to the lack of experience and research regarding research assessment exercises such as the RQF in the Australian context, the exploratory nature of the proposed research project, and the complexity of the topic a qualitative approach to data collection and analysis based on a case study design is warranted for the purpose of this study.

The case under investigation in this thesis is a regional Australian university, which for reasons of confidentiality cannot be named. It is a mid-sized institution. It is significantly smaller than some of the large urban universities but also
significantly larger than many of the smaller regional universities. This size allows for a sufficient number of interviews to be conducted for the purpose of my study. The case university covers most of the science and social science disciplines, which allows for the inclusion of academics from a variety of backgrounds in the data collected for this thesis.

3.2.2 Interviews

The interview was chosen as the main source of data for the study. Several series of semi-structured in-depth interviews with employees of the regional university were conducted. Alvesson (2003) makes an important point regarding the interview as a situation where identity work takes place. Interview accounts construct or portray a certain identity rather than directly revealing it (Alvesson 2003:20). Thomas and Davies (2005:688) point out that in this sense identities are ‘constructed collectively by researcher and the researched’. There is a ‘fluidity to the meanings ascribed’ (Thomas & Davies 2005:688) to what is discussed in an interview that depends on the interplay between interviewer and interviewee. Therefore, the capacity to deconstruct interview accounts in the data analysis stage of the research makes the interview a particularly interesting and applicable method of data collection for identity research. It provides clues not just to the identity of the interviewee but also the identity the interviewee deems to be appropriate or desirable to portray within the context of a particular interview topic and a particular interviewer, in other words his or her position towards a topic or discourse.

Two sets of core questions were developed for the semi-structured interviews of the study. One set of core questions was aimed at interviews with
academics. Another set was developed for interviews with administrative/management staff in charge of the RQF at the faculty and university level of the regional university. These instruments facilitate the conduct of interviews and help guide the interviewer through the interview. A pre-defined set of core questions also helps maintain consistency in the collection of data from different study participants. Core questions were continuously reviewed and further developed throughout the progress of the study. Additional knowledge gained from the ongoing literature review and the preliminary analysis of the collected data was used to improve and extend the interview questions.

Following the explorative nature of the inquiry, core questions were held sufficiently broad to allow for the stories of interviews to emerge and unfold and to keep interviewer bias at a minimum. A set of 12 to 17 core questions was used in interviews with academics. Interviews started with a general question regarding the interviewee’s knowledge of the RQF and what they had heard about it. Core questions were interrupted by probing questions and request to elaborate if necessary, following a semi-structured interview approach. As interviews progressed questions became more specific, asking for the sources academics based their information on and how these sources were regarded for accuracy and reliability. Interviews were also asked whether they felt they had sufficient knowledge of the RQF and about information provided by the university and their respective faculty. These questions aimed at establishing how information was managed by the institution and the relationships of micro level conversations of academics with the meso level discourse of university and faculty management.

Furthermore, interviewees were asked for their expectations regarding the RQF, consequences of the RQF for academics and their university/faculty or discipline, and whether they felt themselves and their institution and departments
prepared to cope with the changes the RQF may bring about. Interviews concluded with a number of questions regarding the interviewee's career and career expectations in the light of the RQF and their stance on the relationship between teaching and research in general and how this may be affected by the RQF. These questions helped to elicit academics’ positions regarding the RQF and how it would affect them and their day-to-day work. Positions could later be cross-referenced with positions found in interviews with university and faculty management as well as positions found in macro level discourse. This line of questioning also allowed for eliciting positions portraying the occupational/professional identities of academics by covering many of the topics that are of vital importance to identity creation in the academic profession.

Interviewees from the university and faculty administration were presented with a separate set of up to 17 core questions. These questions were developed after interviews with academic staff were conducted. This second set of core questions was developed based on the previous questions used in interviews with academics and with the purpose of cross-referencing and comparison of positions in mind. Interviews started with a broad, general question regarding the state of preparations for and management of the RQF at the university or respectively faculty level. Interviews continued with questions regarding the dissemination of information and the communication between management and academics regarding the RQF. The positions found in answers to these questions could later be cross-referenced with positions found regarding similar questions in the interviews with academics. Furthermore, interviewees were asked for their positions on the expected effects of the RQF to elicit potential similarities or differences in comparison to the positions of academics collected earlier. The interviews concluded with questions regarding the perceived rationale for the introduction of a
research assessment exercise, the potential for success of such an exercise, as well as questions regarding the merit of an RQF in the light of the administrative effort and associated costs of such an exercise.

Sampling of interviewees and data requirements of the study are covered in sub-section 3.5. The application of the interviews for data collection to the case study of this thesis is discussed in further detail in sub-section 3.4. Additional data used in the analysis is discussed in sub-sections 3.4 and 3.6.

### 3.2.3 Levels of Analysis

The previous discussion of ontological assumptions underlying this study in chapter 2.3.5 indicates that to gain an in-depth understanding of and to contribute to the knowledge of social phenomena research needs to investigate these phenomena using a multilevel approach. The integration of micro-, meso- and macro-level data in an approach that takes into account the processes of conversations and symbolic exchanges (micro-level), institutional practices (meso-level) and societal rhetoric (macro-level) is vital for such a research design. This multilevel approach is reflected in my research design in the collection of data as well as the analysis of these data. Data representing all three categories of discursive process or levels of the social were collected for analysis. Data collection and the types of data collected are discussed in further detail in sub-section 3.4 of the thesis. A more detailed account of the integration of these different types of data into the analysis of my study can be found in sub-section 3.6 of this chapter as well as subsection 4.2 of chapter four.
3.2.4 Storylines and Positions

The two concepts of storylines and positions, as discussed in chapter 2.3, are borrowed from Positioning Theory to be integrated into the research design of this study. Storylines constitute the main scaffolding structure of the RQF discourse. Analysis of the data may reveal one main storyline or there may be multiple storylines running in parallel, in sum constituting the entirety of RQF discourse. The analysis has to pay particular attention to the positions that may emerge from one level of analysis but not the others. Furthermore, which positions are adopted by the actors on different levels of analysis and which ones they may not adopt or are ignored by some actors all together forms a focal point of the analysis. This approach underscores the multilevel research design of the study. The analysis of the positions taken up by different actors towards the RQF provides an insight into how those actors construct their own identities within or against the research assessment exercise, how they attempt to position themselves and others, and how they respond to attempts by others, such as government policy makers and university management to position them.

Storylines are developed following the tactics for generating meaning in qualitative analysis of Miles and Huberman (1994). In particular tactics (1) 'noting patterns', (2) 'seeing plausibility', (3) 'clustering', (5) 'counting', (8) 'subsuming particulars into the general' (Miles & Huberman 1994:245-262) are employed in the formation of storylines and themes. These tactics are used to establish similarities and differences between categories of codes, identify patterns in the data, aggregate specifics into general concepts, and are particularly useful when large amounts of qualitative data are analysed. Themes are developed using the same methods respectively, however, at a lower level of data aggregation. Themes are discussed further in the following sub-section of the thesis.
3.2.5 Themes

In addition to storylines and positions the research design introduces themes, which it borrows from qualitative analysis, into the array of methods used in the analysis. Themes or conceptual themes (Miles & Huberman 1994:131) represent a number of similar positions regarding a particular issue or topic within the RQF discourse or more specifically within one or more of the storylines that make up the wider RQF discourse. If, to stay within the metaphor, the storylines are the scaffolding of the RQF discourse then themes are windows that provide different perspectives to those looking into the construct of the RQF discourse. Positions allow the analysis to show whether those looking through the same metaphorical window will actually see the same ‘view’ or in how far their ‘views’ are tinted by their individual identities. Therefore, themes are an important intermediate methodological concept that facilitates linking positions into storylines and allow for more in-depth investigation of the impact of individual subjectivity and identity on wider storylines and discourses.

3.2.6 Charts and Matrixes

The research design takes inspiration from a number of sources in developing an approach to map out and represent the findings of the analysis in a manner that does justice to the multilevel research approach of the study, assures a maximum of knowledge generation from the interpretation of the findings and makes the data easily accessible to readers of this thesis. In particular the research design draws on Clarke’s (2003, 2005a) innovative situational analysis approach to qualitative research as well as Miles and Huberman’s (1994) extensive writings on the application of matrixes in qualitative data analysis.
Matrix displays offer a number of advantages over the representation of findings in text only. They contribute to a better understanding of the researched situation, aid the researcher in focusing on data that are relevant to answering the research questions, contribute to a coherent representation of findings and help the reader to ‘re-create your intellectual journey with some confidence’ (Miles & Huberman 1994:239). The research design of my study employs matrix displays to draw connections between levels of analysis, storylines, themes and positions. This approach is explained in more detail in chapters 4 and 5.

3.2.7 Coding, Grounded Theory and Qualitative Analysis

The coding process of this study does not strictly follow the ‘rules’ of orthodox grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss 1967; Strauss & Corbin 1998). The researcher cannot enter the situation of interest without prior knowledge of the subject and is to some degree biased by his or her previous readings of the literature relevant to the research subject, as well as influenced by observations made during the course of carrying out the fieldwork for the study. Also the coding method applied to the present study does not rely entirely on data aggregation emerging from the coding process. While some of the aggregate codes or themes and storylines may be entirely emergent from the coding process others are based on preconceived concepts influenced by the research questions and design as well as the researcher’s subjectivity. Therefore, instead of a ‘pure’ grounded theory approach, this study employs a more recent coding process known as template analysis (King 1998).

Template analysis, also known as codebook analysis or thematic analysis, is different from orthodox grounded theory in that it does not assume that no a priori
theorizing regarding the data or research phenomenon exists. Hence, not all the coding has to emerge from the data. In contrast to the grounded theory approach it is more flexible, less prescriptive with fewer rigid procedures (King 1998:119). It therefore allows the researcher to develop a basic set of *a priori* defined codes based on a review of the relevant literature and existing theory, which can be modified according to the categories emerging from the ongoing coding process (King 1998:118). The template analysis approach is more appropriate for my research project as it is already based on a strong theoretical foundation and the development of an entirely new theory is not the primary purpose of the study.
3.3 **Computer-Aided Research methods, CAQDAS and Nvivo**

The present study makes use of computer aided approaches to qualitative research for two main tasks. The first of these tasks is the transcription of interview audio recordings into text. The second task is the coding of transcripts for the purpose of analysis. While the computer aided coding of data was successfully employed, the computer aided transcription of interviews remained unsuccessful.

Attempts to use voice recognition software for interview transcription were made. However, these attempts failed as the software was not equipped to handle the amount of background noise present. Also the presence of more than one voice in the interviews posed a challenge that the software was not able to meet. The difficulties I experienced with this failed approach to data transcription confirm the experiences reported in the literature (Matheson 2007; Park & Zeanah 2005). The interviews were therefore transcribed in the traditional manner by hand.

The data analysis was facilitated by the application of computer assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS). CAQDAS supports the researcher in analysing qualitative data and helps to organise the data and coding process. It has advantages over traditional manual approaches to qualitative analysis and coding as it allows complex searches and the generation of links between data. CAQDAS also facilitates the organization and handling of large amounts of data (Bringer, Johnston & Brackenridge 2004; Hesse-Biber, Dupuis & Kinder 1991). Several readings of the data or iterations of coding are possible without the danger of the researcher losing the overview of the process. Data code reduction and aggregation therefore becomes feasible even in large, complex sets of data. CAQDAS also allows the researcher to simplify tasks that were previously time consuming and therefore hard to realise, such as ‘take a coded segment back to the context, rethink and
recode, developing and keeping thinking’ during the coding process (Richards 2002:272). Computer aided analysis can make the presentation of finding easier and more coherent through matrix outputs and the application of tools for theory building. The use of CAQDAS can contribute to an analysis that is ‘more visible, thereby enhancing transparency, and so the quality of evidence and argument might be more easily judged’ (Crowley, Harré & Tagg 2002:193).

Two different CAQDAS systems were employed in this study, initially ‘hyperRESEARCH 2.8’ (Researchware 2011) and later ‘QSR Nvivo 8’ (QSR 2011). The analysis the findings of the study are based on was conducted with the help of ‘QSR Nvivo 8’. The initial attempt to employ a CAQDAS system for the study with ‘hyperRESEARCH 2.8’ failed to successfully manage the complexity of the collected data. The switch to ‘QSR Nvivo 8’ was based on a number of criteria. It provides the basic functions for coding, memoing/annotation, data linking as well as search and retrieval (Miles & Huberman 1994:312). Beyond the basic functions, ‘QSR Nvivo 8’ can organise and display data and data aggregations in a coherent way (Miles & Huberman 1994:313). The software lends itself to the present study as it enables the analysis of multiple sources and cases. It provides tools for annotation, linking and revision of sources, and the integration of large amounts of unstructured or semi-structured data, including a diversity of non-uniform documents and entries. There are no restrictions to database size (Miles & Huberman 1994:314). Furthermore, “QSR Nvivo 8’ supports the exploratory nature of the study due to its flexible coding and display tools as well as multiple coding and iterative readings and organisation of data. It also allows the exploration of the context of coded data as well as a number of options to display the finding of the analysis (Miles & Huberman 1994:315).
3.4 Types of Data Collected

The data collected for the study reflect its multi-level approach. Relevant data were collected at micro, meso and macro levels. At the micro level, the level of individual academics, the sources of data are twenty in-depth semi-structured interviews with academics from a number of faculties. Interviews lasted between thirty minutes and up to more than one hour. Academics from the faculties of Science, Engineering, Commerce and Arts were interviewed. Interviewees from different faculties were chosen to investigate whether or not the implementation of the RQF would impact individuals from different disciplines in the same or different ways. The interviews commenced in April 2007, a little less than one year before the proposed implementation of the RQF. The last interview was conducted in October 2007, a few months before the RQF was abandoned by the federal government of Australia.

Meso level data relate to the organisational practices through which the case study institution sought to implement the RQF. They are represented by a number of documents as well as interviews with administrative and management staff of the university. Among the documents collected for analysis are internal reports on the RQF, emails sent out by the faculty and university management to communicate RQF issues to staff and the university’s research newsletter. Furthermore, eight interviews with administrative and managerial staff involved in the preparation, organisation and implementation of the RQF at faculty and university level were conducted. These semi-structured in-depth interviews lasted between one and two hours. Interviews were conducted between February and April 2009. Interviewees represent a range of roles and positions ranging from library staff to the university’s Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research).
Data collected through interviews and other documents at university level are complemented by data from other sources at the macro level - the level of government policy and sector-wide reform. These data expand the analysis to a range of discourses on the RQF. Additional macro level data allow the researcher to appropriately represent the complexity and context of the researched situation (Strauss 1987:26; Clarke 2005a:171-174). The data collected at the macro level are documents such as government publications, publicly available information from the Department of Education, Science and Training, information from the public media, publications by the National Tertiary Education Union, academic journal publications as well as other documents. The collection of these materials was ongoing. It commenced in 2006 and was completed with the commencement of the analysis stage of the study in 2009.
3.5 **Sampling and Data Requirements**

The approach to sampling for the research has to consider the different strata that constitute the relevant population for the researched phenomenon. Therefore a stratified sampling approach was chosen (Gioia & Thomas 1996). The highest level of the population consists of the entirety of the Australian universities. At this level a regional university was chosen as the case to be used for the study. The regional university represents an especially interesting case for the proposed study as it takes one of the upper-middle ranks in terms of dependency on the funding that would be redistributed by the RQF (NTEU 2007). With more than 12 Million AUD representing about 4.5% of the total institutional funding (NTEU 2007:5), the regional university is potentially more dependent on RQF money than most of the smaller Australian universities. In the past these did not receive large proportions of the funding which would be redistributed according to the RQF. These figures indicate that the RQF constitutes a particularly important issue for the case study university.

Stratified sampling at the next level, the university level, distinguishes members of different units of the regional university. The sample was subdivided into groups based on faculty affiliation. This was done under the assumption that academics from different faculties, with different research, publishing traditions and strengths, may be affected to varying degrees by the implementation of the RQF. The faculty-based groups were then divided into early-career academics, mid-career, and senior academics. This was done based on the assumption that academics in different career stages may respond differently to the RQF due to the implications of career stage for one’s professional identity. Academics in later stages of their careers are more likely to be able to contribute publications in higher quantity and of better
quality to a RQF submission. A basic random sample was selected for each sub-group and repeat invitations and follow-up contacts were used to increase the response rate.

Initial invitations resulted in a response rate of 17.5%. A more detailed discussion of response rates and the problems of participant recruitment and sampling bias is provided later in this subsection of the thesis.

Although the research design of the present study does not follow a strictly orthodox grounded theory approach, (Glaser & Strauss 1967; Strauss & Corbin 1998) some concepts from grounded theory are applied. To determine the sample size for the interview series the techniques of theoretical sampling and theoretical saturation (Glaser & Strauss 1967:45-77, 61-62; Strauss 1987:38-39, 21) were used.

Interviewing commenced with a basic stratified sample. From this point onwards data collection continued by means of theoretical sampling. This involved the concurrent collection and analysis of data under constant comparison of the data and the underpinning theoretical framework. This process continues until theoretical saturation is reached. Saturation is reached when the collection of additional data does not yield any additional results in the analysis. This point determines the final sample size.

A potential problem for the study is a biased sample of interviewees. In particular non-response bias poses a potential problem for the research as it may have an impact on the generalizability and usefulness of the findings of the study. Results of data analysis applied to data of a biased sample may alter the conclusions that can be drawn from the study (Michie & Marteau 1999).

Comparison of respondents with the original sample of potential interview subjects invited to participate can provide an indication of a non-response bias in the sample (Dooley & Lindner 2003; Floyd & Schroeder 1994). The sample used for
data collection during the fieldwork phase of my research was subdivided into three categories early-career academics, mid-career academics, and senior academics. These categories were determined based on the position an academic held within his/her faculty at the time the interviews were conducted. The response rates compared over the three career stage categories show a significant lack of response for the category of mid-career academics. Table 3.1 provides an overview of interview participants from the various faculties and the number of interviewees in the respective career stages.

**Table 3.1 Number of interviewed Academics by Faculty Affiliation and Career Stage**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>faculty affiliation</th>
<th>early-career academics</th>
<th>mid-career academics</th>
<th>senior academics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Commerce</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Science</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engineering</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arts</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While over-represented in the sample of participants originally invited to join the study, with 42%, compared to 35% early-career academics and 23% senior academics, mid-career academics were underrepresented in the sample that responded to the invitation. Mid-career academics only represented 25% of the respondents, whereas 35% of the respondents were early-career academics and
40% senior academics. Subdividing the overall response rate of 17.5% into the three sub-categories demonstrates that early-career academics yielded a response rate of 17.5%, mid-career academics resulted in a response rate of 10.4%, and a senior academics’ response rate of 30.8%. In summary the comparison indicates a non-response bias in the sample with mid-career academics constituting the category most reluctant to participate in the study.

Non-response bias is a common problem in social science research and ‘can occur in even well designed studies’ (Michie & Marteau 1999:204). Although commonly used measures to improve response rates, such as detailed information and explanation of the study and measures to assure confidentiality in the invitation, personalized salutations, thoroughly chosen subject line of the email, reminders or repeat invitations and follow-ups, as well as offering a copy of the results (Bartel Sheehan & McMillan 1999; Cook, Heath & Thompson 2000; Harzing 1997; Michie & Marteau 1999; Veal 2005), were used for the data collection of the study, non-response bias could not be avoided completely.

There are several possible explanations for non-response bias. Research on health professionals indicates that non-response may be caused by potential informants feeling threatened by the investigation of their professional practice, or they may not feel comfortable in the role of the research subject (Michie & Marteau 1999). Non-responding academics who were contacted for the data collection of my research project may have had similar reasons for not responding. This assumption is supported by observational evidence such as informants, who initially agreed to participate in an interview, withdrawing from the study once exposed to the interview questions.

Other explanations for non-response could be demanding work schedules and a lack of time to participate. Furthermore, it is likely that academics receive a
relatively high number of invitations to participate in research, which further constrains the time available to participate in any one particular study.
3.6 Data Analysis and Data Triangulation

The multi-level design of the study requires triangulation of data from different sources and over the different levels of analysis when possible. Data triangulation is achieved throughout the data coding process. All data were coded into nodes with the help of QSR Nvivo 8. A node represents the lowest level of aggregation in the data, that is, it represents a unique position within the discourse. At the next level of aggregation nodes or positions are consolidated into themes, each representing a certain concept or broader idea. Storylines represent the highest level of aggregation employed in the coding of the study. They constitute an aggregation of themes which together form a coherent narrative. A particular discourse in turn is comprised of the entirety of its storylines. This study however cannot cover the whole RQF discourse and therefore focuses on the three main storylines that emerged in the data analysis, their most important themes and positions in the light of the research questions of the study.

The coding process comprises two consecutive readings or iterations of coding of the entire data used in the analysis. The first reading focuses on the coding of individual nodes or positions within the data. The second reading has a dual function. On the one hand it is used to check and confirm codes established in the first reading, combine codes with similar meanings and remove those that are obsolete, that is, those that do not make a significant contribution to answering the research questions of the study. On the other hand the second reading consolidates data coded in the first reading into the aforementioned two higher levels of aggregation, positions into themes and in turn themes into storylines.

Coding data from different sources and levels of analysis in the same way ensures consistency and allows for triangulation of data across levels and a variety
of sources. This in turn means the study is able to compare differences in positioning between the different players in the RQF arena as well as across levels of analysis. Some positions may be shared among actors of different backgrounds and across levels of analysis while other positions may only emerge at one level of analysis and with particular actor. This way of data triangulation allows for both possibilities, the interpretation of positions within context as well as the identification of positions that are absent from particular contexts.
3.7 Reflexivity in Qualitative Research

Reflexivity, objectivity and notions of truth in qualitative research are widely discussed issues in the literature. An in-depth discussion of these issues is beyond the purpose and scope of this chapter. However, using the brief summary of developments concerning reflexivity in the organisation and management literature provided by Hardy, Phillips and Clegg (2001) I will explain the stance my research takes towards reflexivity and objectivity.

Hardy, Phillips and Clegg (2001:533) describe reflexivity as ‘reflecting on the way in which research is carried out and understanding how the process of doing research shapes its outcomes’. They identify four major developments in the approach of social science researchers to this process of reflection. These developments are firstly the acknowledgement of and attempt to remove bias, secondly the demise of claims to absolute objectivity in favour of visibility and disclosure, thirdly the postmodern dismissal of objectivity and the introduction of socially situated (subjective) observations, and finally a recognition of the influence of multiple interactions within research communities on research outcomes.

The present research approaches reflexivity throughout the process of the study in the light of all four of the main developments in notions of reflexivity described by Hardy, Phillips and Clegg (2001). I am aware that my research and this written account of its outcomes are not free of bias or subjectivity. My subjectivity as a researcher has been shaped by my previous education, the literature I reviewed (as well as the literature I was not able to review due to time and other constraints) for this study, as well as my choice of PhD supervisors and the university environment the research was conducted in. I have made all possible attempts to recognise and limit the influence of these biases on my research outcomes. The
literature review takes a broad approach to the subject of the study and comprises
the widest possible reading with regard to relevance to the subject matter as well as
the constraints of a PhD research study. Throughout the progress of the study I have
critically questioned assumptions stemming from my previous education as well as
conversations and interactions with my research supervisors and the wider
academic community I am working in. Disclosure of and making visible potential
biases are underlying principles that are applied throughout this textual account
describing my research and its outcomes, where applicable.

This study takes a stance towards objectivity that neither denies the value of
attempts to create scholarly ‘objective’ research accounts nor makes any claims of
definitive objectivity or absolute generalizability of the research outcomes. As such
this account constitutes one possible interpretation of the sum of socially situated
observations and interactions between the researcher, the research subject(s) and
the wider research community. Therefore this study assumes that there is no one
single truth or definitive objectivity. Rather I propose that the highest level of
objectivity a qualitative research account can achieve is a representation that shows
individual subjectivities or voices and the degree to which they overlap with one
another, that, for the purpose of this discussion of objectivity, I call collective
subjectivity. The fact that my research account does not represent a definite
objectivity allows for it to be read in multiple ways. Whether or not, or to which
degree, the account achieves its claims regarding reflexivity and objectivity depends,
at least in part, on the subjectivities of its readers.
3.8 Chapter Summary

Chapter three provided an overview of the methods and techniques that have been integrated in the research design of this thesis. Please refer to Figure 3.1 for a graphical illustration summarising the frame of reference of the study design.

The chapter demonstrates the relevance of the chosen design to the exploratory nature of the study and its suitability for addressing the research questions of the thesis. The case study approach allows for the collection of data within a consistent local context, and provides sufficient depth for analysis. Furthermore, the chapter outlined the additional methods employed to complement the general approach under a Positioning Theory framework.

The chapter has shown how established methods of qualitative data analysis such as data coding using software and grounded theory are used to elicit and organise findings within a framework that uses concepts from Positioning Theory such as storylines and positions. These are used to investigate the responses of academics to the introduction of the RQF, and to explore how their identities were reconfigured through processes involving different levels of discourse.

Finally, the chapter shows the reflexive stance this thesis takes towards qualitative research. It acknowledges the influence of the subjectivity of the researcher on the analysis of data and interpretation of the findings. The next chapter presents the findings of my analysis preceded by a brief introduction to the structure which guides their presentation.
Figure 3.1: Graphical Illustration Summarising the Frame of Reference of the Study Design
Chapter 4

Analysis and Findings
4.1 Introduction

Finding the best way to describe and present the information resulting from the analysis of my data has been a challenge in itself. The complexity of the subject and the multi-level approach to analysis I have chosen require a representation of the findings that makes them intelligible in a sufficiently simple manner yet does due justice to the intricacies of the subject matter. The final form the presentation of the findings takes is a result of a structure that partially emerged from the data during the analysis, is partially determined by the theoretical underpinnings of my study as well as the research questions and aims of the study. Finally, it is at least in part biased by my subjectivity that shapes the interpretation of the data I analysed to some degree. For a more detailed discussion of reflexivity and objectivity in qualitative research refer to chapter 3.7.

The resulting structure illustrating the analysis is hierarchical in nature in so far as it shows the RQF discourse building up from individual positions into broader storylines. The RQF narrative creates a cascade of discursive concepts. At the top of the structure, at the broadest level, are overarching storylines, which are divided into themes. These themes constitute an intermediate level. Themes are broken down into the numerous positions that constitute the socially constructed discourse of the RQF. Actors representing the different societal levels, the macro level represented by the federal government of Australia and DEST, the meso level represented by the management and administration of universities and faculties and the micro level represented by individual academics, have different perspectives on the RQF. There are various agendas resulting in distinctive positions. Although there may be some overlap, different level actors will also emphasise different themes or even pay no attention to one theme while introducing another. This may go as far as
different versions of the same storyline or at the very least different interpretations of the same storyline.
4.2 Storylines, Themes, Positions and Levels of Analysis

While most research projects that work within the theoretical framework of Positioning Theory focus on one specific storyline I introduce three main storylines in this chapter. The complexity of the RQF as a subject of study as well as the vast and rich information that emerged from the data require me to go beyond the limit of one storyline. The three storylines introduced here emerged from the data analysis. However the reading of these data is biased by the previous theoretical knowledge of the researcher based on the review of the existing literature, guided by the specific aims of this study and limited by the constraints of a PhD thesis. While the storylines inevitably partially overlap in certain themes and positions I will show in this chapter that they are sufficiently distinctive to justify separate discussion. The RQF cannot be viewed as an isolated policy event in the Australian Higher Education sector. Rather it constitutes a catalyst for narrative inclusions of broader issues in higher education such as disparities among higher education institutions extending back to the era before the Unified National System, accountability for government funding, quality and performance based funding structures as well as more recently the significance of global university rankings (for a comprehensive introduction of relevant policy developments in the Australian higher education sector since the 1980s refer to chapter 1.3). These developments are to varying extents reflected in the storylines and themes along which I have structured my analysis.

The findings presented in this chapter are the result of an iterative coding process. The three storylines, and fourteen main themes contained in them as well as the numerous positions presented are derived from aggregating and organising the 736 codes that emerged from the initial reading. As expected, not all of the initial
codes retained sufficient relevance to the research question to be presented in the findings of the study. In addition, some aggregations led to themes and positions that are beyond the scope of the thesis. The information presented here therefore constitutes what I deem to be most relevant to answering the research questions of this study. It is however not a comprehensive representation of all the information that could be gained from analysing the wealth of data I collected throughout the field work I conducted. The vast amount of data represented a challenge for the analysis but also opportunities for further research in the future.

Throughout the remainder of this chapter I provide an in-depth analysis of three storylines, which are: first, *Academic Freedom and the Determination of Quality and Excellence in Academia*, second, *The Teaching-Research-Complex*, and third *Culture Clash between a Traditional Model of Academia and New Managerialist Positions*. These three main storylines are overshadowed by an even broader storyline that I have dubbed the *Techno-Practical Administration Complex*. This overarching storyline also constitutes the link to the aforementioned wider developments in the Australian higher education sector and higher education policy.
4.3 First Storyline – Academic Freedom and the Determination of Quality and Excellence in Academia

4.3.1 Academic Freedom

Although a significant theme with fifteen references from nine different sources, academic freedom did not feature as a frequent direct term of reference in the discourse of individual academics during my interviews. Individuals were, however, concerned about how the RQF may affect their freedom in the sense of the control they have over their own work and career. I will return to this theme in one of the following sections. Academic freedom as a general concept featured much more prominently in the macro level discourse. In particular it was discussed in newspaper and academic journal articles and documents published by the NTEU (National Tertiary Education Union).

The NTEU expresses concerns about consequences of the RQF for research that does not fit into mainstream ideas of its respective discipline:

> Any assessment exercise that effectively discounted research that did not fit into the prevailing intellectual ‘fashion’ would threaten academic freedom and therefore be unacceptable to research staff employed at Australian universities. ... Academic freedom is a fundamental and essential characteristic of any higher education system which could be severely compromised by the introduction of the RQF.


The NTEU feared that the RQF could be misused by the government as a political tool to gain unprecedented control over researchers and research activities.
Its submission in response to the RQF issue paper mentions potential consequences such as ‘marginalisation of research that might not be intellectually fashionable at a particular time’, ‘exclusion of funding for research that might not be ideologically acceptable to the Government’ and ‘identifying and marginalising groups of staff whose research contributions do not score highly in the RQF’. These fears of the RQF becoming a normative device to create the “good academic” or “good researcher” from a government point of view were not as pronounced among the individual academics I interviewed. However, some academics were concerned that the RQF could become a tool to exercise control over the higher education sector:

But the norm is pretty much defined as conventional publications of various sorts of outputs, which are then measured by scholarly criteria. So anyone who is not fitting into that sort of box, for example someone who might be having public engagement that’s not in the directive of the scholarly or intellectual focus that’s not going to measure very highly or as highly on the scholarly criteria alone.

[Interview 22191-0807, Senior Academic, Social Science]

Other academics even speculated about hidden agendas behind the implementation of the RQF policies:

Why do they assess us? Because it is a political play ball, because that gives them the opportunity to say: Well, we have got too many universities in Adelaide. Let’s shut two of three down. ... Certainly the number of universities per capita of population is huge in Australia. Hidden agendas could have been reducing the number of universities. The common myth was that they wanted to separate them into teaching and research universities. Which is really the same thing because the teaching ones are basically dead. They are just colleges. But I have no idea
what the motivation, I have no insider information on their true motives.

[Interview 87168-0907, Senior Management, Commerce]

You could say it’s [the RQF] got subsidiary or hidden agendas. But I wouldn’t say they are conscious agendas. But hidden effects and those are about controlling the sector through a monitoring process as opposed to the alternative would be some way of encouraging people rather than putting a lot of scrutiny on. It is threatening in a certain way because it has so much money attached.

[Interview 22191-0807, Senior Academic, Social Science]

Speculations at the micro level were fuelled by a macro level debate about effects of the RQF on the diversity of the Australian higher education sector in newspapers and academic publications. In an academic critique, the RQF is linked to ‘neoliberal and neopositivist thought’ that:

… produces new and refracted understandings of research and research outcomes. The RQF is an outworking of such understandings in that it is both produced by them and in turn productive of them. The RQF operates to construct and create conditions with which research activity can be thought about in certain ways, thus relegating to the margins other ways of thinking about research and research outcomes.

(Cheek 2006:111)

Reports linking the RQF to previous, similar research assessment exercises in other countries, such as the RAE of the UK, confirmed assumptions, speculation and rumours about potential unintended side-effects a RQF might bring with it. An academic with experience of the British research assessment system reports that:
Support for research within institutions became increasingly selective, aimed at researchers and projects most likely to yield income. This is de facto infringement of academic freedom, as earning power becomes the rationale for the good research, and it also damages staff morale.

(Redden 2008:5)

However, public discourse was not limited to utterances of concerns and speculation. There were voices at the macro level actively calling for protection of the sector’s diversity and academic freedom from potential adverse effects of the proposed RQF implementation. In response to the issue paper on the RQF the Australian Council of Deans of Education stated that it ‘believes that Australia would be poorly served by a “one size fits all” approach to assessing research quality’. The NTEU’s response to the RQF called for an assessment exercise that ‘could recognise institutional difference’ and states that ‘Staff at all publicly-funded universities should have the opportunity to develop as researchers and the RQF should not hamper universities from creating such opportunities for staff and students’.

While analysis of the macro level discourse shows a predominant preoccupation with academic freedom as a prevalent policy and philosophical concept in the Australian higher education sector, micro level analysis indicates that a closely related, yet distinct theme is more prominent with and of greater interest to the individual academic. This theme, namely the ability to exercise some degree of control over one’s career as a professional academic, is introduced in more detail in the following section.
4.3.2 Exercising Control over one’s Career

Closely related to academic freedom, yet a much more concrete concept of immediate relevance to the individual academic’s daily professional life, is the theme of career control. Control over one’s career features as a prominent theme in the data. There are 28 references from 16 different sources relating to the theme. The degree of control one has over one’s careers as well as the amount of influence one can exercise over the direction of that career are some of the more prevalent themes that emerged from the interview data. Positions regarding this theme differed greatly among academics. Not surprisingly, the current career stage of interviewees appears to be a significant indicator of their confidence in their ability to control their careers. Discipline affiliation and discipline specific issues also made a difference to the answers that academics provided. However, even academics at similar stages in their careers demonstrated very different attitudes towards their career prospects under the funding regime of the Research Quality Framework. While some academics were very confident that they had control over their careers and that there would be rather little change to this brought by the RQF, others did not share this position. Four main, reoccurring positions characterise the theme: being in control of one’s career, conditional control over one’s career, no or little control over career, and positions regarding changes to the degree of career control over time.

The most confident academics portrayed themselves as being in control of their careers and expected little or no effect upon their state of affairs by the looming implementation of a new performance assessment and funding regime.

Well, I think I am in control. ... I believe that I am in control of myself.

[Interview 12347-0407, Senior Academic, Commerce]
I mean the research work is largely guided by my interests and where I think I can get funding. The main funding is going to come through competitive grants and not through what I might get from this [the RQF]. I don’t see this is something that is going to reward me particularly. It is not going to influence my choices.

[Interview 22014-0607, Mid-career Academic, Engineering]

I don’t think it [the RQF] is going to affect what I do very much because I am five years from retirement. As far as I want to get as a full Professor there is nowhere else to be promoted to. I don’t need to please anyone in order to keep going. My research is very active. The RQF in a sense favours me as much as anyone.

[Interview 22191-0807, Senior Academic, Social Science]

Yes, in general I do [feel in control over my career]. Though I am in a fairly unique position in the sense of my position here, being an arrangement between two government departments and the university, by large I feel in control. Yes. To some degree it is in my hands in particular terms of me using time in the next five years to secure future funding from granting bodies. Bu there is nothing at the moment I see from me being here that impedes me from doing that. It’s up to me and what I produce.

[Interview 57369-0607, Senior Academic, Science]

Those academics who positioned themselves as self-assured and confident in their careers and ability to cope with the changes expected from the RQF are the ones in senior positions, who have established career paths and a research track record to back them up. In some instances individual circumstances relating to funding arrangements were indicative of a confident positioning. However, other academics that positioned themselves as in control of their careers did so only
conditionally. These positions show a more differentiated perspective and acknowledge that there is only a limited degree of individual freedom in this matter.

I think I am in control of my future, at least the future hinging on my own performance. If I am fortunate enough to continue my research, I am sure that I will be fortunate enough to continue.

[Interview 68715-0607, Senior Academic, Science]

This university is a very pleasant place to work and I would like to stay working here. That also means I would like to be promoted at some time or another. However, if that looks unlikely for whatever reason and other institutions are advertising positions, when yes I would go somewhere else. And I consider myself a marketable product.

[Interview 44668-0407, Mid-career Academic, Commerce]

But in control? No. You are not because you always rely on grants. Australian Research Council in my case or some other bodies that can provide you with "pesos" and if you don't get them you are kicked out. As simple as that. So you have to be successful in that field and there you can never ever be sure that you are. But I prefer living on three-year contracts or whatever you can get a grant and do what I like than reverting to a more dull existence.

[Interview 76571-0607, Senior Academic, Science]

Do I feel in control of all that? Up to a point I do because it depends a lot on my abilities and qualities. But in some ways it doesn’t. I mean many new directions could take place, which might not be good for me. ... Or even simple things like for instance I have published a book. But if they say books are not good anymore this is negative. From that point of view I am not really in control. But in many ways I am. It depends on me.

[Interview 77574-0407, Early-career Academic, Commerce]
Conditional positioning towards a degree of control over one’s career occurred more often with early- and mid-career academics. However, similar positioning can be found with senior academics in the field of science. That indicates that perceptions of the situation and consequent positioning may differ among disciplines. Differences in funding and resource allocation as well as different means and standards of publication, may have left some disciplines better prepared for a research quality assessment exercise than others.

While some academics expressed a conditional feeling of control over the careers and future in their positioning, others had little confidence. Academics in the early stages of their careers mostly felt that they had very little control and that the implementation of the RQF was more likely to worsen this situation rather than to improve it.

I just try to keep my research going. I try and publish, I try and attract external money. That’s all I can do at the moment. ... In terms of trying to change my strategy as a result of the RQF being implemented I am not in a real position to change my strategy anyway. ... In terms of research all I can do is just keep on applying for grants and just trying to get money in to keep that thing moving along.

[Interview 44117-0607, Early-career Academic, Science]

Absolutely not. No I don’t feel like I am in control of my future at all. In terms of the balance and workload, no.

[Interview 54716-0807, Early-career Academic, Arts]

Do I feel in control of it no. No not at all. I think we have very little say in how that works. I think possibly if you are in a position where you are already a highly productive researcher, and I mean very highly productive, in this faculty you
might have some sway with what kind of opportunities you get. But no I am not in control of that at all.

[Interview 55741-0807, Early-career Academic, Arts]

In general no. I don’t feel in control and that’s one of the frustrating facets of it. There are things out there, they come in two levels. There are things out there in the community and the structure of university, their position in society, which is not under control of anyone in this university. They are not in control of forces outside, the government notably. So that’s one level. Second level of control is management of the university. I don’t think we get much, I don’t think am I consulted much about the direction of the university, no. Decisions are made by the faculty management and the university management.

In regard to consulting people and the consulting mechanisms of this faculty, the consultation is of that kind where we are consulted in order to agree with what has already been decided. And if we don’t we are troublemakers and if we do great for them. So no, I don’t have a sense of being in control of those issues. ... I won’t have to do some things if I don’t want to. I don’t have to do anything on research if I don’t want to in that respect. But there will be a price to pay for that, which is what I already hinted at.

If I pursue research directions of my own I will probably kiss good-bye to being promoted. If I wanted to be promoted further I needed to do certain things. But I do what I want to do. So basically to answer your question I have no sense of control over the university, no sense of control over the faculty direction, or the RQF or what happens in it. I have some sense for me personally about decisions I make within that context. Probably more than any people in other jobs do.

[Interview 68227-0807, Mid-career Academic, Arts]

Positions indicating very little or no confidence regarding control over one's career again show that these emerge more frequently in some disciplines than others. In particular Arts academics demonstrated little faith in their ability to
influence their own direction within their professional environment as well as a sense of frustration with the way things are done - allowing for little individual freedom.

The fourth and final positioning to emerge from the data under the theme of feelings regarding career control positions the topic within a wider context of changes occurring over time. This positioning indicates that the RQF is perceived as but a further step within a wider ongoing trend in higher education policy.

Though I feel I have some control but not as much. I would have said I had a lot more control, if you had said that to me ten years ago, than I do now. I think now I have much less say in that balance of my activities. ... We don’t have as much freedom anymore as we used to.

[Interview 22014-0607, Mid-career Academic, Engineering]

4.3.3 Excellence and Quality in Academia

Although often conflated within the RQF discourse, a significant differentiation between the terms quality and excellence in research emerges from the analysed data. While quality is deemed to be a measurable variable and goal that the RQF sets out to ascertain and ultimately improve upon, excellence constitutes a much vaguer and difficult to define concept. Nevertheless, it is most noticeable in the data that excellence is frequently used as a substitute for quality in public rhetoric. Excellence features prominently with more than 40 references from more than 25 sources. Examples of this discourse include:

The Research Quality Framework: Assessing the quality and impact of research in Australia issues paper will provide a detailed examination of research excellence
and the impact of research, including its broader implications for society through economic, environmental and social benefits. ... Research is a key element of an innovative and economically prosperous nation and should be conducted in a sustained culture of excellence. ... The Australian Government is committed to ensuring that resources provided to carry out research are directed to areas of research excellence and public benefit ... This paper will provide the basis for developing a Research Quality Framework to measure both research excellence and research impact.

(Nelson 2005)

The existing distribution of university research block funding is based on quantitative measures (i.e. numbers of publications, external research income and Higher Degree by Research (HDR) student load and completions) that have been used as proxies for quality. These particular quantitative measures do not provide sufficient information upon which to identify and reward areas of research excellence or to encourage the wider community to increase its investment in Australian research.

Consequently, the Australian Government is committed to the development of a Research Quality Framework (RQF) that will provide a broad assessment mechanism for research quality and impact.


A FUNDAMENTAL principle of national competitive research grants is that applications should be based on excellence, not on the institution to which the researchers belong.

(Barlow 2005)
Excellence as a vague concept however does not remain uncontested within the arena of public macro level discourse regarding the RQF. Some measure of counter positioning is evident in the data. Numerous positions attempt to contest, redefine, specify and reappropriate the elusive concept of excellence.

"Citation has been recognised for a very long time as an indicator of research quality," Ms Muir said. "The point is, Australia is continuing to do pretty well in terms of the excellence and influence of its research."

(Lane 2007)

It will enable us to make the case for academic excellence on our own terms, recognising our diverse outputs instead of measuring everything by the number of papers and citations.

(Schippers 2006)

[The RQF] will focus on research excellence, which will not catch all the important research outcomes.

[Public Support for Science and Innovation, Productivity Commission Research Report, March 2007]

There are macro level voices other than the government employing excellence rhetoric within the data. Macro level actors such as the GO8 (Group of Eight, a lobby organisation representing the eight largest Australian universities) attempt to take positions that allow them to appropriate the excellence discourse in the context of the RQF to further their own goals and agendas.
6.1 Operating at international standards of excellence

A major challenge is that of being able to operate at a sustainable level of quality by internationally benchmarked standards. Essentially this involves being able to attract and retain high quality scholars and students and to provide them with the high quality facilities and equipment they need to perform at their best, in a university culture that values excellence.

[GO8, Seizing the opportunities: A Group of Eight policy discussion paper; 6 June 2007]

It is the GO8's hope that once the RQF is in place it will produce credible measures of the quality and broader impact of Australian university research in a global context, increase the overall quality and focus of Australia's research effort by targeting available resources on the basis of excellence, and strengthen the case for increased public investment in university research.


At the meso level discourse excellence can only be found within the annual reports and strategic planning documents of the studied university. Although these texts make references to research quality, excellence in the context of the RQF is not a term frequently found in the meso level discourse.

The overall aim of the Research Strategic Plan is to facilitate the University vision by supporting excellent research that has international and national recognition and brings a sustained benefit to the community.

[Annual Report 2004 of the studied university]

Vision
To advance our international reputation as an outstanding research and teaching University distinguished by excellence, leadership and innovation in the quality of our research, in student learning and achievement, and in engagement with our communities.

The University will achieve its Vision by promoting:

- Excellent and Innovative Teaching
- Excellent and Innovative Research ...

[Strategic Plan 2005-2007 of the studied university]

Guiding Principles

As a university community, ... strives for:

- Excellence ...

[Annual Report 2008 of the studied university]

Finally, analysis of the micro level discourse demonstrates a noticeable absence of the term excellence. In fact, only one direct reference is found in the data. However, this account does not just take up the higher level discursive concept of excellence provided, but counter-positions him-/herself by attempting to provide a more specific position and understanding of the meaning of excellence:

But if there is a correct signal based on the RQF that it is the academic excellence, and then I say academic excellence it means both teaching and research, to be the criteria for progression then so be it. I think that should be flagged early on in
somebody’s career.

[Interview 12347-0407, Mid-career Academic, Commerce]

4.3.4 Elitism

The data revealed two closely related themes, both of which are linked to structural changes in the Australian higher education sector. These two are elitism and the stratification of existing higher education institutions. Concerns regarding elitism refer to a more informal divide among academics regarding reputation and individual identities in the perception of peers and one's social environment in the workplace as well as access to the institution's internal research funding allocation. Stratification of the higher education system on the other hand refers to a formal separation of the system into institutions with research capabilities and teaching only institutions, a de facto return to the system that existed before the Dawkins reforms (for a detailed discussion of the Dawkins reforms refer to section 1.3.1). The latter potential threat of the reintroduction of a stratified system brought about by the RQF is introduced in further detail in section 4.4.1 under storyline 3.

Elitism as a theme featured in four data sources with a total of ten references. While elitism only emerges in the micro level discourse collected among interviews with academics, the potential stratification of the higher education system also emerges as a theme in the broader macro level discourse.

The example of one academic demonstrates that the threat of increasing elitism had effects on an individual and personal level, which in the academic's discourse emerges as an attack on his/her intellectual capabilities and self-image of occupational identity.
If what’s driving here is just an elitism based on got-in-top-grade-journals everybody else is dumb as shit, that’s not healthy. ...

I also think there is plenty of danger in identifying clusters of capability and saying the rest of you are no darn good.

[Interview 44178-0407, Mid-career Academic, Commerce]

Elitism under the RQF regime is seen as a system where the only "the rich get richer" or in other words researchers that produce high quality research due to access to larger funds will receive more, while the vast majority of academics would miss out on research funding in future allocations. This prospect is seen as counterproductive as it would discourage research activity and reduce quality for the vast majority of the academic workforce.

The negative part I think is that it’s got a lot of potential to create a sense of elitism and be counterproductive for the research activity of the majority of academic staff. So I’d hate to see a situation where only the rich get richer and the poor get poorer. ...

If it’s quality only, and not quantity, then let’s be frank there is a hundred academic staff in this faculty. Eighty five maybe of them or ninety will say I can’t do that. I am not going to get in an A grade journal. I don’t have any impact against the criteria that they are going to measure. Whatever the other criteria are that measure quality. The risk is that you disengage a lot of people. And they’ll say it’s just for the A team. That’s where I see is a big risk of the RQF. You can’t let it just be for the A team. ... what does it mean for everybody else? ... I will start with the negative, [the RQF could] result in an A team versus B team, an elitism. I don’t think is a positive thing in any way in a university environment. Particularly in a place like this because there are so many people on the B team. In many of the universities around Australia … they are very worried about this because they got almost all B team people. We had the binary system in terms of,
you are too young to know about that, but before the universities came in their current structure, the unified national system, we had a binary system. We had colleges of advanced education and universities. There were places like all the institutions that made up the UWS, like Macarthur Institute of Higher Education, even this place which was started off as a college of teaching. There were very much teachings done there and not research. Serious academics don’t go there. They go to the sandstone unis. I don’t know if that’s healthy? I think that to develop and train the people in the UWS or even here we need some staff. We need to attract them, be able to keep people that can develop and share their knowledge, diffuse their skills with people. Otherwise you just stay dumb. Nobody is teaching you. I see lots of negative potential in the elitism of the RQF. ...

It also has a negative potential to develop a rich get richer poor get poorer all the best people go to the best places, which is a negative in terms of democracy.

[Interview 44178-0407, Mid-career Academic, Commerce]

Notions of elitism are also found in response to existing mechanisms of research resource allocation within the institutions – the so-called Centres of Excellence – in the light of the looming RQF implementation. Positions emerging from the data show critique as well as support for this form of elitism.

Let me just give you a quick example on that. That is that the research centre, sorry, the funded research centres by the university centre is an example of that. So you have about ten centres of excellence that are funded. In fact they are university funded research centres. None of them is in the Faculty of Commerce. Most of them are in science and engineering. ...

They [academics not affiliated with a Centre of Excellence] think they are teaching only, they are here just to fund the research that is done over in those places.

[Interview 44178-0407, Mid-career Academic, Commerce]
We support those research groupings in direct ways in terms of funding and indirect ways in terms of giving preference to internal grant applications coming from those research groupings, the allocation of research scholarships coming from those groupings, and overall the development of research activity. That is not to say that we don't support research outside of those research groupings. But there is preference given to those. The expectation is that therefore performance will grow in breath but also in terms of quality.

[Interview 46384-0907, Senior Management, Research and Innovation Division]

The data also demonstrate that positions emphasising the negative aspects of elitism and elitist approaches to research funding allocation are not shared by all the academics interviewed for the sample. Similar to the findings of section 4.3.2 it appears that more senior academics occupy more moderate positions, portraying confidence in their ability to manoeuvre future changes and emphasising opportunities over threats.

In terms of research there is an enormous scale for doing a range of research even despite the university's focus on research strengths [aka Centres of Excellence], which I see as really constraining. But within the Arts Faculty they have taken it very broadly based. Usually any good researcher can find a way to put their research into the picture. So I'd say there is enormous opportunities, enormous flexibility to do a whole range of things.

[Interview 22191-0807, Senior Academic, Arts]

4.3.5  Publication of Research Outputs and Publication Outlets

There is a close link between publication outlets and an academic's identity in the workplace. The chosen outlet, e.g. conferences, books, journals, the quality of the
outlet, which in turn reflects on the quality of the publication, as well as publication frequency or quantity shape an academic’s reputation among his/her peers. Reputation feeds back into an academics self-reflection process and hence plays a role in the ongoing process that creates a self-image or identity. Furthermore, over the past few years formal performance reviews and annual assessments have become common in many universities. Thus, the characteristics of one’s publications also feed into the relationships and identity forming process between academics and their management within the institutions they work in.

The significance of publication and publication outlets and hence the space an academic has to manoeuvre within the RQF discourse as well as the wider discourse of academic research, the available positions for the individual within the discourse and how positioning can or cannot be negotiated is demonstrated by its prominence in the collected data. The theme of publication and publication outlets features twenty distinct positions and seventy references from about fifteen sources.

Academics responded to the changes that the RQF was expected to impose on publication practices and publication outlets in a number of ways. The most prominent topic within this subset of the data is the introduction of a journal ranking list which evaluates the quality of academic journals and hence the material published in these journals. Other positions are concerned with changes to the choice of publication outlets, the relationship between quantity and quality of research publication as well as increased pressure to publish and self-censorship.

The implementation of a journal ranking list, which categorises journals according to the research quality they represent, triggers revaluations of research published years ago. The retrospective nature of the exercise left academics with few options to adapt to this process other than to carefully negotiate which of their research outputs could be submitted to the RQF. While to some academics the list
may have been a confirmation of their perception of the quality of their work and their own research performance, to others it appeared detrimental to not just their identity and hence motivation but also their career and future in the higher education sector. The example of one academic underscores the severity of the effects of the journal ranking list:

> Well, I had the one guy who wanted to negotiate with me about being in the RQF. He probably had a hundred journal articles. But practically none of them were in ranked journals. His career in fact was dead because of the journal rankings. But that is not because of the mean journal list. It is because this person had taken the cheapest way. He knew exactly what he was doing. People in their fields know what a crap journal and what a good journal is.  
> [Interview 87168-0907, Senior Management, Commerce]

The implementation of the journal ranking list had the power to transform an academic’s identity from one of a successful researcher into someone who could not even make a contribution to a national exercise of research quality assessment. It is not surprising that the position that academics took towards the journal ranking list is one of cynical fatalism:

> ... that depends on who determines the quality of particular journals.  
> [Interview 44668-0407, Mid-career Academic, Commerce]

Similar questions were also raised at the macro level of this discourse. Here the emphasis lies on the issue of conflating research quality with the publication of research output in mainstream academic journals:
... some excellent work appears in specialist publications outside or even opposed to the mainstream. To give a subjective example, some of the dullest work in sociology is published in high-status American journals almost exclusively concerned with quantitative analysis.

(Travers 2005)

The question of who determines journal quality is also recognised by the management of the faculties and university. A manager commented:

... which are the important journals in which area? Academics disagree with that quite often. And they have. In fact we have allowed there to be comments made from the academics on the lists that have come out. So people can put a case forward for particular journals being incorrectly ranked.

[Interview 53475-0907, Management, Commerce]

People haven’t been able to know in all of the journals ... , which are the ones that, from an Australian viewpoint, are considered the best to publish in? Both the best Australian journals and the international ones, people probably had their own idea as an academic or in their profession as to what are the best ones.

[Interview 77147-0907, Management, Library]

The significance of the implementation of a journal ranking list is underscored by the response of academics to the announcement of this instrument. One young academic went so far to write and publish a poem that reflects upon the issue of the ranking list:

Up the greasy pole we climb Seeking academic success Publish! Publish! Is the cry But where to place our bets?
Journals ranked A-star or A, of course these are the best...

Success in those ranked B or C, Yes! We’re on the climb! We’ve got the lines on our CVs But were we wasting time?

(Cortese 2009:300)

The issues raised by the implementation of the journal ranking affected some disciplines more than others. While disciplines in the sciences have had formal journal rankings of different persuasions for years, this practice was not as common in other disciplines:

In Arts and Creative Arts particularly the question of impact factors of journals came up all the time. Lots of journals don’t have impact factors. In fact many more of them didn’t have impact factors than they do now. That was a fairly major issue. There hadn’t been this ranking of journals that has proceeded and is still imperfect. But none of that had occurred yet. There were a lot of concerns about how anyone would judge quality of a journal.

[Interview 46384-0907, Senior Management, Research and Innovation Division]

That was and is an issue for us. It is a bit of a problem with the ranking of journals. Rankings do not always reflect the importance of the variety or diversity of research in Humanities and Social Sciences. There are so many specialised areas. Sometimes it is much better to publish in a smallish journal that is specialised in your area and that will be read by the people who are interested in your particular area of research. It could be that with the effect of the journal rankings there will be much more competition to get into the big journals, the once that have the highest rankings. But those are not necessarily the journals that will have the greatest effect on the research community. That is something that is of some concern to us in this area. The ranking of journals and the fact that metrics
are problematic in our area, that are major concerns.  
[Interview 68472-0907, Senior Management, Arts]

The data demonstrate that across academic micro and management meso level discourse an agreement prevailed that the RQF and in particular the implementation of a research journal quality ranking list would have significant implications for publication outlets, in turn future research and the direction the work of academic researchers would take. In other words what subject matter an academic would choose to research would be mainly determined by where it could be published rather than the researchers own interests, curiosity or the significance of the contribution to knowledge that a particular piece of research could make:

... there will be an increased focus on higher ranking journals, journals with a higher impact factor, i.e. rating by Thompson ...
[Interview 78815-0407, Early-career Academic, Commerce]

I guess the only thing is probably once they'll publish the list of journals for example it may just make it clearer. We will be deliberately targeting the top journals. That’s the only thing. We were already but the list doesn't exist now. It will tell us whether the journals we are targeting are truly the top or the best. It would be nice.  
[Interview 91999-0607, Senior Academic, Engineering]

I am sure that it will change the way academics look at things. I think it will change the way or they'll be forced to change the way they work on research in terms of looking more critically at where they are publishing. I think people have already been doing that for the last X years anyway.  
[Interview 68714-0607, Senior Academic, Science]
In terms of actual contents or what you are researching I haven’t had any real sense that it’s gonna affect that. As far as I understood it, it’s been more about where you publish. It is not so much about, as far as I understood it. The pressure hasn’t been so much about what you research as where you publish that research.

[Interview 55741-0807, Early-Career Academic, Arts]

The only anxiety that remains I think and again because that is so existential for us is the journal ranking list. In the preparations of the RQF a journal ranking list was developed in the area of business. Again that hit people quite hard. Before that people could publish somewhere and would say that is really the best journal in my field. They could just bullshit their way through. Once there is a journal ranking list you can’t do that anymore. If your journal isn’t on the list it is probably dodgy and your CV is not looking that flash anymore. It is scary for people to have a journal ranking list. ... people of course chose their pet journal that was A star, that was on the bottom lowest end of A star. Of course they are scared now it might drop down to A. Again all I can do is talk to them and say look it is not a good idea to choose the worst of the lot. It is better for you to have a bit of a portfolio strategy. So if something changes in the ranking list it does not affect you as badly as if you had just targeted one journal. And the one suddenly got dropped off the list and your CV is dead.

[Interview 87168-0907, Senior Management, Commerce]

Academics uttered concerns that the changes to research outlets and directions described in the previous paragraphs could lead to increased pressure to publish and drastic changes to research culture such as ‘publishing for publishing’s sake’:
I also know that it has put an enormous pressure, an enormous amount of pressure on academics to publish. Both in terms of quantity and quality. ... So it has put pressure on in the sense that I am teaching full time but I also feel like I have to be publishing an enormous amount in order to be competitive for permanent employment. ... also I just feel like I need to publish stuff just for the sake of publishing. Even though it's not stuff that I am happy with. ... I am not saying the papers are of a poor quality. I am just saying I wouldn't be happy with them. I probably want to develop them more. I don't feel like there is really an opportunity to spend a lot of time. ...

R: So you'd say that with less pressure you would probably publish a lower quantity but a higher quality?
I: Yeah probably.

[Interview 54716-0807, Early-career Academic, Arts]

I have never been very keen on publishing for publishing's sake. I reckon when I came here I was too old to get into that thing I reckon. I previously worked at a place where that would have been thoroughly deteriorating.

[Interview 91228-0607, Senior Academic, Engineering]

... there is an increased pressure on universities to perform in order to survive ... this will motivate higher quality output from academics in order to "survive"

[Interview 78815-0407, Early-career Academic, Commerce]

Furthermore, positioning regarding publication outlets demonstrates an expected move away from non-journal publications such as conferences and books towards a focus on journals as the main publication outlet for research. The extensive and time consuming review process for journal publications requires more time and effort from academics. While this development may foster the move
towards quality improvement intended by the RQF, it may be a threat to forms of publication that have a legitimate reason for existence other than quality. Research conferences have a networking function and aid a more rapid dissemination of ideas among the academic community, textbooks and monographs have an important role in the education of students as well as other publications that inform and educate the general public regarding important scientific developments.

But when a journal ranking system will be introduced by the RQF then the quality does count, where you publish, and of course then the focus would be much more. It is expected from academics to look more into it, try to get their work published in quality journals. Definitely not any more in conferences as this school has done in previous years. That basically a lot of people had the focus of well I am just going to go for a conference paper because it is just as equal in DEST points as a journal paper but it’s much easier to get. There will be a change going from quantity to quality, I think. So that will have an effect on expectations and outcomes of your research.

[Interview 74188-0407, Early-career Academic, Commerce]

Publication outputs are a pretty strong indicator of how seriously people took and are taking the exercise [RQF]. I think that probably over the last three or so years that quality has increased…. We have less conference papers and more journal articles, which is what we need.

[Interview 67136-0907, Senior Management, Research and Innovation Division]

...models of assessment have forced artificial behaviour in Australia’s research community; that the pressure to show results favours multiple, short outputs of variable quality rather than the solid, definitive publication of monograph length that, in certain disciplines, was previously the norm.

(Derricourt 2007)
But conference are less nice, are less valued than a journal publication, which is how it should be I suppose. So my focus has gone from conference publications to journal publications. And so rather than getting to write a conference paper I target journals rather than conferences. That’s my step.

[Interview 22417-0407, Early-career Academic, Commerce]

I think we as academics, no I will, I will just focus solely on journal articles. I used to write sections for CCHs, business guides and accounting guides. I will stop doing that because I won’t have the time to do it while I am concentrating solely on journals. ... There is a textbook that a colleague and I were thinking of doing. That will probably stop now because it doesn’t give us any points. I will get more points and therefore more rewards by focusing on journal articles. Will I be as happy about doing that, probably not? But that’s the way it is.

I have got one article, with my co-author, we are looking at publishing it in Accounting, Organizations and Society. And that’s seen by many as being the premier journal for accounting people. It also requires a lot more effort than if you were just publishing in The Journal of Accounting Research, or something like that because they have higher demands. They are more critical with what they get. We presume we are going to have to rewrite it at least twice before it gets in. That’s time. Time you could spent writing other articles for middle-of-the-road journals where we could get published.

[Interview 44668-0407, Mid-career Academic, Commerce]
4.4 Second Storyline - The Teaching-Research-Complex

4.4.1 Stratification of the Australian Higher Education Sector and the Academic Profession

In section 4.3.1 of this chapter I introduced a number of concerns regarding potential side effects of the implementation of the RQF under the theme of academic freedom. Probably the most salient side effect that emerged from the data analysis is the fear of a separation of the Australian higher education sector into research-active and teaching-only academic staff or even research institutions and teaching-only institutions. Such a development would mean a de facto return to the pre-Dawkins era, a two-tiered higher education sector. The potential threat of a stratification of the Australian higher education system in the light of the implementation of the RQF is one of the most prominent themes emerging from the data. It features in more than 60 references from more than 50 sources.

Although the macro level discourse did not make direct references to the possibility of a separated higher education system as a consequence of the RQF, public comments regarding the Dawkins reforms and its ‘one-size-fits-all’ foundations by Julia Bishop, Education Minister at the time, sparked and fuelled speculation at the meso and micro level of discourse.

The Research Quality Framework, as it is known, is the biggest looming issue for universities across the nation. Many have spent significant amounts of money in the past 12 months on trials and extra staff to prepare for its introduction. They will fight for more than $600 million in funds linked to their research performance as it is measured under the new system.
Ms Bishop acknowledged it could further unravel the unified university system created under former Labor education minister John Dawkins. “We must use it as a tool for greater diversity in the higher education sector, focusing universities’ attention on their strengths and moving away from the one-size-fits-all mould of universities into which they were collectively pushed in the 1980s,” she said. (Illing 2006)

These comments were underpinned by a government proposal to divide universities into three teaching and research categories announced about one year earlier.

PROPOSALS by the federal Government to classify Australia’s universities into three teaching and research categories would marginalise some institutions and lead to complacency in others, according to Deakin University Vice-Chancellor Sally Walker. (Perry 2005)

The macro level discourse around the issue of a stratified higher education system was taken up at the micro level and led to widespread speculation and rumours among the academic community.

... about the RQF. And on that basis we will be categorised as whether we are a research institution or not.

[Interview 12347-0407, Mid-career Academic, Commerce]

I think, if this RQF does come in, I think I have heard that the Australian universities are going to be into the future say in the next ten or twenty years they gonna start to separate even more and become more research focused
universities and more teaching focused universities.

[Interview 44117-0607, Early-career Academic, Science]

There is anxiety, I guess, that this process would lead to a situation where it would be altered to teaching rather than having a teaching and research focus. Because the large universities will always going to be the ones that are able to present the best case in terms of productivity and so on. ... In terms of the worst case scenario, the division between research only teaching only or research concentrated and teaching concentrated institutions, I guess that is a possible outcome.

[Interview 55741-0807, Early-career Academic, Arts]

While university management discarded these speculations as ‘myth’, there was a common understanding that the implementation of the RQF would at the least function as a league table and reinforce a hierarchy among universities with regards to research activity and funding. There were fears that smaller universities in particular may suffer a loss of funding and hence research capabilities under the RQF regime.

The common myth was that they wanted to separate them into teaching and research universities.

[Interview 87168-0907, Senior Management, Commerce]

Universities fear it [the RQF] could lead to a de facto league table of universities. The new rules, which are not yet finalised, are expected to reward research concentration, effectively starving smaller players of funds.

(Maiden 2005)
However, there is recognition that in setting up a hierarchy of universities, and there already is an unstated hierarchy of universities in Australia, it is just formalising that in a sense. In setting up that hierarchy in relation to research it is going to maybe make certain universities in higher demand for international students. Therefore it will affect the overall performance of an institution, the overall financial performance in attracting international and other students.

[Interview 46384-0907, Senior Management, Research and Innovation Division]

Apart from that certainly in the initial stage there seems to be quite a lot at stake. If that's what it means, it might mean for small universities such as this university whether it is going to get shut out from major research funding and be relegated to some lower tier.

[Interview 55741-0807, Early-career Academic, Arts]

This discourse of a stratified higher education system, both at the macro and micro level, left its mark on the positioning that academics took regarding the issue. The positions that emerge from the interview data show a link between research, as a part of academic work, and identification with the academic profession. The data demonstrate that both the research identity or reputation of the institution an academic works at as well as an academic's own research activities have significant implications for an academic's self-image or identity. Academics refer to research as a matter of pride and to higher education institutions without research as not being universities. To some academics research constitutes a building block to their identity important enough to take positions that indicate that they would rather quit their job than continue in a position that does not allow for research activity.

Yes. Our faculty is very intent on our research effort. It is a matter of great pride to us. It is a matter of great importance to us to have a strong research profile. It is
very important to staff.

[Interview 68472-0907, Senior Management, Arts]

An institution that doesn’t do research is not a university for me. And a teaching institution even if it is full of degrees is not a university for me. Universities must do research.

[Interview 68227-0807, Mid-career Academic, Arts]

If this faculty was seen as not a contributor to research we wouldn’t get the money, we wouldn’t get the support. We’d start ending up teaching more and more. For me that would be a disaster. I like teaching but I also like doing research. If I was in an institution that wasn’t doing research I’d be looking for another job. And so would other good researchers and there would be a flow out of people out of the faculty. That’s the potentially dangerous consequence. ... For me personally it is the part of my job that I enjoy the most. I like teaching but I would quit an institution that did no research. Well, I wouldn’t necessarily because of the mortgage but you know what I mean. I’d be wanting to move.

[Interview 68227-0807, Mid-career Academic, Arts]

### 4.4.2 The Education of Future Generations of Australian Researchers

With 22 references from 13 different sources the education of future researchers constitutes a significant theme within the analysed data. The theme resonates within the micro level discourse as well as the macro level discourse around the RQF. However, only one reference regarding the theme emerged from the meso level discourse.

The micro level data show that the issue of educating future generations of researchers is mentioned most often by science academics. All but one micro level reference regarding the theme are found in interviews with science and engineering
academics. This is not surprising, as a collaborative researcher culture where
academics work on research projects with students is more established in science
than it is in other disciplines.

In the light of a potential separation of the academic work force or even the
higher education sector into research active and teaching only staff or institutions
many academics take a counter-position due to concerns regarding the education of
future generations of researchers in a separated system. This also poses the
question of where exactly one could draw the line between teaching and research.

If we were to end up in a situation where we had departments that have no
research capacity we would lose the credibility to do postgraduate training. ... But
I can't imagine doing research in any other environment than the university
environment because I enjoy the juxtaposition of teaching and research. I see the
university as my most important environment not so much as in doing research
but in training the next generation of researchers.
[Interview 68715-0607, Senior Academic, Science]

Also I see postgraduate researchers being integral at various parts of the work I
do. I put a huge effort into postgraduate students. Teaching at that level, at the
level of postgraduate students, is incredibly important. Any process that
reinforces and enhances the capability of postgraduate research I think is
extremely important to my research field.
[Interview 57369-0607, Senior Academic, Science]

... there is a link with teaching, as this is needed for the education of the next
generation of Australian researchers ...
[Interview 78815-0407, Early-career Academic, Commerce]
Most researchers say we'd love to just do research but the reality is, if you don't prepare good students you wouldn't be able to do research. Maybe you could do research for five years then suddenly you don't have good students or they are not well prepared and you can't continue your research. Teaching is important because that is the core business. But it is also important to influence the students even from a selfish point of view. If you want good students to do your research you need to teach them well first.

[Interview 91999-0607, Senior Academic, Engineering]

But when you say research in the university context, if research is something done with research students how much of this is teaching anyway? ... So do we call it research or do we call it teaching? Both, isn’t it? It's the teaching part of research as you might say. It's teaching out of research in a sense.

[Interview 91228-0607, Senior Academic, Engineering]

Calls for the importance of the education of future generations of researchers, in particular in the light of an aging Australian academic workforce, are confirmed in the data covering macro level discourse.

The role of research education is a fundamental responsibility of all Australian universities. Providing an adequate supply of researchers with higher degrees is critical to ensuring Australia’s future capacity to sustain high quality and high impact research. Research education must therefore be included in the RQP.

[NTEU, Research Quality Framework Response to the Issue Paper, March 2005]

... he [Ian Chubb, Australian National University Vice-Chancellor] singled out crumbling research infrastructure and the loss of research talent as the critical areas in need of reform. He said too many talented researchers were being "lost in the system" due to an ageing academic workforce, short-term research grants and
a declining proportion of domestic higher degree research graduates. "Australia cannot afford to be so narrow and mean-spirited about developing the next generation of intellectual leaders," he said.

(Illing 2007b)

Researcher supply and demand

To help inform the policy debate, the Group of Eight offers the following analysis of trends in the training of Australia’s future researchers. ...

• Australia is producing only 2.3 new doctorates per 100 university graduates, compared with 3.9 in Canada, 10.1 in Switzerland and 11.2 in Germany …
• Australian PhD student commencements are precariously low in a number of fields that are critical for Australia’s sustainability and competitiveness. …
• Just over one in four HDR graduates take up jobs in education and university research.

[Group of Eight, GO8 backgrounder, No. 3 November 2007]

Meso level data shows that there is an increasing recognition of the significance of collaboration in research between academics and students in disciplines where this hasn’t been a salient feature of the research culture in the past. A senior manager in the Commerce Faculty commented:

I think the RQF put a bit more emphasis on the research. I think that was a good thing. It didn’t detract from teaching. It is arguable that the effect of teaching in a university context is related to research. There hasn’t been a lot of that over the years in Commerce. That is people working with their students on research projects the way the sciences were. It’s a science paradigm. There is a bit more of this now. So the teaching is coming through the process of actual research. Which
is probably a good thing again.

[Interview 53475-0907, Management, Commerce]

4.4.3 Workload Issues and “Split Identities”

The RQF functions as a catalyst regarding many issues of higher education policy and the academic workplace which precede it and remain unresolved. One such issue that becomes more salient within the context of the RQF is workload and the requirement of the academic to split his/her time between the roles of teacher, researcher, administrator and active participant in community engagements. Although not as prominent in the data as other themes, with more than 40 references from more than 30 sources it constitutes a significant chapter of the storyline that describes the teaching-research-complex.

Workload as a theme was mostly featured in the micro and meso level data. At the macro level the theme is mainly restricted to newspaper sources. Macro level references are so few that they are considered negligible for the purpose of this analysis. The absence of workload in macro level discourse is not surprising as workload is a micro-management issue and policy makers hardly consider such issues in any great detail in the bigger picture of policy development.

The main positions towards workload issues that emerged from the data are concerned with three broader topics. These are first, researcher workload and administrative tasks, second, researcher workload and teaching, and finally, changing employment structures in academia and casualisation of the academic workforce.

A science academic in an early stage of his career points out that there is a link between seniority and the administrative workload one has to cope with. Furthermore, the amount of external funding an academic can attract may help with
relief from administrative tasks. This is particularly relevant in the light of the RQF as it fuelled fears among academics that those not sufficiently contributing to the RQF and hence the funding attached to it may find themselves pulled out of research positions and overburdened with administrative and teaching work. Young academics feared for the potential effects this could have on developing a research career.

I think it all depends on the stage of the career that you are at because a lot of the more senior academics can, you know they are pulling in a lot of external money, can have people, senior people in their lab that are responsible for the day-to-day running of the lab and for the day-to-day supervision of a lot of the honours students and things like that. That’s a luxury I don’t have being at the early stages. That adds to the difficulties as well. You have to spend a little bit more time in lab management, looking after OH&S, which you use. Things like that chew up a lot of administrative time.

[Interview 44117-0607, Early-career Academic, Science]

Other young academics deal with the issue of administrative workload by taking a counter position in giving it a low priority compared to their research and teaching commitments.

Look it’s not something I think about all that much. I teach full-time a huge teaching load and subjects I have taught for the first time. And I try to publish. So administrative stuff just goes to the back of my brain.

[Interview 54716-0807, Early-career Academic, Arts]

More senior academics reflected upon increasing administrative workloads in the light of an ongoing trend that precedes the RQF and its additional administrative
tasks to prepare one’s submission paperwork as well as its future implications. There are counter positions to this trend emerging from the data that question its effects upon the availability of the required time to produce the quality research that the RQF is attempting to encourage among academics.

I think that what has been more difficult and increasingly so in the last say five to ten years is trying to get that balance right. A lot of that has to do with additional administrative loads, additional devolution of tasks down from central administration to the faculty to the academic unit level. All of which may be cost saving and may be time saving overall but it adds to the tasks of each individual. That's been a bit a source of frustration in terms of job satisfaction. I think the difficulty also with increasing numbers has been to try and keep workloads and teaching loads down to a reasonable amount and insure that staff can quarantine enough time to maintain their research and also look for new opportunities. So I think that you need both. Trying to maintain that balance is quite a juggle and increasingly so.
[Interview 68714-0607, Senior Academic, Science]

Meso level data tells a somewhat different story. Again, this is not surprising as workload has traditionally been an issue causing conflict between academics and the management of universities and faculties. The workload management narrative presented by managerial staff states that a teaching focus does not have to be a career breaker.

But the university has been very good in working with workload issues in order to allow people who want to concentrate on teaching and don't have an emphasis on research. So they don't suffer in terms of their career development.
[Interview 53475-0907, Management, Commerce]
Managers’ accounts also state that there are workload management models in place that do allow people who produce a particular amount and quality of research to have lighter teaching loads. Managers are quite aware in their positions that the RQF will put further tension on those models and may lead to a wider divide between research-active and teaching-focused academic staff.

Some faculties like Education I know have put that into their workload management. So if you are publishing a lot the next year you might get fewer classes because you have got a research profile. If you are not publishing a lot you might end up with more classes.

[Interview 77147-0907, Management, Library]

... in 2002, the so-called workload model was introduced. The whole idea of the workload model was that if you are doing a lot in research you are going to get a lighter teaching load. In many ways the RQF was just reinforcing this fact. People got used to the idea a lot earlier I think. Again a lot of people denied it. But the moment the workload model was announced it was quite clear that that’s a model for trading off different strengths.

The moment the workload model was here it was quite clear that there may well be teaching focused staff and research focused staff. The RQF then probably as I said was a bit of a sledgehammer. It wasn’t as gentle as the introduction of the workload model. The workload model still allowed to just do something. Whereas the RQF said here is a ranking list and something is not good enough. It’s actually got to be of quality.

[Interview 87168-0907, Senior Management, Commerce]

However, management acknowledges that there is ‘a fault in the system’ that doesn’t allow academics to give a 100% effort to their teaching and produce quality research at the same time.
It is also people looking at their own distribution of effort and realising that you can’t give a hundred per cent to teaching and have any time left to do research. It’s how they organise their teaching commitment. ... That’s a fault in the system in essence. Because nobody was keeping an eye on this nobody was looking at research performance as an institution wide priority. Therefore, it didn’t really have a trickle-down effect on everybody’s workload.

[Interview 46384-0907, Senior Management, Research and Innovation Division]

Teaching workloads just like administrative workloads feature prominently in academics’ positioning when it comes to justifying their research output or lack of output.

But often for good teaching, especially at the first year level, I mean it displaces a lot of energy from your research. So teaching can be quite honourable and that can come at the expense of some research activity. So that’s my experience from the past.

[Interview 12347-0407, Senior Academic, Commerce]

Academics also expressed fears based on past experiences with workload negotiations that the implementation of the RQF would put them into an even more difficult place, both in their negotiations with management as well as their personal time management to achieve the expected heightened research quality standards.

We have presented statistics to senior executives at the university not that long ago showing our teaching loads. They were complaining we weren’t writing as many research grants, the teaching academics. And we said that’s because, we showed them the data, our teaching loads have gone up by 35 per cent over the
last few years. We don't have time to write as many research grants. And they said well we don't accept that. You should still be doing just as much. So it is already happening and the RQF will just make that worse I think.

[Interview 22014-0607, Mid-career Academic, Engineering]

Particularly younger academics speak of 'shock' when talking about their experience of trying to adjust to the demands of the 'split identity' of the academic profession and its two major roles of teacher and researcher.

The initial shock of just how much time teaching took out of your own time. That's just amazing. It has just really, really put the screws on research in terms of myself getting out into the lab. I have got an honours student, which I am supervising, a PhD student, which I am co-supervising, which is sort of helping me keep along with the research. But it's not going as fast as you wanted to. I still try and get out into the lab as much as I can. It really has put a bit tension on the time that I can spend getting into the lab.

[Interview 44117-0607, Early-career Academic, Science]

Finally, changing employment structures and the casualisation of the academic workforce emerged from the data as issues that may be fuelled by and driven further by the implementation of the RQF. While university management presents these developments as a remedy to the workload issues discussed earlier, it also acknowledges that this solution is not free of flaws.

There is a workload issue for academics, how they balance their research and their teaching. I know there are a lot of sessional staff employed to support and allow researchers, academics to get on with their research. That can work really
well or it can work not so well depending on the relationship between the
sessional staff and the full time academics. It can actually work. I have seen
fabulous examples of it in science where you have got a Post-Doc or PhD student
who gets an opportunity.
Their supervisor or whoever runs the lab buys out teaching and they get the
opportunity to develop their teaching skills as well as their research skills in a
closely supervised environment. That’s fabulous because they are building their
future academic skills.
...
But obviously in some areas that does not work so well. For example people
coming in to provide lectures and tutorials but don’t get proper professional
development. I know that is an issue that has been recognised by the university.
[Interview 87193-0907, Management, Research and Innovation Division]

This position of the management is however not shared by academics who
feel that restructuring of the staff employed has left fewer academics to teach an
increasing number of students. The academic counter position towards
management states an increasing imbalance between full time staff and staff
employed on short term contracts or as casual academics.

As staff have been leaving, permanent academic staff have been leaving, the
positions have not been refilled by teaching academics but by research-only
positions or by administrative positions relating to commercialization of research
or legal issues associated with intellectual property and that kind of stuff. We
have got more students than we ever had before. We have got fewer people
teaching them. So the pressure on those people who aren’t the star researchers to
be teaching-only had been gradually increasing.
...

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What’s changed is the number, I think the balance of staff. Whereas ten or so years ago in my area nearly all the staff were continual appointments, academic staff continual appointments who did teaching and research. Now the number of people with those kind of appointments is the minority and most of the staff are in contract positions to do with research or in some cases administrative, specialist administrative jobs. There has been a real change as a result of the nature of the appointment status of a lot of the staff in what’s expected from people who actually have continual appointments. By having staff who are specifically appointed to only doing research, only administration that means therefore those of us who are in continual appointments which cover the spectrum everything that they can’t do automatically comes to us. And we are expected to do it.

[Interview 22014-0607, Mid-career Academic, Engineering]

4.4.4 The Teaching-Research-Nexus

The RQF-fuelled discourse regarding a potential stratification of the higher education system in Australia in conjunction with the ongoing and somewhat heightened debate regarding workload issues described in this storyline feed into another closely related theme – the teaching-research nexus or the question of the relationship between teaching and research in academia. One aspect of this question, the education of future generations of researchers, was already introduced in detail in section 4.4.2 and will therefore not be included in this theme. With almost 30 sources resulting in almost 50 direct references as well as further references hinting on the theme the teaching-research-nexus takes a significant position within the data.

Among academics positions regarding this theme cover a wide range from positions describing support for the link between teaching and research to those
that deem it irreconcilable. While some describe teaching as ‘a core business’ others call it ‘a waste of resources’.

So I think the best teachers are also the best researchers in general. The best researchers are not necessarily the best teachers but in general I think it’s true.
[Interview 68715-0607, Senior Academic, Science]

So if you are a good teacher you are likely to be a good researcher and vice versa. That’s my opinion. But others think they are mutually exclusive. That means if you are a good teacher you can’t be a good researcher and vice versa. But to me, I think in order to become a total academic one must be a good teacher and performing well performing well in the classroom and delivering the material in the most efficient manner.
[Interview 12347-0407, Senior Academic, Commerce]

But teaching is important because it is the core business. Most researchers say we’d love to just do research but the reality is, if you don’t prepare good students you wouldn’t be able to do research.
[Interview 91999-0607, Senior Academic, Engineering]

It’s just I find it ridiculous to have somebody who is paid what I am paid doing first year engineering student tutorials. Which is something that I have been doing recently. That just seems like a waste of money for the institution. Doesn’t mean I am not fine to do it. But yeah, pointless.
[Interview 91228-0607, Senior Academic, Engineering]

Finally, there are more elaborate accounts positioning the teaching –research issue as a cyclic process over the time of an academic’s career. The process is
described in a number of phases over one’s career, each of which puts a different weight on either teaching or research depending upon the particular career stage.

I think there is an important life cycle to your question. Which is very important and you might be able to plot this out on a graph for your thesis. You got to think about when people starting their career they are on a teaching path. So they are developing competence, experience. They have got to do that. That’s their core business. They have to be good enough to do that. And that might take four to five years maybe, maybe longer to get that under control.

And then once that is under control people then turn to, move on to research. So there is a playing around a bit. They are just doing their PhD. So it’s a life cycle. And then say second stage research. What you are looking at, there is teaching but it is not that important any more. I will just manage it, keep it under control, and what I am really gonna focus on is myself, rather than the students or the institution, and do research. I’ll come back to research.

The third life cycle could be corporate administration or corporate governance. There you get to a stage there you are leading or managing, playing a sort of an administrative role, sharing experience or whatever, stage three. I guess stage four could be superstar. Superstar in a sense is that you are so good that you are working close with the industry and you are getting a lot of grants and you have got a cluster of research students surrounding you and a cluster of similar academics. You bring in lots of research income. That’s very rare but that could be stage four. Stage five could be you become a vice chancellor. Stage six could be death, who knows. That’s sort of where it is.

[Interview 44178-0407, Mid-career Academic, Commerce]

The different positions regarding the teaching-research-nexus are a strong indicator to the individual academics’ identities. It becomes apparent that some try to foster a strong researcher identity in the light of the looming RQF
implementation. While others present an academic identity that strives for a balanced approach to the teaching-research question, giving both teaching and research almost equal significance in their positioning. Some accounts even go so far as to tie the requirement to be an active teacher and researcher to their definition of the identity of the 'total academic', as quoted earlier in this section, or the 'true academic'.

Research is my game. So it is obviously incredibly important to me. It's not just research that's initiated through me and I have got a research fellow working with me.

[Interview 57369-0607, Senior Academic, Science]

For me personally since I do do a fair amount of publications, it's important to me that I am sitting in a group that is doing research. And I have enough stuff to be in there, which I do right now. ... My publication record is one of the best in the faculty.

[Interview 68227-0807, Mid-career Academic, Arts]

So I think there is a complimentary between the two. And in terms of my professional development I conduct research and try to be a very good lecturer. So for my record had been that my teaching evaluations had been well judged by the students to be well above average. In most cases my average is around five or exceeding five on a scale of one to six.

[Interview 12347-0407, Senior Academic, Commerce]

There is a large emphasis on teaching in my career. Partly, well largely because of choice and also because of encouragement from the faculty. I am viewed as a good teacher one who is capable of running large classes.

[Interview 22014-0607, Mid-career Academic, Engineering]
No, no. Cause as being an academic you have to teach, you have to research and you have to do other things to be a true academic. If you cut one of these out you either become a researcher or you become a teacher. And either way you gonna lose something.

[Interview 44668-0407, Mid-career Academic, Commerce]

At the meso and macro level the discourse does not feature strongly one-sided positions such as the ones found at the micro level. The discourse is dominated by positions attempting to promote a balance between teaching and research as well as the so-called scholarship in teaching. The NTEU in particular states a strong position for maintaining the teaching-research-nexus in universities. The scholarship in teaching approach fostered by the university and faculty management appears to be an avenue that allows academics whose research contribution is not deemed sufficient for submission to the RQF exercise to establish an identity. It in turn provides academics with a way out of the negatively tainted identities of the research-inactive or teaching-only academic positions.

The nexus between research and teaching is one of the important defining characteristics of a university and this should be maintained at all costs.


I think that having a balanced portfolio needs to be considered. Here at the university we certainly have a balanced portfolio. Seeking excellence in teaching has I believe a really strong impact on research. But it also has a strong impact on our reputation in teaching for undergraduates. I think at smaller institutions like this university that it is easier to manage that balance. Perhaps that is not true at large institutions like the UNSW or Sydney. ...
If they weren’t going to be included, some of them were fine with that. Some of them really recognised that they needed to raise their own level of activity in research. I think there has been a greater interest from some of those people in defining how they become involved in research or how they make the transition to developing scholarship in teaching. Actually doing research about their teaching, publishing their teaching, becoming engaged in and more teaching focused, and being recognised for it. For some people I think it pushed them off their chairs a little bit. That isn’t necessarily a bad thing.

[Interview 46384-0907, Senior Management, Research and Innovation Division]
4.5 Third Storyline – Culture Clash between a Traditional Model of Academia and New Managerialist Positions

4.5.1 Ambiguity, Uncertainty, Anxiety and Academic Culture Shock

The first theme introduced in this storyline is prominently represented in the data. It comprises more than 40 sources with more than 80 references regarding uncertainty, resulting anxieties among the academic community as well as the clash between the traditional model of academic work and the managerialist culture inherent to the RQF policy. The first part of this theme focuses on the uncertainty and ambiguity surrounding the drawn-out development and implementation process prior to the planned introduction of the RQF. It also identifies feelings of concern and anxiety that developed among the academic community during this time. The second part of the theme covers what can be called a culture shock. The inherently managerialist concepts of the RQF policy are perceived as clashing with traditional models of academia and the self-image academics hold of their profession and their day-to-day work. The present theme is particularly significant to the research questions pursued in this study as it demonstrates side-effects of the RQF policy that have the potential to lead to behavioural changes among academics that are in stark contrast with the proclaimed goals of the policy. Uncertainty and anxiety among the workforce of a university or any other organisation can have negative effects on employee motivation and lead to low morale and hence diminished performance. An academic devoting his/her time to worrying about his/her career, future in the organisation or even in the industry, will not produce the high standards of quality research outputs the government is trying to encourage.
Expressions of uncertainty regarding the implementation of the RQF, details of the procedures and measures it would employ in the assessment exercise, and especially its implications for the future of higher education institutions and what they mean to individual academics and their careers can be found in the data collected at the level of university and faculty management as well as in interviews with academics. University managers faced the uncertainty of how their recruitment decisions would affect the future position of the institution, how outcomes of the assessment exercise might affect funding and how to present their institution in the best light possible. On the other hand management also had to face the concerns and questions of the academics who they were meant to guide through the transition process, while managers lacked the necessary information to do so. One member of the managerial staff interviewed described this as 'the blind leading the blind'.

There were still lots and lots of specific questions that institutions had, individual institutions and cross-institutional issues. In a sense I am not sure that it was leeway the universities had. But more unanswered questions. ... The vagueness of the requirements of the RQF, particularly in relation to impact and particularly in relation to how the assessment might pan out, I think would be more likely to have unintended effects than a more clearly metric based system. Partly because within a more clearly metric based system it is clear where you have to move, what position you have to move from and where you need to go. Therefore, your recruitment criteria are more defined.

[Interview 46384-0907, Senior Management, Research and Innovation Division]

At the time it annoyed the hell out of me. I got very stressed with the timing, the time spent and the uncertainty of it all. It was hard to get anything done. It was all so uncertain.

[Interview 53475-0907, Management, Commerce]
As soon as there is an announcement there is going to be an exercise like that people start second guessing. They start trying to organise themselves in one way or another to optimise the chances of looking good in the final exercise. I mean there was a fair bit of information about it. But it took a long time before there was absolute clarity about it. I think even when we did have final guidelines it still wasn’t clear exactly how the results were going to feed into future funding for research, the distribution of funding.

[Interview 68472-0907, Senior Management, Arts]

Well, until the very end it was rather unclear what we had to do. So we were really the blind leading the blind. Everyone was playing guessing games. ... People got exactly the information that I had at any given point in time. But that also implies that I was never able to say yes you are definitely in. We all lived with this uncertainty.

[Interview 87168-0907, Senior Management, Commerce]

Among academics uncertainty was even more widely spread as most of the information they received was of a second-hand nature, filtered down from the top. In some cases this even led to distrust in the available information and in management as the main source of this information. This resulted in some frustration with how the RQF process was managed at the institution and claims of a lack of transparency and information sharing.

Well, mainly there has been a certain vagueness. This is probably the most important thing that certain things haven’t been specified.

[Interview 22191-0807, Senior Academic, Social Science]
But you know the whole thing is so uncertain that I think uncertainty is the more dominant mode of thinking. ... Frankly I don't think any of us knows what's going to happen. We are in a position where we are juggling things and everyone is uncertain about it including the people who claim to know. So I think there is always this uncertainty about it.

[Interview 68227-0807, Mid-career Academic, Arts]

I think that the university has not wanted to jump too quickly full scale into getting everything done. Just because of the uncertainty. I don't necessarily think that, I think the university has tried to give us as much information as they can.

[Interview 68714-0607, Senior Academic, Science]

I don't think I have enough information. And I think this is where my biggest criticisms of the process internally are at the moment. I think that as a university, I am not sure what's going on. So there is a lack of transparency and honesty I think in terms of what the university is doing with the RQF. ... Some secretive group of people have been asked to write a proposal or accredit Commerce in each of these areas. ... The problem I have is that the lack of transparency and honesty about how this is happening. What we are being asked to do is to just place our trust in the management team or this secret group, whoever they are, to write this on our behalf.

[Interview 44178-0407, Mid-career Academic, Commerce]

The uncertainty described by both academics and management fuelled growing concerns about the impact of the RQF and feelings of anxiety among the academic community. Besides concerns regarding the long-term impact of the new funding regime there are specific causes for anxiety such as a divide of academics into separate teaching-only positions and those still allowed to do research, as described in more detail in the previous storyline. There are also anxieties
associated with potentially limiting effects over academics’ choices of publication outlets and how specific outlets would be rated in the assessment exercise.

... everyone is really freaking out about it from my perception. I shouldn’t say freaking out. It is a sensitive issue. There is a lot of, as soon as someone is mentioning the RQF it creates angst.

[Interview 22417-0407, Early-career Academic, Commerce]

There is anxiety, I guess, that this process would lead to a situation where it would be altered to teaching rather than having a teaching and research focus. ... There was talk a while back about having to have a list of top journals. In Arts it is a lot of anxiety about that. Because in Arts unlike some other fields, I mean I talk to people about this as well in science where they have their top ten journals everyone is aspiring to publish in. In Arts there is such a fragmentation or multiple specializations even within a single discipline so that leads arguably to a lot of top journals. So what is a top ten journal in Arts? You might say or there might be one or two humanities journals that are very, very well regarded. But of course a lot of them are much more specialized. People have been anxious about that and what that might mean for their research. But as I said that was a while back and I haven’t really heard any more about that kind of measure. The story does seem to change all the time.

[Interview 55741-0807, Early-career Academic, Arts]

It’s been one of those things where the information has been coming in phases and there was a fair amount of anxiety and then deathly silence and so forth. ... I guess one of the things in the last 18 months or so is that there has been partial information and discussion but even now we don’t even have the final grounds and rules. I think that’s actually putting quite a bit on anxiety and apprehension.

[Interview 68714-0607, Senior Academic, Science]
Interviews with management staff show that managers are aware of the anxiety the RQF caused among its academics. Furthermore, these interviews reveal academics’ concerns about inclusion of their work into the portfolios submitted to the exercise as well as anxieties caused over the identification of an individual’s performance with the help of the data gathered for the assessment. Although managers admit that identification of individual performance on a faculty level was technically possible, their position is that this was never what the exercise was about. While managers address these concerns, they admit that attempts to rebut rumours and accommodate concerns and fears were not always entirely successful. Some anxiety remained among the academic community.

That logic of the RQF of identifying groups still caused angst. ... With each faculty and with each group the RQF project managers as I recall it actually went out to each group and worked with each group about the membership and how to massage that. There was still some angst that some researchers or academics staff who weren’t included. But that was the nature of the RQF process. ... The time frame was one issue constantly. It is probably that sense of angst that if you weren’t included in a group, what did it mean for you. Which probably was a valid question to ask. That was not so much a rumour but a general unease about that selective process.

[Interview 67136-0907, Senior Management, Research and Innovation Division]

You would get complaints rather than enquiries. You would get people who were saying for goodness sake. They were just tired of the whole process and worried about how it is going to affect them and their professional lives.

[Interview 68472-0907, Senior Management, Arts]
That's where at some point there was angst about oh I am not included in that group therefore I may never become a researcher. ... That was a general angst that happened with the whole of RQF and probably in every university. Because the RQF examined research groupings you had to pick individuals to be in that group. But people felt that if they weren’t included in the RQF they may be consigned to a teaching career.

[Interview 77147-0907, Management, Library]

Our aim in the faculty was to always continuously give people the most information. Because we were quite aware of the anxieties that people experienced.

[Interview 87168-0907, Senior Management, Commerce]

There had to be a lot of reassurance that they won’t going to be individually penalised about this. I think some academics certainly were worried that the RQF was a process of identifying the output of individuals and that they would be evaluated in terms of that. They were afraid of the outcome. But right from the start it was never about that. ...

(Interviewer: Although on a faculty level it would have been technically possible to identify individuals?) It would have been.

[Interview 53475-0907, Management, Commerce]

The uncertainties and anxieties described in the first section of this theme above are well summarized by one of the management staff I interviewed. The interviewee describes the traditional model of academic work with the statement ‘academics are almost business owners of their room’. The quote also illustrates the culture shock that the managerialist and performance-driven approach caused by introducing measures and indicators that are alien to the traditional culture of self-assessment and peer-review that dominates academia. A second quote by an
academic underscores the effects of this culture shock upon academics, their egos and the implications for academics’ morale in the workplace.

They (academics) don’t like to be classified. People are used to an academic job where they just do their little thing. Essentially academics are almost business owners of their room. They basically have a few responsibilities. Do your teaching. That’s basically it really in terms of the hard facts. People sit in their offices because nobody checks when they come and when they go. For many, many years nobody checked are they publishing or not. For people to suddenly not only check what they are doing but judge what they are doing is a pretty big culture shock. … No, people don’t like to be judged. So there was resistance. Interestingly, now they don’t care so much anymore. I think the RQF was something of a shock therapy. Now when we ask them to register their publication they know exactly that we can rank them. But somehow it seems less threatening. Maybe because of the RQF. Maybe without the RQF we would have a lot more trouble now collecting these data. The RQF was just such a, it really was like a sledgehammer. And that is how people reacted. They hated it.

[Interview 87168-0907, Senior Management, Commerce]

But it (the RQF) might cause pain. That’s because of the workload and people, academics are interesting creatures in terms of the fact that they tend to have, their egos are easily bruised. Therefore if somebody external saying they are not doing as good as a job as they think that tends to lead to negative impacts in terms of morale and so you try to manage those staff for morale issues. It could be a major issue in trying to sort of soothe bruised egos and trying to keep them productive and focused. So there is likely to be a few issues along the way, which I am sure will be interesting.

[Interview 68714-0607, Senior Academic, Science]
Academics perceive the RQF as a confirmation of a changing culture in the higher education sector. While some of the concepts of the RQF such as the encouragement of research and the striving for excellence are welcomed, it is the bureaucratic and managerial approach and the consumer-driven market economy philosophy inherent in the RQF policy that is rejected as being in stark contrast with ideas of academia as a democratic community of knowledge creation and dissemination.

It's (the RQF) a very bureaucratic, managerial approach to research, which is designed to set up a hierarchy. When there is the losers ... I think the whole thing is very costly and not a very effective way of achieving its ostensible goal. You could say it's got subsidiary or hidden agendas.

[Interview 22191-0807, Senior Academic, Social Science]

... what is good research, what kind of research should be done, who is doing it, etcetera. The difficulty for me revolves not around the principle issues of let's encourage research, let's get excellence. That's fine. The problem lies in the definition of those things. As the higher education sector is increasingly less an institution of the liberal democracy and more an institution of the economy, of a consumer-driven market economy the more the RQF has the potential to be used as a market management tool rather than a research quality tool. That's my fear.

[Interview 68227-0807, Mid-career Academic, Arts]

4.5.2 The RQF as a Game

The theme of RQF as a game only features with a few sources and references in the data. There are eight references to the theme from six sources. However, it is
significant for my study as it demonstrates the differences in the positions taken towards the RQF across the different levels of analysis. While the macro level represented by the government and the Department of Education, Science and Training promotes the RQF discourse of a higher education policy, at the meso and micro level the RQF discourse is also marked by positions of the RQF as a game or strategic game, which needs to be played well in order to ensure an optimum or positive future for the university and its academics or even its survival in a changing higher education environment.

A bit like a game, yes.

• A game that will determine government research funding

• A game that will determine the university’s research standing

• A game that will determine the Faculty of Commerce’s research standing within the university

It may not be a fun game, but we can’t afford not to play it well!

[slideshow presentation, Faculty of Commerce, RQF General Meeting, 2007]

Interestingly, at one of the meetings of the Associate Deans of Research we compared numbers in terms of that trade-off. We asked each other how many people are you putting forward. And the numbers varied hugely from twenty per cent to eighty per cent. Clearly, if that had gone ahead we probably would have seen the full range of strategies played by universities. I think while the guidelines in the end told us exactly what had to be in there, there was a lot of leeway in the strategic game behind it. How are you going to play it to get optimum outcome for the university. That was something that wasn’t in the guidelines. Every university made their choice of how they would play it. But in the end the guidelines were clear in what we had to do. But that took a long time. For many months we were just waiting for the guidelines to come out. Can we really prepare anything before
we have the guidelines?

[Interview 87168-0907, Senior Management, Commerce]

Again one of the issues with the RQF is how they gather the information, how universities play the game ... I think like all these things once the game is fixed then everyone is going to work together for the best outcomes. Therefore, one of the complaints in the UK in the last year or two has been then they announced they gonna stop the current system when the next round comes. There were complaints that the universities have gotten used to it and that they now have to play the game. So then they start saying something like we gonna have a new game, they think no, no, no.

[Interview 68714-0607, Senior Academic, Science]

This notion of the RQF as a game hints on the underlying belief that no actual change will occur with the implementation of the RQF. Rather than actual change, be that in the direction of the proclaimed goals of the RQF or otherwise, the only change that will occur is how the game is played by the new rules. Once all the players have sufficient understanding of the new game, things are expected to return to ‘normality’. This poses the question whether top-down imposed change initiatives such as the RQF are the best way to introduce change in organisations and whether or not this approach may be effective at all?

4.5.3 The RQF and Identity Work

The wider RQF discourse and the interviews conducted for this study in particular constitute an opportunity for academics to engage in identity work. Furthermore, the RQF exercise itself can be viewed as a site of forced positioning, which in turn includes a strong identity component due to the nature of the exercise.
as well as the nature of the academic profession with its distinctive roles of the
teacher, researcher, and administrator. The RQF with its attached changes to the
public funding regime fostered a discourse that encourages if not favours the role of
the researcher. It would be expected that academics who took up this discourse
would equally foster the portrayal of a researcher identity during interviews. On the
other hand, those who did not buy into the RQF discourse would likely portray a
more traditional academic identity with an emphasis on a balanced teaching-
research portfolio. Furthermore, this raises questions as to why the RQF discourse
may have been taken up more by some than by others and what other factors may
contribute to the development of identities that lean towards the research role of
the academic.

Identity work although presented here as a coherent theme takes a variety of
forms within the data. References and sources are scattered throughout the data
rather than emerging in apparent patterns under this specific theme. While there
are straight forward identity statements and positions, some references are more
subtle and only imply or hint at a positioning towards the researcher role fostered
by the looming RQF implementation. Overall there are more than 35 references
from 30 sources that are relevant to this theme. It is worth noting that among the
apparent identity positions positioning towards the researcher role far outnumbers
positioning towards the teacher role.

Examples of academics positioning themselves as researchers in their identity
work during interviews include statements such as:

I find research the main point. I don't think teaching will help me in my career.

That is something that I have taken as a standard component of my job
description but not something that will help me in my career to make promotion
or anything. My focus is just on research.

[Interview 74188-0407, Early-career Academic, Commerce]

It's [research] certainly the most interesting part of my job and my drivers are to do interesting research that stimulates what I am interested in. I have got lots of research activities and lots of constraints as well. But I guess I am very research active. There are a lot of things I am doing.

[Interview 44178-0407, Mid-career Academic, Commerce]

Research is my game. So it is obviously incredibly important to me. It's not just research that's initiated through me and I have got a research fellow working with me.

[Interview 57369-0607, Senior Academic, Science]

My publication record is one of the best in the faculty. ... The two things are important but for me the research is key at an institution and to me personally.

[Interview 68227-0807, Mid-career Academic, Arts]

Oh, research is stronger. Research is very important. Teaching is developing but it cannot go too far. I don't want to be an expert in, I mean if I was going to live two hundred years yes perhaps. But with the years we have I prefer to, although I like teaching, I would prefer to give more emphasis on research.

[Interview 77574-0407, Early-career Academic, Commerce]

On the other hand there are, although fewer, examples of identity statements with a stronger positioning towards the teacher role of the academic:

There is a large emphasis on teaching in my career. Partly, well largely, because of choice and also because of encouragement from the faculty. I am viewed as a good
teacher one who is capable of running large classes.

[Interview 22014-0607, Mid-career Academic, Engineering]

Another identity that emerged from the data is the identity of the ‘research inactive’. References to the term occur at both the meso and the micro level discourse. At the micro level positioning of the ‘research inactive’ occurs as the positioning of others. Not surprisingly, among the interviewed academics no one positioned themselves as research inactive. Therefore, references to the ‘research inactive’ are far fewer on the micro level compared to the meso level discourse.

I think it will be work for people who are not doing work. I think it will make people who are research inactive nervous and rightfully. Really, because some people have their jobs even though they do not research. ... But some people don't do any research. So they are not active in research and yet they still have a job. While other people do do the research and the teaching and the admin. And look like I do right now. Exhausted. ... But I suppose for the people who need, who don’t have the research component there, the RQF will put some pressure on them to become research active if they are not. I think that is a good thing.

[Interview 22417-0407, Early-career Academic, Commerce]

The meso level data shows that managers are aware that there are academics that are identified as ‘research inactive’. It also demonstrates that potential negative consequences to this group were anticipated by management. The data show that managers view the RQF as a trigger for self-reflection that would have academics ask themselves questions which previously could be ignored or avoided. This is described in the data as a ‘reality check’ that forced academics into a process of self-reflection regarding their professional identity and their reputation among peers and standing within their institution/faculty.
The people who were likely to be most affected were the people who are not particularly research active. ... I think it could have had perhaps pretty dire consequences for some academics, who probably would be in line for redundancy. That is already happening as you know for people who are not research active. They are the most vulnerable.

[Interview 68472-0907, Senior Management, Arts]

I think doing the RQF trials was a bit of a reality check for some people. You could say I am a top researcher in my field. But now we will go and get some outside people, who are really top in their field, to assess you and do you stack up? I think in some cases there was, look if we really honestly sat down and looked at what we do rather than giving ourselves a four out of five, we’d actually say we are a two point eight or something, we could see where to improve. I don’t know whether a lot of the research groupings ever sit down and do a bit of a self-reflection or analysis in order to, an organisational self-assessment of where they are at with some criteria. I think the RQF for the first time gave them some criteria to judge themselves against and honestly reflect on that and look at what they are doing.

[Interview 77147-0907, Management, Library]

I think it [the RQF] is great because it gives people guidance. For all the people who were having their cheap ways out that was very bad news. ... At individual level I think it was unavoidable for people to ask themselves questions. Am I a researcher or not? Which before they would probably found there was more space for bluffing both their environment and themselves. But once there is tangible assessment criteria you can’t avoid but to say I am actually not playing in that league. I think this will happen one way or another even after the RQF. The only thing that won’t happen is people won’t be running around with the same...
label on their heads.

[Interview 87168-0907, Senior Management, Commerce]

The identity of the 'research inactive' is further fuelled by the macro level discourse. Reports in the newspapers take up the topic of a lack of research activity among some members of the academic community. The potential consequences for these research inactive academics indicated in the newspaper reports draw a dire picture for their future career prospects.

It warns that the RAE has put pressure on academics to publish the "right sort of papers in the right sort of journals" or to risk being "consigned to the waste-land of the research-inactive".

(Gill 2007)

The National Tertiary Education Union says it is part of a strategy to shunt research inactive staff into teaching jobs in the lead-up to the Research Quality Framework which rewards institutions with top researchers. ... NTEU UQ branch president Andrew Bonnell said a small number of staff said they had been "tapped on the shoulder" by heads of schools saying they should consider a new teaching position because their research was not up to par. But Professor Keniger said the last thing the university wanted was to see research-inactive people diverted to teaching. Last year UQ promoted at least three people to professor specifically because of the quality of their teaching, he said.

(Illing 2007a)

4.5.4 Us versus Them – RQF Management, Resentment and Resistance

There is some evidence in the data that the expected implementation of the RQF as well as the processes that led up to the implementation caused resentment,
in some cases resistance, and what is described as a ‘us versus them’ feeling among the academic community. However, in comparison to many of the other themes described in this chapter resistance does not feature very prominently in the data. There are only 18 references from 10 sources that fall under this theme. This lack of data regarding the theme indicates that either there is little resistance towards the changes expected to be brought about by the RQF or that interviewees did not feel it in their interest to cover this theme in the interviews.

Resistance as a reference can be found in the interviews with academics as well as the interviews with university and faculty management staff. While there are very few indications of resistance in the micro level discourse, meso level discourse – the management narrative – tells a somewhat different story regarding this topic.

At two occasions willingness to resist the RQF is demonstrated by academics. However, both these statements were conditional rather than a general positioning against the RQF. Furthermore, the data show that the RQF was perceived as in imposition from the top, that there were feelings of resentment towards the RQF as well as what an interviewee describes as an ‘us versus them’ feeling.

But that really depends if it would hurt my international career I wouldn’t follow what RQF says. But if it wouldn't be hurtful then I would just follow it. I am looking beyond this university and if it's a very national system that wouldn't help my CV if I would go to another country then I would take other actions than what the RQF says.

[Interview 74188-0407, Early-career Academic, Commerce]

R: ... for example you just mentioned that suddenly books aren’t good enough anymore, do you think that could happen?
I: Yes, that’s why I mentioned it. ... Because I have heard that they might not consider it, counting it from a, I mean as far as I can, as much as I can do I will resist that. Because books are very important. Even Nobel Prize people have published only books and not articles.

[Interview 77574-0407, Early-career Academic, Commerce]

People feel it [the RQF] as an imposition. People feel a bit resentful about it with this whole process. I mean I get that. I know that they have been asked to do it.

[Interview 55741-0807, Early-career Academic, Arts]

... as soon as someone is mentioning the RQF it creates angst. You know, people start arguing, not arguing but debating and like it’s like a real us versus them feeling. Like this RQF is being imposed on us as academics. I just get this feeling of something being pushed on academics from somewhere. This RQF is happening. So from the university perspective I think that perhaps the RQF is making people anxious.

[Interview 22417-0407, Early-career Academic, Commerce]

The meso level discourse draws a somewhat different picture regarding resistance to the RQF. The interviewed management staff reported subtle indicators of resistance such as the need for a strong communication policy regarding the RQF. But there are also more apparent indicators of resistance described as academics attempting to ‘drag the chain’ to slow the process and that ‘people [academics] absolutely hated it [the RQF]’. Overall however, there appears to be a prevailing consensus that there was little open resistance and no ‘boycotting’ or ‘mutinies’ among the academic community.
The RQF was so dependent on academic input that you needed to have a strong promotional and communication policy in order to make it work.

[Interview 77147-0907, Management, Library]

Some ignored it [the RQF] right from the start. They were quite able to do that. ... I think it was extremely unpopular. That’s the impression I got, very unpopular amongst universities. Not because they feared being evaluated but because it was so time consuming. And perhaps people also perceived it as not going to be fair.

[Interview 53475-0907, Management, Commerce]

R: Was there resistance in any way to the whole exercise?

I: Absolutely. Totally. People absolutely hated it [the RQF]. They don’t like to be classified. People are used to an academic job where they just do their little thing. ... No, people don’t like to be judged. So there was resistance. ... They would have wanted to stop it. But they couldn’t. So they just expressed their discontent all the time. ...

I think there was active resistance across the university not in our faculty. ... But certainly nobody was embracing it. Nobody was welcoming it. But nobody was boycotting it in our faculty.

[Interview 87168-0907, Senior Management, Commerce]

There were a couple of groups in the final process that were dragging the chain, hoping for a change in the political landscape. But they were very, very few and I won’t mention who they were. Just a couple, but that was an exception. ... For example delaying the submission of the context statement. Mostly we’d get the cooperation in picking the best four. There were a few outstanding justifications. But there were a number of groups that didn’t submit their context statements. ... There was no obvious mutinies. ... I wouldn’t call it resistance to that extent. It was only a few groups I felt it might have been a deliberate strategy to wait and
see what happens with the political scene.

[Interview 87193-0907, Management, Research and Innovation Division]

4.5.5 Funding, Accountability and Government Support

The topics of accountability for research spending, funding of university research, and government support for universities fall under a common theme as they are strongly linked within the RQF driven discourse regarding these topics. With the particularly prominent concerns regarding a lack of university funding as well as opinions on accountability for public funding this theme represents a significant portion of the analysed data. It consists of more than 30 sources with about 40 references. The data demonstrate that there is a strong common agreement on the necessity of accountability for public funding across the levels of analysis. However, how accountability is implemented and enforced is not without controversy and positions diverge. There are also voices across the levels of discourse that reinforce positions regarding a lack of public funding for university research. Finally, the theme finds that micro level discourse is marked by academics’ frustration with the government’s lack of support, interest in, and appreciation for the academic profession and academic work.

An improvement to the accountability for public funding of university research was one of the goals the government declared when the RQF was announced. The general notion of accountability for public funding in universities is taken up widely in the positions of the interviewed academics. However, not all academics agree with the government approach and accountability at the cost of research capability and academic freedom constitutes a contested field within the micro level discourse.
The Australian Government seeks to ensure that public money is being invested in research of the highest quality that delivers real benefits not only to the higher education and research sectors but also to the wider community.


I think increasingly governments are wanting to be able to explain to their constituency and the general community why they are putting all of this money into research, into universities. ... I think governments are under pressure to explain the benefits of research and the quality of research because they are spending tax payers' money on it.

[Interview 67136-0907, Senior Management, Research and Innovation Division]

From what I can gather the main reason is to make sure that the Australian taxpayers are getting value for money, that their money is getting shipped into funding of research. I think that's probably a good idea to try to assess the quality of the research being done.

[Interview 44117-0607, Early-career Academic, Science]

I think there is you know that universities should be accountable for what they do with the research money that they get. I don't have a problem with that. But I don't think this [the RQF] is the way to do it. I think they should have more trust in universities and academics themselves and take a less interfering, less bureaucratic approach.

[Interview 22014-0607, Mid-career Academic, Engineering]

To some extent I think accountability. I think that the government, the conservative government, is particularly keen to see accountability. I don't think that this is necessarily a bad thing. And they are looking for ways of seeing
accountability in academia. One way of trying to do that and one can argue whether it’s a satisfactory measure is to implement a scheme such as the RQF where one can see the tangible number or an output that can be related to dollars spent etcetera.

[Interview 71368-0607, Senior Academic, Science]

Calls for accountability improvements in conjunction with the expected new norms for research quality and performance assessment of research outputs also evoked general long-standing frustrations and negative feelings among the academic community based on past experience with a perceived lack of support, appreciation and interest in academia by the government. The value placed on academic identity by the academics themselves appears dislodged from the perceived value put on academics by the government and its actions and policies. These counter-positions demonstrate a shared sentiment of contradiction between government demands upon academia and in turn the support the academic community receives from the government and its institutions.

I think the real reasons for, political, have to do with an inherent distrust of the government of universities. I think we have seen them introduce increasing amounts of control or trying to introduce increasing amounts of control over universities over the years and an awful lot of paperwork. ... I mean to my mind that fits with the view of the government that’s very focused on the economy rather than on the people. So it sort of fits with their whole, I mean they make no bones about the fact that they don’t have a lot of time or interest in universities and academics. They said some very insulting things about academia over the years and they are very focused on money and money making. This seems to be reflected in the way this RQF has been set up.

[Interview 22014-0607, Mid-career Academic, Engineering]
I think Australia has an interesting philosophy or has had a history of, I believe we are the lowest government funded country in the OECD. The government gives us the least money. Yet they are among the first OECD countries to assess us. Which is really quite arrogant if you think about it. Because it indicates that there is very little understanding of the core values of education. For the peanuts they are giving us they still want assessment of how well we are performing. ... Why do they assess us? Because it is a political play ball, because that gives them the opportunity to say well we have got too many universities in Adelaide. Let’s shut two of the three down. I presume, I don’t know ... I don’t mind assessment in general. But it would be nice, I don’t mind being assessed as long as if I perform I get generous rewards. I think that is lacking a bit. I feel like we are being assessed but in the end we are getting a few more peanuts. That’s a bit frustrating.

[Interview 87168-0907, Senior Management, Commerce]

Beyond accounts of frustration and the sentimentalities of being underappreciated there are positions among academics taking a more practical approach to criticising the government. A lack of public funding in particular in the light of higher expectations regarding research standards and research quality poses additional hurdles to overcome. These new hurdles make academic work and research in particular more challenging as well as more salient among the determining factors of success in an academic career. Whether or not these developments will help improve research quality across the board is by far not clear to a lot of the interviewed academics. Furthermore, there are macro level voices, such as the government’s political opposition, that confirm the view of an underfunded higher education system.
In fact I believe we will probably see a bigger change in the way that the research grant funding in Australia will be consumed by large research centres. It’s something I think the university needs to consider very carefully. Because I really do think that research funding, without a big boost to current funding, I think changes are happening in the way research money is being spent.

[Interview 68715-0607, Senior Academic, Science]

I mean I think that most academics in this faculty would say that we could do with more for research time, more research funds.

[Interview 68714-0607, Senior Academic, Science]

Because the government feels it wants to get better value for its research dollar. I think it probably believes that. That has happened in the UK. It probably wishes, because of the nature of the current government, it probably wishes to ascribe the clear improvements in the British research more to the Research Assessment Exercise. And it wants to ignore the fact that they are putting a lot more money into it in the UK. But our current government wouldn’t like to see that as an important feature.

[Interview 91228-0607, Senior Academic, Engineering]

Opposition education spokeswoman Jenny Macklin said the launch of the issues paper must lead to the federal government lifting Australia’s research effort to OECD levels. Ms Macklin said research and development was now 1.54 per cent of GDP in Australia, compared to the OECD average of 2.26 per cent. “Australia has dropped well below the OECD average in gross expenditure on research and development,” Ms Macklin said. “A Research Quality Framework will be of little benefit unless the Howard government also lifts our national investment in research and development.”

(Barnett 2005)
4.6  Chapter Summary

The first storyline, *Academic Freedom and the Determination of Quality and Excellence in Academia*, comprises themes and questions revolving around the degree of freedom that academics enjoy in their professional scholarly pursuits of research and teaching as well as how and by whom quality and excellence in academia are defined. The RQF was a wake-up call for many academics as it attempted to implement an external authority, backed by the power to grant or withhold much needed funding, which would largely replace self- or peer-evaluation with external criteria and judgements of quality. The loss of the power to determine answers to questions of academic quality and the freedom and control over one's work and career that comes with it were a threatening prospect to many academics. Thus, academics were forced to reflect upon the quality of their work in ways that they were not used to and that lay outside the comfort zone of many. This process of self-reflection is a process of identity work. One questions who one is as an academic and how such a self-identity comes about within the context of social interaction with peers in the academic profession. These processes of identity work are reflected in the themes of this storyline, ranging from concerns regarding the future of academic publications over control of one's academic career to elitism and the loss of diversity among others.

The second storyline, *The Teaching-Research-Complex*, has been a source of controversy and debate among academics long before the RQF. The RQF however reinvigorated this discourse and gave it new prominence largely due to the prospect that it could potentially lead to a separation of the Australian higher education system into teaching-focused and research-focused or comprehensive institutions of higher education as well as teaching-focused and research-focused positions for the
academic work force. This in turn was feared to lead to a divided academic work force that could see winners and losers of this change, first- and second-class academics. The outlook left many academics in particular those in early- and mid-career stages worried about their career prospects in the Australian system. The themes of this storyline however go beyond the main issue of teaching-research separation. Beyond the relationship between teaching and research in academic work other strong themes are the development of university league tables and the potential consequences of such a development, the effects of a separation in the system on the education of the next generation of Australian researchers as well as workload issues. This storyline is again strongly linked to the process of identity work many academics went through in anticipation of the implementation of the RQF. Among the most interesting findings of my analysis are anticipatory identity evaluations and adjustments by academics in the preparatory stage of the RQF implementation. The public announcement of the RQF and the following discursive thunderstorm that swept through the Australian higher education sector were sufficient to make academics not just question their professional identities but even to attempt to change them. Many were keen to emphasise their researcher identities in interviews. Others expressed frustration about the uncertainty and lack of guidance but also willingness to change in either direction if current policies demanded it. Two interesting observations can be made here: first change starts with the announcement of an initiative rather than its implementation and second, identity is a dynamic concept that can accommodate short-term developments in one’s environment that may or may not lead to more substantial change in the long-term.

Finally the third storyline, Culture Clash between a Traditional Model of Academia and New Managerialist Positions, deals with themes that show how the
technical aspects of RQF administration and management processes but also some fundamental assumptions regarding those processes differ vastly between the more bureaucratic, managerialist approaches of the federal government, DEST and at least in part university and faculty administrations and the traditional ideals of academia as self-governed and largely undisturbed by administrative demands and burdens in its pursuit of excellence in scholarship is still held by many academics. Among others the main themes of this storyline are the RQF as a game, ambiguity and uncertainty, anxiety and resistance but also accountability and issues of funding. Some of these themes are representative of issues that pre-exist and reach beyond the RQF. However, the RQF functioned as a catalyst for many of these issues as it made them more apparent, more salient as they would usually be in the day-to-day business of many typical academics who are not involved with senior administrative functions.

Although these brief descriptions of the three main storylines only scratch the surface of the rich information contained in the data one can tell how all storylines are intertwined, linked and inevitably mutually determining at least to some degree. These links come together in an overarching, broader storyline, traces of which can be found in all three main storylines, themes and positions mentioned earlier. This overarching storyline that I call the Techno-Practical Administration Complex is characterised by an inherent disregard for the softer, social and human consequences that affect the individuals who have to implement and live with polices and their outcomes regardless of the initial intentions of the policy. The focus lies on the abstract concepts that are being pursued in policy making rather than the concrete consequences of policy implementation on people. It appears that at the centre of policy processes are considerations of what is practically necessary to achieve specific aims and what is technically required to implement the policy.
that leads there. Considerations of other consequences and potential side-effects are largely handed down the line and left to the lower levels of management and administration to deal with later on in the implementation process. The effects of this approach are frustration at the lower management levels as well as frustration experienced by the people who are affected by policies that lead to ‘us versus them’ feelings towards policy makers and higher management levels rather than a spirit of collaboration, cooperation and shared goals which are necessary for successful policy development and implementation or sustainable change. I return to a detailed discussion dedicated to this broader issue that brings together themes and positions contained in all three storylines of the RQF narrative in the final chapter of this thesis.
Chapter 5

Discussion and Conclusions
5.1 Introduction

The fifth and final chapter of the thesis presents a discussion of the findings and conclusions drawn from the analysis. The findings are discussed in the light of literature reviewed in chapter two and with the aim of addressing the research questions posed in chapter one. Section 5.2 focuses on the research questions, while section 5.3 offers concluding remarks regarding the study and recommendations for management practices and future research based on the discussion of the findings.

The discussion of the findings is subdivided by research question. Discussion of the findings in regards to the existing literature and the Positioning Theory framework that guides this thesis is limited to the material most relevant for answering the research questions. Addressing the first research question the findings are discussed considering the theory on modes of positioning as well as theories on identity in the workplace. The second research question is discussed with particular attention to the levels of social analysis, the logics of critical explanation, and the significance of positions in the relationship between the levels of analysis.

The final concluding remarks and recommendations focus on the importance of the findings of the thesis for the field of organisational studies. Furthermore, implications of the findings for management practice are discussed. The chapter ends with a brief discussion of the limitations of the research conducted for this thesis as well as recommendations for further research on the topic.
5.2 Discussion of the Analysis in the light of the Research Questions and Literature Review

5.2.1 Research Question One – Effects of Research Quality Assessments

Research Question One: What are the responses of academics to research quality assessment and what effects do research assessment systems have on the occupational identities of academics?

The first research question addresses the effects of the introduction, or in the case of the RQF even plans to introduce, research quality assessment systems on the professional identities of academics. Answers to this question make a significant contribution to knowledge as little is known about how individuals are effected by and respond to research quality assessment systems. Reviews of research quality assessment systems generally focus on intended outcomes and predetermined goals of such systems with a broader perspective on the aims of quality assurance and improvement. However, whether or not research quality assessment systems succeed depends to no small degree on the people whose daily work practice is affected by such systems, namely the academic workforce of universities. Whether positions brought about by research quality assessment are taken up, ignored or contested by academics has significant implications for future success and design of research quality assessment systems. Workplace identity or who academics take themselves to be as professional knowledge workers plays a significant role in the discursive co-creation of a functioning research quality assessment system. Am I a researcher or am I a teacher? Who am I as an academic? Answers to these questions
and how these answers are shaped by a research quality assessment system have significant implications for academic work practices and thus the quality of academic research work and resulting research outputs.

The following sub-sections of this discussion chapter provide an answer to the first research question by discussing the responses to the RQF and discursive manoeuvres found in the accounts of academics and other material analysed for this study in chapter four within a Positioning Theory framework. In particular I demonstrate how applying the analytical tools of Positioning Theory, such as modes of positioning and types of intentional positioning, can shed light on the complexities and intricacies of the dynamic identity processes people go through during times of significant organisational change such as the introduction of a major policy, in this case the Research Quality Framework. Furthermore, I discuss the question within the broader literature on occupational identity and academics’ identities in the workplace in particular.

5.2.2 Modes of Positioning, Responses to and Effects of Research Quality Assessments

Discussing the findings presented in chapter four through the lenses of the different modes of positioning allows me to reduce the complexity of the findings to intelligible chunks of information that draw a much clearer picture of an otherwise overwhelming variety of distinct, individual positions. Furthermore, it allows for a higher degree of abstraction of the data and thus makes categorisation and generalisation of the data more feasible.
First/Second Order Positioning

Identifying first and second order positioning within the data helps to identify responses to the RQF that indicate that the changes implied by the policy have either been taken up by an interviewee or are being challenged. Accounts and statements showing characteristics of first order positioning indicate that the RQF discourse and thus the changes that go with it have been taken up by an academic. However, accounts that challenge the RQF constitute a second order positioning towards the proposed changes. Furthermore, accounts showing first order positioning indicate either the presence of a strong researcher identity previous to being exposed to RQF discourse or identity effects in line with the RQF’s aims, namely the strengthening of the role of the researcher in the overall composition of academics’ professional identities. Second order positioning is not as straightforward in its implications for identity processes in this sense. It may be interpreted in more than one way. Interviewees whose accounts show second order positioning toward the RQF discourse may or may not possess strong researcher identities, they may or may not develop stronger researcher identities as a consequence of the RQF. Challenging the RQF, in particular if done so only in regard to specific details of the implementation of the policy, does not imply outright rejection of research quality assessment nor the absence of a researcher component in the composition of an academic’s professional identity. Hence, in these cases conclusions regarding identity effects can only be drawn through thorough readings of individual interview accounts.

Although the data reveal a great variety of distinct positions some useful categorisation and generalisation can be applied. Hence it becomes possible to identify clusters of interviewees’ positions based on their responses to RQF discourse. Table 5.1 shows the positioning response clusters based on the findings.
presented in chapter four. A few clarifications are needed before commencing a more detailed discussion of the clusters presented in the table. First, one should note that these are position clusters. As such they are neither a representation of archetypical identities nor are they representative of particular individuals. They are abstractions of positions that emerged from the data under the categories presented in Table 5.1. No individual academic is one-dimensional enough to fit neatly into either one box and one box only. Second, while the category of second order positioning employed here corresponds to its Positioning Theory definition the category of first order positioning refers more broadly to accounts and statements that indicate agreement with or at the least absence of disagreement with the positions implied by the RQF policy and its surrounding discourse. Furthermore, these categories lend themselves to being applied to not just the micro level data but also the meso and macro level data. Hence, I will return to these categories in sub-section 5.2.4 of this chapter and add to the clusters presented here to answer the second research question of my study.
Table 5.1: First/Second Order Positioning Response Clusters (micro level)\textsuperscript{8}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>career stage</th>
<th>first order positioning</th>
<th>second order positioning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>early career academic</td>
<td>Cluster One</td>
<td>Cluster Two</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>‘the swallows of slogans’</td>
<td>‘expecting Deltas to know what liberty is’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mid-career academic</td>
<td>Cluster Three</td>
<td>Cluster Four</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>‘the aim of Newspeak’</td>
<td>‘who controls the past’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>senior academic</td>
<td>Cluster Five</td>
<td>Cluster Six</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>‘I’m glad I am an Alpha’</td>
<td>‘sanity is not statistical’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Cluster One (early career academic / first order positioning):

The first cluster covers positions held by early career academics who either demonstrate agreement with or a lack of disagreement with first order positions of the RQF policy and its discourse. Performative positioning or the portrayal of performances in line with the stated intended goals of the RQF, in other words showing behaviour or behavioural change towards a strong, quality-driven researcher identity, fall into this category. However, the data reveal little about the permanence or authenticity of these performances. I will return to this issue later in this chapter under the heading of Performative/Accountive Positioning.

\textsuperscript{8} The cluster headings used in this table are intertextual references to or inspired by Huxley (1932) and Orwell (1949). They function as thought-provoking, symbolic ‘hooks’ that provide an introduction to the respective clusters. As such they are neither to be understood as literal or descriptive nor as an attempt to labelling or the construction of archetypes.
Cluster One positions indicate an increased focus among early career academics on higher ranking journal publications as well as a drive towards journals and away from other forms of publication such as conference papers due to a perception of increased pressure to publish in high ranking journals. However, positions in this cluster do not foresee changes to choice of research subjects or restrictions on academic freedom\(^9\). The cluster includes positions with strong identity implications pointing towards a sole focus on research as teaching is perceived as ‘something that I have taken as a standard component of my job description but not something that will help me in my career to make promotion’.

Cluster One positions demonstrate the positioning of others as ‘research inactive’ or ‘people who are not doing work’ and describe them as rightfully nervous about the RQF exercise. This is not just a way to discursively distance oneself from these ‘research inactive’ colleagues but also a self-positioning act that emphasises the active researcher identity of this cluster. There is also support for the RQF’s notion of accountability through positions that declare that taxpayers have a right to receive value for their money.

Cluster Two (early career academic / second order positioning):

Positions in this cluster are characterised by either disagreeing with or challenging the RQF in one way or another. These positions demonstrate a general feeling of powerlessness against the impositions of the RQF among early career academics, a lack of options to develop coping strategies for the expected changes, and the perception that only senior academics ‘have a say’ due to their positions as

\(^9\) For the purpose of my discussion the common definition of academic freedom as the freedom to teach, discuss, or investigate any topic, even controversial ones, without interference is used loosely and extended to include also the freedom to make choices regarding one’s academic career and work practice. Therefore, it can include freedom to make choices regarding such matters as research topics and directions and choices regarding publication media and outlets among others. This extended definition reflects more adequately the notions of academic freedom and freedom of choice in academia found in the data (see chapter 4).
established, highly productive researchers. Perceptions of increased pressures to publish in both higher quality and higher quantity are accompanied by fears of forced behavioural changes towards ‘publishing for publishing sake’ and having no choice but to publish material one is not quite happy with and should develop further before publication.

Positions also express feelings of angst and anxiety associated with the RQF. These are based in fears of a split of the academic profession into separate teaching and research positions as well as potential consequences for one’s employing institution. A ‘bad’ RQF performance may lead to a university being relegated to a lower tier and hence to loss of access to vital funding sources. Furthermore, there are fears of changes to existing workload allocations, which would make the already challenging task of developing a successful researcher career even more difficult. In the light of these developments early career academics are not just concerned about their own future prospects but also question how the new regime could accommodate the training and education of the next generation of Australian academics and university researchers.

Regardless of the many concerns found in the positions taken by early career academics in this cluster, there is little evidence to suggest resistance to the expected changes. Only two positions feature resistance, one in regard to potential negative effects on an international career and the other in defence of books as a valid and important means of academic publication and dissemination of knowledge. However, an ‘us versus them’ feeling towards the RQF and its instigators remains a salient feature of the positions in Clusters Two.
Cluster Three (mid-career academic / first order positioning):

This cluster constitutes the least populated one in the table. While this may partially be due to the fact that mid-career academics are the smallest group among the interviewees for this study one could also argue for other reasons for this phenomenon, especially in the light of the numerous positions found in Cluster Four (mid-career academic/second order positioning). Among the three groups of academics categorised by career stage, mid-career academics are the group that stands to lose the most from potential negative effects of the RQF. They often cannot fall back on the years of accumulated publications or comforting thoughts of an early retirement that senior academics use to shield themselves. Neither do they enjoy the advantage of not being too invested into a career to change to a different industry outside academia that some early career academics possess. Thus mid-career academics are stuck in the middle with no easy way out. The few positions found in Cluster Three all aim to portray a strong researcher identity with statements such as: ‘I am very research active.’ and ‘My publication record is one of the best in the faculty.’ Positions also indicate take-up for RQF discourse in statements such as: ‘I will just focus solely on journal articles.’

Cluster Four (mid-career academic / second order positioning):

Unlike the previous cluster, Cluster Four features a large number of positions. This demonstrates that the RQF discourse provided mid-career academics with plenty of reasons for critique and was not taken up without being challenged and deconstructed. Positions in cluster four range from specific and pragmatic complaints regarding the handling of the RQF by local university and faculty management to criticisms of broader more abstract trends, such as increased elitism within academia.
Many positions in this cluster demonstrate a degree of frustration with the lack of input of academics into the RQF process and decisions regarding the RQF. Hence the RQF is perceived as an imposition from the top. However, blame is not only directed towards the federal government but also local management at an institutional level. Academics feel that they are only ‘consulted in order to agree’. Mid-career academics’ positions show a perceived lack of transparency and honesty in management processes. Important processes are described as being in the hands of ‘some secretive group of people’ and ‘uncertainty is the more dominant mode of thinking’. These positions are paired with perceptions of the federal government that reach beyond the RQF. The federal government is positioned as driven by economic rationalism and the RQF as a reflection of these values. In this light the RQF is portrayed as yet another attempt to seize increasing control over academia and based on the inherent distrust the government holds towards universities.

While Cluster Four positions do show some agreement with proposals that assessment of quality, excellence, and accountability should be applied to research, there are also concerns about how these assessments are operationalised. In particular academics question who would define terms such as ‘quality’ and ‘excellence’, and ask whether the RQF has the potential to become a market management tool in an increasingly consumer-driven higher education sector rather than a research quality tool. Again there are calls for a system that demonstrates more trust in academics, and is less marked by bureaucracy and interference.

Furthermore, there are positions predicting the development of an unhealthy elitism as a consequence of the RQF. Academics question how such a system would accommodate those not scoring top ratings and how unfair and damaging tendencies of a system in which only the ‘rich get richer’ would be managed. These questions are accompanied by speculations regarding a system that separates
teaching from research roles as well as further increasing workloads and workforce casualisation, concerns that had reportedly been met with dismissive responses by local management in the past.

Identity implications of positions found in Cluster Four point towards a more balanced mix of teaching and research in academics’ identities. Excellence is viewed as something that should apply to both rather than being restricted to research and the ‘true academic’ is identified as one who excels in both teaching and research throughout his/her career. In contrast to other clusters, positions such as the ‘good teacher’ are not uncommon. Research however is important to mid-career academics in this cluster. In fact so much so that some indicate in their positioning that they would rather find another job than continuing employment with an institution that does not engage in research. ‘An institution that doesn't do research is not a university.’

Cluster Five (senior academic / first order positioning):

Positions in Cluster Five indicate strong researcher identities. These are underscored by statements such as: ‘Research is my game.’ Senior academics’ positions appear to be far less worried about the RQF than any of the previous groups. Developments such as the introduction of a journal ranking list are viewed as a confirmation for targeting the ‘right’ journals rather than a threat to one’s career. Similarly local management processes are portrayed quite differently from Cluster Four positions as providing as much information about the process to academics as management possibly could.

Positioning indicates that senior academics feel in control of their careers and foreseeable futures, a position rarely found among early- or mid-career academics. Senior academics feel more secure and less likely to be negatively affected by the
RQF due to their career stage and established research track records. As one senior academic puts it: 'I don't need to please anyone in order to keep going.'

Furthermore, positions indicate understanding for and agreement with the government’s position of ensuring accountability and explaining to the wider community that tax payers’ contributions to research funding have been spent wisely.

It is worth noting that similar to the situation found in the clusters covering the positions of mid-career academics, second order positioning clearly features a greater variety of positions than first order positioning among senior academics. This however is not a representation of the quantity of references in the data. It does not indicate that first order references outnumber second order ones or vice versa in the raw data.

**Cluster Six (senior academic / second order positioning):**

This cluster shows that there are critical positions towards the RQF among senior academics as well. Positions range from suspicions about 'hidden agendas' to the federal government’s oversight of an already existing lack of university and research funding. There are critical voices in this cluster that position the RQF as ‘a political play ball’ and suspect its purpose to be an attempt to seize greater control over the higher education sector. Suspicions go to the extent of seeing 'hidden agendas' that include the RQF as a means to justify the downgrading of universities to teaching institutions and even to complete shutdowns of universities. These voices also call for a system that is based on encouragement rather than scrutiny.

There are critical positions among senior academics that were also found among the two previously discussed groups. These include the questioning of publishing for publishing’s sake, concerns about a loss of capacity to train
postgraduate students to become researchers, as well as frustration with the increasingly difficult to maintain workload balance between teaching, research, and administrative duties. Similar to positions found in the previously discussed clusters there are statements describing local management as vague and unclear in their approach to the RQF. This lack of information is also associated with anxiety and negative impacts on the morale of academic staff. The RQF exercise is positioned as costly, ineffective, managerial, and bureaucratic. Unlike previous clusters, Cluster Six includes positions that indicate a strong teacher identity with references to teaching evaluations well above average.

Finally, Cluster Six positions depict the RQF as a demonstration of the federal government’s arrogance towards the higher education sector. Positions state that while Australia’s higher education sector receives among the lowest levels of government funding, the Australian government is among the first to scrutinise its universities with a research quality assessment exercise. Senior academics ascribe this situation to a deliberate failure to recognise and address the current lack of funding by the government, and the federal government’s lack of understanding of the value of higher education.

Performative/Accountive Positioning

The discussion of the different positioning response clusters above shows that academics responded to the RQF discourse with both performative and accountive positioning. Accountive positioning and the positions taken by academics constitute important findings of this study as they show that the implementation of research quality assessment systems such as the RQF and the necessary organisational change that goes hand in hand with it are far from being free of controversy and
problems. Accountive positioning reveals the many concerns academics hold in regard to the implementation of the RQF. It demonstrates that such changes can cause a significant amount of angst and anxiety among the academic workforce. While some academics may adjust to the changes others will leave the higher education sector either voluntarily or by forced redundancy as victims of the expected new HR policies. These negative effects, although likely to be temporary in nature, have implications for the morale and hence overall performance of academics. Many of the positions that fall into accountive positioning indicate a great deal of frustration with the direction the Australian higher education sector and academic profession are headed.

However, there are a significant number of academics who were too frightened to openly engage in accountive positioning regarding the RQF (regardless of the confidentiality measures employed in this study). This is indicated by a low response rate, particularly among mid-career academics. As discussed in chapter three there is research confirming that professionals are reluctant to participate in research that is perceived as potentially threatening to their current position or future career prospects (Michie & Marteau 1999). This is even more evident in the example of one interviewee of this study who withdrew his/her consent to participate after hearing the first couple of interview questions. During the data collection I was often asked before interviews whether I would report my findings back to university management. In some cases answers indicated that the interviewee assumed I would report back to management (again, this happened regardless of any prior assurances of confidentiality from my side). Most people could be persuaded that I was not a management spy collecting data to ruin their future. However, no amount of persuasion and reassurance was sufficient to keep the above mentioned interviewee from withdrawing. He/she explained to me that
this line of questioning was just too dangerous in the current situation (only a few months before the implementation of the RQF). While withdrawal from or ignorance of the RQF situation and my requests for interviews were probably the more common response of those academics too frightened to speak their mind, some decided that offense may be the best defence. This group engaged in performative positioning, presenting an identity during interviews that closely aligned with the RQF discourse and what was perceived as the expectations of university management at the time.

Performative positioning among academics in this sense constitutes an important finding in its own right. While the presence of performative positioning in the data may confirm that the RQF discourse was genuinely taken up at least in part and by some academics, little can be inferred from the data about the authenticity or permanence of these positions and their implied identities. The interview as a site of identity work is well documented in the literature on discourse and identity (Alvesson 1994, 2003). During the course of the interview identity is revealed through the positioning employed by the interviewee. However, which positions are taken and which ones are deliberately avoided is easily manipulated by an intelligent interviewee who wants to present or emphasise a certain identity rather than simply allow his/her identity to emerge frankly and unfiltered. This is underscored by examples in the data that replicate the language of the RQF discourse to such an extent that it cannot be interpreted as just the individual’s own opinion regarding research quality assessment. Whether it is out of fear or conviction, the RQF did sway some academics to emphasise a strong researcher identity in their self-presentation or identity work.

The permanence of this kind of performative positioning may vary significantly with the given context and over time. The dynamic nature of identity
allows the subject to make identity adjustments to better cope with situations and contexts. These adjustments however can only deviate from the present core identity within reason. To maintain the efficacy of identity adjustments in positioning or identity claims the boundaries of social acceptability and social protocol within the particular context or situation need to be observed. Outrageous deviations would not just be unsuccessful but perceived as self-deception at best or Machiavellian attempts at manipulation at worst by others involved in the discursive encounter. Furthermore, identities may be preliminarily adjusted in anticipation of a certain event, situation or changing context. The RQF constitutes an example of such a situation. In fact the positioning data collected for this study can be viewed as preliminary as it was collected during the period of preparation for the RQF and the early implementation phase. It can be expected that based on the published results of the RQF’s research quality assessment further identity adjustments or fine tuning would have occurred. While there are no data to compare identity effects before the event or during preparations for the change event with data of the fully implemented change, the finding of preliminary identity adjustments constitutes a strong indicator for the dynamic nature of identity and how identity work can be employed to cope with changing contexts and environments.

This is further explained by a closer look at the positioning triangle of storyline, position and resulting speech-act (social force). See Figure 5.1 for an illustration of the positioning triangle. To preserve the efficacy of one’s speech-act in a changing storyline one’s positioning needs to be adjusted to accommodate for the new environmental conditions.
In the case of the RQF to preserve the efficacy of a speech-act or identity claim such as ‘I am an academic’ some had to adjust their positioning. Those academics previously focusing on teaching or non-journal publications as their major publication outlets found themselves in an environment that left them with only two choices. They could either make identity adjustments through changes to their positioning that would bring them in line with the new research-focused and high quality journal publishing archetypal academic identity expected by the RQF or be eventually phased out of the higher education system.

*Self/Other Positioning*

Self-positioning always implies other-positioning as positioning is an inherently social act of making references to others in order to distinguish oneself or establish a distinct identity based on how one differs from the others. Thus, the claim of a strong academic or researcher identity in the RQF context implies the existence of others whose identities do not feature certain characteristics that indicate a strong research focus. It is this very ‘other’ against whom most academics positioned themselves during interviews that caused most of the angst described in the data. The RQF had the power to change the storyline of academic research.
quality in Australian universities. Hence, it could also change the efficacy of previous positioning regarding academic identity. There is a perceived and real threat to academics that the RQF could change their identities to those of the other, the ‘research inactive’ academic, they used to position themselves against. This angst is fuelled even further by the RQF’s trickle approach to releasing information and guidelines regarding the changes. Every new bit of information rewrites the storyline, adds uncertainty, and requires further positioning and identity adjustments. Hence a prolonged phase of transient identity and heightened stress is created.

Furthermore, the data also show the use of direct other positioning. This form of other positioning makes the awareness of academics of the expected identity under an RQF regime or what is required to adapt to a changing higher education system even more evident. The most relevant example of this mode of positioning is the positioning of the ‘research inactive’ who are described in interviews as ‘people ... not doing work ... nervous and rightfully [so]’. Another example of direct other positioning can be found in the way management portrays the ‘research inactive’ or academics who are expected not to perform well in the assessment exercise. Management distances itself from these individuals by positioning them as a ‘person [who] had taken the cheapest way’. Thereby responsibility of any potential negative effects for these academics in the future is discursively transferred to the academics so positioned. Such statements by management are more than simple rhetoric. They constitute discursive manoeuvres that represent and construct organisational change as a consequence of the RQF. This demonstrates the efficacy or social force inherent in the speech-acts that result from the positions brought into being by the RQF. The ‘reality check’ described by management means to some academics that not everyone has a role to play in the storylines rewritten by the RQF policy.
5.2.3 Identity in the Workplace and Research Quality Assessments

This section of the discussion examines the findings of my study in the light of its theoretical underpinnings on identity in the workplace introduced in Chapter 2. The discussion focuses on the literature most relevant to the findings of this study and its research questions. The section starts with the notion of careers from an objective and subjective perspective and continues to examine the notions of license and mandate in the light of professional identities. This is followed by a discussion of role distance and pseudo identities as well as adaptation repertoires of the self and provisional selves. The discussion proceeds with comments on the emergence of a ‘new’ academic identity. Finally, this section discusses the link between identity, agency, and resistance in comparison to findings of previous research on research quality assessment systems.

Objective/Subjective Perspectives of Career

The findings of this study show that the objective perspective on academic career such as the categorisation of formal positions (in Australia levels A to E, from Associate Lecturer to Professor), their job descriptions, or statuses (Barley 1989) is not directly affected by the implementation of the RQF. Although, the findings indicate some more or less subtle changes to HR practices in particular the hiring of academic staff. More importantly for academics’ identities the subjective perspective on academic careers, in other words how career paths are experienced and navigated through by individuals (Barley 1989), however is changed in a number of ways in particular for academics in an early- to mid-career stage. The findings demonstrate how the RQF influences the meanings academics impute to their occupations and in turn and over time, how this impacts the identities derived from
these meanings. It is in this sense that the RQF succeeds in intensifying the salience of research for academic careers by putting up both obstacles and signs which point individuals towards a stronger research component in their career paths. Although the findings clearly indicate that fostering a more research oriented path for individuals navigating an academic career has been taken up by many academics, it is not clear whether the goal of improved research quality across the entire Australian higher education sector will be achieved by a strategy of selective funding that rewards some and punishes others. The findings show that many academics are willing and ready to move towards the direction provided by the RQF. The findings also show that academics require more than pointers in the direction of research. They also require the resources necessary to move in the indicated direction.

**License and Mandate – Concepts of Professional Identity**

License, the agreement between a host society and a group of people (the professionals) that legitimises the performances and conduct of certain tasks or services by this group, constitutes an important foundation for the identities of a profession. It identifies professionals as the only individuals to legitimately engage in the endeavours of an occupation (Hughes 1959). The RQF puts the license of academics as a profession under scrutiny and hence challenges and renegotiates this existing license and in turn the professional identities of academics as legitimate researchers. This is particularly evident in the findings through the discourse of quality, accountability and the notion of taxpayers’ right to receive value for money as providers of public funding for university research. The findings also show that academics generally agree with the concepts of accountability and research quality assessment. However, it is the way this scrutiny and renegotiation process is
implemented by the RQF that is perceived as an external imposition, a threat to academics’ mandates and in some cases their identities as professional researchers. It is looked upon with suspicion, resulting in feelings of anxiety and angst. The externally initiated renegotiation of their license forces academics to engage in a process of self-reflection on their mandate as professionals, the second fundamental concept of professional identity.

Mandate is what provides professionals with agency in the negotiation of their professional licence. In other words how professionals go about their daily business, standards of conduct, and how the quality of their performances is judged has traditionally been largely self-determined (Hughes 1959). The findings show that academics feel the RQF process omits this mandate by not sufficiently consulting them and excluding them from important decision making processes. This perceived loss of agency causes anxiety and resentment among academics. Taking away or restricting mandate and hence agency cuts into the very core of professional identity. The data show that this identity threat is felt so strongly by some academics that they consider looking for new job opportunities either with other institutions or outside the higher education sector. These academics chose identity preservation over identity adaptation to cope with their changing workplace environment. Academics whose identities are closely tied to the notion of academic freedom and who perceive this freedom as being under threat are most likely to respond with identity preservation. The findings show that professional mandate in academia is often established through the concept of academic freedom. Among other choices this includes the freedom to make choices about what to research, how to approach research projects, and where to publish the outcomes of research based on one’s professional judgement as an academic and researcher. The findings show that some academics feel that an RQF funding regime may significantly restrict
these choices and hence academic freedom. They fear that research that does not follow the mainstream or is not publishable in the mainstream outlets favoured by the RQF will not be funded regardless of its potential merits. In the light of such significant cuts to academic freedom or professional mandate academics are left to ask themselves who they are as professionals and professional researchers.

Furthermore, these significant threats to academics’ professional license, mandate and identity raise questions regarding the lack of evidence for significant resistance to the RQF in the data. This however can be explained at least in part by examining the literature on the history of academia. The literature shows that academia has historically been dependent on external funding by institutions such as the church, governments, military, professional organisations, and private industry (Kavanagh 2008). These institutions have their own agendas, which to some degree through means such as selective funding, a concept adopted by the RQF, can exert some influence over research directions and shape and restrict academic freedom. The findings show that there is awareness among academics of this relationship of dependence. Many academics understand that one has to play within the rules of this game in order to keep playing. However, the diversity of the data of this study shows that how much loss of academic freedom or mandate one can accept is a matter of individual perception and choice. Many academics will prefer to operate within the new rules of the game. Others may decide to quit playing altogether.

Role Distance and Pseudo Identities

Among those who decide to stay in the game there will be some who find it harder than others to align their established identities with the changed reality of
their workplace environment. They find themselves in a situation that is incompatible with their ‘old’ identity but at the same time the prescribed ‘new’ identity is resented. These individuals are more likely to resort to role distance and pseudo identities (Berger 1973; Goffman 1961) to cope with the situation. There are indicators in the findings that point towards such developments. Some academics report reluctantly abandoning research and other scholarly activities that do not result in ranked publications or offer disgruntled accounts of having to publish for publishing sake regardless of how one feels about the specific piece of research. Individuals in this situation are more likely to suffer from dissatisfaction with their work, low motivation and morale. In these cases it is unlikely that the intended goal of the RQF to maintain and improve research quality can be achieved, at least in the short term. Another potential consequence is that some may leave academia altogether, seeking early retirement or careers in other industries.

Again it is important to note that identity is a dynamic process that changes over time. Thus the phenomena of role distance and pseudo identities among academics may only be temporary means of adaptation or provisional selves that help to cope with change. Also in the long term pseudo identities are less likely to be successful in a permanently changed system than identities that further embraced change. Thus, these provisional identities will have to be revised further eventually or fade out of the system altogether.

*Adaptation Repertoires and Provisional Selves*

Not all temporary identities resulting from change have to be pseudo identities. At the time the data for this research were collected many academics were still making sense of an uncertain and ongoing change process that was far
from complete. The findings show a variety of responses to the change and effects on academic identities. While some academics showed few effects upon their established notions of what it means to be a "true academic" others engaged in the RQF discourse to a more significant degree. These academics show signs of identity adaptation and the development of provisional identities in order to cope with the changes to the workplace environment (Ibarra 1999). However, due to the ongoing changes to assessment regimes and research funding mechanisms in Australia and hence the lack of certainty as to who they ought to be to achieve success in the new system, these identities are likely to be provisional and undergo further adjustments as change continues. Hence the findings show a range of identity claims from moderate changes to publication habits to more far reaching claims of focusing one's efforts exclusively on research to the detriment of other scholarly tasks and academic activities such as teaching or community engagement. However, over time, with increasing certainty only a few of these provisional identities will prove sustainable and form a more stable identity in line with a stabilising environment. Thus, the long term effects of research assessment exercises such as the RQF will require further empirical research in the future, preferably in the form of more longitudinal studies.

_A 'New' Academic Identity_

The literature on academic identity such as Parker and Jary (1995) and Wilson (1991) argues that there is a development towards a 'new' academic identity. This academic is an 'organisation person' with a more instrumental and rationalised identity. Unlike more traditional academic identity, which is based upon reputation among peers and students, this 'new' academic bases his/her identity on reputation
with university management. This relationship manifests itself in performance appraisals, KPIs and other 'hard' facts such as journal citation indexes, success at winning grants and/or the outcomes of research assessment exercises. This development is made possible through an increasing managerialisation, marketization, and corporate style management of universities. The RQF no doubt shows a trend towards managerial tendencies in Australian universities. As such it has the potential to encourage the development of this ‘new’ identity among Australian academics. However, the findings of my study draw a more complex picture of academic identity. The empirical evidence suggests that while there is some evidence of academics leaning towards this ‘new’ academic identity, there are also significant pockets of more traditional academic identity among the interview subjects. Hence, evidence from my study regarding a ‘new’ academic identity is inconclusive. It neither corroborates ‘new’ academic identity as a widespread phenomenon nor does it disprove its existence. More empirical research is required to investigate this phenomenon further. However, the diversity of identities and different positions constitutive of academic identity found in my study may be explained in part through differences in the degree of agency individual academics possess. The more general notion of mandate discussed earlier in this chapter is not the only factor determining academics' agency.

Identity, Agency, and Resistance

Research by Harley and Lee (1997) into the British experience with research assessment exercises, the RAE, demonstrates that individual academic identity can influence how much agency an academic is capable of exercising. An academic’s seniority, rank, and established research track record can lend a significantly
greater amount of agency to senior academics compared to their early-career counter-parts. In this sense the amount of ‘academic capital’ the individual possesses determines his/her ability to resist external pressures and change. This may work as a firewall against managerial discourse and the ‘new’ academic identity discussed previously. The findings of my study confirm this general trend. The data demonstrate that early-career and mid-career academics experience more pressure and anxiety from the RQF and are more willing, and in some cases even eager, to comply with the changes. In contrast, senior academics rarely report significantly increased levels of pressure or anxiety. While the findings show little open resistance to the RQF, they clearly indicate that senior academics are airing their complaints more openly in the interviews and are far less reluctant to criticise or even dismiss or ignore the effects of research assessment exercises. Thus, the findings demonstrate that individual academic identity based on seniority and one’s research track record is an important determinant in how academics are affected by and respond to research assessment exercises.
5.2.4 Research Question Two – Identity Construction: A Multi-Level Analysis

Research Question Two: (a) How do identity constructions and responses to identity constructions vary at different levels of analysis – macro (government and policy / societal rhetoric), meso (organisational / institutional practice), micro (individual academics / conversations)? (b) How do identity constructions and responses to identity constructions at different levels of analysis interact and influence each other?

The second research question takes a closer look at identity constructions across the levels of analysis. The differences, similarities, and partial overlaps of positioning, in other words the diversity of positions within emerging storylines and the wider discourse, as well as how links between the levels of analysis are discursively constructed and thus drive change make a significant contribution to our understanding of change processes and their interplay with identity in the workplace. Answers to the second research question contribute to the knowledge of the role identity plays in changing workplace environments but also how in turn occupational or professional identity is shaped and evolves through change.

The discussion begins with a birds eye perspective on the discursive material analysed for this study. This approach is facilitated through the application of Glynos and Howarth's (2007) logics of critical explanation to the three storylines identified in chapter four. The second part of the discussion aims to further the understanding of positions and positioning across the levels of analysis by categorising meso and macro level positions found in chapter four into first and second order position clusters similar to the approach taken in the discussion of micro level positions across career stages in academia earlier in this chapter. Finally, the significance of
positioning theory for our understanding of links between the micro, meso, and macro levels of social reality is discussed with reference to the underlying ontological assumptions of positioning theory introduced in chapter three.

### 5.2.5 Levels of Social Analysis and the Logics of Critical Explanation

*The Techno-Practical Administration Complex – A Story of Storylines*

The three storylines introduced in chapter four are each independent storylines with specific foci on a number of core themes. Each set of core themes constitutes a coherent storyline, feeding into the wider RQF discourse and in turn being fed by the wider RQF discourse. However, the themes of the different storylines do overlap at least partially. This demonstrates the intertwined nature of the storylines in the wider RQF discourse and a broader narrative that for the purpose of my study I have dubbed the Techno-Practical Administration Complex. This broader narrative summarizes the individual storylines and puts them into the wider context of not just the RQF but Australian higher education in general. It demonstrates a consistent trend that occurs throughout the data and across all three storylines and most of the themes they contain. The Techno-Practical Administration Complex as such symbolizes the detached yet linked nature of the relationship between the three levels of analysis employed in this study. It shows how at the macro level discourse is dominated by policy development and implementation. This macro level discourse is framed in managerial terms and focuses mainly on the technical, practical, and administrative aspects necessary to achieve the set goals and outcomes of a given policy or the RQF in particular. However, meso and micro
level analysis demonstrate that further down the line policy development and implementation have social consequences that go beyond simplistic administrative procedures covering technical or practical aspects of a policy. It is these social consequences and the micromanagement required to handle them that largely determine the success and outcomes of policy implementation and sustainable change. How university and faculty managers deal with top-down change implementation and how this is received by the academics who have to adapt to a changing work environment forms an important part of the overarching narrative. This narrative sums up the three previously introduced storylines into the broader story of the Techno-Practical Administration Complex.

It is this broader story that most powerfully replicates what Ball (2003:220) calls the ‘mechanisms of performativity’ in the discourse surrounding the implementation of the RQF. Policies developed around the implementation of ‘data-base, the appraisal meeting, the annual review, report writing, the regular publication of results and promotion applications, inspections and peer reviews’ (Ball 2003:220) and other techniques and technologies put in place with largely no consideration of their social consequences abandon the individual in an administrative system that is increasingly characterised by ‘a high degree of uncertainty and instability’ (Ball 2003:220). Identities are exposed to a ‘sense of being constantly judged in different ways, by different means, according to different criteria, through different agents and agencies’ (Ball 2003:220), which, in turn, fosters the surrender of subjectivity to the ‘greater good’ of the advancement of the ‘objective goals’ of the narrative of the Techno-Practical Administration Complex.

My analysis of the overarching narrative of the Techno-Practical Administration Complex deviates somewhat from the approach employed to the three storylines in chapter four. As such it can be viewed as a meta-analysis of the
three main storylines of the chapter. I use the logics of critical explanation framework of Glynos and Howarth (2007)\textsuperscript{10} for further analysis of the findings presented in chapter four. The logics framework employed for my analysis consists of the categories of social logics, political logics, and fantasmatic logics. It facilitates the analysis by providing a structured approach capable of a bird’s-eye-view of the discursive landscape of the RQF represented by the data collected for this study.

Social logics are concerned with the rules and norms of a particular situation in a given environment/context, which find expression in and are reproduced through discursive and symbolic practices. Analysis of these practices can provide insight into the rules a practice is based upon but also show situations that require practices to go beyond existing rules (Glynos & Howarth 2007:137). These latter situations require the breaking of rules or the implementation of amended or new rules. The contestation or transformation of existing rules and emergence of new ones constitutes the political logics of a situation or context. As Glynos and Howarth (2007:142) put it ‘political logics are concerned with the institution of the social, they are also related to its possible de-institution or contestation.’ Finally, fantasmatic logics are concerned with the ‘whys’ of a situation and how these are discursively justified. Fantasies may enter a discourse or may be injected into a discourse in order to disguise the political logics of changing rules and justify changes to social reality. Furthermore, fantasmatic logics can function to defensively conceal flaws or disruptions in political logics to prevent the development of counter-positions and resistance (Glynos & Howarth 2007:145-152).

\textsuperscript{10} The framework of logics employed in the analysis of this study is based entirely on Glynos and Howarth (2007). Glynos and Howarth’s (2007) work is grounded in earlier contributions by Wittgenstein (1967) and Laclau (2000b, a, 2005) among others. These sources however go beyond the scope of the present study.
The Social, Political and Fantasmatic Logics in the RQF Context

Analysis of the three storylines through the lens of social logics demonstrates that there are two main sets of rules and practices that are relevant to the RQF situation/context. On the one hand there is the traditional academic culture with its own set of rules norms and practices, on the other hand there is the Australian government and the Department of Education, Science and Training with their bureaucratic, managerialist culture attempting to implement a set of foreign rules and practices into universities under the RQF policy. Throughout the analysis of the three storylines these two distinctive social logics are shown to be mostly incompatible with only some common ground. Over the following paragraphs my discussion develops an argument that shows that extreme positions inherent in both, the RQF policy as well as the nostalgic notions of traditional academic practice and identity that some academics hold, are fantasies that portray and idealised state of affairs in academia, which does not reflect the day-to-day work practice of most academics. It is the fantasmatic logic presented by these positions at the opposite ends of the continuum of academic practice that leads some academics to perceive the RQF as irreconcilable with their current identities.

Common ground between the two logics exists in so far as there are widely agreed upon principles or concepts to govern practices in research and teaching at higher education institutions. Among these broad principles the data show that high standards of quality in research and teaching as well as striving for excellence regarding the practice of these academic tasks feature across the three discursive levels of analysis. However, how exactly the guiding principles are transformed into practice and how associated goals may be achieved is shown to differ between the positions of the RQF policy implementation reflected in the macro level discourse...
and the positions reflecting the day-to-day experience of its consequences for academics at the micro discourse level.

Analysis of the data demonstrates that although not all, many academics still hold positions that are based in a more traditional academic culture. High quality standards are assured by reputation, peer-review, and an expected or taken for granted striving for excellence stemming from the professional identity of the self-motivated, autonomous individual. These softer performance measures allow for academic freedom and independence in the choice of research directions. They are conducive to a culture that allows for values of collegiality and cooperation, both within and across academic disciplines. There are no strong positions regarding a divide between teaching and research activities or the prioritising of one over the other. In fact references such as the ‘true’ or ‘total’ academic show an identity based on a strong commitment towards both roles – teaching as well as research. This also finds expression in a concern for the education of the next generation of academics and researchers. The emphasis is on the teaching research nexus rather than a specialisation in either role.

In contrast to the traditional academic culture the RQF policy promotes a set of rules and practices that is based on hard performance measures and attempts to reproduce human behaviour in numbers and statistics. These in turn are to become instruments of rule enforcement or devices of normalisation with the aim to steer behaviour and provide direction from the outside. Academic practices must not rely on the self-motivated individual, who is replaced by the managed individual. This shift in academic practices would inevitably mean a shift in the positioning of academics, eventually over time the self-positioning of academics, and hence a shift in the professional identities of academics. The culture implied in the RQF, with its managerialist taint and bureaucratic roots, instils sentiments of fear of hidden
agendas such as political favouritism, preference of ‘safe’ mainstream research over academic freedom in funding decisions, and a loss of diversity in publication and cross-disciplinary cooperation. It nurtures a culture of competition rather than collegiality. Furthermore, the RQF also causes a positional tremor in the equilibrium of the roles of the teacher and the researcher. Although, as shown in the data, not all academics buy into the emphasis on research, whether perceived or actual, brought about by the RQF, its effects on academic practices and hence academic identity are undeniable.

The positions inherent in the two social logics of the RQF policy on the one hand and the traditional academic culture on the other hand appear irreconcilable in many ways. The data demonstrate the detached nature of the relationship between the micro level discourse and the macro level discourse of the RQF. Hence the breaking of the existing rules of academia to institutionalise the new rules of the RQF constitutes the political logic of the RQF situation. This contestation of the previous norms and practices of Australian academia finds a number of different responses and reactions within the academic community. These range from fear and anxiety to resentment as well as political counter-action in the form of resistance to the new regime. The analysis of the three storylines shows that anxieties had a number of causes. First, there is fear caused by the uncertainty regarding the new rules a RQF regime would bring. Second, speculation regarding the potential impact of a change in the rules caused anxiety. These included potential impact on funding outcomes, publication outlets, a divide between those included in the exercise and those not included as well as consequential career effects, a divide among the academic workforce into teaching-only and research positions, and even a stratification of the entire higher education sector to a state resembling the era prior to the Dawkins reforms. Resentment based on the perceived lack of value and
funding attributed by the government to academia and the academic profession became more salient within the RQF context. Finally, the data show some forms of passive resistance to the changing rules such as academics trying to ignore it or stalling the process as much as possible by what management described as ‘dragging the chain’.

Fantasmatic logics can be found in the analysis of the RQF situation in more than one form. The government’s vision of quality improvement and control via formalised measures of research performance, the communication and management practices employed by the faculty and university management staff during the preparation for the RQF, as well as the responses of the academic community to its changing environment all show elements of fantasmatic logics used to cope with or install the previously described political logics.

The RQF policy itself constitutes a fantasy. It represents the government’s fantasmatic logic or vision of research quality within the Australian higher education system. This fantasy does not just provide the means of how to achieve this vision but also a discourse that justifies the need for the proposed changes to the established rules. The macro discourse makes use of the rhetoric devices of global competition in higher education and hence the need for world-class research quality, accountability for tax payers money used to fund university research, as well as the logic of excellence, which is particularly effective in countering undesired positions or resistance as it is grounded in values that form the basis of established academic identities. Thus the fantasmatic logic of the RQF attempts to take a moral high ground that is difficult to contest or resist.

The three storylines show that a number of academics took up the fantasy provided by the RQF. However, the government’s RQF fantasy only worked so far. The data also show doubt among the academic community. Analysis of the micro
discourse demonstrates that not everyone bought into the government’s RQF logic. Furthermore, there are signs of what can be called a counter-fantasy or even nostalgia within the micro discourse and positions of the academic community. References to identities such as the aforementioned ‘true’ or ‘total’ academic constitute a nostalgic fantasy countering the one proposed by the RQF. It demonstrates individuals’ attempts to hold on to the established rules and practices based on the values of a more traditional academic culture.

Finally, the meso level discourse shows yet another level of fantasmatic logic, namely the attempts of management to flatten the waves thrown up by RQF and to maintain calm among the academic community. Within the ambiguity and uncertainty of the RQF development and preparations management was faced with the task of keeping things running within their institutions. To achieve this task management employed its own fantasmatic logic, communicating to academics that rumours and speculations were unfounded, impacts on individual careers unlikely, and that participation in the RQF exercise had no direct implications for the future prospects of individuals, nor would the data collected for the exercise be used in internal personnel decisions or performance reviews. This message however contrasted with the sometimes more, sometimes less subtle changes to the hiring practices of universities at the time. Thus, just like the RQF fantasy the fantasmatic logics of universities’ managers worked on some academics while instilling doubt and mistrust in others.

The present section of the discussion of the findings of this study demonstrates that identity construction between the different levels of analysis can differ significantly. This appears particularly relevant in situations of externally imposed or top-down change within organisations. Analysis of the change induced by the implementation of the RQF shows that academic identities implied by the
positions championed by research quality assessment exercises are not always compatible with existing academic identities nor are they taken up by academics without being questioned or challenged. The findings demonstrate that the “old”, traditional identity of the “true” academic clashes with the “new” academic identity based upon the academic as “organisation man” and his/her representation in hard facts, numbers, and key performance indicators. However, analysis in the RQF context shows that both of these identity constructions are based on positions that constitute the extreme end of a broad continuum. In this context both identities are based on fantasies and each resemble fantasmatic logics in their own right. Both identities are incompatible with the day to day workplace realities of academics. Thus, the RQF as a change process, over time, leads to a compromise identity occupying a middle ground between extreme positions through a discursive negotiation process of adaptation and provisional identities. While in the case of the RQF, and research assessment exercises more generally, this negotiation of positions is played out mainly between micro and macro positions, the findings show that meso level positions and institutional discourse have a vital role in moderating and shaping the negotiation process and its outcomes.

5.2.6 Positioning Divides and Links among Levels of Analysis

The previous discussion of micro level discourse positions across career stages in academia earlier in this chapter categorises these positions into six clusters. Similar to the micro level discourse, meso and macro level discourse analysed for this study show a great variety and diversity of positions. Therefore, the practice of categorising these data into positioning response clusters is continued to facilitate further discussion of meso and macro level discourses. The
resulting four additional position clusters are illustrated in Table 5.2. The extension of clustering positions in this way from the micro to macro levels allows for some comparison of positions across the three levels of analysis. Furthermore, cross-comparison allows me to make further inferences from the data regarding how positions link discourse across levels of analysis by identifying differences, similarities and discursive trends.

Table 5.2 First/Second Order Positioning Response Clusters (meso/macro level)\textsuperscript{11}

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<tr>
<th>level of analysis</th>
<th>first order positioning</th>
<th>second order positioning</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>meso level</td>
<td>Clusters Seven</td>
<td>Clusters Eight</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>‘when the individual feels, the community reels’</td>
<td>‘drops within the social river’</td>
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<tr>
<td>macro level</td>
<td>Clusters Nine</td>
<td>Clusters Ten</td>
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<td></td>
<td>‘O Brave New World’</td>
<td>‘Ending is better than Mending’</td>
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Cluster Seven (meso level discourse / first order positioning):

This cluster, following the same categorisation of positions applied to the micro level discourse, comprises positions that are in alignment with the RQF policy discourse or at least do not constitute counter positions to this discourse.

\textsuperscript{11} The cluster headings used in this table are intertextual references to or inspired by Huxley (1932) and Orwell (1949). They function as thought-provoking, symbolic ‘hooks’ that provide an introduction to the respective clusters. As such they are neither to be understood as literal or descriptive nor as an attempt to labelling or the construction of archetypes.
Positioning in the cluster shows university managers’ attempts to demonstrate support of the academic workforce through research resource allocation with a preference for so-called Centres of Excellence. Management emphasises its capacity to manage academic workload well and protect teaching careers. Although some problems around the casualisation of the academic workforce, such as a lack of professional development opportunities, are acknowledged, the employment of seasonal staff is portrayed as a remedy to relieve overworked full-time staff and a learning opportunity for post-graduate students rather than a problem.

The RQF is positioned as but a step in an ongoing development in the Australian higher education sector. Potential threats of a split between teaching and research are dismissed as merely a ‘myth’. The RQF is viewed as just a formalisation of an already existing hierarchy among Australian universities. It is said to reinforce the existing workload, which provides more relief from teaching and administrative tasks to those who produce more research publications. As such the RQF’s emphasis on research is welcomed as an opportunity, which could benefit the teaching of post-graduate students and shift the publication balance away from conferences in favour of journal publications.

The RQF is also viewed by management as a reality check for academics who are positioned as having taken the ‘easy way out’ in regard to research publication in the past. This, although forced, self-reflection by academics is welcomed by management. It is positioned as something providing guidance to academics rather than a career threat. Management takes positions that portray the RQF as helpful to academics who previously have been bluffing themselves and their environment, a chance to change one’s ‘label’, and ultimately confront an academic with the question ‘Am I a researcher or not?’.
This cluster of positions again reports no significant resistance towards the RQF. Rather the situation is described as one of a high need for communication. Managers are aware that the RQF is unpopular among academics, perceived as unfair, and even hated by a few. Resistance at most takes the form of ‘dragging the chain’ throughout the preparation and implementation processes or simply ignoring the RQF. This form of resistance involved only ‘very, very few’ academics according to management and no open boycott occurred. The ‘cure’ for academic reluctance or resistance may be to communicate a version of the RQF that is positive, or at least non-threatening.

**Cluster Eight (meso level discourse / second order positioning):**

This cluster shows that, just like the micro level discourse, meso level discourse is diverse and fragmented. Not all university and faculty management positions welcome the RQF unchallenged and second order or counter positioning is present in the data. Management positions in this cluster portray a more balanced approach to developing a portfolio that comprises teaching and research. It is acknowledged that in this sense the RQF ‘pushed some people off the chair’. Positions even go so far to talk of a fault in the system that makes it impossible for academics to devote themselves one hundred per cent to teaching and have time for research.

The RQF is positioned as a ‘game’ that due to a lack of definite guidelines makes it hard to prepare for. Positions criticise the RQF as too vague, leaving management and academics with too many open questions. There are long times spend waiting for guidelines to emerge. The subsequent uncertainty leads to a situation where managers positioned themselves as the ‘blind leading the blind’. They found themselves in a situation with academics who were tired and worried.
There was angst caused by the potential to identify individual performance (or lack of performance) through the RQF preparation. These positions also confirm that academics rightfully questioned the meaning of the exercise for their careers and that questions of this nature were valid ones given the situation. Positions show that managers were concerned about academics’ dislike of being judged in this way and resistance was expected.

Furthermore, cluster eight positions cover the controversial issue of a list ranking academic journals by their quality. Management positions state that a ‘portfolio strategy’ to publication was recommended to deal with ongoing changes to the ranking of journals. They also acknowledge the anxiety that remained regarding journal rankings and that some academics could be hit hard by changing journal rankings. The meso level discourse shows management’s awareness of the difficulties of journal ranking, in particular in the disciplines of Arts and Creative Arts, and that the highest ranking journal is not always the best choice for publication. To cope with the apparent diversity of opinions regarding journal quality and journal ranking management allowed academics to comment on the issue.

Cluster Nine (macro level discourse / first order positioning):
Cluster nine positions demonstrate the degree to which the RQF, at the macro policy level, focuses on the topics of excellence in research and accountability for public research funding. The RQF is positioned as a demonstrating evidence for the Australian federal government’s commitment to excellence in research. The Department of Education, Science, and Training’s positioning emphasises the RQF’s function in providing the information necessary for identifying and supporting excellent research in Australian universities. This positioning linking the RQF to the
The second important position attempting to justify the RQF in macro level discourse is the notion of accountability. Accountability focuses on the government’s responsibility to ensure that public funding of research based on tax payer money is used in a way that demonstrates ‘real benefits’ of research to the wider community. However, this positioning falls short of detailed explanations as to how and by whom ‘real benefits’ are determined. Excellence and accountability help create a position that allows the government to move away from what it calls a one-size-fits-all approach to university research funding. This position however instils fears and anxieties of a separation of the Australian higher education sector into research or teaching focused institutions and academic appointments.

**Cluster Ten (macro level discourse / second order positioning):**

The last cluster of this analysis shows that macro level discourse also comprises a number of voices critical towards the RQF. The National Tertiary Education Union (NTEU) takes a position based on concerns regarding the effects of the RQF on academic freedom. It questions the consequences for research and researchers who do not fit into any of the boxes the assessment exercise employs to evaluate research quality and performance. Furthermore, the position of the NTEU shows concern for academics who may be labelled as ‘research inactive’ by the RQF and positions the assessment exercise as a strategy to shunt these academic staff members into teaching jobs.

Furthermore, there are numerous positions throughout the newspapers and academic journal publications that challenge the RQF policy. Again, these positions
point towards fears that selective support for research is a threat to academic freedom and may relegate research that does not fit the RQF assessment to the margins. There are also positions challenging the RQF’s vague concept of excellence by pointing out that ‘excellent’ work also appears in non-mainstream journal publications. The RQF is positioned as a potential league table that may give further rise to the notion of a system that splits into teaching or research focused institutions. This situation is viewed as leading to the marginalisation of some institutions and complacency in others. In the light of these perceived threats to higher education there are positions calling for the maintenance of the teaching-research nexus at all costs. Finally, there are macro level positions that argue that the RQF should be evaluated with regards to an aging academic workforce, and its potential effects on the education of the next generation of Australian researchers. Some also argue that funding levels of Australian universities should be raised to OECD standards to provide academics with the resources necessary for success in a research quality assessment exercise.

Comparison: Divides and Links in Cross-Level Positioning Analysis

The ten clusters discussed in this chapter provide a comprehensive overview of the discourse surrounding the implementation of the RQF. Comparing the positions across the three levels of analysis reveals not only a great diversity of positions but also that some positions may feature prominently at one level of analysis while being absent or a mere sidenote at the other levels. Through the appearance or non-appearance of positions across levels of analysis, we can trace the relative successes and failures of attempts to create new realities through policy discourse. Bridging among levels becomes apparent through links as well as divides
that positions may constitute in the discourse. While positions may be concerned with one and the same issue within as well as across levels of analysis not all positions pass from the macro level unfiltered and unchallenged to the micro level and vice versa. A position given great significance in the macro discourse may be taken up at meso and micro level, or as shown in the data may be challenged and hence given much less or no significance at all. In the following paragraphs I discuss a few examples of positioning across the levels of analysis in more detail. Examples of positions found in the data show both links between levels through uptake of positions from other levels as well as how discourse can be divided by differences of significance and meaning of positions across the discursive layers.

There are numerous examples of micro level positions that reflect macro policy RQF positions, as taken up and circulated by university managers at the meso level. These positions are adopted into micro level discourse and as such impact the identity construction of academics. Over time these positions may contribute to the development of identities such as the ‘new academic identity’ discussed earlier in this chapter. Examples of such positions include proclaimed moves away from conference publications towards RQF ranked journal publications as well as an emphasis on an active researcher identity in academics’ positioning. Such positions demonstrate how macro level discourse can shape micro level positioning and hence identity construction among academics. These examples confirm and are explained by Positioning Theory’s triad of positions, storylines, and social forces/speech-acts. It shows that macro level positions set within the context of the RQF’s storylines can lead to speech-acts or social forces, which become apparent through the adoption of positions into micro level discourse and subsequently altered identity construction in the academic profession. In these cases macro level discourse contributes to new understandings of what it means to be an academic by
shaping how academics take themselves to be within their workplaces and organisations.

There are also examples of positions that show a divergence of positioning across levels of discourse. Here first order positions at one level are met by second/third order positions at another level. These second/third order positions constitute counter positioning that critically questions and challenges the meanings of first order positions in an ongoing process of negotiation. Examples of such positions in the data are issues such as workload management, research support within the institution, and communications and involvement of academics in decisions making processes. The data shows a divide in how academic identity is constructed at the meso and the micro level in regards to these issues. The meso level discourse of the institution’s management constructs a generalised academic identity which is an employee who is supported through internal funding allocation mechanisms to conduct research, benefits from well-established workload management systems, is well informed and included in decisions making processes as much as possible. At the micro level however there are positions that construct an academic identity in stark contrast to the meso level discourse. This academic identity views internal funding allocation systems as a form of elitism that favours only well-established research and researchers, workload is perceived as unbalanced and management unresponsive to complaints, communication and information from management are lacking or even perceived as secretive, and academics are left out of important decisions which affect their careers and future in the profession. While positioning across levels diverges strongly in these examples, it also demonstrates the importance of positioning towards common issues as an important discursive bridging function in the negotiation and construction of academic identity.
A final example in this discussion of identity construction at different levels of analysis linked through positioning are positions that are given great significance at one level but remain curiously absent at another level. One important example of such positions are those constructed through the notion of ‘excellence’. The term finds prominent use in macro level discourse. It features in both the declared goals of the RQF policy as well as justifications for the implementation of a research assessment exercise. However, analysis of the micro level discourse shows that ‘excellence’ is not a term frequently used by academics. At the macro level of discourse the concept of excellence resembles a ‘floating or empty signifier’ (Mehlman 1972:23) - a rhetorical concept with zero symbolic meaning, which due to its inherently vague nature can be appropriated for various means within a specific or situational context. As such excellence can become an instrument or normative discursive device with a dual function. On the one hand it functions to unify the numerous and various voices of differing interests and agendas within the higher education sector under a RQF policy that is both implementable and representative of the government’s political interests. On the other hand its vagueness provides a shield against counter positions and makes it much less contestable within the arena of public discourse in the higher education sector. While the vague nature of the concept may be contestable, and is being contested as shown in the data, the concept of excellence itself can hardly be contested as such. It is guarded in its vagueness by other rhetorical devices such as the complexity of the matter and the long term implications of policy development.

Findings in the meso level data replicate this vague nature of excellence as a floating signifier and corroborate its function as a tool to justify policy implementation in the context of institutional strategic planning and manoeuvring within the arena of discourse in the higher education sector. Micro level data on the
other hand draws a significantly different picture with its lack of uptake of excellence in micro level discourse among interviewed academics. There are two equally significant interpretations of the absence of excellence as a micro level discursive concept. First, it can be explained as a positioning, or absence of a position at this level, that constitutes a form of resistance or counter positioning towards a revised regime of excellence that is pushed upon academics by the government in an attempt to implement top-down change in the system. This interpretation takes into account the RQF as a form of forced positioning. Analysing the assessment exercise as a forced positioning practice reveals that the RQF requires academics to position themselves towards a rather specific set of measures of quality determined by the government. This leaves no or little room for vague manoeuvring or positions of self-proclaimed ‘excellence’ to academics. Within the new quality regime to be established by the RQF vague positions may be perceived as weak and thus make little positive contribution to the professional identities academics required to survive in the new system.

Second, this first interpretation can be further substantiated by interpreting the absence of excellence discourse within the light of what Glynos and Howarth (2007:145-152) dubbed as ‘fantasmatic logics’. ‘Excellence’ constitutes such a fantasy that is injected into the RQF discourse to provide the ‘why’, an explanation, for the political logics of the RQF policy. These political logics are the actual change drivers of the RQF. They break with the previous norms of academia to introduce new social logics that guide the conduct and behaviour of academics as professional researchers. As such the vague notion of ‘excellence’ becomes an important vehicle of macro level identity construction. It provides meaning and reason for change yet remains meaningless outside the specific context of the situation. Thus the absence of ‘excellence’ in micro level discourse is explained by its fantasmatic nature. It is an
elusive fantasy created by the instigators of the RQF policy rather than an integral part of current academic identity. This however may change over time. With an ongoing discourse of research quality assessment to achieve proclaimed goals of excellence the salience of the term will eventually require for it to become more specific in order to be accepted as a core component of researcher identity among academics. Through ongoing debate and negotiation a more specific notion of excellence may eventually morph from a status of macro discourse fantasy to an inherent part of social reality in academia and hence shape identity constructions among academics at a micro level of discourse.

This section of the discussion and the examples from the data show that identity construction takes place at all levels of analysis. Linked through positioning and counter-positioning these different constructions of academic identity respond to each other, influence each other, and in this ongoing process of negotiation may converge or diverge. The findings show that in this discursive cacophony of various and diverse voices and positions there are no clear lines drawn between the parties involved. The implementation of the RQF is not a situation of academic identity versus the federal government or academic identity versus university management. This is not a situation of opposing parties but opposing positions within the storylines of a common discourse. Hence identity constructions in a situation of fundamental change are not simply a matter of imposition of the new and resistance by the old. They are a complex joint effort of negotiation, positioning and counter-positioning, and the eventual emergence of compromise positions that are acceptable to all parties involved in the change.
5.2.7 Ontological Assumptions and Epistemological Opportunities –

Concluding Thoughts

The findings of this study underscore the significance of the ‘new ontological paradigm’ put forward by Positioning Theory (1991:393; van Langenhove & Harré 1999:14). The discussion presented in this chapter shows the importance of the three levels of analysis, societal rhetoric (macro), institutional practices (meso), and conversations (micro), in the construction of social reality as well as the identities of members of organisations and academics in particular. It shows that positions and positioning have a vital role in linking these three levels with one another. Identity construction is not an individual matter or an isolated process. It is shaped by the discursive process of positioning. Positioning occurs in discourse across the three levels of analysis. These different positions inform each other and through positioning and counter-positioning, a continuous and dynamic process of negotiation, positions may be altered and change to social constructs such as identity rendered into being over time.

It remains that macro and meso structures such as societies, governments, organisations, and institutions are not agents. These structures, unlike actual agents – human beings - do not possess agency in themselves. They cannot act, cannot do or change things. Yet, through their human agents or members they can discursively construct certain positions and deliberately remain distant from others, imply positions through their contributions to discourse and their symbolic practices. It is this production of and engagement in discourse and the processes of positioning that allows social structures to shape social reality, influence the subjectivity of agents and thus contribute to identity construction regardless of their lack of agency.
This study shows how Positioning Theory, its underlying ontological paradigm, and perspective on social structures provides the opportunity of an epistemological approach that helps to further our understanding of the relationship between social structures and human agents. Through the deconstruction of social structures in discourse analysis and multi-level discourse analysis in particular a research method based on Positioning Theory allows researchers accounting for the influence of social structures on individual agency and subjectivity. Hence multi-level research becomes possible through an ontology that accounts for the lack of agency of social structures without dismissing their influence on the subjectivity of individual agents. The present study responds to calls in the literature for more studies investigating subjectivity and identity at broader societal, local, and personal levels. Through a more extensive application and exploration of Positioning Theory, grounded in rich multi-level discursive data this study contributes an important step towards multi-level approaches to researching and understanding identity. It underscores the importance of the underlying paradigm of Positioning Theory for further research investigating subjectivity and identity from a multi-level discourse point of view.
5.3 Concluding Remarks and Recommendations

5.3.1 Importance of the Findings for the Field of Organisational Studies

The study presented in this thesis makes a significant contribution to knowledge in the field of Organisational Studies. It demonstrates how the analysis of large scale organisational change through the lens of occupational identity contributes to the understanding and knowledge of change processes in organisation. It helps to further our understanding of the impact of change on individual members of organisations as well as the success of change implementation beyond the case study of academic identity and universities presented in this study. The findings are applicable to future attempts to implement research quality assessment systems, performance based funding regimes of university research, and more generally the management of significant change events in organisations of the public and private sector.

The application of Positioning Theory to the analysis of organisational change shows its potential as an instrument in the methodological tool kit of Organisational Studies. It helps researchers account for the complexity of change events and is particularly useful in the analysis of situations that are likely to impact upon the occupational identities of those affected by change. As shown in this study constructions of occupational identity are far from simple. Individuals and their identities are not one-dimensional constructs and cannot be captured by simplistic approaches attempting to fit individuals neatly into theoretical ‘boxes’ or oversimplified matrixes. The multi-level approach to analysis demonstrated in this study shows how with the help of positioning attempts to change can be tracked throughout and across the levels of discourse that constitute the complexity of a given change situation. This allows for a deeper understanding of the success of
change in some cases or failure of change in others. Better understanding of the
effects of change on identity leads to a better understanding of different behavioural
changes that different identities may display in time of change. Understanding or
even anticipating resistance to or support for change by members of an organisation
through the analysis of occupational identities can make an important contribution
to successful change implementation. By better understanding how different
identities within the same organisation can be affected by and respond to change
very differently, change management can develop more tailored approaches to
successfully guide people through periods of change. Such tailored approaches can
be of mutual benefit to both the organisation and its individual members.

5.3.2 Implications for Management Practice

The findings of this study show a number of implications for the management
and implementation of research quality assessment exercises in general and the
Australian higher education sector in particular. Despite the efforts of university
management to communicate the changes the RQF would bring to the organisation
and how academics would be affected, the data show that not everyone felt well
informed and there are reports of a lack of communication. This shows that there is
room for improvement in communicating change and the consequences of change to
those who are affected by it. The data also show the meso level discourse of
university management and administration to be somewhat fragmented, consisting
of many sometimes contradictory positions. A more clear cut approach to
communication may have prevented this fragmentation from trickling down to the
level of academics and avoid some of the reported uncertainty and anxiety among
them. To some academics it was not clear whether they had the necessary backing
and support from management to cope with the changes and successfully adapt to the new environment.

One argument for the implementation of the RQF was to overcome the shortcomings of a one-size-fits-all approach to research funding by implementing selective performance-based funding. Ironically, the one-size-fits-all approach to research quality measurement introduced by the RQF was one of the most criticised issues of the policy and also a major cause for anxiety among the academic community. Future attempts to assess research quality could avoid this by introducing more mechanisms that allow accounting for factors such as career stage and discipline-specific research and publication traditions in the assessment of performance and performance-based funding allocations. Avoiding high levels of stress and anxiety will make for smoother transitions into new research policies, more acceptance of the new system, and make change more likely to succeed.

The findings of this study show that the attempted implementation of the RQF was somewhat successful in combating mediocre research quality by pushing people towards forms of publication that apply higher quality standards in reviewing and scrutinising research before publication. However, the data also show potential dangers of unintended side effects of the policy. A rigid, bureaucratic system of quality assessment could be detrimental to diversity and have the potential to create a more risk-averse publishing culture and academic identity. This in turn can lead to the production of more ‘safe’ research aimed at mainstream journal publications. Such a development may foster certain definitions of quality in research, but is also likely to create mediocrity in creativity and conformity and prevent breakthrough ideas from ever seeing the light of day, if they do not fit into mainstream research and journals.
There are indications in the findings pointing towards potential unintended negative consequences for teaching and teaching quality from academic identities that have been pushed towards an overemphasis on research in their perceptions of role priorities. Hence, without management intervention and guidance an improvement in the quality of university research may come at the cost of unintended reductions in the quality of university teaching. Such tendencies need to be closely monitored to prevent them early on.

Finally the findings show that the RQF is perceived as a system of punishment rather than incentive by some academics. This is not just a major cause of anxiety but may also hamper the success of the policy. Creating a work environment for academics that is marked by heightened levels of pressure to publish, higher quality expectations, and in some cases fewer resources combined with what can be perceived by some as a rule-driven, rigid, and bureaucratic policy that rewards obedience over creativity may not be the best way to achieve quality research outputs. Future policies aiming at improving university research should replace or at least complement research quality assessment with more incentive and support focused policies. Both academics and the higher education sector in general could benefit from support mechanisms that help academics improve their research efforts and provide more specific guidance as to how to achieve the expected research quality standards, rather than systems that instil anxiety and fear of the future and are perceived as threats to the careers of current and future academics. Furthermore, the education of future generations of researchers, a theme the data show to be of concern to a number of academics, should be taken into account and supported in future policy development. Future policies should make sure that they foster and support quality research without constraining creativity, diversity and academic freedom.
5.3.3 Limitations of the Study and Recommendations for Future Research

The present study is not free from limitations and may be improved upon in future research of the subject area. The data analysed for this study are derived from the case study of only one university. Future research may benefit from comparing data collected at a number of universities to account for differences in academic identities that may exist for example between academics employed by less research intensive regional universities in comparison to the more research intensive institutions of the Group of Eight universities.

The literature on identity reviewed for this study argues for the dynamic nature of identity in general and in the workplace in particular. This has been confirmed by the findings of this study. However, the data the present study is based on constitutes a snapshot or point in time which only allows for limited inferences regarding the development of identity over time. Research into the dynamic nature of identity and how identity may change and adapt to the environment over time would greatly benefit from longitudinal studies that collect, analyse and compare data at several points in time over a longer period. In particular the phenomenon of provisional identities and how these relate to more permanent effects on identity through significant changes in the workplace environment could be better understood through longitudinal research approaches.

The findings presented in chapter four demonstrate the highly complex nature of research quality assessment exercises. This becomes particularly apparent through the three main storylines that emerged from the data, showing how the RQF is intertwined in many ways with unresolved issues in academia that shape academic identity but predate the implementation of research quality assessment. Future research that is focused more specifically on a single storyline or even a limited set of positions could yield a deeper understanding of the relationships...
between existing higher education issues and policies and the implementation of research quality assessment and performance based funding. This was only partially achieved in the present study as it goes beyond the limited scope of its exploratory nature.

Finally, I recommend that future research considers the options that the approach adopted in this study provides for the development of mixed-methods research designs. Combining the qualitative strengths of Positioning Theory with quantitative methods could increase the generalizability of the findings and strengthen the implications of such studies. Investigating the distribution of key positions within a larger sample of the academic community can yield a more precise picture of the impact of research quality assessment on academic identity and even uncover findings that were overlooked previously due to small sample size.
5.4 Chapter Summary

The discussion presented in this final chapter of the thesis demonstrates the complexity of the findings. It becomes evident in the discussion of the different positioning response clusters introduced in this chapter that academic identities are not one-dimensional or simplistic black and white constructions. They are complex, multi-dimensional constructs developed over time through social interaction with one’s environment and in some cases may even hold one or more contradictory positions at any given time. Discussion of the positioning response clusters has shown that there is evidence that the RQF discourse was taken up by some academics. There are positions indicating the emergence of the earlier discussed ‘new’ academic identity. However, there are also indications from the findings that call for caution in regard to the permanence and possible preliminary nature of such identities. On the other hand second order positioning clusters demonstrate that there is also some resentment of and resistance to the RQF. This is underscored by positions indicating that strong traditional academic identities remain within the academic community. This becomes particularly evident in the comparison of clusters representing different career stages and may change over time.

The discussions of the findings with regard to the question of identity constructions at the different levels of analysis showed the significance of positioning in the detached yet linked nature of the relationships between the levels of analysis. It is shown that the fantasmatic logics of the federal government represented in concepts such as striving for excellence and a duty of accountability for taxpayers’ contributions to research funding constitute positions that are employed as discursive devices in an attempt to justify the political logics of the RQF.
and their subsequent effects on the social logics of the higher education system and in turn the identity constructions of academics.

This is followed by the discussion of identity response clusters at the meso and macro level. It is shown that positions have an important bridging function; making apparent both links and divides in identity construction across the levels of analysis. Through positioning and counter-positioning, challenge and negotiation competing identity constructions influence each other, rub off on each other and in the ongoing dynamic process may converge or diverge. Identity challenges through organisational change are shown to be not a simple matter of opposing parties, imposition and resistance, and the new replacing the old. Changing identity constructions are a complex joint effort of negotiation, discursive manoeuvres within and across levels of analysis, and positioning and counter-positioning that more likely result in compromises than the achievement of the clearly defined goals of a single discursive entity within the unfolding storyline(s).


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