

The Enactment of Power within Strategic Interactions:  
A Saudi Arabian Case Study

Submitted by Haneen Mohammad Shoaib to the University of Exeter  
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I dedicate this Phd thesis to my lovely parents, Dr.Mohammad Shoaib and Wedad Dahlan, along with my loving Uncle Dr. Abdullah Dahlan and the soul of my late grandfather Sadeq Dahlan.

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**Abstract**

This thesis contributes to the field of strategy-as-practice by developing understanding of the enacted performance of power within strategic interactions, an area that is underdeveloped. This is addressed by voicing the silences within the field of strategy-as-practice using an organisational studies lens. The study investigates the macro-influences of power, gender, body, culture, and Westernisation on micro-strategising activities and is based on an empirical cross-cultural study of a Saudi Arabian business college.

The strategy-as-practice approach faces the challenge of balancing a focus on the specified actions of individuals and remaining aware of the social influences that govern them. This study complements linguistic approaches to understanding strategy with an embodied socially enacted dramaturgical approach to strategy analysis. Dramaturgy is the theoretical and methodological framework used to focus on micro-face-to-face interactions of strategists, complemented by frame analysis which enables investigation of macro-level aspects of analysis at the meso-organisational level.

The analysis focuses on two main areas: first it explores the embodied gendered aspects of strategising, which have previously been marginalised within the field. This analysis shows how the doing and undoing of gender on a managerial level in mixed-gender strategic interactions reflects the values that govern the family context, maintaining traditional values and often constraining women from assuming active roles as participants in strategising. Second, it analyses the tensions that arise between the clash of modernity and tradition by the adoption of international/Western management

practices. These institutional influences create conflicts within strategists' scripts when tradition encounters modernity in confronting a significant aspect of the Arab struggle. This analysis focuses on the importance of adopting a multi-level of analysis that acknowledges both structure and agency within strategising contexts. It also considers the importance of adopting a different type of ethics that is more sensitive to the particularities of caring for the 'other'.

**Key Words:** strategy-as-practice, dramaturgy, frame analysis, Goffman, power, culture, gender, Westernisation, modernity, tradition, embodiment, silences

## Contents

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Introduction: Strategy-as-Practice: A Saudi Arabian Case .....	12
Chapter One: Investigating the Silences within Strategy-as-Practice .....	23
Introduction.....	23
Strategic Management and Strategy Process .....	24
Strategy-as-Practice Facing Current Strategy Challenges .....	27
Theoretical and Methodological Diversity within Strategy-as-Practice.....	34
Strategy-as-Practice within Higher Education.....	37
Conclusion .....	41
Chapter Two: An Organisational Studies Lens to Strategy-as-Practice.....	43
Introduction.....	43
Strategy-as-Practice in the Eyes of Critics .....	44
Addressing Silences within Strategy-as-Practice .....	51
The Challenges of Structure and Agency .....	57
Power Within Strategic Interactions .....	60
▪ Staging Gender .....	64
▪ Institutionalisation and Power Struggles .....	69
Conclusion .....	73
Chapter Three: Dramaturgy: The Enactment of Organisational Power .....	76
Introduction.....	76
Dramaturgy .....	76
The Dramaturgical Elements .....	80
Dramaturgy’s Critics.....	85
A Dramaturgical Approach to Strategy-as-Practice .....	88
Dramaturgy and Organisational Power.....	92
Power Plays from a Dramaturgical Perspective .....	101
Conclusion .....	106
Chapter Four: The Methodologies of Investigating the Enactment of Power in a Saudi Arabian Private College.....	108
Introduction.....	108
Research Focus .....	108
Methodology and Philosophical Position .....	109
Research Strategy: Qualitative.....	112
Research Design: Case Study .....	114

The Saudi Arabian Case Study .....	119
Access: The Acknowledgment of Power Relations.....	121
Data Collection: Multiple Sources of Data.....	123
▪ Units of Analysis and Sampling Strategy .....	123
▪ Participant Observation.....	126
▪ Semi-Structured Interviews .....	129
▪ Organisational Documents.....	134
▪ Field Notes .....	135
▪ Visual Data .....	136
Data Analysis: Dramaturgy and Grounded Theory .....	137
Criteria: A Qualitative Assessment.....	141
Ethical Considerations: A Cultural Perspective.....	143
Main Actors at MNA’s Case Study .....	150
▪ Male Chairman of Board of Trustees .....	150
▪ Female Board of Trustees Vice Chairwoman.....	151
▪ Dean of the All-Male Campus .....	152
▪ Dean of the All-Female Campus .....	152
▪ Female Vice Dean for Academic Affairs.....	153
▪ Other Members of Top and Middle Management .....	153
▪ Personal Assistants .....	153
Conclusion .....	154
Chapter Five: Interpretation of Saudi Arabian Culture .....	156
Introduction.....	156
Saudi Arabia: A Cultural Examination.....	156
Saudi Economy .....	161
The Negotiation of Gender .....	163
▪ Segregated and Mixed-Gender Saudi Executive Contexts .....	169
The Tensions of Modernity.....	172
Conclusion .....	178
Chapter Six: Dramaturgy, Gender, and Power: A Culturally Embedded Strategy of Embodied Influence.....	180
Introduction.....	180
Staging Gender .....	181
▪ Women Inclusion: A Strategy of Visibility .....	181
▪ Scarcity and Dress Code: Reinforcing Women’s Visibility .....	186

▪ Doing Gender: Doing Difference.....	192
▪ Doing Gender: Doing Similarities .....	201
▪ Undoing Gender: Women Accepted as Honorary Men.....	206
Spaces and Performances.....	215
▪ Two Campuses: Two Spaces .....	217
▪ Spatial Arrangements.....	220
▪ Spaces of Informal Networks .....	229
▪ Spaces of Relaxed Performances .....	232
Changed Identities vs. Gender Identity.....	235
Conclusion .....	238
Chapter Seven: Western Management Practices: Modernity versus Tradition.....	240
Introduction.....	240
Institutional Pressures .....	241
▪ Promoting Western Management Practices .....	241
▪ Buzz words: Metaphors of Modernity .....	247
▪ A Developing Country’s Dilemma: Western Managerialism versus Traditional Culture.....	252
Enforced Performances .....	262
Religion, Tradition, and Modernism.....	266
Conclusion .....	271
Chapter Eight: Discussion and Conclusion: An Organisational Studies Perspective of Strategy-as-Practice .....	274
Introduction.....	274
An Organisational Lens to Strategy-as-Practice: Voicing the Unsaid.....	275
▪ Culture, Gender, and Embodiment .....	278
▪ Modernity versus Tradition .....	281
Ethical Challenges of Strategic Performances .....	285
Conclusion .....	291
References .....	299
Appendix A .....	341

### **List of Figures**

Figure 1 – Women Wearing Adorned <i>Abayas</i> at MNA.....	189
Figure 2 – Seating Arrangements at MNA.....	221
Figure 3 – Spatial Division at MNA.....	223

### **List of Tables**

Table 1 – Western Management Scripts.....	243
Table 2 – Western versus Home Culture Scripts.....	256
Table 3 – Contradictions within Frontstage Scripts.....	258

## **Introduction: Strategy-as-Practice: A Saudi Arabian Case**

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Strategising as a social activity contains the potential for extensive power plays that can benefit some and disadvantage others. The primary interest of this thesis is to understand how power is enacted in instances of strategic interactions within a culturally conservative context. Such power-laden behaviour unfolds through social interactions and can be very subtle. In this study, the focus is on strategic interactions, which consist of the internal communications of strategists, from a strategy-as-practice perspective (Whittington, 2006).

The study concerns the culture of Saudi Arabia, which is different from previous studies that have mostly been located in North America or the United Kingdom, such as those of Kanter (1981), Pettigrew (1985), and Buchanan (2010). The main difference stems from the novelty of women's participation on a strategic level in a society where men and women for a long time existed in two gender-segregated environments. External international pressures on Saudi Arabia's internal affairs have gained women a place to participate on a strategic level and share decision-making with men. However, because of the novelty of this situation, little is known about how men and women strategise in Saudi Arabia. Hence, the uniqueness of this context encouraged the investigation of the opportunities and challenges faced by strategists in their activities. Saudi Arabia is still often considered to be a developing country that looks toward Western institutional models when developing its own organizational practices. In this respect, the study will also investigate the power that Western institutional practices present to strategists and how this is normalised and challenged within the traditional society of Saudi Arabia.

This qualitative study adopts Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical framework to explore the intersection between praxis, practices, and practitioners from a strategy-as-practice approach (Whittington, 2006). This is done by drawing on elements of the theatre such as actors, roles, scripts, backstage, and frontstage to understand practitioners (strategists), along with praxis (what strategists do), and practices (what they engage in) within their activities. The study will investigate the power-laden activities of strategists throughout their interactions, mainly through instances of communication, and with consideration of the audience roles of the strategists' personal assistants. The research design is based on a dramaturgical approach to the case study analysis of a private Saudi Arabian college of business that is undergoing major strategic changes and will be referred to as 'MNA'. This strategic change is exhibited mainly in the college's internationalisation strategy to become a university. This requires the organisation to conform to international accreditation requirements and for the college's all-male campus and all-female campus to come together on a strategic level and make decisions jointly in what is considered to be a new type of interaction for both parties.

Most studies of strategic change construction, implementation, and transformation through practitioners' strategic actions are situated within the theories of discourse analysis (Prichard, 2000), narrative (Buchanan and Dawson, 2007), ethnography (Samra-Fredericks, 2000), and sense-making (Pye, 2001). These theoretical locations have led scholars such as Jarzabkowski et al. (2007) to recommend that future research on practices and practitioners should focus on researching with an innovative methodological frame that is derived from the perspective of strategy-as-practice. In answer to that, this study fills the gap by proposing a dramaturgical approach to analysis (Goffman, 1959) in which elements of the dramaturgical approach, including scripts, staging, and performances, aids in understanding the hidden dynamics of social life

(Prasad, 2005), bringing about an understanding of the power plays associated with strategic interactions. A number of studies have adopted a dramaturgical approach to the investigation of power within top-level management interactions (c.f. Mangham, 1986), yet the focus of Mangham's study is on the frontstage of social interaction. Other organisational studies have adopted a dramaturgical approach focus on either the front- or backstage. The frontstage focus is apparent in the studies of Sutton and Callahan (1987) and Golden-Biddle and Hayagreeva (1997), while a backstage focus is apparent in the study of Ross (2007). This research is based on the assertion that studies that focus on both the front- and backstage such as McCormick (2007) get closer to achieving the full potential for understanding enabled by dramaturgical analysis (Prasad, 2005). Hence, this study adopts a dramaturgical approach that highlights the 'persuasive power of agents' (Sturdy, 2004: 160) in both front- and backstage contexts.

Many research studies have identified the political activities associated with interactions between top-level managers. Buchanan and Badham (1999b) call this 'political tactics', Kumar and Thibodeaux (1990) call it 'political interventions', and Kanter (1981) calls them 'political skills'. Whatever label is used, these activities constitute a part of strategic activity, which Jarzabkowski et al. (2007: 8) explain is an activity that is 'consequential for the strategic outcomes, directions, survival and competitive advantage of the firm'. It is through the deployment of these practices that strategy is accomplished (ibid).

In this thesis, I will refer to these practices as power plays. These power plays are not confined to profit-making organisational forms but extend to non-profit organisations such as higher education organisations because their differences from the former organisations are in degree and not in form (Salancik and Pfeffer, 1974). In addition,

universities consist of various groups with different interests, and this results in conflicts in relation to decision-making, which is why a pluralistic view of managing them is required (Hardy, 1991). Denis et al. (2001) note that it is difficult to achieve strategic change within pluralistic organisations because they are characterised by different conflicting objectives and dispersed power relations. Thus, in adopting a pluralistic approach to viewing universities, there must be recognition of different groups' interests, and actors need to be politically skilled in solving conflicts and dealing with such differing interests (Hardy, 1991). Power is exerted to enhance the performance of universities because power can bring benefits to collective groups and is not used just to pursue self-interest (Hardy, 1991). This is why many scholars have studied strategy within a university context, including Jarzabkowski and Wilson (2002), Kim et al. (2002), and Jarzabkowski and Seidl (2008).

The primary aim of this thesis, therefore, is to explore the intersection between praxis, practices, and practitioners (Whittington, 2006) by investigating the political power plays used by strategists, both frontstage and backstage, through internal strategic communications at a private college in Saudi Arabia.

To satisfy this aim, the study has the following two objectives:

- To critically analyse the power plays used by strategists when communicating strategic change to their colleagues in both front- and backstage contexts.
- To enhance the understanding of the enactment of power plays on the strategic level within a higher educational context.

The major questions that this study seeks to answer are:

- What scripts (including specific vocabularies and phrases) do strategists use to convince their colleagues to accept their proposals?
- What performances do strategists enact to persuade the intended audiences (their colleagues) to agree to their proposals?
- How do frontstage (formal mixed-gender interactions) and backstage (gendered segregated interactions and interviews) influence strategists' scripts and performances within their interchangeable roles as performers and audience members?

The importance of this thesis stems from its distinctive contribution to knowledge, research, and practice by addressing the silences within strategy-as-practice regarding power, gender, body, culture, and Westernisation through adopting an organisational studies lens. The thesis will fill a gap by investigating the embodied experiences of strategists. This is achieved through complementing a linguistic approach to understanding strategy with an embodied socially enacted dramaturgical approach to strategy analysis. Combining these two approaches shows that the physical bodies, specifically the genders, of strategists strongly influence their voices and participation within strategic interactions. Acknowledging gender presents an opportunity to assess strategic interactions on the basis of the embodied experiences of strategists in relation to their specific cultures. This shifts the focus within strategy work from language to the effects of gender and culture on strategists.

The thesis also builds upon existing literature regarding power and politics (Hardy, 1985; Drory and Romm, 1988, 1990; Kumar and Thibodeaux, 1990; Buchanan and Boddy, 1992, Haugaard, 2002; Lukes, 1974, 2005; Clegg et al., 2006; Buchanan, 2010), the communication of strategic change (Pettigrew, 1985; Klein, 1996; Lewis, 2000;

Stroh and Jaatinen, 2001; Elving, 2005; Frahm and Brown, 2007; Johansson and Heide, 2008), strategy-as-practice within a university context (Whittington, 1996; Johnson et al., 2003; Jarzabkowski and Wilson, 2002; Hendry and Seidl, 2003; Jarzabkowski and Seidl, 2008) strategy participation and communication (Mantere and Vaara, 2008, Miller et al., 2008; Jarzabkowski and Balogun, 2009), and linking strategy and organisation studies by conducting cross-cultural research (Floyd et al., 2011). Understanding strategic communication on a work level was enabled through an appreciation of strategists' personal communication on a social level. In the conservative Saudi culture, the expectations on a familial level were transferred into the workplace and affected strategy making. This ensured the cultural values had prominence over workplace values, which often impeded strategy making.

The research study focuses on Saudi Arabia and explores organisational politics in a non-Western cultural context. Understanding political activities in internal strategic communications within diverse cultural contexts has the potential to expand established organisational political theories by providing an account that can be compared and contrasted to existing literature. This study examines an instrumental/ethnographic case (Geertz, 1973; Stake, 2005) that, through extensive description, will enhance understanding of organisational politics within internal strategic communications in higher education organisations. This resulted in a performance-based understanding of organisational power in which strategists included and excluded co-workers on the basis of gender. Power here is not resource-based but comes from the actions and attitudes of strategists, which are anchored within cultural and social frames. This perspective into power within strategy making connects the micro strategic interactions with a macro cultural understanding enabling a comprehensive understanding of strategic activity. Strategists with power controlled participation and some gender bodies experienced

power imbalances. Add to that, the institutional expectations conflicted strongly with the hopes and expectations of strategists.

This study, thus, contributes to research through its location, methodological aspects, and empirical content. First, in contrast to many previous studies, the case study upon which the research is based is located in Saudi Arabia rather than, for example, in North America or the United Kingdom. This choice of focus is encouraged by scholars such as Pettigrew et al. (2001), who, in their assessment of the research on organisational change, point to the need to investigate national cases beyond countries in the developed West. Pettigrew et al. argue (2001) that cross-cultural findings in relation to organisational change can give insight into the whole field in general. The difficulties entailed in crossing national boundaries and conducting research in foreign cultures might have previously hindered this type of research, yet it remains important to explore because Saudi Arabia is a highly conservative culture that is significantly different from most Western cultures. Second, this study will present a methodological contribution, applying Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical approach to a non-Western society in exploring how people perform politically within the constraints of the Saudi culture. A dramaturgical approach to uncovering power within an organisation in a Saudi culture yields various perspectives in understanding the enactment of power. The dramaturgical analysis in this research study will focus on scrutinising the front- and backstage of the social interactions among strategists. Dramaturgical analysis will help to uncover the details of the context in which the political plays enacted by strategists within their internal communication can be understood. Through this the research will go beyond studies such as that of Mangham (1986), in which a dramaturgical approach was used to investigate the micro-dynamics of power on a senior level based on an analysis of frontstage interactions. By taking the analysis into the backstage, this research study

aims to achieve better understanding of the political activities that take place on the strategic level.

Third, this study provides an empirical exploration in the area of political behaviour. Scholars such as Drory and Romm (1990) call for more research to broaden understandings of political behaviour and encourage researchers to focus on uncovering the relationships that exist between the initiator of the political behaviour and the recipients. In so doing, this study contributes to the development of the field of strategy-as-practice by tackling issues of power, embodiment, and gender (Clegg et al., 2004; Chia and MacKay, 2007; Rouleau, 2003, 2005). The study responds to this call by focusing equally on strategists' roles as actors and audience members.

Additionally, the study contributes to practice through gaining a comprehensive, in-depth understanding of the political behaviour that takes place on the level of strategists within a Saudi Arabian context. The study will increase awareness of political behaviour and its various practices. The knowledge about what takes place at the strategic level will point to the practices that are kept hidden because of the difficulties in accessing strategic interactions experienced by researchers. The backstage political behaviours that take place through informal social settings, gender-segregated settings and interviews are equally difficult to access due to their sensitive and critical aspects. However, having established agreements with the organisation to access selective front- and backstage social contexts, this study benefits from comparing and contrasting behaviours within both contexts to provide detailed accounts of political behaviours that, can be important for those engaged in strategic decision-making processes.

The study will also increase understanding of the behavioural side of power, which involves power plays as they are enacted within the Saudi strategic-level culture. Such an understanding will help to pave the way for prospective practitioners to gain insight into what they will be involved with beforehand. That may constitute a different set of expectations than those promoted by studies contextualised in Western societies. The contribution of this study is, thus, achieved by building upon existing theory while also exploring a new cultural context to enrich understanding of the topic studied. Furthermore, the study offers a methodological contribution by extending the methodologies used to explore political behaviour and the communication of strategic change. Finally, it offers a practical contribution in relation to prospective practitioners on what to expect in regard to political behaviour in the Saudi higher education strategic context. This is especially relevant to multinational corporations doing business in Saudi Arabia, where strategists and managers require enhanced awareness of the cultural frame that shapes the enactment of power within this society. Specifically at a time when Saudi Arabia is building stronger relations at the global level, this has the potential to enhance the development of the country and improve its educational institutions through international links.

This thesis is organised as follows:

- In Chapter One, ‘Investigating the Silences within Strategy-as-Practice’, I review the literature on strategy-as-practice. I begin by reviewing how strategy-as-practice differs from the traditional strategy stream before setting out the strategy-as-process research agenda. This is followed by a critical review of the literature on strategy-as-practice.
- In Chapter Two, ‘An Organisational Studies Lens to Strategy-as-Practice’, I review the literature on the critique of strategy-as-practice arguing for adopting

an organisational studies lens to the field, which can enhance the understanding of strategizing within the field of strategy-as-practice.

- In Chapter Three, ‘Dramaturgy: The Enactment of Organisational Power’, I argue that power can be viewed as an enacted performance within social relations by adopting a dramaturgical lens, engendering the potential to analyse face-to-face interactions of social actors within strategic interactions.
- In Chapter four, ‘The Methodologies of Investigating the Enactment of Power in a Saudi Arabian Private College’, I provide an extensive overview of the methodological plan for the thesis, including the analytical framework adopted and the detailed processes of data collection and analysis.
- In Chapter Five, ‘“Interpretation of Saudi Arabian Culture’, I set the scene by describing the cultural and historical background of the case of Saudi Arabia, highlighting the main elements affecting the culture in recent times, mainly related to gender and internationalisation.
- In Chapter Six, ‘Dramaturgy, Gender, and Power: A Culturally Embedded Strategy of Embodied Influence’, I argue that, through the analysis of gender and the cultural enactment of power a triple-level analysis (micro-meso-macro) of visibility (women as tokens) have revealed deeper-level issues of voice (women’s participation). This is shown through analysis of the doing and undoing of the gendered stereotypical roles of strategists and examination of their performances and the spaces they occupy. It is followed by discussion of the challenges facing gendered strategising within the Saudi Arabian context.
- In Chapter Seven, ‘Western Management Practices: Modernity versus Tradition’, I argue that adopting Western/secular managerial practices in the traditional context of Saudi Arabia presents numerous tensions for strategists in their strategising activities. This is shown through analysis of strategists’ scripts

which suggests they are torn between Western managerial practices and traditional culture, leading to enforced performances. This will be followed by a discussion of the micro-macro link and how it provides a consequential perspective to strategising, taking into consideration religion and tradition as mediators of culture.

- In Chapter Eight, 'Discussion and Conclusion: An Organisational Studies Perspective of Strategy-as-Practice', I argue that analysing power within strategy-as-practice from a dramaturgical lens can uncover important silences linked to the strategy-as-practice agenda and related to power, culture, gender, and modernity. This is followed by a discussion of the implications and limitations of this thesis along with providing recommendations regarding the future outlook for the field.

### **Introduction**

This chapter explores how strategy-as-practice differs from the traditional strategy stream and the later strategy process research agenda. The foundations of the strategy-as-practice approach can be traced to the work of Whittington (1996, 2003) and (Johnson et al., 2003). This perspective is built on social theory (Giddens, 1984; Bourdieu, 1990) along with the practice turn within it (Schatzki et al., 2001, Rechwitz, 2002), and raises awareness of the importance of micro-strategising. In this chapter, I will situate strategy-as-practice as the latest development within the strategy literature by locating it in relative to the strategic management traditional stream (Andrews, 1971; Porter, 1979, 1980, 1985; Williamson, 1991) and strategy process research agendas (Mintzberg, 1973, 1973, 1978; Pettigrew, 1977, 1979, 1982, 1985).

The review will show how strategy-as-practice faces key challenges within the strategy field (Whittington, 1996, 2002; Jarzabkowski et al., 2007) by pointing to the similarities and differences between the strategy-as-practice and existing strategy fields (Jarzabkowski and Wilson, 2002; Johnson et al., 2007, Chia and MacKay 2007). These differences will be elaborated further through exploring the richness of theoretical and methodological approaches that strategy-as-practice scholars call upon to investigate strategic activities (Jarzabkowski et al., 2007). The review will then turn to prominent studies in the field of strategy-as-practice within the higher education sector (e.g., Jarzabkowski, 2003, 2005; Honn, 2007). Finally, the chapter ends by arguing that this study will provide a distinctive contribution to the field of strategy-as-practice by

enabling better understandings of gendered embodied power relations and powerful institutional legitimation within the national culture of Saudi Arabia.

### **Strategic Management and Strategy Process**

Strategy as a field, commonly known as strategic management, was built upon economic theories that aimed to help managers deal better with the unpredictability of the business environment (Faulkner and Campbell, 2003). Porter's (1979) work and the introduction of the five forces for competitive analysis, followed by his work on the industry competitive strategy (Porter, 1980) and the company competitive advantage (Porter, 1985), changed the face of strategic management, enabling it to be defined as an independent academic discipline that focused on the definition and prescription of managerial strategies for decision-making. Porter's work provided the stimulus for a shift from an economic focus to more internal analysis of strategy (Prahalad and Hamel, 1990; Teece et al., 1997), turning the focus onto what yields companies' sustainable competitive advantage (Faulkner and Campbell, 2003). This led to a shift in emphasis from a focus on markets to a focus on the strategic environments and how to achieve competitive advantage (Kay et al., 2003).

However, despite the focus on strategies as organisational properties, such as corporate diversification or corporate structures, the field has failed to yield clear connections to organisational performance because of the complexity of strategising itself (Johnson et al., 2007). Studies such as Grant's (2002) show analyses of corporate diversification fail to present answers about profitability in the same way that studies of corporate structures fail to show organisational performance links (Whittington, 2002) even though the main interest within the strategic management literature is on how strategies

produce organisational outcomes, be that in performance or profitability (Porter, 1996; Williamson, 1991).

In addition to this shortcoming, strategic management is limited in their view of who are strategists, in which top management is often seen as the important group with the most important strategizing role being held by the chief executive, while other roles are not considered as important (Andrews, 1971). This failure to even account for internal organisational strategists (Mahoney and McGahan, 2006) adds to the limitation within the field of strategic management. In a response to this narrow conceptual focus and in an attempt to see strategy as not just about the industry and the company but extending to strategists who differ in their orientations (Faulkner and Campbell, 2003), another field of strategy was developed: strategy process. Many scholars have taken up the task (Mintzberg, 1973, 1973, 1978; Mintzberg and Waters, 1982, 1985; Pettigrew, 1977, 1979, 1982, 1985; Bower, 1982; Buregelman, 1983; Fredrickson, 1983; Johnson, 1987) of addressing this shift, focusing more on the processes of strategy than on the strategic choice itself and, in so doing, gaining more control of the strategic situation. They provide rich descriptions showing that strategy includes various participants and is affected by different contextual settings.

However, these longitudinal studies focused predominantly on the organisation as the unit of analysis rather than on the role of strategists. For example, Pettigrew's (1985) work on strategic change within ICI is a landmark in developing the process approach within strategy by taking the organisation as the unit of analysis. However, strategy process research was also moving toward in-depth research tackling managerial cognition (Walsh, 1995; Hodgkinson and Sparrow 2002) and acknowledging individuals' roles within strategy work through how they make sense of what is taking

place (Weick, 1995). This interest in studying cognition puts people before the organisation and gives importance to strategy-makers and conversations that reflect their thinking and intent (Liedtka and Rosenblum, 1996), which, according to Johnson et al. (2007), brings the strategy-as-process tradition closer to what developed later: strategy-as-practice. However, this was still seen by some as insufficient to overcome the limitations associated with strategy-as-process, which led to the growth of strategy-as-practice (Johnson et al., 2003).

Strategy-as-process neglects to address the complexities of investigating different strategists and their activities (Golsorkhi et al., 2010), although it does get closer to achieving that goal through studies focusing on power and political effects on strategies (Mintzberg, 1987; Pettigrew, 1985). To deal with this gap, scholars proposed another stream building on previous process work (Golsorkhi et al., 2010), which they called strategy-as-practice, where the focus was on strategists' actions and the situated practices that they draw upon when strategising (Whittington, 1996, 2003; Hendry 2000; Johnson et al., 2003; Jarzabkowski and Seidl, 2006; Balogun et al., 2007) to address this complexity that stretches far beyond the organisation, moving from a resource-based view of strategy (Wernerfelt, 1984) to an activity-based view (Johnson et al., 2003; Jarzabkowski, 2005) or, as Whittington (2004) suggests, moving to a post-Mintzbergian perspective.

This approach had to overcome the problems associated with previous strategy work, which over-relied on the dichotomies of content and process, and to look deeper into the social practice of strategy (Floyd et al., 2011). The focus shifts from the organisation to the individuals and what they do when they strategise, especially in relation to the creation and development of strategy (Regnér, 2003). In this sense, strategy-as-practice

was proposed as a way of taking attention away from how strategies affect performance to a deeper analysis of what strategists on different levels do when they are actually involved in strategy work, such as strategic planning (Golsorkhi et al., 2010), along with an attempt to adopt a pluralistic approach in viewing strategists, which is not reserved just for those elite personnel at the top of the organisational hierarchy (Andrews, 1971).

### **Strategy-as-Practice Facing Current Strategy Challenges**

Whittington (1996, 2002) notes that adoption of the strategy-as-practice approach changes the focus from strategies to strategists and their activities, looking at how their micro-activities are explained in relation to organisational and institutional levels of analysis (Whittington, 2006, 2007). The focus shifts from the organisation to the individuals and what they do to strategies, especially in relation to the creation and development of strategy (Regnér, 2003). He agrees that this approach builds on strategy-as-process, where the main focus is on identifying strategic change and achieving it (Whittington, 1996). However, strategy-as-practice depends on ‘how managers and consultants act and interact in the whole strategy-making sequence’ (ibid: 734), where diverse personnel in organisations need different skills to succeed in strategising. In this respect, Whittington (1996) proposes that, to better understand strategising, the close observation of strategists while they perform their ‘strategy-making routines’ is called for (ibid: 734). He promotes the idea of emphasising the performance of the strategists rather than focusing just on organisational performance. This is also what Jarzabkowski et al. (2007: 6) argue for, stating that ‘to understand human agency in the construction and enactment of strategy it is necessary to refocus research on the actions and interactions of the strategy practitioner’.

Whittington (1996) identifies four approaches in strategy, the planning approach in the 1960s, the policy approach in the 1970s, the process approach in 1980s, and now the focus on the practice approach to strategy in which strategy-as-practice scholars focus on the ‘work and talk of practitioners’ and how they interact within the strategy-making terrain (Whittington, 1996: 732). This view was further elaborated by Whittington’s work (2006) on how strategists’ activities are to be understood within the social contexts in which they take place. As means of understanding this, Whittington (2007) devised a framework that includes praxis, practices, and practitioners and, at a later stage, added the element of profession. Each element, or some combination, presents a unit of analysis for the study of strategy-as-practice (Jarzabkowski and Seidl, 2006). First, praxis refers to the combination of what individuals and groups do within the context in which it takes place (Jarzabkowski and Seidl, 2006). Paroutis and Pettigrew (2007) add that ‘praxis refers to the actual work of strategising, all the meeting, consulting, writing, presenting, communicating and so on that are required in order to make and execute strategy’ (140). Second, ‘practices’ refer to ‘the shared routines of behaviour, including traditions, norms and procedures for thinking, acting and using “things”, this last in the broadest sense’ (Whittington, 2006: 619). Third, ‘practitioners’ refers to ‘the workers of strategising, including managers, consultants and specialized internal change agents’ (Paroutis and Pettigrew, 2007: 140). Strategising is, thus, not restricted to top management and can include middle managers (Balogun, 2003; Regnér, 2003; Balogun and Johnson, 2004; Rouleau, 2005; Hoon, 2007; Mantere, 2008; Rouleau and Balogun, 2011) and external practitioners (Whittington, 2002, 2003). Fourth, ‘profession’ refers to how strategy presents ‘a specialised institutional field’ with a shared collective identity (Whittington, 2007: 1,580). Jarzabkowski et al. (2007) suggest that scholars are better off focusing more on two of these elements rather than all three to strengthen empirical work in the field, while others such as Johnson et al.

(2007) are less concerned about this distinction and more about the level of analysis and whether it regards strategic content. Exploring yet another way of looking at strategy-as-practice research divided into units of analysis, Jarzabkowski and Spee (2009) point out clear levels of analysis within the unit of praxis that scholars can investigate within strategy-as-practice. They point out that strategy praxis is researched from a micro-level of strategists' experiences (Samra-Fredericks 2003) or from an organisational level, such as by looking at strategic actions (Balogun and Johnson, 2005), or by looking at strategy praxis from an institutional lens and linking it to the whole industry (Lounsbury and Crumley 2007; Vaara et al., 2004).

Although strategy-as-practice can be seen as an extension of the traditional strategy research agenda (Whittington and Cailluet, 2008), strategy-as-practice scholars take a different outlook on strategy, seeing it as something that people do rather than something that organisations have (Whittington, 2004; Jarzabkowski, 2004; Johnson et al., 2007; Whittington and Cailluet, 2008; Jarzabkowski and Whittington, 2008a). In this way, strategy-as-practice goes a step further in challenging the perception of strategy as a property of organisations and towards understanding strategy as what people do (Whittington and Cailluet, 2008). Strategy-as-process as an approach goes beyond the traditional strategy stream that is concerned primarily with abstract elements of strategy, while strategy-as-practice aims to get into the concrete details of strategy, moving beyond abstraction (Johnson et al., 2007).

Strategy-as-practice is defined 'as a concern with what people do in relation to strategy and how this is influenced by and influences their organisational and institutional context' (Johnson et al., 2007: 7). In this view, the focus shifts from strategy to strategising as proposed by Whittington (2003), with the micro-activities of strategists

being seen as consequential in organisations. Researchers in the strategy-as-practice field call for a refocus from the organisation and its performances to include the people, the tools they use in strategising, and how they perform when they strategise (Johnson et al., 2007). The importance lies in strategists' performances when they are concerned with the development of strategies (ibid). This takes place by following what strategists do in different types of strategic communication, be that in strategy meetings (Jarzabkowski and Seidl, 2008), committees (Hoon, 2007), awaydays (Hodgkinson and Wright, 2002), formal routines (Jarzabkowski, 2003, 2005; Jarzabkowski and Wilson, 2002), formal teams (Paroutis and Pettigrew, 2007), and strategy workshops (Hendry and Seidel, 2003; Hodgkinson et al., 2006; Whittington et al., 2006). These activities of strategists on a micro-level are viewed from the perspective of how they influence the organisational meso-level and the macro-institutional level (Johnson et al., 2007). Strategy-as-practice, in this sense, complements the traditional strategy stream and the process stream by providing a practice outlook on strategy (Golsorkhi et al., 2010).

This micro-level focus gives strategy-as-practice a distinctive position in its contribution to the strategy field because scholars must draw on different theoretical and methodological frames from those traditionally used within strategic management (Golsorkhi et al., 2010). Thus, although some scholars see strategy-as-practice as complementary to the traditional strategy stream (Johnson et al., 2003, 2007; Regnér, 2008), it goes beyond this and even beyond the strategy process research agenda. Debates on the differences and similarities between the strategy-as-practice and the strategy process research agendas have been addressed by various scholars. These draw attention to the different perspectives adopted by the two academic groups, some see them as implying that strategy-as-practice is an extension of the strategy process (Jarzabkowski and Wilson, 2002; Paroutis and Pettigrew, 2007). Others (Johnson et al.,

2007) see them as different because of the different units of analysis they each rely on; Whittington (2007) sees one area of overlap and many others that are completely different between the two. Meanwhile, Chia and MacKay (2007) propose that strategy-as-practice is seen as complementary to strategy-as-process and not an independent field.

From a strategy-as-practice perspective, Jarzabkowski and Wilson (2002) suggest that strategy-as-process research focuses on the mutual give and take between strategists and their context, while strategy-as-practice research focuses on the activities of these strategists, seeing strategy practice as an extension of the strategy process. Paroutis and Pettigrew (2007) see that the relationship between the two is very close with only small differences. However, Johnson et al. (2007) acknowledge that the beginnings of the strategy-as-process research in the 1970s share common ground with strategy-as-practice because of the fact that it concerned itself with matters such as the politics and tensions within organisations (Pettigrew, 1977). However, they argue that, by the 1980s and 1990s, this micro-focus was not as important as it used to be, and the main unit of analysis become the organisation and its processes, without looking at what constitutes these processes. Thus, while studies such as Pettigrew (1973) and Mintzberg et al. (1976) are detailed in explaining the activities of strategising, strategy-as-process studies that followed (Papadakis et al., 1998; Wally and Baum 1994) pay less attention to the details of what people actually do (Johnson et al., 2007). Whittington (2007) acknowledges the closeness between process and practice but calls for differences between the two to be clarified. He differentiates between practice and process, although he acknowledges areas of overlap when it comes to praxis. Taking Mintzberg's process work as an example, Whittington (2007) argues that the main differences between this and the strategy-as-practice research agenda is in relation to

strategy practices, practitioners, and the profession of strategy. The elements of analysis that Whittington (2007) points out are new areas that research on practice should focus on that are different from strategy process research. For instance, researching strategy as a profession gives a broader understanding of strategy by linking a macro-perspective to a micro-strategising perspective, which is done by looking at the bigger forces that affect strategy: organisation, society, culture, and technology (Whittington et al., 2011).

Moreover, coming from a process perspective, Chia and MacKay (2007) propose viewing strategy-as-practice from a post-processual approach, alluding to the similarities between both approaches but still arguing for it to be seen as a continuum of the process approach, rather than a fully-fledged approach on its own. They point out that the main difference between strategy-as-practice and strategy process is its focus on the micro-practices of strategising. They criticize strategy-as-practice for the lack of clarity between practices and processes of individual activities and the fact that strategy-as-practice focuses more on individuals' practices and less on their engagement in social practice in a broader sense. This is why they argue that it is not clear whether it is an independent perspective or the extension of the strategy process.

Other scholars within strategy-as-practice (Regnér, 2008) have gone further in proposing a complementary perspective in which the strategy-as-practice approach can complement the strategy dynamic approach through its different points of interests. For example, the importance of interactions, behaviours, practices, culture, contexts, and the number of strategists that can be involved are not linked only to the echelons of organisations. Regnér (2008) even suggests the possibility of establishing a dynamic view of strategy that takes into consideration the socio-cultural context and the artefacts that surround and affect strategists' activities.

This shifting of focus from strategies to strategists (Whittington, 1996, 2003, 2006; Johnson et al., 2003) led scholars to reach out to like-minded researchers at conferences (EGOS, AOM, BAM) and through Internet communities (<http://sap-in.org>) to strengthen the network of people researching this area. Connecting the theoretical to the empirical realms, such as linking micro-levels of analysis to macro-levels, is just one of the main challenges that this perspective faces (Johnson et al., 2007; Jarzabkowski et al., 2007; Golsorkhi et al., 2010). Scholars are continuously trying to satisfy this by calling for a broader inclusion of scholars from other sub-disciplines.

The development of the strategy-as-practice field started with a special issue in the *Journal of Management Studies* in 2003 and, later, special issues published on human relations and long-range planning in 2007 (Johnson et al., 2007). This was accompanied by ‘tracks, symposia and workshops at the Strategic Management Society, the European Group for Organization Studies, the Academy of Management, the European Academy of Management and other meetings [that] have been created and are enthusiastically attended,’ leading to more scholars identifying with the field and more doctoral researchers conducting their research within strategy-as-practice (Johnson et al., 2007: 210). While the online community was called Strategy as Practice ([www.strategyaspractice.org](http://www.strategyaspractice.org)) in 2007 (Johnson et al., 2007), it is currently called SAP-IN (<http://sap-in.org>), standing for the Strategy-as-Practice International Network, pointing to the broader audience engaging with this new field. All these efforts were aimed at connecting scholars from around the world to promote this new field and, by doing so, engaging scholars from different perspectives to draw on different theories and methodologies of social science to enrich the newly formed field of strategy-as-practice (Golsorkhi et al., 2010). The website offers up-to-date information about the

newly published papers in the field. It also offers scholars a chance to discuss their work in progress and the constructs they find difficult to tackle through a discussion forum. In addition, the website keeps members up-to-date with the workshops and activities that the community organises worldwide. New academic researchers, soon after their registration on the website, can be active members through the discussion forums or through getting involved in workshops in Europe or North America.

### **Theoretical and Methodological Diversity within Strategy-as-Practice**

Jarzabkowski et al. (2007: 8) adopt the perspective that an activity is considered strategic when it is ‘consequential for the strategic outcomes, directions, survival and competitive advantage of the firm’. They acknowledge that practitioners are units of analysis from a strategy of practice perspective because of their active role in constructing activities that have consequential outcomes for the organisation. They argue that practitioners construct strategic activities through ‘who they are, how they act and what practices they draw upon in that action’ (Jarzabkowski et al., 2007: 10). The importance for them is not the types of practices in which practitioners engage but, rather, how these practices ‘shape the social accomplishment of strategy’ (ibid: 13).

This type of in-depth investigation of strategic activity led scholars in the field of strategy-as-practice to draw on a diverse range of theoretical and methodological resources, and still there is a call for more diversity to capture the details of micro-strategising (Jarzabkowski et al., 2007). Strategic activity is defined ‘as a situated, socially accomplished activity, while strategising comprises those actions, interactions and negotiations of multiple actors and the situated practices that they draw upon in accomplishing that activity’ (Jarzabkowski et al., 2007: 7-8), which points to the hard

task faced by scholars in trying to capture these micro-activities. This is why scholars within the field made extensive efforts to connect with various theoretical and methodological traditions to gain a better understanding of strategising. Scholars seriously taking up the practice turn within social science have relied heavily on Giddens' (1984) theory of structure and agency and Bourdieu's (1977, 1990) ideas on habitus with the aim of trying to capture how a practice lens can aid in bringing new insights into understanding micro-strategising activities (Orlikowski, 2010).

The practice perspective taken up by strategy-as-practice researchers was criticised by Carter et al. (2008a: 90) because of the ambiguity regarding what practice is from the strategy-as-practice view. This was due to the varied theoretical approaches they draw upon in explaining practice; it is not clear whether practice was 'events, routines, rules', or simply 'being closer to reality' and 'being more practical' (ibid). However, scholars still continued to take on diverse theories in building in-depth understandings of micro-strategising in the field, and this yielded new insights in strategy-as-practice research. For example, Jarzabkowski and Wilson (2002) use social theories of practice, Rouleau (2005) uses sense-making theory, Denis et al. (2007) use actor-network theory, Jarzabkowski (2003) uses activity theory, Mantre (2008) uses role and agency theory, and Jarzabkowski (2004) uses situated learning theory. Although there are variations within the methodological approaches to strategy-as-practice, as in the use of case studies by Regner (2003), discourse analysis by Mantere and Vaara (2008), cognitive approaches by Clarke and Mackaness (2001), and ethnomethodology by Samra-Fredericks (2003), language-oriented methods still dominate.

The discursive methods of analysis within strategy-as-practice continue to dominate, with a thorough focus on analysing the language used for strategising (Hendry, 2000;

Vaara et al., 2004; Beech and Johnson, 2005; Mantere and Vaara, 2008; Phillips et al., 2008; Laine and Vaara, 2010), and the use of ethnomethodology, or forms of conversation analysis (Samra-Fredericks, 2003, 2004, 2005, 2010). The conversations of strategy are seen as important avenues to explore (Samra-Fredericks, 2003; Hoon, 2007) by investigating the rhetorical practices of strategists' persuasion activities (Samra-Fredericks, 2004). This is the case because language is seen as an important aspect of understanding the identities of strategists when they are engaged in strategic activities, and a core element in determining how managers influence others (Maitlis, 2005; Maitlis and Lawrence, 2003, 2007). Vaara (2010) implements discursive methods in analysing strategy to show that strategic activity must be interrelated; by that addressing the complexity of strategy-as-practice through language.

Some scholars have focused their investigation on the language that strategists draw upon in strategic planning, exploring dominant and periphery discourses within their strategic practice (Mantere and Vaara, 2008). Mantere and Vaara (2008) argue for a critical discourse perspective to problematise dominant discourses and promote alternative ones. Through analysis of interviews and strategy documents in 12 organisations in Finland, they suggest that there are three types of discourses that impede strategy participation and three that promote them. They argue that understanding these types of discourse helps to better understand the social practice of strategy. In alignment with such work, Miller et al. (2008) explore participation from a decision-making influence perspective. In their research on the type of involvement and influence that takes place in top-level decisions, they define involvement as any kind of involvement in strategic activities, including providing data and attending meetings. They conducted quantitative research to investigate the level of involvement and influence of participants in relation to strategic activities. In their research, they not only

seek to know who is involved in strategising activities but also how they have been influenced when they are involved. They argue that being involved entails having a voice in the decision to be made, but this does not say anything about who has the loudest voice and more influence. Also, Jarzabkowski and Balogun (2009) look at strategic communication and participation. They employ activity theory to investigate how strategic goals change through strategic planning communication and participation processes until they reach a state in which they are taken up by all strategists. They look at the fact that, when strategists communicate their different experiences, depending on their roles and goals, this can hinder communicative activity. In so doing, they tackle important issues of power, interests, and how communicative processes are perceived and negotiated. These studies all tackle issues of strategic communication and participation and look at power through different lenses, and yet they still focus predominantly on language, while other socio-material aspects are neglected, which points to a need for more investigation in the strategic contexts of these elements (Vara and Whittington, 2012).

### **Strategy-as-Practice within Higher Education**

The in-depth data collection required when conducting strategy-as-practice research led scholars Jarzabkowski and Kaplan (2010) to argue that, due to the difficulties in gaining access when conducting research on strategy-as-practice, scholars have focused on non-profit organisations such as universities (Jarzabkowski, 2003, 2005; Honn, 2007). This is also the case in organisational studies (Salancik and Pfeffer, 1974). Universities are much like other types of organisations when it comes to primary organisational issues such as strategy, power, and decision-making. Pfeffer and Salancik (1974: 472) argue that, '[w]hile universities may be somewhat different from organizational forms, this is

a difference in degree, rather than of form, and thus the basic arguments would still hold’.

Universities share common characteristics with other organisations, including the need to follow their competitors, advance their technology, and continuously develop strategic plans. However, strategic decisions are difficult to achieve, as Jarzabkowski and Seidl (2008) note in their review of a number of scholarly perspectives (Cohen and March, 1974; Denis et al., 2001). They state that, because of the different interests of organisational members within universities, strategic decisions become difficult to achieve and are therefore interesting for scholars to investigate. Jarzabkowski (2003) points out that, because the settings of universities have not been touched upon so much, they present an important venue for studying strategic actions.

Weick (1976: 1) views educational organisations as ‘loosely coupled systems’ where, although they have tenuous connections, they still preserve their separateness. Universities, as a category of educational organisation, are no different. They consist of many groups connected under the umbrella of the university, yet they still preserve their different interests and views. This element of universities being loosely coupled systems makes it even more important to explore how strategic decisions are influenced within them, while noting that different groups will promote different interests. However, in the end, one decision will be made on a specific strategic proposal. Moreover, Cohen et al. (1972: 1) view universities as a form of organized anarchy characterised by ‘problematic preferences, unclear technology and fluid participation’ because of the ambiguity of goals and the indefinite roles of actors within them. In this respect, they propose a garbage-can model to describe decision-making within universities. This model states that strategic choices are based on solutions proposed by certain members

at a certain time, which might not be the right solutions for the current problems. However, this is pursued for the benefit of some groups' interests rather than making a collective strategic decision for the university as a whole. In a similar perspective, Lounsbury (2001) notes that university practices are shaped by the demands of broader institutional pressures. Because of the importance of these pressures, universities are closely scrutinised. Hardy (1991) notes that, because of the external pressures of accountability toward universities, their management teams have turned to the business sector to implement management techniques in a university context.

As noted, universities are similar to other forms of organisations, so strategy is no less important than it is in any other type of organisation. Strategy within a university context is, therefore, well-researched. Jarzabkowski and Wilson (2002) explore how the top management team at Warwick University puts strategy into practice by exploring the process of formulation and implementation. This in-depth study focuses on two levels of analysis: strategy-as-practice and strategy-as-process. The main focus is to uncover the actions that take place in the formulation of strategy as well as the context in which they take place. The latter relates to strategy-as-process, and the former relates to strategy-as-practice. They conclude that, to understand strategy-as-practice, there is a need to link the actions to the characteristics of the top management team and the organisation as a whole. Furthermore, Jarzabkowski's (2003) research study looks into how top teams strategise at UK universities. She looks into how universities achieve a strategic balance. This is investigated with respect to how they combine leadership with research excellence in generating income. Also, Hoon (2007) takes a German university as her case study and looks at formal committees as a strategic practice in which actors (senior and middle managers) interact. She refers to these types of verbal interactions as

strategic conversations and views them as carriers of political actions that are important to aspects of strategic implementation.

Hendry and Seidl (2003) adopt Luhmann's notion of an episode, which is a series of communications that have a beginning and an end. These episodes present the organisation with an opportunity to leave its structured, normal, day-to-day routines to engage in a new atmosphere where strategic practices can be a focus of reflection. Jarzabkowski and Seidl (2006: 4), in their working paper 'Meetings as Strategising Episodes in the Becoming of Organizational Strategy', focus on the micro-practices exhibited in meetings that are 'involved in becoming and why they might tend towards either stabilising [or destabilising] of changing strategic activity'. Moreover, Jarzabkowski and Seidl (2008), in their research on the role of meetings in the social practice of strategy, concentrate on a university context. However, they argue that this context is very similar to other types of organisations, be they public, cultural, governmental, or non-profit. Hence, they suggest their study bears relevance to a broader range of organisations. Kim et al. (2002: 286), in their research on Korean universities, explore 'why and how organizations respond to external pressures for institutional change in terms of organizational political dynamics'. Their research suggests the need for future research that focuses on how organisations react differently to the pressures of external institutional changes and the fact that these are the outcomes of political plays between different groups' interests.

These studies all point to the significant role of a university context for exploring the issues of strategy-as-practice because of the pluralistic nature of these organisations with their conflicts of interest and power plays (Denis et al., 2001).

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has critically reviewed the field of strategy-as-practice and pointed out how it differs from the traditional strategy stream and the strategy process research agenda. Yet because the field is established to mainly address the drawbacks of the study of strategy, it expanded into diverse theoretical and methodological spheres of social sciences in breadth rather than depth. The aim is to scrutinise the details of *micro* strategy making and understand better the activities that strategists engage in when they make strategy. This importance is emphasised within the higher education context, where the diverse interests and the pluralistic nature of people and their organisations are prominent (Jarzabkowski and Wilson, 2002).

Nonetheless, there is an immense requirement for the field to go beyond *micro* strategy, which is perceived as a very narrow focus in the study of strategy in general (Clegg et al., 2004). It initially served the field of strategy to examine the trivial elements of micro strategy making and evaluate their importance. However, for the field to develop it must advance its agenda and face the challenges of being a fully-fledged discipline. This requires an in-depth engagement with theoretical and methodological frameworks that will enable strategy-as-practice researchers to reach to an enhanced understanding of strategy making. Consequently, this means dealing with the weaknesses within the field that, when addressed, will leverage its position.

This need to question the field of strategy-as-practice and challenge its agenda is a way to discover its weaknesses and work on strengthening them. This will reinforce the position of the discipline and aid it to expand its agenda in fruition. This will also establish its position among other disciplines of strategy study, highlighting its

differences and its contributions in relation to other approaches. The results will contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of strategy and the activities that accompanies strategy making, surpassing the advances of other strategic approaches.

However, because the field of strategy-as-practice is relatively young and there are various areas that need development, theoretically and methodologically, calling on different fields is a primary concern. It is an opportunity for strategy-as-practice scholars to engage more with fields like organisational studies to strengthen their position. The following chapter will review the importance of adopting an organisational lens into the study of strategy-as-practice (Carter et al., 2008a) by signifying the need for such a perspective, especially in the national culture of Saudi Arabia. It will show how such a lens will serve to voice some of the silences within the field that relate to gender, body, power, and institutions. These are some elements that need more focus from strategy-as-practice researchers and will improve the in-depth investigation of strategy.

### Introduction

This chapter highlights the importance of adopting an organisational studies lens in the study of strategy-as-practice. A critical review of the literature on the current position of strategy-as-practice questions whether it can develop into an independent field (Clegg et al., 2004; Chia and MacKay, 2007; Carter et al., 2008a, 2008b; Rasche and Chia, 2009), and also enables deeper understanding of strategy as a whole (Golsorkhi et al., 2010). This study aims to address major silences within strategy-as-practice in relation to power, embodied gender relations, and institutions (Clegg et al., 2004; Chia and MacKay, 2007; Rouleau, 2003, 2005). However, the problems of structure and agency within strategy-as-practice are major challenges to the field as a whole. Yet, to address these, the chapter argues for adopting a more comprehensive view within strategy-as-practice (Chia and Holt, 2006; Chia and Rasche, 2010) that will enable articulation of these silences. Because one of the main silences is power, the chapter will focus on investigating power within strategy-as-practice (Clegg et al., 2006) and will extend the understanding of power through two main themes: gender (Gherardi and Poggio, 2001; Bruni and Gherardi, 2002) and institutionalisation (Meyer and Rowan, 1977; DiMaggio and Powell, 1983). The chapter concludes by highlighting the significance of taking up an organisational studies lens. Adopting this lens will provide a distinctive contribution to the field of strategy-as-practice, by enabling better understandings of strategic interactions in relation to gendered embodied power relations and institutional legitimation.

## **Strategy-as-Practice in the Eyes of Critics**

The relative newness of the strategy-as-practice field has led some critical scholars to question the robustness of the field and point to the areas within strategy-as-practice that need more attention (Clegg et al., 2004; Chia and MacKay, 2007; Carter et al., 2008a, 2008b; Rasche and Chia, 2009). Although many of these weaknesses within the field have already been pointed out by strategy-as-practice scholars (Jarzabkowski and Whittington, 2008b), these areas still need to be developed. Strategy-as-practice scholars have called for the development of two main ideas: greater theoretical and methodological diversity and ways of linking the micro-strategising level to an institutional level of analysis (Jarzabkowski et al., 2007; Whittington, 2007; Johnson et al., 2007).

Thus, while scholars within strategy-as-practice (Johnson et al., 2003) view it as an extension of the work on the resource-based approach of traditional strategy, Carter et al. (2008a) view this as a weakness and urge the strategy-as-practice field to break free and develop an independent research agenda. Carter et al. (2008a) state that, even though strategy-as-practice scholars perceive their research agenda as different from the traditional strategy stream, by looking at the micro-activities of strategists that affect organisational outcomes, they retain a commitment to the main goal of traditional strategy research, which is to link strategic outcomes to organisational performance. Examples that illustrate this pattern include Mantere and Vaara's (2008) exploration of the effect of different discourses on strategy participation; Jarzabkowski's (2008) analysis of patterns of successful and unsuccessful strategising; and Mantere's (2005) description of how champion behaviours arise. In this regard, Carter et al. (2008a) point to the importance of developing an independent character within the field that puts it on a different level from other strategy streams.

The criticism of strategy-as-practice goes even further, into its ontological and epistemological basis. Carter et al. (2008a) argue that, because strategy-as-practice scholars study the micro-activities of strategists, they claim to get closer to the real experience of strategists, which brings them closer to a positivist functional perspective of reality. In this view, strategy-as-practice scholars, although promoting themselves as interpretivist, come closer to being functionalist and instrumentalist. Whittington (1996: 731) asserts that ‘the focus of this approach is on strategy as social “practice”, on how the practitioners of strategy really act and interact’; this can lead to some confusion regarding the concept of reality. However, strategy-as-practice researchers, in their defence, argue that they are not looking to uncover a fixed reality but, rather, looking at what strategists do and investigating it as it unfolds without seeking to adopt a functionalist lens (Jarzabkowski and Whittington, 2008b).

Chia and MacKay (2007: 228) argue that strategy-as-practice is focused more on the individual actions of strategists and imply a need to explore the historical and cultural contexts that shape these individuals’ activities, or what they call ‘trans-individual’ activities. This is further echoed by Chia and Holt (2006; 2007; 2009) in their argument that a better understanding of strategy depends on acknowledging the embedded cultural and historical influences that shape strategizing activities. However, scholars within strategy-as-practice acknowledge the importance of embodied cultural practices that are part of the enactment of strategy (Jarzabkowski and Spee, 2009). For strategy-as-practice scholars, it is important to explore the cultural and historical frames of strategies to understand them in their own context (Jarzabkowski, 2004; Jarzabkowski and Kaplan, 2008; Whittington, 2006). However, although efforts have been made to fulfil that aim, according to Rasche and Chia (2009), strategy-as-practice scholars tend

to focus on the individual and not on the *collective background understandings* that are essential for understanding the situated activities of strategists. This point has been a main interest for scholars in the field, noting the importance of innovating methods that suits in-depth investigation and drawing on diverse theoretical lenses that will enable the cultural and historical element of strategists' actions to be captured (Whittington, 2006; Jarzabkowski et al., 2007).

In relation to strategy-as-practice research, Chia and Mackay (2000) propose that strategy-as-practice can fall under a post-processual practice perspective, while Carter et al. (2008a) argue that some strategy-as-practice work (Jarzabkowski, 2003) is very similar to process research and might even go a step backward, as Ezzamel and Willmott (2004) suggest. In previous process research, there was an interest in power and politics, but these issues have not been adequately addressed within strategy-as-practice research. Although scholars have tackled issues of power effects (Samra-Fredericks, 2005), the promotion of certain ideas (Ezzamel and Willmott, 2008), and how managers politically influence others (Balogun et al., 2005, 2008; Jarzabkowski and Balogun, 2009; Rouleau and Balogun, 2011), power is viewed mostly using a discursive lens. Carter et al. (2008a) argue that paying close attention to power and politics will enrich the study of strategy-as-practice and enable it to cut its links to the economic focus of the traditional strategy stream, making it more critical and independent in scope.

In consensus, Clegg et al. (2004) argue for the importance of investigating power within strategy-as-practice with regard to investigating why some voices are heard while others are not and seeing the implications of this for strategy-making. This, they argue, will help in developing an understanding of strategy-as-practice as a social practice. Issues

such as investigating the importance of addressing unheard voices and exploring what is not done as well as what is done when strategising can be of immense importance, as this considers ‘symbols, artefacts and language of strategy’ (ibid: 93). This has the potential to eliminate the ambiguity attached to strategy-as-practice concepts regarding strategists and their activities (Carter et al., 2008a).

In addition to the need to investigate power within strategy-as-practice, critics have called for investigation of the body and the embodied aspects of strategising which they argue have been overlooked within the strategy practice field (Rasche and Chia, 2009). This is an important point that the strategy-as-practice research agenda can capitalise on (ibid) because strategists’ micro-activities predetermine a physical aspect that is worth exploring. The importance of the body as a strategising asset can be explored by conducting ethnographic research (ibid). Although some strategy-as-practice researchers have employed methods of observation in their research on strategic activities (Jarzabkowski 2003; Stensaker and Falkenberg 2007), they do not deal with the body per se. Visual methods involving the use of images and visual data can capture factors that might not be captured otherwise. Thus, surpassing the linguistic turn within social science, scholars within strategy-as-practice acknowledge the need for research on the embodied actions of strategists that enables insight into political plays that cannot be captured solely by linguistic means (Jarzabkowski and Spee, 2009). Although some studies within strategy-as-practice have focused on identity (e.g. Rouleau, 2003, 2005; Beech and Johnson, 2005) or on the embodiment of strategising (Reckwitz, 2002; Orlikowski, 2007; Heracleous and Jacobs, 2008, 2011), most of the focus is on how the bodies of strategists interact with material artefacts rather than on bodies as the centre of study. For strategy-as-practice scholars, the importance of the body stems from its being part of the sociomaterial aspect of strategising (Orlikowski, 2007), which are important

because strategic actions cannot be considered apart from the materiality that surrounds them. In consensus, Reckwitz (2002) defines the sociomaterial aspects of strategising as comprising the routine behaviours of strategists that include their engagement in embodied relationships, their mental activities, their backgrounds, and their emotions.

Rasche and Chia (2009) note that strategy-as-practice should include a focus on the bodily activities of strategists because these practices, in their view, are physical and observed. They also go beyond 'bodily doings', how the body is utilised in the setting, to consider 'bodily saying', which refers to the speech acts that strategists rely on in interactions (ibid: 721). They argue that strategy-as-practice scholars have emphasised verbal communication through bodily sayings (Mantere, 2005; Paroutis and Pettigrew, 2007) but have put less emphasis on bodily doings in strategy practice, which can include strategists' unconscious physical practices in times of strategic engagement. This, they suggest, is an area that heavily reflects the practice element of strategy.

Despite these limitations, there is a developing trend toward investigation of the body within strategy-as-practice. Rouleau's (2003, 2005) research explored the body and gender within strategising in her investigation of middle management in the fashion industry. She notes that strategists use their gendered bodies to give certain communicational clues that can stimulate support from clients with regard to the products marketed. Also, she notes that the language used is gendered and related to 'family metaphors' that link strategists back to their gender roles and align them with specific taken-for-granted roles and identities. This turn toward investigating the body is also taken seriously in the work of Heracleous and Jacobs (2008, 2011), who emphasise the importance of embodiment in understanding organisational strategic planning. They point to the important link between identity and strategy because identity is what

strategists rely on when making decisions within organisations. Their ontological position of embodied realism combines elements of realism and interpretivism, and their concern is with the symbolic embodied artefacts and the metaphors they imply through building with LEGO blocks; however, they do not consider the bodies of participants. Instead, they consider how participants' bodies are related in producing symbolic embodied metaphors. Hence, the body is important to investigate within strategic practices because it is 'a complex bundle involving social, material and embodied ways of doing that are interrelated and not always articulated or conscious to the actor involved in doing' (Jarzabkowski and Spee, 2009: 82). This is a call echoed by other scholars in the field (Whittington, 2011; Vaara and Whittington, 2012), who emphasise the importance of acknowledging the role of body artefacts and materiality within the strategy-as-practice research agenda.

Another point that critical views of strategy-as-practice brings into focus is how scholars in the field tend to engage with various theoretical frameworks but lack theoretical depth (Carter et al., 2008a, 2008b). Therefore, there have been calls for more theoretical engagement to investigate the complexities of strategy-as-practice (Johnson et al., 2007). However, strategy-as-practice critics (Carter et al., 2008a, 2008b) suggest that scholars in the field react to this by pointing to a lot of theories but not engaging them in sufficient depth. Instead, they employ theories as a way of acknowledgment rather than utilising them effectively; for example, some theorists are extensively cited in the field, including Bourdieu (1977, 1990), de Certeau (1984), Foucault (1977), Giddens (1984), and Schatzki et al. (2001). These theories present opportunities for scholars to engage more deeply and to develop more empirical work in the strategy-as-practice domain to uncover day-to-day micro-strategising activities (Rasche and Chia, 2009). Strategy-as-practice scholars are encouraged to go further by drawing upon

practice theories within social science and being sensitive to Whittington's (2007: 1578) call to adopt a sociological view in the study of strategy-as-practice that 'encourages us to see strategy in all its manifestations, and as both widely connected and deeply embedded in particular societies'.

All these concerns regarding the field of strategy-as-practice have led scholars to call for more diverse theoretical and methodological engagement that will assist in investigating the micro-activities of strategists and, at the same time, link them to an organizational meso-level and an institutional macro-level of analysis (Jarzabkowski et al., 2007). Establishing this link is of great importance in advancing the field, but it is a significant main challenge 'to combine an intimate insight into micro-level activities with a continuous regard for the wider institutional context that informs and empowers such activities' (Johnson et al., 2007: 22).

Rasche and Chia (2009) go beyond Jarzabkowski et al. (2007) and Johnson et al. (2007) in calling for innovative methodologies for the study of strategy-as-practice. They suggest an ethnographic approach to studying the practice of strategy and point out that participant observation can provide a rich source of data regarding strategising practices. This point has been acknowledged by other scholars (Johnson et al., 2007), who believe that, because of the nature of conducting research into strategy-as-practice, a close examination of the phenomenon taking place requires qualitative data, including observations, interviews, and the collection of artefacts that include meeting minutes and reports. However, some scholars still think that traditional ethnography is limited in the study of strategy-as-practice and can be completed by methods of 'interactive discussion groups, self-reports and practitioner research' (Balogun et al., 2003: 198).

A final key issue that the strategy-as-practice field faces relates to the idea of generalisability. Jarzabkowski and Whittington (2008a) note that the importance of strategy-as-practice research depends on how such research can give insight into the activities of strategists and what makes them competent in what they do and how analysing the activities that take place at the time of strategising can provide explanations that will lead to enhanced understanding. Through this, strategy-as-practice adds to knowledge by providing explanations rather than being prescriptive. In this sense, it relates to human experiences and provides naturalistic generalisations such that people can identify with these experiences and see the rationale in their analysis (Stake, 1996). In consensus, Jarzabkowski and Kaplan (2010) argue that the generalisability of strategy-as-practice lies in its ability to situate its outcomes relative to certain contexts. The main goal is to gain a better understanding of how strategy is made through strategists' activities, which will aid in providing a better understanding of the strategy profession (Whittington, 2007). In this spirit, it is advisable that the field take on some of the main points out that have been suggested by critics for its development. As Clegg et al. (2004: 25) argue, bringing an organisational studies approach to the strategy-as-practice field will help in investigating the underdeveloped aspects of strategising, including 'power; professional identity; nonhuman actors; ethics; language, and, institutions.' The organisational studies literature, Carter et al. (2008a) argue, is an area that strategy-as-practice has failed to link sufficiently closely to, and it has already engaged with what people do. Hence, engaging more effectively with organisational literature will lead to better in-depth understandings of strategic activities.

### **Addressing Silences within Strategy-as-Practice**

This study makes a contribution to the strategy-as-practice field by addressing some of the silences within the field related to organisational studies. Scholars such as Clegg et al. (2004) and Carter et al. (2008a, 2008b) have criticised the strategy-as-practice field as lacking conceptual depth and theoretical and methodological bases, arguing for the need to focus on power and identity. This study responds to this critique by adopting an innovative theoretical and methodological framework for exploring the detail of embodiment and power within a national culture that is substantively different from those of previous studies. Strategy-as-practice has the potential to benefit from insights gained by studying different strategic contexts, and research from around the world can, therefore, be very enriching to the field (Jarzabkowski and Kaplan, 2010).

This study fills some of the gaps in the strategy-as-practice literature by adopting an organisational studies lens to explore some of the silences in the strategy-as-practice field. In consensus with Tsai and Wu's (2010) argument, linking strategy and organisational research will open more opportunities to learn by building bridges between the two fields. This will provide a rich contribution to the study of strategy and organisations by focusing on a cross-national setting that builds on existing knowledge in the field (Floyd et al., 2011). To achieve this, the study will explore the micro-activities of strategists and link them to the gendered power-laden performances of strategists (covered in Chapter Six). It will also consider the powerful Western institutional rules that govern strategising on a micro-level in this particular cultural context (covered in Chapter Seven). The importance of this focus is twofold: first, it will satisfy the need for a more embodied gender understanding of strategy-as-practice (Rouleau, 2003, 2005). Second, it comes at a time when 'strategy-making agendas have increasingly been set by political agencies external to organizations that, in the past, would have had no formal or emergent voice in the strategy-making process' (Carter et

al., 2008b: 109). Carter et al. (2008a), thus, argue that strategy can be seen as an instrument used to legitimate institutional rules (Meyer and Rowan, 1977). Hence, strategy-as-practice will benefit from drawing on institutional theory to explore how strategy is legitimated by influential organisations in the field and how it is used ceremonially (Clegg et al., 2004). In so doing, the study will provide answers to the continuous call for innovative methods that capture the micro- and macro-aspects of strategy-as-practice (Jarzabkowski 2004; Whittington, 2006, 2007; Johnson et al., 2007; Jarzabkowski et al., 2007; Lounsbury and Crumley, 2007) and specifically the calls by Jarzabkowski and Spee (2009) to extend investigation to strategy-as-practice at a macro-institutional level by looking at strategy as a profession (Whittington, 2007).

This study will thus address the embodied aspect of strategising, which is an area that is still in need of development (Jarzabkowski and Spee, 2009; Rasche and Chia, 2009), especially within the area of gendered strategising (Rouleau, 2003, 2005). This will involve drawing on the gender literature within organisational studies and linking it to the understanding of gendered strategising. Scholars within the gender literature have devised the construct of 'doing gender' to refer to the social enactment of gender rather than viewing gender as a biological reflection (Czarniawska, 2006; Bruni and Gherardi, 2002; Gherardi and Poggio, 2001). This interest has been taken up within the strategy-as-practice field through the work of Rouleau (2003, 2005). She highlights the significance of gender relations within strategic activities, linking them to strategists' family roles and identities and showing how they can have an effect on strategy practice. As Rouleau notes, this interest is not taken up in other strategy research, even though it can be highly significant in shaping strategy. However, it is not the difference between genders that Rouleau (2003, 2005) points to but, rather, the role that this plays in strategising activities.

Within the organisation studies field, Kanter's (1977) structural approach highlights the difference that the numerical presence of gendered subjects can have on power relations. A 'token', defined as a few people or one person who represents a broader category (in this case women), can present a symbol when they are few in number and in the presence of a dominant group. Kanter characterises them as being highly visible in the presence of the dominant group, and they contrast to the dominant group by being different from the norm. It is this imbalance in the representation of women that ensures women's token position and their lesser likelihood of acquiring power (Mann, 1995), ensuring their subordination to male domination (Marshall, 1984). Such circumstances highlight Simpson and Lewis' (2005, 2007, 2012) arguments on how surface-level visibility can be significant in producing situations of gendered difference and exclusion within formal organisations. This is especially the case in settings where the public space is dominated by norms that privilege men and private space that restricts women (McDowell, 1997), hence creating situations where women are enacting culturally expected gendered stereotypical roles through doing gender (West and Fenstermaker, 1995; Martin, 2003) and engaging to a lesser degree in instances where they defy cultural norms by undoing gender (Deutsch, 2007; Pullen and Knights, 2007).

An understanding of such gender power relations can contribute to better understanding the challenges and opportunities that facilitate and obstruct strategising within unbalanced gendered settings within the mixed-gender strategising environment in Saudi Arabia's higher education setting. This is important to investigate because communication and strategic participation do not take place just through people's being in one place (Jarzabkowski and Balogun, 2009). Thus, the mere fact that women occupy spaces of strategising does not guarantee their actual active strategic participation. The

various interests of strategists and their different roles within organisations all contribute to restricting the type of participation that takes place within these strategic interactions (ibid). Therefore, this study will consider how the embodied experiences of strategists can affect the flow of strategic communication and participation within the setting in which social actors are expected to participate. Thus, building on previous work on strategy-as-practice in regard to strategic participation and communication (Jarzabkowski and Balogun, 2009) and gender (Rouleau, 2003, 2005) will enhance the understanding of power in relation to embodied gender relations. This focus will be covered in Chapter Six of the thesis.

The second area this study will seek to explore relates to the way in which strategists' scripts (Goffman, 1959) on a micro-level are governed by powerful institutional legitimating organisations in the context of accreditation processes. In these cases, organisations seek to gain legitimacy, earn value, and guarantee stability by abiding by rules established by institutional power-laden organisations in the field (Meyer and Rowan, 1977; DiMaggio and Powell, 1983). On a macro-level, this results in organisational homogeneity (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983, 1991). However, in the effort to conform, inconsistencies result from social actors' diverse interests (Meyer and Rowan, 1977). These inconsistencies will be examined by drawing on social, cultural, and historical frames (Goffman, 1974) that help to explain the dilemma faced by strategists when they are in the position of adopting Western managerial practices within a traditional cultural context. The analysis will also take the opposite approach and highlight how institutional scripts are challenged by the participation of some strategists who seek hybridisation, through which they can still keep their locality (Nederveen Pieterse, 2004). This will complement previous work on strategy-as-practice in relation to participation concerning the voice that strategists have within

strategy work (Mantere and Vaara, 2008) and the level of influence they can acquire in relation to decision-making (Miller et al., 2008). This focus will be handled in Chapter Seven of the thesis.

This study also satisfies the call within strategy-as-practice for a more in-depth treatment of the unit of analysis of practitioners (Jarzabkowski and Spee, 2009). This involves going beyond traditional elite personnel roles to include other players connected to strategising (Whittington 2003, 2006; Rouleau, 2005; Jarzabkowski et al., 2007; Johnson et al., 2007). Hence, this study includes the top management, middle management, and personal assistants of top management. The aim of including this variety of practitioners is to understand the strategic context through the players who are engaged within it, regardless of the different hierarchical levels they belong to. Thus, the study will fulfil the call for the need of more micro-studies of strategy that will enrich the field of strategy in general because this helps in understanding the ‘internal complexities of organisational positioning’ (Jarzabkowski, 2003: 51).

In this study, Goffman’s (1959) dramaturgy is adopted as the theoretical and methodological framework, and Goffman’s (1974) frame analysis is employed to address the silences that have evolved within strategy-as-practice field. Dramaturgy, perceived as a constituent of the social theories of practice, can extend the meaning of practice within the strategy-as-practice research agenda (Rasche and Chia, 2009). In addition, Goffman’s frame analysis enables a focus on the *collective knowledge schemes* that strategists draw upon in their strategic activities, ‘[which] most studies have failed to explicitly address’ (ibid: 723). This approach has been applied within studies beyond the field of strategy-as-practice exploring managers and their performances (Callero, 2003; Mangham, 2005). Within the field, Goffman’s dramaturgy is thought to hold

great potential to capture the details of strategic activities because of their sensitivity to performances in which strategists are always engaged (Johnson et al., 2007; Whittington, 2007; Jarzabkowski and Whittington, 2008a; Jarzabkowski and Spee, 2009).

### **The Challenges of Structure and Agency**

Adopting dramaturgy as a theoretical approach provides a sensitive framework for analysing micro-power plays that exist within strategic interactions, however it needs to be balanced up by a macro-level of analysis. In assessing the dramaturgical approach, Sturdy (2004: 160) notes that its strength is found in its ability to capture the ‘persuasive power of agents’. However, to capture this aspect of interactions within a strategy-as-practice approach, the cultural context must be examined. To understand these power plays, micro-frames of meanings must be adopted to account for them. Thus, Goffman’s frame analysis (1974) can enable this macro-level understanding of the micro-strategic interactions of social actors. Manning (2008: 682) argues that power issues can be understood by paying attention to the details in relation to the ‘realized context and practices’. Although dramaturgy focuses on the micro-analysis of behaviours within social interactions, there is a need to account for macro-level cultural issues that govern micro-behaviours within social interactions.

Within social theory, the dynamic between micro- and macro-level phenomena is understood through structuration theory (Giddens, 1979, 1984). Giddens views agency and structure as interactive, whereby people’s actions are not independent of the structures that control them. At the same time, structures are not external, independent powers; rather, they are produced through people’s past actions. In this sense, ‘society

only has form, and that form only has effects on people, in so far as structure is produced and reproduced in what people do' (Giddens and Pierson, 1998: 77). Therefore, viewing structures as shaped by human action, Giddens points to the fact that social actors continuously develop the structures that surround them through their actions while simultaneously resulting from such actions. According to Giddens (1984), these structures are the rules that govern the social practices that people engage in within society and are produced and recreated through human agency.

At the same time, Giddens points to how human agency (action) is governed by the structures around it, affecting it in a way that ensures it does not reflect independent action. This reciprocal reproduction relation between agency and structure is the European alternative to the American perspective that binds micro- and macro-levels of analysis (Ritzer and Goodman, 2003). Structure can refer to the macro-external forces that govern social interactions; agency refers to the micro-interactions of social actors (ibid). Although they note that the differences between the two theories reside in their views of the actor, the agency–structure theory view focuses on the behavioural aspect in a more static way, while the micro–macro-theory view focuses on the action in a more historically embedded view. In both perspectives, structure and macro-level influences are predicated through social actors' actions.

This dual perspective is important in reaching a more comprehensive understanding of strategising activities. According to Chia and Holt's (2009) *Strategy without design*, strategic action can be the result of attending to small local details of strategists' everyday activities and in which strategy is characterised by ambiguity and complexity, rather than by clarity and certainty. That is taking up the messier alternative can bring

about valuable strategic consequences, although it is the alternative that is sometimes unclear to the extent that it is not even articulated fully.

Especially at a time when Saudi Arabia is seen as a developing country, Western models present a more reliable and clearer method to follow because they represent influential institutional powers. However, an engagement with strategists' localities and interests, which are of an embedded nature, might bring forward strategic consequences that were not predicted by following the linear, systematic plans of Western development (ibid). This is the type of relational ontology that scholars are calling for within the field of strategy-as-practice, in which strategy is not seen as individualistic but rather as relational (Chia and Holt, 2006; Chia and Rasche, 2010) and in which researchers in the field of strategy-as-practice are criticised for the limited way in which they engage with social theory. A broader understanding of relational ontology has the potential to produce great advantages for the field (ibid).

Thus, Chia and Holt (2006) argue against seeing strategy as intentional and purposeful but rather as serendipitous and purposive, because the former characterisation underplays the macro-cultural and historical influences that actually bring about micro-strategic action in unintentional ways. In this sense, Chia and Holt argue that strategy-as-practice scholars need to account for a macro-historical framework for understanding strategy, because practice is relational in its orientation. It is such that strategic action is purposive rather than purposeful, in the sense that even if it is not related to a long-term goal, it aims to obtain to an outcome.

To realise this point of view, there is a need to attend to the details of everyday strategic activities through engaging with the peripheral, which can reap better results

strategically from simply focusing on centres of focal attention (Chia and Holt, 2009). This peripheral awareness, and how a lack of it might contribute to organisations' failures, refers to being sensitive to what takes place on the margins and to being attentive to those activities that are not the centre of attention, that is, to focus on strategic situations that are characterised by being blurry, chaotic, and random (Chia and Holt, 2007).

This type of peripheral awareness includes being sensitive to that which is emergent and might not be generally noticed, which goes against the rational way in which strategic thinking is advocated to be undertaken, that is, clearly and precisely (Chia and Holt, 2007). This requires scattered attention to what is going on around strategists and thinking differently about strategising (ibid). However, this change is difficult because strategists are trained to focus on what is central, and they miss what happens on the margins (ibid).

Strategy-as-practice research agendas will benefit from such a refocus. This study contributes towards bringing those benefits to the field by focusing on those issues that have not received much attention within strategising, including culture, power, gender, and traditions. These macro-level influences govern the strategising context in this study and contribute to the creation of tensions. Nevertheless, these tensions are not prioritised; rather, these are hidden and invisible influences that can impede the process of strategising in numerous instances.

### **Power Within Strategic Interactions**

The importance of this dual perspective of structure and agency extends to how organisational scholars view power within organisations. Kanter (1981: 216) refers to political action as requiring ‘lobbying, bargaining, negotiating, caucusing, collaborating and winning votes’ for actions to be actualised. She emphasises the importance of considering the organisational environment as a whole in relation to the exertion of power; through the use of power, ‘ideas turn into actions’. In this sense, organisational structure and culture are important elements determining social actors’ power plays. In the same way, Pfeffer (1981) focuses on the structures of organisations and their designs in relation to power tactics.

In consensus, Buchanan and Budham (1999) attempt to clarify the concepts of politics and power in organisations. At the organisational level, power and politics are not only those aspects that we notice on the surface through hierarchal levels and influential people within organisations; an embedded nature of power and politics exists within organisational structures. They point to the importance of understanding this point and utilising it to the best advantage of the organisation. The second important point that Buchanan and Budham (1999) make is that politics and power are ultimately socially constructed concepts. This means that all political behaviours within an organisation must be viewed through the perspective of the organisational members themselves. Therefore, they stress the importance of understanding all the layers of power and politics within an organisation, including those on the surface and those embedded within the depths of an organisation. Consequently, power as it exists within social relations can be examined as both an action of social actors and as a result of the influences that created it.

In noting that strategy-making is in itself a political process (Jarzabkowski and Balogun, 2009), the duality in examining power plays is important. Johnson et al. (2007) argue from a strategy-as-practice perspective that it is important to examine institutional-level practices and link them to the activities of people in organisations. However, they argue that the field faces a main challenge – that is, ‘to combine an intimate insight into micro-level activities with a continuous regard for the wider institutional context that informs and empowers such activities’ (ibid: 22). In this sense, Jarzabkowski and Balogun (2009) highlight the importance of drawing on the social–political dimension because they present the building blocks of strategic planning communication and participation. They note the importance of power in this process as a micro-activity of social actors and, at the same time, recognise that it is predicated by broader external dimensions.

The performativity of power and influence within strategic communication plays a dual role in that it points to the concrete micro-effects of power within strategic interactions; it also points to the abstract effects of the broader macro-influences. Power is not a ‘constant-sum’ phenomenon (Morris, 2002: 91) because power plays include more than one social actor who takes part in this activity. Non-business organisations, including universities, are more susceptible to having conflicting goals; therefore, the use of power and politics is much more prominent in these organisations (Pfeffer, 1981).

Thus, multiple social actors who engage in a context that is strongly characterised by power and politics bring this dual level of analysis to the forefront. The reciprocal relation between micro- and macro-levels of analysis, in relation to political performance, according to Clegg et al. (2006), exists because power plays ensure the achievement of both individual and organisational goals. Although organisational

politics can facilitate personal goals, their main justification should be to encourage the achievement of corporate goals. This perspective makes the idea of organisational politics much more connected to the broader frames that can explain it rather than just linked to independent micro-practices.

Thus, to examine such sensitive power plays, Manning (2008) argues that Goffman's analysis should be based exclusively on the observation of interactions and never on second-hand data. He criticises both Czarniawska's (2006) and Dick's (2005) analyses because they focus on texts, which he believes do not represent interactions. I argue against that method; although observation is essential for a dramaturgical analysis, actors' own interpretations of what is observed add a further dimension to understanding power-laden interactions.

Similarly, Soin and Scheytt (2006), with respect to cross-cultural research, highlight the value of analysing what people say and write to capture the cultural aspects that underpin their practices. With respect to accounting for a cultural perspective, Chen and Fang (2007) identify a gap within the area of political behaviour and impression management, in which the need exists for a cultural perspective that can account for how political behaviour differs across cultures. In addition, Zivnuska et al. (2004) argue that future study should concentrate on empirical research within dramaturgy that focuses on impression management and political behaviour. This study concerns a culture unlike those on which previous studies of political tactics have focused, primarily in North America and the United Kingdom (Buchanan, 2008; Kanter, 1981; Pettigrew, 1985). However, regarding the adoption of a dramaturgical approach (Goffman, 1995), I argue that dramaturgy can capture the details of micro-power plays, and linking that to macro-frames of analysis (Goffman, 1974) will enhance the

understanding of the enacted performance of power. This is particularly valuable in capturing the details of power plays in relation to gender and internationalisation within strategic interactions as will be demonstrated in the following sections.

- **Staging Gender**

Noting that masculinity and femininity are not linked to biological sex, each reflecting a role that can be linked to either a man or a woman (Alvesson, 1998; Goffman, 1977; Kerfoot and Knights, 1998; West and Zimmerman, 1987), renders the understanding of gender as a socially constructed concept (Ely 1995; Gherardi, 1994; Hanappi-Egger and Kauer, 2010) that must be situated using historical and cultural frameworks (Alvesson and Billing, 2009; Martin, 2001; Martin, 2003; Metcalfe, 2008; Kerfoot and Knights, 1993). This renders the understanding of gender as not something that merely exists but, rather, as something that is done through social interaction and governed by cultural norms (Goffman, 1977; West and Zimmerman, 1987). Scholars refer to this as the doing of gender (Gherardi and Poggio, 2001; Bruni and Gherardi, 2002; Czarniawska, 2006; Pullen and Knights, 2007; Kelan, 2010), which must be related to the specific contexts in which it occurred to be understood (Gherardi and Poggio, 2001; Alvesson and Billing, 2009). This is because gender is a construct that deals with bodies and power that are learned and practiced appropriately in social contexts, rendering them continuously constructed through social engagement (Bruni and Gherardi, 2002), creating what is called *gender identity* (Goffman, 1977). The body is very important because, simply, ‘wherever an individual is or goes he must bring his body along with him’ (Goffman, 1977: 327). This importance is linked to the fact that ‘bodies are not objective, static facts. They are seen, appraised and responded to’ (Sinclair, 2005a: 91). This is even more emphasised within the management domain, where gendered power

relations are heightened (Broadbridge and Hearn, 2008) because male bodies are still the norm (Sinclair, 2005a) and female-embodied presentations are used to exert women's power (Swan, 2005).

Consequently, on the basis of exploring gendered bodies and power, Kanter (1977) adopts a structural view of the numerical presence of gendered subjects and coins the theoretical construct of a token. She identifies the characteristics of these tokens, which are few in number and tend to be highly visible in the context in which they exist. They contrast greatly with the dominant group and assimilate the characteristics common to the members of their group category (Kanter, 1977). Kanter's (1977) study shows that women in management positions at the time were perceived as tokens in a male-dominated domain. It is this position of women in relation to the norm group that makes them subordinate to the power of the male norm group (Marshall, 1984). This further clarifies Marshall's (1984) dominant and subdominant group categorisation, in which women comprise the latter group because they are subjected to men's social power and, consequently, become the muted group. That is, the dominant group (men) will use its social power to ensure its supremacy over the muted group. These social powers are infused in the social fabric of society and are part of the social values and the language that people use in a society (Goffman, 1977; Marshall, 1984).

However, Ely (1993, 1994) brings the focus back from women's numerical imbalance, in general, to the levels of hierarchy in which these imbalances occur and the effects they cause. He shows that the demographics of women in senior and lower levels of organisations have diverse effects. That is, when few women are in senior positions, gender becomes a negative indicator, with other women feeling a heightened feeling of competition. Conversely, when there are more women in senior positions, gender

becomes a positive indicator, and women will relate better to those women at senior levels. In this study, only three women are at the senior level, with the others at middle levels. In such circumstances, the division between these two groups is heightened, and male dominance at the senior level establishes masculinity as a value, and feminine attributes are not seen in a positive light (Ely, 1993).

In complementing these structural perspectives on gender, this study will examine how the doing and undoing of gender within these structures are employed as a means to understand the power relations that exist within the social practices of gendered strategising (Deutsch, 2007; Gherardi and Poggio, 2002; Kelan, 2010; Martin, 2001; Martin, 2003; Pullen and Knights, 2007; West and Fenstermaker, 1995). In this context, 'doing gender' refers to the 'social interactions that reproduce gender difference', and 'undoing gender' refers to the 'social interactions that reduce gender difference' (Deutsch, 2007: 122). The latter, which is less common, takes place when gender is not very important in social interaction and when the category is forgotten (Kelan, 2010).

In this sense, gender becomes a performance in which people will engage in gender practices because they feel the accountability to the gender order that requires them to act in certain ways (West and Zimmerman, 1987). In its emphasis on interaction and the performance of gender, this perspective is similar to Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical perspective. However, West and Zimmerman (1987) do not agree with Goffman's (1977) assertion that actors act according to culturally defined roles. However, this study adopts an interactional approach to the performance of gender and acknowledges the importance of linking it to social actors' societal roles (Goffman, 1977). Although this position was criticised (Wedel, 1978) on the basis that Goffman (1977) assigns women to post-Victorian stereotypes of what female and male roles were known to be

but are no longer the case in the modern West. However, in this study, Goffman's (1977) approach in elevating social roles reflects the importance of cultural and social influences on shaping gender in a context such as Saudi Arabia, where social roles are strictly defined. For instance, women tend to act out traditional feminine stereotypes to maintain the normative gender order (Martin, 2003). This is the case because women take jobs that are normally dominated by men, which pushes them to behave according to the gender expectations and norms that are linked to performing a job in that domain (Deutsch, 2007). Thus, doing gender is something that is learned throughout one's engagement in day-to-day social life (Martin, 2003). However, breaking from it is possible when gender is forgotten in social interactions (Kelan, 2010).

To understand these gendered practices on an organisational level, Ashcraft (2004) draws upon both cultural and organisational frames to unveil the hidden social meanings assigned to gendered practices. As shown in the results of a study conducted by Gherardi and Poggio (2001), the experience of doing gender exists in contexts where women work in male-dominated domains. The researchers employ an analysis of the cultural norms and values of organisational gendering to understand the social practice of gender within organisations. This is also emphasised by other scholars who argue that gender is not static and consists of micro-political activities that are socially and historically situated (Martin, 2003; West and Fenstermaker, 1995). These links resemble those drawn between the macro- and micro-level analyses that strategy-as-practice literature calls for to unveil micro-strategising practices (Whittington, 2006). In this sense, Rasche and Chia (2009: 727) argue that '[s]tudying the role of the body opens strategy practice research to issues such as the body as the medium in which power is inscribed; the self-presentation of strategists via the body; and the control of the body in strategic episodes.' In particular, gendered bodies cannot be understood away from the

cultural, social, and historical factors that shape them and the institutional influences that predict gender norms (Sinclair, 2005b).

Hence, taking up a practice lens in the study of gender and examining the doing and saying of gender, which involves tacit knowledge, will address the shortcomings that many gender researchers have encountered (Martin, 2003). This resonates with Goffman's (1974) use of frame analysis to better understand the micro-face-to-face interactions of social actors. This approach will enhance the understanding of gendered bodies within the strategising context and draw attention to the implicit power plays that take place in relation to how gendered bodies exist within strategic interactions. According to Simpson and Lewis's (2007) gender framework, this will enable us to focus on a surface-level analysis of visibility and a deep-level analysis of voice. This will demonstrate how an analysis of both visibility and voice results in creating situations in which women undergo instances of differences and exclusion in a strategic setting (Simpson and Lewis, 2005) when these women are doing gender and much less when they are undoing gender.

The effects of power have been studied by scholars of strategy-as-practice through the use of a discursive lens (Samra-Fredericks, 2005), yet this falls short of capturing the full strategic performance of strategists and acknowledging their physical bodies. Women's bodies at work are always disciplined and controlled to accommodate the organisational context of their work environments (Trethewey, 1999), which is why this study's analysis will go beyond a critical discourse analysis of gendered strategic language (Baxter, 2011) by examining the embodied performances of gender in addition to the linguistic scripts that strategists draw upon to reflect on their embodied performances.

Furthermore, gender aspects within organisations can present avenues for political behaviour (Buchanan et al., 2004). According to Buchanan et al. (2004), both behaviour gender differences and linguistic gender differences exist. Behaviour gender differences are linked to the way in which men and women were brought up as children, specifically regarding the fact that men tend to be competitive about power and status, while women tend to be more supportive of others, care about saving face, and offer helpful feedback. Language trends reflect gender differences: men tend to be more direct, and women tend to be indirect. In Buchanan et al.'s (2004) view, these gender relations can provide space for political behaviour to take place. In this respect, these views are compatible with Goffman's (1974) views regarding the importance of linking performed power relations to broader frames of meaning to ground these power plays socially.

- **Institutionalisation and Power Struggles**

The National Commission for Academic Accreditation and Assessment's (NCAAA) involves national and international personnel who evaluate higher education institutes to determine their level of compliance with international standards and report back to the Saudi Arabian Higher Council of Education (NCAAA, 2008), which then awards institutes university status. Noting the importance of satisfying the requirements of the NCAAA, top management in this case study are implementing strategic change which is justified in terms of modernisation and Westernisation. Processes of accreditation are not neutral in nature and tend to privilege some discourses and marginalise others (Bell and Taylor, 2005). This is the case when organisations adopt institutional rules that result in isomorphism, which is necessary in gaining legitimacy within competitive

environments (Meyer and Rowan, 1977). This is the case for universities in their pursuit of legitimacy, in which the demand for quality measures in themselves is not negative but institutional measurements are seen as a way of controlling organisations rather than improving them (Power, 1997). In doing so, universities tend to reflect institutional ideals and incorporate them within internal organisational processes, reflecting public taken-for-granted ways of doing (ibid). These accreditation measures constitute an audit tool through which they are intended to reflect organisational development by following institutional quality measures (ibid). However, it is often the case that these reflect ritual practices rather than effective measurements of improvement (Willmott, 1995). This explains why organisations tend to be similar and more homogeneous (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983, 1991), regardless of the inconsistencies that result from the quest to conform (Meyer and Rowan, 1977). This is because of the diverse interests of social actors, which do not always reflect institutional interests.

Through the pressures of globalisation, a strong orientation exists toward internationalisation (Knight, 2001); localities are influenced by worldwide influential powers (Giddens, 1990). These pressures are reflected within universities in how they are pushed to reflect more entrepreneurial aspects (Power, 1997). However, these quality controls represent institutional ways of doing things rather than effective measurements of improvement (Willmott, 1995). However, this orientation toward being international and following global trends, although ceremonial in nature (Meyer and Rowan, 1991), is seen to reflect modernity (Robertson, 1992) and present influential pressures to conform to international standards. In the case of Saudi Arabia, these institutional controls (DiMaggio and Powell 1983, 1991; Meyer and Rowan, 1977) are reflected within strategists' performances in which they are pressured into

adopting Western managerial practices to conform to institutional models that are perceived as powerful and legitimate (Dar and Cooke, 2008).

These institutional controls and measures are well-embedded within strategists' performances to ensure legitimacy (Meyer and Rowan, 1977). In enforcing such powerful institutional rules, organisations as a whole become more homogeneous (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983, 1991). These measures create inconsistencies among social actors in the aim to conform (Meyer and Rowan, 1977). The interest of social actors does not necessarily match the interests of powerful institutions, although institutional interests can have a major role in affecting social actors' interests (Scott, 1991). This conflict results in power struggles between these types of interests and bring to the forefront the tensions that arise from modernity in its contrast with tradition (Giddens, 1990).

While universities reflect institutional measurements and controls to gain legitimacy in a global market, these are seen as a reflection of domination (Power, 1997). Although the demand for quality measures in itself is not a negative pursuit, the ways in which these institutional demands are enforced can be power-laden and influential in relation to both organisations and their members. These power struggles, from a macro-perspective, are creating isomorphic organisations that are built on institutional rules based on powerful institutions' ideals (Meyer and Rowan, 1977). This takes place through ensuring that internal organisational processes reflect institutional ideals (Power, 1997). In doing so, smaller organisations copy institutional controls through promoting these institutional models to their members.

The micro-level performances of strategists are where institutional controls are communicated and promoted. According to Powell and DiMaggio (1991: 10) '[i]nstitutional arrangements constrain individual behaviour by rendering some choices unavailable, precluding particular individual courses of action, and restraining certain patterns of resource allocation'. These take place within the institutional scripts that are promoted within strategic interactions of strategists' face-to-face communication (Goffman, 1959). Within these performances, powerful institutional scripts are communicated as a way of mimicking stronger institutional models (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983) and enforcing social actors to abide forcefully to what holds legitimacy and power. However, although these organisational changes are 'episodic and dramatic, responding to institutional change at the macro level' (Powell and DiMaggio, 1991: 11), it is still powerful in the way that it controls organisations.

These institutional influences are implicitly interwoven within strategists' scripts that take place within their strategic interactions. These institutional controls reflect myths rather than actual improvements because they can be ceremonial in nature (Meyer and Rowan 1991); however, they still exhibit a forceful power. The ritual practices of reflecting institutional controls are more important than reflecting organisational development (Power, 1997). Organisations seek to keep pace with globalisation, which is tightly connected to modernity in the way that it reflects up-to-date developments (Robertson, 1992).

According to Meyer and Rowan (1991), managers spend more time communicating institutional controls than focusing on actual practical issues. In this regard, Power (1997) argues that a big difference exists between the frontstage of social actors' performances and the backstage of their informal processes. In this respect (and on a

macro-level), ‘institutions shape organizational structures’ (Powell and DiMaggio, 1991: 1). Modernism is presented as enforcing institutional rules; at the same time, modernity faces tensions arising from a micro-level where social actors continue to hold on to traditions (Sharabi, 1988). Thus, contradictions arise on a micro-level through struggles of power within strategists’ performances. Through perceiving the West as the home of influential institutional rules, local traditions are undermined; unequal power scripts arise. These continuous inconsistencies (Meyer and Rowan 1977) are evidence that people are put under certain influences to conform to a more powerful domain.

Institutional controls and measurements have the capacity to shape the interests of social actors (Scott, 1991), which becomes powerful on a micro-level as well as on a macro-level. Hence, investigating the micro-level scripts of strategists’ performances (Goffman, 1959) and combining it into broader frames of meaning (Goffman, 1974), establishes the link that the strategy-as-practice research agenda is continuously calling for (Johnson et al., 2007). That is, the link between the micro-practices of strategists and the macro-contexts that they take part in. Thus, adopting a dramaturgical approach aids in better understanding these tensions. These power struggles have implications at different levels of analysis in relation to strategists’ interactions (Whittington, 2006). In so doing, these power struggles can be closely investigated within the social performances in which they appear. Hence, a closer view of how both institutional and personal scripts come into close confrontations through social actors’ performances is of crucial importance in understanding the unfolding of power within strategic interactions.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has critically reviewed the critique on strategy-as-practice, pointing out the silences within the field that are better addressed through adopting an organisational lens. Its emphasis requires an in-depth understanding of power within both structure and agency in strategy-as-practice. This is highlighted within two main themes, gender and institutions. A culturally sensitive study like this is important because ‘strategy-as-practice is an interpretive approach in which the world cannot be understood independently of the social actors and processes that produce it’ (Jarzabkowski and Kaplan, 2010: 55).

Dramaturgy is perceived as a tool that will enable such organisational analysis to take place within strategic interactions (Jarzabkowski and Spee, 2009). Therefore, dramaturgy, in this sense, will rely heavily on ethnography and participant observation (Whittington, 2007), which, although a challenging task, is considered by many to be the best way of understanding the role of body within strategising (Rasche and Chia, 2009). Rasche and Chia (2009) call for ethnographic research within strategy-as-practice rather than already exhausted methods, which focus on attending meetings, interviews, and practitioners’ diaries, all of which depend on recorded accounts (Jarzabkowski and Seidl, 2008; Stensaker and Falkenberg, 2007; Mantere, 2005; Paroutis and Pettigrew, 2007; Balogun and Johnson, 2005). Ethnography is a method utilized by scholars within strategy-as-practice (Jarzabkowski and Wilson, 2002; Rouleau, 2005; Samra-Fredericks, 2003). However, Rasche and Chia (2009) note that in-depth participant observation is still not utilised enough within the field. In this respect, Goffman’s (1959) dramaturgy is perceived as a method that can bridge the gap between theory and practice by providing research on practice (Jarzabkowski and Whittington, 2008a).

In adopting this theoretical and methodological framework, this study goes beyond theoretical frameworks within strategy-as-practice that emphasise discursive methods of analysis to engage in-depth with strategic activities and through the use of alternative theories and methods to investigate some of the issues that have been overlooked. This, I argue, enables better engagement with the phenomena under study, where aspects of gendered power and politics and institutional legitimations can be studied on a micro-level and connected back to meso- and macro-levels of analysis. These micro-performances of strategists, including their roles and scripts, is the main focus of examination in this study. This enables better understanding of the embodied experience of strategising and the complexities related to it. The following chapter will explain Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical approach and its potential in the analyses of the enactment of organisational power within strategy-as-practice.

## Chapter Three: Dramaturgy: The Enactment of Organisational Power

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### Introduction

Through the interactionist sociology of Erving Goffman, the theatrical approach of dramaturgy was introduced, where the theatre metaphor is used to make sense of face-to-face interactions. This chapter will adopt Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical framework, extending it to the analyses of organisational power within a strategy-as-practice approach. This will first take place by examining dramaturgy in Goffman's work and then by reviewing management scholars influenced by his approach. The discussion will then elaborate on how a dramaturgical approach can be complemented by Goffman's (1974) frame analysis method. Consequently, this chapter argues that power can be viewed as an enacted performance within social relations by adopting a dramaturgical lens (Goffman, 1959). In extending a dramaturgical lens to power, this chapter argues that dramaturgy holds potential in analysing the face-to-face interactions of social actors within strategic interactions. Finally, the chapter shows how a dramaturgical method provides a suitable framework for the conduct of this research study within a strategy-as-practice approach.

### Dramaturgy

Goffman's (1959) book *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* introduces his perspective of theatrical performance, which uses a dramaturgical approach to make sense of face-to-face interactions. This approach focuses on uncovering the micro-dynamics of social interactions by exploring the dimensions of self-impression management in relation to others within a social context. According to this perspective,

the individual is a performer on one side, while the others in the social interaction setting are the audience. The theory centres on face-to-face encounters and on how the social setting is observed by others within the occurring interaction. The focus is also on preserving what Goffman (1959) terms 'face', which is the public image of a social actor; preserving this will maintain social order when participating in an encounter. This control of public perception, which is what actors participate in when engaged in impression management (Goffman, 1959), is often referred to as an art (Samuel and Bonsu, 2007). Goffman (1961) differentiates between two types of encounters. He considers focused interactions which take place for a specific purpose and unfocused interactions that occur randomly. The former is the focus of this study.

The theatre as a concept entered the area of organisational studies through Burke's (1945) dramatism and Goffman's (1959) dramaturgy (Clark and Mangham, 2004). Goffman's dramaturgy was inspired partly by Burke's ideas on dramatism and how people try to manage the impressions that others receive from them when they interact (Meltzer et al., 1975). Burke (1945) proposes five dimensions that are important to understanding behaviours within social settings: act, scene, agent, agency, and purpose. He refers to these dimensions as the 'pentad'. According to Burke (1945), dramatism requires both the performers and the audience to interpret the pentad as well as their own relationships to gain a complete line of action, which will continuously develop through more interpretations. Goffman (1959) builds his concepts of dramaturgy in relation to dramatism. However, the former approach focuses on the theatre metaphor as a reflection of life, whereas the latter focuses on the theatre metaphor as a way to understand life. This difference is seen in how Goffman's dramaturgy sees the theatre metaphor as a way of creating something that is not there, whereas the metaphor of drama assumes that things are what they seem (Wood, 2001). Goffman's ideas on

dramaturgy were influenced by the ideas of philosophical sociologists such as Mead, Durkheim, and Simmel (Meltzer et al., 1975). The influence of Mead on Goffman was immense, especially in relation to symbolic interactionism (Prasad, 2005). However, Goffman (1959), although making use of symbolic interactionism as his point of departure, goes beyond this in proposing his dramaturgical approach, linking the theory to elements of the theatre such as scripts, performances, personas, and staging.

Clark and Mangham (2004) point out four ways in which theatre has been integrated into organisational research: 1) the use of theatrical text (Mangham, 2001) and games derived from theatre rehearsals to inform organisational programmes; 2) the dramatism analytical approach of Burke (1945); 3) the dramaturgical approach of Goffman (1959); and 4) and the study of corporate theatre or, as Clark and Mangham (2004: 38) call it, 'theatre as technology'. Clark and Mangham (2004) explain that corporate theatre presents organisational values and ideas to an internal audience of that specific organisation, mostly to promote organisational values rather than to confront its people. Mangham (2001) proposes using theatrical texts to provide an understanding of the various elements of social life, including how strategies and plans are developed and how meetings are conducted. As for corporate theatre, Elm and Taylor (2010) argue that theatrical performances can stimulate holistic learning within organisations as part of management education and learning, facilitating the discussion of difficult issues and promoting change within organisations by tackling political issues and relationships within the organisation. Wood (2001) proposes another way of analysing social interactions using the theatre metaphor, using a cinema metaphor to study organisational phenomena, stressing the spectacularisation of social life, and viewing the cinema metaphor as a continuation of the theatre metaphor.

Although theatre has been integrated into organisational studies in various ways, the difference is that Goffman's (1959) dramaturgy suggests that the theatre metaphor can help in understanding social interactions as they unfold. Although Goffman's perspective does not claim that life as a whole is theatre, it does assert that the theatre metaphor can help us understand it (Manning, 2008). The significance of Goffman's analysis lies in the fact that organisations do not present theatres but, rather, constitute elements of the theatre that can be analysed (Manning, 2008). Goffman's ideas are well established within the sociology domain (Patriotta and Spedale, 2009); however, they have lately shown the potential to be adapted to organisational and management contexts (Manning, 2008). For instance, Brown (2005) extends dramaturgy to the analysis of politics and political communication, and McCormick (2007) extends it to organisations.

Some perceive Goffman's dramaturgy and impression management as insincere and artificial (Argyris and Schon, 1974) because of the element of preserving an illusion, but this is a misreading of Goffman's approach (Chriss, 1995). Dramaturgy and impression management, as intended by Goffman (1959), imply ways of maintaining social order. This takes place through the way in which social actors communicate during social interactions, ensuring that they do not disrupt the broader context that governs their interactions. Goffman differentiates between 'two kinds of communication – expression given and expression given off' (1959: 4), the latter of which is more the 'theatrical and contextual kind'; this becomes the primary focus of his dramaturgical analysis. Expression given is linked to what actors directly say or do, whereas expression given off is connected to the 'face work' type of communication that takes place within interactions. Goffman's notion of expression given off is used by social actors to gain either a confirmation or a reaction (Manning, 2008) and is sensitive

to capturing the implicit details of the embodied nature of performances. This type of approach tries to make sense of social interaction through the actions of the individuals taking part in it. It offers a meaningful descriptive analysis of social interaction by linking it to sociological and psychological elements of analysis.

### **The Dramaturgical Elements**

The major theatrical elements on which Goffman concentrates within his dramaturgical approach are scripts, performances, staging (both front- and backstage), and roles, including performers and an audience. He uses these elements to analyse face-to-face interactions and examine how these elements can be used to analyse social interactions. Goffman (1959), however, defines these concepts in a manner that differs from the original field from which they are borrowed to fit his approach of dramaturgy.

According to Goffman (1959: 79), scripts include verbal communication and use impression management techniques such as face work and emotion work, which he refers to as 'expression given off' and suggests are controlled by stage direction. Thus, scripts, including rhetorical skills, are the directions that guide the dialogue, scenes, actors' personas, and whole performance, in which a scene is a situation where a social actor or a group of social actors intentionally disrupt the polite appearance of harmony (Goffman, 1959) and personas are the creation of characters. Gardner (1992) adds that scripts refer to the set of expectations of different situations that people build through their numerous experiences; however, when people are faced with new and unfamiliar experiences, they tend to construct new scripts to help guide them through these new territories. Some organisations provide scripts to their employees, which are not static but, rather, interactive and prone to constant improvisation (Benford and Hunt, 1992).

This view on improvising scripts is shared by Mangham (1978), who points to the importance of the improvisation of actual scripts depending on the situation, specifically in reaction to the audience, the main constituents of interactions in his view. He goes further and differentiates between three types of scripts: situational, personal, and strategic. Situational scripts are those enacted in specific situations, whereas personal scripts are those that serve personal interests. This research study, however, focuses on strategic scripts, in which a social actor tries to influence others through his or her scripts. In this study, strategists, through their situational scripts of ‘communicating strategic change’, bring in their personal and strategic scripts to control the situation.

There are numerous examples of organisational studies in which scholars have focused on situational scripts (Mangham, 1978), including emotions as scripts enacted by performers within a social interaction setting. Rafaeli and Sutton (1991) investigate how the display of both positive and negative emotions (different scripts) by bill collectors and criminal interrogators can stimulate social influence. These authors are among the many who have focused on the effect of emotions, also called emotion work or, according to Hochschild (1983: 35), ‘emotional labour’ because an actor is paid a wage to do emotion. Hochschild (1983) argues that feelings are scripts in that they precede actions and direct them. She investigated the corporate scripts that are forced on workers, as exemplified in the cheerful expressions of flight attendants and the aggressiveness of bill collectors. These scripts offer a means whereby a company can direct its employees’ dialogue, actions, and whole performance. Van Maanen and Kunda (1989) explore the corporate script of friendliness imposed by Disney upon its employees to exhibit a cheerful and joyful attitude to visitors.

According to Goffman, performances are ‘all the activity of an individual which occurs during a period marked by his continuous presence before a particular set of observers and which has some influence on the observers’ (1959: 22). Meanwhile, Benford and Hunt (1992: 45) argue that ‘[p]erforming involves the demonstration and enactment of power’. In addition, Gardner (1992) explains that a performance can be both verbal and nonverbal, along with physical behaviours. Within this performance activity, Goffman (1959) elaborates on the two important notions of staging: front- and backstage. He argues that how well-regarded social actors’ interactions are depends on how ‘practiced in the ways of the stage’ these actors are (ibid: 251). Benford and Hunt (1992) see staging as directing the materials, audience, and performance regions.

The frontstage is characterised by a physical contextual layout and includes the ‘personal front,’ with notions of the ‘appearance’ and ‘manner’ of the performer (Goffman, 1959: 23-24), which is referred to as logistic matters (Benford and Hunt, 1992). The setting refers to the furniture, decoration, and related aspects of where a performance takes place. Appearance is any ‘stimuli’ that tells something about the social status of an actor, and manner is any ‘stimuli’ that tells something about the role the actor will play (Goffman, 1959). Appearance and manner are related; that is, how one appears to be might give away what his manner most probably is. That is why the frontstage has its own conservative formal language – to be enacted in front of the audience.

By contrast, backstage activities relate to how social actors perform in each other’s company but not in the company of their audience. Thus, the language is informal and the actions can be characterised by familiarity. People tend to drop into informal communication channels to address either work-related or social issues (Mintzberg,

1979). The important distinction between formal and informal communication depends on the activities exhibited by a performer or performers in front of a certain audience. Goffman (1959) notes that people occupying a higher position within organisations will, because of their sensitive positions, have fewer people surrounding them with which they are familiar, which is why they have fewer opportunities to drop into backstage activities than those lower down the hierarchy. Thus, social actors at higher levels are likely to continuously perform in front of their audience.

Front- and backstage performances can also differ in relation to hierarchy. Thompson (1961) argues that dramaturgy provides a lens for examining the hierarchal positions and roles within organisations, through which organisational members at higher hierarchic levels try to protect their images by presenting themselves as initiators and innovators, whereas subordinates use dramaturgical elements to present themselves as unthreatening to their superiors by being humble and ensuring that the performances enacted by their superiors go well.

Some scholars who adopt a dramaturgical approach focus on either the frontstage or the backstage; however, others focus on both. For example, by focusing on both the front- and backstage, Clark (1998) uses a dramaturgical metaphor to convey how consultants create positive impressions of their services by managing interactions. This focuses on the activities of executive search consultants, who participate in backstage activities when ensuring the quality of their recommended candidates by preparing them to handle the organisational scripts that their clients expect. The frontstage activities they engage in are also highlighted through how they prepare their candidates using rehearsals so the consultants can present convincing performances to their clients. In this way, the

consultants are guaranteed to create a positive impression for their clients of the services they provide.

However, not all scholars focus on both the front- and backstage. For example, Ross (2007) focuses only on the backstage. He explains that backstage contexts become very important when the frontstage of interactions are risky for social interactions to take place. In his study, he focuses on the backstage communication of learners within an organic online community. He shows how online communities can be presented as a back region in which relaxed communication can take place. By contrast, the study shows how the atmosphere in the back region differs from the front region, where there is no place to share experiences, form friendships, or be totally frank. Other scholars choose to focus only on the frontstage, such as Sutton and Callahan (1987), who, in their research study on four firms filing for protection under Chapter 11 of the federal bankruptcy code, explore how this can stigmatise an organisation's image and propose strategies to manage this stigmatisation. In their study, they use the dramaturgical technique of stigmatisation to explore the studied firms; however, they focus only on the frontstage, namely the audience's perspective of the stigmatised organisation. This might be linked to the difficulty of accessing backstage contexts within organisations and the fact that such difficulty is intensified when the type of information being handled is of a critical nature. Although some scholars focus on either the back- or frontstage, I suggest that it is more analytically rewarding to focus on both regions to illuminate each one in comparison to the other. Accessing the backstage is more challenging because of its relaxed atmosphere, where there are fewer attempts to hide the formal aspects of social interactions in the frontstage.

Moving on to the other elements of the theatre, Goffman (1959) suggests that different roles are taken up by social actors. Performers are involved in presenting themselves within social interactions, and the audience observes performers and interprets the signs and cues provided by them. This interaction between performers and audience is what controls the types of scripts and how performances continue. The cues that each gives the other determine how the interaction proceeds and what roles they assign to themselves within their interactions. These role assignments take place in reaction to the situational performance itself. Both performer and audience aim to maintain the social order through their performances, not to disrupt it. That is why improvising scripts is an important part of a performer's skills in performance. It is also the reason that rehearsals are important for performers to present their roles as believable to their audience (Goffman, 1959). Goffman (1961) also points out that, when a social actor is in a role, s/he might put serious effort into staying in that role while in the frontstage of that performance. However, he argues that, when a social actor is in the backstage in a more relaxed atmosphere, s/he might break out of that role. This breaking out of a role in the backstage has a huge influence on the kinds of performances that take place within this context because the different roles of the performer (namely, both as a performer and as an audience to others in this backstage context) are interchangeable.

### **Dramaturgy's Critics**

Although Goffman's ideas on impression management that link back to dramaturgy (Tseëlon, 1992) have been adopted by many scholars (Johansson, 2007), dramaturgy has received its fair share of criticism from numerous scholars in relation to its application, processes, limitations, and depth. As for application, Prasad (2005) is critical of Goffman, perceiving him as generalising human inclinations that can only be

considered characteristic of and linked to Western society. However, Goffman (1959: 245) anticipates such remarks, noting that, ‘in societies with settled inequalitarian status systems and strong religious orientations, individuals are sometimes less earnest about the whole civic drama than we are, and will cross social barriers with brief gestures that give more recognition to the man behind the mask than we might find permissible’. Goffman’s inference does not prevent dramaturgy from being a useful means of studying non-Western societies; it just predicts that they may be different in the degree of drama enactment. He points to broader political and social influences that can hinder some societies from performing in a predictable manner with respect to what is common in the West. In this regard, it is insightful to apply Goffman’s dramaturgical approach to a non-Western society, which is the interest of this study, exploring how people perform within the constraints of a different culture. Hence, adopting a dramaturgical approach within a different culture might present different perspectives on its implementation.

Dramaturgical processes are also criticised for not showing how the presentation of the self in the interactions of everyday life can provide insight into the inner self’s relationship with broader social structures (Manning, 1992). This is related to the fact that Goffman is interested predominantly in the presentation of the self rather than the inner or real self (Manning, 2005; Messinger et al., 1962; Sarbin, 2003). However, this study is interested in the presentation of self within face-to-face interactions and its links to broader meanings rather than the inner self.

Regarding the dramaturgical approach’s depth of focus, it is criticised because by focusing on social actors’ persuasive strategies, this degrades the audience in these interactions, constructing communication as mono-directional (Sturdy, 2004). In this sense, Goffman (1959) portrays performances, in which what actors do is the most

important action, whereas the audience comprises observers in a way that minimises their role. However, Mangham and Overington (1987), in their use of the dramaturgical approach, amend this point by placing more emphasis on the audience in the interaction through the importance that they place on improvisation when actors perform. This is a sensible way of actualising the role of the audience within a performance because their reactions, in part, guide the performances of the actors. This is the case because face-to-face interactions are perceived as joint performances, where an actor is seen to be both a performer and audience in any interaction that takes place (Mangham, 2005). In elaboration, Gardner (1992) points to the notion that the different characteristics (e.g., status and power) of an audience stimulate different means of impression management from actors. That is, if Goffman does not focus dramaturgy on the audience, it is because it is implied by being a performer within a social interaction. The ways in which performers adjust their scripts and performances are all indicative of the importance of the audience members and their reactions to the impressions that they receive from performers. That is why this criticism of Goffman's dramaturgy seems to be a result of an underdeveloped reading of Goffman's work.

Most importantly, Goffman is criticised for focusing on micro-analyses of brief encounters and ignoring the hierarchical levels and institutional frames in which they occur (Gouldner, 1970). However, Thompson (1961) disagrees with this view, seeing it as a good fit for the study of hierarchy. However, this criticism links mainly to the fact that the dramaturgical approach to analysis is centrally concerned with performances (Manning, 2008) and fails to consider other units of analysis that could broaden the perspective from which the phenomena may be studied. In agreement, Chriss (1995) argues that Goffman's dramaturgical approach focuses on micro-descriptions of face-to-face interactions but does not relate to broader macro-structures. In addition, Sturdy

(2004) notes that scholars' studies using a dramaturgical approach overlook power issues and are less attentive to cultural contexts. This is the case because the focus is always on the interaction itself, not the wider social structure of which it constitutes a part. This is an important point to consider in this study, where a cultural perspective is considered. Therefore, to overcome the cultural limitations associated with this approach, the next section will explain the perspective adopted in this study that combines aspects of dramaturgical and a strategy-as-practice approach, and takes into account macro-perspective.

### **A Dramaturgical Approach to Strategy-as-Practice**

Dramaturgy as an approach within organisational studies (Samra-Fredericks and Bargiella-Chiappini, 2008) is viewed as suitable for studying micro-practices within social interactions (Rasche and Chia, 2009), which constitute the basis of strategists' practices (Whittington, 2007; Jarzabkowski and Spee, 2009). However, like other methods employed within strategy-as-practice, dramaturgy falls short of capturing the cultural and historical contexts that surround the performances that social actors operate within (Chriss, 1995; Sturdy, 2004; Whittington, 2007; Manning 2008), even though performances are deeply embedded within these contexts (Jarzabkowski and Spee, 2009). Noting that strategy-as-practice interest lies in understanding strategists and what they do, it is of immense important to understand the contexts that govern these practices (Jarzabkowski and Kaplan, 2010). Dramaturgy concentrates on exploring performances on a micro-level (Manning, 2008), while other levels of analysis are not scrutinised for their importance. This is why dramaturgy is often criticised for focusing on the micro-face-to-face interactions rather than capturing the macro-structures that govern face-to-face interactions (Chriss, 1995; Sturdy, 2004).

Thus, the main concern for dramaturgy within a strategy-as-practice approach is the challenge of capturing the macro-context: that is, gaining a deeper understanding of the cultural and historical elements of performances (Whittington, 2007). In addressing this challenge of dramaturgy, I propose complementing the dramaturgical approach with Goffman's (1974) frame analysis method, which facilitates the understanding of micro-performances in relation to macro-cultural and historical frames that govern them. Goffman's (1974) frame analysis is taken up as a way of overcoming some of the silences surrounding issues that have been overlooked in the field of strategy-as-practice, and relating micro-level analysis to the macro-level (Johnson et al., 2007; Jarzabkowski et al., 2007; Golsorkhi et al., 2010). Hence, Goffman's (1974) method of frame analysis will be employed to enable the dramaturgical perspective to incorporate an analysis of cultural norms and historical traditions that govern face-to-face interaction. This enables in-depth study of strategists' actions and sayings in the broader context in which their interactional practices take place.

Frame analysis refers to a set of principles used to organise the experience of social life and connect the concrete to the abstract by providing techniques that enable understanding of embodied social interactions (Goffman, 1974). Goffman (1974) suggests two primary frameworks to understand social experiences: a social frame (social processes) and a natural frame (physical processes). The latter is concerned with naturally occurring interactions where no one guides the interaction and it takes place without prior planning. However, the focus of this study is on the social frame, which can explain the background context of intentional social interactions. According to Goffman (1974: 441) social frames are 'immediately available events which are compatible with one frame understanding and incompatible with others'. The use of

frames helps explain the context in which social interactions take place so that related meaningful interpretations can be summoned appropriately. This cultural competency helps in interpreting social interactions in relation to their context, which guards against misunderstandings that result from cultural blindness. In this sense, social interactions are to be explained in relation to the culture in which they occur and not favouring some dominating Western frame to explain culturally specific interactions. To understand social interactions, Goffman (1974) proposes various metaphorical techniques for comprehending social frameworks, including keying, theatrical frames, out-of-frame activities, breaking frame, and frame analysis of talk. This study will focus on the importance of theatrical framing to investigate the micro-practices of power within face-to-face interactions.

Theatrical framing borrows theatrical constructs (e.g., performances, scripts, actors, audience, frontstage, backstage) to describe social interactions and explain them by getting to know what they mean in accordance with the context and culture that governs them. Goffman (1961) points out that, when social actors are in a role, they might put serious effort into staying in that role while in the frontstage of that performance. However, he argues that, when a social actor is backstage in a more relaxed atmosphere, s/he might break out of that role. In the current case study, performances were extremely important, considering that the settings were often a formal meetings. For example, actors (top and middle management) struggled to act as polite and humble as possible in the presence of the chairman. The scripts reflect deep respect for and fear of the chairman. They continued to nod while he delivers his speeches, and they engaged by reinforcing what he is saying. The act continues to show them as timid participants at the meeting table. However, when the chairman leaves the meeting room, the frontstage becomes a backstage, and the actors remove their masks. They then employ personal

scripts (Mangham, 1978), in which they voice disagreements, raise their voices, and show heated emotions. This links to the fact that Arabic culture encourages respect for authority and demands that performances be monitored with respect for gender, age, and power.

The use of this type of theatrical framing to interpret face-to-face interactions helps capture a broader perspective. This is similar to what Mangham (2005) calls ‘joint performances’, where an actor is seen to be both a performer and audience within any interaction that takes place. This dual aspect of performing offers broader insights into what participants say and do specifically when they are linked to macro-frames that allow more comprehensive understanding.

In this research study, the adoption of Goffman’s dramaturgy is twofold: it is the theoretical and the methodological framework taken up to understand the phenomena under study. Goffman’s dramaturgy enables to focus on the face-to-face interactions of actors. This focus is aided by Goffman’s (1974) frame analysis to add an understanding of structure, which underpins these performances. Goffman’s frame analysis is an element of all of his work to varying degrees, because the interest always lies in the knowledge of what is happening in certain interactions (Verhoeven, 1985). However, because frame analysis is vast in its application, this study is selective in focusing on its functional manner. This is why *theatrical framing* as a technique is chosen to build on the main emphasis of this study, which is the performance of actors. This technique enables an in-depth focus on the performances in their theatrical manner, and at the same time it encourages an understanding of the structures that are enabling such performances to take place in a specific manner and not another (Verhoeven, 1985).

However, frame analysis's *theatrical framing*, while helping complement dramaturgy's micro focus through a structural macro focus, still has its own limitations. Capturing performances in this study focuses on participant observation's field notes and voice recordings. Although helpful in capturing the performance in description, these methods are also directing the attention in an equal way to performance rather than content. A method that can overcome this limitation is the use of video recording, which allows the researcher to focus equally on both performance and content. This is the case because the 'knowledge of frames when "in practice" is a sort of *embodied* knowledge' (Baptista, 2003, p. 208), a knowledge that video recording can capture in great detail.

This method, however, is ethically challenging within the context of Saudi Arabia, where a woman's reputation is at stake in video recordings of mixed-gender interactions. Yet with time and the neutralisation of mixed-gender interactions, this restriction may relax and video recording may benefit researchers in gaining more comprehensive data. Hence, complementing dramaturgy by frame analysis is one way to analyse the data in this study. This does not overcome the limitations of the method completely, but it enhances dramaturgical analysis. This approach provides a more comprehensive perspective into micro performances by linking them to macro structures that better explain them.

### **Dramaturgy and Organisational Power**

Power can be viewed through Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical lens and impression management as an enacted performance within social interactions. Goffman argues that organisations can be viewed from a technical, structural, political, cultural, and dramaturgical perspective (ibid: 240). He asserts that the dramaturgical approach can

intersect with other approaches. For example, the possibility for political and dramaturgical approaches to overlap in analysing interactions is shown in the ‘capacities of one individual to direct the activity of another’ (ibid: 240). He elaborates that this is done by keeping strategic secrets from the other; power is seen as ‘enlightenment, persuasion, exchange, manipulation, authority, threat [and] punishment’ (ibid: 240), and it must be displayed in an effective dramatised way to convey the message it holds.

For example, Goffman recounts face-to-face social interactions that contain dimensions of political and power burdens by describing a social interaction as a domain in which two parties attempt to gain information about each other. The information is sought by the two parties to specify the expectations from both sides and to enable them to be aware of what they are expected to do or say in order for one party to get what s/he wants from the other. He believes that, when an individual appears in front of others, that person will have many motives for controlling and influencing how they perceive the situation. This type of interaction conceals the political activities that enable one party to influence the other in the subtle context of a face-to-face social interaction. This concept becomes clearer through Goffman’s definition of such interactions as ‘the reciprocal influence of individuals upon one another’s actions when in one another’s immediate physical presence’ (1959: 9).

However, Goffman (1959: 18) argues that not all performers aim to achieve ‘self-interest’ goals in trying to control their audience’s perceptions; some may seek to achieve goals that serve the audience’s own good or the good of the community as a whole. This view is related to Lukes’ (2005) notion of real interests. In his third dimension of power, Lukes refers to ‘latent conflict’, where there is a conflict between the interests of the powerful and the real interests of the rest. These interests are

achieved in various ways, and Goffman (1959) suggests that a performer can conceal some aspects of himself or of what he communicates to his audience that are incompatible with audience members and their perception of the performer. In this way, the performer wants to relate more positively to the audience members and their expectations to achieve what they are after.

The various interests of social actors from a Goffmanian perspective eventually lead to some degree of conflict. According to Haugaard (2002), there is sometimes total conflict and sometimes total consensus; however, both conflict and consensus can exist. He argues that the duality of his position stems from two factors. The first is that people have complex motives, which makes it hard to hold completely opposing or totally similar perspectives. Moreover, when people do something, they frequently change their perspective in relation to what they are doing. The second reason relates to the nature of social action, which as Haugaard (2002: 309–27) points out, has ‘both a goal-oriented and a structural aspect’. The goals can be linked to personal or organisational goals, whereas ‘structural’ refers to the practices and traditions of doing things and the authority of traditions in institutions. Conflict or consensus can exist between these two aspects. He continues his argument by explaining that conflict takes place when social actors challenge the ‘social order’ by which they are disadvantaged. Conversely, if social actors benefit from the ‘social order’, they will preserve it, and they will work to change it to gain even more benefits. Hence, power is not a ‘constant-sum’ (usually called zero-sum) phenomenon; power includes more than one actor who has the ability to be part of the power play (Morriss 2002: 91). This view of power as a capacity (Kanter, 1981; Giddens, 1984; Morriss 2002) is what enables social actors within organisations to sometimes be controlled; at other times they control, lose control, or escape that control, so there is no one fixed position (Gabriel, 1999). Goffman (1959)

promotes this stance by showing how social actors' roles can vary even in relation to a single character.

Therefore, performers control their impressions so they appear sincere as well as by ensuring that their impressions are acceptable to the audience (Goffman, 1959). To an extent, this relates to what Lukes (2005: 112) describes as positive power, where 'the dominated may willingly comply and from which they and others benefit overall'. This also complements Clegg et al.'s (2006: 2) argument that 'power is not necessarily constraining, negative or antagonistic. Power can be creative, empowering and positive'. In this view, power takes place within social interactions as a performance that maintains the social order and complies with broader social, cultural, and historical frames that control the social interaction (Goffman, 1974).

In addition to the individuals' quest for power, there is also a collective quest. Goffman (1959: 85) points to the notion of teams as performers (i.e., when a group of performers works together to achieve a common goal by 'dramaturgical cooperation'). This group power is exhibited by maintaining agreed-upon impressions and can lead to the achievement of common goals. Also, Goffman (1959: 149) refers to a 'go-between' role, which is a political role that a performer can enact. This occurs when a performer gets to know both sides of an interaction very well and ensures that each side thinks that the other is on his/her side – all in the spirit of maintaining order within the social interaction event.

For example, consider the chairman role of a formal board. When the chairman presents a non-member to the board during a meeting, the chairman must serve as a mediator between the visitor and the members (Goffman, 1959). This type of political role can be

implicit through how it incorporates itself within the performances of actors within interactions. This example illustrates how sensitive performances can be reflecting political plays. A political analysis of the dramaturgical cooperation of teams can provide insights into the political activities that teams use to maintain their positions within a social context. Goffman (1959: 101) refers to two types of power: 'dramatic and directive dominance'. One of these types occurs implicitly, and the other is explicit. Both types of power indicate that, within a given interaction, each team can exhibit more or less of these two 'contrasting' types of power, depending on the situation in which their performance takes place (Goffman, 1959).

Communication is mostly linked to a purpose (Brown, 2005), as well as behaviours (Chen and Fang, 2007). Thus, communication requires actors to be skilled in Goffman's (1959) impression management. This, for Goffman, includes how the body is employed in the transfer of face-to-face communication and its role as a means of maintaining the social order (Giddens, 1988). Political tactics and embodied impression management skills are immensely important within organisational contexts (Chen and Fang, 2007; Harris et al., 2007). This is no surprise. Jenkins (2008) argues that Goffman's interactional theory provides various ways of looking at and understanding power. This is the case because 'Goffman's body of work offers many insights into what power is and how it actually works' (ibid: 158) through its focus on how people struggle to keep the social order within face-to-face interactions. In this sense, 'power is a matter of a taken-for-granted, 'normal' everyday order of interaction, which enables and constrains efficacy and capacity' (ibid: 164). This intrinsic characteristic of power makes a dramaturgical approach even more suitable for understanding its details because of its concern with face-to-face interactions. This is why 'a critical Goffmanian approach is an alternative to many long-settled orthodoxies that, potentially at least, allows us to

comprehend the normal, diffuse ubiquity of power while, at the same time, according full recognition to the practices of individuals, whether self-conscious or habitual, rule-observant or improvisational' (ibid: 167).

In consensus, Rogers (1980) notes that Goffman's dramaturgical approach unveils many insights into power and influence phenomena. Goffman's work focuses on power, and that is apparent though his focus on the intentional manipulation of impression management strategies to serve certain goals for social interactions (Rogers, 1980). These strategies include the fact that social actors must make certain moves and that the possibility of each move will have different implications for all other social actors. This intentionality of actions within face-to-face interactions and their outcomes is what characterises Goffman's view of power. This influence is reflected dramaturgically in how social actors influence each other through their ability to generate change in others' behaviours. Thus, within an organisational setting, hierarchy takes a dramaturgical element: that is, in the way the people in different hierarchal positions employ different impression management techniques that suit their purposes (Rogers, 1980).

An important example within organisational studies that make use of Goffman's dramaturgical approach to study top-level power is provided by Mangham (1986). The study focuses on analysis of a fifteen-minute social interaction, a meeting that takes place between eight executives in preparation for a more important meeting with the board of directors. Mangham observes and recounts this meeting in great detail. He uses this as the basis for his analysis of the 'performance' of these executives, with the aim of describing their social actions and relating them to issues of power. Prasad (2005) believes that Goffman's dramaturgy offers an intriguing research approach because it delves deeply into the hidden and complex layers of social interaction. However,

Mangham (1986) concentrates only on the frontstage of social interactions and does not consider the backstage. This links to the importance of accessing the backstage of organisations, especially at senior levels, because of the type of communication that takes place. This current study shares some similarities with Mangham's (1986) in that the studied phenomenon is situated within an organisation's top level. However, it will take the investigation a step further by comparing frontstage social interactions (formal and informal meetings) to those of the backstage (interviews) to better understand both contexts. Through his use of discourse analysis in researching organisational identity change, Ybema (2010) calls for studies to focus more on backstage settings in addition to the frontstage because of their importance in advancing the understanding of organisational change. It is for this reason that this study will assess both contexts.

These links make dramaturgy and its techniques of impression management a suitable method for investigating power. Bolino et al. (2008: 1090) argue for the need to differentiate between impression management and closely related constructs such as 'self-monitoring, political skill, and influence tactics'. Impression management links directly to Goffman's dramaturgical approach (Tseñlon, 1992); the other constructs can easily fall under its broad scope due to their nature in maintaining the organisational order. Social psychologists Jones and Pittman (1982) identify five different types of impression management techniques: ingratiation, self-promotion, intimidation, exemplification, and supplication. These reflect the impression management behaviours that are most commonly used by employees in an organisational setting (Bolino and Turnley, 1999). Impression management techniques can play a significant role in the degree of power and influence that people have over others (Jones and Pittman, 1982). In Goffman's (1959) terms, social actors aim to control the perceptions of others in relation to their own images and faces. It is this type of controlling and manipulation of

others that takes place within performances that reflects how subtle power can be within face-to-face interactions. Social actors are likely to engage in these impression management techniques when they want to reflect a favourable image in front of the people they wish to influence (Goffman, 1959). Within strategic interactions, at the top management level, actors are likely to engage in ingratiation because of their colleagues' status and power. In doing so, social actors try to influence how they are perceived by their audience (Goffman, 1959).

Thus, scholars tend to employ dramaturgy in studying top organisational levels, where members are likely to draw extensively on face-saving strategies and engage in performances of power. Golden-Biddle and Hayagreeva (1997) concentrate on the top level of an organisation, focusing on how organisational identity influences the board's role and shapes its interactions with managers. They apply the dramaturgical technique of face work (i.e., how actors use face-saving strategies to protect their image and preserve their reputation, among others). They investigate the roles of boards of directors as people assigned in aligning interests between managers and shareholders and in defusing conflict. Their study focuses mostly on the scripts that actors follow in their public performances and not in their private ones. However, their concentration on boards of directors' face work in face-to-face interactions points to the usefulness of implementing a dramaturgical approach in the study of hierarchy and power relations in the sense of how social actors are engaged within performances, in which their roles and scripts can be investigated in depth. In consensus, Thompson (1961) uses Goffman's dramaturgy as a lens to look at organisational struggles of power, authority, and status – in other words, how organisational members use impression management to control information. The use of such impression management techniques reflects the fact that

social actors get things done through how they perform in the presence of each other in their struggle for power and authority (ibid).

Gardner (1992) notes that actors usually ingratiate themselves at an unconscious level with those of a higher status and emphasises the risk of what such ingratiation can lead to. An actor's risks are high if those targeted see through a 'fake' performance because this can have negative organisational consequences. That is why there is a strong motivation for social actors within organisations to employ impression management techniques in their interactions with their colleagues to create targeted impressions (Gardner, 1992). For instance, Freeman and Peck (2007) employ a dramaturgical approach to study the active nature of strategy formation in a joint commissioning partnership board, exploring how the current board reacts to prior strategy direction. They suggest that performance is focused on how interactions construct new understandings and relations of power that consequently shape new interactions. The impression management techniques that take place within these top-level interactions are the main reflectors of power relations.

Goffman (1959) notes the importance of the different roles that people play in the company of different audiences to achieve certain outcomes. Meltzer et al. (1975: 72) cites Messinger et al. (1962), who argue that the strength of Goffman's dramaturgical approach lies in its capability to capture two frames. The first is that of '[t]he analyst's frame of reference', which shows how a dramatist can capture the details of an interaction, and the second is the actor's frame of reference, which concerns the ways in which he assesses how his own actions affect others. In the same way, Gardner (1992) notes that actors within organisations, if they do not engage properly in these impression management techniques, risk a poor performance that may cost them their

role within the organisation. However, it must be noted that these impression management techniques are influenced by the social actors' personal characteristics. Thus, in the company of top management (high-status audience), social actors may tend to use ingratiation in relation to their superiors, reflecting the power relations that exist in a certain setting. This type of impression management will contribute to the success of the individual within the organisation and the organisation as a whole because power, status, and hierarchy are all well accounted for in how impressions are managed (Gardner, 1992).

However, another way in which these impression management techniques reflect power is within controlled settings, which Goffman (1968) refers to as 'total institutions', where social actors, who are isolated from what happens on the outside must abide by the rules of the inside. Total institutions will control how social actors perform, act, and be within them. However, some tend to face these powerful controls and try to shift the power imbalances through their performances by playing the power game to their advantage (ibid). Hence, the aforementioned studies point to the importance of impression management within a dramaturgical approach as a way of assessing the different ways in which power is experienced in an organisational context.

### **Power Plays from a Dramaturgical Perspective**

Organisational politics is 'the practical domain of power put in action, worked out through the use of techniques of influence and other (more or less extreme) tactics' (Buchanan and Badham, 1999b: 611). This resembles Pfeffer's (1981: 7) definition of organisational politics as 'involv[ing] those activities taken within organisations to acquire, develop, and use power and other resources to obtain one's preferred outcomes

in a situation in which there is uncertainty or dissensus about choices'. Power is mostly seen as the potential to affect others, while influence, political behaviour, and the actions that result from it are perceived as the result of realising that potential (Buchanan and Badham, 1999a). Through such definitions, it becomes clear that organisational politics (or what I will refer to as power plays), rather than power alone, carry the action within social interactions. 'Power plays' refers here to the organisational political behaviour and tactics that take place within dramaturgical performances, which are mostly interwoven into social actors' roles and scripts. The preference for this term rather than 'organisational politics' or 'political tactics' is due to its sensitivity to the theatre metaphor and a reflection of the impression management techniques employed within face-to-face interactions. That is, power plays are seen as characteristics of face-to-face performances, resulting in social actors' continuous struggle in their performances. Power plays can be explicit or implicit, but more importantly, they exist within social actors' performances in relation to how they present themselves to others. It is this link to performances that reflects how political behaviour can be seen as power plays, which can be manipulated within performances through impression management techniques (Gardner, 1992) to achieve certain outcomes (Goffman, 1959).

It is important to understand power plays within face-to-face- performances (Goffman, 1959) because they are central to understanding organisational behaviour in general (Buchanan and Badham, 1999a). Political behaviour is not just independent political actions; it is very much connected to and defined by a specific context. Goffman's (1974) frame analysis provides the means by which embodied power plays that take place within social interactions become meaningful through viewing them in relation to broader frames of reference. Thus, the 'physical, social and cultural context[s]' are all

factors that can add new layers of complexity to the communication process (Buchanan and Huczyski, 2004: 183). That is, one thing may have different meanings according to where it was said, to whom it was said, and in what cultural context it was voiced. In this sense, Buchanan and Huczyski's (2004) view of power is compatible with Goffman's (1959: 1974) dramaturgical view, in which multiple frames control the meaningfulness of social interactions and the political actions that take place within them. This is the case because the interest is related to understanding the implicit ways in which power is exercised (Lukes, 2005), in addition to how these embodied power performances originate from macro-level beliefs and values (Ott, 1989) that control how social actors act out their performances (Goffman, 1959).

Buchanan and Huczyski (2004) argue that political behaviour takes place as people act out their roles of power and authority within organisations. The concepts of power and authority are perceived as complementary in their relation to each other; a person in an organisation who seeks to exercise power must have a position that gives him/her the authority to do so. When a person has power and authority in an organisation, then, by default, others will perceive that person's role as having status. In the same way, dramaturgy points out how social actors within face-to-face interactions fall into their roles and act out in terms of the actions expected by their audience but within the accepted social and cultural frames that control the interaction and maintain the social order (Goffman, 1974). This relates to what Buchanan and Huczyski (2004: 182) call 'the exchange of meaning', in which a message is transferred between a sender and receiver. Moreover, other issues are involved in creating the intended meaning other than the message itself, including attitudes, perceptions, and expressions. These elements relate to the message by complementing it and making it more meaningful to the receiver. This give-and-take resembles how actors and audiences react to each other

and modify their performances in accordance with the other's expectations (Goffman, 1959). Hence, power seen through a dramaturgical lens enables in-depth sensitivity to how the embodied performance of power is enacted both implicitly and explicitly within social interactions.

This sensitivity to the subtle power plays interwoven within social actors' performances has led various researchers of organisational studies to adopt a dramaturgical perspective in their examination of power, including Mangham (1986), Golden-Biddle and Hayagreeva (1997), Thompson (1961), and Freeman and Peck (2007). Hence, dramaturgy provides a way of viewing both the implicit and the explicit ways in which power is enacted within social interactions. Thus, this aspect of viewing power as an enacted performance carries the potential for a more in-depth exploration of the embodied political plays that take place within social interactions than the traditional ways of looking at power. This can be linked to the various elements of analysis that a researcher can draw upon in an attempt to understand the phenomenon under study. An example of this is Benford and Hunt's (1992) dramaturgical study of social movements, where they focus on the importance of script, stage, performance, and interpretation in better understanding these movements by taking new approaches to studying them. Their argument focuses on how a dramaturgical approach can help stimulate different areas of research, such as investigating the relationship between dramaturgical techniques and their outcomes. They argue for the centrality of interpretations to dramaturgical performances because it is through interpretations that meanings are conjured, not through individual dramaturgical techniques.

In consensus, McCormick (2007) uses various elements of Goffman's dramaturgical analysis to understand organisational change through a single case study, including

frontstage, backstage, performances, audiences, and scenes. He investigates how a management team of a national research institute tries to maintain the organisational line, which is its own definition of a situation, whereas activists try to disrupt it through various scenes. In doing so, a dramaturgical approach has been shown to be useful to identify power struggles in organisational change because it is more suitable than traditional approaches in its capability to account for irrational organisational behaviour. These multiple elements of dramaturgical analysis are a main strength of this approach and aid in the exploration of the enactment of power.

Hence, to get to a better understanding of these power plays, a dramaturgical analysis prioritises the analysis of face-to-face performances. However, some use second-hand data, including interviews and television documentaries, such as Harvey (2001), who examines the impression management techniques that result from the tensions stimulated by a charismatic relationship, using Steve Jobs as a representative charismatic leader. She employs a dramaturgical analysis approach and focuses on characterisation and impression management techniques in resolving power conflicts. Although this technique can be useful, it does not capture the full potential of using a dramaturgical approach, in which first-hand data are crucial.

Other scholars have combined a dramaturgical approach with other approaches. Patriotta and Spedale (2009) combine a dramaturgical approach with sense-making. They use Goffman's elements of face work and identity to understand how groups make sense of their social interactions. They focus on the role of language, limiting Goffman's face work to the language that people use to secure their images. This link between dramaturgy and sense-making is also depicted by Czarniawska (2006). She points to the influence of Goffman on the work of Weick and argues that the common

ground between them goes back to their interest in understanding the everyday life of social actors and how these acts are connected. Another example is the study by Down and Reveley (2009), which links dramaturgy to the use of narratives in a study of work identity. They implement both methods as complementary and see this as a way of providing a fuller picture of the phenomenon studied. It is this focus on capturing the bigger picture that led Soin and Scheytt (2006) to argue for the use of narrative methods as complementary to others when conducting cross-cultural research. Hence, dramaturgy can be viewed as a method used in combination with other methods to understand social interactions, and, at the same time, it can be used solely through its various elements to delve deep into social interactions. This study will combine a dramaturgical approach (Goffman, 1959) with a frame analysis method (Goffman, 1974) to get a better understanding of the embodied enactment of power within strategic interactions, linking the micro-practices of power to a macro-level of analysis that satisfies the increasing need for strategy-as-practice research to focus on both levels (Whittington, 2006).

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has shown how dramaturgy (Goffman, 1959) as a theoretical and a methodological framework applied within organisational research is of significant potential in understanding the enactment of power. Mostly, it is used to capture what other methods fail to through the various elements of the theatre metaphor. It is this flexibility of the method and its diverse techniques that give it its width and depth, enabling researchers to capture the embodied behavioural micro-dynamics of social interactions. Its context of focusing on social interaction in the form of performances enables the focus on individual elements such as roles, scripts, and staging that can

generate detailed accounts of the social interactions (Jarzabkowski and Whittington, 2008a; Jarzabkowski and Spee, 2009) and the power plays that exist within them. In doing so, this method captures the embodied experiences of strategists, which is seen as one of its distinctive features of the study of strategy-as-practice (Rasche and Chia, 2009). This type of depth is what dramaturgy brings to the understanding of face-to-face strategic interactions in comparison to other methods because of its capability of locating micro-performances in the macro-structures that govern them (Jarzabkowski and Spee, 2009). In addition, dramaturgy enables analysis of the details of the material settings that surround social actors, with which they constantly engage during face-to-face interactions. The comprehensive emphasis that dramaturgy provides on what is done and said to whom, how, where, to what purpose, and why it happened that way it did is the reason that this framework is adopted in this study. The attention to detail that dramaturgy brings to the study of social interactions will aid in depicting the power plays that take place within them. This provides an alternative method that brings into focus the various ways in which power can be enacted within performances. Hence, building on this dramaturgical framework, the following chapter will explain the methodology of this study in more detail.

## **Chapter Four: The Methodologies of Investigating the Enactment of Power in a Saudi Arabian Private College**

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### **Introduction**

This chapter reviews the methodological plan for this research study. It begins by reviewing the research focus. Then, the methodology of the research is summarised, followed by a discussion of the philosophical stance taken. The chapter then proceeds to a discussion of the research strategy, research design, methods of collecting data, methods of data analysis, research criteria, and access issues. This discussion will address issues of power relations and identity construction during fieldwork activities. The chapter then assesses the challenges in abiding by strongly-established ethical considerations of conducting management research. Then the chapter introduces the main actors within this case study on which the following analysis chapters will focus. Finally, the chapter concludes with an argument for the use of an interpretive ethical stance which accounts for cultural differences, specifically those that are associated with the Saudi culture.

### **Research Focus**

This qualitative research study explores the intersection between praxis, practices, and practitioners (Whittington, 1996) by investigating the political plays used by strategists when communicating strategic change both frontstage and backstage. The context is a private college in the Western region of Saudi Arabia. The study will adopt a dramaturgical approach to analysis, contributing to an enhanced understanding of the

power plays of strategists in influencing decision-making within the strategy-as-practice approach.

The primary interest of the research is to gain a better understanding of power plays as they take place at the strategic level within the context of an institution of higher education. Such behaviour unfolds through social interactions (Goffman, 1959). In this study, the focus is on interactions where strategists are engaged in the communication of change. The study concerns a culture different from those on which previous studies have focused; previous studies have mostly been located in North America and the UK, such as those of Kanter (1981), Pettigrew (1985), and Buchanan (2008). Bryman and Bell (2007) note that the increased interest in cross-cultural research in the area of business and management is due to scepticism about the application of Western theories and practices to non-Western cultures. Prasad (2005) concurs, arguing that the employment of a dramaturgical approach to research is based on characteristics of Western societies; its implications might not suit other societies. In response to the need for a national study that can be compared and contrasted to the extant literature, especially to research that also follows a dramaturgical tradition, this study takes place within Saudi Arabia. Potentially, Western cultures have a sufficiently large influence on the Saudi Arabian society that similar observations might result. Equally, these observations could also be entirely different. A dramaturgical approach to uncovering power within an organisation, employed in the context of a different culture, will yield different perspectives on understanding the experience of power.

### **Methodology and Philosophical Position**

This study adopts a dramaturgical framework (Goffman, 1959) to investigate micro-organisational behaviour with a focus on political behaviour at a private Saudi Arabian college. Using a strategy-as-practice approach, it examines the power plays used by strategists when communicating strategic change to their colleagues. Elements of the theatre, including roles, scripts, staging, and performances, will be analysed as a metaphor for the enactment of power and influence on the strategic level within the higher educational context. In particular, the research will focus on the roles of performers and audience in the interplay of their power and influence in both front- and backstage strategic interactions. This empirical study employs an interpretive research design using a qualitative inductive case study, providing extensive description (Geertz, 1973) of the detailed case. The data will be analysed using an inductive, dramaturgical framework that draws upon two core analytical techniques of grounded theory: coding and memos. The findings will be compared and contrasted with existing literature in the field.

Shah and Corley (2006) outline the different goals that different epistemological paradigms – positivist and interpretivist – aspire to achieve. The former, which represents the perspective of quantitative research, aims to test theory through the formation of causal links, while the latter, which represents the perspective of qualitative research, aims to build theory through extensive description. These differences are based on the ontological assumptions of objectivity for the former and subjectivity for the latter (ibid). That is, objectivity presumes that things exist independently of observation and that there is one independent reality that can be accessed. Subjectivity, on the other hand, presumes that things exist depending on those who observe them and that there are multiple interpretations of the reality of things. These differences represent the distinction between the two paradigms in determining

the aims, practices, and methods of research. Thus, while the positivist approach aims to drive research that tests theory and can be replicated, the interpretivist approach aims to understand social phenomena, interpreting these phenomena through the experiences of social actors to add to existing theory. The choice of paradigm depends on the researcher because each has much to offer to the acquisition of knowledge (ibid). However, the philosophical position of a researcher has implications for his or her research choices and practices and also affects the type of criteria by which research should be evaluated (Johnson et al., 2006). In this specific research study, the epistemological position is that of an interpretivist, and the ontological assumption is subjectivist; consequently, the methods of research are qualitative.

This research study reflects an interpretive epistemological position with a phenomenological, inductive approach. The interpretive tradition is concerned with the understanding of human behaviour, while the phenomenological approach is concerned with making sense of people's actions; the interpretations with which this tradition are concerned are various, including the interpretations of the people researched, the interpretations of the researcher regarding those people, and the researcher's interpretations of existing literature on the researched topics (Bryman and Bell, 2007). In addition, this research adopts a constructionist, ontological position, where social entities have multiple meanings, continuously constructed by the people involved in interpreting them.

Creswell (2007) argues that, when a researcher engages in qualitative research, five main assumptions are to be set: ontology, epistemology, axiology, rhetoric, and methodology. For this research study, the ontological assumption is that reality is multiple and subjective. Epistemologically, this study assumes that the researcher must

come closer to the subjects investigated, working to understand their own experiences and the meanings they attach to them. As for the axiological assumption, this research study acknowledges the subjectivity that will affect the interpretation of the data provided by the participants. Rhetorically, most terms will be defined by the participants themselves rather than relying on fixed, preconceived definitions. Finally, methodologically, this research study will adopt an inductive style of analysis, moving from particular toward naturalistic generalisations (Stake, 2005) in relation to the context-based study at hand. These ‘naturalistic generalisations are conclusions arrived at through personal engagement in life’s affairs or by vicarious experience so well constructed that the person feels as if it happened to themselves’ (Stake, 1995: 85). This type of analysis will enable others to have the opportunity to understand the details of this case, thereby enhancing their involvement with it.

### **Research Strategy: Qualitative**

A qualitative research strategy adopts an inductive approach to form links between theory and empirical research (Bryman and Bell, 2007). Maykut and Morehouse (2001) refer to qualitative research as a phenomenological approach. This paradigm has its own defining characteristics that stem from its assumptions. The main benefit of qualitative research methods is that they enable a researcher to uncover new relationships in complex contexts, elaborating the understanding of the influence of the social context on a studied phenomenon (Shah and Corley, 2006).

Qualitative research can be viewed in terms of some defining characteristics: first, it focuses on exploring and describing a phenomenon from the point of view of those who experience it; second, the research design might change as the researcher progresses

with data collection so that new data refines the whole design; third, the sample will be chosen to reflect a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon targeted, and not just randomly; fourth, the data collection will take place naturally, not through controlled circumstances, to record the participants' real experiences; fifth, the researcher not only gathers data but also derives meaning from what is collected; sixth, qualitative data collection methods, including interviews, are used prominently; seventh, the type of data analysis is inductive, proceeding from details toward generalisation of the cases studied; and finally, the final report of findings comes across as a connected narrative, where all elements are a part of a whole (Maykut and Morehouse, 2001: 43-74).

One reason that this research study adopts a qualitative strategy is that the issues with which the study is concerned are influenced by their context (Creswell, 2007). Qualitative research depends heavily on understanding context through the real experiences of the people engaged in the issues studied. Also, the research questions are related to how people engage in social interactions and how these social interactions can be interpreted. Such a focus should be backed up by a research strategy that can account for these social interactions and the different meanings and interpretations that the people engaged within them, along with observers, can attach to these interactions.

However, adopting a qualitative research strategy puts my values as a researcher in a critical position. This is the case because, being led by an interpretive epistemological position and a subjective ontological position, I have been faced with multiple meanings and interpretations of social entities and interactions. From that perspective, my own interpretations, as well as the interpretations of others, were the building blocks of analysis. As a result, the way in which my values are integrated within the research

study is a concern; however, values cannot be perfectly controlled in either quantitative nor qualitative research strategies since not all aspects of my preconceptions that constitute values can be controlled (Bryman and Bell, 2007). In this research study, I will justify all research choices and decisions, explaining how they were reached. In this way, the transparency between the researcher and the reader regarding the final narrative will reduce any hidden bias related to the researcher's preconceptions. These issues will be discussed in depth in the ethical considerations section.

This issue of subjectivity has brought the qualitative research strategy considerable criticism, in response to which Maykut and Morehouse (2001: 19) argue that the subjectivity of a qualitative research strategy should not prevent its consideration. They even choose to refer to the method as 'perspectival' rather than 'subjective', representing the way in which qualitative research encompasses multiple perspectives. This returns to the ontological assumption upon which this paradigm is built, namely that reality is multiply interpreted. Viewing this research method through this paradigm makes it easier to appreciate the depth of meaning that this tradition can elicit and which cannot be gained through a positivist research design.

### **Research Design: Case Study**

The research is based on an interpretive case study, which focuses on understanding the multiple natures of social realities (Thacher, 2006). It is important for an interpretive case study to convey a vivid presentation of the physical description of an event (Stake, 1995). The case study will not reflect the studied phenomenon unless it portrays most of the contextual elements with which it is interlinked. Thus, qualitative case studies aim to create unique narratives from the descriptions of events (ibid). Yin (2003: 13),

working from a positivist approach, defines a case study as ‘an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident’. Although the definition of the case study may seem similar between the interpretivist and positivist traditions, the criteria that govern case studies in both traditions are very different. In this respect, Tight (2009) argues against the use of the terminology of case study and the concepts that link to it as a research strategy, design, method, and methodology, preferring to be guided just by how scholars define case studies and then naming them ‘small number studies’ or ‘in-depth studies’ so that the researcher will not get into the position of choosing between differing paradigms. However, this research study explicitly adopts the qualitative case study as a research design within the interpretivist paradigm.

This research study has an instrumental/ethnographic case study design that yields extensive descriptions and an additional interpretation of the phenomenon under investigation (Geertz, 1973; Van Maanen, 1988). It is instrumental in the sense that it will elicit a general understanding of the phenomenon (Stake, 1995). In addition, it is ethnographic in that it engages with culture in addition to its sensitivity to what people say and do and how they interact with the material world (Spradley, 1979). The data within this case will be examined through a dramaturgical lens (Goffman, 1959), which is viewed as a theoretical construct that can provide an invaluable means of viewing culturally sensitive data (Van Maanen, 1988).

This design was chosen because it is viewed as the best way to study power and politics within organisations because contextual details can be vividly captured through it (Buchanan and Bryman, 2009). Furthermore, case studies play a major role in

understanding power issues and managerial processes in organisations because they can provide a holistic perspective of the phenomenon taking place (Remenyi et al., 1998; Gummesson, 2000). Noting the complexity of a political context and the many subjects that can take part of it, the advantages of a case study design are clear. In particular, a case study design aids in producing knowledge that is derived depending on the context in which it is studied (Flyvbjerg, 2006).

To this end, this qualitative ethnographic case study will present an in-depth, comprehensive account of the phenomenon under study (Van Maanen, 1988; Patton, 1990). To satisfy this purpose, triangulation is integrated into the study to provide extensive description (Geertz, 1973) and multiple interpretations of the phenomenon under study. Triangulation is when statements and assertions that the researcher perceives as critical are checked through other methods and sources of data. Triangulation is used to examine a finding that is reached by a certain data collection method, confirming or disconfirming it through other methods (Layder, 1993). If it is confirmed, then the finding is held valid, but otherwise, it is abandoned on the grounds that it came about only through that particular method (ibid). Moreover, the use of multiple methods of data collection gives a greater opportunity to cross-validate the findings and also enriches the study as a whole (Gillham, 2004). This helps substantiate important interpretations, clarifying their multiple meanings and yielding enhanced understanding of the case (Stake, 1995).

Triangulation is employed within this study through multiple data-gathering methods: semi-structured interviews, participant observations, organisational documents, and the researcher's field notes. The extensive description of the case will align it with other cases through naturalistic generalisations (Stake, 1995). This will enable a broader

understanding of the enactment of power within institutions of higher education on a strategic level.

In that regard, Piekkari et al. (2009), in their review of 135 articles based on case studies published in four international business journals between 1996 and 2005 and 22 articles published from 1975 to 1994, found that most case studies were informed by positivistic traditions. Therefore, they recommend that future research adopting a case study methodology focus on different traditions, an invitation to adopt the interpretive approach. This is not always the case. In their review of the methods used in studies published in three journals (*Management Journal*, *Administrative Science Quarterly*, and *Journal of Management*) between 1985 and 1997, Scandura and Williams (2000) note a decrease in the use of quantitative methods and an increase in the use of qualitative field studies. They disapprove of this tendency, believing that it jeopardises the generalisability of the findings and the internal validity of the studies. However, case studies are not meant to be generalised to other cases and populations. They are different from research designs that are concerned predominantly with generalising their findings to large populations (Bryman and Bell, 2007). However, the quality of the analysis and the rich description of a case are critical, as it is not the generality of the case that gives it validity; it is how theory connects to the empirical research (Bryman and Bell, 2007). Accordingly, this research study will move beyond the positivist-overpowered literature on case studies, which is led by Yin (1994, 2003) and Eisenhardt (1989). It will instead focus on interpretive views of case studies, exemplified by scholars such as Stake (1995, 2005) and Gummesson (2000), who note that the criteria that govern qualitative and quantitative case studies are different.

Regarding the number of case studies in a given study, it is noted that a larger number of case studies results in less depth for each (Creswell, 2007). Since generalisability is not an issue in qualitative research as it is in quantitative research, this study will utilize a single case study design to conduct in-depth analysis due to the difficulty of gaining access to organisations, especially in cross-cultural settings, to study sensitive matters, namely power-related issues (Lee, 1993). There are well-established examples of single case studies in management research. Pettigrew (1985), in studying organisational change, uses a longitudinal, single case study design to study a chemical manufacturing company known as ICI. He uses various data collection methods including interviews, organisational documents, informal conversations, and observation. His work was a major point of departure for the processual-contextual outlook on organisational change. Also, Buchanan's (1999) research on the logic of political action employs a single case study composed of an account of the political behaviour of one individual in relation to another individual who worked to block the change. His study presents an experiment in what he calls the 'epistemology of the particular'. Noting that generalisability is not as important a factor for an interpretive single case study as its particularity (Stake, 1995), Buchanan (1999: 5) advises that choices of case studies should be linked to the 'opportunity or potential for learning' and strongly argues for the epistemology of the particular. Buchanan (1999) argues for two approaches to generalising from single case studies: naturalistic generalisations (Stake, 1995) and analytical generalisations (Yin, 1994). In naturalistic generalisations, as Stake (1995) puts it, the reader, through the qualitative account presented to him/her, can reconstruct the arguments produced and reach an insightful conclusion. That is, the reader will engage with the accounts provided, relating to it constructively. In the analytical approach, by contrast, the researcher attempts to connect the implications of the research to current theory, building up conceptualisations of the studied phenomenon.

Nonetheless, many scholars have highlighted weaknesses in the use of case studies, which relate primarily to the fact that they cannot be generalised. While these are doubtlessly crucial issues, other scholars are confident in the merits of case studies. One such researcher is Flyvbjerg (2006), who argues that the case study approach is of great importance and contributes significant research. The basic corrections made by Flyvbjerg to existing rival views are that concrete knowledge depends on practical, real contexts, not theoretical dependence. Furthermore, he points out that cases can be generalised as a form of examples, even if they are unfit to be generalised scientifically. Moreover, the case study approach is useful for more than generating hypotheses. Flyvbjerg demonstrates that the case study approach exhibits no more researcher bias than other methods. Finally, he corrects the view that case studies are difficult to summarise because, from his perspective, it is the outcomes of these case studies that must be summarised, which is not a difficult task.

Thus, an interpretive approach to case studies gives more freedom in conducting this research. This is the case because it enables us to look retrospectively at the case under study to find hints about questions that might be answered alongside the initial research questions (Buchanan, 2010). This is possible because, as Stake (1995: 12) notes, interpretations of the qualitative case study should present ‘multiple realities’.

### **The Saudi Arabian Case Study**

The case study is based on a four-month period of instrumental/ethnographic fieldwork (October-December 2011) in a private institute of higher education in Saudi Arabia, which will be referred to as MNA. The college was established in 2003. It has two

gender-segregated campuses, as women and men are not permitted to mix in Saudi culture. The college is located in the western region of Saudi Arabia called Hijaz. Due to its close proximity to the holy cities within the country, it is known for its more urban characteristics. For this reason, in addition to being a private college, it provides opportunities for mixed-gender face-to-face meetings. Individuals at other universities in the country still have mixed-gender communications through closed-circuit television, where women see men through television screens and men can only hear the women's voices.

Facing competition in the Saudi higher education market, MNA aims to gain university status. It must utilize an internationalisation strategy to satisfy international and national accreditation requirements. These requirements include various criteria developed by the National Commission for Academic Accreditation and Assessment (NCAAA), as mentioned in Chapter Two. The NCAAA required MNA to conduct mixed-gender meetings regarding the level of strategic planning, ensuring that both genders had a say in the future of the college. Although this was viewed as a challenge in the face of the national traditions of Saudi society, MNA has met this requirement since 2011. If it did not, it would lose funding and licensing from the Ministry of Higher Education (Abdulah, 2010). Further, it would not gain university status, which is a strategic goal that it is pursuing to gain a better position in the higher education market in the country. Thus, prior to 2011, MNA's two campuses were separate. The men at the all-male campus developed the strategic plans for both campuses to follow. However, beginning in 2011, this was no longer the case.

### **Access: The Acknowledgment of Power Relations**

Gaining access is ‘the researcher’s biggest problem’ (Remenyi et al., 1998: 109), and this problem becomes even more complex when the research addresses a sensitive topic (Lee, 1993) and the sample targeted is highly ranked within the organisation (Pettigrew, 1992; Odendahl and Shaw, 2002). That is why it was very important to plan access in advance to predict any difficulties that might occur while conducting the fieldwork. To that end, in this research study, access was established through family networks. Saudi Arabia is a country in which the family determines the social structure (Yamani, 2002), including extended family ties (Al-Sweel, 1993). The importance of the family stems from its being the source of individuals’ identity and status, combined with the power that families obtain by forming alignments with other families of the same status to broaden their influence (Metz, 1993).

Thus, in a country where ‘tribal and family blood ties are the major determinants of status’ (Shaw and Long, 1982: 84), my family networks, reflected in my direct kinship to the chairman of the board of trustees, one of the three owners of the college, facilitated my initial access to MNA. The college is a highly centralised institute. The chairman of the board of trustees represents the nexus of power within it. Therefore, I had to negotiate access with him months before the fieldwork actually took place. This required multiple meetings during which I explained to him in great detail the focus of my research and the type of data that I wanted to collect. These meetings resulted in obtaining a written consent form that allowed me to gain access to the college and conduct research. This consent form promoted the formation of trustworthy relationships with gatekeepers at MNA when I returned to conduct my actual fieldwork.

Although the consent form aligned me as a researcher with top-level members of MNA because of my connection to the chairman, it distanced me from members at lower levels of the organisational hierarchy. Therefore, while I gained the trust of the most influential key personnel within the organisation on the basis of my personal links to the chairman, my initial access was still insufficient. Gaining the access that I needed for actual daily fieldwork depended upon securing the cooperation of other organisational members by formulating trustworthy relationships with individuals during my four months of fieldwork. Although I obtained a consent form from the organisation's chairman that formalised my research process and guaranteed full access, with the condition that I ensure anonymity of the data, I had limited access. I had to continuously encourage the participation of people within the organisation. Lee (1993) describes this process as moving from the first step, the physical type of access, to the more difficult type, social access. During the fieldwork, I had to negotiate with participants the terms of their engagement with the research, explaining both my role as a researcher and their role as participants.

Obtaining informed consent from participants in research is a difficult task because of the difficulty of securing informed consent from each and every participant given the disruption that this will cause at the organisational level (Bryman and Bell, 2007). This was the case in this study, as the initial access based on power relationships was insufficient to guarantee participants' engagement in the research. This was reflected in participants' suspicion, doubt, and feelings of unease about being involved in the research. Thus, building rapport with the participants informally promoted their engagement.

## **Data Collection: Multiple Sources of Data**

During the four months of my fieldwork, I was located formally within the Institutional Development division of the college, which is responsible for strategic planning activities. From this vantage point, I had access to various sources of data, including participant observation of formal and informal interactions, semi-structured interviews, organisational documents, field notes, and visual data. This included participating in both mixed-gender and gender-segregated interactions. It is acknowledged that, within the latter type of interactions, my gender as a female researcher is likely to have affected the dynamics of the all-male interactions (Bell, 1999). These multiple data collection methods characterise qualitative research in the field of management, as they aid in understanding social reality through the constructed meanings that people attach to the way that they experience reality (Johnson et al., 2006). Thus, in this study, multiple sources of data provided a comprehensive understanding of the phenomena under investigation, which is the norm for case studies in general (Stake, 1995). Accordingly, the following section will elaborate on the data collection methods chosen for the purpose of this study after explaining the sampling strategy and the units of analysis on which this study focuses.

### **▪ Units of Analysis and Sampling Strategy**

In this case study, there are four units of analysis that the level of inspection revolves around: the organisation itself and three levels of strategists within the organisation (top management, middle management, and personal assistants of top management). The first two groups of strategists are straightforward and directly connected to the proposed phenomenon that this study is investigating. However, the third unit of analysis, which

is the personal assistants of top management, is employed as a response to an implication of Blau's (1955) study on bureaucracy. His study on two governmental bureaucratic agencies looks at the interpersonal relations within these agencies and examines the role of receptionist. He notes in his study the role of receptionists as exercisers of power in situations in which they should not have it; nonetheless, they do. In his study, he explores how receptionists in an employment agency help clients get interviews despite not meeting the criteria set by the organisation. They rationalise their actions through the fact that their exercise of discretion makes them feel more satisfied in their work and helps them to help people. He notes that this exercise of discretion was allowed by supervisors because it gave employees a sense of job satisfaction and, at the same time, did not disturb the departmental duties which the supervisor was responsible for. He notes that receptionists tend to unconsciously show preference to clients who have their same skin colour, exhibiting 'ethnic bias' (ibid: 90), that these actions take place unconsciously, and that within the organisation under study, it does not present any disturbance for the department itself. His study implies that that receptionist clerks exercise authority outside their boundaries. Jaffee (2001: 102), in response to Blau's study, suggests that there is definitely a place for human 'capabilities for innovation, resistance, and agency in bureaucratic organisations'. That is, employees will use alternative methods to get things done even if this is inconsistent with the procedures set by their supervisors and their own roles within the organisation. It is from this perspective that this study considers the role of the personal assistants of top management within strategic interactions.

However, due to the high power distance that exists between the top/middle management and the personal assistants in the Saudi Arabian context, the role of personal assistants within this research is peripheral. Yet their accounts were utilised

through their audience role within strategic interactions. Their function in strategic interactions as writers of minutes of meetings allows them to attend the performances that take place within these interactions. That is why their accounts are utilised as illustrative of the data gathered from the other two groups of strategists. Their role as writers of minutes of meetings allows them more power in the writing of events rather than actual real-time participation. This discursive focus can be intriguing, yet it goes beyond the interest of this research, which focuses primarily on face-to-face interactions.

There are various sampling strategies for identifying subjects for a given study, including, for example, maximum variation, homogeneity, and convenience (Creswell, 2007). However, the different sampling strategies have no prominence over each other because a study's sampling strategies must fit the purpose of the research (Maykut et al., 2001). This case study uses a particular sampling strategy (Stake, 1995) within a private college in Saudi Arabia. For other units of analysis in this case study, purposeful sampling is employed. Purposeful sampling is when the subjects are chosen because they help in understanding the issue studied and the phenomenon that the research aims to uncover (Creswell, 2007). This is very similar to what is called criterion sampling, where subjects are chosen on the basis that they all experience the phenomenon to be studied (ibid).

In qualitative research studies, there is no fixed number regarding the necessary sample size, but it must reach a 'saturation point', when new collected data is 'redundant' to data already gathered (Maykut et al., 2001: 62). In this research study, the purposeful sample size is determined to include 20 men and 11 women at different managerial levels who participate in what the college refers to as strategic interactions. In these

interactions, participants discuss long-term plans regarding the college, namely accreditation requirements for the college to gain international status and acquire university status. Three main groups are targeted: members of top management (11 male and 3 female), members of middle management (6 male and 5 female), and personal assistants of top management (3 male and 3 female). This sample was determined after gaining initial access to the organisation.

- **Participant Observation**

Participant observation involves intensive involvement in the daily organisational life of the research participants, observations from an insider perspective, and attention to what is happening and being said, along with questions about these observations (Bryman and Bell, 2007). Having established access to the organisation, participation observation included 28 formal meetings of a strategic nature, including 5 informal lunches and dinners in both mixed-gender and gender-segregated settings. In this respect, strategic meetings and interactions were marked by those instances in which participants discussed requirements for pursuing national and international accreditation in their efforts to become a university.

Various types of mixed-gender strategic activities occurred at MNA. The most important type of these meetings is the formal monthly mixed-gender college council meetings, which alternate between the all-male and the all-female campus. There were also departmental mixed-gender meetings that took place after the gender-segregated meetings at each campus. Men held departmental and administrative meetings at the male campus, whereas women did the same at the female campus. Also, there were various committee meetings at the top-management level that required both men and

women to participate. In addition, there was a board of trustees meeting that also required the participation of women, who did not have that privilege prior to 2011. Finally, the college hosted various informal mixed-gender lunches and dinners on both campuses. I attended these meetings and took observational notes, which I wrote up in much more detail electronically on the same day of the observations.

I spent three days with the organisation from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. for the first two weeks. Then, I spent five days a week at the organisation from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. for the remainder of the four months. The increase in the amount time spent with the organisation was intended to diminish the likelihood of my being uninformed about informal meetings. I used the time that I spent within the organisation to establish a rapport with organisational members and gain their trust. This was an important part of my fieldwork, as I needed to align with organisational members at lower levels of the organisational hierarchy, especially middle managers and assistants of top managers.

According to Gold (1958) a researcher who engages in participant observation will reflect various roles with respect to the level of involvement in the social context that s/he is studying. In this study, I had two main roles. One was that of a participant-as-observer, where the main focus was on observing interactions while, at the same time, participating in and interacting with the organisational context. This role was clearly experienced within departmental meetings, committee meetings, and informal lunches and dinners. The second role was that of an observer-as-participant, in which the amount of observation was greater, while the participation was less. This took place where I shadowed the female Vice Chairman for Development within her formal and informal meetings and interactions. This role was the main focus when observing the college council meetings and the board of trustees meeting, which involved minimal

participation and where I mostly observed what was taking place, following up with field notes to enhance the gathered data.

Although Gold (1958) points out that taking up the role of participant-as-observer can get the researcher closer to the participants, such proximity is criticised as leading to increased personal identification with participants in a way that might affect the integrity of the research. He also points out that the observer-as-participant role, on the other hand, puts the researcher in quite a detached relationship with the participants, which might lead to misunderstanding the social setting observed. In that respect, within this study, I took up both roles to minimise the drawbacks of relying exclusively on one role. This closeness and remoteness with respect to participants reflected Simmel's (1950: 406) characteristics of a stranger: 'The stranger is close to us, insofar as we feel between him and ourselves common features of a national, social, occupational, or generally human, nature. He is far from us, insofar as these common features extend beyond him or us, and connect us only because they connect a great many people'. Thus, in connecting to participants, the aspect of my professional stranger role was achieved by aligning with them at a social and cultural level yet remaining distanced from them through my research orientation.

With respect to the use of participant observation in the context of Saudi Arabia, Al-Jeaid (1993), in his PhD study of managerial behaviour in Saudi Arabia, employed this method as part of his data collection and reported that Saudi managers had negative attitudes toward it. The managers were tense and anxious about having someone observe them to the extent that Al-Jeaid (1993) notes it sometimes led them to change their usual working routines. He links these negative attitudes to the idea that people in Saudi Arabia are less familiar with observation as a method of data collection and are,

therefore, suspicious of its outcomes. They perceive it as spying on them and trying to locate their weaknesses. Therefore, in this study, given the time allocated for fieldwork, I worked to build trust with organisational members and explain to them the participant observation method before actually observing formal meetings. In this way, organisational members understood this method as one way of collecting data that was in alignment with other data collection methods that they were more familiar with, including interviews and surveys. However, this was a complex task. Consistent with Al-Jeaid's (1993) observation, in this study, organisational members were worried about how I was recording their actions and words through observational notes. However, over time and after numerous observations, they relaxed and did not seem to notice my presence. Participants even called me to attend some meetings of which I was not aware.

- **Semi-Structured Interviews**

Qualitative, semi-structured interviews were undertaken as the second step after observations to gather data that was topic-focused. These ensured that the data gathered from different informants related to a discrete number of specific topics, easing the analysis of the data. Semi-structured interviews are used when the researcher knows enough about the issue in question that he/she can develop the questions to be asked, but, importantly, not enough to know the answers to those questions (Richards et al., 2007). The availability of background information on the issues under investigation due to the fact that observations preceded the interview process provided a reason to use semi-structured interviews rather than unstructured interviews, where different informants can result in different datasets.

The interviews were conducted face-to-face, and they were audio recorded for the purposes of future analysis with the consent of the interviewees. The interviews lasted, on average, between 60 and 90 minutes. Warren (2001) maintains that respondents, through a consent form or through the researcher's explanation, should be provided with a clear idea of the intent of the research. This was done before each interview, in which the consent form was explained to the participants and anonymity issues were discussed. The interviews took place on the premises of the organisation itself on both the all-male and the all-female campuses, providing a comfortable and relaxed atmosphere for the participants.

Qualitative interviews are different from quantitative interviews in that the former are less structured, more flexible, and interviewee-focused, encouraging interviewees to talk about what they feel is important to them (Bryman and Bell, 2007). This aspect of qualitative interviewing enabled me to go beyond the interview schedule when I needed to with the aim of obtaining more descriptive responses. Ultimately, I acquired rich and valuable data for inductive analysis. I played an active role in constructing meanings from these interviews, looking to establish patterns and themes across participants' responses (Warren, 2001).

The semi-structured interviews were scheduled after my first month of fieldwork, when I had time to participate in formal meetings and informal interactions, observing interactions within the college. Accordingly, I built a rapport with organisational members and explained the research project to participants. In doing so, I linked the interview questions to real incidents that participants experienced during their participation in various meetings. Meeting minutes and agendas were presented to members when the interviews took place to remind them of the specific meetings in

which they participated. This proved to be useful in reminding them of the details of the meetings they attended.

The interview consisted of 12 questions relating to the power dynamics within the meetings and members' interactions, which were based on my observations of meetings and interactions within the college (see Appendix 1). These questions were altered slightly to suit individuals' specific experiences in relation to the meetings and interactions in which they participated. This was done to elicit specific information that I noticed during the observations that I followed up on in the interviews. The interviews took place throughout the fieldwork period, starting in the second month of fieldwork. They were recorded and transcribed afterward.

Although qualitative interviews are difficult, the interviews within this study were even more challenging because they primarily targeted the elite members of the college. Odendahl and Shaw (2002: 306-307) argue that 'success in studying elites is predicated upon the researcher's overall knowledge of the elite culture under study, in combination with the personal status and institutional affiliation of the interviewer or project director'. Pettigrew (1992) defines managerial elites as those who occupy formal positions of authority, holding strategic positions within organisations. He includes those with separate positions, such as chief executive officers and chairmen, along with those without these individual positions such as members of boards of directors and top management teams. In more general terms, Stephens (2007) defines elites as people who are of a higher social status than the researcher and, compared to average people, hold greater power and have higher social status. He sees this definition as being in alignment with Zuckerman's (1972) description of Nobel laureates as ultra-elites. The ultra-elites that Zuckerman (1972) describes are members of an elite group who hold

more power and are more influential than others. Although different scholars define elites in different ways, this research study adopts the widely-accepted definition that elites are people who hold 'positions of power' and authority (Smith, 2006: 646).

The difficulty of conducting interviews with elites is the barriers that put elites on a different level to others (Welch et al., 2002). Scholars of organisational studies have pointed to the power imbalances within management research, emphasising how interviewees rely on their organisational positions as a sign of their power over the interviewer (Cassell, 2009). To that end, I made use of my fieldwork time to explore into interviewees' territories through different means, trying to reduce these power imbalances through preparation. This was done mostly through trying to get to know them on a personal basis before conducting the interviews and to determine how to approach them (Kezar, 2003; Phillips, 1998). Zuckerman (1972) argues that such preparation conveys the seriousness of the interviewer to the interviewee, which was something I wanted to communicate to participants.

However, power relations within elite interviews should not be taken for granted because elites are not always solely in power over the researcher; rather, there are power relations unique to each interview of which the researcher must be aware (Smith, 2006). That is why it was important to try to understand the micro-politics of social interactions and relate them to a broader understanding of power (Phillips, 1998). In this situation, my identity as a young female researcher was mediated by my direct kinship with the chairman, which contributed to the shifting of power within interviews at times. However, to try to overcome the asymmetry of power between myself and the elites, I took up Welch et al.'s (2002) advice to researchers to present the interview

context as an intellectual dialogue. In this way, they were more appreciative of my role as an academic, reducing the power imbalance.

Two gaps that scholars emphasise most in interviewing elites are the age gap and the gender gap. It is difficult for a researcher to be taken seriously when the age gap between the researcher and the interviewed elite is large (Odendahl and Shaw, 2002). This is the case in this research study, in which there is an age gap of approximately thirty years between the age of the members of the elite group interviewed and myself. However, establishing rapport by crafting a relationship with the elites that mirrored that of a PhD student with a supervisors (Stephens, 2007) and where the elites perceived themselves as enlightening the young researcher (Welch et al., 2002) was helpful in overcoming the age gap barrier. As for the gender gap, as a female interviewer, I was perceived as unthreatening to the elite group, leading to a more relaxed interview context and more open elite participants (Denitch, 1972; Welch et al., 2002). However, to bridge these gaps even more effectively, I reflected the neutrality of academia and, at the same time, I was empathetic to the elites and their organisation (Welch et al., 2002). Thus, both my age and my gender were employed to ease the interviewing process.

There is a trend among scholars to call for transformational elite interviews, where the interviewer challenges the interviewee by trying to make a difference through the process of interviewing itself. Kezar (2003) argues that the traditional literature on interviewing elites is not sufficiently deep, so, forming links with the feminist literature on interviewing elites, she proposes some transformational elite interviewing techniques. She stresses that interviewing elites must make a difference, increase understanding, and enable change. In agreement with this perspective, Conti and O'Neil (2007), who interviewed global elites at the World Trade Organisation, call for

integrating qualitative feminist methodologies into the process of elite interviewing to gain a better understanding of power issues. They explain that revealing power relation dynamics within the process of interviewing elites will help in managing the process and gaining the utmost from it. In this regard, I attempted to draw attention in the interview process to the taken-for-granted power gender dynamics that took place in strategic interactions. This resulted initially in participants' denial of any power-gender dynamics and their subsequent provision of cultural and social explanations of them. Nonetheless, it prompted the participants to rethink their initial responses and provide in-depth elaborations.

On a final note, it was very important to alter the data collection instruments and refine the questions put forward (Creswell, 2007) to suit the participants they were intended for. Therefore, the interview schedules were continuously reviewed throughout the process of conducting the interviews. The feedback that was provided regarding the questions and their clarity within a specific interview were incorporated in following interviews, ensuring that the word choice was clear and the questions understandable.

- **Organisational Documents**

Documents related to the organisation or to the informants themselves can bring rich data to the study (Richards et al., 2007). Documents are a possible substitute for events that the researcher could not observe personally (Stake, 1995). The organisational documents emphasised in this study included the organisation's management documents, minutes of meetings, meeting agendas, emails, and decrees. These documents were used to provide an in-depth perspective of the organisation as a whole. This helped put other data in context. In this regard, the organisational documents

provided some indication of how things are done within the organisation and how things continue to be done. These documents were the bases of building the background of the case, ensuring a comprehensive view of the case in relation to the other methods of collecting data, including interviews, participant observation, field notes, and visual data.

- **Field Notes**

During the period in which I was conducting the fieldwork, detailed field notes capturing my thoughts and reflections of what was observed were recorded daily in detail (Van Maanen, 1988). Sanjek (1990) differentiates between field notes and head notes: the former are the notes that stay the same after the fieldwork ends and are understood mostly by the author, while the latter are continuously developed afterward and can be understood by others. This development of head notes links to how field notes come together to bring about a clearer presentation of the fieldwork in which the field notes are not an interpretation of experiences but, rather, a descriptive record of what was experienced for later reflection and contemplation (Emerson et al., 1995).

Eisenhardt (1989) encourages researchers to write in their field notes all the impressions that occur because only later will it be clear whether or not something is critical. Eisenhardt also encourages researchers to continue questioning these notes and examining how they might help to advance understanding of the phenomenon. In addition to including my own reflections, field notes consist of notes on follow-ups from meetings and an activity log recording all of the data-gathering activities throughout the research process. This was an important step, especially within the Saudi context, because it is an oral culture; it was hard for people to accept that they were

being watched and that comments were written on the basis of their every action (Emerson et al., 1995). This is why it was sometimes beneficial to keep field notes written in great detail shortly after observations took place (ibid).

Also, a personal research diary was employed to encourage reflexivity in relation to the data collection process within the fieldwork (Nadin and Cassell, 2006). These field notes activities were especially important throughout the participant observation period, where important and detailed information was gathered to complement the bigger picture (Van Maanen, 1988). This process is a building block within the holistic perspective that qualitative research tries to create through comprehensive, extensive description (Geertz, 1973). In this research, the diary provided background information for the case rather than being a main source of data. Thus, much of the historical background of the case was built on diary records kept during the research fieldwork period.

- **Visual Data**

The use of images within ethnography is a growing trend (Pink, 2007), primarily because of the importance of capturing the cultural details that go beyond words. Although visual images may not be the main focus of data analysis, their use is related to their importance in illuminating the main sources of data (Cockburn and Ormrod, 1993; Pink, 2007). Images complement the text and help to show what words fail to illustrate (Goffman, 1976; Pink, 2007). In the context of this research, the use of images was not planned. In Pink's (2007: 19) words, it was 'serendipitous'. Nevertheless, they were considered to be important because they illustrated the embodied practice of strategy in a totally different culture than what is perceived as familiar in the West.

Visual images were not adopted as a planned method in this study due to the sensitivity of the culture to photographs. Images could harm the reputations of the participants, especially women. Harm can mean different things in cross-cultural research (Pink, 2007). In the Saudi culture, images of overt mixing between men and women are frowned upon and generally stigmatise women's reputation in society (Goffman, 1963a). Thus, images that include women are often problematic, as they can be harmful to their own reputations as well as those of their families and their extended networks. Hence, in this case, images were not sought until after the fieldwork was completed, after the establishment of trusting relationships with all participants and familiarity with the research context. The images used in this study were kept by the organisation in its photograph archive. I was able to gain access to them by explaining my intention to the gatekeepers, which was to use the pictures to illustrate the major themes in the study, primarily gender-related issues related to space and seating arrangements. Fieldwork involves recording embodied experiences (Coffey, 1999). Sometimes, it includes aspects of the material environment that are best captured through images (Pink, 2007). In this way, images are important because they stimulate meanings and create knowledge (ibid). Although the interpretation of visual methods is considered to hold a degree of subjectivity, they can encourage a reflective approach that values the subjectivity of the researcher in the creation of the knowledge upon which this research is based (ibid).

### **Data Analysis: Dramaturgy and Grounded Theory**

The dramaturgical approach to analysis is employed to make sense of the micro-dynamics of everyday, face-to-face interactions (Goffman, 1959) and connect embodied practices to broader frames of meaning (Goffman, 1974). This involves an analysis of a

particular social interaction through the actions of the individuals taking part in it. It yields a meaningful, descriptive analysis of the social interaction by linking it to various elements of the theatre, including roles, performances, scripts, and staging. This is done by drawing upon two major analytical techniques of grounded theory: coding and memos through a constant comparative method (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). Grounded theory is a theory that is grounded in the data that is gathered and analyzed in a systematic way and used to aid in understanding the complexity of social processes (Strauss and Corbin, 1994). Data is analyzed by a constant comparative method of simultaneous coding and memo-taking processes (Glaser, 1992, 1998; Glaser and Strauss, 1967). As a result of this process, significant codes are interwoven into conceptualized categories and then integrated into theory (Glaser, 1978).

In this study, emerging categories from the data were identified. The data included interviews, observational notes, and organisational documents. Phenomenological processes occur when the researcher writes and rewrites until a complete picture of the researcher's reflections develops (Richards et al., 2007). Thus, emergent categories from the data were identified to develop the theory. The use of memos (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) contextualised the codes through discussion as they developed. Field notes are a type of memo that involves recording information that might not seem relevant at the moment but might be critical in later stages of analysis. Given that the study uses a non-positivist research design, it required the researcher's involvement in the interpretation of the data (Remenyi et al., 1998). Thus, processes such as categorising, theming, and grouping helped in discovering relationships and connections within the data.

Analysis of the collected data was based on coding. Coding interpretive data can be both concept- and data-driven (Gibbs, 2007). There is freedom to begin from either position, starting with a table of thematic codes derived from relevant literature or deriving the codes from the gathered data (Gibbs, 2007). However, these starting positions are not exclusive; the researcher can begin with some idea of the codes to use from the literature while simultaneously remaining open to deriving new codes (Gibbs, 2007). Data coding is employed to identify as many categories and their properties as possible within the data. Glaser and Strauss (1967) call this categorisation theoretical coding and open coding. Initial analysis was based on open coding. That is, the complete count of the data segments was constantly compared to generate the main categories and their properties, which eventually led to the formation of theory.

In this respect, data were simultaneously analysed through the constant comparative method in the coding and memo-taking processes (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). In this method, the data segments were analysed through the deconstruction and reconstruction of the data. The central purpose of the constant comparative method of analysis is to identify the core category as the central part of the process. Consequently, the aim was to search for the core categories that served to create a theory. Through this approach, significant codes were interwoven into conceptualised categories and finally incorporated into the proposed theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967).

Because the research took place in Saudi Arabia and the Arabic language is the dominant language of communication, there were major translation issues. The transcription of interviews and observational notes was done in both Arabic and English. They were then translated selectively throughout the analysis process to preserve the meanings of the phrases and words in Arabic by maintaining the original

meanings and providing explanations about and elaborations of the translations. This is similar to the methods of Gibson et al. (2003). In their research study on team effectiveness in multinational organisations, they first conducted interviews in foreign languages. They opted to preserve the original language's phrases if they did not directly translate into the other language, providing definitions to try to capture the meanings of original phrases.

To obtain conceptually equivalent translations of terms within cross-cultural management research, a translator must not only have knowledge of the two languages and a deep understanding of both cultures but also a thorough understanding of the literature of the discipline (Eglene and Dawes, 2006). Direct translation from one language to another is difficult, as the culture and the history of the language have a major effect on the translation process (Buckley et al., 2008). In this study, translating between Arabic and English was more meaningful when it was linked to cultural and historical elements (Buckley et al., 2008). In this sense, translation can be viewed as a transformational process that occurs between the translator and what is being translated, creating something that can later reflect more dimensions of the data (Czarniawska and Joerges, 1996).

In this respect, the study was based on an interpretive approach to data translation in cross-cultural research (Xian, 2008). That is, translation incorporated cultural differences; it was not an objective task. This emphasised different cultural realities and their multiple interpretations. Thus, the study capitalised upon the richness of the context that surrounded the translated discourse from Arabic to English and depended on the researcher's familiarity with the culture. As these conditions were met, it was easier to provide a clearer understanding of the translated meanings. However, the

‘ambiguous, unstable and context-dependent character of language determines that data translation is messy’ (Xian, 2008, 238). Nevertheless, when it is guided by an ontological position of subjectivity that incorporates the multiple meanings that can be reflected through the interpretations of social entities, this task becomes part of the process of analysis.

### **Criteria: A Qualitative Assessment**

Using a qualitative research strategy, the proposed case study takes an inductive approach to forming links between the literature and empirical research (Bryman and Bell, 2007). This research is primarily qualitative, and supported up by an interpretive tradition. The criteria that govern quantitative research are different from those that govern qualitative research as a result of the different epistemological and ontological positions on which the qualitative research strategy relies (Maykut et al., 2001). That is why Stake (2005) calls for a different set of criteria to determine the validity of generalisations in relation to researching a particular case. In this respect, trustworthiness is an important criterion for judging the quality of qualitative research (Lincoln and Guba, 1985).

Bryman and Bell (2007) draw parallels between the elements of trustworthiness that govern qualitative research and the criteria that govern quantitative research. First, credibility in qualitative research corresponds to internal validity, which is reflected in the fact that the findings present a believable explanation of the observed phenomenon. This was done by adopting good research practices and ensuring the credibility of findings through the use of multiple methods of data collection. Second, transferability in the context of qualitative research corresponds to external validity in quantitative

research; this is related to the possibility that the findings apply to other contexts. That is, with rich qualitative descriptions, the study represents a basis for transferring the findings to other similar contexts. Third, the dependability of qualitative research corresponds to reliability in quantitative research; this is related to the issue of how the findings apply to other times and places. Dependability was achieved through keeping full records of every step of the research process so that the process can be checked by others in detail. Fourth, confirmability in qualitative research corresponds to objectivity in quantitative research, and this is related to the degree of intrusion of my own values within the study. This is a difficult element to control; as a qualitative researcher, I have more freedom with respect to personal interpretations in qualitative research than in quantitative designs. This research is interpretive and constructionist, and my personal interpretations are valuable in presenting different social realities of the phenomenon studied.

Moreover, this qualitative instrumental/ethnographic case study (Stake, 2005) employs triangulation through multiple data-gathering methods, which is integrated to facilitate the substantiation of important interpretations and to clarify their multiple meanings (Stake, 1995). However, this does not guarantee the generalisability of the case to the extent expected of quantitative methods, which is a major issue for positivist scholars such as Yin (1994, 2003) with respect to determining the validity of case studies. However, the importance of this qualitative case is based on extensive description, which aligns it with other cases through naturalistic generalisation (Stake, 1995) and yields a broader understanding of strategy within institutions of higher education (Jarzabkowski and Wilson, 2002; Jarzabkowski, 2003; Hoon, 2007). This not only provides new insight through the collected data but also suggests implications for practice.

The research findings will be compared and contrasted against the existing literature on the phenomenon studied. This is what Remenyi et al. (1998) refer to as confirmability. This situates the study in the broader field of inquiry, creating a place for this study among many others that are relevant. The construction of theory based on existing knowledge ensures that the study makes a valid contribution to the area of interest. Finally, another measure of validity for qualitative, non-positivist research designs is 'phenomenological', meaning that a study that gains higher access improves its validity (Remenyi et al., 1998). Higher access improves the chances of obtaining the entire picture that the researcher seeks to capture. In this study, this was guaranteed by the initial access through facilitating attendance at formal meetings and informal interactions, providing me with an office at the college. The next section will elaborate on the ethical considerations relating to organisational access and the participants' rights.

### **Ethical Considerations: A Cultural Perspective**

Major ethical considerations were addressed throughout the conduct of this research, especially because of the sensitivity attached to the political and strategic aspects of the chosen topic. These ethical considerations are dealt with from the beginning of the study to establish the appropriate context to begin the data collection process and provide a suitable environment for data analysis. Researching politically sensitive topics requires a level of concern to be established because of the conflict and controversy that occur in these situations (Lee, 1993). This is the case in this study especially because of the sensitive focus on exploring political plays at a strategic level. Organisational members regarded the issue of power plays negatively and raised some speculation and

doubts regarding them. However, these doubts subsided after the focus of the study was explained to them.

This research study focused on satisfying ethical concerns in four major areas: informed consent, the role of participants, the research process, and data handling. These areas comprise the main concerns pointed out by Christians (2005) and also by most professional bodies, such as the Academy of Management, the Social Research Association, the American Psychological Association, and the British Sociological Association (Bell and Wray-Bliss, 2009).

Initial access was gained via a formal consent form from the main decision-maker at MNA, the chairman. Although this was a sound starting point (Rapley, 2007), it still required continuous effort to negotiate access with participants to take part in the research. Given that power relations were the basis upon which I gained access to MNA, I had to deal with major ethical issues. These issues were related primarily to cultural and social considerations, which resulted in going beyond the well-established ethical bodies (Bell and Wray-Bliss, 2009). The uniqueness of MNA's case with respect to its sensitive mixed-gender context required some flexibility in abiding strictly by regular ethical policies, enabling some variance to match the specifications (Moore, 2006). This notion was capitalised upon in this research. Within management research, there is a need to be aware of factors that are specific to one's research context and to work to develop ethical directives that suit the situation (Bell and Bryman, 2007).

For this reason, in the conduct of this research, there was a need to adopt an interpretive ethical stance to account for cultural differences, specifically those associated with the Saudi culture. Thus, after ensuring that the research generally was aligned with the main

ethical bodies in the field, this interpretive ethical stance is utilised to deal with minor details within the research. This was a necessity due to some cultural issues that needed more sensitivity. These issues are dealt with through an interpretive ethical stance and explained in situations where there is deviation from the main ethical standards. This type of perspective helps in dealing with fieldwork experiences in an individual way by being sensitive to the context specificities of the culture. This stance is in accordance with the epistemological and ontological positions informing this study, where social actors' experiences and their interpretations are of prime importance. It is sensitive to that aim and aids in facilitating the research process in cross-cultural settings. Throughout the following sections, some of the decisions made will be explained in accordance with this perspective.

One major ethical issue that was of immense importance was the researcher's multiple identities within the fieldwork context (Goffman, 1959). Certain elements of the researcher's identity became important in this case, including class, gender, and age. In controlling one of these elements (class), not announcing it, I affected how the participants perceived me (Pink, 2007). Thus, my identity was threatened by the established links to the chairman (class), who facilitated my access and held the main source of power at MNA. Here, 'class' refers to being from the same social and tribal level. Thus, some participants within the college were aware of my direct link to the chairman; others were aware only of my links to top management. This was an issue that I chose not to disclose completely at the beginning of the fieldwork to avoid discouraging participants from engaging in the study. In Saudi culture, power relations are perceived to be of extreme importance. Therefore, the participants might have felt threatened by the mention of the chairman's name. Following the University of Exeter Ethics Policy (2007) and the Economic and Social Research Council Framework for

Research Ethics (2010), participants in the research study were free to participate or to withdraw with the guarantee of maintaining their safety throughout the process. I negotiated access and participation on a regular basis with participants, talking to them about the research aim and objectives and their roles and rights as participants (Richards et al., 2007). This ensured that the participants were fully aware of the research subject and the nature of their participation, and they were promised anonymity regarding their presentation within the research (Creswell, 2007). However, this did not enlighten them fully about my multiple identities within the research setting. This was not a totally covert research methodology such as in the case of Dalton, who did not receive informed consent from the participants in his study (Bell, 2011). Covert research is not necessarily unethical; however, it should be seen through the specific settings of which it is a part (Pink, 2007), especially the cultural and social settings that govern it.

It has been acknowledged that fieldwork produces multiple subjectivities of the researcher (Coffey, 1999). In this case, multiple subjectivities had to be managed to ensure the participants' ease of engagement. My multiple identities (Goffman, 1959) were managed to achieve the data collection target. During the fieldwork, I was constantly engaged in body work relating to how I present myself (Coffey, 1999); this is part of Goffman's (1959) presentation of the self, which includes gaining access through fulfilling various fieldwork roles. This was reflected in the fact that choosing a specific personal front can increase closeness to the participants and ease their engagement. Also, sometimes, I tried to make my presence as invisible as possible through controlling some aspects of my personal front, including a plain dress code. Also, I controlled my manner such that I was mostly quiet unless asked to participate. This was done to ease participants' performances in front of an observing researcher. However, at other times, I utilised my dress code and academic level to facilitate more

conversations and situate myself in accordance with specific circumstances, especially in informal interactions.

Adopting Goffman's (1959) notion of the front- and backstage, Lee (1993) concludes that participants use the frontstage to limit what the researcher gains from a situation. As a result, he suggests that researcher should go beyond the frontstage to get to the sought-after information. He recommends activities such as identifying with participants, spending time with them, and trying to show them that their commitment to doing what they are doing will help to achieve the researcher's objectives. This was an issue I addressed while at the college for four months by taking the time to form trusting relationships with participants outside of formal meetings. This eventually enabled me to gain the participants' trust by explaining that there was no conflict of interest between the multiple identities (Goffman, 1959), especially my identity as a researcher and my identity as a relative of the chairman. This was a continuous process, as not all members were aware of my connection to the chairman. However, by the end of the fieldwork, these multiple identities were explained and discussed openly with participants who voiced their worries about the confidentiality of their data. These concerns were honoured and discussed openly with participants.

This is why a formal consent form was not the most appropriate method of gaining informed consent. This is not considered an obstacle because even completing a consent form should not be taken for granted as a measure of consent. This is the case, because of the fluid nature of consent which is not a straightforward process and requires negotiation of meanings (Bhattacharya, 2007). Also, consent is not guaranteed by signing a consent form because participants can agree but then later withdraw (Sin, 2005). This is why I had to gain the trust of participants on an individual basis so they

would cooperate and agree to take part in the research on their own terms. The consent provided by the organisation did not represent any individual person's free will or personal opinions; however, being sensitive to individuals within the college helped in negotiating the terms of their consent.

Confidentiality and anonymity are two measures that are taken to guard against the risk of harm to participants and the provision of privacy (Bryman and Bell, 2007). This helps ensure that the participants' dignity and rights are protected against any kind of harm (Academy of Management Code of Ethics, 2005). In this study, a main aspect of caution was in the way in which the data was presented, protecting the reputations of both the organisation and the participants relating to the use of photographs. Visual images can harm the reputations of the participants (Pink, 2007). In the case of MNA, some female participants reported that their families did not know that they were participating in mixed-gender interactions at the college. In this case, using photographs that depicted them in a mixed-gender setting would have harmed their reputations in society. Specifically, they might have been viewed as unrespectable women. As a result, additional care was taken to blur the images of the women's faces in these pictures. Also, the focus was placed on images that depicted the material environment, as images can go beyond the capacity of words (Pink, 2007). This is done to protect participants' identities and ensure their safety within their own society. Also, caution was exercised in the way that the data was presented, protecting the reputation of both the organisation itself and the participants through the use of pseudonyms. Because there may be difficulty distinguishing between the Arabic pseudonyms of men and women, within the analysis, 'M' will be used to refer to a male participant and 'F' to refer to a female participant.

Moreover, in this study, the participants received clear information about the research process; the sources of funding that might affect the conduct of the research and the participants were disclosed (ABS/BAM/BMAF Draft Ethics Guide, 2009). Thus, the participants were informed that the research was funded by the government of Saudi Arabia and that there were no conflicts of interest in the study that would affect the conduct or the results. The funding was independent of the research area of focus, which was declared from the beginning of the fieldwork.

Issues of data processing were also a major concern, starting with the process of collecting, storing, and reproducing data. Maintaining integrity and clarity in the data was prioritized (University of Exeter Code of Good Practice in the Conduct of Research, 2002). Specifically, it was ensured that the research and results were presented without fabrication (ABS/BAM/BMAF Draft Ethics Guide, 2009). Thus, while sharing results with other researchers and the public is important, the way in which it is shared presents a critical matter. To this end, data documentation was a very important process that started from the beginning of the research and continued throughout. The focus was on how data were created, how they would be used, what they mean, and how they will be presented in a way that can be comprehensible to any others who come across them (UK Data Archive, 2009). Transparent accounts were provided, but certain choices were subjective and value-laden. Therefore, the decisions and choices made in this study were explained to facilitate a more transparent understanding of the research (Code of Professional Conduct in Socio-economic Research, and Database of Professional Bodies, 2003). The next section will introduce the main social actors at MNA, whose strategic performances will be the main focus of analysis in Chapters Six and Seven.

## **Main Actors at MNA's Case Study**

The Saudi culture affects the performances and scripts of the social actors at MNA on a micro-level. These actors reflect these challenges on a strategic level and deal with them as managers. The social actors consist of three main groups: top management (11 men and 3 women), middle management (6 men and 5 women), and personal assistants to top managers (3 men and 3 women). Within this categorisation, the performances and scripts of five main actors had a major influence on others. The following sections will review these actors' status in accordance with their importance at MNA as well as their hierarchy within the college.

- **Male Chairman of Board of Trustees**

Dr. Fahad is the chairman of the Board of Trustees and one of the three main owners of MNA. He is in his late 50s and has had a vision for transforming education ever since he was the secretary-general of the Jeddah Chamber of Commerce for a decade before establishing the college. In that position, he was the catalyst for Jeddah's first MBA program, open to both men and women. He became familiar with such programs while pursuing his higher education in the United States of America, where many Saudi scholars aim to study. His family's background is in business, and his roots in Quraish, the most prestigious tribe in Saudi Arabia, bring him great respect in the society. These qualities, in addition to his status as an owner and major shaper of the college, place him at the nexus of power and the centre of decision-making within the college. Although the college has two other owners, their presence is rarely felt. Dr. Fahad's personality dominates the college and ensures that decisions are made first through him and then negotiated on other levels. His main office is on the all-male campus, and

when he needs to visit on the all-female campus to sign formal papers or conduct meetings, he uses his female vice-chairwoman's office, where he has his own section. As a businessman engaged in other matters besides the college, he is not at the college regularly, but people at the college anticipate his reaction to every step they make and every word spoken. People tend to talk about Dr. Fahad as if he is in the room next to them, and even visitors hear stories about this leader of the college.

- **Female Board of Trustees Vice Chairwoman**

Dr. Fowzeyah, the female Board of Trustees vice-chairwoman for development, holds the second-most powerful position at MNA on both the all-male and all-female campuses. Her position as the head of development of both campuses places her second in power to Dr. Fahad, above both the male dean of the all-male college and the female dean of the all-female college. Dr. Fowzeyah comes from an established family known for its business background. She is in her late 50s and obtained her higher education in the USA as well. She held many managerial positions at the public King Abdulaziz University in Jeddah, and as the dean of its all-female campus of 24,000 thousand students, she was at the top of the organisational hierarchy. She then was asked to join MNA, first as dean of the all-female campus before being promoted to her current position three years ago. Dr. Fowzeyah is mainly responsible for gaining MNA the national and international accreditation necessary for university status. People at MNA are intimidated by her power and realise that she is an extension of Dr. Fahad's authority. Although she is not related to him through blood ties, her position in the college is directly related to and backed up by him. In that relationship, she reflects the power that others perceive in him personally.

- **Dean of the All-Male Campus**

Dr. Sami, dean of the all-male campus for the past six years, is in his 70s. He studied business in the USA, held prominent roles at King Saud University in Riyadh, and is from the same tribe as Dr. Fahad. His age, family's prominent status, previous positions, and Western education all grant him power at MNA. People tend to respect his age and his position, and even when they oppose his opinions, they do not dare to confront him directly. He also reflects Dr. Fahad's power because he is the male representative of the chairman in his absence. Dr. Sami cannot make any major decisions, though, without consulting the chairman. To all other staff members at MNA, he ranks third in power behind the chairman and Dr. Fowzeyah.

- **Dean of the All-Female Campus**

Dr. Mariam, dean of the all-female campus, came to MNA from King Abdulaziz University five months ago to fill the post left vacant by Dr. Fowzeyah's promotion. Dr. Mariam is in her late 50s and received her higher education in business in the USA. Her family is one of the most well-known because of its engagement in commerce in the region. Her tribal origins are well-respected and honoured. Her position of power as the dean of the all-female campus is threatened in the all-female college by Dr. Fowzeyah and by the male dean who holds an analogous position at the all-male campus. Although the staff at the all-female college regards her as the main decision-maker on her own campus, they know that she will bend if they can persuade Dr. Fowzeyah or the male dean to support them over her.

- **Female Vice Dean for Academic Affairs**

Dr. Ruba, the female Vice Dean for Academic affairs, joined MNA three months ago and comes from a diverse background. She is in her 50s and is half Egyptian and half Austrian. She obtained her higher education in Canada and worked there and in Egypt and Lebanon before joining MNA. Although she is not a Saudi citizen, Dr. Ruba's foreign education and experience, along with her position in the all-female college, have granted her a significant status. Her staff perceives her as powerful and suggests that she is backed up by the chairman, giving her substantial power at MNA. She is outspoken and forward, qualities that reflect the support of a male power, Dr. Fahad in this case.

- **Other Members of Top and Middle Management**

The study will also focus on other members of MNA in top and middle management from both the all-male and the all-female campus. The men include Drs. Hasan, Amer, Essa, Hammad, Hatem, Amjad, Habeab, Nader, Taha, Razeen, Saed, Ali, Soud, and Fawaz and Mr. Yousef, and the women include Ms. Rana, Ms. Jana, and Drs. Yara, Sana, and Hind. These people are the heads of departments and top managers at MNA. They come from different ethnic backgrounds, mainly Saudi and Egyptian, with one Jordanian and one Indian. Most of them received their higher education abroad.

- **Personal Assistants**

The focus is on three male and three female personal assistants of top managers, Mr. Saleh, Mr. Anass, Mr. Sultan, Ms. Fatin, Ms. Fadia, and Ms. Laila. They come from different ethnic backgrounds, including Saudi, Egyptian, Indian, and Philippine. They

accompany top managers at meetings, recording the minutes or otherwise assisting their bosses. They are mostly silent at meetings, but they observe and analyse the performance and interactions of top and middle management.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has reviewed the detailed methodological plan for the conduct of this qualitative research study. Fieldwork can be a challenging task due to its dependence upon managing relationships (Coffey, 1999), which leads to the constant negotiations of power relations within the fieldwork. This becomes an even more difficult task, as ethical considerations are strongly interwoven with power relations in fieldwork (Pink, 2007). Relationships within fieldwork are the outcome of continuous negotiations and crafting between the researcher and the participants (Coffey, 1999). The ethical issues related to them need to be considered within the boundaries of the cultural frames that govern both parties. This is why the conscious decision regarding building an appropriate culturally sensitive researcher image and identity was an important matter in the completion of this fieldwork (Coffey, 1999). This was done in alignment with the main ethical guidelines in the field. In the instances in which these guidelines were not followed, a culturally based explanation was provided to support the situation-specific decision. This cultural uniqueness of the Saudi case helped to bring new insights to the conduct of the research by highlighting a different approach to ethical considerations that appreciates the novelty of the context of the research.

Tsoukas (2009) argues that, for studies to provide a field of inquiry with a substantive contribution, they must be located within the epistemology of the particular rather than the epistemology of the general. Tsoukas (2009) points to the potential of particular

studies to provide what he calls ‘analytical refinement’, as opposed to what Yin calls ‘analytical generalisations’ (295). Therefore, these analytical refinements provided by particular cases can specify what is already known and provide deeper dimensions of existing theory. By focusing on a single case study, this research study provides an enhanced understanding of the existing theory of organisational power and politics, within strategy-as-practice, at the elite level within a traditional cultural. The findings of this study adds to the existing literature, enhancing understanding of the phenomenon under study and its relationship to other phenomena in similar contexts. The study uses a dramaturgical approach to analysis to uncover the political dynamics that other methods have been unable to capture in this context. The following chapter will set the scene and highlight the major actors in this cross-cultural study by describing the characteristics of the Saudi culture and its effects on the management context in the country.

## **Chapter Five: Interpretation of Saudi Arabian Culture**

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### **Introduction**

The Saudi culture shares much common ground with the broader Arabian culture of which it is part. However, as the most conservative country in the Middle East, Saudi Arabia has a culture that is stricter and more traditional than the norm in other Arab and Muslim countries. This unique culture will be reviewed through analysis of Saudi Arabia's background, emphasising its culture, religion, history, and economy. The chapter will also identify the major cultural changes in higher education, particularly issues related to gender and internationalisation. Finally, in detailing the challenges that the Saudi culture faces, this chapter introduces of the main actors in the MNA case study. This includes analysis of the power relations between participants, whose performances will be further analysed in Chapters Five and Six. This triple-level analysis links the culture on a macro-level to higher education's organisational meso-level and to a micro-level analysis of how the culture predetermines what people say and do within it.

### **Saudi Arabia: A Cultural Examination**

Saudi Arabia is the homeland of Islam and contains within its borders the two holy cities of Mecca and Medina. People from around the Arabian Peninsula have performed the pilgrimage to Mecca since the prophet Abraham built the house of God there with the help of his son Ishmael. The revelation of the message of Islam through the prophet Mohammad 1433 years ago sustained the Hajj pilgrimage to Mecca, which people continue to undertake today. This tradition has made the western region of Saudi

Arabia, called Hijaz, different from other parts of the country. The interweaving of various cultures over the centuries has made this area more susceptible to change and more open to external influences. The people in this region view themselves as different from other Saudis because they benefit from openness, modernisation, and a cosmopolitan culture that pilgrimages encourage (Yamani, 2009). However, the unification of Saudi Arabia as sovereign state under King Abdulaziz Al Saud in 1932 has given greater political, cultural, and religious unity to the rest of the country on the basis of traditional norms, a rare feat for a Middle Eastern country (Lengzowski, 1967). In contrast to the region of Hijaz, where the tradition of pilgrimage has exposed Saudis to the modern world through the Internet and international travel and encouraged them to see modernisation as a positive sign of progress and development, much of Saudi Arabia is caught in a dilemma between the traditional and the modern (Yamani, 2009). The country's newest generation wants change while preserving social identities linked to traditional religious values (Yamani, 2000).

This confusion within the Arab world has been the focus of much recent international attention. Westernisation and modernisation have caused Arabs to search for a new identity that is simultaneously consistent with their deeply rooted traditions and with a future based on modernism and development (Omair, 2008). Hijab (1988) argues that the major reason that the Gulf countries cling to traditions is because of the speed at which the oil boom in the 1970s ushered in modernisation. She argues that the modernisation of 'formal education systems, industry, growing urban centres, [and] nation states' took place faster in Saudi Arabia than in any other Arab country or even in any European nation, so Saudis perceive traditions as the only solid basis on which they can rely in the face of a changing world (Hijab, 1988: 123). In the Middle East, religion, institutional structures, and social relations shape businesses, so it is no

surprise that tradition and modernisation have become fiercely contested issues within Saudi Arabian organisations (Metcalf, 2007).

Although a common language, religion, and historical heritage unify Arab culture, some variations of these elements still exist (Muna, 1980; Atiya, 1996; Elamin and Omair, 2010). While Islam is the dominant force that governs the behaviour of people in the Arab world (Ali, 1996), different cultures have produced many variations on Islam (Syed, 2010). Unlike other Arab countries, Saudi Arabia strictly adheres to Islamic law (Muna, 1980) because of both the country's political establishment's links to the religion and the nation's deep-rooted adherence to traditional Bedouin social principles. These dual cultural sources are why Islam as an influence on Arab culture must be distinguished from the patriarchal culture that governs Bedouin social life (Omair, 2008). The unique mixture of Islamic and Arab traditions in Saudi Arabian culture makes traditional norms even more powerful because they are tied to religious belief (Bjerke and Al-Meer, 1993). Throughout its spread from the Atlantic to China from the 7<sup>th</sup> century onward, Islam has been not just a religious movement but also a social reform movement. Different cultures have produced diverse interpretations of Islam (Syed, 2010), and one of the strictest of these interpretations emerged in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century as the Middle East underwent major economic and political changes, including the birth of new states and the start of women's formal education (Ahmed, 1992). In Saudi Arabia, traditional religious scholars have worked to make sure that social practices are governed by a strict, unified, conservative understanding of Islam (Elamin and Omair, 2010) rooted in a school of thought that accepts interpretations of scholars from the first three centuries of Islam and rejects new interpretations (Nevo, 1998; Doumato, 1999).

This school of religious thought, which was first preached in central Arabia in the 1940s (ibid), remains the dominant theology and has been incorporated as a main pillar of the Saudi education system from kindergarten to the university (Nevo, 1998). The strong link between the religious and political establishments in Saudi Arabia give this Unitarian school of thought priority among all other interpretations of the religion (Atawneh, 2009) and this has shielded the Saudi people from being open to other interpretations of Islam (Prokop, 2005). This theology helped in the formation of a strict code governing social interactions that has resulted in gender segregation, a strict dress code for women, and religious-based education (Ahmed, 1992; Doumato, 1992; Souaiaia, 2008; Yamani, 2009). In addition, it has been a significant factor in the subjugation of women in Saudi society (Syed, 2010).

Saudi Arabia's mixture of Islamic and Arabic cultural influences, contribute to the underprivileged position of women and the gendered roles that are prevalent in Saudi culture (Bjerke and Al-Meer, 1993; Mincese, 1982; Metcalfe, 2008). The Quran serves as the holy book to which Muslims refer in all aspects of life, but it is not a set of laws and did not erase the Arabian tribal society and customs that pre-date Islam itself. The well-established and strongly rooted cultural norms of Saudi culture grant superiority and authority to the male gender (Ali and Al-Shakis, 1985). These cultural traditions make people shy away from confrontations and defer to senior males during social interactions (Muna, 1980). Religion and tribal relations reinforce a hierarchical family structure in which children are dependent upon, obedient to, and passively accepting of their parents' will, particularly that of their father (Ali and Al-Shakis, 1985). Children raised in this relation to their father typically become passive and dependent in other spheres of social life (ibid).

The family is the dominant social structure in Saudi Arabia (Yamani, 2000; Mincese, 1982). Both tribal and non-tribal populations in Saudi Arabia utilize families' alliances with other families of a similar status as sources of cultural influence (Metz, 1993). Saudi Arabia is a country in which 'tribal and family blood ties are the major determinates of status' (Shaw and Long, 1982: 84). The importance of family as a social structure extends to the economy; business is conducted through family and social ties rather than individual efforts (Bjerke and Al-Meer, 1993). These influences make the immediate and extended family the most important institution in Saudi society and a source of individual identity and status (Metz, 1993; Al-Sweel, 1993). The Arab Gulf states share a culture that emphasises kinship and the traditional roles of women and strictly defines gender roles (Abdallah, 1996; Elamin and Omair, 2010). In patriarchal Saudi families, women are always dependent on men and operate within fixed roles, which are deeply embedded in the family as a social structure (Doumato, 1992). Under this culture, Arab women experience many forms of discrimination that limit their rights, including the choice to work outside the home, many of which derive from conservative traditions rather than religion (Taleb, 2010; Yaseen, 2010).

This culture has led to rigid adherence to strict religious interpretations that, to protect women's modesty, require that unrelated men and women be segregated (Doumato, 1992). Thus, the strict rules on women's social interactions in public reflect cultural norms originating from an essentially patriarchal system (Yaseen, 2010; Taleb, 2010; Mincese, 1982). However, in the past decade, changes in the world economy have opened some public spaces to Saudi women, including medicine, banking, and private companies. The inclusion of women in the upper echelons of business in Saudi Arabia started with their participation in the Chamber of Commerce in Jeddah, next in Mecca,

and then in other sectors and regions. The following section reviews some of the economic factors that have led to major changes in Saudi culture.

### **Saudi Economy**

In addition to its global religious importance, Saudi Arabia is crucial to the global economy as a major producer of oil and natural gas that holds more than 20% of the world's oil reserves. The huge increase in oil prices in the 1970s created enormous revenues (Metz, 1993), and still, 'one out of every four barrels of oil produced in the world today comes from Saudi Arabia' (Al-Sweel, 1993: 91). The country is the largest exporter of petroleum in the world, and the oil industry accounts for 80% of government revenues, 45% of GDP, and 90% of export earnings, according to the CIA World Fact Book (2007). However, the country's immense economic reliance on petroleum is starting to change, particularly under the vision of Saudi Arabia's current ruler, King Abdullah Al-Saud, who is seeking to diversify and reform the economy. Joining the World Trade Organisation in December 2005 also served as a catalyst for plans to diversify the Saudi economy. The government has started to encourage the growth of many private sectors, including education, power generation, telecommunication, and petrochemicals, to lessen the dependence on oil and provide employment for the country's rising youth population. With nearly 40% of Saudi Arabia's 28,686,633 residents under 15 years old (CIA, 2009), the government wants to diversify its oil-based economy, which employs only 10% of the population.

Government initiatives to reform and diversify the economy started with the announcement of plans to establish six economic cities throughout the country. The

King Abdullah economic city near the major port city of Jeddah has already opened, and most of the other economic cities are under construction.

The government has also sought to provide full support to the educational sector. Saudi Arabia used to have eight government universities scattered across its various regions, which did not effectively serve the country's increasing population. King Abdullah's government has worked to increase both the quality and the quantity of the education sector. Saudi Arabia now has 24 public and nine private universities, along with numerous colleges. The opening of the King Abdullah University of Science and Technology (KAUST) in September 2009 fulfilled the monarch's 2007 vision to create a world-class research university. KAUST is a primary scientific research centre and has attracted scientists from around the world to teach and conduct research there.

The development of the educational sector can serve as a vital source of transformation for other sectors of Saudi culture and society. This transformation, however, will require a substantial amount of strategic planning, and how much the education sector can affect the economy will depend on how the sector reacts to uncertainties and ambiguities (Niblock, 2006). This is especially the case at a time when education standards and expectations are rising in Saudi Arabia (Yamani, 2000). The education sector needs to plan for, manage, and implement change to enable the larger Saudi society to cope better with the threats and competitive pressures of the global environment. In this context, it is crucial for the education sector to adopt proposals to help its institutions manage, communicate, influence, and accept the strategic changes that they will certainly face (Prokop, 2003).

In reaction to such needs, this proposed study investigates the techniques used by strategists to communicate strategic change within private institutes of higher education. This investigation seeks insight into power plays that determine how strategists talk and act in educational settings. A cultural and historical lens of analysis was adopted because the Saudi culture is a primary determinant of people's behaviour. This investigation addressed the challenges and opportunities faced by Saudi strategists and presented them with practice-based recommendations to aid in strategic planning for implementing change and communicating effectively with diverse audiences.

The study location of Jeddah provides major indicators about changes in Saudi Arabia's education sector. Given the government's focus on reform and change, which is not an easy process to manage, it is important to analyse the process of communicating strategic change from the start – when cultural characteristics shape strategic interactions. The following section examines the two main areas in which higher education in Saudi Arabia has experienced major changes: gender and modernity.

### **The Negotiation of Gender**

The restrictions on female roles and behaviour in the Arab world are due to cultural forces in addition to religious ones (Yaseen, 2010; Metcalfe, 2007). As a social reform movement, Islam improved the status of women, including permitting them to keep their names after marriage, own businesses, and inherit property without obtaining consent from a male guardian (Mincese, 1982; Yamani, 2000). However, the dominant patriarchal societies in the Middle East emphasise the subordinate role of women in society (Atiya, 1996; Doumato, 1999; Al-Lamky, 2007; Metcalfe, 2008; Tlaiss and Kauser, 2010). In Saudi Arabia, the predominance of a conservative interpretation of

Islam has limited the way in which people view gender roles and portrayed traditional Arab social norms as religious values even when this is debatable (Nevo, 1998; Doumato, 1999; Prokop, 2005; Taleb, 2010; Yaseen, 2010). For example, Saudi women did not possess their own citizenship cards but were included as dependents on their male guardians' cards until 2001 (Doumato, 2003). They cannot travel without the consent of their male guardians (Doumato, 1992), they are forbidden to drive, and their use of public transportation is restricted (Prokop, 2003). These laws have created fixed roles for both men and women in Saudi society (Lengzowski, 1967; Doumato, 1992). While the roles of men and women may vary and change more in the West, Arab women's primary role is their commitment to the household and children, and men's main role is to be the breadwinner for their families (Jamali, 2009; Omair, 2009). This arrangement maintains women's roles as traditional and subordinate to men's (Abdallah, 1996). Although women in Western cultures have gradually been liberated from traditional values and Arab countries have been advancing rapidly, Arab women generally remain subordinate to men (Mincese, 1982; Al-Lamky, 2007). The confinement of women in the Arabian Gulf countries to traditional roles might stem from the enormity of the oil wealth, which did not require women to work for families to survive (Esposito, 1998). However, modern social, political, and economic pressures are beginning to modify these traditional gender roles (Jamali, 2009).

The need for women's participation in the workforce has changed the perceptions of gender roles in the Arab world and particularly in Saudi Arabia. However, these changes are still incremental and being implemented only gradually because of how deep-rooted traditional gender roles are in the culture. In Saudi Arabia, many religious scholars still resist women's participation in the workplace (Prokop, 2003) because they believe that any change in women's roles will threaten the institution of the family and,

through that, weaken the larger social structure that genders all interactions (Elamin and Omair, 2010; Joseph and Slyomovics, 2001; Hijab, 1988). It comes as no surprise that Saudi Arabia ranks very low on the gender gap according to the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report (WEF, 2008), which measures work, education, politics, outcomes, and the gender ratio.

When Saudi women first joined the workforce, they worked exclusively in all-female settings for a long time (Guthrie, 2001), and only recently have economic demands started the trend towards mixed-sex workplaces in the Arabian region (Omair, 2009). Cultural norms about gender relations derived from the home have largely transferred to the workplace (Muna, 1980), resulting in stereotypes that classify women as secondary to men (Syed, 2010). The patriarchal system of the Arab world (Tlaiss and Kauser, 2010) and Saudi Arabia favours masculinity and seniority in all social interactions, including those in the workplace (Ali and Al-Shakis, 1985).

Among the consequential outcomes of gender norms, boys and girls are taught to act in certain ways and, as adults, they become women who are quiet and men who use loud voices to assert themselves (Doumato, 1992). Women are encouraged to avoid using culturally accepted masculine communication techniques such as raising their voices or using body or hand gestures to make a point (Jamali, 2009). Women must demonstrate social conformity by being passive and obedient in the presence of men (Ali and Al-Shakis, 1985). Culture, too, is divided spatially between the genders; there are always two spaces: a private space for women and a public space for men (Guthrie, 2001).

However, women are allowed to participate in the public space shared by men through their adherence to wearing the veil. Veiling has many forms and communicates different

meanings (Abu-Lughod, 2002). In Saudi Arabia, this involves wearing an *abaya*, which consists generally of a plain, long, black robe that covers the body from shoulder to foot, with a black headscarf covering the hair (Yamani, 1996). However, some women in Saudi are not confined to the plain *abayas* and tend to wear new forms of *abayas* that include colourful and extravagant designs (Doumato, 2003). This represents the clash between conservative and modern cultures (ibid), where women are conforming to wearing the veil but giving it social meaning through the different styles which they choose to wear. The most important aspect of the veil is that it reflects women's agency in public spaces, allowing them to present themselves with modesty in the presence of men (Yamani, 1996; Abu-Lughod, 2002). This has allowed women to participate in the public sphere and work in mixed-gender contexts while still maintaining their dignity in a culture that considers a high level of interaction between the genders in the workplace as improper (Elamin and Omair, 2010). The dress code for men in Saudi Arabia is also quite standardised in public spaces. In general, men wear standard Saudi formal attire: a white long gown called a *thoub* with a white or red headscarf, while occasionally opting for a Western business suit. Both men's and women's dress codes reflect the high degree of cultural conformity to the values of Saudi culture.

Cultural conformity transmits gendered behaviours from the family to the workplace, where women are expected to show respect to men, be quiet, and accept men's dominance, preserving patriarchal roles (Rawaf, 1990). This transference is why it is important to understand the cultural factors that shape gender (Metcalf, 2008). However, some working women are able to manipulate their seniority and status to overcome some of the gender stereotypes in Saudi culture. Just as older women in Arab societies tend to have more influence in their families (Mincese, 1982), they can also have more influence in business settings. Additionally, women make use of their social

status granted by family and Arabian tribal links. Since the early days of Islam in Saudi Arabia, certain women, like the prophet's wife Khadijah, have gained power through wealth, nobility, owning property, managing businesses, or marriage to a socially elite man (Souaiaia, 2008). On the other hand, poor women have always suffered from marginalisation (ibid). Women are treated with the same regard and respect as their male relatives, so well-connected female workers can get respect in the business world. The Saudi business culture favours nepotism (Rawaf, 1990; Joseph et al., 2004), and Yamani (2000) notes the importance of tribal and family connections for succeeding in Saudi society. Yamani (ibid: 37) argues that 'having a personal tie to the top of the state elite is the best way to get things done in any Gulf state'.

In modern times, women's status in the business world has been enhanced by increasing access to jobs and education, particularly degrees from Western universities, which elevate them above their colleagues (Esposito, 1998; Omair, 2009). Saudi women are using these cultural elements to empower themselves to transform their roles outside the home in the business world, creating new roles and identities for themselves without abandoning their cultural values (Joseph and Slyomovics, 2001; Sidani, 2005). Doing so has been a hard fight since Saudi women first engaged in demonstrations calling for the right to drive in 1990. Religious scholars suppressed these calls in an attempt to preserve women's traditional roles (Doumato, 1992). These women called for their social rights within a liberal Islamic tradition rather than a conservative one that continues to restrict women to the home. This protest and the reaction to it are an example of the continuous challenges that Saudi women face as they aspire to new social roles and identities in a context where men see those desires as an effort to break loose from the firm grip of traditional norms that guarantee women's subordination to men.

Kinship and family ties do not always guarantee Saudi women a more powerful social status. For example, Princess Basma bint Saud Abd Al-Aziz al Saud, daughter of a former king and niece of the current king, stands in the highest ranks of society, but she does not have the right to participate in politics. Ahmed (1992) notes that Saudi women lost the right to political participation after the first stage of the rise of Islam. In an interview, Princess Basma (*HARDtalk*, 2011) was asked about the difference between a royal princess and prince in Saudi Arabia. The princess replied, 'It is as the difference as in the difference between a man and a woman in the Saudi society. They enjoy more privileges. They enjoy the privilege of taking a part in decision-making while we do not' (*HARDtalk*, 2011). Such statements convey the power of cultural norms that bar Saudi women from the domains of decision-making. This type of political discrimination has led many countries to criticize Saudi Arabia's reluctance to fully implement the United Nations' 1979 international treaty, the Convention of the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women. Saudi Arabia responded by stating that, 'in case of contradiction between any term of the Convention and the norms of Islamic law, the Kingdom is not under obligation to observe the contradictory terms of the Convention' (United Nations, 2006: 26). This loose reference to 'norms of Islamic law' resulted in international opposition because it injects cultural norms rather than religious values into the issue of women rights. To further women's rights, it is important to approach these cultural norms in ways that acknowledge their primacy in Saudi culture and provide nonthreatening alternatives.

A high point in Saudi women's political rights occurred on 25 September 2011, when King Abdullah announced that women in the Kingdom will be given the right to vote in municipal elections and to be appointed to the Shura Council (Buchanan, 2011). A consultative assembly founded in 1992 under the rule of the late King Fahad, the Shura

Council operates as a 150-member advisory council to the king, questioning the country's ministers and proposing laws (Nevo, 1998; Doumato, 1999). Formerly, all members of this council were men, except for six women assigned to an external committee examining issues related to women and families. Under the new royal decree, however, women will be allowed to serve as full members of the Shura Council. The king said that this change was done in the spirit of helping women who have been marginalised and that women's serving in such roles complies with Islamic law, called *Sharia*. Islamic law and Saudi traditions always govern Saudi women's participation in politics, which preserves their dignity and social standing (KSAMCIFI, 2004).

- **Segregated and Mixed-Gender Saudi Executive Contexts**

Saudi labour laws divide work along gender lines because of the need to protect women and provide them with a moral setting for work (Metcalf, 2008). This segregation is seen as an appropriate means for women's protection (Elamin and Omair, 2010) throughout their lives starting with schools; the first government school for boys in Saudi Arabia was established in 1932, but the first government school for girls was not founded until 1965 (Yaseen, 2010). This gap between the establishments of these schools reflects men's primacy and dominance over women in the Arab world in general (Minces, 1982; Doumato, 1999; Joseph and Slyomovics, 2001; Elamin and Omair, 2010; Tlaiss and Kauser, 2010). Although the restrictions on women's education in Saudi Arabia have been eased since the 1960s, the traditions of a male-dominated society still impair the education system and ensure that it remains segregated by sex (Taleb, 2010). However, women have increasingly pursued formal education up to the university level. In the current generation of young Saudis, women make up 58% of students but only 15% of the total workforce (Baker, 2011), and according to the

Kingdom of Saudi Arabia Human Development Report (2003), the gender-related labour force ratio is 1:6.2 (female to male), with 92% working in the government sector in education, health care, or banking or the private sector. This is the case because, in a sex-segregated economy, women's job options are greatly limited.

There is a noticeable lack in the existing literature concerning of female Saudi executives. Muna (1980) focuses on 52 top Arab executives' managerial experiences, explaining their behaviours and ways of thinking, but there is no mention of a single female executive in the six countries he explores, including Saudi Arabia. Furthermore, within the all-male contexts he studies, the male executives and employees describe their roles in companies with family-based metaphors, calling themselves fathers, big brothers, and godfathers. Top Arab executives see themselves as the head of a family and their employees as members of the family (Muna, 1980). In doing so, these top executives cite social norms that grant the power of position to the head of a family and transfer that cultural norm into executive leadership (Bjerke and Al-Meer, 1993).

Taleb's (2010) study on female leadership styles in an all-female academic institution in Saudi Arabia found that women tend to adopt stereotypically feminine attributes of leadership. Taleb's work confirms the findings of studies by Eafly and Johnson (1990) and Gevedon (1992) indicating that men are perceived to be more likely to adopt a task-oriented leadership style, while women are more likely to be concerned with maintaining interpersonal relationships.

These gendered differences in communication can explain the findings of Rawaf's (1990) study indicating that women and men working in the sex-segregated middle and upper echelons of government agencies experienced many misunderstandings and

communication problems resulting from women's being managed remotely by men. Rawaf also points out that women are rarely found to be engaged in policy-making, planning, and decision-making. Saudi men are not used to women as co-workers, and women are confined to all-female settings at work because even Saudi companies that employ both men and women place them in sex-segregated offices (Metcalf, 2008). This type of restricted yet mixed-sex workplace reflects the controversy over women who, by working side-by-side with men, violate the cultural and historical norms of gender segregation (Neal et al., 2005). Professional Saudi women must get permission from their male guardian, are always subordinate to a man at work, and must always be physically separated from men, communicating with them by phone or in writing (Rawaf, 1990). These practices reflect Saudi Arabia's strong social values governing the separation of sexes, shaping how interactions take place (Doumato, 1992).

Saudi culture is apparently accepting of women in the public sphere, reflecting their calls for change and new identities (Jamali, 2009; Joseph and Slyomovics, 2001; Atiya, 1996; Minces, 1982), but it still limits female workers through strict dress codes and restricting their office space and interactions with men (Elamin and Omair, 2010). This sex segregation encourages male executives to use familial metaphors and idioms to describe their relationships with employees, further ensuring that women remain in subordinate positions at work as well as in the family (Joseph and Slyomovics, 2001). However, while women working in mixed-sex settings are seen as a violation of social norms, the inclusion of women in the workforce is still a large step forward in the creation of new identities (Yamani, 2000; Sidani, 2005; Elamin and Omair, 2010) in which men and women accept each other as counterparts at an executive level. These gender-related tensions are also accompanied by another type of tension that exists in

relation to the pursuit of modernity in a highly traditional culture. This will be examined in the following section.

### **The Tensions of Modernity**

The arrival of the French Emperor Napoleon Bonaparte in Egypt in the late eighteenth century marked the start of the diffusion of European modernisation throughout the Arab world, affecting military, bureaucratic, legal, and educational structures (Sharabi, 1988). The spread of ideas about how ‘Western progress is the separation of church and state and the creation of a civil society governed by secular laws’ initiated the conflict between the Western secular system and the traditional Islamic system (Lewis 2002: 157). Because ‘religion permeates many aspects of social activity’ (Giddens, 1990: 107), Saudi fundamentalists resisted the introduction of modern amenities such as cars, radios, and telephones in the 1930s (Ibrahim, 1982). The Saudi government played the role of mediator between traditionalism and modernism (Al Saud, 1983). For example, King Abdul-Aziz, the father of the current king, was criticised for introducing Saudi society to the radio, which was accused of bringing evil, so he demonstrated how the radio can be used in a positive way by getting fundamentalists to listen to recitations of the Holy Quran over the radio (Al Saud, 1983). King Abdul-Aziz eased the Saudi people into accepting the material products of globalisation.

Because of such instances, Islam is sometimes accused of being an obstacle to science and development. However, Muslim scholars were pioneers in science at the peak of the Islamic empire, close to the beginning of the faith (Lewis, 2002). Through this history, contemporary Muslims see religion and technical advances as complementary and, instead of rejecting modernism, seek a balance between science and faith that will allow

them to retain their identity and beliefs (Sharabi, 1988). While only one law, *Sharia*, based on the *Quran* and *Hadith* (the prophet's sayings and actions), regulates all aspects of Muslims' lives (Lewis, 2002), thinking of religion as a discursive tradition (Asad, 1993, 2003) in which 'tradition, unlike religion, does not refer to any particular body of beliefs and practises, but to the manner in which those beliefs and practises are organized, especially in relation to time' (Giddens, 1990: 140) can yield a deeper understanding of how Saudis implement religion and cultural traditions in their everyday social lives.

The oil-fuelled economic boom of the 1960s allowed Arab countries to become welfare states, providing benefits and modernisation to their residents (Muna, 1980). In addition, the West's political and economic influence led to a transformation of traditional social norms in Arab countries (Mincese, 1982; Doumato, 1992). In Saudi Arabia, social changes brought by Westernisation were seen in shopping malls, Western goods, and Western people working in Saudi Arabia, who presented another challenge to traditional values (Doumato, 1992). To resolve the tension between tradition and modernity, many Arabs have sought hybridisation, in which local traditions stand alongside modernisation (Giddens, 1990; Nederveen Pieterse, 2004). Beneath attempts to modernise lie 'opposition, tension, contradiction' (Sharabi, 1988: 23), so Arabs are constantly looking for a new identity that connects their traditional roots to the challenges of a modern future (Syed, 2010).

For example, the late King Faisal of Saudi Arabia said in 1974 that he wanted his country 'to achieve economic growth and modernization without sacrificing the traditions of Islam and Arab culture' (Muna, 1980: 101) because modern inventions were viewed suspiciously as a way to distance people from religion (Ibrahim, 1982).

However, ‘secularism in the modern political meaning – the idea that religion and political authority, church and state are different, and can or should be separated – is, in a profound sense, Christian’ (Lewis, 2002: 96). This belief, which perceives modernity as the decline of religion and the rise of science, does not account for religion’s powerful influences on daily life (Appadurai, 1996).

However, this does not negate the fact that tensions in Saudi Arabia are experienced as a conflict between religion and modernity. Although reform is an integral part of Islam, the task that revelation gave to the prophets, reform is still seen as a threat to religion, culture, family, and society as a whole (Esposito, 2005). Reform means that society confronts traditional gender roles and permits changes such as mixed-gender workplaces (Esposito, 1998). Although Saudi Arabia itself was not colonised (Ibrahim, 1982), the country was still affected by ‘socioeconomic and cultural influences exerted by imperialism on the region as a whole’ that did not produce modernity but only a modernised patriarchy (Sharabi, 1988: 62). These imperialistic influences simultaneously created a relationship of dependency and subordination between Saudi Arabia and the West and reinforced Saudis’ strict adherence to the norms (Doumato, 1992) upon which the country’s political and social systems are built (Lengzowski, 1967). Saudi Arabia was not alone in developing a subordinate role; since the Middle Ages, most Arab countries have been at a disadvantage compared to the West in terms of science and technology (Sharabi, 1988).

These tensions between tradition and modernism emerge in the effort to develop the education system so that it can pace with the social, economic, and technological changes taking place worldwide (Metz, 1993). Saudi Arabia first established a ministry for education in 1953 and, since then, it has allocated special funds to advance

education (Niblock, 2006). Although Saudi Arabia is a highly conservative country, the leadership of King Abdullah is steering it toward reform even though women still may not drive or travel unaccompanied or unlicensed by a male guardian. However, the government has become increasingly aware of the need to improve the quality of the education system to ensure the country's economic survival (Prokop, 2003). This sudden adoption of modern practices in an extremely conservative and traditional society is bound to face some opposition. For example, the late King Faisal's desire to open a girls' school in Qasim in the 1960s was met with objections, but a few years later, the people of that city asked the king to open a girls' schools there (Al Saud, 1983). In this instance, the royal family responded sensitively to the traditional norms of Saudi society but did not let go of modernisation (ibid).

This dedication of the government to reform was echoed by Saudis who received higher education in the West and were promoting Western-style education and the adoption of English as the language of science, privileging American business practices and modes of thinking (Sharabi, 1988). Saudis increasingly hold such attitudes, informed by a broader view of the world and modernity (Ibrahim, 1982). However, efforts by the government and Western-educated Saudis were insufficient to end the conflicts arising between religion and modernity because internal pressures to conform to traditional norms restricted the free thought and speech of new Arab critics, who live in Saudi Arabia, were educated in the West, and have mastered its languages, theories, and methods (Sharabi, 1988). While Saudi society put on a front of adopting Western practices, a struggle between norms governing traditional society and modernism continues behind the scenes.

A similar dilemma affects the current generation of Saudi youth, who want both to stick to their religious beliefs and traditional norms and to modernise their education system (Yamani, 2000). Since the 1990s, the country's technological advancements, including the introduction of the Internet and the high rate of foreign travel have pushed the young generation to want more than what a traditional society alone can provide (ibid). This desire for change is balanced with a need to maintain the national identity linked to traditional social norms (ibid). In 2004, the Saudi foreign minister acknowledged that the country will catch up with the developed world through improvements to the education system (Prokop, 2005). Prokop (2005) believes that the reform of the Saudi education system could transform the nation fundamentally, but it will take a long time to realise such a huge change. The pace of change, though, is faster in private schools, which are trying to meet the demands of the modern world (Yamani, 2000). Saudi universities have been called to achieve distinction by creating new responses to modern challenges rather than copying older models (Al-Essa, 2010). Funded by the monarch's generous personal endowment, the King Abdullah University of Science and Technology has challenged cultural and social values; its workers and students operate in mixed-gender settings.

While education systems in the Arab world have a superficial appearance of modernity, they are still characterized internally by a patriarchal system in which personal interests come before institutional ones and family interests come before social interests (Sharabi, 1988). This led to the question of whether it is of value to teach modern business practices and use American business textbooks with Saudi students who will work in a traditional culture (Bjerke and Al-Meer, 1993). Finance as taught in American textbooks does not translate to a practical application in Saudi society because much of modern finance violates Islamic law. For example, insurance companies violate the

current interpretation of Islam, so only insurance companies of Western origin can operate in Saudi Arabia (Wilson, 1982). However, Wilson (1982) argues that future innovative interpretations of the Quran could allow business practices that will ease the tension between traditions and modernity. The interpretations he calls for are characterised by being less restrictive and more open to face the challenges of the modern world (ibid).

The new graduates of the changing Saudi education system are bringing these challenges into the business world. Top Arab executives must sensitively balance modern and traditional practices in their organisations, satisfying the tension-filled desire to both modernise and continue to follow traditional social norms (Muna, 1980). Executives' exposure to the West, whether through education or travel, makes them susceptible to the idea of creating a society where the modern and the traditional coexist (ibid). In the spirit of the *Quran*'s insight that, even as cultural differences are an invitation for people to get to know each other, no culture has primacy over others (Nederveen Pieterse, 2004), Sharabi (1988: 152) argues that, as change happens in the Arab world, 'only a force from within Arab society will be able to hold it together'. He argues that the hybridisation that Arabs seek in which they can still keep their local traditions would create a situation that is neither traditional nor modern.

This conflict adds to the challenges that Saudi Arabia faces in dealing with a modernity that threatens well-established traditional norms, starting at home and school and ending in the workplace. These tensions reflect the major shifts in the Saudi society that strategists in this case study are facing in their daily professional work.

## **Conclusion**

Social science scholars and organisational analysts need to pay more attention to Saudi Arabia's unique status as a complex, traditional country engaging with the challenges of the modern world (Al-yahya, 2009). This need is intensified because, as one of the most conservative Middle Eastern countries, Saudi Arabia is dealing with various political and economic pressures to conform to international standards on gender issues, along with the challenging tension between religion and modernity. In 2006, the United Nations urged Saudi Arabia to enact gender equality laws that would bring it in line with the standards of developed countries. These changes are seen as part of comprehensive political and economic reform that would enable the country to help women shape a modern identity based on new social roles (Hijab, 1988). For this to happen, new interpretations of the *Quran* aim to reconcile Islam and the realities of the country's changing and modernising society, such the inclusion of women in the workforce and the idealisation of Westernised international practices (Doumato, 1999). Because of Western and modernising influences, many Arabs feel the need to change their traditional ways. However, the way in which religion and modernity are negotiated in terms of the dominant interpretations of religious discourse is immensely important in how people within society face the inevitable effects of internalisation and globalisation (Omar, 2009).

Weir (2001) argues that the various interpretations of Islam in the Arab world will open up more opportunities for action rather than limiting options. His organisational analysis of Saudi Arabia as a case study encourages cross-cultural analysis within the field. However, this thesis argues that sensitive cultural inquiry into the Saudi culture is better addressed through *experience near study*, where the research benefits from the insights

of an insider from the culture who provides deep, sensitive cultural analysis (Geertz, 1973). In addition, the role of a 'professional stranger' (Simmel, 1950) is utilised to balance the construction of a reflective critical perspective on research and analysis.

Hence, the following two chapters engage in in-depth analysis of two prominent shifts in the Saudi culture: gender and modernity, respectively. This analysis highlights the challenges and opportunities facing social actors in this study that reflect the social and cultural changes on a strategic level. This analysis builds on the call for increased engagement with the organisational field in the area of strategy-as-practice (Clegg et al., 2004). The focus on the micro-doings and -sayings of strategists (Whittington, 1996, 2003, 2006) is balanced by examining the macro-cultural influences that govern them. This establishes the link that strategy-as-practice scholars call for in the field, in which various levels of analysis can bring a better understanding of strategising rather than just focusing on the micro-level (Whittington et al., 2011; Jarzabkowski et al., 2007). Moreover, the following analysis chapters address some of the silences within the strategy-as-practice research agenda. In Chapter Six, the analysis will focus on the embodied gender performances of strategists, which is an underdeveloped area within strategy-as-practice (Rouleau, 2003, 2005). In Chapter Seven, the analysis will proceed to focus on the effect of modernity due to following institutional Western management practices on the scripts of strategists (Meyer and Rowan, 1977; DiMaggio and Powell, 1983). In doing so, the analysis will realise Whittington et al.'s (2011) call to examine the wider forces that affect strategy-making within organisations, with the aim of reaching a more thorough understanding of the phenomenon.

## Chapter Six: Dramaturgy, Gender, and Power: A Culturally Embedded Strategy of Embodied Influence

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### Introduction

This chapter presents an analysis of gender and the cultural enactment of power through a dramaturgical lens, showing how influence can be embedded in the face-to-face embodied interactions (Goffman, 1959) of strategists' internal strategic communication. This topic is explained through reference to broader cultural and historical frames (Goffman, 1974). It begins by analysing how gender is staged within MNA by focusing on women inclusion, their dress code, doing gender and undoing gender. This is done by positioning gender as a culturally constructed concept (Gherardi, 1994; Goffman, 1977) engaging with the theoretical construct of 'tokenism' (Kanter, 1977) and the significance of organisational demographics (Ely, 1994, 1995) in the case of MNA. It then extends into examining the power relations that exist in the situated doings of strategists in their social practice of *doing gender* (West and Fenstermaker, 1995; Martin, 2003; Kelan, 2010) and *undoing gender* (Deutsch, 2007; Pullen and Knights, 2007; Kelan, 2010) in the doing of strategy. This will emphasise the surface-level analysis of visibility and the deeper-level analysis of voice (Simpson and Lewis, 2007; 2012) within the case. The analysis of the embodied strategic interactions, will focus on how the doing of gender through enacting cultural norms constrains gendered strategising and shows how undoing gender through the reduction of acting out gendered norms (Deutsch, 2007) can relax some of these constraints. Then the chapter offers an analysis of space and its effects on doing gender and undoing gender in both frontstage and backstage (Goffman, 1959) spaces of strategising, focusing on the significance of public and private spaces in influencing strategising (McDowell, 1997;

Handley, 1994; Goffman, 1977; Goffman, 1959). A discussion of the changed identities of MNA's social actors in relation to their participation in public space and subtle power-laden performances will follow, expounding on the challenges of gendered strategising in Saudi Arabia. Some implications regarding the strategising context at MNA are highlighted, and active participation by both genders in strategising is called for. The chapter concludes by pointing out the contribution of this analysis to the existing literature on gender, power, and strategy.

### **Staging Gender**

- **Women Inclusion: A Strategy of Visibility**

MNA has two main campuses, one all-male campus and the other all-female. This is commonly the case in Saudi organisations that employ both genders; according to the Saudi labour regulations for the employment of juveniles (1969):

In no case may men and women commingle in the place of work or in the accessory facilities or other appurtenances thereto. [Chapter X, section 1, Article 160]

Thus, the organisation maintains two separate spaces, and space is defined as a place which 'has a set of rules to determine how its boundary shall be crossed and who shall occupy [it]' (Ardener, 1981: 11). Ardener (1981) argues that each society has its own invisible rules that govern how social relations take place and consequently influence people's behaviours. At MNA, the division of space mirrors everyday social life in Saudi. However because MNA is pursuing national and international accreditation,

female inclusion at the strategic level became a requirement. Even so, this was very new for MNA, especially when women and men came together through unified, face-to-face, mixed-gender college council meetings to make decisions related to the college. This policy even extends to departmental meetings and large- and small-scale committee meetings. This development in mixed-gender strategising is especially significant for both MNA and the participants themselves. Nonetheless, this step, as a male member of the board of trustees explains, is supported by the government and translates the government's new orientation of women's inclusion:

I tell you when the high authority wants something to happen, it happens. And now they want the women's participation. [Dr. Ali – M]

This orientation of female inclusion on a strategic level started in Saudi Arabia with women participating in the Chamber of Commerce in the city of Jeddah. The female dean comments on this first incident of mixed-gender interactions in Saudi Arabia and the fact that the location of Jeddah is perceived as easing the inclusion of women on boards:

The big turnabout that contributed to this [inclusion of women] was putting four women on the board of directors in Jeddah's chamber of commerce, which opened the door wide for the private sector to start recruiting women on boards, whether boards of directors or board of trustees, higher-level committees, and so on and so forth. This was six years ago, and in six years, I would say a lot of women started to join these boards; you see it happening more in Jeddah than in other parts of

the country ... but definitely, in Jeddah, they broke ground rules. [Dr. Mariam – F]

This inclusion of women is also combined with a meso-level of orientation where female participation coincides with the owners of MNA's orientation toward the inclusion of women in decision-making. The chairman of the board of trustees and one of the three owners of the college, in speaking of women's inclusion, emphasises that this is taking place as an initiative of the college:

It was the college orientation; without any pressures, we are convinced of women's role in this field, and we welcome their presence, and [we are] totally convinced of their role and their effectiveness, and we did not face any refusal or rejection or opposition from the higher ministry ... even the decree for women's participation has been granted to us with the approval of the higher ministry of education. [Dr. Fahad – M]

He goes on to explain the role of women's participation at MNA, clarifying that it is not restricted in any way:

We did not limit the type of role or type of participation women should be acting according to. On the contrary, we decided that women should have the right to participate and say their opinions, discuss issues and present ideas on equal basis with men. So there [are] no differences at all between men and women. [Dr. Fahad – M]

In addition, there is another meso-level pressure toward women's participation, which is the organisational culture of MNA. A male participant explains:

[MNA] culture encourages their people, yeah, and this [is] starting from the top management ... presented in the chairman of [the] board of trustees and the dean and the vice deans and so on. All of these represent the [MNA] culture, which influences or encourages females to participate frequently. [Dr. Essa - M]

On an operational level at MNA, the male dean sees himself as starting the initiative of mixed-gender college council meetings, which reflects his role as the head of the patriarchal system in the absence of the chairman of the board of trustees. He comments on the benefit of mixed-gender meetings in building collaborative thinking:

I am the one, I don't want to say I, but I was the one who suggested this [mixed-gender college council meetings] to begin with, and [Dr. Fowzeyah – F] of course endorsed the idea ... and she supported me ... and [the chairman] was convinced and consequently we continued to have this sequence of joint college council meetings ... so I find it to be very useful so far ... and the other thing about the strength of this is when you have six or eight people thinking and when you have 20 people thinking together about a particular issue. Although it will take more time, supposedly you will reach better decisions. [Dr. Sami – M]

However, prior to the inclusion, the all-female campus was managed by the all-male campus. This was a normal role for males, to take up positions of power and authority

in accordance with the patriarchal systems they belong to. Subsequently, the all-female campus then obtained their independence for a period of time before accreditation brought both campuses together. The male dean explains how this began:

Before we started as one college, then they [women] went out a little bit to become independent. Women ... always want to be independent in everything and they want to be equal with men. Now we are reintegrating by preserving the independence, preserving the independence as a separate [female] college but at the same time with more coordination. [Dr. Sami – M]

This comment, although positive, still reflects a stereotypical attitude toward women's desire for independence and equality and the fact that men are seen as their protectors and guardians. This is because Saudi labour laws are guided by the need to protect women by providing a moral setting for work.

This inclusion of women is influenced by many forces. Dr. Fowzeyah [F], the highest-ranking woman on both campuses as the Vice Chairwoman of the Board of Trustees for Development, sees that the main force was the recommendation that MNA received from the national accreditation body requiring the college to conduct mixed-gender meetings. This explains why it was only because of this international Westernised pressure on MNA, through the accreditation process, that this idea was taken seriously.

After the last panel [of the accreditation body] I got to understand something, [that is] for us [MNA top management], we have to get a recommendation from a foreigner for them [people within the college] to

perceive it as right and correct, so [based on the recommendations of the panel] we established the joint college council meeting and the department joint council. [Dr. Fowzeyah – F]

Although men voice their encouragement of women's inclusion and participation on a strategic level, on a practical level, the female dean complains about being powerless on her own campus. In one of the Colleges Restructuring Committee meetings, the female dean used the opportunity to express these feelings because everything on her campus needs to correspond with the all-male campus, even on issues that relate only to the all-female campus, such as staff employment and academic plans [field notes, 11<sup>th</sup> meeting]. The powerlessness of the female dean reflects the depth of the problem of empowerment on the all-female campus at MNA regardless of what appears to be a celebration of female inclusion.

Thus, the bureaucratic compliance with the recommendation of female inclusion through multiple levels within Saudi Arabia, in the case of MNA, succeeded in ensuring women's participation at strategic levels. Despite this, the social power incorporated in dominating social norms that control face-to-face interactions continues to influence this type of strategic participation. Nonetheless, their inclusion, although small in number compared to men, means that they are highly visible (Kanter, 1977), yet the way they do gender is what marks their level of strategic participation, which the following section highlights.

- **Scarcity and Dress Code: Reinforcing Women's Visibility**

Because MNA has separate campuses for each gender, when top management teams meet, women are rendered highly visible due to their scarcity and their dress code. Mann (1995) argues that women in the West are generally still underrepresented in management positions due to their lower chances of gaining power and authority, resulting in their token status in the presence of men. This is the case because management and bureaucratic work are still viewed as masculine (McDowell, 1997). In the case of MNA, for the top-management mixed-gender strategic committees, the ratio in a committee meeting is eight men to three women [field notes, 2<sup>nd</sup> meeting]. For the college council, there are 13 men to eight women [field notes, 19<sup>th</sup> meeting]. However, when it comes to mixed-gender departmental meetings, the ratio varies drastically; some departments have almost the same number of male and female faculty members, while others have as few as one woman to five men depending on the department [field notes, 20<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> meetings].

Most importantly, when it comes to female representatives on the board of trustees, the highest ratio for strategic participation at MNA is ten males to two females [field notes, 18<sup>th</sup> meeting]. For women on the board level at MNA, their merit is very important to distinguish them from other women, which renders them even more visible. The chairman of the board of trustees comments on the female participation at the board level:

The decisions of women are stronger than men's decisions because of the high quality of the calibre of the women participating on our board ... [they are of a] high level, with a long history of experience. They were chosen on very high criteria; that is why their participation is very huge and they play a big role in decision-making. [Dr. Fahad – M]

These characteristics, although earning women a visible position among men in sharing responsibilities in decision-making, are heightened in particular through the choice of extravagant dress in the presence of men. According to Tietze et al. (2003), the dress code within organisations reflects status, power, and prestige; however, the meanings of the dress will differ among cultures. Thus, through the different materials, colours, and styles of dress, different symbolic meanings are conveyed (Humphreys and Brown, 2002), easing organisational members into their roles (Rafeali and Pratt, 1993). On that note and in agreement with Pratt and Rafeali's (1997) notion of the role of the organisational dress code in forming one's social identity, Omair (2009) argues that Arab professionals use the dress code to communicate specific symbols that reflect their social identities. This is especially true with women because a woman's dress code at work holds messages, even unintentional ones, while the male dress code is seen as unmarked and lacking any specific messages (McDowell, 1997). Accordingly, women tend to go beyond their acknowledge merits into a way of constructing their social identities in the presence of men through an extravagant dress code through purposefully choosing what to wear to situate themselves best in face-to-face social interactions (Goffman, 1959).

In the board of trustees' annual meeting, the men all wore standard Saudi formal attire, while sometimes opting for a Western business suit. The women wore *abayas*. Usually, *abayas* are black and plain in nature, but women at MNA tend to wear different designs and colours in accordance with different situations [Figure 1]. It is no wonder, especially in light of Rafaeli et al. (1997: 5) that 'women in male-dominated organizations have a great need for the legitimacy, credibility, acceptance, and self-confidence that dress can convey'. Thus, the two women attending the board of trustees'

meeting both wore adorned abayas. Dr. Fowzeyah [F] wore a brown *abaya* with turquoise embroidery, while Dr. Mariam [F] wore a black *abaya* with red, yellow, and green embroidery [field notes, 18<sup>th</sup> meeting].



Figure 1 – Women Wearing Adorned *Abayas* at MNA

This was also the case with women attending the mixed-gender college council meeting, where the women wore black *abayas* with coloured trim, including Dr. Mariam [F], the dean of the female college [field notes, 4<sup>th</sup> meeting], as well as for women participating in mixed-gender departmental meetings. Dr. Sana [F] wore an *abaya* with paige cloure trim, Dr. Yara [F] wore an *abaya* with pink trim, and Ms. Rana wore an *abaya* with blue trim, in addition to noticeable makeup [field notes, 26<sup>th</sup> meeting]. This is the case not just in formal meetings but also at informal gatherings held at MNA [field notes, 3<sup>rd</sup>

meeting]. This pattern is the reverse of Rafaeli's et al. (1997) findings when researching women at a Western business school. There, women tend to wear fancy floral and lacy styles at informal meetings that they would not usually wear in formal meetings. According to Goffman (1963b: 25), this is what social actors do to be 'situationally present': manage their personal embodied appearance.

At an informal dinner held at the start of the term for top management and staff, the women were highly visible through their choice of very extravagant *abayas*, makeup, high heels, and personal possessions. In addition, the wearing of high heels is shared by the women bankers in McDowell's (1997) study, where women said that wearing high heels at work gave them a better chance of being heard by men and gaining power. Women tend to make use of dress, realising Goffman's (1963b: 8) emphasis on the importance of customs in portraying certain messages and maintaining the social order, which is 'any set of moral norms that regulates the way in which persons pursue objectives'.

This use of the body as a medium of communication for certain messages (Goffman, 1959) is not unnoticed by women; Dr. Fowzeyah [F], explains:

I feel this is very important: how you present, the words you use, your body, your tone, everything is extremely essential.

In addition, men also notice this use of the body and the messages it potentially carries in face-to-face interactions, in which the body is responsible for providing information in regard to the social context in which social actors are involved (ibid); even though it is not a part of conversations, it is a part of the scenes that social actors are engaged in

(Goffman, 1971). The male Vice Dean of Academic Affairs clarifies what it means to him to see women wearing colourful adorned *abayas*:

It is kind of a show! To show off that I am here, I am intelligent, I am pretty, I am the woman who will come up with the idea. [Dr. Amer – M]

This perspective reflects the importance of understanding the dress code in relation to the culture and traditions in which they are located (Hunt and Miller, 1997; Pratt and Rafaeli, 1997). Not only are cultural norms related to a macro-perspective but it is also important to note the meso-level, how cultural and historical norms shape the identities of social actors in the workplace (Adib and Guerrier, 2003; Alvesson and Billing, 2009).

However, these adorned *abayas*, with their different colours, were not chosen when the top three women attended a small strategic committee meeting with only five males and three female participants. The *abayas* in that meeting were mostly plain and black, and the women did not wear much makeup. This connects to Goffman's (1959) construct of front- and backstage settings and the fact that social actors are less concerned about how they present themselves and are more relaxed in a backstage context. Similarly, these women in top management were relaxed in their dress; consequently, their performances were relaxed as well. This relaxation of participants in backstage settings was also shared by men and women who participated in gender-segregated meetings at MNA. In all-male meetings, men still wore the traditional Arabic attire, but some opted for a casual choice of trousers and shirts rather than formal Western suits [field notes, 12<sup>th</sup>, 13<sup>th</sup>, and 16<sup>th</sup> meetings]. The same was evident in all-female meetings [field notes, 12<sup>th</sup>, 13<sup>th</sup>, and 16<sup>th</sup> meetings], in which women do not need to wear *abayas* because no

men are present. Consequently, they wore Western-style clothes such as blouses, skirts, trousers, and suits. This relaxed dress code reflects the relaxed pressures of their visibility and their opportunity to speak and to be heard. One female participant describes such meetings, saying:

In the female meetings, we hear each other. [Dr. Yara – F]

The women's dress code at MNA renders them highly visible in a male-dominated environment. Their use of dress to heighten that visibility violates Western advice for women in management, where the main aim is to avoid reflecting themselves as sexual objects by limiting their visibility (Wolf, 1991). Thus, at MNA, the importance is for women to forge a social identity that reflects status, elegance, and beauty that will give them a stronger stand on a stage that is dominated by men, one where they compensate for losing control by speaking through their clothes (Wolf, 1991). This is part of the managerial identity that women try to protect while they are participating at MNA. However, gender-stereotypical performances at MNA still exist and take a leading role in influencing strategists' practices. This will be further illustrated through the analysis of doing gender that renders women subjects of gender roles within their strategic performances at MNA.

- **Doing Gender: Doing Difference**

Western scholars who study men and women working together note the tendency for both genders to fall into stereotypical roles in alignment with their societal norms (Marshall, 1984; McDowell, 1997; Goffman, 1977) that ease the doing of gender

(Martin, 2003; Gherardi and Poggio, 2001). This case is exaggerated with MNA because of the overarching traditional norms that the society abides by.

The all-female campus at MNA, as the venue where mostly mixed-gender interactions take place in conducting meetings, is seen by a male participant as different:

It is like a different planet for us. [Mr. Anass]

However, some male participants voice a positive reaction to the women working with them at the top managerial level. However, this appreciation of women is seen through a family lens in which women are sisters and, consequently, still subordinate to men. A male participant explains his feelings regarding mixed meetings with women:

In the beginning, it was not normal, but we get in these kinds of meetings, [and] I really like the way of the behaviour of the ladies, those I respect as sisters first of all. We are working together and we have some goals; we would like to achieve these goals together and really, really, I find it is really excellent. [Dr. Soud – M]

Seeing female participants in a positive light was first acknowledged through their roles within the family. To that end, a female participant explains that:

Women when they talk and they attempt to say something, they get ignored by men because it is a new experience for women, and also men don't want to give up their authority and they view women as less equipped. For them, the women are in two roles, basically, the role of the

mother and the other is the role of a sexual object; however, it is getting better. Ladies are being heard more now. [Dr. Ruba – F]

That is, although women's participation at the top levels is increasing through greater inclusion, because it is being defined in terms of the societal roles that are appropriate for women, the women at MNA are at a disadvantage. This is similar to Rouleau's (2003) study, in which the male vice president of a business organisation continually referred to family metaphors (e.g., 'wife') in conversations with the female head of customer service to reflect the hierarchy of the company, putting his female subordinate in an inferior position. In both cases, female managerial roles are not taken for granted because their family roles are seen as the basis of their other broader societal roles. Consequently, they are expected to act accordingly and to abide to the authority of senior male members in the organisation. A male participant says:

I mean you never ever think that we believe that females are less [important] than males at all; for us, females are a mother and a wife and a daughter and a sister. [Dr. Hasan – M]

Thus, although women are linked to their familial roles in society, they do participate with men at the top managerial levels. However, due to these links to familial roles, women's performances in the presence of men significantly reflect doing gender according to stereotypical roles (Goffman, 1977). Thus, when engaging in gendered strategising performances, women and men use different kinds of voices, and this disadvantages the former and gives the latter primacy in social interactions. A female participant comments:

It is a different perception of a high voice between men and women; females see that a high voice isn't chic – it is not nice. Men see that a high voice is power; it isn't something that can be taken from them. You know what I mean?! Your parents raised you in a way that, well, girls do not have to raise their voice, but for men, well, they can raise their voice. It isn't a matter of female meetings or male meetings; it is a matter of females and males all over the world. [Dr. Yara – F]

Women, due to the social norms of their upbringing, are taught not to raise their voices, while men use loud voices to assert themselves in meetings, which reflects how both genders tend to identify with their own accepted gendered roles. This means that women are disadvantaged by their voices according to social norms, making them do gender as it is known in society. A male participant points to this societal effect, noting:

Maybe it is part of femininity or something like that, to be feminine; as a female, she usually speaks softer, she speaks at a lower tone than the male, maybe because of the environment we are living in. [Dr. Hammad – M]

However, this use of voice is not an issue for women in all-female meetings. A female participant comments on the ease of communication in all-female meetings:

In the female meetings, we hear each other and we don't scream; we don't scream! I think that's because all of us are professionals and well-educated ladies, so it is in our nature not to scream. But men don't see that screaming is bad. Men don't see that. Sometimes men they try to

emphasize their power by their screaming in their high voice. [Dr. Yara – F]

Hence, all-female meetings present a medium where voices are not used to disadvantage any participant because they all generally speak in soft voices; it is their backstage space in which the restraints on their performances are relaxed (Goffman, 1959). For this reason, no power issues are perceived through the use of voice, which is the case in mixed-gender meetings, as a male participant comments on the reason behind men's use of loud voices:

It is to prove dominance and to prove superiority ... which the ladies here are not equipped with. [Mr. Anass]

Men acknowledge that their use of voice is unmatched by the women and can be used to transmit messages of dominance as well as authority and power. A female participant says:

I think it is [the use of a high-volume voice] a way of trying to influence others. It is a kind of terrorism; they want to scare people to accept what they are saying. The high-volume sounds are used to make the other person step back and accept what is proposed. [Dr. Hind – F]

This view on the holding power of the voice resonates with another female participant who observes what loud voices mean to men in their strategising performances:

Screaming and a high voice don't mean for men that they are upset, for example, or that there is a big conflict. It is a way of emphasising their opinion. The high voice it is not because they are upset or something; that's why, when it finishes, they are friendly. They are not upset by each other; it is a way of saying their opinions. Maybe they think unconsciously that a high voice is power. [Dr. Yara – F]

This power in voice that the majority of women at MNA seem to lack can be linked to the fact that women reflect the same attributes they utilise in all-female performances within mixed-gender interactions. This renders them often silent as they wait for a turn to participate (Maccoby, 1990). Still, other reasons that might be linked to various social pressures on women in Saudi Arabia are explained:

We can't ignore that females here not only in Saudi Arabia but in all the Arab countries, they don't have the same voice as men. And more, in Saudi Arabia, they cannot drive a car; lately, they had their own bank accounts [and] it is a recent issue. And maybe men here in Saudi Arabia are not very much acquainted with the idea that [women] can have a voice. [Dr. Yara – F]

In addition, this use of voice is seen as culturally acceptable for men in the Arabic culture, a female participant explains:

This is normal in the Middle East, the raised voices, the hand gestures, the shouting, the body gestures; it is just like the parliament in the UK. You see the same happening there, too. [Dr. Ruba – F]

This use of elaborative physical gestures is culturally accepted by men and frowned upon if exhibited by women. A male participant comments thus:

Raising the voice might be a good indication to pursue the other because you speak very loudly and aggressively and you use facial expressions. You convince them with your idea, and I think, in the Arabic world, all people would use the facial expressions, hands, voice, loudness, to try to express their ideas or convince somebody else. [Dr. Taha – M]

Men tend to not exert their voice or their physical gestures in the presence of the chairman of the board of trustees, who is the highest-ranking man at the college. Hence, in the second college council meeting [field notes, 5<sup>th</sup> meeting], the chairman of the board of trustees joined the meeting as a guest speaker, ensuring quietness and respect from the other participants though mirroring his masculine authority and position. It was only after he left the meeting that male participants began using loud voices and hand gestures. After the chairman of the board of trustees gave his introductory speech and left the meeting room, arguing began in the room, but upon his return by the end of the meeting, they all mirrored respect once again. They even referred to familial metaphors to explain this change in their behaviour:

Because most of the department heads are in direct relation with the chairman in different ways, and they adore him and respect him, and accordingly, when he is there, its a type of showing respect, to show such a way of behaviour that they don't want, of course, to raise their voices when he is there; they don't want to show that they are in conflict

... in the end, we feel that we are a family, and this feeling is really very important, not only for me – I hear it from all my colleagues. [Dr. Hammad – M]

This adherence to the use of physical gestures is shared by women, not just in respect for the chairman of the board of trustees but also in abiding by cultural norms that govern their behaviour in the presence of men because of the seniority of these males. This is another reason for the quietness of women in mixed-gender meetings. A female participant explains females' rationale in the presence of men, linking factors beyond being female:

Not just because they are ladies – even the age factor, it is an important factor. Three-fourths of the department heads are male, and they are old, so, when a female comes and she is younger than him, will he bear her changing any rules or anything while he is there? ... The age is an important factor ... I think this is what blocks the ladies from getting their voice heard ... she will say, “Why should I? Nobody will listen to me; I cannot make any changes.” [Dr. Mariam – F]

Even when a woman attempted to use physical gestures and raised her voice, she was ignored by the men, who did not approve of women undoing gender by reflecting masculine attributes. A female participant clarifies this in relation to a woman's participation in the second college council meeting, saying:

I believe [Ms. Ruba] tried to state her opinion which was different than [Mr. Sami, the male dean's] opinion, and she tried to state her opinion in

such a way: 'Hey hey hey' [giving hand gestures]. And I think that [Mr. Sami] didn't accept this way, so he just ignored it; he ignored the opinion, I mean, because of the physical gestures, so when, well, for me, when my voice isn't heard, I just stop and sit in my place and stop talking. But other members try more to get attention and sometimes these gestures are culturally not acceptable. [Ms. Yara – F]

Women at MNA ensure their non-engagement in what are perceived to be masculine performances that are likely to stigmatise their image in the presence of men (Goffman, 1963a). A female participant expounds:

Let's say that someone attacked me in the meeting; if a man is in my position, he may scream and shout or whatever, but I am not going to do that because, in the end, they will say I am disrespectful. [Ms. Hind]

Thus, women are encouraged to do gender, in this instance, by reflecting socially accepted feminine attributes. Hence, women in middle management avoid making gestures that are perceived as culturally unacceptable for them, such as banging their fists on the meeting table. For instance, in a meeting of the Colleges Restructuring Committee, discussions became heated and, in an effort to defuse the situation and maintain order, the male dean banged his fist on the meeting table. It was because of this physical gesture, accompanied by his grim expression and assertive manner, that caused all the participants to become silent out of respect for the male dean [field notes from 14<sup>th</sup> meeting].

In addition, men tend to interrupt in meetings, reflecting the power to disrupt on-going conversations, while women tend not to engage in such behaviours, especially in the presence of men. At the second college council meeting, the male Vice Dean for Academic Affairs, Dr. Amer, interrupted the chairman of the board of trustees' speech at the beginning of the meeting. He shared information about his department progress, which was irrelevant to the meeting's agenda and to the speech itself. However, his comments were taken seriously and positively by the chairman, who even asked the female participants to cooperate with him to implement similar plans at the all-female campus [field notes, 5<sup>th</sup> meeting]. This simply reinforced Dr. Amer's masculine power in the meeting room to the other participants.

Men in mixed-gender meetings make extensive use of their bodily and facial gestures to communicate their ideas. Dr. Omar, in a meeting for the Colleges Restructuring Committee, suggested a change and tried to hold eye contact with the rest of the group before looking directly at the male dean, who tried to interrupt him. Mr. Omar did not give him a chance to do so, though. He continued to raise his voice, use his hands, and hold a very serious expression until he finished making his point. Then, they approved his suggestion for the time being [field notes, 11<sup>th</sup> meeting]. These various uses of voice and body to convey ideas are perceived at MNA as masculine traits, which help to reinforce the divide between men and women in doing gender at MNA.

- **Doing Gender: Doing Similarities**

Women at MNA tend to take up their group category characteristics as their own, reflecting how women are expected to perform in the presence of men (Martin, 2003). This happens as a result of women's feeling accountable to conform to the behaviours

culturally seen as fit for their gender (West and Zimmerman, 1987). This is aided by how men present the all-male campus and how women present the all-female campus; when they come together, the divide between them can be very vivid. A female member explains:

[The male] campus can feel they are a team, so when they discuss issues – maybe they don't notice, but it is something unconscious – they support their own teams. [Ms. Fadia]

This divide, which indicates to both genders that there are two teams, make it easier for women to fall into gendered stereotypical performances, doing gender as expected by their society. A female participant comments on how she and other women were forced to be silent in the second college council meeting, in which men were taking the leading roles; she explains:

The ladies were silent, totally silent. Me, I was one of them; I was silent ... and if you voice your opinion, you will not be heard. What is the point in saying it? No point. [Dr. Yara – F]

This divide forces women to reflect feminine attributes that characterise their category group in the presence of men. Men, on the other hand, support the way in which women reflect these gendered stereotypical roles and are opposed to seeing them reflecting masculine attributes. A male participant, asked if he would like to see women behaving more like men, says:

No, this is not the way. We cannot have them [women] as men, to talk a lot, no, no. It is not the way, but I think they are doing well. [Dr. Soud – M]

Men who approve of this assimilation see women's quieter participation and less engagement as proper conduct, reflecting the gendered performances that they traditionally expect from women. Others think that these similarities among women's quieter participation are due to numerous reasons; a male participant explains:

Maybe [it is] something cultural, or sometimes they don't care too much, or they think somebody expressed the idea – then there is no need to talk too much about it. [Dr. Taha – M]

In consensus, another male participant thinks that women's weak participation can be attributed to some personal traits and lack of experience; he says:

Maybe they get shy ... maybe they don't have experience to participate in this kind of meeting; it is a matter of experience. [Dr. Amer – M]

Some see this shyness as a personal trait that is due to being a part of the Saudi culture, which causes women to be shy in the presence of men. A male participant says:

They [women] always feel shy. And this is a nature, again, of Saudi women, especially if they are in formal meetings, but sometimes they are encouraged to say something, but sometimes they feel embarrassed to

talk openly or something, but this is the nature of our ladies here in Saudi sometimes. [Dr. Hasan – M]

Other males think that the reason for this doing of gender is due to structural reasons. The male dean explains the weak participation of women by saying that it can be attributed to the high turnover of female leadership:

You see, the problems with the ladies' side is that we had a high turnover in the female college; [Dr. Mariam] ... is the fourth or the fifth dean in five years ... you cannot give them [women] more influence in the decision-making process or in the strategic decisions. [Dr. Sami – M]

This is also linked to the fact that Saudi Arabia is a male-dominated society, and men have primacy over women, as a male participant explains:

We live in a male-dominated society, so why shouldn't the [MNA] meeting be male-dominated? [Dr. Habeab – M]

Women have their own explanations for the noticeable general weak participation of women in meetings. A female participant shares her male colleague's justification for having to exist in a male-dominated setting, saying:

What is the point of sharing if you know that whatever you want to say won't be recorded in the minutes of the meeting and it won't have an effect on the decisions? So why share? Plus – and I feel a lot of the

ladies are very silent and the reason is the over-dominance of the males.

[Dr. Sana – F]

Another female shares other reasons that are linked more to men's power-laden performances, which hinder women's participation. Similar to what Marshall (1984) refers to as breaking into the male domain, in which women are interrupted, ignored, and made fun of while their male counterparts are listened to and taken seriously. Dr. Ruba [F], in describing what happens to women in meetings, says:

Women, when they talk and they attempt to say something, they get ignored by men because it is a new experience for women, and also men don't want to give up their authority, and they view women as less equipped.

This weakness of participation at MNA is also linked to the fact that women perceive their roles as subordinate to that of a man's role, in which women learn early to fit into these prescribed female positions (Handley, 1994). A female participant, addressing this issue, says:

I think that the ladies, if they think they are equal with men, then their opinions will be much more intelligent and much more effective in the work environment. [Ms. Fatin]

A male participant links this weak participation to the culture, which discourages women's participation in the presence of men in Saudi Arabia, saying:

Females in a culture like this culture, which is an Islamic culture and so on, might be demotivated to participate in a joint meeting between men and females. However, I think, by repeating this practice, you will find that it will get better. [Dr. Essa – M]

The similarities among how women do gender at MNA reflects the fact that they drop into the prescribed gendered stereotypical roles enforced on women to conform to cultural norms in relation to the gender order. However, only three women in the top management of MNA and two who are members of the board of trustees deviated from doing gender in the way that other women were doing it, and that yielded them acceptance by the norm as ‘honorary men’ (McDowell, 1997; Gherardi and Poggio, 2001) in which they exhibited traits of power and influence.

- **Undoing Gender: Women Accepted as Honorary Men**

The three women in top management at MNA who exhibit masculine attributes (Rosenberg et al., 1993; Marshall; 1984), including assertiveness, firmness, and a loud voice (Carli, 1989; Riviere, 1986; Hall and Braunwald, 1981), are those accepted by men as powerful and influential (Gherardi and Poggio, 2001; McDowell, 1997). According to Lahtinen and Wilson (1994), women try to appear more masculine within organisations to appear more powerful. In the case of MNA, only three women at the senior level make any attempt to undo gender (Deutsch, 2007; Kelan, 2010). Two of these women are the first two and only women to participate on the board of trustees at MNA. They stand apart from the rest of the women participants at MNA because of how they present themselves. The first is Dr. Fowzeyah, who holds the highest hierarchal position after the male chairman of the board of trustees. The second is Dr.

Mariam, the dean of the all-female campus. The third is Dr. Ruba, the female Vice Dean for Academic Affairs.

These three women, although small in number, do not reflect the self-presentational characteristics of other women at MNA. This lack of assimilation is linked to the need to assert themselves in a male-dominated setting in which masculine attributes are favoured over any others (Marshall, 1984; Riviere, 1986; Rosenberg et al., 1993). Thus, while other women feel shy in meetings, avoid holding eye contact with the head of the meeting, and often break eye contact, Dr. Fowzeyah, Dr. Mariam, and Dr. Ruba, when voicing their opinions, hold direct eye contact with the male dean, exhibiting masculine attributes in a male-dominated setting (Rosenberg et al., 1993) and, thus, breaking from the traditional way of doing gender in such settings.

In the second meeting of the Colleges Restructuring Committee, Dr. Fowzeyah held direct eye contact with the male dean and told him that she had a new plan to introduce to the group for next time. He asked her to do that and that they would be waiting to hear it [field notes, 11<sup>th</sup> meeting]. Holding eye contact with the male dean when voicing her suggested plan put her on equal footing with the male dean. At the same meeting, when Dr. Mariam was commenting on a project that Dr. Fowzeyah is responsible for, she did not hold eye contact with her; instead, she held eye contact with the male dean [field notes, 11<sup>th</sup> meeting]. This lack of acknowledgement of the other woman through not holding eye contact shows the seniority given to the male dean as the oldest participant in the meeting and reflects a behaviour that is never exhibited by other women at MNA. That is, other women will try to hold and keep eye contact to show engagement and equal status with other women, but not with senior men.

In addition, these women tend to draw extensively on facial and bodily gestures to communicate their thoughts in meetings. For instance, when Dr. Fowzeyah does not like an idea, she changes her facial expression into a frown while holding a very serious and firm expression. The other members follow up on her signals and immediately know that she is not in favour of what is being discussed [field notes, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 14<sup>th</sup>, 15<sup>th</sup>, and 17<sup>th</sup> meetings]. This tendency of exhibiting masculine attributes is similar to that of some of McDowell's (1997) female bankers who admitted in interviews that, by acting more like men, they were accepted as honorary men. This is the case because, according to Ardener (1981: 16), certain spaces can influence women to become 'fictive men' by exhibiting masculine characteristics (Rodgers, 1981). However, it must be noted that, when women are accepted as honorary men, they are no longer perceived in their stereotypical roles; their undoing of gender makes them women of a different nature.

Thus, taking up such attitudes in meetings and exhibiting masculine attributes is not unnoticed by men. These three women at MNA, are reported by men as not having any problem at all in communicating their ideas and thoughts. This is because these women, in the presence of men, have adopted more masculine attributes (Hall and Braunwald, 1981). A male participant says:

I don't think that [Dr. Fowzeyah, Dr. Ruba, and Dr. Mariam] ... they have any problem. [Dr. Hasan – M]

This is also supported by another observation from another male participant, who says:

[Dr. Mariam and Dr. Ruba] ... participate very effectively, and they share the ideas and the knowledge and everything. [Dr. Hatem – M]

This is due to how men perceive senior women who have long managerial experience, accepting them as equals. This is because these women did not reflect traditional gender stereotypical attributes. A male participant talks about the three top-level women at MNA and compares them to the others:

Our [female] deans, to me, they are very mature and their discussions [are] as equal as anybody else. I mean, I don't see any weakness in them communicating their suggestions or their ideas to others. No, maybe some other [women] or those that don't have exposure or they cannot communicate, but the deans and the ladies we have here, they have enough experience and they have been through a lot of different meetings whereby they can expose their ideas and share their comments and views very openly. [Dr. Yousef – M]

These women in top roles are seen by men as different from all other women. This is similar to the findings of Rodgers (1981), who notes that men under the influence of space within the House of Commons in England perceive the few women as men or as supernatural. This is linked to the societal belief that women should not have direct access to power and control in the public arena. Hence, those few women participating at the top level at MNA are pointed out and seen as different. A male member of the board of trustees, commenting on women in top management at MNA, says:

All the women [at MNA] are from the best ladies in the whole city of Jeddah, such as Dr. Mariam and Dr. Fowzeyah. [Dr. Wafi]

This is recognized by women as well. A female participant talks about the two female members of the board of trustees, saying:

[Dr. Mariam and Dr. Fowzeyah], they can lead and give their opinions and can be better than men. [Ms. Laila]

This is also linked to their experiences in different universities, a male member of the Board of Trustees talks about Dr. Fowzeyah in relation to her experience, says:

Look at [Dr. Fowzeyah]; she was at [a prestigious public university], then she was at [a prestigious private college], and now she is here with us [at MNA]. And we were the ones who were trying to get her; she is a very valuable member of this organization. Believe me, the women's roles are just advancing day by day. [Dr. Ali – M]

These differences are linked to their personalities and how they reflect Western cultures' orientation to professionalism. A male participant, commenting on these three women's performances, says:

These three women, their personalities are more friendly, more Western culture-oriented. I mean, they are more capable of talking. [Dr. Nader – M]

This power of women is seen as unmatched power, especially when it is linked to the most powerful women at MNA. The male dean explains the power and influence of Dr. Fowzeyah as a reflection of the power of the chairman because she is his assistant. This

shows that, when a woman forms a coalition with a man in power, it can put her in a strong position through her connection to that man in social interactions (Goffman, 1977). The male dean says:

Of course, the most influential female person who is affecting our present and future strategy ... you know her ...

Interviewer: Yes, Dr. Fowzeyah.

[Laughs] Yeah, because she is the project manager for NCAAA ... and the IDD institutional development division ... so here she is, and her influence sometimes even goes beyond everyone in the colleges, sometimes even beyond the deans, simply because of her close relationship with [Dr. Fahad]; she is always in contact with him. She is his assistant, by the way. What more influence than that can females ask for? [Dr. Sami – M]

Nonetheless, the participation of these women in the board of trustees annual meeting [field notes, 18<sup>th</sup> meeting] is seen as very important, especially since the number of women on boards and in senior managerial roles is still universally low (Wood, 2009; Pesonen et al., 2009; Biehl, 2008; Martin et al., 2008; Lahtinen and Wilson, 1994). A male member of the board of directors says:

The ladies' participation is very important. [Dr. Fowzeyah and Dr. Mariam] were a good addition to the board ... If they did not participate, that will mean there will be a lack of information. [Dr. Fawaz – M]

When asked about what makes these women strong, a male participant says,

I think that they are strong because they are senior. They have good experience. I think that's because the [female] deans I know, at least at these meetings, and [the female] vice deans, they are all mature ... and they hold PhDs from outside the kingdom [Dr. Yousef – M]

However, while women, in undoing gender, are appreciated for their unique traits, they are not always perceived positively by men. The male dean, in describing the female dean, says:

She is a very nice lady. I like her very much. She has a good view, good vision, although she is a bit controlling. [Dr. Sami – M]

This is the case because women in power are still new to the male-dominated setting of management (Wood, 2008), and men are not used to them. A non-executive member of the board who was participating on the MNA board for the first time expressed the shock of women's participating at this high level in a mixed-gender atmosphere:

The participation of women is new, by all means, to me at least. I did not expect the ladies' participation; even if I had, I did not expect that they would be at the same meeting table. I was shocked, to be honest. However, they were respectful, and each lady played her role very well. [Dr. Fawaz – M]

This attitude toward senior women's participation, that they are respectful in playing their roles, indicates that men think of women in terms of their societal roles and of

respectability. It is these attitudes that push women to conform to the characteristics of other women, fulfilling their societal roles and eventually doing gender as it is defined culturally. However, these women who are participating at the board level are playing totally new roles, which men are still not used to, and women tend to feel the need to undo gender to prove themselves (Deutsch, 2007) because they are taking up non-traditional professions for women (Wood, 2008).

According to Kerfoot and Knights (1998), exhibiting masculine attributes is not limited to men but extends to all those who have influence within organisations. This exhibition of non-traditional attributes of doing gender among women at MNA at the top level led some of them to exhibit very dominant attitudes over other women as well and to their being perceived negatively by their same-group members (Ely, 1994). Czarniawska (2006) argues that women are in a society in which they too act like men, viewing that the roles associated with women due to cultural norms are inferior, that is why they tend to react to women in lesser positions in the same way that men do. However, Ely's (1994) study results point out that, when there are only a few senior women within an organisation, they tend to make it harder for other women to break into higher positions by exhibiting a high degree of competition in their relations with them. A female member comments on the performance of the female Dean of Academic Affairs (Dr. Ruba) in a meeting that she held with her female team members:

It is war tactics, not a meeting; if it was a meeting, you would have gotten out with a goal ... this is not a meeting, this one that she [Dr. Ruba] participated in ... she [Dr. Ruba] is here for only two months, and this voice of hers, from where did she get it? ... she [Dr. Ruba] goes into the meetings very strongly ... but she took this voice from those who are

above her ... and she goes into the meeting saying it is like this and whoever doesn't like it, let them bang their heads on the wall. [Dr. Sana – F]

This description of Dr. Ruba's performance reflects the fact that women tend to become angry with other women who exhibit masculine attributes more than men themselves because they tend to treat them worse than men (Czarniawska, 2006), and they are less supportive of them (Ely, 1994). Another female participant condemns that Dr. Ruba's [F] performances as not reflecting the accepted forms of doing gender:

[Dr. Ruba] sometimes, in her replies, she is aggressive.

Interviewer: Toward men?

Toward everybody. This is her personality; this might be taken in a way that is not so good. You are talking with men – again it is the culture – one should use a low-volume voice and not be outgoing. [Dr. Hind – M]

This reflects the fact that women, according to Rodgers (1981), can oppose other women, preferring to work with men and being seen as one of the men, which leads them to undervalue other women in the same space that they share with them. This discrimination against women by both women and men, according to Czarniawska (2006), can be a result of women's being a part of the same social system that assigns men to superior roles and consequently result in mimicking men's reactions to women through devaluing feminine characteristics, especially in cases where women hold non-traditional jobs for women. In the case of MNA, it reflects the women's increase in Saudi managerial jobs and their new positions within a male-dominated setting, in

which they need to assert themselves to both men and women. The female dean explains these new roles for women, saying:

Women are the newcomers. Generally speaking, on the level of workplace I am talking about in Saudi Arabia, you are generally seeing them coming out of their cocoons that they were put in for quite a long time and were just allowed to come out of that cocoon. [Dr. Mariam - F]

Thus, what other women see as not abiding by the culturally defined norms of doing gender might be actually the way in which these women choose to undo gender in a new domain dominated by men.

Doing gender according to the gendered stereotypical roles of strategists at MNA was much more evident in the majority of the women. However, even though the three top women at MNA did not show similar characteristics common to other women, they were also judged based on their societal roles, and their power and influence was questioned and justified by both men and women. Consequently, these gendered performances control actors' social interactions in accordance with the spaces that they operate within. The following section will shed light on gendered performances in relation to both public frontstage and private backstage contexts.

### **Spaces and Performances**

The idea that the spaces that social actors inhabit influence how they interact is explained by Goffman (1959; 1977) through the constructs of frontstage and backstage settings. People, he argues, are much more conscious of how they present themselves in

the frontstage of performance, while constraints on performances are highly relaxed in the backstage settings. This relates to what is called public space and private space (Marshall, 1984), in which the former is seen as the formal space for men, while the private space is where women are assigned (Handley, 1994) and formalities are relaxed. This is the case, according to Goffman (1977), because the societal assignments of roles and characteristics of each gender determine how women and men relate to the public and private spaces, where women are mostly disadvantaged. At MNA, there are various presentations of this dichotomy of spaces, and, accordingly, performances are altered accordingly. Power relations related to different spaces and people within them effect how people strategise in these settings, producing numerous instances of inclusion and exclusion in relation to those participating within these spaces. Nevertheless, the inclusion of women in men's public spaces of strategising is a big shift in the Saudi culture and open up possibilities for new identities for actors in these strategising contexts. However, because of the overarching cultural norms that influence people in this society, this inclusion of women still adheres implicitly to power-laden performances, which mostly encourage the doing of gender in relation to most women and, in a limited way, the undoing of gender by those women in senior positions (Kelan, 2010). These conceptual areas will be illustrated through front- and backstage analysis (Goffman, 1959) of the spaces that strategists at MNA inhabit. Then, it will examine the micro-spatial arrangements of strategists and their effect on doing and undoing gender. This will be followed by an analysis of the spaces of informal networks and their role in affecting gendered strategising. Finally, the analysis shows that the existence of spaces for relaxed performances can present an alternative space where gendered strategising can be less constrained.

- **Two Campuses: Two Spaces**

In Saudi Arabia, universities have two campuses, one for male students and one for female students, in accordance with Islamic teachings. Hence, there are two campuses at MNA, and the all-male campus is always in the position of the guardian of the all-female campus. All the decisions of the all-female campus have to go through male decision-makers. However because of MNA's accreditation process, female decision-makers were required to participate alongside the male decision-makers to make MNA eligible to gain university status.

This is a sensitive matter because women have traditionally been limited to domestic private spaces (Rubin, 1997). A male member of the board of trustees says:

Of course, there are some ladies who do not want to be in a place where men are present, and also there are men who don't want to be in a place where women are present. [Dr. Wafi – M]

This matter is deeply rooted in the culture, and it will required time for people to accept it as a normal way of interaction. A male participant, describing the men's initial visits to the all-female campus for meetings, says:

It is [the all-female campus] like a different planet for us. [Mr. Anass - M]

The all-female campus is seen as different because the main emphasis has been on the all-male campus. The female campus is an all-female space, where women operate on

their own, far away from men. A female participant describes the interactions between the all-male campus and the all-female campus in terms of war:

My impression is that it as if they are entering a war. Guys against women, as if they are in war [all-male campus and all-female campus]. I always have this feeling that they are in competition with each other; each party wants to point out that the other is doing something wrong.

This is the impression I got from all the meetings. [Dr. Hind – F]

This confrontational attitude in meetings can be expected because both are operating in new shared public spaces. Men are not used to women making decisions with them, and women are not used to being included in decision-making. A male participant stresses the difficulty of mixed-gender interactions:

In Saudi Arabia, this is a new trend that the women participate in public activities, so some accepted this with conservatism and doubt; sometimes they fight. This is the culture, no more than that.

Interviewer: Who is fighting?

Fighting, actually both; I observe them.

Interviewer: Do you think it is because of cultural aspects?

Because this is new to the society, that we sit together, decide together. This is new. [Dr. Amjad – M]

This attitude is not restricted to these men and women; it extends to the women's families. Numerous female participants confessed that some of their female colleagues

do not tell their husbands or parents that they are participating in mixed-gender interactions because it is not accepted. A female participant says:

You have some women who say, “Sorry, my family doesn’t allow me to attend mixed meetings.” [Ms. Rana]

Some women participated in mixed-gender meetings without the knowledge of their families and behind the backs of their male guardians. In the West, Marshall’s (1984) female managers who were married tended to care about their husbands’ opinions of their work. They wanted acceptance from their husbands and from their co-workers; this concern of a partner is related to leading a balanced work-family life. However, at MNA, this issue is linked to the fact a husband controls a female manager’s interaction with her male co-workers. A female participant in relation to the college council meeting says:

Not everyone will accept his wife’s participation in the joint college council meetings. Some of the women here don’t tell their husbands that they attend or that they meet men, and when you get to form friendships with them here, you get to know that they attend the meetings, but their husbands don’t know. [Ms. Laila]

Despite the hardships, women are accepting their new roles within these new shared public spaces with men, which resonates with Saudis’ yearning for new roles and identities without abandoning their cultural values. However, women still think that the two campuses will not be unified for accreditation purposes, and women are the ones

who are suffering. A female participant comments on how the all-female campus leaders are imposing regulations on them that are not enforced on the all-men's campus:

Some decisions that are made here are made without discussing it with [the all-male campus]. We are getting many instructions from the [female] vice dean that it is not a joint decision [with the all-male campus], and it should be that the procedures are unified in everything. It is not; it is just for the female section. [Dr. Hind – F]

These differences between the two campuses disadvantage the women on the all-female campus by enforcing regulations that men on the all-male campus do not have to adhere to (Marshall, 1984). This differentiation is also seen in the seating arrangements in mixed-gender meetings. These arrangements affect how social actors behave and determine their strategising activities. The following section will discuss this aspect of the Saudi strategising culture.

#### ▪ **Spatial Arrangements**

Spatial arrangements through seating allocations are very important in relation to MNA and the Saudi culture. For the first time, women are sitting at the same table with men in public meetings but on opposite sides [Figure 2]. This comes from the idea of the division of space in Saudi, yet here, it is applied on a micro-level. The strong social values that govern the separation of the sexes in Saudi shape how interactions take place. The culture has gradually accepted the inclusion of women in the public sphere, reflecting calls for change and new identities. However, power relations were exhibited through seating arrangements (Goffman, 1959).



Figure 2 – Seating Arrangements at MNA

This culture of separating women from men on a macro-level translates into various types of micro-practices of seating arrangements in meetings. A male participant says:

When people are sitting together in one place, females are on one side, men on another side ... these cultural values might affect negatively or discourage females from participating in any joint discussions. [Dr. Essa – M]

This indicates that the seating positions of women on one side of the meeting table and men on the other side, although it is considered part of the culture to maintain

separateness from men and appropriateness, still push women into defined social roles. However, acceptance of this type of seating is seen as a part of respecting culture and staying in one's appropriate place (Goffman, 1977; Marshall, 1984). A female participant clarifies the rationale behind these seating arrangements:

It is the culture ... the culture here; they are used to it, to sit each on a side. [Ms. Fatin]

Some women acknowledge the marginalisation that takes place in these shared public spaces because it reinforces traditional roles and the doing of gender [Figure 3]. On the other hand, a female participant sees it as a positive step toward a broader inclusion of women:

As for seating men on one side and women on the other side, this is something internalized in the culture itself, and it became natural, and it is the first step for this type of joint meetings to happen because everything is separate in this culture. [Dr. Ruba – F]



Figure 3 – Spatial Division at MNA

Women see that their new managerial roles require them to accept this seating arrangement. However, both men and women oppose having women sit at the far end of the meeting table while men are sit at the head. A male participant clarifies:

This is acceptable when a female is on the right, male on the left or vice-versa, but it doesn't matter who is on the right and who is on the left, but it is not acceptable that you [man] are in the front and I [woman] am in the back; this is not acceptable. This will make those [women] who are in the back feel that they are less important. [Dr. Omar – M]

In the first and the third college council meetings, both held on the all-female campus, women sat on one side and men on the other. However, the seating arrangement in which women were forced to sit at the back of the meeting table was evident in the

second college council meeting, which was held on the all-male campus [field notes, 5<sup>th</sup> meeting]. Eight women arrived before the men and sat on both sides of the head of the meeting table. Afterward, eleven men came into the room, with the dean sitting at the head of the table with the female dean on his left; the rest of the men sat toward the far end of the meeting table. The chairman of the board of trustees unexpectedly asked the male dean to join their college council meeting as a guest speaker. At the end of his introductory speech, the chairman voiced his disapproval of the seating arrangements and asked the participants to sit according to administrative and academic ranks. This, he explained, would mean that those in the highest hierarchal positions would sit at the head of the table, while those in lower positions would sit toward the back. Thus, out of respect for his suggestion, after he left the meeting room, the male dean asked the participants to change their seating arrangements. The participants reluctantly tried to figure out where they were in the hierarchy. Ten minutes later, all of the women except for the female dean were sitting at the far end of the table, with most of the men at the head of the table. This change maintained the men's primacy and dominance over women. This type of seating arrangement stirred many negative responses because cultural norms were shaping the managerial sphere. The female Vice Dean for Academic Affairs says:

I did not like it [the seating arrangements], and they should sit equally; women are marginalised because they are women, and this is just double marginalisation with the seating positions. [Dr. Ruba – F]

Putting women at the far end of the table, although they were there as equal partners, restricted their participation. A female participant says:

All the HODs [heads of departments], me and [Ms. Jana and Ms. Sana], everybody in lesser positions, even we, were seated at the far end of the table, so even if I wanted to talk, nobody would hear me unless I raised my hand and somebody gave me the floor because I was too far away, so I raised my hand twice and nobody gave me the floor, so I sat silent until the end of the meeting. [Dr. Yara – F]

This seating arrangement reinforced feminine shyness in the Saudi culture. Women become reluctant to speak up in a huge meeting room, and if they wanted to, they would need to raise their voices in the presence of men. Studies have shown that women prefer to conform to the known female stereotypes to match the expectations of their organisational culture in their workplaces (Gherardi and Poggio, 2001). A male participant explains:

If a particular person is a shy person and he or she doesn't talk that much, and you put them at the end [of the meeting table], you are helping them not to talk at all. [Dr. Omar – M]

This silencing of women in the meeting place also showed whose opinions mattered the most. A female participant says:

In my opinion, making somebody feel that she is in a lower position than others will make her feel that her opinion is less important than the others. Everybody already knows the positions and the authority of the others ... don't make it so obvious with the place; don't emphasise it.

[Dr. Yara – F]

This led some women to wonder why they were included in the meeting if they were going to be pushed to the far end of the meeting table. In addition, the room was not equipped with microphones that would have enabled the women to be heard when they spoke. This was also observed by a female department head:

We were seated at the big meeting room on [the all-male campus]. No one could hear or listen to the people who were seated at the end of the table, no one! Thus, what was the purpose of the meeting? And when there is a room like this and you want to hear everybody's voice, then you should put microphones in, but since you don't have the right setting for the meeting, you don't care to hear the voice of the other people. So many things communicated to me messages that "I don't care to hear about you" and those who are sitting at the back are not important. [Dr. Sana – F]

Men were aware of the effect of the seating arrangements on women's participation and inclusion, reflecting their own power and authority. A male participant says:

I am afraid this might give an impression of the person that you are less important, and that's what I didn't like about that particular seating [arrangement]; I think it should be free seating. [Dr. Omar – M]

This awareness of the effect of the seating arrangements on women's participation was shared by women who considered alternative seating arrangements. A female participant says:

What happens if we all sat together! But at least if I had something to say and my male colleague is sitting beside me, I will be heard; you will find then that the voice will come from the meeting room from each side equally. But when you put men and women each on one side, then you have decided and communicated that these are one power and these are another power. And when you did the ranking of the seating, you decided and you communicated non-verbally that these people have the voice. [Dr. Sana – F]

Women in managerial roles are rejecting cultural norms that emphasise their inferior positions to men in meetings. Thus, they recognise that these cultural and societal values are depriving them of power in their mixed-gender meetings. This enforces family-based values in a managerial context. In doing this, these women were experiencing, in Goffman's (1969: 63) terms, 'role distance', in which they were reflecting detachment from their managerial roles and acting upon their traditional roles. Thus, women strategists have the dilemma of balancing their managerial roles with the cultural traditions that control their performance at work. However, some men refuse to believe that seating arrangements have any effect at all on women. A male participant says:

Wherever I am going to sit, I am going to speak in the same manner, the same way; if I am at the far end of the table or the front or in the middle, whatever ... no, I doubt the seating has any influence on this. [Dr. Hammad – M]

Another male explains the irrelevance of seating and the primacy of participation as the main goal of attending meetings:

In my opinion, it is not a matter of where they choose to sit; that is, if they sit beside the dean or at the end of the table, it doesn't matter. The main purpose [is that] they must participate; they must add value for the meeting. [Dr. Amer – M]

These seating arrangements created a private backstage space within the public space in which meetings take place (Goffman, 1959). That is, when women sat at the far end of the meeting table at the second college council meeting or on the other side of the meeting table in other meetings, they were forming their own private space that disconnected them from the larger public space.

Nonetheless, some of the senior-level women's seating arrangements strongly established their positions in the public domain. That is the case through their undoing of gender as it is enacted by most women at MNA (Deutsch, 2007). For instance, Dr. Fowzeya [F] staged her presence by sitting on the right-hand side of either the chairman or the male dean during meetings [field notes from 15<sup>th</sup>, 23<sup>rd</sup>, 14<sup>th</sup>, and 28<sup>th</sup> meetings]. When she was asked about why she insisted on sitting in that position, she said, 'Because of the position', referring to her hierarchical position within the college. In the same manner, the second most powerful woman at MNA, Dr. Mariam [F], sits on either the left or right side of the male dean during meetings [field notes from 5<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> meetings]. Their position beside these top male authority figures at MNA engages them within the public space that men manipulate. However, it shows the contrast between them and the other women at MNA, who mostly sat either on one side of the table or at

the far end of it. It should be noted that these two women represent the highest authority among women, and their overall embodied strategic participation is highly contrasted to that of all other women. Their staging arrangements, although limited to them, show an alternative that is lessening the constraints that other women at MNA suffer from.

Overall, despite women's new managerial roles, MNA strategists did not relax the cultural values and norms that hinder both genders from full participation. Cultural norms play a significant role in perpetuating traditional gender roles (Rubin, 1997) even when women participate in public spaces, except for a limited few. This micro-level division of space resulting from the influence of macro-cultural norms also extends to a meso-level space division when it relates to the informal networks in which strategists take part. Thus, even then, women at MNA suffer from implicit modes of exclusion from men's informal networks, which the following section highlights.

- **Spaces of Informal Networks**

The division of spaces incorporated in an all-male campus and an all-female campus has a significant effect on the ways in which strategists engage in informal networking through backstage activities. In the West, women are also excluded from men's informal networks (Marshall, 1984; Lahtinen and Wilson, 1994). Some spaces, such as the men's room or the locker room, exclude women from informal networking (Marshall, 1984); however, at MNA, the situation is even worse by having gender-segregated campuses. The men benefit from their dominance in their all-male campus (Kanter, 1977) and from being high in the hierarchy of MNA. The female dean thinks that being on the all-female campus disadvantages women:

[On the all-male campus,] they have an edge more than us because [Dr. Fahad] is sitting there among them ... and to lobby with the decision-maker, you need that advantage that exists on [the all-male campus], and we don't have that, and that leaves us with another disadvantage, which is going to his home. For example, he may talk to [Dr. Essa] and say, "Come to my home," but he cannot say this to me or any other female. The male doctors will go to his home, but for us female top management, we cannot, and we are deprived of that, not because they don't want us but because, culturally, it is not accepted. If he said it to me, people would take it negatively on him; if I accepted, I would be shot out of a cannon. We are not bad people, me or him, but, culturally, it doesn't even present itself. [Dr. Mariam – F]

Women in Saudi Arabia are confined to private spaces for most of their lives, so it is culturally unacceptable for them to take up the full responsibilities that come with their new roles and to engage fully in the public spaces they share with men. Thus, although they interact with men at informal dinners and lunches [field notes, 3<sup>rd</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, and 18<sup>th</sup> meetings], these interactions are formal because of cultural norms. Women in Saudi Arabia have to respect the social norms that have set the boundaries between private and public spaces. Dr. Fowzeyah [F], Vice Chairman of the Board of Trustees for Development, shares some of these sentiments regarding the fact that men have opportunities for networking that women do not. For instance, men play cards, but women do not. Dr. Fowzeyah [F] says:

It is a disadvantage to the women when you think about it: a group of men going into a meeting room; the day before, they had dinner

together; they played “balout” [famous card game among senior men in Saudi Arabia] together. Definitely at least for a big number of them, this will have an effect, and he [a man] is using these meetings to get what he wants.

Women report that they can network with each other. However, they cannot include men in their networks. The female vice dean of academic affairs explains the constraints in establishing informal networks with men at MNA:

I discuss it [an issue] with [Dr. Mariam – F] and get her agreement on the idea. I also go and discuss issues with the female heads of departments, but there is no chance to get males’ support because we are not engaged with the informal networks of men by being on the all-female campus; there is a physical constraint of communication with men. [Dr. Ruba – F]

The division of spaces disadvantages women and lessens their chances to form connections with men at MNA. The female dean emphasises this problem by saying:

If we were with them on [the all-male campus], we would have done that together [networking], so they are doing it on their own and we are doing it on our own. Geographical boundaries! [Dr. Mariam – F]

These constraints on women’s performances because of the division of space limit the development of their informal networks and put them in a disadvantaged position in relation to men. However, these constraints are experienced less within gender-

segregated spaces and limited mixed-gender spaces, where familiarity with the space and participants relaxed the enactment of performances.

- **Spaces of Relaxed Performances**

Certain types of spaces at MNA result into a high degree of relaxation in performances, which Goffman (1959) refers to as the *backstage*. This differs from the frontstage of performances, in which actors embrace their roles and where social norms regulate face-to-face interactions. These relaxed performances were witnessed at MNA in both segregated and in some mixed-gender meetings.

When men and women strategists participate in gender-segregated meetings, their performances are aligned with their gender roles. In all-male meetings [field notes, 12<sup>th</sup>, 13<sup>th</sup>, and 16<sup>th</sup> meetings], men exhibited masculine attributes in their performances, including extensive interruptions, raising their voices, and using facial expressions and bodily gestures. It is customary in all-male meetings to see two participants arguing, raising their voices, and gesticulating. These physical gestures are accompanied by anger, frustration, and confrontation [field notes, 16<sup>th</sup> meeting]. However, unlike in mixed-gender meetings, male participants do not view these performances as threatening. A male participant says:

It is sometimes cultural; we used to do that to support our ideas. We use face, expressions, raise our voice, maybe sometimes talk with a higher-volume voice. [Dr. Saed – M]

This is similar to the situation in all-female meetings [field notes, 7<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup>, and 10<sup>th</sup> meetings], in which women do gender (Gherardi and Poggio, 2002) by showing feminine attributes of nurturing and caring (Maccoby, 1990). For instance, women do not threaten or challenge each other. They politely interrupt each other and raise their voices only slightly to assert their opinions. There are fewer hand gestures and much fewer negative facial expressions. These attributes reflect the fact that women are psychologically much more prone to exhibit feminine attributes (Maccoby, 1990; Carli 1989). For instance, in a discussion of the college's new policies, Ms. Haifa, voiced her disapproval of the new policy by interrupting the female chairperson of the meeting, arguing that this policy was not even similar to what was seen as best practice in the USA. She then gave others the chance to respond [field notes, 7<sup>th</sup> meeting].

In addition, when men and women were participating in middle management meetings [field notes, 9<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup>, and 20<sup>th</sup> meetings], many gender stereotypes were relaxed. The similar ages of participants and their equal academic status ensured that both men and women were more relaxed. Knowing that one of the main determiners of authority in Saudi Arabia, seniority, was relaxed, the performances of both genders were much more relaxed. Thus, the cultural norms that ensure women's deference to men were less obvious than in the college council meetings.

In the middle-level management meetings, seating arrangements in which women sit on one side and men sit on the other side are still observed. However, women participate much more; they share their opinions and express disagreement. In these meetings, it does not matter who is participating in the meeting; the interactions are very open and participatory. For instance, in a joint departmental meeting [field notes, 20<sup>th</sup> meeting], a female participant was at ease when she confidently opposed a new system. Ms. Rana

used hand gestures, raised her voice, and, in a confrontational manner, opposed the new system. Even though she is seen as an assertive woman, she still does not engage in such behaviour in meetings with men who are higher in the university hierarchy.

This is the case because women are still newcomers to managerial positions, which for a long time has been regarded as a male domain (Wood, 2008; Alvesson and Billing, 2002; Gherardi and Poggio, 2001; Rubin, 1997). Thus, although gendered performances are more relaxed, it depends on the level of the meetings along with the gender and age of the participants. However, this relaxation was still more accessible to women in high hierarchal positions who can undo gender, while others in lower hierarchal positions were still doing gender (Gherardi and Poggio, 2001), controlled by the societal norms that ensure their acceptance in a given context (Biehl, 2008).

These backstage spaces (Goffman, 1959) of strategising performances produce alternative ways of strategising at MNA, where women in middle management are more engaged and where social norms are relaxed. This is fully integrated in gender-segregated meetings and in mixed-gender meetings of middle management. This represents a model in which the context is conducive to strategists' full engagement and participation.

The analysis of space in relation to the all-male and all-female campuses and their seating positions show how women are disconnected from the spaces in which men dominate. Their work in mixed-gender settings is seen as a violation of social norms and a step toward the creation of new identities such that men and women accept each other as counterparts on a strategic level. The following section will examine the

changed identities of strategists at MNA in relation to the cultural values that govern their performances.

### **Changed Identities vs. Gender Identity**

This analysis builds on Rouleau's (2003) call for research on strategic change and gender, giving in-depth accounts of the activities of strategists, which is done through focusing on their face-to-face interactions (Goffman, 1959). This investigation into power and the numerical effect of gender (Kanter, 1977; Ely, 1994) highlights the situated doing and undoing of gender (West and Zimmerman, 1987; Bruni and Gherardi, 2002), which helps in rendering the intangible activities of strategists visible for inspection in relation to the strategising process (Rouleau, 2003). Thus, in relation to Simpson and Lewis' (2007) framework of gender that consists of both a surface and deep analysis of voice and visibility, this analysis is situated at a surface analysis of visibility, looking at how women's visibility has deeper effects on their voice and participation, thus introducing a focus on how visibility can result in creating situations of exclusion and differences such that women, as a minority, tend to be marginalised and excluded within organisations dominated by men (ibid). Further, Lewis and Simpson (2012) argue from a poststructural perspective, that issues of visibility and invisibility evident in Kanter's theory of tokenism bring to surface various issues of gendered power. This analysis builds on these ideas and goes beyond this framework by showing how, in situations of undoing gender, women at MNA proved that their visibility was actually associated with asserting their inclusion and similarity to male strategists.

Strategists at MNA are interacting face-to-face in a mixed-gender setting, which is a fairly recent trend in Saudi society and in higher education. Women's rise to top managerial positions is supported by the government's plans to empower women. However, the cultural norms are still considered the main determinants of the appropriateness of such interactions. This has led women to do gender in alignment with gender norms, which presents an obstacle on the micro-level for women's strategic participation in managerial posts. This occurs not in just in Saudi Arabia but also in the West (Wood, 2008). These conditions, Gherardi and Poggio (2001) argue, govern the experience of women in male-dominated domains, which reflects the social constructions of maleness and femaleness. That is, women are encouraged to conform to their subordination to men (Handley, 1994).

However, people's attitudes and ways of thinking are changing in Saudi Arabia, and this has enabled MNA to take a step that other universities have not. Nonetheless, because of competition among business universities and colleges, strategies of growth through internationalisation helped in relaxing the restraints on mixed-gender interactions. In time, other universities will follow MNA, which will yield more social acceptance of women's full participation.

This acceptance of women's inclusion made it possible for women to strategise with men at MNA, but the gendered performances of strategists remains the main obstacle to women's progression in management (Wood, 2008). This is observed throughout the analysis and is contrasted by instances in which gender is undone and women's participation is characterised as powerful and strong. In that spirit, Metcalfe (2007) argues for the importance of the study of gender and social change in management,

especially in the Middle East. Hence, MNA's case reveals how strategists' gendered interactions reflect the social change taking place in the society.

Thus, although MNA is conducting mixed-gender interactions, it is still considered culturally improper. However, at MNA, women and men have accepted women's inclusion in top-level strategising. These are the first steps toward forming a new gendered identity for female participants in which their new managerial roles are forming social identities rather than their traditional roles. Okin (1995) argues that gendered roles within the family place women at a disadvantage in the workplace, especially in third-world countries. However, this inequality is not confined to these countries because issues of women's under representation at the senior level in the West also associate with gender stereotypes (Wood, 2009).

Hence, the difficulties faced by women in the Middle East are shared by women around the world. Thus, while Western self-help books encourage women to adopt masculine norms or at least to control their femininity (Kenny and Bell, 2011), women at MNA are operating under rules that emphasise their femininity in managerial roles. Hence, it is important to highlight the significance of the socio-cultural and political factors that shape gender (Metcalf, 2008) and how it is done in strategic interactions. It is also important to look at the culture that produced such understandings of gender to understand how people interact (Rouleau, 2003). Tietze et al. (2003) argue for a constructionist view of gender, one that depends on the communities where it is created, challenged, and reproduced because the performance of gender in creating situations of submission or domination is a main characteristic of organizations (Cheng, 1997).

Alvesson and Billing (2009) argue that there are four positions of seeing women in management. The fourth position is the alternative values position, where the emphasis is on the differences between the typical man and the typical woman and the conflict between them. This is the basis of this analysis. The attention here is on the fact that men and women are a product of different social spaces, public and private, that shape their gendered identities and make them different. It is under these circumstances that Hijab's (1988) argument on shaping a modern Arab gendered identity for women in the Arab Gulf countries depends on economic, political, and women-related reforms. MNA, presents a case in which these reforms are taking place, yet it shows that there is still much to be done for these reforms to be actualised in a way that enables both genders to have access to full strategic participation. This is linked to the cultural norms that privilege one gender over the other in Saudi society. In this respect, it is important to tackle these cultural norms in ways that will acknowledge their primacy but unthreateningly provide alternatives.

## **Conclusion**

While scholars such as Rouleau (2003) recognise that gender is used for strategic goal achievement, this analysis shows that doing gender creates obstacles in mixed-gender strategic interactions. This chapter has provided a detailed analysis of gender, space, and power within strategising performances. The analysis constructed cultural and societal frames to examine strategists' interactions. This enabled an in-depth analysis in which the macro-cultural level is linked to the meso-organisation level in explaining the micro-level of face-to-face gendered strategising. Hence, the analysis contributes to the literature on the enactment of gendered power plays within organisational strategising settings.

This is done through analysis of both doing gender and undoing gender within strategic interactions, showing that the former position is the norm for female strategising performances at MNA, while the latter provides an alternative way of doing strategy through undoing gender. There is no doubt that undoing gender is limited at MNA, yet it shows, in comparison to doing gender, the difference in women's participation. Undoing gender can be the future outlook for women strategists at MNA, a step up from their family roles to their strategic managerial roles, which transform their performances into full strategic participation.

Nevertheless, this analysis acknowledges that there are strict cultural barriers facing professional women in the Arab region (Metcalf, 2008). However, business can be a place where these barriers can be relaxed and challenged (Maak and Pless, 2009). The case of MNA presents a step toward changing the way in which gender relations are traditionally perceived and contributes in starting to achieve social justice in a conservative culture. This is just the beginning, but it presents empirical evidence that such changes are possible even under a very strict context of social interactions. As important as gender relations in the Saudi culture are, modernity and its consequences present another area that strategists continuously negotiate in their everyday strategising interactions. The following chapter presents an analysis of the challenges that modernity predicts with respect to notions of traditions and religion that shape strategists' interactions in Saudi Arabia.

## Chapter Seven: Western Management Practices: Modernity versus Tradition

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### Introduction

The interrelation of religious and culture norms presents numerous tensions and pressures for strategists in their struggle between modernity and tradition. In this chapter, religion will be treated as a discursive tradition (Asad 1993, 2003), and its role in shaping strategic face-to-face interactions will be explored (Goffman, 1959). Additionally, the analysis explores tensions caused by the pressures experienced by strategists resulting from the adoption of Western/secular managerial practices in the face of traditional practices within the domain of strategy-as-practice (Whittington, 2006). Mainly the analysis focuses on the scripts that strategists (Goffman, 1959) use in relation to the institutional rules enforced within their organisation (MNA) in the context of accreditation processes. It is argued that these scripts aid in the production of an isomorphic organisation, in which an organisation seeks to gain legitimacy, earn value, and guarantee stability by abiding by institutional rules (Meyer and Rowan, 1977; DiMaggio and Powell, 1983; Power, 1997). Through drawing on social, cultural, and historical frames (Goffman, 1974), the analysis will further focus on the dilemma faced by strategists when they are in the position of adopting Western managerial practices within a traditional cultural context. The focus will be on how such scripts are challenged by some strategists who seek hybridisation, through which they can still keep their locality (Nederveen Pieterse, 2004). Then the analysis will examine how Western practices are implemented by strategists at MNA in conformity with institutional rules, without a critical assessment of their significance. Then the discussion will follow the consequences of these power-laden scripts in shaping strategists' performances at MNA, relating a micro-level analysis to the macro-level

(Whittington, 2006). This will take place through extending the institutional theory on a macro-level (religion, tradition and modernity) to explain strategists' activities that are taking place at the micro-level (Johnson et al., 2007) and exploring how 'practice occurs within a coexistent and fluid interplay between contexts' (Jarzabkowski, 2004: 542). Finally, the implications of this analysis will be critically explored in the context of local cultural situations in which strategists are engaged.

### **Institutional Pressures**

- **Promoting Western Management Practices**

Strategists at MNA promote Western management practices to support proposals for change and to lessen opposition. This includes three main positions that strategists use to compare themselves to the West: viewing themselves as followers of the scientifically advanced West, wanting to strengthen their change proposals, and having open access to the modern world of information.

At MNA, strategists' scripts are strongly influenced by the internationalisation of education, which constitutes a response to globalisation (Knight, 2001), in which globalisation is 'the intensification of worldwide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa' (Giddens, 1990: 64). Globalisation is linked to modernity because it refers to up-to-date developments (Robertson, 1992). This can be seen in MNA's strategic and organisation management documents:

To provide quality business and applied research in accordance with international standards that nurture managerial and technical skills required by the ever-changing national and international business environment. [field notes, MNA's Mission]

... encouraging and implementing the best practices of international higher education institutions. [field notes, MNA's Organisation Management Document]

MNA, as a higher education organisation, aspires to mimic other Western organisations in the field to gain a respectable place, and by seeking to establish standards borrowed from the West, it is becoming more homogenous with other business schools. This goes beyond printed documents and is reflected in strategists' scripts. One member of the board of trustees responded to the question of the intensive comparison to the West exhibited within strategic interactions at MNA's strategic interactions by saying:

[We use] the Western society experience because we might, as the third world, as people name us ...we are trying to follow the Western world, trying to do the same thing that they are doing. [Dr. Soud – M]

Such attitudes are increasing among Saudis who have studied in the West, resulting in their possessing broader conceptualisations of the world and modernity (Ibrahim, 1982), where modernity is perceived as springing from the West (Giddens, 1990). A head of department, when asked why strategists keep comparing MNA to the West in their strategic interactions, replies:

Because most of them are American university graduates or European graduates; you are there and you see they have long experience in teaching and education in higher education ... I think if you say at King Saud University [local university] ... they won't accept [being compared to] a local domestic university. [Mr. Saed – M]

Strategists' use of Western comparisons reflects the tendency toward isomorphism as a means of ensuring the organisation's legitimacy and value, guaranteeing stability within the organisation and, thus, maintaining its success (Meyer and Rowan, 1977). In so doing, an organisation will exhibit culturally approved forms and activities, be approved by influential bodies, and follow authorities' norms; thus, these organisations tend to survive more than organisations that do not (Scott, 2008).

Mention of International Comparisons during Meetings	Mention of NCAAA during Meetings
<p>Dr. Omar [M] talked about the structure suggested and said that it is similar to other structures within international universities around the world. (field notes, 2<sup>nd</sup> meeting)</p> <p>[Mentioned 5 times during other meetings]</p>	<p>Dr. Fahad [M] talked about previous strategic changes exhibited at MNA as a requirement of the NCAAA. (field notes, 5<sup>th</sup> meeting)</p> <p>[Mentioned 5 times during other meetings]</p>
<p>Dr. Amer [M] suggested a structural change and justified it as 'the way they do it in international universities'. (field notes, 2<sup>nd</sup> meeting)</p>	<p>Dr. Fowzeyah [F], referring to NCAAA requirements, tried to convince Dr. Anas regarding her proposed structural changes. (field notes, 14<sup>th</sup> meeting)</p>

[Mentioned 3 times during other meetings]	[Mentioned 4 times during other meetings]
Dr. Sami [M] mentioned that his interest in the key performance indicators stems from his long-term background working on related issues in the USA. (field notes, 5 <sup>th</sup> meeting)	Dr. Sami [M] said it was important to start the meeting by discussing the key performance indicators because it is a part of NCAAA that Dr. Fahd advised them to discuss. (field notes, 5 <sup>th</sup> meeting)
[Mentioned 8 times during other meetings]	[Mentioned 3 times during other meetings]

Table 1 – Western Management Scripts

This quest for homogeneity is observed when universities try to match the forms of profit-seeking organisations (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983, 1991) by promoting Western scripts to enforce changes [Table 1]. The influence that institutional Western scripts possess ensures people’s lessened resistance and greater acceptance of these changes. As the head of a department states, when asked the reasons that he thinks strategists are promoting such Westernised scripts within their frontstage performances:

Because we are a developing college or country even, we have to upgrade ourselves to the top research, to the top people, to the top universities, to the top colleges; that is why we compare ourselves to them. [Dr. Hatem – M]

Development, perceived as Westernisation, is seen as a project that will help less privileged, non-Western nations to modernise and benefit from globalisation (De Vries, 2008). It is from such a colonial perspective that third-world developing countries are perceived as incapable of modernisation and management practices (ibid). This type of managerial categorisation presents a sort of domination that produces power relations and inequalities that favour one group over all others (Murphy, 2008). This has

reinforced the weak position of strategists at MNA when they constantly situate themselves as coming from a *developing country* or a *third-world country* within the scripts they draw upon. This has a major effect in showing how managerial practices can have a dehumanising effect (Dar and Cooke, 2008), as some groups are receivers of what powerful groups produce. It is dehumanising in the sense that people themselves are not so important, and what is majorly of concern is following institutional managerial practices (ibid).

These issues are heightened within higher education because higher education institutions in nation-states are seen as a method of developing the state, and nation-states that are linked to core nations that transmit these higher education models more closely resemble the changes in the world's emphases in these models (Ramirez, 2006). In the case of MNA, following the West is seen as a symbol of knowledge and modernity. A head of a department expresses this attitude at MNA by stating:

We would love to be one of the top universities of the world ... we have that pride and we have that inspiration [Mr. Amer – M]

Thrift (1998) argues that universities match the forms of profit-seeking organisations in their efforts to resemble more influential organisations. In that sense, business and academia are becoming more similar in their orientation. This is empowering for academic organisations and presents what is known as *soft capitalism*, as these organisations are reflecting powerful influence (ibid). It is through this that strategists at MNA are trying to leverage their change proposals by comparing them to established Western higher education institutions. A head of a department comments on strategists' continuous use of comparisons to the West, stating:

Usually, they compare to international standards to give more solid ground to their change [proposals]. This is basically like they say, “Let’s be like them” most of the time. [Ms. Jana]

This urge to strengthen change proposals through comparisons to Western universities reflects DiMaggio and Powell’s (1983) second and third mechanisms by which isomorphism takes place: mimic isomorphism, in which there is a need to face uncertainty, and normative isomorphism, which is linked to how organisations seek to achieve professionalism and set standards. Both of these mechanisms are reflected in strategists’ persistence in comparing their higher education institution, MNA, to international higher education institutions, mainly Western ones. For example, at the second college council meeting, the male dean, Dr. Sami, started to discuss the first item on the agenda, the key performance indicators (KPIs). He mentioned that he had consulted the KPI measures for some American universities and come up with his own KPI list. Then he said that he wanted to hear his colleagues’ suggestions and opinions regarding it (field notes, 5<sup>th</sup> meeting). The reference to such powerful Western scripts ensured that the male dean’s proposal to use the KPI measures would not be resisted. This ensures that organisations such as MNA organise in specific ways with the aim to be isomorphic, with the institutional rules based on the powerful bodies in the field (Meyer and Rowan, 1977), with the result that their strategists’ change script proposals are strengthened and face less opposition.

These Western-laden comparisons are heavily adopted by some of MNA’s strategists, and one member of the Colleges Restructuring Committee says that this is a result of having open access to the West:

... So many occasions whereby doctors brought existing structures of other institutes in the kingdom, and so many also we got internationally from other colleges or whatever all over the world. I mean it is open; nowadays, information ... is not a secret so we can share it. [Mr. Yousef – M]

It is this effect of globalisation as a ‘flow of technology, economy, knowledge, people, [and] ideas ... across borders’ (Knight, 2001: 229) that reinforces strategists’ scripts by promoting institutionalized Western practices as elite and irrefutable such that the outcomes of colonialism are not just geopolitical but also can be experienced on a local economic level (Kenny, 2008; Thrift, 1998).

- **Buzz words: Metaphors of Modernity**

Strategists at MNA rely heavily on specific scripts to empower their change proposals and lessen possible resistance toward them. The main buzzwords they use that instantly have an effect on others are based on the modernist metaphor of ‘not re-inventing the wheel’ and quoting the NCAAA, the accreditation organisation, as an authoritative body for legitimating proposed strategic changes. These practices can present a dehumanising effect on the people engaged in them in relation to how people’s opinions and views are marginalised in the face of institutional rules and norms (Dar and Cooke, 2008).

The metaphor of ‘not re-inventing the wheel’ is used to legitimate change proposals at MNA. Strategists use these terms in a deterministic manner. The female vice dean comments on why people at MNA should follow the proposed strategic changes because it is common sense:

We are not re-inventing the wheel; mostly, there are things that should happen, and sometimes it is good to show the people some benefits, that is, what is in it for them when they go by the new idea or new proposal. [Dr. Ruba – F]

The metaphor of the wheel relates to the modern Western conceptualization of science, in which modernity is ‘modes of social life or organisation which emerged in Europe from about the seventeenth century onwards and which subsequently became more or less worldwide in their influence’ (Giddens, 1990: 1). This scientific advancement of Europe by the end of the Middle Ages into the era of the Renaissance produced cutting-edge technological revolutions. At this time, the advancements of the Muslim world came to an end, although it had led the world in technology and science for centuries before. This resulted in Muslims losing their leadership, their role being reducing to that of followers of the West (Lewis, 2002). Such circumstances, which eased the expansion of Western organisations’ influence, resulted in organisations elsewhere reflecting modernisation as Westernisation and the notion that what is not Western is not modern and therefore represents a problem (Thorne and Kouzmin, 2008). Thus, not re-inventing the wheel becomes a way of following the West, as it represents what strategists at MNA refer to as common-sense standards and benchmarks. A member of the Colleges Restructuring Committee comments on the communication of strategic proposals:

Well, the aim of this committee actually is to open discussion; we put the suggestion and we listen to comments, and then we start ... obviously ... “Somebody say no ... somebody [say] yes” and we debate the issue. In the end, we follow one of the two, such as the standard, the benchmark, what others are doing. [For] that, we don’t have to re-invent the wheel. [Mr. Yousef – M]

This use of the metaphor reinforces the isomorphic pattern of MNA's development (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983, 1991). The need to emulate Western institutions is justified by 'not re-inventing the wheel'. Any alternative to this is, thus, positioned as traditional and underdeveloped (De Vries, 2008). Through this, strategists seek to imply that those who do not adopt the new institutional rules are going against progress and the common sense of Western managerial practices (Thorne and Kouzmin, 2008). Also, the wheel metaphor is linked to the expression of predetermined strategies that are enforced on the organisation by a higher authority, which DiMaggio and Powell (1983) refer to as coercive isomorphism. This 'results from both formal and informal pressures exerted on organisations by other organisations upon which they are dependent and by cultural expectations in the society within which organisations function' (ibid: 150). A head of department comments on the fact that there is no need to re-invent the wheel:

It is not a matter of my perspective or your perspective. We have a book that we have to go by; we have a higher education course prescription that we have to go by, so it is not [a] matter of me trying to do something by myself or re-inventing the wheel ... we are just trying to accomplish a message we received and we are trying to implement it. That's all. [Dr. Habeab – M]

The wheel metaphor as an influential buzzword is accompanied by the use of the phrase 'NCAAA', referring to the accreditation body that measures MNA's quality performance and its eligibility to transform into a university [Table 1]. The important role that this accreditation body plays makes it very influential and powerful. Even though these measurements of accreditation are not always seen as improving organisations; rather they control them (Power, 1997; Willmott 1995). This is the case

because organisations are not treated according to their individual needs; rather, they are forced to copy an international model to be approved. As the female dean puts it:

NCAAA, as soon as we say it [a proposed change] is a requirement of NCAAA, even if we are lying, [people go by it] because they don't read it continuously and they hardly ever require proof to show them where it is written. You just throw it and you are home free. [Dr. Mariam – F]

Although the National Commission for Assessment and Academic Accreditation (NCAAA) is national in its orientation, it is based on and advocates international standards. According to the NCAAA's (2008: 4) handbook for quality assurance and accreditation in Saudi Arabia:

The Commission is committed to a strategy of encouraging, supporting and evaluating the quality assurance processes of post secondary institutions to ensure that the quality of learning and management of institutions are equivalent to the *highest international standards*. These high standards and levels of achievement must be widely recognized both within the Kingdom and *elsewhere in the world*. (Emphasis added)

This handbook mentions the word 'international' 21 times in reference to international standards, accreditation, higher education institutions, organizations, comparisons, and universities. Most importantly, one aspect of the NCAAA procedures is an independent external peer review committee that consists of international personnel (e.g., faculty from universities in the USA/Europe), who consider institutions' applications for accreditation on the basis of international standards (NCAAA, 2008: 5). This is done to

ensure quality improvements within these organizations that can be ‘comparable to, and wherever possible exceeding international standards’ (NCAAA, 2008: 7).

It is such a stance that results in producing discourses within business schools that privilege some and marginalise others (Bell and Taylor, 2005) – in this case, privileging all that comes from the West in the form of accreditation requirements and marginalising all that is not Western (De Vries, 2008). Hence, all that comes via the influence of the West is seen as having a coercive element that, even if people at MNA do not agree with a strategic proposal, they will follow it because of the influential character of the institutional organisation that it is associated with. As a head of a department comments when asked about how he promotes his proposals:

I explain the purpose of that decision or [say] this is a recommendation that comes from the quality assurance or the external panel review and we need to follow this. [Dr. Amjad – M]

This use of the term to justify change proposals and to persuade others to agree to these plans is accompanied by what this term means to people at MNA. The female dean elaborates:

Mainly, they [people at MNA] know that the NCAAA is key to becoming a university, and this is the direction of all the top management [and] owners ... for this place to be accredited, so it can become a university. [Dr. Mariam – F]

Thus, it becomes easier for strategists to accept proposals when they are taking the college in the direction of becoming a university and being accredited nationally and

internationally. The influence of the NCAAA was particularly evident within the Quality Action Plan Committee. The observed reaction to the mention of the NCAAA within this committee meeting was that opposition subsided almost entirely when Dr. Fowzeyah [F] informed them that this action plan was a part of the NCAAA requirements and not something separate that they were doing just for the sake of quality (field notes, 22<sup>nd</sup> meeting).

Thus, modernity as a Western conceptualization (Giddens, 1990) and its effect of producing isomorphic organisations is driving change proposals at MNA through the use of the wheel metaphor and by citing the NCAAA as an influential body. However, some have criticised perceiving globalisation as Westernisation (Nederveen Pieterse, 2004) because it does not acknowledge the impact of non-Western cultures on the West. In the same sense that reflexive modernisation does not account for third-world countries because they are perceived as incapable of engaging in such modernity to begin with (De Vries, 2008) in favouring the West over all other cultures (Murphy, 2008). However, globalisation can be seen as merely a concept that refers to ‘the compression of the world and the intensification of the consciousness of the world as a whole’ (Robertson, 1992: 8). This argument will be illustrated by how strategists at MNA refuse to conform totally to a modernist model and insist on making use of their own experiences within local cultural environments.

- **A Developing Country’s Dilemma: Western Managerialism versus Traditional Culture**

The contrast with tradition that modernity implies (Giddens, 1990) is a source of many tensions for strategists who desire hybridisation in seeking situations in which they can

maintain their locality amid calls for modernisation (Nederveen Pieterse, 2004). These attempts bring about a position where strategists at MNA are questioning the ritualistic aspects of taking up Western managerial practices and their relevance to their context. In so doing, they are contemplating the effectiveness of Western managerial practices in relation to improving their own situation at MNA, going even further to question the benefits of following these practices and the fact that sometimes, it represents only an institutional course of action rather than actual development (Willmott, 1995).

At MNA, there is a strong emphasis on comparisons to the West in proposing strategic changes because of their need for up-to-date knowledge in relation to their organisational development that is available to the West (Murphy, 2008). However, comparisons to the West are also judged through a challenging perspective. A head of a department comments that, even though comparisons are good for establishing benchmarks, differences exist between MNA and the West, and these should be acknowledged:

When you compare yourself with experiences in the States or in Canada or something like that, this is still a valid point, to a certain extent. I mean, we are benchmarking ourselves with such universities, so we consider this the ideal situation we should reach, so maybe, we are maybe far behind in certain cases and very similar in others, so when we are suggesting a solution, we are trying to reach this target, but at the same time, we know that we [are] far from this target, so that when we propose suggestion[s], we take in consideration that, in [the] long run, it will lead us to this level. [Dr. Hammad – M]

This emphasis on differences between the West and the situation at MNA points to the ‘continuities between the traditional and the modern’ (Giddens, 1990: 4). The situation that MNA is in, aspiring to be accredited and following Western models while still existing within a traditional environment, has resulted in strategists’ sometimes challenging the taken-for-granted Western scripts that are communicated within strategic meetings. During these meetings, the strong influence of Western scripts is experienced because they reflect institutional influence and are not refuted. Some strategists refrain from using these Western-laden scripts. A department head comments on her reason for refusing to engage in such scripts:

I don’t use this way because every country there is, of course international standards in some issues, but every country and every situation has its own roles and it all, let’s say ... suitable standards that are more suitable to the culture, to the language, to the ... I don’t know ... to the individuals, to the qualifications that we have as individuals. [Dr. Yara – F]

This emphasizes the importance of local culture, language, and individuals, noting that these elements are important and risk being overlooked or devalued by adopting Western managerial scripts. Thus, while international standards originating from the West are seen as important and abandoning them presents problems (Thorne and Kouzmin, 2008), some MNA strategists are keen to achieve hybridisation or ‘translocality’, in which they can still keep their cultural distinctiveness (Nederveen Pieterse, 2004: 55). These tensions are never discussed during meetings (frontstage), yet strategists remain critical about why they should copy Western models and not think of models that fit the local situation of MNA as an individual case within their reflexive comments in interviews (backstage).

This emphasis on the West during meetings to propose changes led some strategists to question the rationale of these comparisons and linking them to organisations' objectives. As one strategist puts it:

Ok, they do it [follow certain rules and standards] in the USA. They do it that way because they have objectives; they know the objectives and work to satisfy them. Thus, if it doesn't have certain objectives, they won't do certain things.

[Dr. Nader – M]

This perspective questions the reasons behind the adoption of certain Western models without considering the objectives that these models were designed to satisfy – in other words, reflecting the new institutionalism's emphasis on how people in institutionalised contexts construct meanings through the language they use to make sense of what they are going through (Meyer and Rowan, 2006). In this respect, there is an interest in strategists' scripts on refocusing on the organisation itself and its objectives and devising plans that fulfil these objectives rather than following prescribed Western models. However, these were often evident only in the backstage, as strategists reflected on the meaning of Western scripts within interviews rather than in frontstage scripts performed during meetings. In the latter, strategists refrained from expressing opinions that contradicted Western models because of the power and influence they reflect (Murphy, 2008).

Frontstage Scripts (Meetings)	Backstage Scripts (Interviews)
<p>At a meeting of the Colleges Restructuring Committee, Dr. Amer [M] suggested a structural change and justified it as ‘the way they do it in international universities’. (field notes, 2<sup>nd</sup> meeting)</p>	<p>‘What we need depends on what we need, its logic. We can convince them and they will be convinced.’ [Dr. Amer – M] (interview)</p>
<p>At the committee meeting for the Quality Action Plan, Dr. Nader [M] made international comparisons to validate his arguments. (field notes, 22<sup>nd</sup> meeting)</p>	<p>‘Benchmarking is something very healthy ... also, we need to see our own history, to see where we were and what were the objectives we wanted to achieve and how much we achieved and how much we didn’t ... and learn from it to improve.’ [Dr. Nader – M] (interview)</p>
<p>At the MBA council meeting, Dr. Soud [M] discussed the international-based standards set for the pre-MBA program that they are currently adopting at MNA. (field notes, 15<sup>th</sup> meeting)</p>	<p>‘We might go to benchmark with other universities to see what the world is doing ... in our case, we shouldn’t take everything.’ [Dr. Soud – M] (interview)</p>

Table 2 – Western versus Home Culture Scripts

These tensions between the backstage accounts and frontstage scripts of strategists, in their comparisons to the West, elicit negative attitudes from some MNA strategists who do not want to follow Western models literally [Table 2]. Strategists at MNA are in a sensitive situation in which they are trying to balance modern and traditional ways of acting within their organisations. In the frontstage, they rely on scripts that they know

are influential due to their association with institutional rules, while backstage, they hold opposing ideas and call for considerations of the local environment. It is this desire to pursue modernisation while still being restricted by norms and traditions that creates tension. Their level of exposure to Western cultures, whether through education or travel, helps make these strategists partial to the idea of reaching a place where both the modern and the traditional can coexist (Muna, 1980). Strategists at MNA aspire to account for local models suiting their specific needs at MNA. A department head comments on why strategists overuse Western scripts at MNA:

Because they [strategists] don't believe in their own existing system, and they don't believe in their own words, as if your words are not valid, that your opinion is not valid, so the only way to support what you are saying is referring to some system or university that everyone believes in. They always say all the universities do it, but they do it so people will be quiet and listen to what they are saying, not because you have a personal point of view that should be respected, which gives one indication, which is your opinion is not important.

[Dr. Sana – F]

This points to the fact that individual opinions at MNA are put to one side in the face of powerful Western managerial scripts that are believed to leverage strategists' proposals. In this situation, strategists will, as Dr. Sana [F] points out, think that their personal scripts are worthless and that only institutional scripts have primacy in influencing others.

Frontstage [Institutional Scripts]	Frontstage [Personal Scripts]
<p>At one of the meetings for the Colleges Restructuring Committee, Dr. Sami [M] continued to legitimate his point by using international comparisons. (field notes, 11<sup>th</sup> meeting)</p>	<p>At one of the committee meetings for the Restructuring of the Colleges, Dr. Sami [M] commented on Dr. Fowzeyah's [F] use of international comparisons to support her proposal, saying, 'Never mind what others do; we may reach something better than what others do'. (field notes, 14<sup>th</sup> meeting)</p>
<p>At the committee meeting for the Quality Action Plan, Dr. Nader [M] made international comparisons to validate his arguments. (field notes, 22<sup>nd</sup> meeting)</p>	<p>At the quality proposal meeting, Dr. Nader [M] told Dr. Fahad [M], 'We cannot compare ourselves to international universities, for now we need to work on the little things within the college'. (field notes, 17<sup>th</sup> meeting)</p>

Table 3 – Contradictions within Frontstage Scripts

This has brought about another form of contradiction within strategists' scripts in frontstage performances, but not only between the frontstage and the backstage scripts [Table 3]. That is, the same strategists who promote institutional Western scripts on the frontstage during meetings argue for the locality of MNA in other meetings in situations where they want to strengthen their personal proposals. Thus, after just taking the position of refraining from accepting the primacy of Western institutional scripts on the backstage (interviews), strategists took a progressive step by starting to voice their opposition in frontstage (meetings). This indicates the degree of tension that the use of Western scripts evokes in strategists, which leads them to voice their resentment toward what is promoted within their own frontstage scripts. However, this is done sparingly.

Thus, local practices and institutionalised policies are applied and abandoned ceremonially (Meyer and Rowan, 1977) depending on the strategists' personal views and proposals.

This ceremonial application of Western institutionalised plans is evident in the way that the top management at MNA requires the use of the English language within strategic interactions, even though some strategists are opposed to it. This is also the case for education at MNA, where teaching takes place completely in English. The college has a two-year foundation program in English to prepare students to enrol afterward in business majors. This is the case because English is perceived as the language of business, along with the fact that it is perceived as reflecting the developed West. This indicates that the pursuit of modernity is characterised by interdependency, undervaluing other ways of being (De Vries, 2008). This position yields conflict through the power imbalances it drives. This is a perspective shared by Scott (2008), who argues that, although institutional pressures can make organisations very similar, it can end up leading to contradictory outcomes rather than homogeneity.

An example of the opposition taking up change proposals on the premise of backing it up with Western management practices is the tension of using the English language during strategic meetings at MNA, which created discomfort. A department head comments:

What is the purpose of the meeting? Let's take it ... this is the way I try to convince people to be organized with thoughts: what is the cause, the purpose, and the aim of the meeting? To practice English! All of us can speak English, so what is the purpose of the meeting? To practice English or be able to express our

opinions in a very open way and at ease and finally reaching a decision. Thus, also at this time, she [vice dean] tried to convince me that, at such universities internationally, they speak English. I don't believe that this is the case; in France, for instance, if they have a meeting, although they teach some programs in English, they speak French. This is not bad, talking in Arabic in a meeting; Arabic is not bad. Arabic is our language, so I say that my opinions in points in an organized way, and sometimes other people say, if this is done in such a university or this international university, it is applicable in our university, which is not true. We teach in English, yes, it is true; this doesn't mean that the meetings must be in English. [Dr. Yara – F]

This frustration, linked to the enforcement of the use of the English language in strategic meetings, is related to its promotion as the lingua franca of international universities. Arabs who have had a foreign higher education are likely to promote Western educational systems and the use of English as the language of science, privileging American managerial practices and modes of thinking (Sharabi, 1988). This is the case for the vice dean, who requires strategists to speak English in meetings. However, some strategists at MNA oppose the imposition of powerful institutional rules to ensure that they mimic what are seen as leading organisations (DiMaggio and Powell, 1991). Thus, beneath the new modernisation lies 'opposition, tension, [and] contradiction' (Sharabi, 1988: 23), as strategists seek to retain their traditions and language. This critical view of the use of English arises from the concern that it undermines their first language. A department head says:

They equate English with professionalism, which is wrong. English is a language; it is the first business language. Yes, our emails are in English, to

teach, yes, but in a meeting, well, we must, I think we must choose whatever language we are more comfortable speaking because the main purpose of the meeting is to share [our] opinions verbally. [Dr. Yara – F]

This type of opposition is a result of taking up institutional practices, placing the organisation in a situation in which many problematic instances occur because people are pressured to conform to what is modern and Western (Thorne and Kouzmin, 2008). However, because these managerial practices are taken up ritually (Power, 1997) and in a dominating way (Murphy, 2008), some institutions fail to be more creative (Meyer, 2006). Thus, in the quest to pursue with globalisation, higher education institutions are urged to be homogenous through reflecting elements of modernisation, which is seen as a form of imperialism and neocolonialism in which the whole world is targeted to adopt Western values (Maringe, 2009). This underplays all others and presents management as global capitalism (De Vries, 2008). This type of domination leads to the dilemma that strategists at MNA experience. Thus, while they heavily promote Western scripts on the frontstage, they voice contradictory scripts on the backstage, where they can be more reflective about institutional practices that are enforced in meetings. The next section will deal with an extreme example of such enforcements.

## **Enforced Performances**

Western managerial practices are adopted by strategists as an enforced performance, reflecting an instrumental way of practice (Dar and Cooke, 2008). Some of the practices that strategists adopt from Western-oriented institutional rules are unquestioned and practiced as a way to guarantee legitimacy (ibid). In doing so, strategists perform in accordance with predetermined plans of higher institutional authority (NCAAA, 2008), thereby affecting the way they perform at MNA. The most important instance of this type of enforced performance is holding mixed-gendered meetings to fulfil an international requirement to gain accreditation. This comparison to Western higher education institutions led MNA to implement mixed-gender interactions within a society that is very conservative about gender mixing. Although, as elaborated in Chapter Six, women's participation in mixed-gender interactions is seen as a step forward regarding women's participation on a strategic level, it is still a result of external pressures to conform to an international model. It was the recommendations of the NCAAA (2008) that enabled such mixed-gender interactions. This represents a complex situation in which strategists at MNA are taking up Western management practices, but women still face many challenges, one of which is often being silenced in mixed-gender interactions. The aspect of enforcement that is linked to these performances aids in decreasing their effectiveness because it challenges social and cultural norms.

The male dean explains the phases that MNA went through before it achieved mixed-gender meetings, which he refers to as 'more coordination':

Before, we started as one college; then they [women] went out a little bit to become independent. Women, they always want to be independent in everything, and they want to be equal with men. Now we are reintegrating by preserving the independence, preserving the independence as a separate [female] college but at the same time with more coordination. [Dr. Sami – M]

This ‘coordination’ that the dean refers did not exist before the NCAAA required women to take part in strategic meetings within the college. This required men to accept women sharing their meeting table and taking part in what used to be an all-male activity at MNA, which violated the traditions of their society. Traditional routines and rituals provided important security for strategists in linking the past to the present and the future without introducing unpredictability into social practice (Giddens, 1990), which is why it was hard for strategists to accept this new institutional rule. Consequently, it introduced a high degree of unpredictability into strategists’ practices on a micro-level. Dr. Fowzeyah [F], the Vice Chairwoman for Development, comments that mixed-gender meetings were a sole result of the NCAAA recommendations through its international review panel that assisted MNA in its eligibility for accreditation. It is the force of this influential institutional body that ensured that MNA will integrate what is seen as best practice. Dr. Fowzeyah [F] comments on this:

After the last panel [of the accreditation body], I got to reach something. For us [MNA’s top management], we have to get a recommendation from a foreigner for them [MNA’s top management] to perceive it as right and correct, so we established the joint college council meeting and the department joint council.

This reflects DiMaggio and Powell's (1983) first mechanism through which isomorphism takes place, coercive isomorphism, in which there is pressure on the organisation to conform. If MNA fails to gain accreditation, this means that it will be cut off from licensing and financing provided by the Ministry of Higher Education (Abdulah, 2010). This, according to DiMaggio and Powell (1983), increases the extent of isomorphism because the organisation is dependent on another organisation for resources. Knight (2001: 232) argues that quality assessment and assurance are means of aiding higher education organisations in their quest for development in a competitive environment, including 'privatization, decreased government funding, new teaching/learning/research technologies, globalization, knowledge-based economy, increased competition, and new forms of collaboration.' That is why, even though it is a difficult requirement to satisfy within a culture that looks down upon the mixing of genders based on strict religious interpretations, MNA implemented mixed-gender meetings to guarantee its survival. However, implementing such a system holds symbolic meaning related to the social order, which surpasses the content of such implementation in the effect it brings about (Scott, 2008). It is perceived by members of MNA as enforcement and compliance with NCAAA and as a chance for men and women to collaborate in bringing better results. The male dean comments:

The [meetings] that had to do with the NCAAA, those meetings ... I look at it as a must; we have no choice but to do it, and it was definitely useful. It was not just a waste of time; we get together, we share ideas and so on, and at the same time, we satisfy some requirements of the NCAAA by doing so. [Dr. Sami – M]

Although the male dean agrees regarding the benefits that MNA is reaping from men and women coming together to strategise, the emphasis is still on the fact that it is a

requirement that needs to be satisfied. The major emphasis is put on the institutional rules that the college needs to satisfy (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983) to meet the NCAA requirements. This presents instances of culture clash in MNA's quest to conform because performing in such a context violates established social, cultural, and religious frames that are critical of mixing among genders (Goffman, 1974). A head of department comments on this, saying:

Decisions come from the upper management; it is not usually communicated inside with the people before it is given to them. [It is] imposed. [Dr. Jana – F]

This imposition of decisions intensifies the importance of continuing to enact these enforced performances. Strategists link such decisions to top management and express their perception of such influence. However, this sense of enforced performance in mixed gender interactions is gradually losing its rigidity at MNA, with some seeing it as a sign of openness:

Now in 2011, there have been many [mixed-gender] meetings; now it is really very wide open. [Mr. Anass]

2011 marks the transformational point in MNA's history because it marks the beginning of holding mixed-gender meetings on a strategic level. Although this presented a clash with cultural values, the alternative is that the organisation will not gain accreditation and eventually become a university. Thus, institutional practices were balanced with preserving the cultural and religious order within these strategic interactions through preserving women's conservative dress code in the presence of men and the separation

of the seating arrangements as elaborated in the previous chapter that helped to ease people's acceptance of these new institutional rules.

These modernised practices, which arise from the West, overpower all that is considered traditional and cultural through the promotion of globalisation and development (Robertson, 1992). This has leveraged Western scripts in the face of traditional ones, bringing about, in the case of MNA, two groups, those who are totally in favour of Westernisation and modernisation versus those who are sceptical of adopting Western scripts without consulting their local environments. The following section will further examine the tensions that Western managerial practices present in its relation to religion and tradition.

### **Religion, Tradition, and Modernism**

To better understand the infatuation with Western practices, a historical frame will be adopted to track the progression of this situation within the Arab world in general and Saudi Arabia specifically. By adopting a historical and cultural frame, the analysis will be better able to address the area mostly criticised within strategy-as-practice, namely capturing the historical and cultural contexts that shape the individual activities of strategists (Chia and MacKay, 2007). This aims to problematise the issue of modernisation within the case of MNA and to get closer to the dilemma that strategists on a micro-level are struggling with in their daily social practices.

Religion and tradition are closely related (Giddens, 1990), and strategists at MNA struggle to strike a balance between them and modernity. Their attempts bring about

what is referred to as *neopatriarchy*, a position that is neither modern nor traditional, (Sharabi, 1988). This is the case because neopatriarchy builds on two main realities, both modernity and patriarchy, with the latter referring to a traditional society and the former referring to the historical phase in Western Europe of breaking from traditions. This is a situation that is observed on a macro-level in the Arab states, which are referred to as *neopatriarchal societies* because they are neither modern nor traditional, ensuring the creation of relations of dependency and subordination to the West (Sharabi, 1988).

In the case of MNA, institutional scripts are kept in the frontstage, and the personal scripts are mostly kept on the backstage. This is a result of the shared beliefs, cognitions, and schemata of people that contribute to the building of institutionalism (Meyer and Rowan, 2006). Nonetheless, as Sharabi (1988) argues, the Arab awakening (*nahda*) in the nineteenth century failed to end patriarchy and resulted in bringing about neopatriarchy, which exhibits numerous contradictions and conflicts. This resulted in conformity to institutional rules on the frontstage of performances such as MNA's strategists' loyalty to Western scripts of practice, while backstage, they are still struggling with contradictions springing from traditions governing social practices.

MNA's strategists are caught in a critical position. On one side, there are the religious, cultural, and historical values (Goffman, 1974) that govern their face-to-face interactions (Goffman, 1959), while on the other side, there are Western institutional practices that are extremely influential (Power, 1997). This brings Arabs to a situation in which they seek *hybridisation* such that they can retain their locality while perusing modernity as well (Sharabi, 1988). Hence, Western scripts, because of their influential

character, are still used to establish legitimacy (Dar and Cooke, 2008). However, strategists still draw on identities of culture and tradition in backstage contexts.

In this respect, an issue such as starting mixed-gender meetings at MNA, which was adopted to satisfy Western standards of strategising, can present tensions. The change in Saudi society through the effect of Westernisation due to Western influences within Saudi Arabia presents a means by which cultural values are challenged. Therefore, tensions exhibited by MNA's strategists still exist within backstage scripts, yet they are not strong enough to dominate the frontstage scripts, among which Western institutional scripts moved by aspirations of modernity are in control. This tension exists, even though strategists do not clearly articulate an alternative to adoption of Western institutional practices. Their backstage scripts call for a more sensitive approach that considers their cultural traditions, local context, and specific needs, without voicing what these needs are in relation to MNA. They are very aware of what modernity means in relation to the college but less aware of the alternative they call for to balance modernity. This draws attention to the potential of delving into this underexplored alternative that is brought forward but not really clearly defined.

Knowledge of such cultural influences can provide the macro-level analysis that can explain strategy on an institutional level, where strategy-as-practice is defined as 'a concern with what people do in relation to strategy and how this is influenced by and influences their organisational and institutional context' (Johnson et al., 2007: 7): that is, how strategists react to institutional rules on a micro-level through their daily strategising activities. This reflects how the institutional context governs strategising practices and, in the case of MNA, creates tensions in both the front- and backstage contexts (Goffman, 1959).

The power struggle between these scripts at MNA facilitate the creation of what Goffman (1968) refers to as 'total institutions', in which members are isolated from what happens on the outside (cultural rules) and must abide by the rules and authority of the inside (institutional rules). That is, at MNA strategists abide by the institutional rules within formal meetings. This results in their social interactional behaviours being controlled on the frontstage.

Similar to how Goffman's (1968) mental hospital inmates play the system to their advantage by abiding by the rules of these institutions on the frontstage while at the same time going against them on the backstage, at MNA, strategists must play the system to their advantage and gain power by adopting Western scripts in the frontstage of their performances, keeping their opinions and views about their local setting mostly in their backstage scripts. Although the categorisation of organisations as 'total institutions' and 'non-total institutions' is limited in scope (Silverman, 1970), it provides insight into how participants within them act in accordance with the context to which they are assigned. This view, in the case of MNA, is important because it points to the distinction between those who participate in working the system to their own advantage by adopting Western scripts on the frontstage and yet draw back to their contradictory personal scripts only when they are backstage (Mangham, 1978) and when there are no advantages to be sacrificed.

Thus, strategists at MNA benefit from an increased awareness of the complexity that surrounds their own frontstage and backstage scripts. This awareness in acknowledging such complexity within their organisation can result in reflective thinking about their own specific practices (Schön, 1983). Such a stand can aid strategists in realising the

contradictions and conflicts that are taking place within their own scripts and will facilitate a better understanding of their own practices (ibid). Although some strategists were able to communicate their opinions on the frontstage [Table 3], indicating reflective thought, this involved just a few of the highest-ranking male strategists at MNA. Although these strategists [Table 3] have, in other instances, promoted Western institutional scripts on the frontstage, they were able to refute it in other instances in the frontstage contexts as well. This is a step beyond the clear conflicting scripts between the front- and the backstage of strategists. It is through such awareness and reflective thinking that the tension caused by trying to balance traditions and modernity can be moderated. Strategists' reflective type of scripts on the frontstage will depend on their type of participation and voice within strategy work (Mantere and Vaara, 2008) and the level of influence that they have on decision-making (Miller et al., 2008). It is difficult to contradict the dominant scripts at MNA, but it remains a way of bringing about awareness that is needed in thinking about the tensions that exist within strategists' own scripts. This type of reflectivity can aid in moderating some of the imbalances caused by a powerful dominant Western script versus a local cultural one.

This is close to Nettle and Robertson's (1968) concept of social modernisation, according to which societies must balance their traditional identities in facing global restraints within a globally dominated world. Such a balanced view that can provide a means of discussing institutional rules and ensuring that strategists' personal scripts are not assigned to the backstage of their performances. The amount of relaxation and ease of communication in the backstage (Goffman, 1995) enables strategists to increase reflective thinking about their practices (Schön, 1983). Thus, if this reflexivity is transferred into the frontstage of performances, strategists' frontstage scripts may be more closely aligned with their backstage scripts. However, because of the influential

power that institutional rules hold, it becomes harder to confront them and easier to control people through them. This brings about more sceptical views regarding Westernisation, modernity, and secular practices as dominant scripts of influence and control rather than scripts of progress and development (De Vries, 2008; Power, 1997; Willmott, 1995). Hence, institutional rules on a macro-level ensure the assignment of personal scripts of strategists to the backstage (Mangham, 1978) and institutional Westernised scripts to the frontstage. This ensures the imbalance of power between the two and reflects how Western institutional scripts undermine strategists' personal scripts.

Nonetheless, it must be noted that the binary dimension of tradition and modernity is not clear-cut. Khondker (2000) argues against a narrow understanding of globalisation as Westernisation and a means of cultural imperialism, arguing for a view that can accommodate the contradictions and complexities within globalisation. Because local cultures are not erased by globalisations but, rather, is affected by it, its own distinctiveness ensures that the end effect is a mixture of both. It is not that local cultures are being erased in favour of a global culture. Thus, the binary dimension of tradition and modernity is not very useful, so '[w]e must no longer consider either tradition or modern, but the fusion of tradition and modern', where hybridisation is the result of this process (ibid: 31). This will help local traditions to stand alongside modernisation in an effort to reduce the contrast between the two (Nederveen Pieterse, 2004).

## **Conclusion**

By examining institutional level practices and linking them to the activities of strategists in an organisation, this chapter aims at confronting the challenge of combining ‘an intimate insight into micro-level activities with a continuous regard for the wider institutional context that informs and empowers such activities’ (Johnson et al., 2007: 22). This call for the connection of micro-phenomena to macro-phenomena is echoed by Jarzabkowski and Spee (2009) in the study of strategy-as-practice. They argue that this importance stems from how the strategy-as-practice research agenda has long focused on the study of the micro-practices of strategists, and this can obscure the embedded nature of strategy-making and the way that localized interactions both shape and are shaped by the wider strategy context.

To this end, this analysis shows how the micro-practices of strategists at MNA reflect continuous tensions between cultural traditions and modernity. The Western power-laden scripts that strategists draw upon to justify and legitimate the emulation of Western international practices help to shape strategists’ performances at MNA. Thus, the role that these scripts play within face-to-face interactions (Goffman, 1959) has broader effects on different levels of analysis (Whittington, 2006). Strategists at MNA acknowledge the power of Western managerial scripts and make use of them in their frontstage performances, while backstage, they still struggle to defend their local cultural practices. Sometimes this involves using Western managerial scripts to promote their strategic change proposals. At the same time, they argue that strategic change must take into account the local cultural context and the individual situation of MNA. Where various interests exist, conflicts arise; the ways in which social actors experience the power struggles is linked to how they perform in each other’s company. This face-to-face interaction of social actors mirrors the complexity of the fact that power plays take

place in the most subtle ways. In this respect, dramaturgy as a method of analysis enables the examination of power within strategic interactions.

Hence, this chapter proposed a detailed analysis of how Western practices are used to empower strategising performances, the dilemma caused by this, and the enforced engagements involved in such practices. This reflects the trend of internationalisation due to globalisation, in which borders are replaced by conversions of ideas, thoughts, and practices, and internationalisation is a ‘process of integrating an international perspective into the teaching/learning, research and service functions’ of higher education institutions (Knight, 2001: 229). This is a process that higher education organisations must go through to gain a legitimate place in a highly competitive environment (Power, 1997). The analysis also draws on religious, cultural, and historical frames to explain the various positions by which strategists choose to perform (Goffman, 1974). This provided in-depth analysis in which the micro-interactional level is linked to the meso-organisational-level of analysis to explain the macro-institutional level of strategising (Whittington, 2006). In doing so, the analysis contributes to the literature on the enactment of institutional power within organisations at a micro-level. The following chapter will provide an in-depth discussion of the implications of this study’s empirical analysis in relation to the overlooked silences within strategy-as-practice.

## **Chapter Eight: Discussion and Conclusion: An Organisational Studies Perspective of Strategy-as-Practice**

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### **Introduction**

This empirical case study has adopted an organisational studies lens to examine power within strategy-as-practice in the cultural context of Saudi Arabia. This cross-cultural context has brought into consideration various elements of analysis that were previously marginalised within the strategy-as-practice field (Jarzabkowski and Kaplan, 2010). This chapter will begin by showing how this empirical study contributes to building knowledge. This will be done by identifying the problem that this study addresses and the questions it aims to answer. In addition, the chapter demonstrates how this was enabled through the employment of dramaturgy as the theoretical and methodological framework for this study (Goffman, 1959). In so doing, the chapter will articulate the areas in which strategy-as-practice did not receive sufficient attention in previous research (Rasche and Chia, 2009; Jarzabkowski et al., 2007; Clegg et al., 2004). This is done to show the importance of issues of power, culture, gender, and modernity in the advancement of the understanding of strategy-as-practice. This is then linked to a broader challenge of strategy-as-practice, which combines a micro-perspective with the meso-organisational and macro-cultural perspectives (Johnson et al., 2007; Jarzabkowski et al., 2007). Furthermore, this chapter will highlight how challenges of strategy-as-practice bring about ethical considerations for strategists at MNA as a consequence of strategists' performances. This brings into reflection the importance of adopting a different type of ethics that is more sensitive to the particularities of caring for the 'other' in organisational settings (Gilligan, 1982; Held, 2006). Finally, the chapter ends by proposing some implications of this study of power in the Saudi

Arabian strategising context. To that end, the study encourages a culturally based understanding of power and politics within the strategising context while pointing to the limitations of adopting such a perspective, and it also recommends future avenues of research in the field.

### **An Organisational Lens to Strategy-as-Practice: Voicing the Unsaid**

This study focused on critically analysing the enactment of power plays within strategic interactions in instances of internal strategic communication in both front- and backstage contexts. This is done to better understand the enactment of these power plays on a strategic level within the context of higher education from a strategy-as-practice perspective, in which the main focus is on strategists and what they do and say when they strategise (Whittington, 1996, 2003, 2006). However, the field of strategy-as-practice overemphasises this focus to the degree that it downplays the macro-level of analysis in favour of the micro-level, presenting a significant challenge to researchers in the area (Johnson et al., 2007; Jarzabkowski et al., 2007; Golsorkhi et al., 2010). This is why current trends in the field have called for a restabilisation of the balance between these levels of analysis and for a better understanding of strategy-as-practice (Whittington et al., 2011; Jarzabkowski et al., 2007). In overcoming this challenge, this study focused equally on a triple level of analysis, considering the situated doings of strategists, the organisations they occupy, and the wider cultural context within which they exist.

To that end, this study examined the scripts and performances that strategists enact to convince their colleagues to support their strategic proposals. The examination included scrutinising strategists' frontstage (mixed-gender interactions) and backstage (gender-

segregated interactions and interviews) contexts, showing how those contexts influence their scripts and performances within their face-to-face interactions. Dramaturgy was selected as the study's theoretical and methodological framework of analysis (Goffman, 1959) and complemented by frame analysis (Goffman, 1974) to compensate for the limitations of dramaturgy. This is especially crucial given the fact that frame analysis (Goffman, 1974) presents a way in which broader frames of meaning can be brought to bear on understanding of face-to-face interactions. This establishes a way to meet the main challenge of strategy-as-practice: that is, linking what strategists do and say to macro-level explanations (Johnson et al., 2007).

The methodological framework of dramaturgy is arguably based on characteristics of Western societies, and for that reason, it might not be suitable to employ in relation to other societies (Prasad, 2005). However, the application of dramaturgical analysis in Saudi Arabian society proved that this method is transferable to this non-Western context. However, the outcomes of social actions are different from those expected in Western societies due to the differences in culture and religion, which are prominent factors shaping Saudi society. Nonetheless, employing a dramaturgical approach to understanding power within a higher education organisation proved to be very insightful in bringing about multiple perspectives of the experience of the enactment of power.

This facilitated the development of two main concepts in accordance with the specificities of this study. The first concept is *power plays*, which refers to the organisational political tactics that are employed within dramaturgical performances and are often interlinked within a social actor's face-to-face interactions. It was necessary to coin this term rather than using terms such as 'organisational political behaviour' (Buchanan and Badham, 1999a) because of its sensitivity to the nature of the theatre

metaphor on which this analysis is based. In that sense, power plays are perceived as elements of face-to-face performances that result in continuous struggles within social actors' strategic interactions. It is this interwoven aspect of power plays that reflects the fact that they are experienced through impression management techniques (Gardner, 1992) to reach desired outcomes (Goffman, 1959).

The second concept is the *interpretive ethical stance*, which accounts for cultural differences, specifically those associated with the Saudi culture. This perspective was necessarily applied to the detailed accounts of accepted ethical regulations, which are often taken for granted when conducting research. This research study is conducted in alignment with major ethical bodies in the field. However, with regard to specific situations where these guidelines were not followed rigidly, a culture-based explanation is proposed to explain the particular decisions made. To prevent cultural relativism, this research study abides by the ethical regulations of the accepted bodies of authority and reverts to the interpretive ethical stance only to address the specificities of Saudi culture. This has helped to create a distinct perspective of ethical considerations that recognises the novelty of the researched context.

These conceptual constructs, combined with adoption of a dramaturgical lens, have enabled the analysis of power within strategy-as-practice and given voice to the silences linked to the strategy-as-practice agenda. Crucial examples include how the macro-level analysis of culture, gender, and Westernisation exerts a significant impact on power when strategising at the micro-level. It is this emphasis that gives this thesis its contribution to knowledge, research, and practice in relation to the strategy-as-practice field. The analysis fills a gap in existing literature, where there is an urgent need for studies that investigate the embodied experiences of strategists (Jarzabkowski and Spee,

2009; Rasche and Chia, 2009). This was facilitated by the dramaturgical approach to strategy analysis that complements the established linguistic approach to the understanding of strategy, where language on its own fails to capture the complete picture of strategising (Jarzabkowski and Spee, 2009).

Throughout the analysis, it was evident that the focus on the embodied experiences of strategists is very important in the investigation of how power is experienced in instances of strategic interactions. This was even more evident when these experiences on a micro-level are linked to broader frames of meaning (Goffman, 1974) that expand on what these face-to-face interactions mean and what certain behaviours indicate and symbolise. This brings to light the fact that strategising goes beyond mere doings and sayings and is significantly linked to the situated embodied experiences of strategists. The following will elaborate on the main areas in which this analysis has yielded insights into strategising and power. The areas of culture, gender, embodiment, and modernity all constitute a bigger picture of what strategising is part of and what it is influenced by. These influences significantly impact how strategy is done and how social actors enact their roles in the ways they are expected (Goffman, 1959).

- **Culture, Gender, and Embodiment**

The focus of this analysis on the embodied gender understanding of strategising was inspired by the need for such investigation in the area of strategy-as-practice (Rouleau, 2003, 2005), especially since strategy research has long been silent on the effects of gender. Numerous influences have helped to construct this silence, including the primacy of men, who tend to be viewed as more experienced because they occupied managerial positions long before women joined them, given that managerial roles

remain primarily a masculine domain (McDowell, 1997). This situation is intensified in Saudi Arabia because of the low percentage of female participation in the country's workforce (Mansour, 2008), ensuring that men occupy higher organisational positions. Consequently, women experience a sharp contrast in comparison to men and perceive themselves as the other in the contexts they share with men. This is linked to the dominant position of men and the subordinate roles of women in Saudi society (Rawaf, 1990). Moreover, on the workforce level, labour laws are guided by the need to protect female modesty and provide a moral setting for work, resulting in a gender-segregated division of labour (Metcalf, 2008). This makes the task of strategising even more challenging for both men and women when they are required to interact in mixed-gender settings.

A society that is, as a whole, divided into two spaces – one that is private for women and another that is public for men (Guthrie, 2001) – has profound effects on all aspects of interaction in other spheres as well. This was indeed the case for MNA's strategists, influencing all their face-to-face interactions on the basis of cultural, social, and religious values. It was evident from the analysis that the way in which the strategists dress, talk, interact, and locate themselves spatially is greatly influenced by how the society dictates that men and women should communicate. Protecting women's modesty and preserving men's positions in society are important considerations for strategists in face-to-face communication.

Nonetheless, the new roles of women in managerial posts and their newly established positions as participators in decision-making and strategising challenged these cultural norms. Women who were in higher positions hierarchically, senior in age, and well-connected to the main male figure at MNA primarily conducted strategy in a different

way from women in lower hierarchical positions, who were younger and less well-connected. Although these women's experiences were limited, this observation drew attention to the contrast between women's participatory experiences in the same setting depending on their different hierarchical positions. The undoing of gender (Deutsch, 2007) was brought about by senior women who were closer to decision-making and perceived more seriously by their male peers. In contrast, women in middle management roles were still perceived as assigned to their cultural roles because they continued to uphold gender roles (Kelan, 2010) as expected by society at a managerial level.

This type of interaction and the outcomes that arise from it have been relevant since Rawaf (1990) suggested in her plans for reform that women in Saudi Arabia should be allowed more space for male and female interactions. This, she encouraged, should start in domains where women are highly engaged, such as education, for both sexes to change their stereotypical attitudes, for men to trust women, and for women to become role models for other women. There is no doubt that the situation at MNA realised this type of mixed-gender interaction. However, what is expected from it is not viewed in a very utopian manner. Complexities regarding the overarching cultural norms and religious values play an influential role in regulating the genders' interactions. This is a significant step for a conservative society such as Saudi society, and any change in gender roles will require more time for cultural and social norms to be relaxed. Although the context here is managerial and the workplace is presumably different from family-based interactions, it remains evident that both settings are strongly influenced by cultural values. The boundaries between the two spaces, family and work, are not well-established, which is why much of what takes place in the former impacts the

latter. Thus, controlling the way in which strategists interact often prevents women from assuming active roles as participants in strategising.

- **Modernity versus Tradition**

On 1 July 2012, King Abdullah approved the decree changing MNA from college to university status after it satisfied all the conditions for this transfer (Okaz, 2012). This came about as a result of MNA's continuous commitment to satisfying the requirements of the NCAAA for accreditation purposes. MNA worked for several years to implement the requirements put forward by the regulating body for quality assessment. Although these requirements come from a national body of accreditation, this body symbolises a Western entity through its international 'Western' members and global orientation. This has led to many changes at MNA, including the conduct of mixed-gender interactions following a Western university model.

This was a transformational change for MNA, and since it was only a regular national college, additional pressures were put on it to conform to international models of what a university should be. These pressures were felt at all levels and presented many conflicts at MNA, resulting in continuous negotiations regarding why a certain Western model should be followed. However, because this was the orientation of the owners of the college, members were motivated to work toward satisfying the requirements of the NCAAA and to do whatever was necessary to obtain university status. However, this commitment occasionally generated conflicts in situations where the context of MNA required the following of local models rather than international ones. In such cases, there is a preference for what suits MNA's culture and setting rather than just following Western management practices. This reflects the desire within Arab cultures for

hybridisation, seeking a balance between following modernity and adhering to tradition (Nederveen Pieterse, 2004).

Nonetheless, following Western practices and copying international models serves to earn organisational legitimacy by mirroring well-established institutional bodies (Meyer and Rowan, 1977; DiMaggio and Powell, 1983). This legitimacy, exhibited in the scripts used to promote modernity and Western management practices at MNA is powerful and influential (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983). As a result, strategists at MNA refer to them extensively in their frontstage performances while confiding backstage (in interviews) that Western practices are not always the most appropriate. In the privacy that interviews provide, participants were eager to speak their minds about how the locality of MNA should be considered and prioritised, given the following of Western practices (Nederveen Pieterse, 2004). However, scripts that value local, traditional, and contextual aspects do not hold power and influence and are, thus, less likely to be employed powerfully within strategic interactions.

Despite the above, scripts remain a source of conflict when tradition encounters modernity in a confrontation that constitutes a significant aspect of the Arab struggle in the modern world (Muna, 1980). The complexity of this situation is observed daily at MNA in strategic interactions, where – due to external pressures – there is always a motivation to conform, even though doing so does not necessarily improve the organisation (Power, 1997). Although strategists at MNA do not voice how these localities should be satisfied and how traditions should be maintained in the face of international scripts, they voice the need for alternatives. This again points to the fact that Western practices are more powerful, while traditions in the context of strategising are harder to articulate. This makes the situation even more complex because, although

they voice the need for an alternative, this alternative is not really clear. There is no direct script used to define what a traditional practice might be; however, a Western practice is easily defined and known to all. This is the case because influential institutional bodies in the field are strong, and organisational survival becomes reliant on reflecting their norms and being approved by them (Scott, 2008).

Moreover, strategists' scripts at MNA are not clear-cut in their assignment to back-stage and front-stage contexts of interactions. Table [3] shows how these scripts are not just assigned to one specific context but can occur in contradicting manner on the front stage. As acknowledged previously, this complexity, in which there are no fixed categorizations but rather alternative positions that can appear in both contexts, was evident in strategists' scripts. These instances show that actors are not confined in their scripts to a certain stage, but rather become more relaxed in their front stage as well. Certain performances—but only by those in top hierarchical organizational positions who can afford to speak their minds—go against the neat distinctions of Goffman's stages.

These instances reflect a diversion from what is observed within MNA: that is, front-stage scripts echo institutional rules, while back-stage scripts voice the need for other alternatives. This points to the changing positions of scripts; they are not any more assigned to a specific context, but rather they are becoming dynamic and challenging the contexts to which they are traditionally linked. Yet, their link to men at the top of the hierarchy at MNA points to the scarcity of these scripts. However, they still exist, and they engender a new way of thinking about scripts and performances, other than Goffman's very stern dichotomy of back-stage and front-stage contexts.

In this sense, there are actors who are more privileged than others, and their power enables them to participate, through contradictory scripts, in the front stage of their performances. This goes against Goffman's distinction of contexts, through showing how such front-stage/ back-stage scripts can occur in the same front-stage context only when actors are powerful enough to do so. This is the case because the rest of the participants were not able to have that privilege, and to build their credibility they needed to hold on to institutional scripts on the front stage. This type of complexity that surrounds scripts is due to the participants' need of conducting themselves in the best accepted manner at MNA. This means holding up Western scripts in the front stage, but those who are less interested in conducting their credibility were much more at ease with saying their minds in the front stage.

This points to the importance of the actors' positions in relation to the scripts upon which they draw and their context rather than the effect of the audience. In some situations, the mixture of scripts in one stage reflects a lower interest in audience desire and a greater interest in what the actors themselves think. This represents a way of releasing some of the tensions that strategists are going through when they are being open about what they think in the front stage as well. In doing so, breaking the invisible barrier between front and back stage shifts attention to the actors' powerful positions within MNA rather than their audience's expectations of what scripts are to be accepted and in which context. These macro-level elements of analysis are important in explaining the micro-level situated actions of strategists. This link will be further elaborated in the following section, which highlights the ethical challenges related to issues of strategic performances.

## **Ethical Challenges of Strategic Performances**

Islam, the main determiner of how people interact in the Arab world (Ali, 1996), is influenced by diverse interpretations of what Islam is perceived to be within different cultures (Syed, 2010). Conservative interpretations have resulted in many constraints on social relations in Saudi Arabia (Mincese, 1982), empowering men and emphasising traditional gender roles in society (Metcalf, 2008). This places women in a weaker, subordinate position (Atiya, 1996; Al-Lamky, 2007; Metcalf, 2008). These positions are emphasised in Saudi culture and automatically transferred from a family context to a work context in Saudi society (Muna, 1980). This intensifies the gender stereotypes that position women as secondary to men (Syed, 2010), also reflecting the social and economic factors that shape gender relations in Saudi Arabia (Metcalf, 2008).

Some scholars have contended that the failure to actualise Islamic principles is due to socio-political reasons rather than directly to Islam itself (Williams and Zinkin, 2010). It has even been argued that there is no clash between Islamic principles and the UN Global Compact principles for a responsible business (ibid). Islam, these authors argue, goes even further and is more detailed than the UN principles in a way that can bring more understanding between Islam and the West. This is reflected in the fact that women have equal rights to men in Islam, as has been the case from the time of the prophet (ibid). However, in Saudi Arabia, religion, institutional structures, and social relations shape businesses (Metcalf, 2007). These factors incorporate within them cultural barriers that continue to hinder women's roles at work and ensure traditional social relations (Metcalf, 2008). Nonetheless, political progress is predicted to take place through organisations taking action, as MNA has done, which has changed the way in which gender relations are traditionally perceived and, through this, contributed

to the achievement of social justice (Maak and Pless, 2009). However, this role should not be overestimated; it is simply a first step toward a broader inclusion of women.

Women in Saudi Arabia have benefited significantly from such initiatives and started to challenge the social ethics that bind them to the private space by participating in the public sphere (Metcalf, 2008). The wearing of the veil has enabled this type of participation in public arenas because it preserves modest self-presentation in the company of men. However, this does not necessarily reflect a 'lack of agency' (Abu-Lughod, 2002: 786) on the part of women. The embodied experience of the wearing of the veil represents the clash between conservatives and the new modern culture, symbolising women's agency and their participation in the public sphere.

Women's veiling in public spaces represents their Islamic identity (Badran, 2009) and their respect for social norms, enabling them to share the public space with men. Such participation is further controlled by the management of space, where women are segregated from men, even if this means being on the other side of a meeting table. This situation is highly sensitive, especially in Saudi Arabia, where the ethical challenges of women's organisational participation are highly influenced by socio-cultural and historical factors that account for the historical status of women in the country (Esposito, 1998; Syed, 2009).

Women's participation in the public space within mixed-gender interactions at MNA can be seen as an Islamic way of liberating women. Their participation occurs in accordance with religious and social values through respect for the dress code and the division of space. In this respect, scholars have argued against the Western liberal feminist notion that Arab women's liberation must follow the same path as that of

Western women (Duval, 1998). Arab women want to maintain the familial aspects of their traditional society but not the negative aspects of their society that engender their unjust treatment in society (ibid). This places them in an ambiguous power struggle where they fight for their rights while simultaneously accepting their subordination within their respective cultures (ibid). This mirrors the struggle of Arabs in general, as they seek an identity that connects both their traditional roots and the challenges of modern-day society (Syed, 2010). In such a situation, a 'context-specific framework for equal opportunity' is required that considers socio-cultural factors, along with the historical specificities of a given culture, instead of implementing a Western version of equal opportunity on the East without considering the latter's culture (Syed, 2009: 436). This echoes Abu-Lughod's (2002) call to be open to other cultural traditions and to understand them through the contexts that govern them.

This has led Muslim feminists to call for the appreciation of difference rather than abiding by colonial ideas regarding the liberation of Muslim women within a political agenda (Abu-Lughod, 2002). In Saudi Arabia, women are returning to the basics of Islam to negotiate power through religious discourse since this has been a prominent source of power since the 1980s. This is unlike feminist movements in other Arab countries, which are based on secular motives (El Guindi, 1999). However, most feminist discourses are generally woven into discourses of power relations (Mohanty, 1991). In that sense, there should be no opposition between the Muslim feminists' view and the Western feminists' view because that brings about a position of conflict, making the West the alternative to any other position (Abu-Lughod, 2002). Thus, it is not fair that the choice is to be feminist in the Western perspective or not to be feminist at all (ibid).

Western feminist discourses that undermine women in different cultures by treating them as different and not following the Western ideal must be challenged (Mohanty, 1997), especially since Western perspectives on gender are limited in their view of global issues (Metcalf and Woodhams, 2012). This is a shortcoming on the part of Western feminists who need to go beyond the colonial lens when considering women from third-world countries (ibid). As Western feminists did not abandon their culture for a new one when reforming their situation, Arab women should not abandon their culture in favour of another (Ahmed, 1992). It is more a matter of being critical of one culture and questioning women's injustices; such a lens will bring more hope for a better Arab feminist movement (ibid). Even though feminist movements are rooted in the West, they are selectively, as appropriate, developed in the Middle East to suit the historical, social, and religious aspects of Middle Eastern cultures (Abu-Lughod, 1998). In this sense, Abu-Lughod (1998) argues that feminism in the Middle East, from a post-colonial perspective, is a form of hybridisation rather than imitation of the West in terms of adapting to modernity. This accounting of hybridisation will result in a type of feminism that does not undermine social hierarchies and morality (ibid).

Segregated gender contexts in which women operate apart from men can present a 'powerful social force' through lessening male dominance over women (Duval, 1998: 47). However, the challenges of globalisation through internationalisation requirements call for mixed-gender contexts; therefore, both men and women are under pressure in relation to their performances and their ethical consequences. That is why it is important to reach an understanding that stems from female strategists' own context rather than depending on Western feminists' discourses that treat Arab women as a homogenous category (Mohanty, 1991). This kind of view is superficial in its nature because it does not go into deeper levels of analysis that considers women's individual identities and

experiences (ibid). This echoes the call within the gender literature for greater criticality of globalisation in the investigation of gender in cross-cultural settings (Metcalf and Woodhams, 2012).

Thus, resorting to a feminist ethics of care can be beneficial in understanding such cross-cultural interactions for it includes aspects of caring and cooperation that are missing from other ethical theories (Burton and Dunn, 1996); viewing ethics from this perspective builds on the notion that ‘morality is a matter of care’ (Gilligan, 1982: 147). This view of ethics favours relationships and maintains them in the best way possible (Noddings, 1984). This task can be challenging when there is a dominant norm, which makes realising differences a harder task because women’s voices may not be recognised (Gilligan, 1982). In this respect, Gilligan (1982) calls for ethics of care that realises the importance of maintaining relations and not being violent and hurtful to others. In this type of care, it is not just male and female relationships that are impacted; rather, workplace relations and familial relations all have the potential to benefit from ethics of care that respects the other. Thus, where ethics of justice holds that everyone should receive the same treatment, the ethics of care promotes an avoidance of hurtfulness and violence. In doing so, women’s voices, which are distinct from those of men, may be recognised by shifting the focus from right and wrong to establishing relational responsibilities between men and women (ibid).

This conforms with Held’s (2006) ethics of care, which includes both practice and value ethics; Held argues that what needs to be done is done in the spirit of being sensitive to others’ needs in a relational way. At MNA, many of the performances are restricted by ethical practices that are informed by societal norms and values, including establishing the superiority of men and the division of space. Although these are done out of respect

for the cultural values that are strongly anchored in Saudi society itself, they restrict women's full participation in strategising. The ethics of care that underpin these practices should also take into account the values that maintain relationships in these instances instead of undermining one group for the benefit of another. It is this type of relating in a responsible way that will bring people together rather than pulling them apart (Gilligan, 1982).

In MNA, the gender relations that transfer from family to work settings situate men as superior to women. This automatically sets men as guardians of women and establishes women as having secondary roles in their shared space with men. This type of interaction has been shown to restrict women's strategic participation at MNA. This presents a significant challenge for women's strategising activities because it hinders the progress of the entire group. In arguing for an ethics of care, the argument builds on enhancing relations between men and women in their practice of strategising by considering the values that bring them together. Women's new roles in society and their participation in mixed-gender settings within the workplace are still defined within the context of societal norms. However, whether or not women and men protect these societal norms out of respect, they are nonetheless marginalising to women. However, these societal norms are not necessarily to be abandoned to establish caring relations. In this sense, the ethics of care constitutes the broader space in which virtue, utility, and justice can also fit (Held, 2006). This ethical position can be used to facilitate rather than restrict performances, where the main emphasis is on enabling an active type of strategic participation.

The following section highlights the main implications of this study, its limitations, and recommendations for future research in the field.

## **Conclusion**

Throughout this study, the aim was to critically analyse the enactment of power within strategic interactions and to reach a better understanding of this phenomenon on a strategic level. This was done by investigating what strategists do and say when they strategise (Whittington, 1996, 2003, 2006), including their embodied experiences and their roles in communicating power. The latter was needed to capture much of what is not said in these instances (Rasche and Chia, 2009), aspects that cannot be captured solely by means of linguistics (Jarzabkowski and Spee, 2009). Dramaturgy (Goffman, 1959), through its micro-focus on face-to-face interactions, facilitated this exploration, and frame analysis (Goffman, 1974) – through its macro-focus – complemented this methodology. This has been insightful in capturing the details of social interactions and in linking them to macro-level explanations that enable micro-practices to be explained in relation to their specific contexts and their consequences to be considered.

This has enabled some of the silences that were apparent in the field of strategy-as-practice, including power, culture, gender, embodiment, and modernity, to be voiced. These macro-levels of analysis were highlighted through the elaboration of strategists' micro-practices and the explanation of power plays experienced within strategic interactions. This culture-based investigation was beneficial in enabling the triple level of analysis (micro-meso-macro) that is called for within strategy-as-practice (Jarzabkowski et al., 2007; Johnson et al., 2007). This drew attention to many of the challenges that strategists at MNA encounter, that impede their strategic participation and create tensions within these instances. Strategists' participation was often

constrained and restricted through subtle power plays, whether embodied through their performances or voiced through their scripts.

These constraints within strategic interactions are no surprise and, in fact, are a part of the complexity of organisations. Social actors and the experiences they engage in are not straightforward and are part of a cultural, social, historical, and religious background that shapes them and gives them meaning. There is no easy way around this and no straightforward solution for these complexities. However, this culture-based understanding of power and politics within strategising has led to a better understanding of what takes place on a strategic level. Examining such aspects of strategising and questioning what is taken for granted is a first step toward assessing this situation. Often, this context is hidden from observation because of its sensitivity on a strategic level. However, this study has benefited from a high degree of access to the case study organisation, enabling participant observation of formal on-going strategic interactions as well as informal interactions. This, along with the interviews and access to organisational documents, has enabled understanding of the complexity of the phenomenon and resulted in a deep analysis of the case.

My position as an insider and outsider is by no means clear-cut, because conducting oneself as an insider (Geertz, 1973) and trying to balance it with Simmel's (1950) concept of stranger is not a straightforward process. The unknowability of how 'they' see 'us' makes these positions even more vague. This is due mostly to the complexity of conducting such ethnographic research, especially as a social scientist. In my fieldwork, an insider position was signified by informal interactions with participants and by my base-office at the organisation. However, the stranger position was signified by my role in formal interactions where I was attending and taking notes but not participating. In

the latter position, it seemed as if I were invisible in some instances where I was barely noticed. However, while these positions guided the way I perceived the fieldwork, they were not necessarily how people perceived me as a researcher and my position at MNA.

Hence, my main concern was to be sufficiently aware of my positions to enable me to reflect more on my research experience at MNA. This is the case because ethnographic fieldwork research is predicated on the researcher's strong relationship to his or her self and how that is constructed and reconstructed within the time period of the research (Coffey, 1999). The way a researcher is perceived is also affected by how the people within the fieldwork perceive these positions of the researcher and how they make sense of them. These perceptions of the researcher's positions are even more critical because fieldwork requires forming rapport, which is built on relationships (Coffey, 1999). These relationships, due to their fluid nature, make pinning down a researcher's position at a specific time quite difficult. Hence, acknowledging the various ways we are perceived as social scientists will facilitate our understanding of an ethnographic researcher's identity and position within the fieldwork.

From my position as a social science researcher and a complete cultural participant by virtue of being a female Saudi citizen, my role as a 'professional stranger' (Simmel, 1950) aided my reflective persona through 'distance and nearness, indifference and involvement' (Simmel, 1950: 404). Through this, I have sought to develop some practice-based recommendations for strategists at MNA. These action-based strategies aim to encourage both men and women to fulfil their potential strategic participation. Active strategic participation and influence (Mantere and Vaara, 2008; Miller et al., 2008) are expected within strategic interactions, and knowing that there are strong historical, cultural, social, and religious factors hindering this is an important first step.

It is crucial to be aware of the power struggles taking place within strategic interactions. Many strategists were initially reluctant to voice problems regarding members' participation. Then, after bringing to their attention particular incidents during meetings, they began to think reflectively about these incidents and to acknowledge their existence. Thus, the first step involves drawing strategists' attention to some of the sensitive issues that take place within interactions. Pointing to specific problems can bring about awareness of what is normally taken for granted, particularly through exploring the possibility that interactions in the workplace are a continuum of familial interactions.

In relation to female and male interactions, some participants in their interview scripts suggested solutions to encourage full participation. Some indicated that, to address women's diminished participation in meetings, microphones should be provided. This was suggested as a way of overcoming the advantage that men have through their loud voices and overcoming the cultural norms that require women to be shy and speak in quieter voices. Furthermore, it was suggested that the division of space can become less strict so men and women can sit beside each other rather than each group sitting on one side. This is seen as a way of balancing the power division within the meeting room so that men do not dominate participation from one side of the meeting room. Another suggestion made was that turn-taking in meetings should be regulated to give women opportunities to talk without being afraid of interrupting a man or risking being ignored or unheard.

Women in Saudi society are not accustomed to working with men, and their interactions with them are constrained because of cultural norms that enforce this divide. Hence, one of the strategies encouraged in the West that can promote women's full participation is

providing male mentors for female participants (Handley, 1994; Lahtinen and Wilson, 1994) who can introduce women to men's networks. However, this strategy in the case of MNA is doomed to failure because it involves extensive mixed-gender interaction, which is perceived as improper. Other strategies, including assertiveness training and promoting an equal-opportunity culture (Handley, 1994) can be invaluable for women at MNA. Assertiveness training (ibid) can teach women to deal with men in situations where cultural norms favour maleness and age. Promoting a culture that values equal opportunities will empower women's participation in male-dominated settings. This training will help women to perceive undoing gender as an acceptable alternative that will not threaten their managerial identity or lead to stigmatization (Goffman, 1963a). However, for such training to take place, it must also respect the culture itself. Assertiveness training that jeopardises the cultural values connected to male and female interactions can backfire on women (Handley, 1994). It must, therefore, be handled in alignment with the culture while still preserving women's rightful participation.

A further possibility is to offer dramaturgical based awareness workshops for both men and women. Issues of cultural values and the necessity of modernisation are best addressed by the social actors themselves. In providing a setting in which institutional scripts can be challenged and discussed freely, strategists will have fewer issues contemplating these scripts backstage. This method will provide a context in which modernity is not presented as a clash with tradition but a position to be debated and discussed. Western scripts will be presented as alternative models open to adjustment, not a one-and-only model to be followed. Such changes might not benefit the organisation in its accreditation processes in the short term, but it will lessen the tensions that strategists struggle with in the long term. This will provide a means by which issues of tradition and modernity are debated, through which strategists rationally

arrive at solutions that fit the organisation itself rather than depending on fixed Western models for survival. The Western scripts of influence can be balanced by strategists' active participation and voices within frontstage performances.

This type of communication will provide men and women with the opportunity to discuss some of the challenges they face, and solutions can arise from spreading awareness of such issues. As shown in the analysis, issues of age and hierarchal position can present an obstacle in such interactions. Therefore, it is preferable to begin by holding separate workshops for men and women before gradually integrating them so ideas are disseminated in a non-threatening manner. As a result, strategists of both genders at MNA will be better prepared for mixed-gender strategising interactions. Hence, the current challenges can be transformed into opportunities for enhanced strategic internal communication.

These recommendations are developed in response to the analysis conducted in this study. However, there are various limitations in the extent to which findings regarding the enactment of power within strategic interactions can be applied. This study focuses on a single case study of an organisation of higher education in Saudi Arabia; it does not reflect the sector as a whole. In addition, although there was a high degree of access to the organisation, some backstage contexts (Goffman, 1959) could not be directly observed, such as all-male informal interactions outside the college and private meetings within the college. Instances where social actors tend to operate in secrecy are beyond this study's reach. This is a sensitive matter because it is often the case that important conversations and interactions happen away from observing eyes, yet this is a limitation to which this study admits. Moreover, this type of ethnographic study would benefit from in-depth examination that goes beyond the four months allocated to this

study. Additional time would have proved beneficial to the development of longitudinal analysis of changes over time and enabled greater sensitivity to detail that this type of investigation relies on.

This research study has filled a gap in knowledge by investigating power within strategy-as-practice research agendas and by giving voice to some of those who are rarely heard in strategy-making (Clegg et al., 2004). It has further contributed to enriching the strategy-as-practice field by investigating the implications of doing gender through doing strategy, an issue that requires further development (Rouleau, 2003, 2005). More significantly, the study has emphasised the role of the embodied strategic experience by studying the bodies of strategists and their role in strategic interactions (Rasche and Chia, 2009). It has also contributed to the field by bringing a broader understanding of how institutional powers affect the situated actions of strategists within the strategy-as-practice field (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983). This is done in a cross-cultural context, which enriches understanding of strategy-making in general (Jarzabkowski and Kaplan, 2010). This was enabled by adopting dramaturgy as a theoretical and methodological framework for the study, a method that bridges the gap between theory and practice within strategy-as-practice (Jarzabkowski and Whittington, 2008a). This facilitates a detailed ethnographic approach to the study of strategy-as-practice, an approach that is necessary in the field (Rasche and Chia, 2009; Jarzabkowski et al., 2007; Johnson et al., 2007). Thus, this study has addressed one of the main challenges that strategy-as-practice faces, namely linking micro-levels of analysis to macro-levels (Johnson et al., 2007; Jarzabkowski et al., 2007; Golsorkhi et al., 2010).

Finally, future research in the field of strategy-as-practice will benefit from increased engagement with organisational studies (Clegg et al., 2004). Issues of power, gender, culture, modernity, and tradition have huge potential in exposing the intricacies of strategy-making. In addition, future research will benefit from focusing on the ethical consequences of strategising, which remains another underexplored topic within the field. More in-depth case studies would be useful, particularly those emphasising observation that are more sensitive to capturing the details of strategising. Moreover, future research should investigate the constraints of strategising and the reasons behind these constraints through different levels of analysis. In so doing, better understanding of the challenges that face strategists can be achieved. This will aid in improving the practice side of strategy-as-practice through linking a theoretical understanding of strategising with its practical and ethical improvement. This is the main motivation that informs this study.

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## Appendix A

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Research Title:

The Enactment of Power within Strategic Interactions:

A Saudi Arabian Case Study

This interview is part of my research as a PhD student at the University of Exeter's business school. The purpose of this interview is to investigate the influential behaviours that take place within strategic interactions. I would like to interview you for about 60 to 90 minutes. The results will be part of my PhD dissertation and other follow-up papers; however, your responses will be anonymised in the analysis and publication. Can I please record your answers? Thank you. Do you have any questions before we start?

Name of participant:

Position of participant:

Date and time of interview:

Interview Questions:

- 1- Can you tell me about your general impressions on the conduct of joint meetings that you attended at MNA? What do you think of them?
- 2- Why do you think, in the joint college council meeting, that the ladies' voices were not heard as much as the men's voices? Can you please elaborate?

- 3- Can you tell me how you convinced the members of the joint college council of your change proposal? Did you notice any changes in your voice and facial expressions when doing so?
- 4- What do you notice yourself doing and saying to influence the members of the college council to agree to your proposals? Can you please elaborate on taking the discussion outside the meeting room?
- 5- Do you think that there are some tactics that are more effective than others in influencing the members of the college council when change is proposed? Can you give me some examples?
- 6- Can you tell me why you think, in the college council meeting and other meetings, members tend to prefer to speak to the person sitting beside them rather than to the whole group when the discussion becomes heated?
- 7- Can you tell me about the major differences you noticed between what takes place when participants voice their suggestions within a joint meeting and when the same happens within an a gender-segregated meeting? How do they talk? How do they act?
- 8- What do you notice yourself doing and saying to influence the members of your team in the departmental meetings to agree to your proposed ideas? Can you please elaborate on how you try to influence them outside the meeting room?
- 9- Can you please share with me your impressions on why the members of the joint college council, during the informal lunch, were acting very differently from their behaviour in the formal meeting?
- 10- Based on your experience, how do you perceive the use of influential tactics in relation to influencing strategic decision-making? Is it normal behaviour? Is it something that people usually tend to do? Can you elaborate?

- 11- How do you perceive the use of influential behaviour in relation to your organisation? Is it part of the organisational culture? Is it not? Can you elaborate?
- 12- In your own experience, what are the values (principles, standards) that govern the use of influential behaviours in your organisation? Please elaborate.