Developing the academy in Vietnam: an investigation of the formation of academic identity by university lecturers in Vietnam

Thi Kim Anh Le

Southern Cross University

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DEVELOPING THE ACADEMY IN VIETNAM: AN INVESTIGATION OF THE FORMATION OF ACADEMIC IDENTITY BY UNIVERSITY LECTURERS IN VIETNAM

Le Thi Kim Anh, BA (Orel State University), MEd (University of Melbourne)

School of Education
Southern Cross University

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

November 2016
Declaration

I certify that the work presented in this thesis is, to the best of my knowledge and belief, original, except as acknowledged in the text, and that the material has not been submitted, either in whole or in part, for a degree at this or any other university.

I acknowledge that I have read and understood the University's rules, requirements, procedures and policy relating to my higher degree research award and to my thesis. I certify that I have complied with the rules, requirements, procedures and policy of the University (as they may be from time to time).

Signed:  

Date:  November 15, 2016
Abstract

Vietnam’s higher education system is developing rapidly in a context in which there are high expectations for its contribution to the social and economic advancement of the nation. A select group of leading, research-oriented universities are expected to play an important role in this process by connecting Vietnam with international knowledge networks and associated international academic standards. This investigation was prompted by a need identified to document the state of academic culture at these institutions, together with the nature of the influences contributing to the development of this culture and to the formation of a strong sense of academic identity among academic staff members.

An ethnographic investigation of academic culture and academic identity at four of these research-oriented universities was conducted. The methodology of Naturalistic Inquiry was employed to generate robust and reliable ethnographic data concerning the workplace culture and the experiences of 30 academic staff members from across a range of organisational and disciplinary settings at these universities. Of interest were the issues, claims and concerns of the participants about the culture of their workplaces, and about the impact of this culture on the attainment of their academic aspirations.

The investigation demonstrates the existence of a keenly developing sense of academic identity at Vietnam’s leading, research-oriented universities. It is in the natural and applied sciences especially that a sense of allegiance to global disciplinary communities was found to be most prevalent. In these disciplines, there was a depth of engagement with and a strong aspiration towards acceptance within global knowledge networks through publishing in international peer-reviewed journals.

In the more individualistic research specialisms of the humanities, the desire for an affinity with global disciplinary communities was widely reported, but research outcomes in terms of international publications were comparatively far less in evidence. Publishing in the humanities remains for the most part locally focused and intermittent.

Academics working in the applied social sciences, particularly teacher education, were the least globally engaged, reporting meagre links with international scholarly networks. Typically, in the field of teacher education, an understanding of the need to mark out intellectual territory through publishing research findings in peer-refereed journals was
acknowledged, but it was an attainment that was also considered to be wholly out of reach in practical terms.

This investigation provides empirical evidence to inform institutional and system-level policy settings for the development of Vietnam’s designated research-oriented universities. Importantly, the investigation shows that these settings must take account of epistemologically grounded cultural differences, and of the implications of these for the formation of academic identity.
Acknowledgements

In undertaking this research, many people offered me valuable support and assistance. First, I would like to express my deepest gratitude to both of my supervisors: Associate Professor Sharon Parry and Professor Martin Hayden. These two supervisors had a determining influence on my decision to undertake a PhD investigation on the topic of academic culture and identity in Vietnam. Associate Professor Sharon Parry, my principal supervisor, introduced me to the ideas of a wide range of distinguished scholars, including Burton Clark, Tony Becher, William Tierney and Mary Henkel, whose contributions to an understanding of the nature of academic culture and identity in a Western context have been immense. Professor Martin Hayden, who has developed a deep and empathetic understanding of the higher education system in Vietnam through his various projects, including once focused on developing a master plan for Vietnam’s higher education system, has assisted me to see the relevance of concepts relating to academic culture and identity to the higher education system in Vietnam. It is my extraordinary good luck to have been guided by these two scholars, who have introduced me widely to a community of scholars whose focus is the study of higher education. I am indebted to them.

Doing cultural studies is always a hard work, and even more so when undertaken in a language that is not one’s mother tongue. I have appreciated the enormous assistance provided to me by my supervisors, from start to finish. Associate Professor Parry enforced strictly the requirements of Naturalistic Inquiry, instilling in me an appreciation of its scope and potential. It is a methodological approach that is largely unknown in Vietnam, and I feel privileged to have acquired a depth of insight regarding its implementation. Professor Martin Hayden, through his depth of knowledge of higher education systems in Asia, has broadened significantly my understanding of the progress made and the path ahead for higher education in Vietnam.

In completing my PhD investigation, I have felt a strong sense of belonging to a big family at Southern Cross University. Individuals whose support I have appreciated include Professor Amy Cutter-Mackenzie, Mr Alan Foster, Dr Marianne Logan, Dr Dao Van Khanh and Ms Jubilee Smith, all of whom have provided me with valuable insights about my topic. I am also most appreciative of the administrative support provided by Mr Stephen Brown and Mr Tim Mulholland, and of the training in NVivo*10 provided...
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My family, including my husband, Mr Vo Chi, my two sons and my daughter, have been generous without reservation in their love and care. I owe them a huge debt for their support. During candidature, my life has been further enriched by the birth of my granddaughter, who now regularly “talks” with me via Skype since her birth in 2015. My four parents have now passed away, but I continue to feel them very close to me and they have inspired me enormously with my endeavour.

Finally, I express my deep gratitude to the Australian Government, which generously supported my candidature with an Endeavour Postgraduate Scholarship. Without this support, I could not have considered undertaking a PhD. I acknowledge also the support I received in earlier times from the Russian Government to undertake a BA at Orel State University and from the Australian Government to undertake a MEd at the University of Melbourne. Three governments have been played very significant roles in the development of my academic abilities.
Preface

As a university lecturer in Vietnam, my role for much of my career was confined to teaching. My responsibilities were to improve my teaching, to update my course content and, as required, to restructure my courses in response to new developments such as the introduction of a credit-based curriculum model. Since 2005, however, research has become a new and an increasingly important requirement for me as a university lecturer in Vietnam. Like many of my colleagues in the social sciences, I felt unprepared for this development. Initially, my idea of research was to summarise whatever I could find in the library or from the internet and then consider its implications for my teaching. Meanwhile, my colleagues in the physical sciences were rapidly engaging in the production of journal articles and in the presentation of research papers at national and international scientific meetings. The contrast became unsettling. It prompted questions about the nature of academic work. I wondered about which kinds of academic achievements contributed most to the development of an academic reputation. Subsequently, I became involved in the management of various national programs focused on the professional development of university lecturers, particularly in terms of their ability to apply different teaching methodologies and to evaluate the impact of these methodologies on student learning. I realized, however, that what was needed in the social sciences was for university lecturers to begin to generate new knowledge, though that was difficult because of the lack of library resources, financial support and research expertise. These restrictions also applied to me. When given the opportunity to complete a PhD in Australia, therefore, I was delighted. As anticipated, the experience allowed me to investigate in depth what is at the core of academic work, how knowledge is produced in different disciplinary communities, and how achievements in knowledge production are important to the career development of university lecturers and to the formation of an academic identity. These insights are fundamentally important to the future development of the academic profession in Vietnam.
## Acronyms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ILSSA</td>
<td>Institute of Labour Sciences and Social Affairs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GDP</td>
<td>Gross Domestic Product</td>
</tr>
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<td>GSO</td>
<td>General Statistics Office</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HERA</td>
<td>Higher Education Reform Agenda 2006-2020</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MOET</td>
<td>Ministry of Education and Training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MOST</td>
<td>Ministry of Science and Technology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NAFOSTED</td>
<td>National Fund for Science and Technology Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PCEC</td>
<td>Party Central Executive Committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VASS</td>
<td>Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences</td>
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<tr>
<td>VAST</td>
<td>Vietnam Academy of Science and Technology</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# Table of Contents

Declaration i

Abstract ii

Acknowledgements iv

Preface vi

Acronyms vii

Table of Contents viii

List of Tables xii

## Chapter 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Research Problem 1
1.2 Conceptual Perspective 4
1.3 The Research Questions 8
1.4 The Research Methodology 9
1.5 Scope and Limitations of the Investigation 12
1.6 Organisation of this Report 13

## Chapter 2: THE ACADEMY IN VIETNAM

2.1 Development of the System 15
2.2 Contemporary Issues 19
2.2.1 Governance 19
2.2.2 Funding 21
2.2.3 Research and Research Training 22
2.2.4 Academic Standards 25
2.2.5 Graduate Unemployment 26
2.2.6 Internationalisation 28
Chapter 6: EXPERIENCES OF DISCIPLINARY CULTURE – TEACHING AND RESEARCH

6.1 Teaching
6.1.1 Natural and Applied Sciences
6.1.2 Humanities
6.1.3 Applied Social Sciences
6.2 Research
6.2.1 Natural and Applied Sciences
6.2.2 Humanities
6.2.3 Applied Social Sciences
6.3 Concluding Remarks

Chapter 7: EXPERIENCES OF DISCIPLINARY CULTURE – SOCIALISATION

7.1 Induction
7.2 Networks
7.3 Publishing
7.4 Achieving Recognition
7.5 Concluding Remarks

Chapter 8: EXPERIENCES OF ACADEMIC IDENTITY

8.1 Shared Characteristics
8.2 Different Characteristics
8.2.1 Cosmopolitan Researchers
8.2.2 Local Researchers
8.2.3 Reluctant Researchers
8.3 Barriers to Identity Formation
8.3.1 The Cosmopolitans
8.3.2 The Locals
8.3.3 The Reluctants
8.4 Concluding Remarks

Chapter 9: DISCUSSION

9.1 Academic Workloads
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9.2</td>
<td>Research Productivity</td>
<td>156</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.3</td>
<td>Academic Inbreeding</td>
<td>158</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.4</td>
<td>Internationalisation</td>
<td>161</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.5</td>
<td>National Expectations</td>
<td>162</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.6</td>
<td>National Policies</td>
<td>164</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.7</td>
<td>Concluding Remarks</td>
<td>167</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Chapter 10: CONCLUSION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10.1</td>
<td>Review of the Findings</td>
<td>168</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.1.1</td>
<td>Conceptual Perspectives</td>
<td>169</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.1.2</td>
<td>Methodological Approach</td>
<td>170</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.1.3</td>
<td>Summary of Findings</td>
<td>171</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.1.4</td>
<td>The Importance of Teaching</td>
<td>175</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.2</td>
<td>Relevance of the Conceptual Frameworks</td>
<td>177</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.3</td>
<td>Policy Implications</td>
<td>184</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.4</td>
<td>Methodological Issues</td>
<td>187</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.5</td>
<td>Further Research</td>
<td>188</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.6</td>
<td>Concluding Remarks</td>
<td>190</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

REFERENCES 191

APPENDICES 207
List of Tables

Table 3.1: A Framework of Organisational Culture ......................................................... 38
Table 4.1: Participants in the Investigation ........................................................................ 57
Table 4.2: Interview Schedule .......................................................................................... 61
Table 4.3: Examples of Initial Codes .................................................................................. 67
Table 9.1: Participants by Academic Inbreeding and Type of Research Commitment .... 159
Table 10.1: Layers of Influence on Individual Academic Identity ................................... 178
Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Vietnam’s higher education system is developing rapidly in a context in which there are high expectations for its future contribution to the social and economic advancement of the nation. As the system develops, it is seeking to engage more fully with global knowledge networks. The cultural implications of this trend for the academy in Vietnam are, however, not well understood, mainly because so little attention has been given to date to the topic of academic culture in Vietnam. This investigation seeks to address this deficit by throwing light on the experiences of academic culture and on the formation of academic identity of a group of academic staff members selected from across four leading, research-oriented universities in Vietnam. This chapter introduces the investigation.

1.1 The Research Problem

Vietnam’s higher education system has experienced a dramatic transformation over the past 25 years. Whereas in the early 1990s less than 2% of all young people in the eligible age group for participation in higher education attended a university or college, by 2011 the enrolment rate for this age group had risen to 24% (World Bank, 2014, p. 50). There are now more that 2.2 million higher education students in Vietnam, attending one or other of 442 public and private universities and colleges (Bộ Giáo dục và Đào tạo [MOET], 2016). There are almost 94,000 members of academic staff across the sector.

The period of most rapid expansion of the higher education system was from 2001 to 2011, when the annual rate of enrolment growth averaged 9% (Bộ Giáo dục và Đào tạo [MOET], 2016). This growth was made possible by the establishment of over 200 new universities and colleges during the ten-year period (Master Plan for Vietnam’s Higher Education System, 2012, p. 17). Since 2011, there has been a small downturn in enrolment numbers, with fewer school leavers proceeding directly to higher education (Vnexpress, 2016/08/27), principally because of the increasing cost of participation in higher education, but also because of a decline in the full-time employment rate of recent graduates (Viện Khoa học Lao động và Xã hội, 2016). Over time, however, a recovery in the growth rate is inevitable. Confucian tradition, as London (2011, p. 7) has observed, imposes a strong obligation on Vietnamese families to support their
children to obtain educational qualifications. The impact of this tradition on higher education participation rates in Vietnam is likely to be the same as has been experienced in other Confucian-heritage countries, including Japan, South Korea and Singapore, which now have very high participation rates in higher education.

The Government of Vietnam wants to develop and strengthen the national higher education system, which it understands to be foundational to the advancement of Vietnam’s national goals of industrialisation, modernisation and international integration. Higher education reform continues to be a priority for the Communist Party of Vietnam (hereafter referred to as the Party). Important recent policy and legislative developments include a new Higher Education Law (Law No. 8/2012/QH13, dated June 18, 2012, Quốc hội [National Assembly], 2012), a new strategic development plan for the education system at large (Decision No. 711/2012.QĐ-TTg, dated June 13, 2012, Thủ tướng Chính phủ [Prime Minister], 2012b), a revised higher education planning framework for the period up to 2020 (Bộ Giáo dục và Đào tạo [MOET], 2016; and Decision No. 37/2013/QĐ-TTg, dated June 26, 2013, Thủ tướng Chính phủ [Prime Minister], 2013), and a Party resolution concerning the need for the education system to become more responsive to the socio-economic development challenges to the nation (Resolution No. 29, NQ/TW, dated November 4, 2013, Ban Chấp hành Trung ương [PCEC], 2013). In combination, these developments point to a need for Vietnam to have a more socially accountable, more research-oriented, more internationally networked and more internationally competitive higher education system – and one that is also better able to respond promptly to changing labour market needs.

Achieving higher education reform in Vietnam is not, however, a straightforward matter. The higher education system is constrained by the limited investment capacity of the Vietnamese economy. In 2015, the level of GDP per capita for Vietnam was only US$2,111, compared with a global average of US$9,995 (World Bank, 2016). The system is also constrained by centralised forms of Government control and by bureaucratic forms of decision-making (Dao Van Khanh & Hayden, 2015; Hayden & Lam Quang Thiep, 2010). A further constraint is the limited research capacity of most Vietnamese universities (Nguyen Thi Lan Huong, 2013), with only 15% of all academic staff members in Vietnam holding a doctoral qualification (Bộ Giáo dục và Đào tạo [MOET], 2016).
Academic employment in Vietnam is highly regulated. Relevant legislative instruments include the Higher Education Law of 2012 (Law No. 8/2012/QH13, dated June 18, 2012, Quốc hội [National Assembly], 2012), the Education Law of 2005 (Law No. 38/2005/QH11, dated June 14, 2005, Quốc hội [National Assembly], 2005), and the Science and Technology Law of 2013 (Law No. 29/2013/QH13 dated June 18, 2013, Quốc hội [National Assembly], 2013). There are, in addition, multiple ministerial decisions, regulations and circulars that apply to the employment of academic staff members. One example is the Ministry of Education and Training’s (hereafter referred to as MOET) regulation on the working conditions for higher education institution teaching and research staff (issued pursuant to Decision No. 64/2008/QĐ-BGDĐT, dated November 28, 2008, Bộ Giáo dục và Đào tạo [MOET], 2008), which prescribes how much time academic staff members should devote to teaching, research and community engagement. It directs, for example, that lecturers at public higher education institutions should devote approximately one-third of their working time to ‘scientific research’. In practice, though, this requirement is not properly enforced.

Over recent years, the Government has expressed a determination to develop a tier of public universities that will become internationally competitive in terms of their teaching and research capabilities. It has also determined that a few of these universities should attain ‘world-class’ recognition by 2020. There are currently 19 public universities that have been officially designated as the leading, or ‘key’, universities.¹ These institutions, which are expected to provide national leadership in teaching and in research, account for more than one-quarter of all higher education enrolments in Vietnam. They include the two large national universities, one in Hanoi and the other in Ho Chi Minh City. Less than one-half of these 19 universities are yet ‘research-oriented’, however.

These recent developments are influencing academic culture in Vietnam, but estimating the extent of their impact is difficult because there is little available in the way of relevant data. Works published by Hayden and Lam Quang Thiep (2010), G. Harman and Le Thi Bich Ngoc (2010), and K. Harman and Nguyen Thi Bich Ngoc (2010), have provided some insights regarding the conditions of academic employment in Vietnam, but these accounts are becoming dated. There is, therefore, a need to know more about the contemporary state of academic culture in Vietnam, and there is also a need to know

¹ See http://toplist.vn/top-list/truong-dai-hoc-trong-diem-quoc-gia-4203.htm
more about the kinds of conditions that may be impacting on the formation of academic staff members, referred to generically in this thesis as lecturers, in Vietnam.

It is with these needs in mind that the present investigation was instigated. Guided by a conceptual understanding of the nature of both academic culture and academic identity, the investigation is intended to fill a gap in the higher education literature concerning the professional life of Vietnamese academics. Most importantly, it seeks to provide the basis for a better understanding of what academics in Vietnam understand to be their roles and responsibilities, and what it is they regard to be their professional aspirations.

1.2 Conceptual Perspective


Austin (1992, pp. 1614-1623) reports that Snow’s (1959) anecdotal speculation about the distinction between the humanistic (or inductive) and the scientific (or deductive) cultures of the academy prompted an initial interest in the topic of academic culture. Gaff and Wilson (1971) then investigated differences between the values, lifestyles and approaches to teaching practice of academic staff members working across a range of discipline areas. Lohdahl and Gordon (1972) independently examined how academic disciplines varied in their adherence to a single research paradigm. They found that scholars in physics and chemistry did generally adhere to the same research paradigm, and so were referred to as ‘hard’, whereas scholars in sociology and political science employed a variety of research paradigms, and so were referred to as ‘soft’.

Biglan (1973a, 1973b) made an even more significant contribution to the literature by showing how disciplines differed from one another in terms of their epistemology, social connectedness and research productivity. Drawing upon Lohdahl and Gordon (1972), he identified the natural and applied science to be ‘hard’, and the humanities
and applied social sciences to be ‘soft’. He also distinguished between disciplinary areas that are ‘pure’, in the sense of being focused on theory, and disciplinary areas that are ‘applied’, in the sense of being focused on practice.

The next important development in the literature on academic culture was the publication of Clark’s (1983) book, *The higher education system: Academic organization in cross-national perspective*. Clark made a significant contribution to a conceptual understanding of the nature of academic culture. He described it in the following terms:

> All major social entities have a symbolic side, a culture as well as a social structure, some shared accounts and common beliefs that help define for participants who they are, what they are doing, why they are doing it, and whether they have been blessed or cursed. (Clark, 1983, p. 72)

Clark (1983, p. 74) referred to academic culture as being underpinned by the “self-defining ideas and beliefs” of academics, which he argued were embedded in four social entities: the discipline, the enterprise (or organisation), the profession and the national higher education system.

Disciplinary culture, he argued, derived from the “knowledge traditions – categories of thought – and related codes of conduct” of the disciplines (Clark, 1983, p. 76). Enterprise (or organisational) culture derived from the ideas and beliefs associated with belonging to an enterprise such as a higher education institution: “Those who have worked together for a decade will develop some shared feelings about ‘their’ organization, a set of beliefs that help to define their place in life and gives meaning to the fact that they have contributed so much time and effort to a particular institution” (Clark, 1983, p. 83). Professional culture derived from acceptance by the members of a profession of various shared doctrines that gave them a sense of being distinctive. The academic profession, for example, was said to portray an “altruistic commitment” to the creation of knowledge and the transmission of cultural heritage (Clark, 1983, p. 91), thereby providing the profession with a rationale for seeking to enjoy the privilege of academic freedom. Finally, systemic culture derived from academic beliefs that “have their principal source and attachment in the national system as a whole” (Clark, 1983, p. 95), such as beliefs concerning how accessible higher education should be to the
community at large, how specialised it should be, with which occupations it should connect, and how empirically oriented it should be.

Clark argued that the academic department was the site at which these various “self-defining ideas and beliefs” converged. The academic department, the stated, was “simultaneously a part of the discipline and a part of the enterprise, melding the two and drawing strength from the combination” (Clark, 1983, p. 32). It was, however, “the discipline rather than the institution [which] tends to become the dominant force in the working lives of academics” (Clark, 1983, p. 30). The discipline, he said, was the generator of “a steady flow of symbolic materials” from which came “self-identities that may be more powerful than those of mate, lover, and family protector, or those that come from community, political party, church, and fraternal order” (Clark, 1983, p. 80).

The academic disciplines were, he claimed, the “cultural houses”, entered by recruits to the academic profession, “there to share beliefs about theory, methodology, techniques, and problems” (Clark, 1983, p. 76).

This view of academic culture was somewhat at odds with claims made in his earlier works (Clark, 1970, 1972), in which he accentuated the importance of the enterprise in shaping of academic culture. In a series of institutional case studies conducted in the early 1970s in the United States, he had sought to identify the pre-conditions for organisational unity and effectiveness in the context of a higher education institution. It was in this context that he developed the notion of an ‘organisational saga’, that is, a narrative frequently repeated and widely shared about an organisation’s survival and the development of its institutional character.

During the 1980s, an interest in the organisational culture of higher education institutions blossomed. Scholars contributing to this literature searched for the distinctive attributes of highly-effective higher education institutions (see, for example, Peterson, Cameron, Mets, Jones, & Ettington, 1986; Ruscio, 1987; Kuh & Whitt, 1988). Factors reported to be important were reported to include:

- mission and purpose, its size, complexity, age, and location, the way in which authority is conceived and structured, the organization of work (especially teaching and inquiry), the curricular structure and academic standards, student and faculty characteristics, and the physical environment. (Austin, 1992, p. 1617)
Especially important was a series of institutional case studies conducted by Chaffee and Tierney (1988). They mapped the organisational cultures of seven different higher education institutions in the United States, looking for those aspects of organisational culture that resulted in a culture of institutional effectiveness and social cohesion.

Based on their findings, Tierney (1988) subsequently proposed an analytical framework for investigating organisational culture in the context of higher education. The elements in his framework included: the organisation’s environment, its mission, its socialisation processes, its information management processes, its strategy, and its leadership.

Following a separate line of enquiry, and drawing more upon data collected in the United Kingdom, Becher (1981, 1984, 1987a, 1987b, 1989) explored the disciplinary dimension of academic culture. His work culminated in the publication in 1989 of Academic tribes and territories: Intellectual enquiry and the cultures of disciplines, in which the disciplines were not only epistemological entities but that they were also social and cultural in nature. He identified various distinctive social and behavioural characteristics of scholars working in specific disciplines that were, in his view, inextricably linked to the epistemological characteristics of their chosen disciplinary areas. In other words, each discipline could be seen to have its own tribe and its own epistemological territory (see especially Becher & Trowler, 2001, pp. 45-51).

Building upon these ideas, and those of Clark and Tierney, Henkel, in Academic identities and policy change in higher education, published in 2000, argued the need to recognise the “central symbolic and instrumental significance both in the lives of individual academics and in the workings of the academic profession” of academic identity (Henkel, 2002, p. 137). She conceptualized academic identity as comprising an amalgam of values, interests, beliefs, self-images and reputations that were, in her view, both individualistic, in that they were shaped by the personal pursuit of academic accomplishments, and socially embedded, in that they were realised in the organisational and disciplinary settings of the academic workplace. Academic identity, she claimed, grew out of the “interaction between individual histories and choices and the workings of key communities and structures: disciplines, departments and institutions” (Henkel & Vabo, 2006, p. 128).

Henkel subsequently mapped various forces permeating the culture of Western higher education systems that, in her view, could fragment a sense of academic identity within
the academy (Henkel, 2005b, pp. 152-153). She observed, for example, that academic identity and academic autonomy were necessarily linked (Henkel, 2005b, p. 149), because academic identity was said to rely heavily upon academics being able to pursue freely and independently the development of knowledge within a discipline. She also commented on a widely-observed tendency in Western economies for knowledge to be regarded as a saleable commodity, with universities experiencing increased pressure to act entrepreneurially when determining their research priorities. This pressure, she argued (Henkel, 2005b, p. 152), could potentially undermine academic identity, as traditionally understood and experienced.

These matters are of enormous global importance to the future integrity of higher education systems. To date, however, they have not been examined much in an Asian setting, and not at all, it seems, in the context of higher education in Vietnam. Their exploration in a Vietnamese setting is, therefore, timely and appropriate. They relate to the quality of academic life in Vietnam and are of immense importance to the future development of the academy as an important cultural community in Vietnam. Of course, it must be assumed at this point that the frames of reference referred to above, all of which derive from research in the context of well-developed higher education systems in the West, would be relevant to a developing higher education system in Southeast Asia.

1.3 The Research Questions

To provide the basis for an empirical investigation of the nature and importance of both academic culture and the formation of academic identity in Vietnam’s higher education system, three research questions were developed. These three questions have been utilised to guide an interpretive exploration of the role played by academic culture and identity in the lives of a selected group of participants at four leading, research-oriented universities in Vietnam.

The first question concerns the organisational culture experienced by the participants in the investigation. The research question is: what are the experiences of the participants concerning the organisational culture in their workplaces?

Tierney’s (1988) conceptualisation of organisational culture underpins this question and his identification of six elements for analysing an organisational culture provides a
framework for exploring the experiences and perspectives reported by the participants. Details of Tierney’s perspective are explained in Chapter 3, and the findings related to this first research question are reported in Chapter 5.

The second research question concerns how disciplinary cultures were being experienced by the participants. The research question is: what are the experiences of the participants concerning the disciplinary cultures in their workplaces?

Becher’s (1989) conceptualisation of disciplinary cultures underpins this second question. Becher identified a range of social and behavioural characteristics that vary between a broad range of disciplinary groupings, and that provide a reference point for academic staff members seeking to belong to discipline-based scholarly networks that are both local and global in their distribution and influence. Details of Becher’s perspective are explained in Chapter 3, and the findings relating to this second research question are reported in Chapters 6 and 7.

The third research question concerns experiences of the development of academic identity, as reported by the participants. As noted earlier, Henkel referred to academic identity as involving the “values, interests and beliefs, self-images and reputations” of academics (Henkel & Vabo, 2006, p. 128). Clark (1983, p. 74) refers to more generally as the “self-defining ideas and beliefs” of academics.

The third research question is: what are the experiences and perceptions of the participants concerning their sense of academic identity in the context of their individual workplaces? Details of Henkel’s perspective are explained in Chapter 3, and the findings relating to this third research question are reported in Chapter 8.

These three research questions called for a qualitative research approach involving ethnographic interviews with the participants, supplemented by on-site observations and the collection of documentary materials. Details of the methodological approach of the investigation are now briefly sketched, with much more detail provided in Chapter 4.

1.4 The Research Methodology

This investigation employs Lincoln and Guba’s (1985) constructivist methodology of *Naturalistic Inquiry*. Patton (2002, p. 40) describes this methodology as suitable for the investigation of “real-world situations as they occur naturally”. In *Naturalistic Inquiry,*
no attempt may be made to manipulate or control the real-world setting of the participants, and the investigative methods and techniques must remain discovery-oriented throughout.

Naturalistic Inquiry is well suited to the present investigation because the phenomena for investigation are socio-semiotic in nature, that is, they concern social practices that embody significant meaning for individuals interacting with one another within a specific set of social and cultural circumstances. As practised in anthropological research, Naturalistic Inquiry typically requires the use of unobtrusive observation, requiring the investigator to adopt the role of non-intervening onlooker with respect to a specific culture. As practised more widely in the social sciences, Naturalistic Inquiry usually also requires the conduct of open-ended interviews and the examination of relevant artefacts, including documents relating to the ways in which social behaviour is regulated.

In the present investigation, the main data-collecting method is ethnographic interviewing, but there is also extensive use made of unobtrusive observation and of documentary analysis. According to Spradley (1979, p. 5), ethnographic interviewing seeks to provide a rich and detailed understanding of “the meaning of actions and events to the people we seek to understand” (p. 5). This kind of interviewing is consistent with an epistemological constructivist stance. Schwandt (1997, p. 20) explains that “constructivists hold that knowledge of the world is not a simple reflection of what there is, but a set of social artefacts; a reflection of what we make of what is there.” Constructivists appreciate that there will be multiple realities in how individuals perceive complex social phenomena, and so obtaining a nuanced understanding of these realities requires an interpretive theoretical perspective, and one that, according to Crotty (1998, p. 67), provides “culturally derived and historically situated interpretations of the social life-world” of the individuals concerned.

The methodology of Naturalistic Inquiry has distinctive design, data-collecting and data-analysis principles for ensuring rigour. These principles will be more fully explained in Chapter 4. For now, it is important to explain that an investigation adopting Naturalistic Inquiry must be conducted in the natural setting of the social phenomena under investigation, and the exploration must be emergent in nature, that is, the investigator must be able to adjust the design of the investigation in response to findings
generated as the investigation proceeds. The sampling of participants must be purposive, that is, for the purposes of finding “information rich” and “illuminative” cases for examination (Patton, 2002, p. 40).

In terms of data collection and fieldwork methods and techniques, the focus must be on building a “rich, detailed, and concrete description” (Patton, 2002, p. 473) of the social phenomena of interest to the enquiry. Because the investigator is also the instrument for collecting and interpreting the data, there is a heavy responsibility for implementing procedures identified by Lincoln and Guba (1985) as being necessary to achieve the trustworthiness of the findings. Uncovering tacit knowledge through inductive logic is also highly valued.

For this investigation, three leading, research-oriented universities in Vietnam’s capital city, Hanoi, were initially selected as site institutions for the collection of data. Within each institution, an academic department was selected to locate participants willing to inform the investigation. These departments were intended to represent the kinds of organisational and disciplinary cultures commonly found in leading, research-oriented universities in Vietnam.

Subsequently, a fourth academic department, also from a leading, research-oriented university, but this time in a regional city in Vietnam, was selected for inclusion in the investigation. This measure was in response to a need identified to broaden the participant profile by having more humanities participants.

From the four academic departments, a total of 30 participants eventually participated fully in the investigation. Data collection took place in three phases between 2014 and 2016, during which time all the participants were interviewed at least twice, and 10 of them were interviewed on three separate occasions. There were also extensive follow-up email discussions with the participants. Chapter 4 provides a full account of the research methodology for the investigation, together with details about how the investigation was implemented and an explanation of how the trustworthiness criteria were implemented.

Consistent with Lincoln and Guba’s (1985) *Naturalistic Inquiry* methodology, the investigation was intended to be emancipatory for the participants by engaging them in the process of developing an understanding of their own academic culture and sense of
The investigation also sought to focus on generating outcomes in the form of meanings and interpretations that would be subject to a final critical appraisal by each of the participants. The technique of ‘member-checking’, whereby the participants were encouraged to review their input to the investigation, and to comment on themes to emerge from the findings, played an important role in contributing to the final conclusions. Member-checking is uncommon in Vietnam, where positivism is the predominant research paradigm.

The ‘emic’ nature (Patton, 2002, p. 84) of the present investigation is important to note at the outset. The researcher conducting the investigation is a member of academic staff from one of the site institutions at which the interviews were conducted. She is, therefore, writing about academic culture in Vietnam from the point of view of an insider. Qualitative research involving an ethnographic approach to data collection typically requires the investigator to become an insider to the culture under investigation. An investigator who is already an insider has a strong natural advantage in being able not only to observe what is happening but also to know what it feels like to be part of the culture and to make educated interpretations about why certain perceptions exist. As Patton (2002, p. 268) advises, though, “The challenge [for the emic investigator] is to combine participation and observation so as to become capable of understanding the setting as an insider while describing it to and for outsiders.” Therefore, the challenge is to use the data chapters to give voice to the participants’ views and experiences, while not influencing the nature of the issues, claims and concerns being reported.

1.5 Scope and Limitations of the Investigation

This investigation is confined in scope to an exploration of the topics of academic culture and academic identity, as experienced by the participants selected from four academic departments at four research-oriented universities in Vietnam. Consistent with the methodology of Naturalistic Inquiry, findings from the investigation relate only to the sample group of participants. Thick, rich descriptions in the reporting of the data may resonate with a wider audience, but no attempt is made to generalise from the findings of the investigation to the wider academic community in Vietnam.

The site institutions were selected because they are research-oriented in terms of their mission. They are universities within which an academic culture and a strong sense of
academic identity may well be more evident than would be the case in many other universities and colleges in Vietnam. The participants selected from these site institutions were drawn from academic departments that are widely respected for their academic achievements. The reasons for focusing on the experiences of academic staff members from respected academic departments within research-oriented, and therefore elite, universities in Vietnam are explained comprehensively in Chapter 4.

The methodology of *Naturalistic Inquiry*, while clearly well suited to the nature of the investigation undertaken, has certain limitations. First, it is a methodology in which the risk of research findings becoming biased is relatively high if robust methods of trustworthiness in data collection and analysis are not rigorously implemented. To minimise the risk of researcher bias in reporting the findings, certain trustworthiness criteria, as prescribed by Lincoln and Guba (1985, pp. 289-300), had to be strictly applied. Details of these criteria, and of the ways in which they were applied in the present investigation, are reported in Chapter 4. Second, as already reported, *Naturalistic Inquiry* requires an inductive approach to the interpretation of data, which does not allow for deductive generalisations about a population. It follows, then, that judgements made about the broader relevance of the conclusions reached must remain subjective in nature, and may only be appraised for the extent to which they are seen by the reader to be transferable to other similar situations with which the reader is familiar. Third, because of the way in which data-collecting occurs, requiring, for example, ‘prolonged engagement’ by the researcher with each of the participants over time, *Naturalistic Inquiry* is a time-consuming methodology to implement. Data collection must continue until data saturation, and hence data redundancy, is reached, yet the decision not to engage more participants is an especially difficult decision to make, given that including additional participants may possibly throw further light on the matter under investigation. The processes required for analysing qualitative data are also very time-consuming, especially so in this investigation, given that the interviews were conducted in Vietnamese and then finally had to be reported in English.

### 1.6 Organisation of this Report

The investigation is reported in ten chapters, of which this chapter is the first. It has provided an overview of the purpose and rationale, the conceptual framework, the research questions and methodological approach for the investigation. It has also outlined the scope and certain limitations of the investigation.
Chapter 2 reports more fully on the current state of the academy in Vietnam. The importance of this chapter is that it documents the context for the everyday activities of academic staff members in Vietnam. Because of the rapid pace with which the higher education in Vietnam is evolving, attention is given particularly to aspects of the reform process being implemented over recent years.

Chapter 3 presents a review of the literature relating to academic culture and academic identity that is pertinent to the context of the Vietnamese higher education sector. To keep the review focused, most attention is given to the work of selected scholars whose contributions to an understanding of academic culture and academic identity have been most influential internationally.

Chapter 4 presents a detailed account of the research design and methods for the investigation. Attention is given to the implementation of trustworthiness criteria as a basis for ensuring the credibility, dependability, confirmability and transferability of the findings. The operationalisation of these methods and techniques, and their contribution to the reliability and validity of the findings, are explained fully in Chapter 4.

Chapters 5, 6, 7 and 8 report the findings from the investigation. Chapter 5, which concerns the first research question, documents findings about the organisational culture experienced by the participants. Chapters 6 and 7, which concern the second research question, document findings about the disciplinary cultures experienced by the participants in the investigation. Chapter 8 concerns the third research question, documenting findings about academic identity as experienced by the participants against a background of the current state of the higher education system in Vietnam.

Chapter 9 provides a discussion of some broad themes to emerge from the findings reported in Chapters 5 to 8. These themes concern aspects of the findings that relate to matters requiring attention at both the systemic and institutional levels of higher education in Vietnam.

Chapter 10 concludes the investigation. It draws together key themes to emerge from the investigation, and addresses the relevance to academic culture and identity in Vietnam of the conceptual frameworks adopted for the investigation, as well as policy implications arising from the findings, some methodological issues associated with the investigation and possible future lines of enquiry suggested by the investigation.
Chapter 2

THE ACADEMY IN VIETNAM

The previous chapter introduced the investigation, noting the research problem, the conceptual perspective, the research questions, the research methodology, and the scope and limitations of the investigation. This chapter seeks to locate the research problem within the context of the higher education system in Vietnam. The chapter begins with a brief review of the historical development of the system, which is important due to the extent of the present-day influence of legacies from the past. Then, various contemporary issues impacting on the experience of being an academic staff member in Vietnam are discussed from the point of view of their potential impact on the academic culture and on academic identity. Finally, the chapter reports on the physical and regulatory conditions of employment of academic staff members in the large public sector of higher education, which accounts for 87% of all higher education enrolments in Vietnam.

2.1 Development of the System

Higher education has existed in one form or another in Vietnam for most of the past millennium. Confucian academies, first established in the 11th century, served to meet the higher education needs of an elite in society over a period of almost 1,000 years (Bộ Giáo dục và Đào tạo [MOET], 2004; Lê Văn Giang, 2003; Pham Lan Huong & Fry, 2002; Pham Minh Hac, 1995). The influence of these academies began to wane during the 19th century as French colonial authorities exerted their influence more pervasively on the education system and on educational values. During the early 20th century, as the last of the Confucian academies disappeared, the French introduced a system of Collèges. These new institutions provided forms of training considered to be more relevant to the needs of the colonial administration. Access was severely restricted to a very small number of Vietnamese people, making these higher education institutions remarkably elite (Pham Lan Huong & Fry, 2002; Pham Minh Hac, 1995). The higher education system established by the French fell into disarray after the Second World War. It is indicative of its exclusiveness that over the period of its existence there were remarkably few graduates. Even after 1940, when the Collèges were amalgamated to form the Université de l’Indochine, the peak level of enrolment was only 1,200 students, reached in 1943-44 (Lê Văn Giang, 2003, p. 100). At the time, the Université
de l’Indochine served the whole of the French colonial region, including Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos. The estimated population of Vietnam at the time was 12.7 million (Pham Minh Hac, 1995, p. 57).

Following independence from the French in 1954, and the subsequent political division of Vietnam into North and South, North Vietnam adopted a Soviet model of higher education, consistent with the Soviet influence on that part of Vietnam. South Vietnam sought to rebuild the French model, and to augment it, by introducing an American model of higher education. Higher education student numbers were generally higher in the South than in the North: by 1975, for example, there were 150,000 higher education students in the South, compared with only 55,700 in the North (Lê Văn Giang, 2003, p. 198; Pham Minh Hac, 1995, p. 55). In the North, the higher education system comprised a relatively large number of small mono-disciplinary colleges or institutes (estimated to be 51 in 1975) that had been established by various State ministries to meet their graduate training needs. In the South, there were fewer higher education institutions, but they were individually much larger and were more comprehensive in terms of the training programs they provided. In 1975, for example, the cities of Saigon, Hue, Thu Duc and Can Tho each had a relatively large university that offered a wide range of training programs. In addition, there were multiple community colleges spread across the smaller cities in the South. As has been reported by Do Ba Khe (1995, pp. 141-143; see also Le Van Giang, 2003, pp. 196-199), the South also had a flourishing private higher education sector that by 1975 accounted for about one-quarter of all higher education enrolments nationally.

Upon national reunification in 1975, under a Communist Party government dominating from the North, the Soviet model of higher education was quickly rolled out across the country. This model privileged the establishment of vocation-specific higher education colleges and institutes that were intended to be a conduit to graduate employment in one or other of the State ministries (Pham Lan Huong & Fry, 2002; Pham Minh Hac, 1995). Private-sector higher education institutions were abolished on ideological grounds. Responsibility for research was assigned largely to a constellation of discipline-specific research institutes, detached entirely from the higher education system.

By the mid-1980s, Vietnam’s economy ranked among the poorest in the world (Glewwe, 2004, p. 1). The need for economic reform had become urgent. In 1986, the
Party made the momentous decision to abandon Soviet-style centralised economic planning in favour of a regulated market system. An economic reform process, known as *đổi mới*, was approved for implementation. This process, which saw the reintroduction of private ownership in key areas of agriculture and industrial production, had an immediate and positive impact on the economy (Dollar, 2002; Glewwe, 2004; Pingali & Vo Tong Xuan, 1992).

Reform of the higher education system followed. Planning for this reform commenced in the late-1980s. In 1993, a landmark Prime Ministerial decree (Decree No. 90/ND-TTg, dated November 24, 1993, Thủ tướng Chính phủ [Prime Minister], 1993) prescribed a new structure for the system. Shortly thereafter, various measures, which in combination represented a significant departure from the Soviet higher education model, were approved. These included: the establishment of two large national and three relatively large regional universities as multi-disciplinary institutions; the approval of various ‘non-public’ higher education institutions owned by community organisations rather than by the State; and the removal of a guarantee of employment by the State for higher education graduates. A national qualifications framework that followed the American model of four-year degree-level programs for universities and three-year diploma-level programs for colleges was also adopted; and tuition fees were introduced for all higher education programs.

The reform process that began in the early 1990s continues to this day. An account of the process is comprehensively documented by G. Harman, Hayden, and Pham Thanh Nghĩ (2010), and, more recently, by Tran Thi Ly et al. (2014). Drawing upon these works, the following account focuses upon the more important developments over the past two decades that have had considerable impact upon the nature of academic work and culture in Vietnam.

A development of major importance was the approval in 2005 of a Higher Education Reform Agenda 2006-2020 (HERA) (Resolution No. 14/2005/NQ-CP, dated November 2, 2005, Chính phủ [Government], 2005b). HERA was significant in indicating a future direction for the higher education system. It was also ambitious in scope, signalling that by 2020 the following reforms should be achieved: removal of the system of line-management of public higher education institutions by different ministries and State instrumentalities; a doubling of the rate of participation by young people in higher
education; the creation of a ‘research-oriented’ tier of universities catering for no more than 20% of all higher education students; an improvement in the lecturer-to-student ratio in higher education institutions; a trebling of the proportion of academic staff members with a doctoral qualification, the target being 35% by 2020; a sharp increase in the importance of research and development activities in higher education as a source of revenue for public higher education institutions; an improvement in the extent of internationalisation of the higher education curriculum; and an increase in the level of international integration of the system in terms of course offerings and academic standards.

Another important development was a change in policy regarding the acceptability of private higher education. Given Vietnam’s socialist political outlook, the decision in the early 1990s to permit the existence of ‘non-public’ higher education institutions represented a major departure from previous policy and practice. After 1993, the ‘non-public’ sector expanded rapidly in size, to such an extent that by 1999 it accounted for 13% of all higher education enrolments (Bộ Giáo dục và Đào tạo [MOET], 2016).

Concerns about profiteering led to a decision in 2000 to constrain its further growth. Then in 2005 and 2006, a new policy opened the door for a further rapid expansion of the private sector. The new policy approved ‘fully-private’ higher education institutions, which are institutions owned by shareholders and managed for the purpose of making a profit (Decree No.75/2006/ND-CP, dated August 2, 2006, Chính phủ [Government], 2006; and Decision No. 14/2005/QĐ-TTg, dated January 17, 2005, Thủ tướng Chính phủ [Prime Minister], 2005). However, the nature and extent of profit making considered acceptable continued to be a politically sensitive matter. It was not until 2013 (Decree 141/2013/ND-CP, dated October 24, 2013, Chính phủ [Government], 2013) that a mechanism for distinguishing between ‘for-profit’ and ‘not-for-profit’ private higher education institutions was finally established. Institutions considered to be ‘not-for-profit’ were defined as those for which shareholders received either no dividend from their shareholdings or, at most, a dividend that fell below the interest rate paid on government bonds.

The Government indicated that it would provide ‘not-for-profit’ institutions with access to certain incentives for development, but the nature of these incentives was and continues to be unspecified. While the policy change announced in 2005 and 2006
resulted in a large increase in the number of private higher education institutions, the rate of student participation in this sector has not increased as rapidly; indeed enrolments in the sector over recent years appear to have plateaued at about 13% of all higher education students (Bộ Giáo dục và Đào tạo [MOET], 2016). This enrolment level falls well below the target set by HERA (Resolution No. 14/2005/NQ-CP, dated November 2, 2005, Chính phủ [Government], 2005b), which had proposed that 40% of all higher education students should be enrolled in private-sector institutions by 2020.

Yet another important recent development has been the introduction of a new Higher Education Law (Law No. 8/2012/QH13, dated June 18, 2012, Quốc hội [National Assembly], 2012). The significance of this Law is that the higher education sector became recognised as having characteristics and circumstances that set it apart from the primary and secondary school sectors. Prior to that time, it had been grouped under the Education Law of 2005. The Higher Education Law also brought together in one legal document much of the regulatory detail that had been approved incrementally by the Government over the previous two decades. The new legislation prescribed that there should be a multi-tiered higher education system, consisting of research-oriented, application-oriented and profession-oriented higher education institutions. It also reinforced the need for each public higher education institution to have its own institutional governing council, capable of assuming responsibility on behalf of the State for the institutional use of fee income and public funds. These initiatives mirrored those in developed higher education sectors globally.

2.2 Contemporary Issues

Various recent accounts of the higher education system in Vietnam (see, for example, Dao Van Khanh & Hayden, 2015; G. Harman et al., 2010; Pham Thi Ly & Briller, 2015; Tran Thi Ly et al., 2014) provide a rich source of information about and analysis of the contemporary issues facing the system. The account provided here identifies only those issues that are important contextually to an understanding of the experience of being an academic in Vietnam.

2.2.1 Governance

Governance continues to be a problematic issue for the higher education system in Vietnam. Under the Soviet model, the system was centrally planned and controlled by the State, with individual ministries and other State instrumentalities permitted to
establish their own higher education institutions. These public institutions were regarded primarily as training arms of their parent ministry or instrumentality, and so in practice they were given very little institutional autonomy. Over recent years, however, and as evidenced in the Higher Education Law of 2012, public higher education institutions have been given more independence in decision-making about matters related to student recruitment, staff management, budget allocations and the management of international collaborations (see Articles 28, 29 and 32 of the Higher Education Law of 2012). The process of decision-making tends, though, to remain firmly under the influence of the relevant line-management authority. The Government has, however, begun to press rectors more firmly to establish their own institutional governing council, in anticipation of a future in which individual institutions will need to carry more responsibility, on behalf of the State, for the exercise of institutional governance functions, as occurs worldwide. Curiously, rectors have not been enthusiastic about embracing this offer of more institutional autonomy. They appear not to be convinced that such institutional governing councils will ever be permitted to exercise a significant level of autonomy, and they have concerns about being made subservient to an institutional governing council with views that might be at odds with their views or with the views of the relevant line-managing ministry or the Party (Master Plan for Vietnam’s Higher Education System, 2012, pp. 78-79). Because of this resistance, relatively few institutional governing councils have been established.

At the same time, rectors of public universities have aired concerns that they do not themselves have sufficient autonomy to manage their institutions (Master Plan for Vietnam’s Higher Education System, 2012, pp. 78-79). They point, for example, to the need for their institutions to comply with curriculum frameworks issued by MOET, and to the fact that they have little discretion in matters relating to the payment of salaries and allowances. They also point to what they regard as excessive regulatory complexities. By way of example, MOET has one set of regulations regarding academic workloads and responsibilities (Circular No. 47/2014/TT-BGDDT dated November 31, 2014, on the regulations of the work norms by university lecturers, Bộ Giáo dục và Đào tạo [MOET], 2014). At the same time, the Government has a different set of regulations regarding academic salaries and academic promotions (Decree No. 204/2004/NĐ-CP, dated December 14th, 2004, on salary scale of government's officials, Chính phủ [Government], 2004). Further, it is the Prime Minister who independently sets the standards for the award of professorial titles (Decision No. 20/2012/QĐ-TTg dated
April 27, 2012, on standards for appointment and abolition of academic titles of associate and full professor, Thủ tướng Chính phủ [Prime Minister], 2012a). There is, in other words, a remarkable lack of system-wide coherence.

### 2.2.2 Funding

Vietnam is a low-income country with severe capacity constraints on its ability to fund the public higher education system. Expenditure from all sources on higher education has, however, been increasing significantly since the early 2000s. In 2001, expenditure on higher education represented 0.36% of GDP. By 2012, the proportion had increased to 1.0% of GDP (Ban Cách hành Trung ương [PCEC], 2012). Expenditure on science and technology has also been increasing. In 2013, it accounted for 0.87% of GDP. By 2020, the level of spending on science and technology is expected to reach 2% of GDP (Bộ Khoa học và Công nghệ [MOST], 2015).

Public higher education institutions in Vietnam receive a little over one-half of their revenue from the State. The remainder comes mainly from student tuition fees. Those institutions with better-developed research and development centres have the capacity to receive additional revenue from the sale of outsourced research and consultancy services. Private higher education institutions, in contrast, rely almost entirely on student tuition fees, because they receive no direct funding support from the State. The tuition fees these private institutions charge may be two, three or even, in a few cases, ten times higher than those charged by public higher education institutions.

Public higher education institutions may set their own tuition fee levels, but ceiling fee levels are set by the State. In general, the tuition fees charged by public higher education institutions are not widely considered in Vietnam to be excessive in terms of their affordability, but, as Nguyen Ngoc Anh (2012, p. 269) has shown, the cost of supporting a full-time student at a public higher education institution in Vietnam is equivalent to about 40% of an average household income.

The funding mechanism for public higher education institutions is slowly evolving, with more encouragement presently given to individual institutions to manage their own budgets (Article 66 of the Higher Education Law of 2012). In the past, public funds were allocated for specific purposes and for specified periods of time. Public universities and colleges may now make their own spending decisions, though within a
framework of ‘norms’ established by the State. Public higher education institutions are also currently permitted to set tuition fee levels for the delivery of ‘non-regular’ training programs. These are part-time training programs undertaken by students who would not generally have qualified for admission to a full-time training program. However, because public higher education institutions can earn additional income from offering such programs, and may then exercise discretion in terms of how they spend the income earned, there has been a strong incentive for them to increase the number of ‘non-regular’ admissions. This incentive has been identified as potentially diversionary for the country’s leading universities, which are also the universities best able to attract large numbers of ‘non-regular’ enrolments (Lam Quang Thiep, 2012, p. 265). Though ‘non-regular’ enrolments currently account for only 15% of all higher education enrolments (Bộ Giáo dục và Đào tạo [MOET], 2016), there is a concentration of these kinds of enrolments at Vietnam’s leading universities, which are also expected to be ‘research-oriented’. Conflicted interests thus exist for the more research-oriented universities.

Research funding is determined mainly by the Ministry of Science and Technology (hereafter referred to as MOST), which channels funds to ministries and provincial governments responsible for universities. MOST also funds public research institutes.

2.2.3 Research and Research Training

Vietnam’s research performance is generally viewed as being poor by international standards. Bibliometric indicators, using the Scopus database, show how the gap in publishing performance between Vietnam and two of its benchmark neighbouring ASEAN member states, Thailand and Malaysia, has been widening since 2001 (Scimago, 2016). Vietnam has been shown to produce a relatively small number of peer-reviewed international publications per one million of population (Pham Duy Hien, 2010, p. 617). Contributing to this situation is the fact that there are many PhD-qualified academic staff members who do not publish at an international standard. In 2014, for example, though there were about 14,300 PhD-qualified academic staff members in Vietnam, yet only 3,955 peer-reviewed publications were recorded in that year (see Scimago, 2016). This problem is especially pronounced in the humanities and social sciences. The Scimago data set shows that, over the twenty years from 1996 to 2015, only 345 of the 29,238 peer-reviewed publications from Vietnam were from scholars working in the humanities and social sciences fields.
The implications of weak research performance are widely evident. Scimago ranks only four institutions in Vietnam (VNU-Hanoi, VNU-HCMC, Hanoi University of Technology, Vietnam Academy of Sciences and Technologies) as being worthy producers of innovative knowledge that has a technological impact, compared with 14 universities in Thailand that are recognised for these attributes (Scimago, 2016). Vietnam also scores poorly when compared with Thailand and Malaysia as a knowledge-based economy. Vietnam’s performance in 2012-13 on the World Economic Forum’s *Global Competitiveness Index*, and its performance on 2012 on the World Bank’s *Knowledge Economy Index*, were considerably lower than the performance levels achieved by both Thailand and Malaysia (Hayden, 2013, p. 166).

Various constraints limiting Vietnam’s research performance have been identified. One is the low proportion of academic staff members holding a doctoral qualification, which in 2016 was only 15% (Bộ Giáo dục và Đào tạo [MOET], 2016). Another restriction concerns the overall national level of investment in research and development, which has been modest. A most considerable constraint is that the physical conditions for research at most universities are sadly lacking, particularly in terms of the paucity of well-equipped laboratories, library facilities, computing infrastructure and internet access. The National Fund for Science and Technology Development (NAFOSTED), which became operational in 2008, now funds scientific and technological projects that have been rigorously assessed for their merit using peer review procedures. NAFOSTED also plays a leading role in contributing to improvements in research infrastructure. It remains the case, though, than less than 5% of the national research budget is allocated to NAFOSTED (obtained from Bộ Khoa học và Công nghệ [MOST], 2015, p. 84).

The relative weakness of research performance in the humanities and social sciences warrants special mention. Research funding agencies in Vietnam demonstrably favour research in science and technologies (see, Bộ Khoa học và Công nghệ [MOST], 2015, p. 88). NAFOSTED, for example, gives weight to international publications, which tends to disadvantage researchers in the humanities and social sciences whose research topics are more likely to focus on matters of national or even local interest. Further, the primary research outputs in the humanities and social sciences continue to be books and extended reports written in Vietnamese, which means that they do not achieve international impact. It is noteworthy that the nature of global academic competition has
increased enormously in the humanities and social science disciplines, as has been shown by Gibbons et al. (1994, pp. 90-96), Delanty (2001, pp. 116-120), and Slaughter and Leslie (1997, pp. 23, 117, 118, 197, 211). In developed higher education systems, the need to mark out intellectual territory more speedily in these fields has led to the publication of journal articles overtaking the publication of books, which simply become out-dated by the time they reach print. Vietnamese scholars in the humanities and social sciences are disadvantaged technologically in these terms. An additional consideration is that research methodology in the social sciences in Vietnam tends to be ideologically limited in scope, restricted mainly to a positivist paradigm, which is consistent with Marxist dialectical materialism (Bùi Ngọc Hoàn, 2014/01/10; Thanh Niên Newspaper, 2016/04/25, 2016/04/27). The lack of research skills in the humanities and social sciences in terms of the application of inductive logic and post-positivist research methodologies is deeply concerning.

In general, low enrolment levels in postgraduate education are widely seen to be a significant factor contributing to the low proportion of PhD-qualified members of academic staff in Vietnamese universities. Added to this is their low level of research productivity overall, but especially in the humanities and social sciences. The quality of postgraduate training in Vietnam is a further source of concern. G. Harman and Le Thị Bích Ngọc (2010, p. 100) identified various weaknesses in postgraduate education, including an overall lack of university-based research, a lack of well-developed linkages between university research and industry, and an imbalance in postgraduate enrolments across the range of academic disciplines, with a higher level of enrolment in the social sciences and humanities, and a lower level of enrolment in the natural sciences and technologies.

Since 2005, the Government of Vietnam has invested heavily in the provision of opportunities to obtain a PhD, domestically or from abroad. Recently, the Government has funded 37 ‘advanced programs’ across 23 universities, involving accredited international partners. Advanced programs are intended to produce greater research and research training capacity (Bộ Giáo dục và Đào tạo [MOET], 2015). Additionally, there are 142 designated ‘high-quality’ undergraduate programs available mainly at the leading universities. These programs are intended eventually to increase the number of postgraduate enrolments at the ‘key’ universities. From these initiatives, the proportion of academic staff members holding a doctoral qualification has recently begun to
improve – in 2012, it was 11%, and by 2015 it had reached 15% (Bộ Giáo dục và Đào tạo [MOET], 2016).

An enduring legacy of the Soviet period of influence on higher education is the continuing separation between the higher education system and the national system of research institutes. In 2011, there were over 1,600 research institutes of varying kinds operating in Vietnam (Ban Chấp hành Trung ương [PCEC], 2012). Of these, only 55 were recognised by the Ministry of Education and Training as being eligible to provide PhD training (Bộ Giáo dục và Đào tạo [MOET], 2012a). The organization of the system of research institutes is complex, and their distribution scattered. Some, such as the Vietnam Academy of Science and Technology (VAST) and the Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences (VASS), are quite large, but most are small and mono-disciplinary. As provided for under Decree No. 115/2005/ND-CP, dated September 5, 2005 (Chính phủ [Government], 2005a) and Decree No. 80/2007/ND-CP, dated May 19, 2007 (Chính phủ [Government], 2007), the three types of research institute are: first, those which focus on basic research and policy development for the State; second, those which are largely self-funded but which also receive some State support for research, training and the provision of services; and, third, those which are entirely self-funded and function like any business entity. Links between research institutes and universities tend seldom to be formal in nature, and the better-established research institutes are widely considered to be better able than universities to offer PhD training programs because they have superior research facilities. This disconnection is problematic for the advancement of Vietnam’s university-sector research aspirations.

2.2.4 Academic Standards

The importance of quality assurance is gaining momentum within the public higher education sector in Vietnam. Many, if not most, public higher education institutions now have established centres, known as Centres for Quality Assurance, to take responsibility for monitoring and evaluation of academic standards and assessment practices within their institutions. At the national level, a process for appraising the quality of individual higher education institutions is steadily being implemented (Bộ Giáo dục và Đào tạo [MOET], 2012b, 2015), though this process has not yet reached a point at which the viability of a public university or college would be compromised if it failed to meet the required quality standards.
The General Council of Education Testing and Quality Accreditation within the Ministry of Education and Training is the governmental agency responsible for implementing the national quality assurance framework. This Council was established in 2003. Its responsibility initially was to establish a quality assurance process across the higher education system. More recently, as documented in the Higher Education Law of 2012, its responsibilities have been made more explicit.

The quality assurance process initially requires the completion of an institutional self-assessment report. Then there is an external review and accreditation process. There are 10 quality standards and 61 quality criteria that have been identified by the Ministry of Education and Training as having to be met by individual higher education institutions (Bộ Giáo dục và Đào tạo [MOET], 2007). For the external review process, two accreditation centres were established in 2013, one at each of the two national universities, and, in 2015, two more centres were established, one at Da Nang University and one belonging to the Association of Vietnamese Non-public Universities and Colleges.

The self-evaluation reports appear to have positive effects, as Nguyen Kim Dung, Oliver, and Priddy (2009) have observed, but there are also some weaknesses. The 10 quality standards issued by the Ministry of Education and Training are, for example, strongly focused on inputs and ongoing processes rather than on outputs and outcomes (Nguyen Kim Dung et al., 2009, p. 130). Moreover, the quality assurance process focuses exclusively on meeting minimum standards, with little room provided for assessing individual institutions on a ‘fitness for purpose’ basis. The process is also constrained by limitations to the availability of quality-related data on key indicators, particularly globally acknowledged standards concerning students’ experiences of their courses, graduate employment outcomes, research higher degree completions, and details of research performance and impact.

2.2.5 Graduate Unemployment

Graduate unemployment has recently emerged as an issue of significance for the higher education system in Vietnam. According to the World Bank (World Bank, 2014, p. 27), a slowdown in the rate of economic growth in 2013 and 2014 has triggered the problem, and a steep increase in the number of recent graduates searching for employment has added to the slowdown’s extent and impact. Between 2013 and 2016, the number of
university graduates who were unemployed increased significantly from 72,000 to 115,400, with many redundancies declared in the business administration, banking, finance and accounting professions, as reported by Institute of Labour Sciences and Social Affairs (ILSSA) (Viện Khoa học Lao động và Xã hội, 2016). Indeed, in one survey conducted by the Institute of Manpower Banking & Finance, as many as one-half of the more than 30,000 university graduates in banking could not find employment between 2012 and 2013 (Viện Nhân lực Ngân hàng Tài chính, 2014). Meanwhile, according to General Statistics Office of Vietnam, the proportion of the labour force with a university qualification has risen appreciably from 5.7% in 2010 to 7.6% in 2014 (Tổng cục thống kê, 2016). At a time of declining demand for graduates in certain fields, there is an increasing supply of graduates available.

Employers continue to report, though, on the difficulties of finding suitable graduate employees. The usual concerns expressed are that recent graduates do not have sufficient practical experience to be able to step into a role and perform it without the need for a long period of induction, and that recent graduates are often deficient in terms of their ‘soft skills’, variously understood to include social skills, communication skills, character traits and personal ethics (Dân Trí Newspaper, 2016/02/02; Tuoi Tre Newspaper, 2015). These issues were canvassed in a World Bank (2014) report that identified ‘skills lag’ and ‘skills shortage’ problems in the labour market for graduates: the former refers to university graduates lacking the ‘work-ready’ skills required to be immediately productive when they enter the labour force, and the latter refers to the lack of graduates with the skills required by employers. However, these problems are also sectoral in nature. Employers in the information technology and natural sciences fields report a different kind of problem, that is, that they cannot find enough graduates to fill recent vacancies (Tuổi Trẻ Newspaper, 2016/08/05).

Tracer studies of recent graduates provide additional evidence of the recent downturn in the labour market for graduates, and they provide some additional insights. These surveys, conducted within the framework of a national Higher Education Project initiated by MOET, have pointed to a decline in the proportion of recent graduates finding employment in the public sector, and to a small but increasing incidence of recent graduates being employed on a part-time rather than a full-time basis. Recent graduates are also reporting that they feel a need to undertake further professional training, particularly in relation to information technology skills, foreign language
skills, especially in English, and ‘soft skills’ such as social and communication skills (Higher Education Project, 2012).

2.2.6 Internationalisation

International integration is a powerful driving force behind the higher education reform agenda in Vietnam. Its impact on the academic community is becoming more marked over time. The Central Committee of the Party has consistently affirmed Vietnam’s commitment to international integration, stating as long ago as 2002 that it wished to see “widening international collaboration in education; maximising projects funded by international organizations in education; opening various forms of cooperative . . . overseas providers’ programs, organising on-shore study abroad programs” (Resolution No. 14/NQ/TW dated July 26th, 2002 of the sixth Party Congress IX on Education and Scientific Development, Ban Chấp hành Trung ương [PCEC], 2002). This commitment was reinforced in HERA in 2005, which referred explicitly to the need for “developing [a] strategy for international integration, improving capacity for international collaborations and competitiveness of Vietnam higher education, implementing international treaties and agreements.” Most recently, the 11th Party Congress in 2013 identified international integration to be one of seven guiding principles for the comprehensive and fundamental reform of the higher education system, observing that: “education and training must meet the requirements for international integration for the country’s development” (Ban Chấp hành Trung ương [PCEC], 2013).

Vu Thi Loan (2015, p. 67) has identified four modes of international integration that are evident in the higher education system in Vietnam. First, there is a ‘cross-border’ mode, whereby a Vietnamese higher education institution acts as an intermediary for the delivery of programs designed and delivered by foreign higher education providers. Second, there is an ‘overseas study mode’, which involves sending Vietnamese students abroad for their education. This mode has intensified over the past decade because of increased development aid funding and significant budgetary allocations by the Government to improve the qualifications of academic staff members in Vietnam, especially at the PhD level. Third, there is a ‘collaborative partner’ mode, whereby a foreign higher education provider joins with a Vietnamese higher education institution to deliver a program that is accredited by both institutions. The 37 ‘advanced programs’ now being offered at 23 universities in Vietnam provide an example of this mode. There are, in addition, more than 400 other foreign partnership programs being delivered by
higher education institutions in Vietnam (Bộ Giáo dục và Đào tạo [MOET], 2015). Fourth, there is a ‘fully integrated’ mode, whereby foreign universities may establish an independent campus in Vietnam – the prominent examples being the establishment of the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology-Vietnam in 1995, the Vietnam German University in 2008, the British University of Vietnam in 2009, the Vietnam French University (now the Hanoi University of Sciences and Technology) in 2009, and the Vietnam Japan University in 2014.

Many of the early initiatives that focused on the internationalization of the higher education system relied heavily on development aid in one form or other. As Vietnam’s economic capacity develops, future support for internationalisation will need to depend more on budgetary support by the Vietnamese Government, and will, therefore, need to be strongly aligned with Vietnam’s plans for the development of human resource capacity and international competitiveness. The Government appears from all indications to remain strongly committed to international integration in the higher education system, as illustrated by its significant level of financial support provided for Project 911, concerning the strategic training of lecturers at PhD level for academic roles in universities and colleges over the period from 2010 to 2020 (Decision No. 911/Q-TTg, dated June 17, 2010, Thủ tướng Chính phủ [Prime Minister], 2010). In 2013, however, the Ministry of Education and Training voiced some concern that “the international integration in higher education lacks . . . strategic direction . . .. There needs to be more quality assurance and accreditation processes over the partnership programs with international partners” (Bộ Giáo dục và Đào tạo [MOET], 2012b, pp. 2-3)

2.3 Conditions of Academic Employment

To better understand the nature of academic life in Vietnam, it is important to consider the conditions of employment in the higher education system. As reported earlier in this chapter, academic employment in higher education institutions in Vietnam is regulated by a range of legislative and regulatory instruments, important among which are the Higher Education Law of 2012, the Education Law of 2005, and the Science and Technology Law of 2013. In addition, there are various ministerial decisions and circulars that apply to academic employment.
All higher education institutions in Vietnam are responsible for employing their own members of academic staff, and so employees of public higher education institutions in Vietnam are not civil servants. The conditions applying to academic employment at public higher education institutions are, however, so tightly prescribed by the State that the absence of civil service status is not especially important. In contrast, no such prescriptions apply to academic employment in private higher education institutions, meaning that these institutions function very much as private corporate employers.

The Higher Education Law of 2012 requires that academic staff members at public universities should teach, undertake research, and participate in professional development. Teaching refers to the delivery of academic programs at the diploma, bachelor, master’s and PhD levels. Article 15 of the Law indicates that the teaching role also involves a commitment to self-improvement and to setting an example for students. Reflecting Confucian values, Article 15 of the Law commits the State to providing the “necessary material and spiritual conditions for teachers to fulfil their roles and responsibilities, preserving and developing the tradition of respecting teachers and honouring the teaching profession.”

Article 18 of the Law describes research as the conduct and dissemination of scientific and technological investigations, both for improving educational quality and for contributing to the cultural, scientific and technological capacity of Vietnam. Article 18 of the Law also expressly refers to the service function of research, whereby priority should be given to research focused on the solution of problems relating to Vietnam’s national and local socioeconomic development. Academic staff members are being given increased opportunities to further their qualifications and advance their research experience, whether in Vietnam or abroad. Sabbatical leave, however, is not available for academic staff members in Vietnam.

Professional development refers to attendance at courses intended to improve the capacity of academic staff members in three areas: political knowledge, knowledge in an academic specialisation, and knowledge of pedagogy, as is prescribed by Article 55 of the Law. Acquiring enhanced political knowledge about Marxism-Leninism and the thoughts of Ho Chi Minh is particularly important in Vietnam for academic staff members seeking to achieve managerial and leadership positions. Relevant training
programs are routinely provided in the form of short courses conducted by Party authorities.

There are five academic appointment levels in Vietnam: assistant lecturer, lecturer, senior lecturer, associate professor and professor. While individual higher education institutions may have additional requirements, the minimum requirement for appointment to any of these levels is the attainment of a master’s-degree qualification. A new member of academic staff typically starts as an assistant lecturer and is then promoted to higher levels based on years of experience acquired, though the attainment of academic achievements in the form of higher degree qualifications or scholarly publications may also impact positively on promotion and appointment opportunities. Appointment to associate professor or professor generally requires the attainment of a PhD qualification. As prescribed by Decision No. 20/2012/QD-TTg, dated April 27, 2012 (Thủ tướng Chính phủ [Prime Minister], 2012a), appointment to associate professor also requires continuous experience of teaching for at least 3 to 5 years after the attainment of the PhD qualification, and it requires successful team leadership experience in completing a significant research project that has been approved at either institutional or ministerial level. Experience with the supervision of PhD candidates to completion, and fluency in one of English, French, Chinese, Russian or German, are also requirements for appointment to associate professor level.

The appointment process to professorships is more complicated; it further requires explicit approval from high-level authorities. In the past, universities had a limited role to play in the appointment process, with professorial appointments largely under MOET’s control. Since 2012, however, universities have been permitted to exercise more autonomy. A candidate for appointment as a professor must demonstrate relevant expertise and qualifications for the role. Professorial appointees must now have been an associate professor for at least three years, have supervised through to completion at least two PhDs, and have achieved the equivalent of at least six peer-reviewed publications in international journals. The decision to award the title of professor is made ultimately by the National Professoriate Committee, which is appointed by MOET (Thủ tướng Chính phủ [Prime Minister], 2008). Since 2012, universities have been required to submit such requests to this Committee for the assessment of any candidate being recommended for award of the title of professor. Disciplinary committees appointed by the Ministry, acting on behalf of the National Professoriate
Committee, then review the achievements of the candidates and make recommendations. The Committee then makes recommendations to the rectors of the universities concerned (Thủ trưởng Chính phủ [Prime Minister], 2012a).

The importance attached to peer-reviewed research publications in the context of promotion decisions to associate professor and professor positions has dramatically increased over the past decade. Applicants for promotion to associate professor must now achieve at least 6 publication points, and applicants for promotion to professor must achieve 12, with points allocated thus: from 0.25 to 1.0 point for each national publication, and 2.0 points for each peer-reviewed international publication. Because English has *de facto* become the international language of science, and therefore for most international peer-reviewed journals, researchers who have a facility with English have a distinct advantage in terms of being able to achieve peer-reviewed international publications as lead or sole authors. Conversely, researchers who cannot write in English, or who do not know the scholarly conventions of a disciplinary field, are at a distinct disadvantage. Not surprisingly, this group of academic staff members tends to be the most critical of the points system for publications (see, for example, Thanh Niên Newspaper, 2016/04/27).

Prior to 2015, academic workloads, as prescribed by MOET, required all academic staff to allocate a little over 50% of their time to teaching, with the balance allocated to a mix of research and professional development. The research allocation for lecturers and senior lecturers was about 28%, while for associate professors and for professors it was 34% and 40%, respectively. Recently, in *Circular No. 47/2014/TT-BGDĐT, dated December 31, 2014* Bộ Giáo dục và Đào tạo [MOET], 2014), the Ministry has mandated that all appointment levels should have the same workload allocation of a little over 50% for teaching, and 33% for research. This pattern of allocation is more or less in line with profiles for other national higher education systems, including Norway’s (Kyvik, 2000, p. 48) and Australia’s (G. Harman, 2000, p. 93; McInnis, 2000, p. 120).

Full-time research appointments at universities in Vietnam, though rare, are permitted, with appointment levels designated as assistant researcher, researcher, senior researcher and highly ranked researcher. The Science and Technology Law of 2013 prescribes that
researchers who then engage in some teaching will be eligible for appointment as associate professors or professors.

Salaries for academic staff members in public higher education institutions are based on seniority, as regulated by the Government. Salary increments are awarded every three years, depending upon successful completion of assigned tasks, as assessed by senior academic managers. The salary for an assistant lecturer currently starts at 2 million VND (US$100) per month and increases over nine steps (at three-year intervals) to 6 million VND (US$300) per month at the top of the scale. For a professor, the starting salary is 8 million VND (US$400) per month, increasing in six steps (one step every three years) to 12 million VND (US$600) at the top of the scale. With additional responsibilities, senior academic staff members may achieve the highest possible income level of 15 million VND (US$750) per month. In general, these salary levels are insufficient to maintain a family, according to several sources (see, for example, Thanh Niên Newspaper (2016/10/13); Tuổi Trẻ Newspaper (2015/11/16); and Tiền Phong Newspaper (2016/02/06). Many academic staff members feel obliged, therefore, to earn a supplementary income. Those employed at public higher education institutions readily find opportunities for part-time and casual employment at private higher education institutions, which function on a business model that involves a heavy reliance on the employment of part-time and casual teaching staff. Academics also take on extra work outside the academy, such as in hospitality or consulting.

Academic appointments at public higher education institutions are made on a full-time, continuing basis and continue until the compulsory age of retirement, which is 55 years of age for females and 60 years of age for males. Associate professors and professors may keep their titles beyond retirement, and can only have their titles removed if they are judged by their rector to have been delinquent in some way. This situation differs from what happens in many higher education systems, where maintaining a professorial title is only possible with an emeritus appointment beyond retirement.

Recently, in Decree No. 141/2013/ND-CP, dated October 24, 2013 (Article No. 8, Chính phủ [Government], 2013), provision was made for associate professors to be regarded as equivalent in status to highly-ranked government officers, and for professors to be regarded as equivalent in status to highly-ranked experts. The Decision also made provision for academic staff members who have a PhD qualification, and for
associate professors and professors to be able to obtain a five-, seven- or even ten-year extension of employment beyond the official retirement age. This measure is intended to retain skilled academic staff members, building sectoral capacity. The Decision also made special provision for the retention of experienced and productive researchers, providing them with privileged categories of appointment and with access to funds and administrative support to enable them to continue to publish and to train new researchers. These measures bear witness to Vietnam’s recognition of the need for skilled researchers, and to the need to make such roles more attractive, in the quest to attain international parity for the higher education system.

Though the circumstances of academic staff members employed in private higher education institutions are not pertinent to the focus of the present investigation, some differences from the public sector are of note. Private higher education institutions generally offer higher salary levels, but employment is typically offered on a contractual basis, meaning that there is considerably less security of tenure. Few private higher education institutions support research, and so employment at a private higher education institution is typically limited to teaching and course administration.

### 2.4 Concluding Remarks

This chapter has provided a detailed account of the context for academic employment in Vietnam. It has recorded some of the more important milestones up to the present in the reform of the higher education system and it has provided a review of various contemporary issues that have an impact, whether directly or indirectly, on the professional lives of academics in Vietnam. The final part of the chapter reviewed the employment conditions experienced by academic staff members in Vietnam.

When comparing Vietnam with other more developed higher education systems, it is evident that Vietnam is making strategic progress towards internationalisation of its higher education system. Nevertheless, cultural mores and traditions that are complex and deep-rooted tend to remain problematic, stifling the necessary social change. An enduring characteristic of the system, though, is that the position of teacher in higher education has high-value social status attached to it, even though these staff members are so poorly remunerated.
The chapter has not addressed the important matter of academic culture in Vietnam, nor has it referred to the sense of academic identity experienced by members of academic staff. As indicated in Chapter 1, these are matters about which little or no research reports are evident in the relevant literature. Therefore, these are matters to be addressed in the present investigation. Before exploring them empirically, however, notions of academic culture and of academic identity must be comprehensively reviewed. This is the task of the following chapter.
Chapter 3

ACADEMIC CULTURE AND ACADEMIC IDENTITY


3.1 Academic Culture

Austin’s (1992) review of the literature on academic culture points to four relatively self-contained lines of enquiry relating respectively to disciplinary culture, organisational culture, systemic culture and professional culture. Välimaa (1998) reports on two perspectives on academic culture that he suggested did not cohere with one another: Tierney’s (1988) account of the organisational culture in higher education, and Becher’s (1989) account of disciplinary cultures. Smerek (2010) identifies three different perspectives on academic culture. One is an integration perspective, said to assume that higher education institutions have the capacity to develop a single, unified organisational culture focused on achieving institutional effectiveness, and said also to be evident in works by Dill (1982), Tierney (1988, 1997), Chafee and Tierney (1988), Zammuto and Krakower (1991), Cameron and Freeman (1991), Fjortoft and Smart (1994), Smart and St. John (1996), Sporn (1996), Bartell (2003), and Hartley (2003), amongst others. Another is a differentiation perspective, said to assume that higher education institutions do not have the capacity to develop a single, unified organisational culture, principally because they are essentially collections of different sub-cultures that are frequently unable to co-exist harmoniously, and said also to be evident in works by Gouldner (1957), Lohdahl and Gordon (1972), Becher (1981, 1984, 1987a, 1987b, 1989, 1990, 1994), Becher and Trowler (2001), and Toma (1997). The third is a fragmentation perspective, said to assume that higher education institutions do not have the capacity to develop a single, unified organisational culture, mainly because
of their ambiguities, their lack of specific shared objectives, and the existence within them of sub-cultures that are “fleeting, issue-specific coalitions that fragment and reform as time passes” (Smerek, 2010, p. 384). This third perspective is said to be evident in works by M. D. Cohen and March (1974), Weick (1983), and Silver (2003).

The concept of ‘culture’ is, as Välimaa (1998) has observed, “difficult as an instrument of research” (p. 119). He pointed out that the concept is variously defined and understood, and that it tends to encompass too many elements when applied in the context of higher education institutions. His preference was to use the concept of academic identity as an intellectual device for studying academic communities as cultural entities (Välimaa, 1998).

Meek (1988) also pointed to the difficulties associated with invoking the notion of culture in the context of higher education. He expressed concern at the way in which some contributors to the literature on the organisational culture of higher education mistakenly assume that specific kinds of leadership can lead to the predictable result of specific forms of organisational culture. He argued that:

> culture should be regarded as something that an organization ‘is’, not as something that an organization ‘has’: it is not an independent variable, nor can it be created, discovered or destroyed by the whims of management. (p. 470)

This point is important. In the following account, the two perspectives addressed are those of Tierney (1988), whose focus was organisational culture, and Becher (1989) whose focus was disciplinary cultures. It is important to see these perspectives as being concerned with independent variables that most likely impact substantially on academic culture, but that do not necessarily account for all its essence.

Tierney’s (1988) perspective is unmistakably integrationist. He claimed that “a central goal of understanding organizational culture is to minimize the occurrence and consequences of cultural conflict and help foster the development of shared goals” (p. 5). Studying the cultural dynamics of a higher education institution, he reported, “equips us to understand and, hopefully, reduce adversarial relationships” (p. 5).

Becher’s perspective aligns much more with the differentiation perspective. Becher’s (1989) starting point was that “the ways in which particular groups of academics organize their professional lives are intimately related to the intellectual tasks on which
they are engaged” (p. 1). The nature of these intellectual tasks was said to differ markedly across the disciplines; and so too did the social characteristics of the specific knowledge communities engaged in the task of advancing disciplinary knowledge. The argument that there were different disciplinary cultures in the academic world developed from these foundations.

Tierney’s and Becher’s perspectives on academic culture are being utilised to frame this review because they point to important influences in the professional lives of academics. They build on Clark’s (1983) earlier claim that the professional life of an academic is strongly affected by both organisational and disciplinary influences.

3.1.1 Tierney’s Organisational Perspective

Tierney (1988) sought to identify the elements that might contribute to a consistent ideology within a higher education organisation, about which there might be institutional consensus. Drawing on insights from a series of case studies of higher education colleges in the United States (Chafee & Tierney, 1988), he developed a framework for analysing organisational culture at the level of a higher education institution. The elements in this framework, which are as shown in Table 3.1, included: the environment, the mission, the socialisation process, the use of information, the use of strategy, and the exercise of leadership. Tierney viewed these elements as providing a comprehensive basis for characterising the state of the organisational culture of a higher education institution. Each one was said to be indispensable to the task of seeking to understand the organisational culture of a higher education institution. He claimed that: “if an anthropologist conducted an in-depth ethnography of a college or university and omitted any mention of institutional mission we would note that the anthropologist had overlooked an important cultural term” (Tierney, 1988, p. 8).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Environment:</th>
<th>How does the organization define its environment?</th>
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<td></td>
<td>What is the attitude toward the environment?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>(Hostility? Friendship?)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mission:</td>
<td>How is it defined?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How is it articulated?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Is it used as a basis for decisions?</td>
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</table>
How much agreement is there?

Socialization: How do new members become socialized?
How is it articulated?
What do we need to know to survive/excel in this organization?

Information: What constitutes information?
Who has it?
How is it disseminated?

Strategy: How are decisions arrived at?
Which strategy is used?
Who makes decisions?
What is the penalty for bad decisions?

Leadership: What does the organization expect from its leaders?
Who are the leaders?
Are there formal and informal leaders?

Source: (Tierney, 1988, Table 1).

Tierney’s way of explaining each element was by providing examples of its application in the context of a fictional public higher education institution, referred to as Family State College. The element of ‘environment’ was illustrated by an example of Family State College becoming more engaged with the needs and priorities of its immediate community. The element of ‘mission’ was illustrated by an example of the president of Family State College frequently restating the College’s mission in his speeches and in College newsletters. The element of ‘socialisation’ was illustrated by the way in which new staff members at Family State College were made to feel welcome, and by the extent to which stakeholders felt they had ease of access to the president of the College to discuss their concerns. The element of ‘information’ was illustrated by reference to a style of communications at Family State College that was exemplified by openness and inclusiveness in the communications coming from the president. The element of ‘strategy’ was illustrated by reference to a style of decision-making at Family State College, described as one that “proceeds from the understanding that the organization can play a role in creating its environment” (Tierney, 1988, p. 14). The element of ‘leadership’ was illustrated by describing how the president’s day-to-day interactions focused on developing and reinforcing an institutional culture. Finally, the element of ‘leadership’ was illustrated by the president’s “effective use of symbols and frames of
reference, both formally and informally, [to articulate] the college’s values and goals and [to help] garner support from faculty, students, staff, and the community” (Tierney, 1988, p. 16).

Tierney (1991) later clarified that he did not dispute the importance of the role played by the disciplines in the organisation of academic work, but he asserted that institutional contexts have a powerful impact on how knowledge is defined, observing from evidence gleaned from institutional case studies that definitions of knowledge may be influenced by the organisational culture of a higher education institution. Tierney thus regarded assumptions about the nature of knowledge to be framed and legitimated by institutional ideology, developed within the context of an organisational culture.

In 1997, Tierney provided a more detailed account of his understanding of the nature and importance of institutional socialisation. Socialisation, he observed, was not simply “a planned sequence of learning activities where recruits learn one fact and then another” (Tierney, 1997, p. 7), but was instead a process that involved “a give-and-take where new individuals make sense of an organization through their own unique backgrounds and the current contexts in which the organization resides” (Tierney, 1997, p. 6). For Tierney, therefore, the challenge involved in understanding socialisation was that of drawing upon the attributes of individuals for the purposes of building the culture of the organisation, as opposed to imposing upon individuals a set of expectations about how the institutions should function and about how they should contribute to its objectives.

Tierney’s view on the importance of organisational culture to higher education institutions may be seen against the background of popular literature during the early 1980s concerning organisational effectiveness in corporate settings generally. This literature included Peters and Waterman’s *In search of excellence* (1982), Ouchi’s *Theory Z* (1981), Deal and Kennedy’s *Corporate cultures* (1982), and Schein’s *Organizational culture and leadership* (1985) – all of which were acknowledged by Tierney (1988, p. 2). In much of this literature, the focus of interest was the extent of the contribution made to organisational effectiveness by different kinds of organisational cultures, often assumed to be synonymous with distinctive styles of leadership. When applied to higher education (see, for example, Cameron & Freeman, 1991; Fjoroft & Smart, 1994; Smart & St. John, 1996; Zammuto & Krakower, 1991), some types of
organisational culture were said to be more conducive to organisational effectiveness than others. In general, however, evidence in support of the claim was found to be equivocal, as Smart and St. John (1996, p. 220) effectively concluded, though they did identify that a ‘strong’ form of organisational leadership was more likely to be effective in providing a high level of internal integration for an organisation.

### 3.1.2 Becher’s Disciplinary Perspective

Becher’s (1989) approach was to identify the ways in which disciplinary cultures impacted on the professional life of scholars. Disciplinary cultures, he argued, were the result of the fusion between a specific epistemology and the social and behavioural characteristics of the knowledge community engaged in its preservation and extension. In distinguishing between the different epistemological groupings, he drew heavily on Biglan’s (1973a) ‘hard-soft’ and ‘pure-applied’ distinctions, as already introduced in Chapter 1. Becher identified four broad discipline groupings, also noting the extent to which anomalies within them occur. These were the natural sciences (the ‘hard-pure’ knowledge areas), the applied sciences (the ‘hard-applied’ knowledge areas), the humanities (the ‘soft-pure’ knowledge areas), and the applied social sciences (the ‘soft-applied’ knowledge areas).

Knowledge in the ‘hard-pure’ disciplines was said to be objective, in the sense that it existed independently of human beliefs, fears or desires, and cumulative, so that scholars in these disciplines go about the task of adding to knowledge as if filling in a jigsaw puzzle (Becher, 1987b, p. 278). Research typically involved breaking down the ‘big-picture’ problem into smaller components that could then be more manageably investigated. Those engaged in this research enterprise understood well the criteria for knowing when new knowledge had been produced, and their forms of analysis and of reporting findings were said to rely heavily on the language of mathematics and science.

Knowledge in the ‘soft-pure’ disciplines, in contrast, was said to take the form of a constructed reality, with meaning in these disciplines understood to be highly individualistic, and so capable of ongoing reinterpretation (Becher, 1987b, p. 278). Existing theories were, therefore, often re-investigated for the purposes of developing more nuanced, or even quite different, interpretations of social or cultural phenomena (Becher, 1989, p. 13). The criteria for knowing when new knowledge needed to be produced were said to be much less widely agreed, but the products of research in these
disciplines were more likely to be accessible by a wide readership because of the extent of reliance upon clear and extended argument.

Knowledge in the ‘hard-applied’ and ‘soft-applied’ disciplines was notably focused on practical application. Knowledge that was ‘hard-applied’ was said to be purposive, pragmatic and concerned with mastery of the physical environment, with research in these kinds of disciplines said to be more concerned with ‘knowing how’ than with ‘knowing that’ (Becher, 1989, p. 15). Knowledge in the ‘soft-applied’ disciplines was said to be functional, utilitarian, and largely concerned with the improvement of professional practice (Becher, 1987b, p. 278). Scholars in these knowledge areas were said to draw on ‘soft-pure’ knowledge “as a means of understanding and coming to terms with the complexity of human situations . . . with a view to enhancing the quality of personal and social life” (Becher, 1989, p. 15).

Each of these knowledge areas was shown to have an associated set of communities sharing specific social characteristics, thus contributing to their cultural distinctiveness (Becher, 1989, p. 20). The ‘hard-pure’ natural sciences, for example were “competitive; gregarious; politically well-organised; [having a] high publication rate; [and] task-oriented”; the ‘soft-pure’ humanities were “individualistic, pluralistic; loosely structured; [having a] low publication rate; [and] person-oriented”; the ‘hard-applied’ applied sciences were “entrepreneurial, cosmopolitan; dominated by professional values; [with] patents substitutable for publications; [and] role oriented”; and the ‘soft-applied’ applied social sciences were “outward-looking; uncertain in status; dominated by intellectual fashions; [with] publication rates reduced by consultancies; [and] power-oriented” (Becher, 1987b, p. 289). These characteristics, Becher argued, aligned with the nature of knowledge across the four broad disciplinary groupings.

Other differences were also observed. Informal communication channels were found to be of most importance in the ‘hard’ disciplines, where knowledge advanced rapidly and where scholars felt a sense of urgency about being the first to report a discovery (Becher & Trowler, 2001, pp. 108-110). In these areas, ‘preprints’ of research reports were routinely circulated to keep other scholars in a specific specialism informed about research results in advance of the formal publication of results in journals. Scholars in these areas were also more likely to engage in informal communication by means of
attendance at invitational conferences, visits to laboratories, and the exchange of letters, emails and telephone calls on a routine basis.

Of course, Becher’s research was conducted prior to widespread adoption of information technologies for speedy communications, and so the mechanisms for disseminating research results have become much more highly evolved since the time when he was conducting his research. Becher proposed, however, that formal modes of communication in the ‘hard’ disciplines occurred principally through the publication of peer-reviewed journal articles, whereas, in the ‘soft’ knowledge areas, books were preferred. Becher and Trowler (2001, p. 112) acknowledged that books were no longer the exclusive avenue for the communication of fresh perspectives in the humanities, but in these disciplines it continued to be the case that there was less intensity experienced about being the first to report new insights.

The style and accessibility of research reports was also reported to differ between the ‘hard’ and the ‘soft’ discipline areas. Most notably, research publications in ‘hard’ knowledge areas tended to take the form of communications with other specialists in the field, and findings were often reported using highly condensed quantitative codes (Becher & Trowler, 2001, p. 116). In contrast, research publications in the ‘soft’ knowledge areas were more accessible to a wider reading audience, with scholars having to frame an individual perspective against the background of previous insights and perspectives reported in the literature. These scholars needed to argue persuasively that the new argument they were advancing represented a fresh and consequential insight.

Becher (1989, pp. 91-92) identified competition to be a social characteristic intrinsic to the ‘hard’ disciplines, where the need to get ahead of others in terms of making and reporting a discovery or invention could easily give rise to intense rivalry. He observed, however, that not all research specialisations within the ‘hard’ disciplines experienced a culture of competition. It tended to be in those research areas where there was a clustering of researchers focused on achieving breakthrough discoveries that “the fiercest tussles take place over the division of the spoils of research” (Becher, 1989, p. 91).

Collaboration was identified by Becher to be another important social characteristic of research in the ‘hard’ disciplines. He reported that research outputs from these fields
were much more likely to be multi-authored, and that, in some areas of ‘big science’, research projects with significant budgets often required extensive collaboration to achieve efficiencies in the use of expensive research infrastructure (Becher, 1989, p. 95). In contrast, researchers in the ‘soft’ disciplines were reported to be more likely to prefer to work alone. In history, for example, one of Becher’s participants explained that ideas must be “shaped in the mind of the individual scholar” (Becher, 1989, p. 98). This comment is illustrative of the predominantly interpretive nature of knowledge in the ‘soft’ knowledge areas.

3.2 Academic Identity

The concept of identity has been explored across a wide range of disciplines. Significant contributions to the literature include works by Cooley (1902), Mead (1934), Bourdieu (1975), Geertz (1983), MacIntyre (1981), Taylor (1989), Giddens (1991), Jenkins (1996), and Bauman (1996). Identity refers in general terms to a “sense of self” and to “an ongoing effort to make sense of who we are” (Billot, 2010, p. 711). In an insightful account of the history of the concept in the West, Bauman (1996, p. 19) describes the need for identity to be an individual quest, or project, driven by a desire to escape the kind of uncertainty that exists when “one is not sure how to place oneself among the evident variety of behavioural styles and patterns, and how to make sure that people around would accept this placement as right and proper, so that both sides know how to go on in each other’s presence.” Bauman added that culture provides for the “collective breeding” of identity (Bauman, 1996, p. 19), thus relieving the individual to an extent from having to address in isolation the task of escaping a personal sense of uncertainty.

The importance of academic identity is implicitly recognised in nearly all the literature pertaining to the topic of academic culture, but it was Henkel, in Academic identities and policy change in higher education (2000), who identified its explicit importance when she argued that the process of identity-building in the academic world was “central to the dynamic of academic life in the Western world” (Henkel, 2000, p. 13). She was referring to the status and reputation of the individual academic. She proceeded to argue that academic identity, which she defined as the “values, interests and beliefs, self-images and reputations” of academics (Henkel & Vabo, 2006, p. 128), emerged in the context of two cultural settings: that of the organisation, and that of the discipline. She observed that organisational and disciplinary communities, though different, could be “mutually reinforcing and so together constitute a strong source of identity for
academics” (Henkel, 2000, p. 20), but she also noted that academic disciplines, because of their evolutionary tendency to fragment, could create conditions in which “enterprises may look towards legal, bureaucratic or managerial strategies for integration”, in which case the enterprise could well become “a counterforce to the discipline” (Henkel, 2000, p. 20), potentially diminishing the extent of disciplinary influence on academic identity formation. Henkel was, therefore, the first to identify the tension between institutional and disciplinary identity.

Henkel further argued that, academic identity, though resilient, was susceptible to being shaped by significant environmental conditions impacting on the academy. Important among these, Henkel reported, was an increasing tendency for technological innovation to be seen to underpin national and regional prosperity in a globalised economy, which by then included the pace of knowledge dissemination on and accountability via digital technologies (Henkel, 2005b, p. 151). This development required research to be framed more by the needs of the economy and less by the needs of the discipline (Henkel & Vabo, 2006, p. 131). Gibbons et al. (1994) had labelled this new mode of knowledge production as ‘mode 2’, in contrast to the more traditional disciplinary-based mode of knowledge production, referred to as ‘mode 1’. This development, Henkel suggested, could serve to challenge the primacy of the role played by the discipline as a “defining community” for the development of academic identity, and it also potentially challenged the importance of the role played by the university as an organisational platform for the development of academic identity because of the extent to which research activity was increasingly taking place away from universities (Henkel, 2005b, p. 162). Henkel concluded, therefore, that academic identity had become “more of an individual and open-ended project, as the institutional frameworks in which it has been shaped have become less stable and cohesive” (Henkel, 2005b, p. 162), than previously.

An important aspect of Henkel’s perspective was her claim that “traditional academic reward systems reflect the cultivation of an institutionalised individualism within a community of peers” (Henkel, 2000, p.13). This individualism, she asserted, was principally established through academic publishing, based upon independent peer review that “feeds into the sense of an individual professional identity and self-esteem” (Henkel, 2000, p. 187). Research, she argued, held a dominant position in the public and private identities of academics, but she acknowledged that success as a teacher could also be important to many academic staff members in terms of how they saw
themselves as professionals (Henkel, 2000, p. 210).

Henkel’s insights regarding academic identity form part of a larger body of literature concerning the academic profession more broadly (see, for example, Barnett & Di Napoli, 2008; Bentley et al., 2013; Cummings & Teichler, 2015; Enders & Musselin, 2008; Enders & De Weert, 2009; Leisyte & Dee, 2012; Musselin, 2008; Teichler, Arimoto & Cummings, 2013). Much of this literature is concerned with the changing external conditions of the profession, especially in the form of globalisation, marketization and managerialism, and the global knowledge economy. There is also, more broadly, an appreciation of the increased social and economic importance of the profession in the context of a more knowledge-based world (Enders & De Weert, 2009, p. 252). Musselin (2008, pp. 48-49) argued, however, that research about the academic profession has been too focused on the research activities of scientists, and that many accounts of the ways in which the profession functions give insufficient attention to the institutional environment within which academic work takes place. She proposed the need to look at academics from the perspective of a sociology of work, having regard to matters such as how work responsibilities are allocated within universities, how these allocations impact upon academic or disciplinary identity, how new measures of research performance are enabling individual distinctiveness to become recognised, and how, at the same time, there is an emerging commitment to the importance of individual scholars believing that their institution is ‘special’ in one way or another. These topics are pertinent to the present investigation, but the way in which they are viewed and reported in this investigation is shaped by a cultural perspective on the professional life of the academic member of staff, and not by a perspective that is strongly sociological in focus.

3.3 An Analytical Framework

Universities in Vietnam are structured organizationally in similar ways to those in developed higher education sectors. Academic departments in Vietnamese universities tend to be discipline-based, and faculties are usually formed by aggregating academic departments that have similar or like-minded epistemological foundations. While academic departments in Vietnam are expected to generate research outcomes, as well as deliver teaching programs, the extent of their commitment to research has not to date been closely monitored or strongly enforced at the institutional level. At the ‘key’
universities (introduced in Chapter 1), however, where there is a rapidly-developing aspiration to be better aligned with international benchmarks of academic performance, research outputs are more explicitly expected, and the conduct of research is receiving more institutional support. It is from these kinds of universities that the participants in the present investigation are drawn, and it is the experiences of these participants concerning academic culture and academic identity that are reported in Chapters 5 through to Chapter 8.

In exploring the nature of these experiences, two analytical frameworks concerned with academic culture (Tierney, 1988; and Becher, 1989), and one analytical framework concerned with academic identity (Henkel, 2000), are employed. Tierney’s (1988) framework concerns the organisational dimension of academic culture. It identifies six elements of organisational culture that might be examined when exploring the culture of an organisational setting in higher education. These elements provide a foundation for the documentation in Chapter 5 of the experiences of the participants of the organisational culture of their work settings. Becher’s (1989) framework concerns the nature of disciplinary cultures. It identifies various elements of the social experience of being an academic that might be examined when exploring disciplinary settings in higher education. These elements provide a foundation for reporting in Chapters 6 and 7 on the disciplinary context of teaching and research, as experienced by the participants. Henkel’s (2000) concept of academic identity provides a basis for examining the ways in which academics perceive themselves as members of an academic community, particularly in terms of their “values, interests and beliefs, self-images and reputations” (Henkel & Vabo, 2006, p. 128). Henkel’s (2000) framework provides a basis for reporting in Chapter 8 on how the participants perceived themselves and their role as members of academic staff.

### 3.4 Concluding Remarks

The purpose of this chapter has been to develop the conceptual framework for the present investigation; the perspectives of Tierney and of Becher have been identified as providing strong, but differently focused, foundations for an exploration of the experiences of the participants concerning, respectively, organisational culture and disciplinary culture, which appear to be at odds to some degree. Henkel’s perspective on academic identity has been identified as providing a strong foundation for then exploring their experiences of academic identity.
Vietnam’s higher education system is undergoing a process of rapid transition. For reasons explained in Chapter 2, its focus has for many years been teaching. Now, in response to the spread of knowledge about the nature of universities in more developed countries, and in response to official recognition of the need for the ‘key’ universities to be much more research-oriented, its focus is now becoming teaching and research. It is in the ‘key’ universities, however, that the pace of change is most rapid, and it is from four academic departments at four of these ‘key’ universities that the participants in the present investigation were drawn. Before proceeding to report their experiences of life as an academic, it is necessary to explain the research methodology of the investigation, and to document the methods and techniques of data analysis implemented to ensure the rigour of the findings. The following chapter addressed this need.
Chapter 4

METHODOLOGY

This chapter addresses the methodology for the present investigation. It begins with an account of the investigation’s methodological foundations and research design. It then reports on the institutional sites for the investigation, the participants, the procedures followed for collecting and analysing the data, the measures implemented to assure trustworthiness of the data collection and analytical procedures, and the ways in which ethical considerations relevant to the investigation were addressed. The chapter closes with a consideration of various methodological delimitations.

4.1 Methodological Foundations

Underpinning the present investigation is the epistemology of social constructivism. Constructivism asserts that reality is socially constructed, and so is capable of being variously perceived. As Crotty (1998, pp. 8-9) explains: “Truth, or meaning, comes into existence in and out of our engagement with the realities in our world. There is no meaning without a mind. Meaning is not discovered, but constructed.” Schwandt (1997, p. 20) explains similarly: “... constructivists hold that knowledge of the world is not a simple reflection of what there is, but a set of social artifacts; a reflection of what we make of what is there.” From a constructivist perspective, then, how humans perceive and engage with complex social phenomena gives rise to multiple realities, the character of which is essential to document as a basis for developing a deep and nuanced understanding of a social or cultural phenomenon. Social constructivism addresses specifically the nature of the multiple realities that may exist in a social or cultural setting. Crotty (1998, p. 58) explains social constructivism as a theory of knowledge that “emphasises the hold our culture has on us: [how] it shapes the way in which we see things (even the way in which we feel things!) and gives us a quite definite view of the world.”

In seeking to elicit an understanding of how individuals in a specific cultural setting perceive and experience a social phenomenon, an interpretive theoretical perspective is required. According to Crotty (1998, p. 67), a researcher adopting an interpretive perspective “looks for culturally derived and historically situated interpretations of the social life-world.” As Neuman (2007, p. 88) explains, the concern is to generate an interpretation of social reality that is grounded on the “ideas, beliefs and perceptions
that people hold about the reality.” The researcher must, therefore, attempt to see the world through the eyes of the people who are the focus of the investigation (Neuman, 1997, p. 88). This approach is consistent with the phenomenological doctrine of *Verstehen* (Elwell, 1996), in asserting that the study of the social life-world of human beings requires empathetic identification of a kind that is only possible for another human being to achieve (Patton, 2002, p. 52). Schwandt (2000, p. 192) describes it as “an act of psychological re-enactment – getting inside the head of an actor to understand what he or she is up to in terms of motives, beliefs, desires, thoughts, and so on.”

It follows that ethnography, a methodological approach to qualitative enquiry that is centred on the pursuit of an understanding of a specific culture, provides an appropriate framework for the collection and analysis of data relating to how human beings in particular social and cultural settings construct their reality. Spradley (1979, pp. 9-10) describes ethnography as seeking to “build a systematic understanding of all human cultures from the perspective of those who have learned them.” In an ethnographic investigation, the researcher ultimately gives meaning to the social or cultural phenomenon under investigation, but only after becoming immersed in the meanings given to it by those experiencing it. This process typically requires a prolonged period of engagement with the participants in their natural setting. It requires extended conversations and meaningful interactions with key informants. Schwandt (1997, p. 78) describes key informants to be “knowledgeable, articulate ‘insiders’ possessing a unique perspective on social action within the site where the fieldwork is unfolding.”

### 4.2 Research Design

In the present investigation, the methodology of *Naturalistic Inquiry* (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) was implemented because it accommodates not only the preferred epistemological stance of social constructivism; it also adopts an interpretive theoretical perspective and an ethnographic approach to data collection. *Naturalistic Inquiry* builds on five axioms, according to its authors, (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, pp. 37-38), each of which has important implications in the context of the present investigation. The first is that *Naturalistic Inquiry* assumes the existence of multiple realities that require a holistic approach to their interpretation. The second is that the researcher and the participants necessarily interact in ways that may influence one another; in other words, the “knower and the known are inseparable” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 37). The third is that the focus of a qualitative investigation should do no more than develop working
hypotheses to describe individual cases: no basis exists for the generalisation of findings to a larger population. The fourth is that there is no place for distinguishing between cause and effect because all entities are said to be in a state of “mutual simultaneous shaping” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 38). The fifth is that all enquiry should be regarded as being value-laden, and is, therefore, influenced by the values of the researcher, the research approach, the conceptual framework, and the social and historical context in which a social or cultural phenomenon occurs.

Lincoln and Guba (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, pp. 39-43) identified fourteen distinctive characteristics of Naturalistic Inquiry, the most relevant of which to the present investigation are now briefly reported. The first is that Naturalistic Inquiry requires empirical research to be conducted in the natural setting of the phenomenon under investigation. It is, therefore, a non-interventionist methodology that seeks to avoid any manipulation of the social environment of the participants. Patton (2002, p. 40) explains that Naturalistic Inquiry involves studying real-world situations in a way that is non-controlling and that remains open to whatever emerges during data collection and analysis, and as findings emerge. In the present investigation, the researcher had to avoid disturbing the natural work environment of the participants. Therefore, interviews had to be conducted at times and in ways that were least likely to impose any artificial constraints on the participants. Participant observation also needed to occur without being intrusive. The approach of the researcher had to be one of learning from the participants, as opposed to one of providing suggestions or of giving directions or advice of any kind.

A characteristic of Naturalistic Inquiry is that the researcher is the primary data-gathering instrument. A fundamental assumption of the methodology is that a human being, as the instrument for the research, is best able to interpret the complexity of the meanings that participants in the research may attach to social actions and objects. To this end, the researcher must engage for an extended period in the daily life of the participants for the purposes of gaining rich understandings of how the participants perceive and are experiencing the social or cultural phenomenon that is of interest. This responsibility places a heavy burden on the researcher. Later in this chapter, details will be provided concerning how, for this investigation, the researcher spent extended periods of time at each of the selected sites for data collection, and the ways in which data collection and analysis evolved in this characteristic way.
The need to uncover tacit knowledge is a special characteristic of the methodology that is not often acknowledged. Tacit knowledge is the kind of knowing that is intuitive to the participants. It is often not easily articulated by them. It is often also difficult to access because the participants may not be consciously aware of its existence. It was first identified in the context of higher education by Polanyi (1983, p. 24), who showed that tacit knowing “can account (1) for a valid knowledge of a problem; (2) for the scientist’s capacity to explore it, guided by his sense of approaching its solution, and (3) for a valid anticipation of the yet intermediate implications of the discovery arrived at in the end.” Tacit knowledge operates “behind the scenes”, according to (Douglas & Moustakas, 1985, p. 49). It is, however, important in affecting human actions (Greenwood & Levin, 2007, p. 66). In this investigation, information about tacit perceptions and knowing was collected mainly through the researcher’s observations, but also by means of the observations of tacit knowing that were reported by the participants. During interviews, for example, notes were taken about aspects of a participant’s outlook or understanding, body language or tone, that appeared to convey a tacit understanding. This kind of information was also consciously explored by observing work practices at each of the site institutions. Most importantly, the researcher presented every participant with an opportunity to confirm or negate the meanings interpreted from the observations made.

The need for purposive sampling is also a characteristic of Naturalistic Inquiry. Participants in an investigation utilising the methodology of Naturalistic Inquiry are purposively selected for the richness of their potential in contributing to a thick, rich and holistic understanding of a social phenomenon. Lincoln and Guba (1985) note the importance of thick, rich description to ensure rigour in terms of confirmability, dependability and transferability in their methodology. While the participants may ultimately be broadly representative of a larger population, no attempt is made to generalise the findings from the sample to the larger population. Instead, the findings are utilised to provide a sufficiently rich description of the phenomenon being investigated as to enable the reader to identify with the experiences of participants and to build a holistic understanding of the culture. This “thick description”, as Geertz (1973, p. 6) referred to it, may then provide a basis for the reader to draw parallels with other similar settings, but it is not a basis for generalisation to a range of other settings. As reported later in this chapter, the participants in the present investigation were deliberately selected for their likely ability to inform the researcher about the range of
social constructions of the phenomena of academic culture and academic identity that exist in their universities and for them individually.

The need for purposive sampling in *Naturalistic Inquiry* is related to another key characteristic of this methodology, which is that it provides for the research design to be varied during an investigation in response to emergent data and resulting information needs. As explained by Lincoln and Guba (1985, p. 102), “succeeding methodological steps are based upon the results of steps already taken.” The design allows for a redirection of the focus of an investigation in response to insights emerging from the data. In the present investigation, for example, the researcher, having completed interviews at three sites, felt obliged to recruit participants from a fourth site because a need was identified to obtain additional insights from academic staff members working in the humanities.

Finally, *Naturalistic Inquiry* requires the application of special criteria intended to assure the trustworthiness of the findings. These criteria, which are comparable to validity and reliability in positivist research methodologies, concern, as previously mentioned, credibility, dependability, confirmability and transferability of the findings. These criteria, and the ways in which they were addressed, are explained later in this chapter.

### 4.3 Sites and Participants

In determining whom to sample, three considerations were foremost. First, the investigation needed to involve participants who were members of academic staff working in university settings where both research and teaching were the institutional expectation. This meant that the participants needed to be members of academic staff from research-oriented universities in Vietnam. As explained in Chapter 1, Vietnam’s higher education system is comprised of over 400 universities and colleges, but only 19 of these institutions have been officially designated as ‘key’ universities, meaning that they are expected to engage in both teaching and research. The participants needed, therefore, to come from one or more of these 19 universities. Second, given the importance attached by Lincoln and Guba (1985, p. 200) to maximum variation sampling, that is, sampling that allows for an exploration of the widest possible range of experiences of a social or cultural phenomenon, it was considered essential to involve participants from different institutional and disciplinary settings in the investigation.
Third, the investigation needed to be conducted within a context of the limited time and resources of doctoral research, and so the number of participants and settings to be included in the investigation, while necessarily sufficient to provide a depth of understanding of the topics of interest, needed to be manageable, given the circumstances of the researcher.

Accordingly, three universities were initially selected as sites for the investigation. These institutions had in common being relatively large and well-established universities, being research-active in the sense that each was a relatively important source of peer-reviewed publications, and being in one of Vietnam’s two major cities, which was important in terms of accessibility by the researcher and the attainment of prolonged engagement with the participants. Because each of the universities was well established, having been in operation since the 1950s, each had weathered the social, economic and cultural conditions of Vietnam’s history at least since independence in 1954. They were also, to a greater or lesser extent, comprehensive in their curricular offerings, with each of them conducting programs across at least three of the four broad disciplinary groupings identified by Becher (1989), that is, the natural sciences, the applied sciences, the humanities, and the applied social sciences.

Subsequently, a fourth university located in a regional city was selected for inclusion as a site for the investigation. This university was of equivalent standing to the other three, and shared most of the essential characteristics. Its inclusion came about when more thick description was needed from participants in the humanities.

The research attainments of the four site institutions are of special note. At each of them, more than one-half of all academic staff members held doctorates – which is well above the national average of 15% for higher education institutions in Vietnam (Bộ Giáo dục và Đào tạo [MOET], 2016). Their research profiles were also much stronger than for most other universities in Vietnam, though data of the kind needed to confirm this aspect of their profile are neither routinely collected nor reported in Vietnam.

To obtain permission to collect data at each of the institutions, a letter was sent by the relevant Head of School at Southern Cross University to the rectors of the institutions concerned (see Appendix A). The letter explained that the investigation had obtained approval by the Southern Cross University Human Ethics Committee (see Appendix B), and that the identities of both the participating institutions and the individual
participants in the investigation would remain anonymous. A summary of the aims, methodology and likely outcomes of the investigation provided to the participants is available at Appendix C.

Permission for their staff to participate in the research was willingly provided by the rectors concerned. In two cases, the permission was provided by the institution’s rector. In the other cases, it was provided by the acting rectors of the institutions.

Specific academic organisational units were selected within each of the four institutions, with the aim of achieving as much variation as possible in the eventual disciplinary profile of the participants. It was important that the organisational units selected should be led by a head of department who would be supportive of the investigation, given that the researcher would need to be able to spend extended periods of time in discussion with academic staff members and observing their day-to-day workplace practices. In determining which units to approach, advice was sought from the rector or vice-rector at each of the selected site institutions. The websites for the academic departments nominated were then examined to assess their suitability for inclusion in the investigation. Important considerations were that the academic departments selected should be research productive, that they should be relatively large, and that they should have an academic profile that included senior and experienced academic staff members.

At one of the site institutions, the academic department selected was specialised in the natural and applied sciences. At another, the academic department selected was specialised in the humanities (mainly literature). At the third, the academic department selected was specialised in the applied social sciences. At the fourth, the academic department selected specialised in the humanities (mainly history).

Permission was sought from the heads of these academic departments for the researcher to approach individual members of academic staff about participating in the investigation. In each case, permission was willingly provided. Of note, though, is that one of the academic departments approached was a substitute for another department where the head of department expressed a reluctance about participating for reasons that were not explicitly stated but that appeared to relate to heavy workload commitments within the department.
To begin the process of selecting participants, each head of department was given background information about the investigation and asked to nominate several academic staff members who might be invited to contribute to the investigation. These participants were required to fit certain requirements: to be experienced with teaching; to hold a doctoral qualification; and to be reasonably accomplished in terms of their research outcomes. A purposive sampling technique, referred to by Patton (2002, p. 237) as ‘snowball sampling’, was then implemented to identify further participants, this approach being well suited to locating information-rich informants for an interpretive investigation. As applied in the present investigation, it involved asking participants who had been interviewed to suggest some colleagues in their department who might also be willing and able to throw light on matters of interest to the investigation. This process continued up to a point where data saturation, also described by Patton (2002, p. 246), began to be experienced. Though keeping a gender balance was not an explicit selection consideration, care was taken to avoid over-representation by one gender among the participants.

The participants were initially contacted by telephone, and then by email. Every one of the staff members approached to participate in the investigation willingly agreed to do so. Each member of staff who agreed to participate was given a summary of the aims, proposed methodology and likely outcomes of the investigation, together with an informed consent letter and return sheet, as required by the Southern Cross University Human Research Ethics Committee (see Appendix D for a copy of the consent form).

When chatting initially with each of the participants to develop a positive rapport, the researcher took time to explain her interest in the topic under investigation. She provided a brief account of her own academic career, together with an account of the reasons why she was interested in the perceptions of academic staff members regarding their role and work experiences. This process of self-disclosure appeared to be highly effective in gaining the confidence and trust of participants. The participants expressed satisfaction with the assurances given to them regarding anonymity, and they also clearly understood that they had the right to withdraw from the investigation at any time, for any reason, and without any need for explanation.

A total of 30 participants eventually contributed to the investigation. These participants came from a diverse range of backgrounds and described a diverse range of experiences.
Table 4.1 presents an overview of the participant profile.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Academic Position</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Site</th>
<th>Discipline</th>
<th>Highest Qualification</th>
<th>Experience</th>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>M</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>Nano-technology (NS)</td>
<td>PhD (Russia)</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Chuan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Associate Professor</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>Energy recovery (AS)</td>
<td>PhD (Vietnam)</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Quang</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
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<td>A</td>
<td>Energy materials (AS)</td>
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<td>35</td>
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<td>4</td>
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<td>A</td>
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<td>Tong</td>
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<td>10</td>
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<td>B</td>
<td>American literature (H)</td>
<td>PhD (Vietnam)</td>
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<td>11</td>
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<td>B</td>
<td>Russian literature (H)</td>
<td>PhD (Vietnam)</td>
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<td>M</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>Theory of literature (H)</td>
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<td>Specialization</td>
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<td>16</td>
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<tr>
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<td>C</td>
<td>Applied mathematics (AS)</td>
<td>PhD (Vietnam)</td>
<td>14</td>
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<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Associate Professor</td>
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<td>C</td>
<td>Clinical psychology (ASS)</td>
<td>PhD (France)</td>
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<tr>
<td>22</td>
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<tr>
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<td>C</td>
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<td>24</td>
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<td>C</td>
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<tr>
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<td>C</td>
<td>Clinical psychology (ASS)</td>
<td>PhD (USA)</td>
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<tr>
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<td>C</td>
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<td>PhD (Vietnam)</td>
<td>12</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
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<td>M</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>Social sciences (H)</td>
<td>PhD (France)</td>
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<td>29</td>
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<td>D</td>
<td>Chinese history (H)</td>
<td>PhD (China)</td>
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<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>Associate Professor</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>Vietnamese &amp; Southeast Asian history (H)</td>
<td>PhD (Vietnam)</td>
<td>30</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In Table 4.1, four academic levels are shown – professor, associate professor, senior lecturer and lecturer. Gender is shown as male (M) or female (F). The site institutions are labelled A, B, C or D. The disciplinary groupings are shown as NS for the natural sciences, AS for applied sciences, H for the humanities, and ASS for the applied social sciences. The specific area of disciplinary expertise of each of the participants is also shown, as is each participant’s highest academic qualification and the country in which this qualification was obtained. Experience as a member of academic staff is reported by means of years of university experience, and each participant is given an ID code in the form of a pseudonym.

Some aspects of the participants’ profile are of note. Eight of the participants were from applied sciences. Some of these were originally anticipated to be from the natural sciences, but the interviews clearly established that their academic interests were in areas that combined knowledge of the natural sciences with a current interest in applied science. Only four participants were clearly engaged in teaching and research in the natural sciences. In general, the experiences reported by participants from the natural and applied sciences were similar, and so, after interviewing a total of 12 of these participants, their interviews produced no new information, and data redundancy became evident. Many of these participants were involved in postgraduate teaching and research, and so a special effort was then made to include more participants from the natural and applied sciences who were engaged with undergraduate teaching.

Ten of the participants were from the humanities. These participants were specialised in areas of either literature or history, and one of the participants as from social sciences. Initially, interviews were conducted with seven participants from University B who were from the humanities, but these were all from areas of literature. To broaden the database, interviews were conducted with one more humanities scholar from University C, and with two additional humanities scholars from University D. By the tenth interview, data saturation in the humanities was reached. In general, these participants were much more active in teaching than they were in research.

Eight other participants were interviewed, all from the applied social sciences. Five of these participants worked in and mainly identified with the field of teacher education, and three of the participants were from the field of clinical psychology. For one of the
three clinical psychologists, research was a major preoccupation, while, for the five teacher educators, teaching was the main preoccupation.

Not documented in Table 4.1 but noteworthy nevertheless is that 10 of the 30 participants, including nine from the natural and applied sciences, had completed either their PhD or a post-doctoral program, or both, at leading international universities in Europe, North America, Japan or Australia. For six of these participants, their post-doctoral programs had been undertaken in a different country to the one in which they had completed their PhD.

4.4 Data Collection

The process of collecting data for the investigation took place on three occasions over the period from 2014 to 2016. The occasions were: June 2014, March 2015 and February 2016. Three methods of data collection were principally employed: semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and documentary analysis of departmental and university records. Each method is now explained.

4.4.1 Semi-structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were an effective means of obtaining information relevant to the focus of the present investigation. According to Patton (1980, p. 206), a semi-structured interview is a “two-person conversation initiated by the interviewer for the specific purpose of obtaining research-relevant information.” L. Cohen et al. (2011, p. 439) explain that the purpose of semi-structured interviews is “to explore issues, personal biographies, and what is meaningful to, or valued by, participants, how they feel about particular issues, how they look at particular issues, their attitudes, opinions and emotions.” According to Tuckman (1999, p. 237), “by providing access to what is ‘inside a person’s head’, [interviews] allow investigators to measure what someone knows (knowledge or information), what someone likes or dislikes (values and preferences) and what someone thinks (attitudes and beliefs).” Patton (1980, p. 206) explains that a semi-structured interview should allow the freedom and flexibility for new questions to arise naturally from the context, which increases the relevance and richness of the information obtained.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with each of the participants listed in Table 4.1. Each interview was conducted at a time and place of the participant’s choosing. The
location for the interviews was mainly in the participant’s office, but interviews were also conducted in classrooms, in the grounds of the site institution, and sometimes, at the request of the participant, at a cafe close to the institution. All the interviews were conducted in Vietnamese, the native language of the researcher. All interviews were scheduled to require about one hour in duration. No interview took less than 30 minutes. In eight cases, the main interview continued for more than 90 minutes. With permission from the participant concerned, each interview was recorded digitally using a small and unobtrusive digital recorder. Participants were assured that the digital recorder could be turned off at any point during the interview, but no participant made this request. The researcher returned to the participants for follow-up interviews by way of member-checking, mainly concerning matters of detail needing to be clarified, and for the purposes of triangulating the data reported.

Contact with one-third of the participants continued for some months following the main interview. These were participants who had indicated a willingness to take part in follow-up discussion and to respond to queries sent to them by email. The offer to assist the researcher in this way proved to be invaluable because, for some participants, supplementary interviews provided additional insights that greatly enhanced the quality of the information originally obtained. Ten of the participants were happy to be interviewed at least three times.

In developing an interview schedule for the data collection, the researcher consciously tried to include a mix of ‘grand tour’, ‘mini-tour’, ‘example’ and ‘experience’ questions, as recommended by Spradley (1979, pp. 86-88). The ‘grand tour’ questions could be ‘typical’, ‘specific’, ‘guided’ or ‘task-related’, also as explained by Spradley (1979, p. 87). Table 4.2 presents the interview schedule employed for the present investigation. The questions presented in Table 4.2 are predominantly ‘typical grand tour’ questions, and the purpose for asking each of them is summarised in the right-hand column in the Table. It is important to note, though, that many additional and subsidiary prompts were given and questions asked in response to the explanations given as the participants responded to the ‘grand-tour’ questions shown in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2: Interview Schedule

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tell me about how you acquired expertise</td>
<td>This question sought to provide an</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
in your knowledge area and about why you decided to be an academic.

understanding about the participant’s educational background and process of academic enculturation. The question provided a basis for being able to find out more about the participant’s experience as an academic, especially their early experiences of induction to academic life.

What does your work as a university academic involve?

This question provided a basis for understanding each participant’s role and responsibilities, and day-to-day employment experiences. It also sought to make the participants feel that they were engaging in a conversation related to their interests and experiences. It provided an opportunity to identify their understanding of their role and about how it fitted with their university’s vision (aspiration) and mission. It sought to obtain rich, descriptive accounts of what each participant did, as a teacher and as a researcher.

What is it that you value most about being a university academic?

This question provided an opportunity to hear about the circumstances of academic life, and about perceptions of the role of an academic staff member. It was an important question for gaining insight to the sources of professional satisfaction for participants. It also prompted discussion about aspects of organisational culture, including the role played by the participant’s university in society. A matter of special interest concerned experiences of organisational socialisation, but some participants were wholly internationally aspirational.

How important is your research to your role as a university lecturer?

This question provided a basis for exploring each participant’s experiences of research and of immersion in a disciplinary culture. It also allowed for an exploration of the ways in which organisational culture supported disciplinary culture.

Have you published articles in peer-reviewed academic books and journals? What has been your experience of publishing? How important is it to you?

This question was intended to obtain factual details about the research productivity of the participants. It also sought to encourage the participants to
Why?

To what extent would you say that you belong to an ‘academic community’? Describe the academic community and networks to which you feel you belong.

This question sought to obtain details about the extent to which participants felt a sense of affinity with the notion of an academic community. It provided an important opportunity for obtaining information about the sense of academic identity experienced by each of the participants.

What do you see to be the conditions that encourage you and support you to achieve what you value about being an academic?

This question sought to obtain details about the incentives (or lack of incentives) and opportunities (or lack of opportunities) for the attainment of personal satisfaction from teaching and research at a university. Additionally, this question was intended to obtain a stronger sense of how the participants perceived organisational and disciplinary values were being supported by national strategies and external forces. Various prompts were given concerning different aspects of the organisational culture and leadership of the participant’s university and academic department.

All things considered, would you recommend the academic life to your most capable students? Why/why not?

This question encouraged more general reflection on the values associated with an academic life, and on the extent to which the pursuit of these values in the context of higher education in Vietnam is a worthwhile pursuit. It also provided a basis for exploring views about the future development of the profession.

If you had three wishes, what you wish for as an academic member of staff?

This light-hearted way of concluding the interviews was intended to provide the participants with an opportunity to attach priorities of importance to their aspirations as academic members of staff. It also provided a means whereby each participant could sum up on all that had been reported during the interview, and express their values, beliefs and aspirations as academics.
4.4.2 Participant Observation

Over the three one-month blocks of fieldwork, the researcher managed to spend extended periods of time at each of the four site institutions, chatting informally with participants and other colleagues. During this time, the researcher was invited to attend various meetings, including faculty meetings and departmental meetings. It was considered critically important to document the cultural elements and tacit understandings reported by the participants. In this regard, the researcher, who had in the past been an academic member of staff at one of the site institutions, was in the privileged position of being able to build on her insider, or ‘emic’, knowledge of the culture at the site institutions. A reflective journal was kept daily throughout the period of fieldwork. This journal was initially intended to be a supplementary document for interviews, with notes kept about matters that might not be evident in the interview transcripts. Progressively, it became a rich source of information that included not only notes relating to the interviews but also notes made after casual discussion with many other staff members from each of the site institutions. It provided a valuable means of recording casual observations and personal reflections, and an avenue for member-checking and triangulation across sources, over time and between data sets, as required by Lincoln and Guba (1985) for trustworthiness in data collection and analysis. Much of what was recorded in the journal gave expression in words to everyday taken-for-granted activities and interactions at the site institutions – that is, to the tacit aspects and understandings of participants in the daily life of the site institutions.

Participant observation has been defined by L. Cohen et al. (2011, p. 456) as a research process that “offers an investigator the opportunity to gather live data from naturally occurring social situations.” Participant observation is, as Simpson and Tuson (2003, p. 14) describe, “the most subtly intrusive” form of observation. It permits the researcher to act as a sympathetic member of a group, while at the same time being able to retain a degree of detachment with regard to the situation being investigated (L. Cohen et al., 2011, p. 465). Participant observation permits a researcher to obtain access to everyday natural behaviours in the natural setting of the participants in an investigation. It is a more likely source of valid and authentic data than is usually available from secondary accounts and from inferential measures (L. Cohen et al., 2011, p. 456). Robson (2002, p. 310) adds that participant observation may also be utilised to understand how what people do might be different from what they say they do.
In the present investigation, participant observation was undertaken to supplement the collection of data derived from the semi-structured interviews with participants. While observing the daily life of an academic department by participating in the daily flow of verbal communications, by attending classes and meetings, and by interacting informally with academic staff members and their students, the researcher could build an understanding of the natural context of the culture being observed. This understanding allowed the researcher to triangulate across data types by checking on her interpretations of what was being reported by the participants. In turn, she could construct a profile of the tacit knowledge shared by the participants working in their specific departmental settings.

The schedule of observations adopted for the present investigation was semi-structured, enabling the researcher to be flexible and responsive in finding out about what De Munck and Sobo (1998, p. 93) describe as the “backstage culture” of the social setting. Following a schedule proposed by Morrison (1993, p. 80), characteristics of the physical setting were the first to be documented. Observations were made regarding the state of the buildings, lecture rooms, libraries, laboratories, equipment, working spaces and internet access points. Second, observations were made about the range of academic activities in which the participants were engaged, including scientific seminars and conferences, meetings and working sessions, and thesis defence meetings. Third, the routine actions of the participants were documented, including their routine behaviours, their informal communications with colleagues, and their more formal contributions at meetings and scientific seminars. This information was all systematically documented in the researcher’s journal, which was updated daily.

4.4.3 Documentary Analysis

While conducting site visits and interviews, many documents relating to the every-day working lives of the participants were collected. These documents mainly concerned regulations issued by MOET to the higher education sector, directives from senior management levels at each of the four site universities, course outlines, research reports and learning materials produced for use by students. In addition, institutional websites were routinely monitored.

Documentary materials were mainly valuable as a source of triangulation, that is, checking the extent of the correspondence between what was reported by the
participants and what was evident in documentary sources. These materials were of additional value in terms of building an understanding of the perceived and actual priorities of each of the site universities, and for triangulating issues, claims and concerns reported by the participants.

4.5 Data Analysis

The task of analysing the data was formidable. Its volume, including interview transcripts, observation notes and personal reflections, amounted to more than 300,000 words. In addition, there were many documentary materials collected from each of the site institutions.

To begin the process, each of the recorded interviews was transcribed in Vietnamese. Each transcription was then sent to the respective participant, who was invited to edit the material if required and offer any additional comments if interested in doing so. While the participants appeared generally to be satisfied with the transcriptions, four of them supplied additional comments.

The task of translating the transcriptions into English then commenced. After translating 12 transcripts, it became evident that too much valuable information was being lost in the translation process. Many of the participants’ remarks, made in everyday Vietnamese, were rich in meaning, but this meaning was difficult to reproduce in English without adding a great deal of supplementary text. It was decided instead to analyse the documents in Vietnamese.

The strategy for data analysis followed Lincoln and Guba’s (1985, pp. 333-335) model, the main features of which are that data analysis should be inductive, generative and constructive. Inductive processes of data analysis begin with the data themselves, from which the theoretical propositions and their relationship are drawn. Attempts are then made to establish propositions grounded on the data by using inductive analysis. The process of abstraction was based on the units for analysis derived mainly from the data set of participants’ accounts.

The interview transcripts were initially given code names to preserve their anonymity, with header information based on the level of experience of each participant, that is, whether senior (S) or junior (J), and the participant’s disciplinary field, that is, whether in the natural sciences (NS), applied sciences (AS), humanities (H) or applied social
sciences (ASS). Categorisation within and across header variables was thus possible. Each interviewee was given a pseudonym, as indicated in Table 4.1. Documentary materials were given coded identities as being either from MOET or from one of the four site institutions. The interview data set was then loaded into NVivo*10 to enable multiple retrieval (in Vietnamese) of strings of interesting or important words by the researcher during data analysis.

The process of open coding of data, as described by (Patton, 2002, pp. 462-466), followed. This began with screening of the transcripts for ‘units of meaning’ in the form of meaningful phrases or sentences that could be labelled with descriptors. Some ‘units of meaning’ had several descriptors attached to them. The intention of open coding was simply to tag as many ‘units of meaning’ as possible with descriptors that were conceptually relevant. These descriptors then provided the basis for a further refinement of analysis of the data.

The generation of descriptors during the process of open coding involved the use of two techniques, constant comparison analysis and negative case analysis, both as described by Lincoln and Guba (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 309) as trustworthiness criteria. This form of analysis is also described by Goetz and LeCompte (1981, p. 54). Typically, the descriptors were drawn from the terms used by the participants. An additional source of descriptors was the relevant literature, as reviewed in Chapter 3. By reading through the transcripts and listening once again to each interview, descriptors emerged and were noted. Examples such as ‘career aspiration’, ‘low regard and frustration’, ‘commitment to teaching’, ‘moonlight teaching’, ‘scholarship’, ‘advanced technology’, ‘respect for evidence’, ‘innovation’, ‘networking’ and ‘publication’ emerged. These descriptors provided an initial set of codes that was continuously refined and splintered taxonomically until the point of saturation was reached. Table 4.3 provides examples of the code list initially established.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 4.3: Examples of Initial Codes</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Unit of Meaning Extracted from Transcript</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am co-supervisor of two PhD students from other universities.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Our main task of doing research has been supported by institutional strategy, which has been focused on the development of research.

We sometimes send data for analysis to overseas labs.

I have collaborated with scholars in different disciplines from other institutions in doing two research projects.

Government funding schemes are more available

Our research will address practical issues

I love literature, and I love teaching literature. I felt great happiness with my work.

I enjoy freedom and an autonomous working agenda

Most of my time is spent on research

Increasing research funding

Seminars are often organised at the department

We have few opportunities for overseas trips and exchanges

Having produced many peer reviewed papers

Spending much time on moonlight teaching, which generated additional income

Axial coding, as described by Patton (2002, pp. 462-467) followed, requiring a laborious process of line-by-line examination of the data for the purposes of searching for emerging themes and examples of them throughout the data set. This process also required the identification and analysis of negative cases to better understand the phenomena holistically. The use of the software package, NVivo*10, which permits multiple retrieval of themes and strings of words, and which accommodates the Vietnamese language, greatly assisted with this process by enabling the researcher to regroup ‘units of meaning’ speedily in response to the identification of emerging themes. As Coffey and Atkinson (1996, p. 169) explain, however, this software does not help in generating themes; this process is the sole responsibility of the researcher.

Finally, thematic analysis was implemented. In this process, key themes already identified were searched for in the text to ensure thick, rich description of the issue,
claim or concern aired by participants. Negative case analysis continued in this stage. Passages of text from the interview transcripts that shared a common theme were grouped and regrouped as new insights emerged. Thematic analysis was the most intensive of the analytic processes because it required much re-reading of the transcripts, together with checking of the researcher’s journal notes and some re-interviewing of selected participants to establish clearly the intent behind some of their remarks. It was at this stage of the coding process that documentary materials were intensively examined for their relevance to and capacity to inform the emerging themes.

Once the major themes were identified, using N*Vivo10, ‘quotable’ quotes from the data set, that is, the transcripts and the other documentary materials, were selected to illustrate the major themes. These quotes were carefully translated into English. An independent bilingual auditor then undertook back-translation into Vietnamese of a wide, random selection of these quotes in English, together with an audit of the thematic analysis process and initial, emerging finding. The original and the back-translated versions in Vietnamese were then compared, and the researcher and the auditor discussed matters of detail to come to an agreement regarding how particular words and phrases might be best reported in English.

4.6 Establishing Trustworthiness

Lincoln and Guba (1985, p. 43) identify four criteria for assessing the rigour and authenticity of findings to emerge from the use of Naturalistic Inquiry as a research methodology. These criteria concern credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. They represent different aspects of the responsibility an investigator bears in undertaking research within the framework of Naturalistic Inquiry.

Credibility refers to the extent to which an investigation has been implemented rigorously, to the point where its findings are not only likely to be believable but also would be regarded by the participants in the investigation as being believable (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 296). Transferability refers to the extent to which an investigation is reported in such a manner that others may be able to find meaning from the findings that applies to their own situation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 296). Dependability refers to the extent to which the investigative process has been implemented in a way that is logical and traceable (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 299). Confirmability refers to the extent to which the findings of an investigation can be shown not to have been simply a
figment of the investigator’s imagination, but a fair and reasonable interpretation that any reader might agree is appropriate.

All the techniques suggested by Lincoln and Guba (1985) to achieve trustworthiness in *Naturalistic Inquiry* were applied in the present investigation. First, there was ‘prolonged engagement’ with the participants in the investigation. The researcher spent a total of almost three months, at three separate intervals, visiting the four site institutions and interacting with the participants in the investigation. This length and spread of time provided ample opportunity for the researcher to become immersed in the work setting of her participants. It built trust and permitted the development of an adequate general appreciation of the local cultures. During this time, it was possible for the researcher to develop a strong rapport with each participant. It became possible then to maintain informal contact by email with most of the participants.

Second, there was an extensive process of ‘triangulation’ of the data collected by means of the interviews. The claims made by individual participants were checked against claims made by other participants, as well as against the researcher’s observations of what happened in practice, and against documentary materials relating to workload requirements, institutional policies, curriculum frameworks, and so on.

Third, ‘member checking’ was rigorously applied as a means of ensuring credibility. The participants were provided with numerous opportunities to refine, negotiate and confirm the findings to emerge from the investigation. The participants were, for example, invited to validate the authenticity of the interview transcripts, to comment on the ways in which points made by them were being interpreted by the researcher, and to participate in the development of the emerging themes from the investigation. All the participants were, for example, invited to contribute to a mini-seminar conducted at three of the site institutions to hear about and discuss the main themes to emerge from the investigation. Ten of the participants took advantage of this opportunity to contribute directly to discussion of the main themes.

Fourth, ‘peer debriefing’ took place frequently and regularly as a means of ensuring the credibility of the findings. The researcher met weekly with her two academic supervisors throughout most of the period of the investigation – except, of course, when she or they were abroad. At these meetings, documents were routinely shared and critically reviewed. The research also contributed to seminars attended by other doctoral
candidates, including four occasions that included researchers who were from Vietnam, and who were, therefore, very familiar with the context for the investigation.

Fifth, a process of ‘independent auditing’ was implemented whereby a fellow PhD candidate from Vietnam who had extensive experience of qualitative research, but no prior knowledge of the present investigation, carefully checked a random selection of the translated transcripts to ensure particularly that idiomatic expressions in Vietnamese were being adequately reported in English. This person also reviewed the evidence contained in the transcripts, as well as in the researcher’s reflective journal, upon which the themes to emerge from investigation were developed. An independent report by the auditor is attached as Appendix E. A sample of entries in the researcher’s reflective journal is presented in Appendix F.

Notwithstanding all the effort invested in ensuring the trustworthiness of the data, the findings reported in this investigation are drawn from settings in which notions of an academic culture and of academic identity are heavily influenced by local circumstances to such an extent that there may continue to be a dissonance between the understanding of these concepts held by those reading this report and the understandings of the participants in the investigation. The probability of this dissonance occurring can be minimised by adhering to the trustworthiness checks that have been reported here, but the risk can never entirely be eliminated, especially if the audience is not very familiar with Vietnamese higher education culture.

4.7 Ethical Considerations

As reported earlier, the plan and procedures for the conduct of the present investigation was approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee of Southern Cross University (see Appendix B). Of importance was the need to protect the anonymity of the participants and their institutions, and to obtain informed consent from the individuals contributing to the investigation. The participants were required to confirm that they were appropriately informed about the investigation and that they were participating voluntarily. Of significance, though, is that, while the participants approached for interviews were most willing to oblige the researcher, many of them expressed a degree of reluctance about signing a consent form. This concern is quite understandable in Vietnam, where it is not customary for participants to sign consent forms because there is a general concern felt about the need to remain anonymous. To achieve the
signatures, a great deal of explanation along the lines that requirements in Australia are
different, and that the consent forms would be stored separately from interview
transcripts, was necessary. In some cases, the reaction to the request to sign the consent
form was puzzling because the participants concerned had completed their own PhD
research in developed higher education sectors abroad where concern about research
ethics is a fundamental research requirement. There was also concern expressed by
some participants, who did not want that their interview recorded. These participants
were reassured that, once the interviews were transcribed, they would be invited to edit
the transcript to remove anything they did not want to disclose. Subsequently, though,
when provided with the opportunity to edit the transcript, no one requested any changes.

In the context of Vietnam, having a good relationship with participants is a stronger
basis for trust than having a signed consent form. Building a good relationship takes
time and involved many visits to each of the site institutions in this investigation. It was
important to the participants that the research project should be explained in detail, that
the researcher should explain the context for postgraduate research in Australia, and that
the researcher should offer to conduct a seminar on her research once findings began to
emerge. All these forms of assurance were provided and commitments met. During the
final writing up of the investigation, the researcher provided seminars to participants on
the key findings from the investigation.

4.8 Concluding Remarks

This chapter has presented an account of the methodology for the present investigation.
It has identified Naturalistic Inquiry (Lincoln and Guba, 1985) as an appropriate and
rigorous methodological approach for the investigation. It has reported how the
investigation was implemented and how the results were analysed. It has also given
detailed attention to the implementation of trustworthiness requirements, and it has
reported the attention given to ethical considerations. However, it is now essential to
examine the data and the emergent themes to give life to the operationalisation of the
methodology and to understand the experiences of the participants about being an
academic in Vietnam.
Chapter 5

EXPERIENCES OF ORGANISATIONAL CULTURE

This chapter reports findings relating to the first of the research questions introduced in Chapter 1. The question concerns the participants’ experiences of the organisational culture of their academic department and, more broadly, of their university. Tierney’s (1988) framework for analysing the key elements in an organisational culture in the context of higher education, explained in Chapter 3, informs the structure for reporting the participants’ experiences of organisational culture within their workplaces. Tierney’s framework points to six key elements that he considered to be important to an understanding of the organisational culture of a higher education institution. These were: the organisation’s environment, its mission, its processes of socialisation, its decision-making strategy, its use of information, and its leadership. Each of these elements is addressed in the following account.

For convenience in reporting the data, reference is made to the four site institutions as University A, B, C and D. As shown in Table 4.1, there were 9 participants from University A, 9 participants from University B, 10 participants from University C, and 2 participants from University D.

5.1 Organisational Environment

Tierney (1988, p. 9) argued that the way in which a higher education institution relates to its environment can play an important role in enabling an institution to define more clearly its individual organisational distinctiveness. Noteworthy were comments made by the participants about their university’s relationship with its environment, which were provided in response to an interview question about what the participants considered to be important about the role played by their university in society.

The strongest overall theme from these comments was a view of their university in Vietnam as an organisation focused on making a significant contribution to national socioeconomic development. Research-oriented universities were claimed to have a special role to play in this regard by generating knowledge and by providing advanced training for future professionals. This perspective appeared to provide the participants with a strong framework for viewing their own role and responsibilities as members of academic staff.
For participants from the natural and applied sciences, this view fitted well with their research interests. Mr Quang, an associate professor of energy recovery (a specialism within chemical engineering) at University A, explained: “Producing appropriate technologies in the discipline of chemical engineering is helping poor families in Vietnam and is an effective way for Vietnam to narrow the gap that exists with its neighbours in Southeast Asia.”

Ms Lam, a young lecturer in magnetic materials (a specialism within applied physics) at University A, expressed a similar commitment to the application of science in support of Vietnam’s socio-economic development: “My profession is in basic science. In Vietnam, if our country would like to invest for its future development, [my profession] would be very valuable because industrial production needs us. We can support industry. We do research, and industry produces products. It would be very good.”

Mr Noan, a senior lecturer in physics at University A, spoke in more general terms about the contribution to Vietnam’s economic development that the natural and applied sciences could make through its focus on innovation:

*Because of our present society, changes are needed, are they not? Without changes, without innovation, how would our society be? How good is our productivity compared with Singapore? The time for growing by relying on the faster production of more food [a reference to Vietnam’s traditional reliance on rice production] is finished. We would never achieve growth if we had not developed the sciences and if we did not have highly regarded scientists.*

Many of these comments focused on the benefits of applied science, reflecting a tendency for participants from the natural and applied sciences to be mainly concerned with application and the societal relevance of scientific and mathematical knowledge. Even for those participants whose research interests were in areas of basic science, their inclination was to regard what their research work to have relevance to the need for positive contributions to national socioeconomic development.

For participants from the humanities and the applied social sciences, a view of the university as an institution committed to serving national socioeconomic development also fitted well with their research interests, though their focus was claimed to be more sharply directed towards improving the individual and social well-being of the people of...
Vietnam. Mr Cuong, a professor of American literature at University B, commented, for example: “Literature [helps] to ensure the balance in society, for example, in terms of how we understand life, people, ethics, what is right, and what is wrong. Literature, history and geography teach children and form their personalities.”

Mr Quan, an associate professor of Vietnamese literature at University B, expressed a similar perspective: “Social sciences and humanities are very much needed. Vietnamese people now have a fairly homogenous living style, basically concerned only with earning money because of our poverty. It is increasingly clear that money cannot meet all the [community’s] social needs.”

Mr Men, a young lecturer in clinical psychology at University C, was also confident that his area of expertise could contribute to community well-being: “The specialism that I pursue helps to have a healthier community, both physically and mentally. The health of people is our business, and recognition by society [of the role we play] gives us pleasure.”

Across all disciplinary groupings, the societal importance of teaching was widely emphasised. Participants from the natural and applied sciences referred frequently to the sense of personal responsibility they felt for training the future generation of scientists, engineers, biomedical experts, statisticians, and so on. A recurring theme was the need to take account of labour-market needs when designing and delivering training programs. Mr Hoang, an associate professor of energy materials at University A, explained:

*The goal of an education program of high quality is to produce the graduates required for areas of need in the community. Our courses, as I see it, must meet certain criteria, including that the knowledge base is as good as can be found anywhere, even overseas, and that the knowledge is relevant to labour-market needs. This means the knowledge must be contemporary and must meet hi-tech needs.*

In the humanities and applied social sciences, the aspiration expressed by many of the participants was to improve the ways in which young people in Vietnam might approach the future. Some of the participants expressed a sense of disappointment,
though, that they were not able to achieve more in this regard. For example, Ms Phuong, an associate professor of educational theory at University C, commented ruefully that:

I try to be a reference point for young people . . . a reference point for spirit, a reference point for values . . . for all students. . .. I see [this to be] most important, because, at present in society, the core values have been turned upside down. The bad things in the past now become good; and the good things in the past now become bad. For example, in the past, working hard to become wealthy was a reason for feeling guilty. Now, people are encouraged to pursue wealth. Most traditional values have been overturned or destroyed. I feel pity for young people. Food and clothing have become much better, but young people have lives full of hardship, because adults are selfish and society is in chaos. Young people cannot find a reference point for their spirit.

Ms Khanh, a lecturer in Russian literature at University B, also touched upon this theme. She reasoned:

When I teach, I always tell my students about the beautiful things. [I want them to] discover that everything in literature is beautiful and interesting, including humanity, values and love. But in day-to-day reality, they see all that has no meaning, and all that has no real values. My students say: ‘Teacher, you keep talking about beautiful things but after graduation we need to have money and a job if we are not to be unemployed. Teacher, for what purpose do we learn and graduate?’ I don’t know how to answer my students’ questions. I often feel frustrated, because I have devoted my life to my teaching.

Though very firmly committed to the importance of their teaching, these participants appeared to struggle with doubt about the extent to which they could ever be successful in living up to the high expectations they had set for themselves as teachers.

Participants from the humanities and applied social sciences also expressed concern about the minimal social impact of their research efforts. Ms Nuong, a lecturer in the theory of literature at University B, pointed to an important theme raised repeatedly in comments from participants in the humanities and applied social sciences. She was concerned about the disconnect between social research and policy making in Vietnam:
They [her publishing and teaching achievements] cannot make much difference to the reality that is Vietnam. It is a fact of life for the humanities and social sciences. It cannot make any real change. I often feel discouraged. [At meetings] we spend time sitting here and discussing these issues without knowing why. We cannot make any change in the life outside. The policy makers make the decisions on everything. They do not need research! The researchers keep doing research. They do not know about policies.

Mr Huan, a lecturer in the theory of literature at University B, expressed the same point of view, stating that: “No lecturer from our department has ever been invited to comment about contemporary social issues, such as, for example, about the relationship between Vietnam and China. Yet we have several experts in the department who graduated from China.”

Ms Quynh, an associate professor of educational psychology at University C, agreed, but thought that the problem was essentially one of a lack of belief in the value of the research undertaken by Vietnamese scholars in the applied social sciences:

"Research outcomes in the natural sciences are [widely considered to be] of higher quality and more reliable. But in the social sciences, these things [research outcomes] are not seen as reliable at all. Therefore, in the social sciences, research is for research purposes only. It does not have any applicability at all for decision making. For introducing a single social change, we are forced to use outcomes of research conducted overseas. Regarding our own research, what we are talking about – nobody listens and nobody believes."

Issues relating to the quality of the research undertaken by participants from the humanities and applied social sciences are addressed in more detail in later chapters. Of significance, though, is that participants from the humanities and applied social sciences felt so much concern about the lack of social impact of their research. To that extent, then, they felt that they were not sufficiently aligned with a sense of their institution’s role in making a significant contribution to Vietnam’s socioeconomic development. Their feelings were palpably those of frustration.
5.2 Mission

In Tierney’s (1988, p. 11) framework, the mission of a higher education institution, as documented in an institutional mission statement, should provide a rationale and a range of criteria for the future development of the institution. The mission statement should also provide a basis for engaging in institutional self-criticism and for reviewing institutional performance. Tierney also argued that, in a well-developed organisational culture, the mission statement would be widely shared among and well understood by all members of staff. The institution’s president would, for example, routinely articulate the institutional mission statement in speeches and in written communications.

Each of the four site institutions had a mission statement. These statements, though not elaborate, were prominently located on institutional websites and had in common a strong emphasis on the need to strive for international recognition through research achievements and high quality teaching. University A’s mission statement referred to “providing to society and the community the best service via training, research and technological transfer, making an efficient contribution for industrialisation, modernisation, security and the development of Vietnam’s higher education system.” University B’s mission statement referred to “producing human resources of high quality, cultivating talents for the national education system and the whole of society, undertaking pure and applied research in the disciplines of the natural sciences, humanities and the social sciences, and providing education and technological services for industrialisation, modernisation and international integration of the country.” University C’s mission statement referred to “making efforts to be a research-oriented institution, producing lecturers and teachers for all education levels, education management staff, educators and education researchers, based on national and international scholarly networks, achieving regional standards, and having some units achieving international standards.” University D’s mission statement referred to “being a multidisciplinary institution for producing high quality human resources, meeting the needs of society, being a centre for research, technological application and transfer, serving the socio-economic development of the middle area [of Vietnam] and the whole country. . . a key university, having some disciplines at international standards.” The similarity of wording between the various institutional mission statements is indicative of the extent to which all the institutions paraphrased prescriptions in the Higher Education Law of 2012 regarding the importance of being more research-oriented.
For participants with strong research credentials, the emphasis on research in their institution’s mission statement was overwhelmingly welcomed. Ms Thu, a senior lecturer in applied mathematics at University C, described the success of her university as follows:

*Academic staff members at this University have the highest qualification levels in the country: 90% of academic staff members are PhD holders. The University has maintained high, very high, disciplinary standards. We have become well known [for the importance of our various disciplines]. The University has leading scholars at international levels. These scholars are often invited as lecturers and scholars to overseas universities. These are leading international scholars. It is our great pride! In recent years, I do not exaggerate, any ministry or any agency anywhere that needs experts in natural sciences invites scholars from this University [to work with them].*

Mr Huynh, an associate professor of Vietnamese history at University D, also expressed enormous pride in the research achievements of his institution:

*Since this University was designated as a ‘key’ university, the institutional leadership has required higher standards of teaching and research. Regarding research, because of such strong leadership over recent years, we are among the top universities producing the highest number of international publications in Vietnam.*

Mr Huynh’s claim could not be readily verified from available data, but there was no reason to doubt the claim that his institution had recently acquired a strong reputation in Vietnam for its research attainments. It had achieved a high rating in recent accounts in the popular press of ‘top 20’ universities in Vietnam.²

Many participants were also delighted to see more resources now being made available for research. They reported on the direct link between the Government’s aspiration to have some globally significant research-oriented universities and an increase in the availability of funds to support research at these universities. For example, Ms Kieu Nga, a senior lecturer in linguistics at University B, commented:

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Over the past 10 years, I have seen the Government’s support for higher education become much better. A higher priority is now given to young lecturers being trained in research skills and completing doctorates abroad. Investment in science and technologies has increased. These developments have provided many more opportunities for research. NAFOSTED provides a large amount of financial support for researchers in the humanities and social sciences [compared with previously]. There are more opportunities for researchers to collaborate with international research communities. Provincial research schemes provide more opportunities for research institutions to achieve technology transfers.

Mr Hoan, an associate professor of applied mathematics at University C, also commented on the positive effect these developments were having on the aspirations of individual academics:

Recently there have been more funding schemes available. Now there is NAFOSTED. Regarding its operation, the administrative requirements have become far less bureaucratic, and there has also been an important move towards internationally comparable standards. These developments have encouraged university lecturers, especially active researchers, and they have created incentives. The increase in research funding schemes has resulted from developments in the economy and from the push for global integration of Vietnam’s universities.

Mr Kien, a professor of applied physics at University A, referred to the scale of the recent increase in funding:

In Vietnam, the conditions for research are getting better and better. Some universities and institutes have received huge investments. At this University, there has been an investment of 70 to 80 billion Vietnamese VND [US$3.5 to 4.0 million] in research support!

The increased funding was regarded to be particularly helpful for early career researchers. Ms Luong, a senior lecturer in physics at University A, explained, for example:
Recently, the Government has issued many policies that support young lecturers. In this academic department, most recent PhD graduates from overseas receive considerable funding support to continue their research. The University also offers supportive conditions to departments engaged in research and publication. I have less teaching now, so that supports my research. In short, everything is very good!

It was also reported that there had been a much-needed improvement in the information technology infrastructure at research-oriented universities. Ms Quynh, an associate professor of educational psychology at University C, commented enthusiastically on this development:

*The physical conditions and the infrastructure are much more supportive of research. Internet connections are [now] available everywhere. Access to scholarship is made possible via the internet now! Overseas study programs are another enabling opportunity. Even without public funding, individuals are now becoming able to find their own way.*

Mr Cuong, a professor of American literature at University B, agreed:

*At present, there is plenty of information available. There is so much information now available via the internet. Internet communications with overseas institutions are good. . .. Famous literary works that used to be rare, and which we could not read, now can be found very easily. In fact, they are now available to print, and soft copies can be obtained via the internet at affordable prices. Before this development, it was impossible to access them.*

The participants reported also though on some important needs that were yet to be addressed. One of these concerned the low salary levels of academics. It was widely agreed that low salary levels impacted adversely upon the research productivity of academic staff members. The heavy teaching workloads made research productivity difficult, if not impossible, because members of staff were forced to do more teaching outside their normal workload to augment their income. Mr Duong, a young lecturer in psychology at University C, explained the situation for himself, and evidently for his colleagues:
The remuneration is very low. Regarding our specialism, those who work in NGOs or private centres usually earn much higher salaries because they work in a service sector. At universities, the wage rate is only VND 3-4 million [around US$150-200] per month. This remuneration is extremely low if a family depends upon it.

Ms Lam, a lecturer in magnetic materials at University A, claimed similar difficulties. She explained:

We face a lot of difficulties. The salary for academics does not afford a living. You see a salary of 5 million VND [US$250] per month. How can we live on it? We spend funds from research projects for buying chemicals, for measuring, and supporting students. For example, I have a project valued of 800 million (US$40,000). I have nothing for my pocket. I must spend for everything: paying remuneration for this and that person, and all such things. This grant affords only my travelling costs. Without doing research projects, life is very difficult. Wealthier families might support someone’s living. Regarding myself, after I defended my PhD with the institutional committee, I didn’t want to stay here. . . . We haven’t got a house, we rented. My husband was far way. My child was often sick. It was so difficult. Both our families could not help. They live far away.

Many participants reported that, because of the low salary levels, there was a lot of pressure upon them to do additional teaching, above and beyond the required base teaching load for academic staff members, to secure more weekly income. Mr Thuan, an associate professor of social sciences at University D, explained how research could be neglected under these circumstances:

Lecturers face the need to have rice and money: children go to schools, paying their extra classes, living in cities, and all the other expenses. Therefore, many lecturers choose to offer extra classes to supplement their income. The rate for one hour of supplementary teaching is four to five times the normal rate for teaching by a full-time employee at the university. . . . Because of the need to do more teaching, academics become distracted from pursuing research and publications.
Mr Kien, who for many years had been a professor of applied physics at University A, expressed his frustration about the extent to which the need for academic staff members to take on heavy teaching workloads detracted from research activity, especially in a context in which the mission of research-oriented universities was increasingly focused upon achieving ‘world-class’ status in research. He described the situation to be self-defeating:

*Our reality here is like that of Korea 10 or 20 years ago. All day long our professors spend time teaching and do only a little bit of research. We must change. Universities must do research. The view of many people in universities is so strange: ‘We teach and we earn money for the university. You do research, and yet you earn nothing for the university.*

Another major claim reported was the poor and inadequate institutional research infrastructure. Mr Van, a young lecturer in educational evaluation at University C, reported, for example: “As you can see, I cannot say that my office at the university is a place to do research. It is a place for resting.” His office was a large room shared with all other academic staff members in the department. There were three times as many academic staff members in his department as there were desks available, and so it was a frenzied atmosphere.

The dire state of physical infrastructure for academics was reportedly no better at any of the other site institutions. Ms Loan, an associate professor of educational management at University B, described the situation in her academic department:

*Only academics in management positions, such as the dean and the deputy deans, are provided with a private desk and a computer with internet access. Our computers are often not in working condition, and we have either no access to the internet or low-speed access.*

She demonstrated how frustrating it was for younger academics. Pointing to the computer at her shared desk, Ms Loan commented despondently: “Some senior academics, such as associate professors and professors, are provided with a desk and a computer that has internet access, but they never use the computer because they lack the basic computer skills.”
While the missions of all four site universities were widely perceived by the participants to have shifted significantly over recent years in favour of a stronger commitment to research, significant impediments to research, particularly in the form of the low base academic salary levels of academics, remained a considerable constraint. A better alignment between the institutional mission statements was possibly being made by additional funds being made available for research, but the prevailing view of the participants was that their institutions had a long way to go in terms of achieving a significant level of alignment between their missions and the reality of life in academic departments.

5.3 Socialisation

Tierney’s (1988, pp. 12-13) notion of socialisation initially emphasised the importance of the day-to-day reinforcement within an organisation of its values and aspirations. Later, in 1997, he argued that the process of socialisation involved drawing upon the attributes of individuals for the purposes of building the organisation’s culture (Tierney, 1997, p. 14). During the interviews, the participants were invited to report on how they had experienced being socialised to their university and to their academic department.

Across all four of the site departments, although no actual induction programs were mentioned, there was a widely shared sense of satisfaction expressed about the professional relationships existing between members of academic staff. Pride in the achievements of an academic department blended with the quality of these relationships to produce what many participants described to be a ‘family atmosphere’ within their academic department. Informal processes of organisational socialisation therefore prevailed.

The high level of identification with their university that many participants expressed is captured by the account given by Mr Tong, a senior lecturer in applied chemistry at University A. He explained that: “I always highly value this University. I have travelled to many places. I see this University as friendly. Students and teachers are friendly, especially in this department. ... This might be unique [in Vietnam], but I don’t know.

Ms Nuong, a lecturer in the theory of literature at University B, provided an account of why the academic staff members in her academic department experienced a strong sense of social affinity with one another. She explained:
I have been in this academic department for the past 10 years. We have a connection with one another. From the moment, I joined here, I found that the existing staff members considered new staff members just like their sons or daughters. The research activities also link us closely. The senior academic staff members provide guidance to the younger staff members. [These relationships] continue to be extremely harmonious and sustainable. It is my very good luck. Not every unit and specialism has this luck.

One of the manifestations of the high level of commitment to an academic department appeared to be the willingness to work long hours. At University A, for example, Mr Kien, a professor of applied physics, reported proudly: “I never have a Saturday off. I am always the last person leaving the office at 8:00 pm. I have a lot of work: writing papers, revising proposals, revising students’ reports. There is so much. I work hard.” Also from University A, Mr Noan, a senior lecturer in physics, reported with pride that: “I never go out for lunch, because I don’t want to waste time.”

Clearly, though, the willingness to work long hours was also based on a love of their discipline, as was expressed by Ms Thu, a senior lecturer in applied mathematics at University C. She reported:

*I think almost all [our] lecturers love working, love being busy, and love doing what they are interested in. We attract funds for doing what we are interested in, and that’s how we gain prestige. There is nothing that can compare with this feeling.*

While, like Ms Thu, many of the participants did work for long hours because of their love of their work and their sense of being a valued member of a departmental community, just as many reported that the long hours committed to their work could be stressful. Ms Nuong, for example, from University B, reported:

*For a year, the full teaching load exceeds 300 hours, including only formal courses, and excluding other forms of teaching, such as teaching in part-time, in-service, distance and transitional courses. The teaching commitment is stressful, therefore, and it means less time is available for research.*

None of the participants made any reference to formal professional development activities being conducted at their university. Some recent policy initiatives had,
however, been directed at providing more research support for new members of academic staff. Ms Kieu Nga, a senior lecturer in linguistics from University B, described how an institutional scheme at her university that sought to give priority to research projects proposed by new members of academic staff. She reported:

_The University’s annual research scheme gives the most support to young academic staff members who are starting their careers. The research committee always considers first the research proposals submitted by young staff members and PhD candidates. This is a flexible policy of the University, which has been gradually prioritising the development of young staff._

At University C, a parallel scheme of institutional support for new members of academic staff was reported, though in this case emphasis was placed more on developing research teams as an avenue for building research capacity in line with universities abroad. Mr Van, a lecturer in educational evaluation at University C, explained:

_The University has identified a research development direction and has been strengthening research capacity recently. An example is the University’s policy for encouraging strong research teams. The policy focuses on the support for research teamwork, which is a shift away from individual research. Larger research projects are now also more likely to be approved if they involve teams._

The forms of organisational socialisation reported by the participants were based mainly on the quality of the working relationships developed within individual academic departments. There was limited evidence reported of the site institutions intervening directly in the socialisation of academic staff members.

5.4 Information

Tierney (1988, pp. 12-13) considered information to be a key element of organizational culture due to its importance in fostering social cohesiveness. He argued that if leaders are effective in sharing information with the organizational community, and if informal channels also exist for the sharing of information and the discussion of ideas, then a family atmosphere and a sense of closeness was likely to be engendered within the institution (Tierney, 1988, p. 13). Several questions in the interview schedule provided an opportunity for participants to report on the flow of communications at their
universities and within their academic departments. There were some variations evident in terms of what the participants had to report.

The participants widely and frequently commented on the value of the internet in enabling a better flow of communications within their academic department and at their university. Information flow by this means was widely reported to be efficient and effective. All four site institutions were reportedly using the internet to provide organizational information in compliance with *Circular No. 9/2009/TG-BGDĐT, dated May 7th, 2009* (Bộ Giáo dục và Đào tạo [MOET], 2009), that is, concerning matters related to institutional revenue and expenditure, and in terms of quality assurance protocols and practices. The university websites were also reportedly providing information about current significant events, including meetings and working parties involving university leaders and ministries, engagements involving city or provincial authorities, scientific meetings and conferences taking place, celebratory events, graduation ceremonies, PhD defence meetings, cultural and sporting events, and job fairs for students. An additional use of these websites was reportedly the provision of information to students about teaching schedules for different training programs. Assessment results and the availability of learning materials were also reportedly being made available through university websites. Speeches given by the rector at meetings and ceremonies, for example, were uploaded routinely to institutional websites. However, participants widely claimed that information about graduate employment rates was not made available, nor was information about staff incomes, even though these are required categories of information under *Circular No. 9/2009/TG-BGDĐT, dated May 7th, 2009*. A check of institutional websites and documents confirmed this claim. Comments made about information flow at the institution-wide level were generally positive.

Information flow within academic departments, which was also supported by internet use, was considered by the participants to be much more important. Across all four academic departments, there were weekly meetings, with agenda notices circulated by email. Ms Huong, a lecturer in educational management at University C reported, by way of example, that these meetings presented an opportunity for academic staff members to “raise their views.” Indeed, many participants gave various accounts of having expressed their personal opinions in these meetings. Ms Ninh, an associate
professor of clinical psychology at University C, gave a typical example of raising one’s voice:

*I often raise my voice at staff meetings, expressing my view that if I have many research project commitments then I would like to have less teaching load to compensate. At present, the State regulates 280 teaching hours for a senior staff member like me. This teaching load is too high. The higher the academic rank, the higher is the teaching load allocated. Associate professors and professors are required to have more teaching hours than lecturers, which means that teaching is given more emphasis than research.*

Concerns about workload were widely reported as being expressed, but it seemed that matters to do with academic standards, or policy, were not. Another participant who claimed to use these meetings to raise contentious issues for discussion was Mr Men, a lecturer in clinical psychology at University C. He reported that he had expressed his concern many times about the excessive use of administrative staff within his academic department. He explained:

*There is still too much administration work. At universities with which I am familiar in other countries, there are far fewer administrative staff members per member of academic staff, and the administrative staff are much more productive. Here, the administrative procedures are too complicated. Though there is a huge administrative unit, when we want to borrow something, it seems like we must go begging. This costs time and it gets in the way of us doing research.*

A small number of participants referred to the opportunities now available via the internet for students to provide feedback on their experiences of the learning environment at their university. Ms Kieu Nga, a senior lecturer in linguistics at University B, had much to report on this topic: “Students have a major avenue for communication. They can send their comments and feedback directly to the rector, and to the department head. They have many opportunities to do that.” Many other colleagues, she claimed, were strongly supportive of the provision of opportunities for students to provide feedback on their experiences:
At this University, we conduct performance assessment of all lecturers and all administrative and management staff. I see the effects of this kind of assessment are very positive. For example, lecturers, especially young lecturers, receive feedback from the students. Lecturers then have opportunities to improve their teaching methods.

However, obtaining student feedback on teaching was not a familiar practice to many due to lack of anonymity of students in providing feedback. Ms Thu, a senior lecturer in applied mathematics at University C, also touched on the topic of internet access:

Since 2007, we have introduced credit based training. . . . Registering for units, accessing learning plans and finding learning schedules is now possible via the internet. Students have more choices and more flexibility in selecting units and accessing learning materials . . . and accessing their assessment results.

In summary, information flow at each of the four site universities, and especially within each of the academic departments, was widely reported to be relatively efficient and acceptable. The internet was widely reported to be utilised to keep colleagues well informed within departments and institutions.

Whether an effective sharing of information was, as Tierney (1988, p. 13) anticipated, contributing to a family atmosphere in any of the four site academic departments is much less certain. As noted in the previous section, there were references to a family atmosphere existing in some academic departments, but it was not evident that processes supporting the effective flow of information had much to do with the institutionally governed experiences reported.

5.5 Strategy

Tierney (1988, pp. 13-14) regarded organisational strategy to be concerned with how decisions are arrived at, which decision-making strategies are employed, who has the authority to make decisions, and what potential penalty might adhere to poor decision-making. He presented as an exemplar a higher education institution in which there was both a formal sequence for strategic decision-making and a wide range of informal activities that supplemented its formal decision-making processes. These informal activities, Tierney argued, include the creation of opportunities for inclusiveness in
decision-making and for discussion with the wider community about the significance of specific decisions.

Deep questioning about inclusiveness in decision-making processes failed to produce much information concerning how the participants viewed overall strategic decision making at their institutions, or within their individual academic departments. Some participants commented favourably on the decision-making culture at their institution. Others expressed minor concerns. It was clear, however, that few participants had questioned these priorities prior to the investigation.

Mr Hoang, an associate professor of energy materials at University A, however, was one of the participants who commented favourably on the decision-making processes at his university. His main interest was research, and he was pleased with the introduction of processes whereby the research priorities of his university informed the research priorities of his academic department, which in turn informed the research priorities of individual members of academic staff. He explained:

Subject to the University’s general direction, we have identified our specific goals. These goals are related to the priorities of our research teams. The department has identified research priorities for electronic materials, nano-magnetic materials, and nano-sensors. Individuals and their teams define more specific topics. These teams have autonomy in proposing research projects.

Ms Loan, an associate professor of educational management at University B, referred more to teaching than to research. While recognising that academics did not have complete autonomy in terms of the design and delivery of the curriculum, she expressed optimism that her university was enabling members of academic staff to exercise more control over what they included in the curriculum. She explained:

As a member of the [University’s] Academic Committee, I know that lecturers now have a stronger role in deciding the curriculum content. We have the right to decide what to teach. We write textbooks. Autonomy is increasing and is becoming more substantial. .. Lecturers are guided by a curriculum framework, but lecturers now have authority to decide almost 60% of the volume of the curriculum. It is only required that we follow the general syllabus outline
In Vietnam, curriculum frameworks for all academic programs, other than those delivered by the two national universities, must be approved in advance by the Ministry of Education and Training. Over the years, the Ministry has progressively relaxed the level of prescriptiveness applied to these frameworks. Ms Loan was indicating that lecturers now had a significantly increased level of freedom to include what they wanted to teach in the curriculum for training programs. She regarded this trend as being positive, and of strategic importance.

Some other participants expressed concerns. One of these was Ms Phuong, an associate professor of education theory from University C. She drew attention to what she regarded as being an institutional resistance to adopting more contemporary approaches to teaching and learning, particularly concerning student assessment:

There is a uniform standard that we must follow. At the university level, [we] must adopt the prescribed textbook. The textbook is full of out-of-date knowledge. In my subject area, the textbook was written by copying from Soviet books dating back to the 1960s and the 1970s, and this is the book that must be used by all education colleges in the country! The people administering student assessment reinforce the need to keep using it; they base assessment tasks on its content. There is a need to update the material, but the capacity of different lecturers to update it varies. Assessment tasks remain the same for everybody, therefore, and are based on the same [out-of-date] content.

Another participant who expressed similar concern was Ms Khanh, a lecturer in Russian literature at University B. She was unhappy and frustrated about being directed to teach the same volume of content in fewer teaching hours:

Regarding my specialism of Russian Literature, I used to offer the program in 60 teaching hours. Then the program was shortened to 45 teaching hours. Now it is only 30 teaching hours! We cannot possibly cover the content that we consider to be appropriate in that time. We intend to petition to the University that only 30 hours for teaching Russian Literature is not enough. We can cover only a part of the content [in 30 hours].
Yet another concern was expressed by Ms Quynh, an associate professor of educational psychology at University C. Her concern was that institutional policies for research were pointless if no money is allocated to support research projects. She explained:

*This University has issued a policy encouraging the establishment of strong research teams. Let’s form them, but to do what? Research proposals have been submitted, but no funding approvals have been given to them. It makes me wonder that things can the research teams do? Why do we maintain research networks when we cannot apply them to projects?*

The topic of strategic decision making was not one that engaged the participants much, but comments relating to institutional strategic directions were expressed, with some affirming institutional directions being taken, while others expressed concerns. It was implicitly accepted that authority for strategic decision-making belonged at a much higher level than the individual academic department, but individual participants felt perfectly entitled to be critical of the strategic decisions taken by their institutions in the privacy and candour of the ethnographic interviewing during the research project.

5.6 Leadership

Leadership is a pivotal element in Tierney’s (1988) organisational culture framework. As reported in Chapter 3, he regarded leadership as having the potential to bring unity to an organisational role, providing a basis for the organisation to make progress with its own development. Leadership was, therefore a relevant topic of discussion with the participants.

Many participants described the leadership style at their universities and in their academic departments as being collegial in nature. They referred, for example, to the opportunity they had to contribute to the electoral process for the appointment of a rector. They referred also to the fact that appointees to senior management positions were generally considered to have been good scholars. Mr Quan, an associate professor of Vietnamese literature at University B, approved strongly of this situation, stating that:

*Senior managers who are well established researchers can understand about doing research and about researchers, so what they say has more credibility.*
University academics are more willing to listen to and accept work delegations from highly-regarded scholars.

Other qualities, though, were also identified. Ms Thu, a senior lecturer in applied mathematics at University C, explained:

Only those who have successfully demonstrated their excellence in teaching and research, and [who] additionally demonstrate their leadership and management capacity, should be appointed to a senior management post. Not everyone can perform a management role. . .. For appointment as Rector, one must have an outstanding record; normally including the prestige of having graduated from a foreign university; having exceptionally good students; and having produced excellent PhD graduates.

Her views were widely shared among the participants. However, Ms Loan, an associate professor of educational management at University B, was first to identify an issue in need of being addressed. She raised the poor accommodation and computer access available to academic members of staff. Her concern was by no means isolated. Like many after her, she claimed that staff information technology skills were inadequate:

In my department, not every lecturer knows how to use IT. [The senior academic staff members] who are provided with computers cannot use them, and those who can use them are frequently not provided with them. In my department, there is a severe lack of resources. There are two tables for the deputy deans. One table has a computer and the other doesn’t. One has a printer, but it doesn’t work. There are three computers provided for administrative staff. Lecturers do not have computers. My department has repeatedly applied for projectors for lecturers but none has been provided. If someone needs to type something, he or she must ask permission from the administrative staff to use their computer for a while. We do not have a private desk, or a chair, or a bookshelf, for working, and we have nowhere to meet privately with students.

Ms Loan was concerned about the lack of computers, but she also courageously expressed a concern about the extent to which senior managers were not proficient in their use of computing equipment and digital technology.
Mr Chuan, an associate professor of nanotechnology at University A, expressed different but also widely reported concern about the leadership at his university. His concern was the extent to which there was a misguided sense of priorities in the allocation of scarce funds. He claimed:

We have a broken machine, valued at 7 billion VND ($US350,000). We requested 600 million VND ($US30,000) for repairs. We have submitted our proposal [for repairing this machine] to the University in each of the past four or five years. The University has consistently refused to give us the required amount. Students have no machine now for doing their practical work. In the meantime, renovation of the Rector’s office has cost 800 million VND ($US50,000), and it was completed quickly. At the end of the financial year, the Rector reported that the University had spent 2.7 billion VND ($US135,000) for equipment repairs, but 70 billion VND ($US3.5 million) for repair of the sports fields and buildings . . . . I complained because of the irony: a budget for renovation of the sports fields is available, but the repair of equipment needed for teaching is impossible. It is a huge waste!

This extended quotation illustrates why the participants could easily be provoked to criticise their institutional leaders when academic priorities were seen to come a distant second to non-academic priorities in the allocation of scarce budgets. Mr Chuan, like most of the other participants interviewed, felt perfectly entitled to express his grievance as loudly as possible because he felt that the situation constrained his capacity to teach effectively as well as to do research.

Various attempts to modernise the leadership and management of the four site institutions were reported by the participants. Progress was, however, widely regarded to be slow. A key theme was the widespread concern of many participants about the lack of any effective performance management systems and processes. It was widely reported that members of staff who were performing at a high level could not be remunerated for the value of their contribution, while those performing at a low level could continue to gain advancement through seniority, regardless of their effectiveness at teaching or research. As Mr Men, a lecturer in clinical psychology at University C, explained: “The more senior academics might have the better ideas, better methodological approaches, and even might produce more international publications,
but the lack of merit-based promotion is not always convincing.” He proceeded to remark that the energy and enthusiasm of younger academics needed to be better recognised and rewarded.

5.7 Concluding Remarks

This chapter has concerned findings that relate to the participants’ experiences of the organisational culture within their academic departments and, more broadly, within their individual university. Tierney’s (1988) framework has been used to frame a broad coverage of relevant considerations.

The chapter provides a range of insights relating to how the participants experienced the organisational culture of their workplaces. In general, they valued those elements in their organisational environment that enabled them best to perform teaching and research duties. These explicitly included: having opportunities to contribute to Vietnam’s socioeconomic development; having leaders in whom they had confidence; having access to adequate resources to support the responsibilities given to them; being well informed about the values and direction of their organisational units; and being able to enjoy working collegially with other members of their academic department. There were some notable lines of difference between the organisational experiences of participants from the natural and applied sciences and participants from the humanities and social sciences. In general, participants from the natural and applied sciences appeared to be better placed to benefit from an organisational setting in which research attainments of immediate relevance to Vietnam’s economy were highly regarded by national funding agencies and by the State.

Attention now turns to the question of how the participants experienced their own disciplinary culture and allegiance. In doing so, the focus moves from Tierney’s (1988) perspective on organisational culture to Becher’s (1989) perspective on disciplinary culture.
Chapter 6

EXPERIENCES OF DISCIPLINARY CULTURE – TEACHING AND RESEARCH

In this chapter and in the one that follows, the findings relating to the second of the research questions introduced in Chapter 1, concerning the participants’ experiences of disciplinary culture, are reported. Becher (1989, p. 1) claimed that “the ways in which particular groups of academics organize their professional lives are intimately related to the intellectual tasks on which they are engaged.” In these two chapters, the ways in which the participants reported organising their professional lives are documented against the background of their disciplinary affiliations and aspirations. This chapter examines their experiences of teaching and of research. The following chapter goes on to address their experiences of socialisation.

The four site institutions continue to be referred to Universities A, B, C and D. The disciplinary groupings of interest are those identified by Becher (1989), that is, the ‘hard-pure’ natural sciences (4 participants), the ‘hard-applied’ applied sciences (8 participants), the ‘soft-pure’ humanities (10 participants), and the ‘soft-applied’ applied social sciences (8 participants). In reporting the findings, the participants will often be distinguished simply on the basis that they belonged to either the ‘hard’ or the ‘soft’ knowledge areas, since this issue lies at the heart of the main disciplinary contrast in the findings.

6.1 Teaching

6.1.1 Natural and Applied Sciences

A widely-shared view among participants from the natural and applied sciences was that teaching primarily involved the transmission of knowledge. For these participants, there was, therefore, a close relationship between teaching and research because of the role of research in generating new knowledge. They regarded teaching to be an important professional commitment, but it was also seen as an activity that distracted them from the conduct of research, which was their priority.

For many of these participants, teaching provided an opportunity to share insights from current research projects with their students. Ms Luong, a senior lecturer in physics at
University A, explained, as did others, how she employed examples from her research in her teaching presentations:

I, like my colleagues, have many research commitments. It is good for us because we must routinely solve the current, hot issues presented to us by the community and the world at large. It is very helpful for our teaching because we can take examples that best describe what currently occurs. In my lectures, I take examples from my current research. . . . The research projects we are doing always relate quite closely to social needs. We do not do much pure, basic research. My research projects have high applicability. Therefore, they have many benefits for teaching.

Ms Luong’s comments related specifically to postgraduate teaching, and many other participants from the natural and applied sciences spoke of the synergy between teaching and research being attainable only in the context of postgraduate teaching.

There was a general view that undergraduate programs were too elementary in nature, and so referring to examples from current research projects had much less impact in undergraduate programs. Mr Quang, an associate professor of energy recovery at University A, reported, for example, that:

The area of my interest is solid state materials. . . . I teach various courses, all of which are closely aligned with my area of research, but my undergraduate courses require only basic knowledge, whereas my postgraduate teaching and PhD supervision are closer to my research interests and require updating more with international scholarship.

Ms Quyen, an associate professor of physics at University B, was even more emphatic, stating that the undergraduate curriculum did not provide a context for reporting research findings. She also expressed concern that undergraduate students seemed often to be not well prepared for university studies in physics. She remarked:

Teaching general physics is difficult because it requires very broad knowledge. Students in years 1 and 2 don’t even know how to learn. . . . For me to move to teaching general subjects in the lower years of the undergraduate programs was so difficult. I had to spend a lot of time rereading old materials and visiting other lecturers’ classes. When I commenced at the University . . . I had to sit in
on colleagues’ lectures to learn about teaching experiences. Preparing lectures and doing other things took so much of my time. Then there was time that had to be spent on student-related concerns. If I gave lectures, the lectures had to be well prepared, so my commitment to teaching impacted badly on my research. Now I understand why there are many lecturers who, because of too much teaching, cannot do research.

Ms Quyen’s concern about the ability of undergraduate students to comprehend higher-level knowledge in the natural and applied sciences was also referred to by other participants from these disciplines, but they were generally less concerned than Ms Quyen about the matter.

They did, however, strongly identify with her view that undergraduate teaching was extremely time-consuming, and so was potentially a distraction from research. Indeed, young lecturers who wanted to build research careers reportedly sought to avoid undergraduate teaching for this reason. Mr Chuan, an associate professor of nanotechnology at University A, expressed this concern as follows:

*In some departments, young academics do not pay any attention to teaching; they concentrate only on writing papers. They do not have a good basic knowledge and the students cannot understand much from their teaching. . . . The present reward system focuses too much on research, and the new, young lecturers benefit. For one paper, they receive 10 million VND (US$500), and then the publication will be considered when they are being considered for a professorial title. Teaching does not bring any benefits like this.*

Mr Chuan was referring here to incentive schemes to encourage academic publishing. These schemes enable young lecturers to boost their income by publishing, and there was no comparable incentive available to encourage them to excel at teaching. Their publications also provided them with a stronger foundation for obtaining research grants, and for being promoted. Taken together, research accomplishments were widely understood to bring more reputational status than teaching.

The view that teaching took up too much time was widespread in the natural and applied sciences. Mr Kien, a professor of applied physics at University A, reported that “at present the institutional expectation ratio is about 60% of the time for teaching and
40% of the time for research”, which he considered to lack balance. He preferred that the workload allocation for teaching and research should instead be 50% each. Mr Hoan, an associate professor of applied mathematics at University C, made a similar claim:

At universities in Vietnam, lecturers have too heavy a teaching workload. There is too much concentration on teaching. .. In leading international universities, the professors mainly do research and supervise PhD students. As far as I know, at leading universities in other countries, each professor has one teaching unit at each of the undergraduate and postgraduate levels. In Vietnamese universities, we have too much teaching.

Mr Hoan’s claim ought to be seen, though, to be based entirely on his experience as a PhD candidate at a leading research university in Japan. As did several other participants, he was generalising about leading international universities on his experience of working at one international research university.

6.1.2 Humanities

The participants from the humanities were generally much more positive about the importance of teaching, and they viewed their research as providing a ready source of new ideas to enliven their classroom teaching by stimulating students to think deeply about areas of disciplinary significance. Several of them indicated that postgraduate programs provided them with more scope for integrating their research with their teaching, but most of the participants reported that they were primarily responsible for undergraduate teaching.

There was a strong conviction shared by humanities participants that research played an important role by contributing to the vitality of teaching programs. Mr Quan, an associate professor of Vietnamese literature at University B, explained a widely shared view of the relationship:

The mission of a university lecturer is to teach new things. .. One must continuously find new things to teach. .. A university lecturer must feel this pressure, pressure to find new things.
Mr Thuan, an associate professor of social sciences at University D, commented similarly:

*For university teaching, I feel it is most necessary to find new things and to renew every aspect of my teaching. I find that the easiest way to renew my teaching is to teach about the outcomes of my research. These outcomes are of great interest to my students.*

Ms Kieu Nga, a senior lecturer in linguistics at University B, had a similar outlook. She asserted strongly that a reliance on textbooks was not acceptable in the teaching of humanities. She explained:

*Textbooks are widely available and have been well developed. . .. But the genuine and committed lecturers never satisfy themselves with the existing textbooks. They continuously find new things, and are open to new ideas, so they must do research to have greater understanding. That’s how they encourage their students to see things differently.*

These views on teaching in the humanities resonate strongly with Becher’s (1987b, p. 278) account of the nature of knowledge in the ‘soft-pure’ disciplines. The participants referred, for example, to the highly individualistic nature of scholarship in their disciplines, requiring a focus on the development of more nuanced interpretations of established bodies of knowledge. Teaching was seen, therefore, to require the presentation an individually synthesised account of a body of knowledge to the students. In this context, total reliance on textbooks was out of the question. Mr Quan, an associate professor of Vietnamese literature at University B, explained his specific view of the nature of teaching in the humanities:

*Transmission of knowledge is not the mission of university lecturers. It is the mission of school teachers. Being a university lecturer means that academic staff members must have their own ideas.*

For Mr Quan, and for most other participants from the humanities, it was essential that university lecturers should instil in their students a capacity for developing and defending a personal point of view. Mr Thuan, an associate professor of social sciences at University D, and a distinguished scholar in the humanities in Vietnam, recounted how he had come to this realisation during his time as a student in France. He reported:
Before going to France, I thought all scholarship was embraced by books, so I did a lot of reading. But in France, I remember, I sat in the front row and offered my opinions. At first, I was very hesitant, but my lecturers encouraged me. They encouraged my independent thinking, and they encouraged discussion with lecturers. Then I started to realise that lecturers in France were different from lecturers in Vietnam. Vietnamese lecturers tended to read more and explain the scholarship to students. Lecturers in France encouraged a lot of reading but then they encouraged discussion about what we had in our heads. It was by this means that my ideas about research developed. My lecturers encouraged me in reading and researching. .. Research plays an important role [in learning]. This is my conception about the value of research for teaching.

Humanities participants, especially those who were active as researchers, expressed a strong desire to have more time available for their research. They felt that their teaching workloads were too heavy and constrained them too much. They wanted a workload that allowed them to spend at least one-third of their time on research. However, their research preoccupations, in contrast to those of the scientists, focused on understanding and not on achieving internationally recognised research outputs.

6.1.3 Applied Social Sciences

Of the eight participants from the applied social sciences, five worked in teacher education and three worked in clinical psychology. The focus of these participants was the development the foundation skills of their students for professional practice. The clinical psychology participants were committed to combining a teaching role with a research role, but only two of the five teacher education participants had retained any realistic connection with research. All participants from the social sciences were, however, in agreement that teaching should be informed by research. Mr Men, a lecturer in clinical psychology at University C, spoke for others when he claimed:

*If teaching alone, without research . . . we feel boring, because the knowledge is not new. We need to update our knowledge annually with social events, and we need to give explanations based on general psychological principles.*
Among the teacher education participants, the value of research was derived from how useful it might be in informing an aspect of the curriculum or teaching practice in schools. Ms Loan, an associate professor of education management at University B, reported, for example:

There are some research projects directed at writing textbooks, while others might be focused on identifying the theoretical foundations for a teaching subject. Therefore, research is closely linked with teaching. Yes, it is used for teaching.

The clinical psychology participants conveyed a similar disposition. Ms Ninh, an associate professor of clinical psychology at University B, explained how her most recent research project was likely to be important in informing her students about an area of professional practice. She reported:

I have recently conducted an epidemiological evaluation of the mental health of Vietnamese children. The percentage of children with mental defects in other countries is available, but relevant data about Vietnamese children have not been available. We teach our students about mental health. This gap forces those of us who are pursuing this specialism to find out valid data in Vietnam. .. Our initial findings show that around 12-13% of Vietnamese children are exposed to risks in terms of mental health. We introduce this figure immediately to our undergraduate and postgraduate students. By doing this, it is persuasive and it helps our students to understand more about the topic.

This account, and others like it, reflect clearly Becher’s description of knowledge in the ‘soft-applied’ disciplines to be “functional, utilitarian, and largely concerned with the improvement of professional practice” (Becher, 1987b, p. 278). Teaching and research in these disciplines were said by him to have a strong focus on “enhancing the quality of personal and social life” of society (Becher 1989, p. 15).

Teaching in the applied social sciences was described by the participants to be very demanding, mainly because of its focus on skills development related to professional practice in schools or clinical settings. Many hours were reportedly required to assist students with the development of these skills, which for most of the participants concerned placed a significant constraint on the time they had available for research.
In clinical psychology, the gaps in the availability of specialist clinical equipment were also emphasised, as were the difficulties associated with obtaining a budget to buy new clinical equipment. Mr Duong, a lecturer in clinical psychology at University C, reported, for example, that:

> At present, we can offer this specialist subject, but teaching in this area requires that we have the appropriate equipment for the learners to use. In Vietnam, we haven’t got that equipment. For example, one important diagnosis device costs about US$1,000, which we can’t afford.

Only one of the nine participants from the applied social sciences reported having experience as a PhD supervisor. This participant had little to say, however, about the topic.

### 6.2 Research

#### 6.2.1 Natural and Applied Sciences

Participants from the natural and applied sciences were universally committed to the importance of their research role. They lived and breathed their disciplinary specialisms. They expressed a high level of confidence in their research capabilities and routinely drew attention to their growing lists of publications in international refereed journals to illustrate the extent to which the research they were doing was globally competitive. There was an intense commitment among these participants to the importance of publishing in leading international journals. It was also taken for granted that collaborative teamwork was essential for the completion of significant research undertakings, not only in terms of attracting research funding, but also because of the competition in their specialism to make claims to new knowledge territory.

These participants were generally remarkably well informed about their success, individually and collectively. Nine of the 12 participants from the natural and applied sciences were from the same academic department at University A. This department was widely reported by them to be exceptional in Vietnam in terms of its publishing success. Mr Tong, a senior lecturer in applied chemistry in the department, reported proudly that:
[This department] is the best in the University. To date this year, 30 of the 100 or so refereed papers produced by academic staff across the University have been from [this department]. Given the small number of academics in our department, the ratio of publications per staff member [in this department] is very high!

Ms Luong, a senior lecturer in physics who also worked at University A, reported that, because of its publishing success, her department was receiving certain privileges from the University hierarchy. She explained with pride and confidence:

*Because research is our strength, academics in this department have fewer teaching hours compared with others at the University. The University’s research profile is strong because of our department. We have produced most of the international publications coming from the University. Because of our success, we get to do more research than our colleagues, which is fine by us.*

Obtaining international recognition for research achievements was highly valued by these participants. They routinely pointed to the international journals in which their research reports were published, and there were also instances reported of research teams being able to commercialise their intellectual capital and sell knowledge-based products to a global marketplace. Mr Noan, a senior lecturer in physics at University A, was the leader of a team recognised as having achieved extraordinary success in this regard. He explained his team’s work as follows:

*We have been successful in making [samples] to sell to other countries where they will be used. I sold them to the Netherlands. The measurement techniques created by Mr [colleague’s name mentioned] are comparable with those used in the UK, and with others created at [name of laboratory given] in the United States. All this means is that our measurement techniques are seen to be internationally competitive and highly regarded.*

Research funding was a topic of much importance to all 12 participants from the natural and applied sciences. They commented often on the positive contribution being made to their research productivity by NAFOSTED, a national funding agency about which details have been reported in Chapter 3. NAFOSTED was reported to be providing a considerable funding boost, underpinning the development of basic research, as well as
enabling the purchase of specialised technical equipment. Mr Kien, a professor of applied physics at University A, reported, for example, that: “Some universities and institutions have made huge investments. At [university named], there has been an investment of 70-80 billion Vietnamese VND [US$3.5-4.0 million], and with new equipment, [scientific] measurement becomes much easier.” He was not satisfied, however, that the size of the investment was enough in his own department. He confided:

To be honest, it [insufficient funding] is our greatest concern. If we kept digging away at one thing, it would get completed. . . . Having new [research problems] depends on the availability of equipment, but [the existing equipment] is so poor, and is sufficient only for short-term projects. For longer-term projects, we need some financial credits. As you can see, our team produces a lot of papers annually with funding of only some thousands of dollars. But this money only affords the purchase of consumables.

Other forms of infrastructure were also reported to be deficient. Ms Thu, a senior lecturer in applied mathematics at University C, was more direct about her frustration:

Our physical infrastructure! I don’t know. The public institutions. It is so difficult and bureaucratic. Here, professors don’t have a private office. In several departments, PhD candidates have desks in shared offices. . . . All the professors share one or two offices. . . . The space here is such that it will not accommodate more offices! Since the University has begun offering in-service education, the need for space is even greater. There is a severe lack of lecture halls, so it is impossible to have more workspaces. . . . We would most like to have a building for laboratories, and a garden for plants and animal husbandry, but at this campus it is impossible.

There was also a problem reported concerning the difficulties which scholars returning to Vietnam had experienced in being able to continue the kind of high-level research for which they had gained a reputation abroad. Ms Quyen, an associate professor of physics at University B, was one of these participants. She explained:

My supervisor [when she was working abroad] used liquid helium for measurements, but we don’t have the equipment to make liquid helium at very
low temperatures. We keep going [with our research] but we must work within a framework of what is possible in Vietnam.

Though NAFOSTED funding was universally acclaimed by participants from the natural and applied sciences, one limitation of this funding was that the grants were for short-term projects. Mr Kien, a professor of applied physics at University A, was especially concerned about this problem. He explained how he and his team members had tried to find a way around it:

In applying to NAFOSTED, we break one major research application into smaller parts because NAFOSTED requires only four international papers as the basis for one new project, yet it grants up to 1.2 billion VND (US$60,000) for a two- or a three-year project. Our team publishes many papers every year. Therefore, we apply for many smaller projects instead of only one big one. It is not a good way to support our research. We don’t like it, but what do we do? We haven’t got the money. We can do much bigger projects, but why will they not fund them? I wish we could have one big project funded for up to 10 years. . . . These smaller projects are all short-term, and I wish we could for once pursue one big problem over an extended period, but it seems impossible, due to the existing regulations in Vietnam.

The workplace culture described by participants from the ‘hard’ knowledge areas was one that involved a heavy reliance on research teams. Research productivity was widely reported to be a function of researchers working collaboratively in team structures. Mr Kien, a professor of applied physics at University A, gave an outline of this kind of arrangement:

My [academic department] has a high research capability because of the research competence of our staff members. They include 21 staff members who have graduated abroad with PhDs. These people work hard, following the example of a core group of senior colleagues who are the team leaders and who act like engines in taking a leading role in the research.

His account resonated strongly with Becher’s (1987b, p. 278) description of the disciplinary cultures in the ‘hard-pure’ and ‘hard-applied’ disciplines. He observed also that the ‘hard-pure’ natural sciences were “competitive; gregarious; politically well-
organised; [having a] high publication rate; [and] task-oriented” (Becher, 1987b, p. 289), while the ‘hard-applied’ applied sciences were “entrepreneurial, cosmopolitan; dominated by professional values; [with] patents substitutable for publications; [and] role oriented” (Becher, 1987b, p. 289). It is of special note, though, that these disciplinary values and conventions were documented over 30 years ago, and the social conventions for knowledge-making have evolved substantially since then (see especially Nowotny, Scott, & Gibbons, 2003).

Against this background, it is also of interest to know to what extent participants from the ‘hard’ knowledge areas considered that they were becoming more engaged in transdisciplinary research. As reported in Chapter 3, various scholars (for example, Gibbons et al., 1994, p. 49; Nowotny, Scott, & Gibbons, 2003, p. 1) have observed that the global production of knowledge has become increasingly tied to marketplace needs, rather than to the research priorities defined within a discipline. None of the participants referred to this matter, which has become a major research vein in developed countries. Many participants reported their research interests were largely discipline-based, though, in practice, most of them were engaged in applied research of one kind or another. Mr Kien, a professor of applied physics at University A, explained the issue as follows:

> We want to develop sensors to measure environmental pollution in areas surrounding Hanoi. The data will be uploaded to a website. For example, if you want to buy a house in a certain area, you can know what the quality of air is in that area. For the time being, though, we cannot proceed in that direction. Computer technology is needed to develop the database, and electronics and telecommunications software is required to transmit the data to the website. . .. Nevertheless, collaboration between the disciplines is helpful when it enables applications of this kind.

He reported also that a lack of financial investment in this kind of research was the main problem going forward: “These are ideas we are pursuing, but we face difficulties in finding sources of funding. If we were in Korea, where similar ideas have been proposed, the Government would immediately match industry funding by, for example, Samsung.” The accuracy of this claim was not readily able to be verified.
6.2.2 Humanities

As reported earlier, not all the 10 humanities participants reported being actively engaged in research, though all the humanities participants claimed that they had at some stage produced research publications. Of those who were currently active researchers, only one had successfully published in international, peer-reviewed journals. The account provided here is based mainly on the experiences of research reported by the respondents who continued to be actively engaged with research.

The approaches to research reported by humanities participants were entirely consistent with Becher’s (1989) account of how knowledge-making occurs in ‘soft-pure’ knowledge areas. They described, for example, how they revisited existing topics and themes in the literature to add their own individual insights, based often on the discovery of new sources of relevant information. Their arguments were inductive in nature, having as their purpose the articulation of a new, or at least a different, insight about a contemporary issue or phenomenon of interest and relevance in their specialism.

A typical example of the accounts provided by these participants is Mr Quan’s explanation of how research in his specialism revolved around the need to reconceptualise existing and widely accepted understandings of Vietnamese literature in the 20th century. Mr Quan was an associate professor of Vietnamese literature at University B. He reported:

Five years ago, I researched Vietnamese literature of the 20th century. I observed that scholars, because they had insufficient documentary information, had been drawing some incorrect conclusions. As new documents became more [widely] available, the nature of these errors became more obvious. I began to review different theories and I came to read Foucault’s work. . . . I wrote an article about applying Foucault’s discourse theory to understanding sexuality in Vietnamese literature. You see, discussion about sex and sexuality used to be a forbidden topic in literary theory in Vietnam. It was, in effect, extinct. I did some reading about Foucault’s perspective. . . . After that, I wrote a series of papers about the application of Foucault’s discourse theory when researching Vietnamese literature. I also returned to an investigation of a literary movement in Vietnam known as the Self-Strengthening Literary Group [a pro-independence literary group that existed in the 1930s]. I then published 3 papers
in national journals on this topic. More recently, based on my earlier work, I have studied the relationship between literature and Vietnamese folklore. I now write at least one peer-reviewed article each year about appropriate applications of Foucault’s discourse theory to Vietnamese literary texts.

Mr Quan’s explanation of his experience indicated, at least in part, why participants in the humanities focused on local topics, and hence why they tended to publish nationally rather than internationally. While Mr Quan could conceive of his research having a global application, the nature of his research topic, in combination with his relative isolation from global knowledge networks, led him to believe that his scholarly outputs would have most relevance within Vietnam.

Becher and Trowler (2001, p. 36) observed that a holistic perspective was evident in the kinds of research undertaken by scholars in the ‘soft-pure’ disciplines. Knowledge in these disciplines, he claimed, was developed inductively, interpretively, and in a cultural context. This holistic feature of research in the humanities was amply illustrated in the comments of various of the humanities participants. Ms Muon, a lecturer in Chinese literature at University B, described, for example, the complexities of writing about the cultural context for literature:

When we research about culture, we do not study culture alone. For example, if I write a paper for a conference about Korean literature in the context of China, my paper must also address Korean trends and their influences on the translation issues and perspectives concerning Korean literature in China. These conceptual issues are not confined to literature. They extend to concerns about translating Korean perspectives. There are Korean waves of perspectives and constantly changing Korean movements of thought. To make sense of these conceptual developments clearly requires other literatures to inform Korean movements. It requires other literatures to inform our thinking, including knowledge about movies, fashion and cuisine.

Ms Muon was describing the potential complexity of research in the humanities, with the examination of one topic likely to give rise to the need to examine a range of related topics, each involving different conceptual perspectives. It was not surprising, then, that she and other participants from the humanities referred to the book as being the preferred format for reporting research that might start simply but rapidly become quite
complex. A profile of their publishing activities pointed, in fact, to many works of academic significance having been produced by them in book form. In discussion, however, as many as four of these participants – out of 10 humanities participants in total, appeared to be as excited about their blogs as they were about their formal scholarly publications. Evidently there is a strong appetite among humanities scholars in Vietnamese higher education to use new digital technologies to express their ideas.

The views of participants from the humanities about the social usefulness of their research were contradictory. Some reported that their research did contribute significantly to Vietnamese society through their research and publications. One of these was Mr Huynh, an associate professor of history at University D, whose interest concerned the nature of international relations, commented, for example:

*I focus on the relationship between the provinces across the middle borders of the two countries [Laos and Vietnam]. My research has social meaning . . . at a certain level, my research is useful for local decision makers in planning the relationships with a neighbouring country, in this case, Laos.*

In contrast, Ms Nuong, a lecturer in the theory of literature at University B, seemed to be despondent about the extent to which scholarship in the humanities might have any social impact in Vietnam. She explained:

*It is the reality in the humanities. [Our works] cannot make any change. I often feel discouraged. We spend time sitting in meetings and discussing these issues without knowing why. We cannot make any change to the life outside the university. The policy makers make decisions on everything. They do not need, nor do they consult, researchers. The researchers keep doing research. They do not know about policies. There are some peculiar regulations that people are forced to follow. [They] are often justified with fake data.*

Some of the humanities participants referred to concerns about political sensitivities, which they reported to place constraints on what they could investigate and report. Mr Huynh, an associate professor of Vietnamese and Southeast Asian history at University D, explained, for example:

*I would like to take the approach [of contributing to international scholarship] in undertaking my research, but there are just so many difficulties in practice.*
We still cannot explore and critique concepts freely. I see the need, and the importance, of open dialogue and free critique. In the end, I must come back to the traditional Vietnamese methodology of logical history, because it is not [politically] problematic.

Mr Huynh and others appreciated, however, the huge advances now possible because of the increasing ease of access by means of the internet to international sources of ideas and information. The internet, it was claimed, had made possible an immersion in scholarship from other parts of the world that in the past had been completely impossible. Mr Tan, a lecturer in Chinese history at University D, reported, for example:

*For teaching and research, we go to the internet and search for international scholarship. In teaching some courses, we adopt some international theories, for example, theories about relationships between countries. In supervising theses, we guide students about various theoretical frameworks to inform their arguments, such as realism and constructivism.*

The topic of academic freedom was not one that featured prominently in their responses to interview questions. It was in the humanities, however, that concerns about academic freedom came closest to the surface in discussions. To protect the participants, the researcher did not push the questioning further about this topic.

### 6.2.3 Applied Social Sciences

As noted earlier, there were eight participants working in the ‘soft-applied’ areas of teacher education and clinical psychology. Their publication outcomes, when compared with other participants, were generally much lower, especially among the teacher education participants. In general, their commitment to publish was driven largely by requirements associated with academic promotion and positional status within their institutions. The research they undertook closely reflected their interests as teachers. Only one of these participants had produced an international peer-reviewed publication.

Participants from teacher education expressed serious reservations about the quality of the research undertaken in Vietnam in their field. Ms Quynh, an associate professor of educational psychology at University C, reported, for example:
Research outcomes in the sciences are of higher quality and more reliable [than in the field of teacher education], so that they also have a higher general level of applicability. But in the applied social sciences, these things [research outcomes] are not reliable at all. . .. They do not have any applicability at all for decision making. . .. When introducing a single social change, we rely on overseas research findings to guide us. Regarding our own research, nobody listens and nobody believe us.

She proceeded to explain that she mostly drew upon the research findings reported by international scholars, and she did not want to use research outputs produced by Vietnamese scholars.

Various participants from teacher education attributed the problem of weak research achievements in their field to a lack of sufficient training in research methods. Ms Phuong, an associate professor of educational theory at University C, commented, for example: “Because of not mastering research methods in Education, many lecturers cannot design instruments for data collection, for example questionnaire or interview schedules.”

Participants from clinical psychology were generally much more confident about their research skills, and at least one of the three participants had published widely in refereed journals. As Mr Men, a lecturer in clinical psychology at University C, explained, however:

At present, my practice task occupies too much of my time. For one patient case, I spend around three hours. I have almost no time for research. It is not good at all. I try to keep a balance. Research is very important.

6.3 Concluding Remarks

This chapter has provided a report of findings relating to the disciplinary context of the participants’ experiences of teaching and research. Becher’s (1989, p. 1) contention that how academic staff members organize their professional lives is related to the nature of their disciplinary context has provided the basis for the reporting of these findings. Becher’s contention also underpins the purpose of the following chapter, in which the experiences of the participants about how socialisation to their disciplinary specialisms took place are reported.
Chapter 7

EXPERIENCES OF DISCIPLINARY CULTURE - SOCIALISATION

This chapter addresses the second of the research questions introduced in Chapter 1, that is, concerning the participants’ experiences of disciplinary culture. Whereas in the previous chapter the focus was on the ways in which the participants from different disciplinary backgrounds went about discharging their teaching and research roles, this chapter’s focus is on the nature of disciplinary socialisation, as experienced by the participants.

Becher (1989, p.p. 24-25), drawing upon Geertz (1983), asserted that being a member of a disciplinary community involved a sense of identity and personal commitment, a “way of being in the world”. Becher identified the process of acquiring this identity as beginning during the undergraduate years of study, becoming more intense during the period of postgraduate studies, and continuing throughout an academic career. This chapter concerns manifestations of this process as experienced by the participants.

7.1 Induction

Becher (1989, p. 29) referred to disciplinary induction as “getting to know the ropes”, meaning that it was a process whereby novices to the academy acquired the basic skills for creating and reporting knowledge in a discipline by completing a doctorate, and then gaining admission to a disciplinary culture by being appointed as a member of a discipline-based academic department. This induction process, he argued, entailed not only the acquisition of technical skills but also of an understanding about how to succeed in the social culture of a discipline.

When invited to comment on their early experiences of academic staff, most participants recalled their experiences of PhD candidature. Ms Luong, a senior lecturer in physics at University A, reported how, during her studies in Japan, she acquired the work habits required to succeed in her discipline, including an ability to prepare quickly for and report confidently on her research at seminars. She explained:

*Japanese professors delegated a lot of the work to us. Their concern was that we should achieve outcomes. Every week or so, we had to present a seminar at*
which we reported these outcomes, and we had to work day and night to have something to report.

Many other participants from the natural and applied sciences reported similarly. Mr Tong, a senior lecturer in applied chemistry at University A, explained, for example, how when he was a doctoral candidate in Germany he had also experienced an intensive regime of seminar presentations, which then progressed from delivering papers at conferences to writing journal articles. He described with satisfaction the nature of the skills he had acquired:

Doing a PhD meant that we had to learn how to write. We had to learn how to do a literature search, and how to document our observations, without needing the support of our supervisors. We became confident in writing papers and in providing clarifications in response to reviewers’ feedback. In Germany, all PhD students are required to publish several papers during candidature, but only in peer-reviewed journals.

Many participants from the natural and applied sciences spoke about how their own experiences as PhD candidates had impacted on their current supervisory practices. Mr Hoang, an associate professor of energy materials at University A, described, for example, how he now explicitly emulated the style and approach of his PhD supervisor: “I guide them. They discuss with me. They write and I revise. It is an induction to the research team.” For Ms Quyen, an associate professor of physics at University B, the influence of her experience as a PhD candidate was said to have been so pronounced that she often felt she was walking in her PhD supervisor’s shoes. She exclaimed: “I am becoming more and more like my [PhD] supervisor! What I do is exactly what he used to do. My behaviours, my habits. . .. How I teach my students is so like how he taught me a long time ago.”

Participants from the humanities and applied social sciences, but especially those from the humanities, also reported being deeply affected by their own experiences of doctoral candidature. Their experiences were different, however, from those reported by participants from the natural and applied sciences. Participants from the humanities referred frequently to the distinctive inspirational qualities of their supervisors. Ms Nuong, a lecturer in the theory of literature at University B, reported, for example:
We [PhD] students were a long way behind our teachers in terms of expertise [said with laughter]. We were immature. Their brains were amazing. Many lecturers taught beautifully. For example, one teacher [named] who taught us was the most wonderful in the department. . . . There are not many of these kinds of respected teachers. They are the persons we most respect and admire.

Being inspired by their doctoral supervisors was a condition that many humanities participants felt to be an important aspect of the induction process during PhD candidature. In contrast, participants from the natural and applied sciences were much more likely to have valued the skills they were taught about producing and reporting research results.

A large majority of all participants identified how learning how to get published was a key milestone in terms of their induction to academic life. Participants from the humanities and applied social sciences often commented, however, that the skills involved in getting published had not been sufficiently emphasised during their years of doctoral candidature, or even during their early years as an academic. Reflecting on her period of doctoral candidature, Ms Nuong, a lecturer in the theory of literature at University B, commented that she missed having opportunities to present her work at international conferences: “We lacked these opportunities because of the constraints on our time. We had no chance to attend seminars overseas, but we could have had more of these opportunities nationally.” She reported also that she and many of her contemporaries subsequently experienced enormous difficulty when, as members of academic staff, they were expected to write articles for peer-reviewed journals. They had mostly completed their PhDs in Vietnam, where they had not been exposed to English, and so they also felt reluctant to submit articles to journals produced in English. They lacked confidence and were concerned about appearing unintelligent. Mr Huan, a lecturer in the theory of literature at University B, explained the situation as follows:

We are backward because we have been living for too long in a society that has remained ideologically the same. Meanwhile, the rest of the world has become more diverse. I feel deficient in terms of having a proper command of scientific methods and techniques . . . . I feel I am voiceless. I might have a story to tell, but I don’t know how to tell it until now. Vietnam has been like an island. We have
not engaged enough with our region, or with the world. When my colleagues do look at international scholarship in our fields of expertise, we feel that it is impossible to apply the same standards to what we are doing. We lack the capacity.

In contrast, participants from the natural and applied sciences reported how they had been inducted early to the importance of writing for publication, and how they insisted on teaching these skills as early as possible to their PhD candidates and new members of academic staff. Mr Kien, a professor of applied physics at University A, reported:

*Doing a PhD means that students must learn how to write, how to search the literature . . . so that they can work independently without support from supervisors. They must learn how to write papers, and write clarifications in response to reviewers’ feedback.*

He saw this need to be one that urgently required attention in Vietnam, and, like others, he regularly contributed to and participated in training programs about how to write articles for publication. Mr Tong, a senior lecturer in applied chemistry at University A, reported: “*[My academic department] has some persons who are excellent in writing . . . my wish is that all these skills should be transmitted to our colleagues, so that they can catch up more quickly.*”

Participants from the natural and applied sciences also reported that learning how to work as part of a team was a critical part of the induction process to their disciplinary culture. They frequently described how, as early-career academics, they had been assigned to a research team that provided them with support and guidance in the development of a research direction. These teams typically included an experienced researcher as team leader. This person, or one of the other experienced members of the team, was given responsibility for mentoring newly-appointed staff members. Mr Hoang, an associate professor of energy materials at University A, explained:

*Over the past five years, we have recruited about 15 or 16 new graduates. I have responsibility for these new staff members. I guide them. They discuss with me. They write and I revise. It is an induction to the research team. My role is to direct the research team.*
New staff members in the natural and applied sciences reportedly also received guidance with teaching. Ms Lam, a young lecturer in magnetic materials at University A, reported how her team leader and the other members of her research team had made important contributions to her development as a teacher:

I spent almost a whole month preparing [for teaching]. I even did rehearsals. There were no students, but our senior team members sat in. They are all professors and associate professors. They complimented me on the first section. For the second section, they were more critical. Our seniors guide us to teach in a way that enables the transmission of energy to the students. But for us, the main concern is to remember the content, to know how to behave naturally, and not to feel shy. How do we transmit energy? I think learning this skill might take a lifetime!

In the humanities and applied social sciences, the induction processes for new staff members were reported to be much more individually based, involving the establishment of a close professional relationship with one or more senior scholars in the department. In this context, the role of a scholarly mentor was said to be of paramount importance. Ms Nuong, a lecturer in the theory of literature at University B, while reflecting on her own experiences, provided the following defining account of how newcomers to her disciplinary specialisation learn how to make progress:

It is like with a flock of birds. The leading bird is very strong. This is the teacher, the person who has an ability to see the new ideas and set the new directions. This is the leading-edge scholar. We are weaker. We follow. By being in the flock, however, we are safer.

Scholarly isolation was, however, reported by these participants to be one of the risks associated with not having structured research teams. Mr Huan, a lecturer in the theory of literature at University B, described with a mixture of frustration and sadness how he and his immediate colleagues felt that they had little in common in terms of their areas of specialised expertise. His account mirrors precisely Becher’s (1989, p. 97) finding about the intellectual loneliness of the lone scholar, and the internecine disputes among lone-scholar departments such as sociology and other interpretive, ‘soft-pure’ fields of knowledge. He reported:
They [my colleagues] feel hesitant in knowing what to talk about. When they say something, others do not understand because we have no issues in common to discuss. There is little discussion among colleagues in the department. It is so sad. Many of my female colleagues talk only about their dresses, their husbands and their children. . .. We feel intellectually lonely. For example, I do some works, but other people don’t understand and they cannot share. . .. I don’t have any easy way of knowing if my ideas are right or wrong. It makes me feel strongly that there is no scholarly coherence in our department.

One humanities participant, Mr Thuan, an associate professor of social sciences at University C, had, however, been successful in creating research teams in the humanities. He had over many years been successful in obtaining external research grants for social science research and these grants had enabled him to construct a system of collaborative research teams within which newer staff members were formally mentored by more experienced staff members. He described this arrangement as follows:

*I organise my young colleagues into research teams. There are some team members who are good at foreign languages, and they will more often collaborate with international scholars. There are others who are not good at foreign languages, so they will engage in national projects. This is a way of allowing young colleagues to develop. This developmental process happens quickly. Every one of my young colleagues takes part in at least one or two externally-funded research projects each year.*

Belonging to a disciplinary culture was highly valued by a large majority of the participants, who claimed that it provided a social context and contract for continuing to enjoy a love of learning that had prompted them to become academics in the first place. Mr Quan, an associate professor of Vietnamese literature at University B, described, for example, his sense of good fortune in having been able to pursue his passion for literature: “*I feel so happy because I love literature, and I have opportunities to teach and research about literature. It is so meaningful.*” For Ms Quyen, an associate professor of physics at University B, the pursuit of knowledge in the discipline of physics was described as “*great fun. . .. It is fantastic. I feel satisfied with the current work I have.*” Mr Duong, a young lecturer in clinical psychology at University C,
reported similarly, stating that his work allowed him to continue to satisfy his curiosity about knowledge in his field: “When we are able to do many things such as teaching and research, we find our life is not boring. Being specialists in a discipline, we can always find something new that interests us.”

Whether engaged deeply in research or not, most participants reported experiencing a deep sense of belonging with their discipline and to the international community of like-minded scholars who shared their love of a discipline. Their comments resonated strongly with Clark’s (1983, p. 30) assertion that it is “the discipline rather than the institution [that] tends to become the dominant force in the working lives of academics.”

Among the five teacher educators, however, this sense of affinity with a disciplinary culture appeared to be much weaker. These participants were heavily engaged with issues affecting schools. While undertaking postgraduate training, they had experienced a certain amount of socialisation to a scholarly culture, but they could not describe this experience with any clarity. They each had specific areas of professional expertise, but their knowledge was more often based upon their personal professional experience than upon any allegiance they may have had to a theoretical perspective or body of scholarly knowledge. Ms Quynh, an associate professor of educational psychology at University C, expressed her despair about the extent to which teacher educators worked so much in scholarly isolation from one another:

> Each person has a different area of specialisation, and each person has his or her own areas of interest, so each person has freedom to decide what to do within that area of interest. Even when teaching within the same subject, different lecturers will stress what they think is important to stress, but there will be no sharing of ideas or approaches. The extent of sharing amongst us in this field is weak. It is possibly too weak!

In her view, teacher educators were not well socialised to a research-oriented academic culture. Their perceptions of themselves as academic staff members were shaped more by their workplace experiences in schools.
7.2 Networks

Except among the teacher educators, building networks was regarded by nearly all participants to be an indispensable part of the process of acquiring a research reputation. There were, however, some important differences in emphasis between the views of participants from the ‘hard’ and the ‘soft’ knowledge areas.

Achieving a global reputation for research achievements was what mattered most in the natural and applied sciences. Mr Hoang, an associate professor of energy materials at University A, was emphatic about this view:

*International collaboration is very important. We have a strong collaboration with the University of Amsterdam. [Our department] has been a Vietnam-Netherlands institution for postgraduate education. Our research teams have also collaborated with other research teams in Europe and with research teams in South Korea.*

For Mr Hoang, as for others in the natural and applied sciences, collaborations with other research laboratories allowed for an exchange of expertise and, especially, of the establishment of performance benchmarks. This point was also made by Ms Yen, a young lecturer in nanotechnology at University A. She explained how maintaining a collaborative relationship with scholars in her disciplinary area at international universities provided many opportunities for her and her Vietnamese colleagues. She explained:

*This University has good relationships with other universities in many countries. This situation provides a framework for us. When we want to develop a new research area, we find out if there are similar labs and we try to see the level of development they have achieved. We contact them and try to go to them for study visits.*

Attendance at international conferences was described by these participants as being essential to the development and maintenance of external networks. As well as providing a forum for reporting research outcomes, these networks assisted with the identification of new research ideas and the internationalised socialisation of new recruits. As Mr Hoang explained:
We are strongly linked with the international academic community through international conferences, exchanges and emails. For example, we organise international conferences, inviting guest speakers and distinguished professors from overseas. This year, at the end of October, we will hold an international conference on nano and electronic sensors. We have invited 15 speakers from overseas. These include nearly all the most distinguished scholars in the field. At present, we have one postdoctoral fellow in the Netherlands. We sent another one to Japan for his postdoctoral fellowship. We will also send two staff members for a one-month exchange program in Japan, and they send their students and staff members here for us to teach them.

All of this was reported with a huge sense of pride, and of confidence in their internationally comparative and competitive achievements. Participants from the ‘hard’ knowledge areas also referred to the importance of participating in national networks. Importantly, in these as well as in the international networks, it was research attainment that provided the basis for scholarly recognition. Ms Quyen, an associate professor of physics at University B, reported, for example:

*I have many opportunities to communicate with other researchers from outside the University, including with those in the Vietnam Academy of Science and Technology. Our research enables us to do this. If we did not do research, we would have no basis for communications.*

She continued to explain how valuable these connections were as a source of inspiration for her research:

*Attending conferences motivates me so much to do more research. I also attend seminars held by the Academy. These are the things that motivate me to want to continue doing research. If not able to communicate with active researchers outside my University, I would probably lose hope and might give up being a researcher.*

While participants from the ‘soft’ knowledge areas, other than teacher education, also referred to the importance of engaging with scholarly networks, their networks were much more loosely defined and rarely extended to include international scholars. Unlike the situation reportedly existing in ‘hard’ knowledge areas, where individual scholars
generally work within the collegial environment of a research team, scholars in the ‘soft’ knowledge areas were more likely to be working alone in their area of research specialisation. Mr Cuong, a professor of American literature at University B, provided the following account of the restricted nature of the scholarly networks within his academic department:

At this University, I am the only specialist in American literature. We also have one staff member who specialises in French literature, and another who specialises in British literature. We function with relative independence. We are connected by an interest in literature, but the social and intellectual connection is weak. There are no specific ways in which I can contribute to the research of the others, nor is there any way in which they can contribute to my research.

Ms Muon, an early career lecturer in Chinese literature at University B, reported similarly:

Our sense of community is, as I see it, poorly developed. Our research is conducted individually. For example, when we have a big project, we may function like a team, but it does not mean that we are engaging in teamwork to produce research outcomes. It means simply that big jobs are broken down into smaller parts, each of which is then completed by an individual, and then the individual components are combined to achieve a single project report.

Opportunities for networking outside their institutions were, therefore, warmly welcomed, and were reported to have become more usual, but these were said to be restricted mainly to Vietnam, rather than abroad due to cost. Importantly, these networks were said to be social as well as professional – whereas in the ‘hard’ knowledge areas the participants referred mainly to professional networks. Mr Huynh, an associate professor of history at University D, reported on the state of networking in his specialism:

There are plenty of opportunities now for networking with our local and national colleagues. Previously we were classmates. Now we are colleagues. ... They invite us to their conferences, and vice versa. We invite each other to collaborate in undertaking research. Gradually, we have built close networks with almost all universities and research institutes in Vietnam.
There were few references made by these participants, however, to global networking. Various participants in the humanities referred to the lack of opportunities for international exchanges and scientific visits. Mr Huynh identified the lack of financial capacity to be a severe limitation, but there were other restrictions. He spoke with resignation:

Regarding attendance at international conferences, we lack opportunities because of the lack of time, the lack of resources and a limited sense of vision. We have no opportunity to attend seminars overseas.

Financial constraints were frequently referred to by participants from the humanities as barriers to developing international networks. For example, Ms Nuong, a lecturer in the theory of literature at University B, explained:

Up until now, this University has received inadequate funding to support research [in the humanities]. The funds available for projects initiated by the institution are extremely limited. Consequently, many lecturers prefer not to engage in research. There are certainly no funds available to support attendance at overseas conferences.

Networking was also reported to be restricted by the perceived lack of leading international scholars in Vietnam across all fields in the humanities. Mr Quan, an associate professor of Vietnamese literature at University B, sadly reflected upon the situation. He said:

It is difficult for Vietnamese scholars in the humanities to participate fully in the international academic community. There are simply not enough highly capable scholars in Vietnam in these fields who can write and think in English. Communicating deeply with international scholars is very difficult under these circumstances. . .. At present, it is extremely difficult trying to identify scholars in the humanities who can explore the relevance of international theories to current national practical issues.

The five teacher educators provided a different perspective on the building of networks. Though not in most cases deeply engaged with research, these participants reported many opportunities for attendance at conferences in Vietnam, and they also reported having some opportunities for overseas travel to participate in workshops, training
programs and study visits. These events involved scholarly exchange, but appeared generally not to be research-based. One such conference, attended by the researcher, concerned the piloting of a training program in the field of teacher education. The presentations made by the attendees focused on different aspects of teaching practice, but none was based on systematic research and the conference provided little or no encouragement for future collaboration and networking. These were, in effect, professional development workshops or seminars.

An example of the kinds of comments made by teacher educators with respect to building networks is provided by Mr Van’s account. He was a lecturer in educational evaluation at University C, with an interest in quality assurance. He reported:

I have attended several workshops on quality assurance. This coming July, I will attend a training course to be held in Australia. We will spend one week in Melbourne at ACER [the Australian Council for Educational Research]. Before Melbourne, we will attend a training course somewhere else, I don’t know where. This project is funded by overseas. It also involves people from Indonesia and Vietnam.

These participants appeared to have many opportunities for building networks in support of research, but their focus was instead directed towards matters of professional practice.

7.3 Publishing

Becher (1989, p. 77) pointed to the existence of differences in the styles and types of academic communication preferred by scholars from across a wide range of disciplinary cultures. Even though digital dissemination of knowledge has well overtaken paper-based books and articles, it was relevant to explore the experiences of the participants regarding academic publishing in Vietnam. The main contrast was between the experiences of participants from the natural and applied sciences, on the one hand, and participants from the humanities, on the other hand. Participants who were teacher educators did not fit either profile, raising the question of whether teacher education is a practice or a discipline.

As has been referred to earlier, publishing was regarded as an essential activity by participants from the natural and applied sciences. Many of these participants had
acquired skills in English while working or studying abroad and so were confident about their ability to submit articles to international journals published in English. Overall, they regarded an ability to write in English to be fundamental to their ability to publish internationally. Even, as in several cases, where participants had completed their PhDs in a non-English speaking country, they reported having acquired an ability to write their scientific papers in English as a key career strategy. Ms Yen, a young lecturer in nanotechnology at University A, reported, for example, how, though she had completed her PhD in France, she used English for all of her published work: “I have published all of my journal articles in English. All my published papers and conference presentations are also written in English.”

For these participants, however, publishing was not necessarily always a straightforward task. At least one-half of the participants from the natural and applied sciences made some form of reference to the tedium of revising articles in response to feedback from reviewers. Ms Quyen, an associate professor of physics at University B, commented in a brusque tone borne of frustration: “You know, this article [referring to one that was recently published] was revised many times. I submitted it in January and got questions [for clarification] nine months later. Then I had to write the clarifications.”

Participants from the humanities reported less peer pressure to publish frequently. Eight of 10 humanities participants reported having well-developed publication lists, a claim able to be confirmed by accessing the websites of their institutions. Among these participants, there was a strong preference for publishing in Vietnamese journals and magazines, as was also evident from their publication lists. Writing in English for publication in international journals was widely reported by them to be extremely challenging. Most described their English skills as weak, especially in relation to the level of academic writing required by publishing houses. Mr Thuan, an associate professor of social sciences at University C, who had completed his PhD in France, explained his situation as follows:

"I can write, speak and do interpreting in French. But I am not strong in English. To work in English, I must make a serious effort. Why do I speak about English? Because at present there are many journals published in English, but only a few in French, and almost none in Russian. I write and publish in French, but my
opportunities for publication are restricted. In the meantime, there are 40 or 50 journals available in English.

The lack of access to international networks was also regarded as presenting a fundamental publishing constraint for these participants. Nearly all these participants reported being unable to access international knowledge-based networks, and some also reported that they did not know which international journals they should publish in. Mr Cuong, a professor of American literature at University B, reported, for example:

_The papers we write here, and the PhD theses we supervise, are, I believe, of international standard. Our works are not backward and out of date. They say something new. But the biggest difficulty is that we do not know which journals to publish in, or even how to publish. . . . I have some experience of publishing, but I only tinker in my attempts at searching the internet. Some [journals] are good because they reply to my enquiries. But there are many that simply ignore me._

Mr Huan, a lecturer in the theory of literature at University B, concluded:

_It is difficult for Vietnamese scholars to fully participate in the international academic community. Capable scholars are scarce in Vietnam, and these scholars must be able to write and think in English to understand deeply and communicate equally [with other international scholars]._

An impediment to publishing reported by many of them was the lack of opportunities for scholarly publishing in Vietnam. Ms Muon, a lecturer in Chinese literature at University B, reported, for example: _“Take my specialism. We have only one or two scholarly journals, while there a lot of people needing to publish their PhD theses.”_ Ms Khanh, a lecturer in Russian literature at University B, commented along the same lines: _“The Journal of Foreign Literature stopped after one issue. It could not continue for lack of money. What can be done?”_ Vietnamese journals were also reported as having a poor reputation in terms of their integrity, mainly because of the unscrupulous behaviour of some editors and reviewers. Ms Khanh, a lecturer in Russian literature at University B, went on to explain this concern:

_Very often, [scholarly] reviewing is only an excuse. The real reason is to make money. That why people do not respect national publications. At present,
[publishing] is difficult. Many journals only publish papers from PhD candidates and master students [who will willingly pay].

Participants from the humanities showed a distinct preference for writing books and monographs, with these forms of publication reportedly the most prestigious. Mr Huynh, an associate professor of history at University D, expressed his deep reverence for books by reporting the impact of a single book written by a notable Vietnamese scholar in philosophy. He commented: “I remember Professor [scholar named]. Over his entire career, he wrote only one book, yet his work provided the nucleus for the development of so many subsequent studies.” Ms Nuong, a lecturer in the theory of literature at University B, also expressed her high regard for books:

I have from time to time authored books, not as an editor but as an author. Books are more important than journal articles, which have only a topical value. In writing a book, it is necessary to have an idea throughout the work and a precise research strategy. Books require a lot of time and a great deal of concentration.

A search of the website for Ms Nuong’s academic department confirmed that she and many of her colleagues had, in fact, written books or monographs.

These findings are consistent in many respects with reports from more advanced higher education systems regarding the publishing styles and preferences of scholars across a range of disciplines (see, for example, Porter & Umbach, 2001, p. 187; Parry, 2007, pp. 59-60; and Wilsdon et al., 2015, p. 50). These accounts have documented the preference of scholars from ‘hard’ knowledge areas to publish in journals, and of scholars from the humanities to publish in books and monographs, though pressure on scholars from ‘soft’ knowledge areas to publish more frequently are reported to be causing them to publish increasingly in journals. In this investigation, curiously, participants from the humanities expressed no sense of pressure to publish frequently.

Participants from the applied social sciences had the least to say about their experiences of publishing, in large part because they were not well published. Some, such as Ms Quynh, an associate professor of educational psychology at University C, had extensive publication lists, but most of her publishing was done in the form of magazine articles and conference papers. Ms Quynh explained:
I write only national papers. Many of them are conference papers. I send them to this or that journal depending on how I want to share my research. I have about 30 national journal and conference papers.

7.4 Achieving Recognition

Various of the interview questions elicited responses concerning issues of recognition and esteem. All participants from the natural and applied sciences reported the importance placed on achieving disciplinary recognition and esteem for their research achievements, nationally as well as internationally. About one-half of the participants from the humanities also reported achieving disciplinary recognition and esteem for their research achievements, but only within Vietnam. In the humanities and in the applied social sciences, however, teaching was reportedly an additional source of disciplinary recognition and esteem, but only within Vietnam. This may well have been institutional recognition, but many participants in this disciplinary grouping tended to have an institutional rather than an international outlook on academic status.

Participants from the natural and applied sciences reported actively seeking international recognition through their peer-reviewed publications. Most of these participants spoke proudly about their attainments, drawing attention to significant publications and important international conferences at which they had been keynote speakers. Mr Hoang, an associate professor of energy materials at University A, reported, for example, that he had been the lead author for more than 40 peer-reviewed papers in international journals. He reported also that he had been the team leader for more than ten major national research projects. While proud of his personal achievements, for which he was celebrated at his university, and for which he had gained recognition internationally, his main concern when interviewed was to draw attention to the achievements of his colleagues. He humbly explained:

*Regarding international publications, our department has many outstanding scholars, many of whom graduated from overseas. I am the oldest among the staff in the department. In the past, we focused mainly on applied research, but now we are changing our focus to basic research, which certainly assists in obtaining international publications.*
One of his colleagues, Mr Kien, a professor of applied physics, was another scholar who had achieved international distinction. He was the leading author of more than 85 papers published in international peer-reviewed journals. He reported:

_Last year, I attended an Asian conference on chemical sensors. I had not attended this conference for a long time. We haven't got money, but it was a surprise to me that, after my presentation, so many people knew me. Many professors knew me. When I introduced our research team, they already knew them! The reason why they know us is partly because I am a reviewer of their papers. I know, therefore, what they do, and what they have achieved to date. I review about 15 papers each year for prestigious journals. Submitting papers for review is a strong communication channel. Our team on gas sensor is well known across the world. Other research teams know our team._

Participants from the natural and applied sciences also reported that individual professional recognition was greatly enhanced by belonging to an academic department that had acquired a strong reputation for its research. In this regard, it was accepted that there was a strong relationship between individual reputation and institutional reputation. The academic department at University A was especially esteemed for the high level of research productivity of academic staff. One important consequence of this high status was that there was reportedly intense competition to obtain employment in the department, and there was also strong competition reported to obtain PhD candidature in the department. This academic department was, therefore, able to be highly selective in its selection processes for the appointment of new staff members.

Participants from the humanities and applied social sciences areas had a markedly different perspective on the source of professional recognition and esteem as a scholar. For some of these participants, recognition based on their research publications mattered a good deal, but for most of the participants what mattered most was their reputation as a great teacher. Mr Quan, an associate professor of Vietnamese literature at University B, whose research attainments were exceptional when compared with other participants from the humanities and applied social sciences, explained this perspective: “About my role, I am a lecturer, and beloved and respected by my students.” Mr Huynh, an associate professor of history at University D, who was also highly respected as a scholar, spoke lovingly of his role as a teacher, stating that:
I have gradually realised that being a teacher is like being the driver of a boat. After each trip delivering our clients across a river, we feel the highest value when the clients say that they still miss the driver. . . . We have generations of graduates who are close and warm to us. I see the highest value in this.

Mr Thuan, an associate professor of social sciences at University C, was also held in very high regard as a teacher. He spoke about the importance of the investment made by a good teacher in his or her students:

In my view, the value of my profession is embedded in my students, in what they have learnt. I see my students as the people who bear our values. The value of a university lecturer is in the value that has been cultivated in his or her students.

This kind of recognition and esteem was individualistic in nature, that is, it did not derive from being part of a distinguished research team, or from belonging to a highly credentialed academic department. Scholars in these knowledge areas built their reputations individually, by establishing a personal reputation for their inspirational teaching. Their authored works were also individualistic, that is, there were few examples from across the range of their publications of any co-authored publications.

7.5 Concluding Remarks

This chapter has reported the findings relating to participants’ experiences of socialisation to a disciplinary culture. Becher (1989, p. 1) contended that being a member of a disciplinary community involved a sense of identity and of personal commitment, a “way of being in the world”. The different identity values of the science and non-science participants relate well to Becher’s (1989, pp. 79-80) distinction between rural and cosmopolitan perspectives wherein academics may be cosmopolitan in terms of their international outlook and identity, or rural with an institutional (or inward-looking) outlook and identity. This chapter has documented the experiences of the participants in terms of their “ways of being” as academic staff members working within different disciplinary cultures. In the chapter that follows, the focus moves to the question of academic identity.
Chapter 8
EXPERIENCES OF ACADEMIC IDENTITY

This chapter addresses the third of the research questions introduced in Chapter 1, concerning the ways in which the participants perceived themselves as academics. Henkel argued that academic identity could be observed in the “values, interests and beliefs, self-images and reputations” (Henkel & Vabo, p. 128) of academics, and that these elements of academic identity are formed in the context of an organisational and a disciplinary culture. This chapter begins with an account of aspects of academic identity that the participants appeared to share. It then reports on differences between groups of participants in terms of how they saw themselves as academics. Finally, barriers to identity formation that were identified by the participants are documented.

The four site institutions continue to be referred to Universities A, B, C and D. The four disciplinary categories are the same as in Chapters 6 and 7, that is, ‘hard-pure’ natural sciences (4 participants), ‘hard-applied’ applied sciences (8 participants), ‘soft-pure’ humanities (10 participants), and ‘soft-applied’ applied social sciences (8 participants).

8.1 Shared Characteristics

Overall, the participants had in common a strong sense of the pride in being an academic, underpinned by a well-developed sense of the importance of their individual roles. This aspect of their sense of academic identity could well have been anticipated, given the influence of Confucian tradition on views about the status of teachers generally in Vietnam, and given also the social prestige normally associated with being an academic at one or other of the leading research-oriented universities in Vietnam. There are Vietnamese legends about teachers which are taught to children from the early years of schooling. One of these, which was referred to obliquely by various participants when expressing frustration about their low official salaries, is the legend of Thầy Đồ (Teacher Đồ), a poor farmer who lived modestly in his village and who, instead of attending to his farming, selflessly devoted himself to the education of young villagers. The celebrated poet, Tú Xương (1986), tells the story of Teacher Đồ’s wife, who worked tirelessly to support her husband and her five children. To show their gratitude, the people of the village would take offerings of food to Teacher Đồ at the start of each new year. This ritual is now enshrined in the Vietnamese New Year
festival of Têt, when presents are traditionally given to teachers on the third day of the new year (Gia đình và Xã hội Newspaper, 2016/02/07). The legend perpetuates a view of teachers as pillars of society in Vietnam, and it also characterizes them as being selflessly devoted to the intellectual and moral development of their students.

Vietnam’s history and culture significantly influenced the participants in a variety of ways. One of these was its influence on them becoming academics in the first place. Many of the participants referred to the traditional values of their parents, and, more broadly, of their extended families, as an important source of influence. Mr Tan, a young lecturer in Chinese history at University D, reported, for example, that: “I was influenced by my family. My father wanted me to work in a school environment, which he considered would be better for his son. He wanted me to become a teacher.”

Ms Lam, a lecturer in magnetic materials at University A, reported similarly: “I completed my PhD, but still worked for an international company. My parents insisted that I should come back to university. They did not want me to have a career in business. They were afraid money would distract from my family and personal values.”

Mr Van, a lecturer in educational evaluation at University C, reported being influenced not only by his parents but also by his grandparents. Teaching at a university was seen by them, and was now seen by him, to be a highly respected career in Vietnamese society. He explained the nuances of traditional values:

> People in my village regard university lecturing to be of much higher status than any other profession, even higher than being a schoolteacher. My parents and grandparents wanted their children to be university lecturers for that reason. I realised that the requirements of being a university lecturer were high, regarding competency in a specialisation and mastery of English. The greater the professional requirements, the higher is the social status [in Vietnam] of university lecturing.

Another important source of influence was the example provided by former teachers, and especially by former university professors. When referring to these exemplars, the participants often accentuated the qualities of hard work, singular focus and a modest lifestyle. Mr Huan, a lecturer in the theory of literature at University B, became quite
emotional when recalling the devotion to learning and the absence of worldliness that he observed in his PhD supervisor:

*It was during my PhD candidature that I could get to know my professor better. Whenever I visited his home, I saw that he sat and read every day. He read relentlessly. Once, after reading something, he called me at 10.00 pm. We had a conversation for more than an hour. I felt he was sharing his devotion to scholarship with me. It melted me. He did not have a wealthy and indulgent life, so his enthusiasm [for his scholarship] made me feel ashamed for sometimes blaming my employment circumstances for not making more progress academically.*

For many participants, though, the circumstances of life as an academic were making it difficult to live up to these kinds of ideals. Many reported that their official income levels did not provide a secure basis for supporting a family, or even for meeting the education costs of their children. Ms Khanh, a lecturer in Russian literature at University B, explained the situation graphically as follows: “*Most lecturers face challenges in meeting basic needs, such as buying food and clothes. For many lecturers, pursuing scholarship . . . is leading to death.*” Mr Van, a lecturer in educational evaluation at University C, reported:

> . . . the remuneration for attending to academic responsibilities is below what is needed to survive. School teachers have more income, even without teaching outside of school hours. Their life is better than ours. My friends go to the countryside and work as school teachers. Their monthly salary is better than mine.

Mr Cuong, a professor of American literature at University B, reported:

*Salary has a critical impact on research. . . . If I were to be paid a salary of US$2,500 per month, I could well afford my research. We need a certain amount that affords a standard of living sufficient to support our work. . . . The salary for a professor like me is about 10 million VND per month (US$500). Who can live on this when you have two children?*

There was also concern that research, which for many participants was what made employment as an academic so distinctive and so enjoyable, was poorly and unreliably
funded. Ms Quynh, an associate professor of educational psychology at University C, while also declaring that “I love teaching, and, even if I were not paid, I would keep teaching”, stated that the lack of sufficient funds for research gave her and her colleagues the feeling that they were being exploited by society. She commented:

I do often find myself struggling to remain inspired. There are so many obstacles. Over my career, I have had three funded projects. I was a co-leader for one, which had a budget of US$15,000, and the other two had budgets of only US$1,000 each. I continue to guide my [research] students, and I have even spent my own money to support my research. But it disappoints me a lot, and takes away from my motivation. I don’t like having to struggle so much.

Poor infrastructure was another concern. Ms Muon, a young lecturer in Chinese literature at University B, reported, for example, that:

When we completed our doctorates [in China], we studied in highly supportive environments. We often wish that our students could have this same opportunity. The library there [in China] was cool in summer and warm in winter. The library staff members were pleasant, supportive and respectful. Here, the students go to the national library where, in summer, the air-conditioning is turned off to save electricity costs. Or the library staff members are bureaucratic and shout at the students. Our students go to classrooms that are hot, humid, and have no air-conditioning. Sometimes, we chat about the need for the expenditure priority to be more air-conditioners. Very often, we sit in classrooms that are not air-conditioned, sweating from head to toe, and nobody wants to study in such conditions.

There were, however, some different voices woven through the data. A few participants reported being contented with the rewards and conditions of their employment. Mr Kien, a professor of applied physics at University A, reported, for example, that his income enabled him to enjoy an acceptable lifestyle. He reported:

Regarding our salary, we cannot say we are rich, but our work does sufficiently support our existence. The salary at this University is sufficient to support our family life with two children. The University pays salary and then we get additional funds from research projects. . .. Of course, we cannot afford
luxuries, just a normal life. We cannot afford an expensive house, or a car, for example.

Mr Kien also reported how he had given up part-time work with a private firm so that he could focus more on his research. His part-time work had generated an income three times greater than his university salary, but he had returned to working as a full-time academic because of his love of research.

Some younger participants expressed uncertainty about whether they had made good career choices. One of these was Ms Muon, a lecturer in Chinese literature at University B. She declared defiantly:

*It is not the right time to become an academic. Maybe it will be better in 20 or 30 years, but I would not want one of my children to become an academic. The golden days were at the time of our ancestors. Those times have passed. In those days, everybody lived equally, all experiencing harsh conditions. The old people could find joy in becoming legendary models. Now, young people cannot survive for one day by becoming a legendary model.*

She continued:

*My high school classmates, who did not follow this profession [of becoming an academic], whose professions are in areas of international affairs and international trade, journalism, and so on, have better lives and more advantages [than me]. They are wealthier, are higher achievers, and have better working conditions. They can jump from one employer to another, which means they have more choices about the jobs they do. For example, my friends who are accountants, if they are not satisfied with their jobs, they can apply for different ones. It is very difficult for academics to jump. To where do we jump? Universities and research institutes are all very similar.*

Ms Muon’s reference to legendary models is of special note. She, like some other younger participants, was no longer so attached to the legend of Teacher Đô, and of other similar legendary teachers. Her poor official salary level and the deficiencies in the physical quality of her workspace clearly had eroded her belief in the nobility of teaching as a profession.
8.2 Different Characteristics

While some “values, interests and beliefs, self-images and reputations” (Henkel & Vabo, 2006, p. 128) were shared by all participants, there were many that were shared only among certain groups of participants, and these groups tended to be strongly defined by the nature of the engagement of their departmental colleagues with research. Drawing upon Becher’s (1989, pp. 79-80) distinction between rural and cosmopolitan academics, and on the emerging trend for some to become disillusioned with their academic careers, three groups of participants became readily observable. Participants were categorised simply as: ‘cosmopolitan researchers’, ‘local researchers’, or ‘reluctant researchers’. Participants in the first and second of these groups valued research, were research-productive, and saw the combination of teaching and research to be intrinsic to their professional identity. Participants in the third group, though they had each demonstrated capability as researchers, were not passionate about its importance, and tended therefore to regard it as an activity engaged in only for the purposes of meeting the minimum requirements for promotion.

8.2.1 Cosmopolitan Researchers

Thirteen of the 30 participants comfortably fitted the description of being ‘cosmopolitan researchers’. This category included 10 of the 11 participants from the natural and applied science disciplines, one (Mr Thuan) of the 10 participants from the humanities, and one (Ms Ninh) of the 8 participants from the applied social sciences. Nine of the 13 participants who were ‘cosmopolitan researchers’ had obtained their PhD qualifications abroad.

These were participants who were well connected as members of an international community of researchers in their knowledge specialisms. They valued highly their engagement internationally with their disciplinary peers and were eager to maintain and further build their own scholarly reputations through these international networks. They were highly competitive scholars, with a strong focus on producing research outcomes and on being the first to report knowledge breakthroughs. One of these participants, Ms Quyen, an associate professor of physics at University B, described excitedly how, through her induction to her disciplinary community while she was a PhD candidate in Russia, she had achieved status as the first Vietnamese scholar to work on high-temperature superconducting. She reported:
It was so nice of him [my supervisor] to instruct me in this research topic. At that time, high-temperature superconducting was a hot topic. It was completely new. A Nobel Prize had recently been awarded to a scientist working in the area. My supervisor instructed me to investigate the topic for my thesis. In 1990, my thesis was presented, it was the first research done on that topic by anybody from Vietnam. I felt so proud!

Her enthusiasm for working on a “hot” topic, that is, for doing research in an area of science where new research questions continually arose and became popular and competitive, was shared widely among the ‘cosmopolitan researchers’. Mr Noan, a senior lecturer in physics at University A, was another participant who expressed enormous excitement about being in this position. As already reported in Chapter 6, he proudly stated:

*The measurement techniques created by Mr [colleague’s name mentioned] are comparable with those used in the UK, and with others created at [name of laboratory given] in the United States. It means that our measurement techniques are seen to be internationally competitive and highly regarded.*

As indicated above, nine of the 13 participants in this group had obtained their PhD qualifications abroad, but nearly all of them had completed a post-doctoral training program in a research-intensive setting in countries that included France, Germany, Japan and the Netherlands. Their exposure to research at leading research institutions in developed higher education systems was a badge they wore proudly. They felt that they belonged to the research networks established while they were abroad, but they were also conscious of the need to maintain their membership of these networks by contributing new research findings as often as possible, or by ‘keeping up’ with elite research networks.

The ‘cosmopolitan researchers’ saw themselves to be spearheading the emergence of Vietnamese universities as globally competitive research institutions. Doing innovative research was seen by all of them to be fundamental to such a development. Mr Hoan, an associate professor of applied mathematics at University C, argued, for example, that it was only through its research achievements that his university would attract funds, nationally and internationally. He explained:
The best thing about this University is that it is focused mostly on research. It has enormous potential in being able to attract investments in research from many sources. With more funds becoming available, the research infrastructure can only improve. Another [strength] is the University’s international collaborations, which have produced many advantages. I see it [the international capacity] to be very important.

Mr Tong, a senior lecturer in applied chemistry at University A, who held similar views to those of Mr Hoan, argued in addition that the research achievements of his university needed to be better recognised within Vietnam. He wanted to see the development of a ranking system that would enable his university to be properly acknowledged for the distinctiveness of its research achievements. He explained this aspiration:

It is the time for this University! Among all the universities in Vietnam, we must surely be ranked as the best. What are the ways a university can become the best? By writing many scientific papers, by having many PhD students, and by having a very high proportion of lecturers who hold a PhD. The ranking system for universities in Vietnam must be made public. We must speak out. … Students must be able see the details of how university departments perform nationally and internationally. If we have a proper ranking system, out University will go to the top in the ranking!

It is relevant to note here that, of all four of the site institutions, University A was the one that was widely recognised by participants, including participants from the other site institutions, as being a strong contender for ‘world-class’ status sometime soon. Regardless of which site institution they came from, however, ‘cosmopolitan researchers’ were confident not only about their own research capabilities but also about the future research prominence of the academic departments and the universities to which they belonged.

Research collaboration was highly valued by all the ‘cosmopolitan researchers’. Indeed, an ability to work collaboratively was identified by most of them as fundamental to their personal success as researchers, as well as to the success of their academic departments. Collaboration was regarded to be a prerequisite for obtaining research grants and for delivering research outcomes. Collaboration was said to support both individual and team development. Its importance was such that, at least in University A,
senior academic staff members felt a strong personal commitment to inducting new appointees to the values of the research team. Mr Hoang, an associate professor of energy materials at University A, described how this aspiration was achieved:

Over the past five years, we have recruited about 15 or 16 new PhD graduates. I have responsibility for these new staff members. I guide them. They discuss with me. They write and I revise. It is an induction to the research team. My role is to direct the research team.

Through working collaboratively in teams, the participants also recognised that it was their individual achievements that contributed to their scholarly reputation, and hence their sense of individual academic identity. Mr Kien, a professor of applied physics at University A, explained how the balance between being a team member and achieving individual distinction worked:

We have common research projects, but everyone has his or her own goal and role, because every researcher needs gradually to become established. To gain the title of associate professor, one must have his or her own research stream. One cannot simply identify himself or herself by the team’s research area because these come and go. In one research team, there cannot be two professors having the same research directions. Each must have an individual complementary direction.

Experienced research participants also emphasised the importance of being able to cope with pressure in being able to stay on a research production treadmill. Stepping off this treadmill was reported by several of them to be potentially disastrous in terms of maintaining a research career. Ms Quyen, an associate professor of physics, was emphatic in this regard. She explained:

Continuity is very important, because if a researcher interrupts research for some years, when coming back there will be a high level of hesitation. Firstly, one would have lost a leading position. In the sciences, other researchers move ahead of you within one or two years. . .. Secondly, there would be the loss of excitement. Without this motivation, a researcher might find it very hard to restart a research career.
The participants also emphasised the importance of retaining access to global networks of scholars, and so attendance at peak international conferences was regarded as an essential aspect of their professional life. Ms Luong, a senior lecturer in physics at University A, explained how collaboration with international colleagues played an important role in her work as an academic:

*My collaboration with international scholars is very important. ... In my specialism, I have close relationships with Japanese universities. I might receive measuring equipment, for example. I have some visits for scientific exchanges, and measuring. Professors from there often come here for conferences. ... I often have trips funded by overseas institutions.*

The ‘cosmopolitan researchers’ also recognised the importance of undergraduate teaching, but less than one-half of them expressed any enthusiasm for doing undergraduate teaching themselves. They all did, though, recognise its general importance. One participant who expressed enthusiasm for undergraduate teaching was Mr Hoang, an associate professor of energy materials at University A. He commented:

*My students are future engineers, physicists, engineers. I teach an advanced program based on one created by the University of Illinois. All lecturers teach in English. ... The basic knowledge acquired is that needed for further their study and to for overseas study. The knowledge gained must meet international needs for when they are seeking employment.*

Mr Hoang was referring here to his involvement in one of the 37 ‘advanced programs’ now being offered by 23 universities across Vietnam. As reported in Chapter 2, these programs are part of an initiative by the Government to internationalise the curriculum in Vietnam’s higher education system and to improve opportunities for highly capable undergraduate students to proceed to postgraduate studies in Vietnam or abroad.

For most ‘cosmopolitan researchers’, however, their main teaching interest was in postgraduate programs. Supervising doctoral candidates was reported to be an especially satisfying role because it helped to build their research reputations. Their doctoral candidates had become a symbolic way of signifying their research leadership. At a practical level, these students also contributed to the achievement of research
publications. Mr Hoang, an associate professor of energy materials at University A, went on to explain how this symbiotic relationship worked:

*There is, of course, collaboration, but I have management responsibilities, so I have insufficient time for writing. But I have colleagues, PhD students. I guide them. They discuss matters with me. They write and I revise. It is a research team. I perform my role in directing the research team.*

The enthusiasm of the ‘cosmopolitan researchers’ for research fitted in well with, and was strongly supported by, the system of research funding through NAFOSTED, which was referred to by many of them as being essential to their success as researchers. Mr Tong, a senior lecturer in applied chemistry at University A, explained how the support was provided:

*It is to our advantage that NAFOSTED has provided research grants based of the number of international publications. . . . Doing research at present is much better supported than before. Doing research at present receives full support: conditions are better, finance is available, and equipment is available. Of course, getting this funding support is not easy, but it is possible.*

As reported in Chapter 6, however, NAFOSTED was also regarded to have certain limitations. One of these was that NAFOSTED was regarded to be insufficiently funded by the Government to overcome all the resource and research capacity shortfalls in universities.

The ‘cosmopolitan researchers’, not surprisingly, demonstrated an ambivalent attitude to academic management. Nonetheless, four of these participants were academic managers at the time of the interviews. Management positions were accepted by ‘cosmopolitan researchers’ as a normal part of career progression, but it was evident from their comments that engagement with academic management usually presented an unwelcome distraction from their research. Ms Quyen, an associate professor of physics at University B, who had been the dean of her faculty, explained: “*Honestly I had to spend so much time on meetings . . . it was not good.*” Ms Lam, a lecturer in magnetic materials at University A, reported how one of her colleagues who had recently been appointed as director of a research institute had applied to resign from the position because it was taking him away from his research: “*Mr [named] is now a director, but*
he complains because the new position takes him away so much from his research. He has refused the position.”

8.2.2 Local Researchers

Nine of the 30 participants comfortably fitted the description of being ‘local researchers’. These participants included nine of the 10 humanities participants. Only two of these humanities participants had obtained their PhD qualifications abroad, both in China.

The distinctive characteristic of the ‘local researchers’ was that they published nationally rather than internationally. While some of them reported using the internet to explore international themes relating to their research, they were not committed to participating in global research networks, and, in any event, most of them could not have participated in these networks because of their inadequate English skills and limited networking opportunities. These participants were, however, research-productive, and could point to multiple books, book chapters, monographs and journal articles that they had authored in Vietnamese.

These participants saw teaching to be their main professional commitment. Though postgraduate teaching related more closely to their research interests, their commitment to undergraduate teaching was generally quite strong. These participants were positive in their outlook on teaching, and referred affectionately to their teaching experiences. Mr Huynh, an associate professor of history at University D, described his pride in being a teacher:

*I have gradually realised that being a teacher is like being the driver of a boat. After each trip, when we have delivered our clients across a river, we feel the highest value when the clients say that they still miss the driver. Really, we across Quang Ninh to Kien Giang, everywhere. We have many generations of students who remain close to us. That’s what I value most about being a teacher.*

Mr Tan, a lecturer in Chinese history at University D, also described his teaching responsibilities with great affection. He commented:

*I always tell my students: “one day at university is one day of being happy”. Meeting with students means having great fun. . . . I often get up early in the*
morning and stay late at night to prepare my lectures and to do my research. It is my career, my passion and my strong sense of responsibility.

As were the other ‘local researchers’, these participants identified themselves at least as much by their teaching as by their research. In this regard, it was striking that they described their PhD supervisors in much the same vein. Their PhD supervisors were often described have having been scholars who shared their wisdom with their PhD candidates. Mr Cuong, a professor of American literature at University B, reported, for example:

I graduated from this University, and am a product of this University. My supervisor . . . was a leading scholar of Western Literature. The institution [I attended] was not important. The most important thing was who my supervisor was.

Ms Nuong, a lecturer in the theory of literature at University B, also reported on the enduring effect on her career as an academic of having been supervised for her PhD by a highly-respected national scholar. She explained:

We [PhD] students were a long way behind our teachers in terms of expertise [said with laughter]. We were immature. Their brains were amazing. Many lecturers taught beautifully. For example, one teacher [named] who taught us was the most wonderful in the department. . .. There are not many of these kinds of respected teachers. They are the persons we most respect and admire.

Mr Huan, a lecturer in theory of literature at University B, expressed the respect he continued to feel for his PhD supervisor. He reported:

Regarding my research career, I owe an enormous debt to Professor [name provided]. I saw him to be a great man. He directed my research. . .. He had a strong influence on me, so strong that I have learnt and adopted a similar approach in my work with my students.

Mr Huynh, an associate professor of history at University D, also spoke with affection and respect about the influence on his teaching and supervisory style of the example provided by his own PhD supervisor. He reported:
I did my PhD thesis under a supervisor in Hanoi who guided me with my research methodology. A strong research method is essential for a good thesis. What I learnt from my supervisor, I now transmit to my students.

Networking and collaboration were widely reported by the ‘local researcher’ participants as being of increasing relevance to their research activities and to their sense of being a member of the academic profession. These networks were, however, national, rather than international. The participants reported that there were now more opportunities for them to travel within Vietnam to participate in meetings with other scholars and to share research ideas. Mr Huynh, an associate professor of history at University D, provided an account that was broadly representative of the experiences of the other ‘local researchers’. He explained:

There are many opportunities for collaboration with my Vietnamese colleagues. We used to be classmates at school, at university, and when we did our PhDs, and now we are colleagues. Now we sit on the same PhD thesis defence committees. We also invite each other to our conferences. And we collaborate wherever possible when doing research. Gradually, we have built a very close network of scholars across universities and research institutes in Vietnam.

For some of the ‘local researchers’, however, their networks and the extent of their collaboration with other scholars remained weak. Mr Cuong, a professor of American Literature at University B, reported:

At present, collaboration in research in my field within Vietnam and abroad is weak. Research depends primarily on individual efforts, because collaborative research barely exists. Initiatives to develop collaboration have certainly begun, but, from what I have seen, these initiatives are relatively recent.

Deficiencies in English were reported by the ‘local researchers’ to present a fundamental impediment to becoming more internationally engaged. Mr Cuong, a professor of American literature, went on to explain this concern:

At present, we undertake research only in Vietnam. I do research, I write and I supervise PhDs and master’s theses. For example, I now have five master’s theses and two PhDs now in their final stage of being ready for examination. To deliver our voice to the international community, though, is difficult. We have
something to publish internationally, but we don’t know which journal to publish in and we cannot write in English.”

Mr Quan, an associate professor of Vietnamese literature at University B, expressed a similar sentiment, stating:

Everyone must build his own one road, regardless of whether it is as small as an alley or as big as a highway, depending upon their own capacity. But every university academic must build, but if we could not write in English, then we cannot publish in international journals. We don’t know where to start!

The research productivity of the ‘local researchers’ varied. The most published of these participants was Mr Cuong, a professor of American literature at University B, who had published more than 100 works, including books, book chapters and papers, all in Vietnamese. Others aspired only to write one major work, to be published in the form of a book. Mr Quan, an associate professor of Vietnamese literature at University B, who had published many papers, reported, for example: “I intend to write about two books. Writing more than that is, I think, impossible.” Unfortunately, like his ‘local researcher’ colleagues, his focus was inward and institutionally oriented. He was not yet influenced by the increasing pressure internationally in the humanities to publish collaboratively and in prestigious journals, rather than in books.

Most of the ‘local researchers’ were graduates of the university where they now worked, which gave them a particularly inward-looking, institutional focus on their academic work. None of these participants expressed any concern in this regard, and some spoke proudly of now being a senior academic at the university where they had completed all their studies. One of these participants was Mr Cuong, a professor of American literature at University B, who rather naively explained his institutional focus:

My supervisor was [scholar named]. She was very strong in Western Literature, I followed her for my master’s and PhD theses. .. The papers we write here and the PhD theses we supervise here are, I believe, of an international standard. [Our works] are not backward and out of date. They have produced something new. But the most difficulty is that we are not able to rise up to become known in international journals or we don’t know how to publish in them.
An impediment to networking that was reported by many of the ‘local researchers’ concerned the paucity of funds available for attending international conferences and the fact of heavy teaching commitments. Some of these ‘local researchers’ aspired to be part of an international community of scholars in their areas of disciplinary specialisation, but the obstacles were simply overwhelming. Mr Huan, a lecturer in the theory of literature at University B, spoke for the others when he explained:

To understand deeply and communicate equally [with international scholars] is very difficult. If [we] do not introduce fundamental changes in education and training in the higher education system, and if we do not introduce policies for the development of young talent, we will be slow in making progress as a nation. At present, there are too few scholars who can understand international theories and relate them to national practical issues.

Mr Huan understood the gap between aspiration and reality in these fields and was clearly frustrated by the situation.

NAFOSTED research funds were reported by the ‘local researchers’ to be difficult for them to obtain, mainly because NAFOSTED was reported to prefer international publications, which few of these participants reported having. One participant, Mr Huan, a lecturer of theory of literature at University B, reported also that there was a lack of sophistication in some of the research proposed by humanities specialists for funding by NAFOSTED. He regarded some of them to be of “low scientific value”, and more like the kinds of literature searching projects that in major international universities would be performed by library staff members.

8.2.3 Reluctant Researchers

The remaining eight participants shared certain characteristics, thereby categorized as ‘reluctant researchers’. These participants included all five teacher education participants, together with two participants (Mr Men and Mr Duong) from clinical psychology and one participant (Ms Thu) from applied mathematics. These participants had produced research publications, but not in international journals, and, though some were maintaining an output of reports and papers, they were doing so reluctantly, with difficulty and not in a strategic or sustained way.
‘Reluctant researcher’ participants regarded teaching to be their highest priority. They also had relatively high teaching workloads, which limited their capacity to do research. They regarded themselves as being respected for their commitment to teaching. Some of these participants expressed as passionate a commitment to teaching as the ‘cosmopolitan researchers’ had expressed to research. Ms Phuong, an associate professor of educational theory at University C, stated, for example:

*Passion is what is needed to be a good lecturer. . . . Teaching does not mean stuffing knowledge into students. It is about lighting a fire of passion for learning. I must burn myself first before burning others! I try to be a spiritual reference point for my students to lean on.*

The ‘reluctant researchers’ were not generally critical of the value of doing research. Indeed, though three of the teacher education participants had abandoned research altogether, most continued to produce papers and reports for local consumption, but their motivation was driven more by the need to meet explicit institutional research responsibilities than to undertake a research strategy because they enjoyed it. Only one of these participants was currently supervising a PhD candidate.

None of the ‘reluctant researchers’ reported any success in obtaining research funding. Some expressed resentfulness about the extent to which their applications for funding had been rejected. Ms Quynh, an associate professor of educational psychology at University C, was one such participant. She described her frustration:

*My University has issued a policy encouraging the establishment of research teams. OK, let’s form them, but to do what? Proposals for funding are submitted and then rejected. What is the point in having a research team, or belonging to a research network? Let’s have the projects funded, and then academics will naturally connect with networks.*

Her comments illustrate her lack of awareness or acceptance of research funding mechanisms. It was surprising, though, to discover the extent to which the ‘reluctant researchers’ frequently attended conferences and training programs, not only in Vietnam but also, sometimes, abroad. Attendance at these events was explained by the need to remain informed about contemporary developments in teaching practices. Ms
Huong, who was a lecturer in educational management at University C, reported, for example:

At some conferences, I will present a paper, while at others I simply listen and seek to learn from shared experiences. Each year, I would normally attend one international conference (hosted in Vietnam) and three or four other local conferences. There are limited opportunities for attending conferences outside Vietnam. Conferences are a way of maintaining networks with colleagues, and I do also take part in discussion with people who are doing research on teacher education.

She commented further that:

At my University, many colleagues are not interested in conference attendance. They are too busy with their teaching. Sometimes, they do not see the career benefits of going to a conference. The don’t participate and share their experiences with colleagues because they don’t feel confident about trying new theories or techniques, and they are also reluctant to share the lessons learned from their failures.

It seemed that Ms Huong was also making an oblique reference to the tendency of many of her colleagues not to expose their lack of knowledge about theories and techniques underpinning their profession.

Mr Van, a lecturer in educational measurement at University C, reported that he often attended workshops and training programs. His current interest was quality assurance, and he reported most enthusiastically that he would soon be attending a one-week training program on this topic in Australia.

In general, the ‘reluctant researchers’ did not communicate much with their colleagues about their academic interests, and they were not members of any research teams. One of these participants, Mr Duong, a lecturer in clinical psychology at University C, explained, for example: “People here [in his department at University C] don’t care about my work. Nobody knows about what I am doing here. And I don’t know anything about what the others are doing. Sometimes I feel lonely at work.” Another ‘reluctant researcher’, Ms. Quynh, an associate professor of educational psychology at University C, attributed her lack of involvement in any research team to the unavailability of
research funds. She, like Ms Huong, either did not know or could not accept that governmental funding bodies set priorities for research funding, and that, to obtain these funds, academics must follow the required rules and apply the appropriate strategies. She commented: “How can we collaborate with others and form research teams if we cannot get research funds. Without research funds, there is no means for making connections.”

The ‘reluctant researchers’ had little research contact with international scholars, other than vicariously by attending international conferences and enjoying keynote addresses. Four of the ‘reluctant researchers’ had completed their PhDs abroad. Two of these participants reported that they maintained links with their supervisors, who provided them with access to books and software, but there were no continuing research links. One other ‘reluctant researcher’ who had completed her PhD abroad, Ms Loan, an associate professor of educational management at University B, reported wistfully: “I lost contact with my supervisor a long time ago. Since graduating [in 2003], I have not been back to Australia”.

8.3 Barriers to Identity Formation

Nearly all the participants commented on their professional aspirations. In the process, they reflected on the various conditions that they felt might stand in the way of being able to achieve these aspirations.

8.3.1 The Cosmopolitans

For the ‘cosmopolitan researchers’, the impediments related almost entirely to the lack of sufficient funds to enable them to achieve ‘world-class’ research outputs. These were participants who had demonstrated a capacity to absorb more funds, as shown by their research track records and well-developed disciplinary networks, but they felt constrained by the lack of availability of advanced technologies capable of enabling them to address research problems at the cutting edge of knowledge in their areas of specialisation. The lack of up-to-date technology led them to feel that they were not able to compete with international scholars in advancing knowledge in disciplinary specialisations. Ms Luong, a senior lecturer in physics at University A, explained:
Regarding finance, with the available amount of funding, we are not able to address big problems. At present, we focus on small problems that we can afford to address with the limited funds available to us.

The funds these participants hoped for were well beyond the size of the grants made available through NAFOSTED. As reported in Chapter 2, NAFOSTED provides only small grants for basic research, and, in aggregate, accounts for only 3% to 5% of all public funding for research. Most research funding is administered by the Ministry of Science and Technology and is dispersed to ministries and, through them, to universities. Research grants, known as ministerial grants, are made available by ministries, and individual universities make institutional grants available. Research grants from either source were regarded as problematic because of the lack of transparency and the excessive bureaucracy that accompanied applying for them. Some participants reported, for example, that, even after a research proposal had been approved, it was not uncommon to have to hand back between 10% and 30%, and sometimes up to 40%, of the grant in the form of benefits for the funding authority. Mr Tong, a senior lecturer in applied chemistry at University A, explained:

There is no competition in Vietnam, as you might know. It is about relationships. For example, the tasks proposed by a Ministry. They would give these to their research institutes first. University academics are the second in the queue.

A further obstacle was the difficulty the participants experienced in attempting to commercialize any of their research outputs. Mr Quang, an associate professor of energy recovery at University A, explained:

In some basic areas, Vietnamese researchers are excellent, at an advanced level, so others need us. But in my area of chemistry, we must produce technologies to serve Vietnam, and particularly to serve the poor. We cannot export anything to Thailand. It is very difficult. If it is difficult to export rice from Vietnam, then it is even more difficult to export scientific products.

Mr Tong, a senior lecturer in applied chemistry at University A, also referred to this difficulty. He commented:

To be approved, ministerial and governmental projects must have relationships with enterprises as a partner who will provide counterpart funds. Research
proposals will have a high possibility of getting approval for funding if an enterprise or a company has been named as an industry partner. However, these projects are not very specific. Some ministries, for example the Ministry of Industry and Commerce, and the Ministry of Agriculture, having considered their internal needs, might propose a very specific research task, for which a large sum of money is allocated. For academics, however, these projects are not easy to take on. They don’t have the capacity to address very big tasks that involve the expenditure of a huge budget. They are more comfortable doing small tasks. They are also not capable of guaranteeing certain outcomes within a specific period, even for tasks that are not so big.

These participants were strongly in agreement about the need for a single point for coordination for the allocation of research funds, and for transparent funding mechanisms. Most of all, they agreed that NAFOSTED ought to be the main source of all research funds in Vietnam.

### 8.3.2 The Locals

Participants who were ‘local researchers’ all reported that they also felt constrained by the lack of available research funds. Their more pressing need, however, was to have more time available to undertake research and publications. They all expressed the need for reduced hours of teaching and for better remuneration to reduce the pressure on them to engage in supplementary teaching simply for the purposes of achieving a reasonable standard of living. Some proposed that the appropriate remuneration for a senior lecturer should increase to US$1,000-1,200 per month, which was generally considered sufficient to allow them to focus exclusively on their teaching as well as do their research.

These ‘local researcher’ participants also referred to the absence of a sufficient number and range of journals within Vietnam. They had no understanding that such a development might be self-defeating in a country trying to create ‘world-class’ universities. Ms Muon, a lecturer in Chinese literature at University B, claimed:

> Regarding writing, there are only few professional journals in Vietnam. Take my specialism for an example. We have only one or two journals, while there are numerous people who need to publish for their PhD theses.
Various younger ‘local researchers’ expressed a preference for building their reputation through their engagement with electronic platforms, including blogs and Facebook entries. They complained that there was nothing to be gained professionally from submitting their papers locally for peer review. However, Mr Men, a lecturer in clinical psychology at University C, explained:

> Regarding national publication, I sent my paper, as I thought it was of good quality, and then I forgot. Then one beautiful day they called to give me some money. I knew that my paper had been accepted for publication. Yes, there were revisions required. . .. These were mainly . . . administrative requirements. However, there was no scientific feedback, no peer exchange. I could learn nothing from it.

Again, the tension between the cosmopolitans and the locals arises. Those who were locally-focused faced a significant ‘glass ceiling’ when it came to internationalisation. They could not build an international reputation unless they became more cosmopolitan.

Added to this, concern was also expressed about the extent to which scientific merit came second to obtaining financial benefits in the peer-review processes for national journals. Ms Muon, a lecturer in Chinese literature at University B, claimed that the peer-reviewing system for journals in Vietnam was also corrupt: “We should pay and have a [financial] relationship with national journals if we want our papers published.” Ms Khanh, a lecturer in Russian literature at University B, was also extremely critical of the national publishing culture:

> Very often, [scholarly] reviewing is only an excuse. The real reason is to make money. That why people do not respect national publications. At present, [publishing] is difficult. Many journals only publish papers from PhD candidates and master students [who will willingly pay].

### 8.3.3 The Reluctants

Participants who were ‘reluctant researchers’ generally appeared to be contented with their status as teachers who occasionally produced locally-oriented research reports. They reported that they enjoyed teaching, but were happy to produce a paper or a book chapter on a topic that related to their teaching. Like the ‘local researchers’, the ‘reluctant researchers’ were concerned about the inadequacy of funds available to
research. They also reported that their English skills were too weak to provide a basis for engaging with international scholarly networks, and thus was felt to be a huge obstacle. Mr Men, a lecturer in clinical psychology at University C, who had obtained his PhD in the United States, explained, for example, that: “Writing papers in English in the social applied sciences remains difficult for us. Although we graduated with PhDs written in English, we could not possibly write and publish papers without support and help from our supervisors.”

Another impediment reported by the ‘reluctant researchers’ was a perceived lack of scholarly leadership in their areas of disciplinary interest. Unlike many of the ‘local researchers’ who had completed their PhDs in Vietnam, none of the ‘reluctant researchers’ who had completed their PhDs locally made any reference to the inspirational influence of their doctoral supervisors. Ms. Quynh, an associate professor of educational psychology at University C, commented, for example, that: “There are no leading scholars in our field. We don’t know how to conduct a real scientific research project, and there is nobody to guide us. What we need most is to have some research leaders, who can initiate research and lead a research team.”

8.4 Concluding Remarks

This chapter has reported on how the participants identified themselves as members of academic staff. Henkel’s understanding of academic identity as the “values, interests and beliefs, self-images and reputations” (Henkel & Vabo 2006, p. 128) provided by members of the academic profession. This chapter has focused on the experiences reported by the participants concerning their sense of themselves and their work as academic members of staff. The next chapter identifies a broad set of issues emerging from the findings that are important to consider because they directly influence research capacity-building in Vietnam.
Chapter 9

DISCUSSION

This chapter provides a discussion of some broad themes to emerge from the findings reported in Chapters 5 to 8. These themes concern aspects of the findings that expose the developing higher education system in Vietnam to jeopardy if not recognised and addressed at both the systemic and institutional levels. These themes also help to contextualise the more specific details reported in those chapters and to reconcile them in terms of the theoretical framework. The chapter begins with an account of themes referring to specific aspects of the professional life of the participants in the investigation. It then turns to address themes that relate more to the national policy context.

9.1 Academic Workloads

At various points in Chapters 5 to 8, reference is made to the issue of workloads, concerning particularly the perception that too much time is required to be spent on undergraduate teaching, which has adverse consequences for making progress with research outputs or research endeavours. As reported in Chapter 2, the Ministry of Education and Training now requires that 50% of the workload allocation of every academic staff member in Vietnam should be devoted to teaching, with 33% devoted to research and with the balance devoted to professional development. The requirement is intended to apply to all higher education institutions and to all levels of academic appointment. As reported earlier in Chapter 2, however, this requirement is not vigorously enforced, particularly concerning the amount of time required to be spent on research. For the participants in this investigation, though, the main concern was that there was not enough time available to them to do more research. Especially in the humanities and applied social sciences, many of them did not feel that they were even able to allocate 33% of their time to research, given their teaching commitments.

Of the four site institutions, University A stood out as being the most committed to ensuring that teaching workloads were not excessive for research productive members of staff. As Ms Luong, a senior lecturer in physics at University A, reported: “Because research is our strength, academics in this department have fewer teaching hours
compared with others at the University.” Even so, Mr Kien, a professor of applied physics from the same department, reported that: “... at present the institutional expectation ratio is about 60% of the time for teaching and 40% of the time for research.” He preferred instead that 50% of the time should be allocated to each of teaching and research. At the other site institutions, and especially among participants from the humanities at Universities B and D, there was a strong sense conveyed that they were not able to devote even one-third of their time to research because of their heavy teaching workloads.

Summarising international research on the topic of academic workloads, Fairweather (2009) concludes simply that: “the more hours spent teaching in the classroom, the lower the scholarly productivity” (p. 173). Drawing on data from a national survey in 1999 of postsecondary academic staff members in the United States, he reported also that, on average, academic staff members at four-year colleges and universities in the United states spent 54% of their time on teaching and 20% of their time on research, and that the institution was more important that the discipline as a predictor of the amount of time academic staff members spent on research. He also concluded that formal workload allocations for research were among the best of the predictors of the amount of time that academic staff members spent on research.

These findings present a possible explanation for the generally higher level of research productivity among participants from University A, given that it was the only site institution that appeared to enforce the national requirement that 33% of an academic workload should be allocated to research. Other factors, though, may also have been influential. Participants from University A were all from the natural and applied sciences, and they appeared generally to be benefitting greatly from NAFOSTED funding for their research.

9.2 Research Productivity

Many of the participants clearly regarded success in achieving scholarly publications as a fundamental basis for any recognizable academic status and for the attainment of an individual academic identity. The pressure felt to publish was, however, much more keenly felt in the natural and applied sciences than in any of the other disciplinary areas. Furthermore, it was mainly the participants from the natural and applied sciences who were publishing internationally, thereby earning the ‘cosmopolitan researcher’
categorisation applied to nearly all of them in Chapter 8. While these were the disciplinary areas that benefitted most from NAFOSTED funding, they were also areas in which the positive effects of collaborative research endeavour, as is typically found in laboratory-based research settings, was widespread and provided a setting that was highly conducive to the co-authoring of research publications. Research productivity was also widely reported by participants in these disciplinary areas to be a function of collaborative research effort undertaken in team-based structures. Mr Kien, a professor of applied physics at University A, explained, for example:

*My [academic department] has a high research capability because of the research competence of its staff members. They include 21 staff members who graduated abroad with PhDs. These people work hard, following the example of a core group of senior colleagues who are the team leaders and who behave like engines in taking a leading role in the research.*

Mr Kien’s comments resonate with claims about the increasingly applied nature of knowledge (see, for example, Gibbons et al., 1994; Slaughter & Leslie, 1997).

At University C, a whole-of-institution policy of encouraging the formation of research teams, congruent with institutional and sectoral policies in developed higher education systems, had been initiated. Its purpose was to increase research productivity and it was being vigorously implemented. Mr Van, a lecturer in educational evaluation at University C, explained:

*The University has identified a research development direction and has been strengthening research capacity recently. An example is the University’s policy for encouraging strong research teams. The policy focuses on the support for research teamwork, which is a shift away from individual research. Larger research projects are now also more likely to be approved if they involve teams.*

Other considerations, of course, were also important to research productivity. At a global level, Altbach and Salmi (2011, p. 3) have identified these as including: a concentration of student and staff talent, having access to abundant resources, and having a governance environment that favours innovation and flexibility. The relatively lower levels of research productivity among participants from the humanities and applied social sciences may, at least in part, be attributed to the lack of opportunity for
them to access research funds through NAFOSTED, given its requirement that applicants for grants must have international publications. For the time being, this potential block for researchers in the humanities and social sciences may be premature because it locks existing and potential researchers in these areas into an unwinnable or insurmountable position.

It was also the case, though, that the quality of research undertaken in the humanities and applied social sciences may not consistently have been of a high academic standard – an observation reported by several of the participants, as well as by Ngo Viet Son (2015, p. 10). Seen in the light of a long-term priority to fund the natural sciences at the expense of the inductive disciplines, this circumstance seems inevitable, but it also points to an important challenge for the higher education system, that is, the need to foster stronger research capacity in these areas. Many of the leading scholars in ‘soft’ knowledge areas in Vietnam received their doctoral training in one of the Soviet satellite countries where an epistemology of dialectical materialism dominated. This epistemology has limited scope in contemporary research in ‘soft’ knowledge areas, in Vietnam as well as internationally. A new generation of PhD graduates from Western universities will introduce fresh approaches to research in the humanities and social sciences, but it will be many years before these graduates become the leading scholars in their respective disciplines, and only then if there has been a deliberate investment made in providing them with the opportunities required for publishing success.

9.3 Academic Inbreeding

The trend for graduates to undertake postgraduate studies at the institution where they were undergraduates, and eventually become lecturers at the same institution, was an emergent theme of note from the findings. That there was a considerable number of participants in this category were seen to present a situation of ‘academic inbreeding’, a term used by Horta (2009, 2013), amongst others, to refer to the extent to which academic staff members tend to work at the same university where they have completed their undergraduate and postgraduate studies. Horta (2013, p. 490) distinguished between ‘pure inbreds’, that is, academics whose entire experience as a student and then as a scholar is based at the same university, and ‘mobile inbreds’, that is, academics who spent at least some time at another university, whether for their doctoral studies or for a post-doctoral appointment, but tend to return to their alma mater as a work base.
Nearly all the participants in the present investigation were ‘inbreds’ of one kind or the other, but it is significant that a clear majority of the participants who were either ‘local researchers’ or ‘reluctant researchers’ were also ‘pure inbreds’, whereas a large majority of the participants who were ‘cosmopolitan researchers’ were ‘mobile inbreds’. Figure 9.1 allocates the participants to one or other of six categories, based upon whether they were ‘cosmopolitan’, ‘local’ or ‘reluctant’ researchers, as described in Chapter 8, and ‘mobile inbreds’ or ‘pure inbreds’, as defined by Horta. Some strong relationships are evident. Ten of the 12 participants from the natural and applied sciences were both ‘cosmopolitan researchers’ and ‘mobile inbreds’, meaning that they were internationally engaged in terms of their research and that they had also studied or worked away from the university where they now held an academic appointment. Seven of the 10 humanities participants were both ‘local researchers’ and ‘pure inbreds’, meaning that they were not internationally engaged through their research and that they had never left the university at which they now held an academic appointment. All three clinical psychologists were ‘mobile inbreds’, because they had completed their PhDs abroad, but only one of them was a ‘cosmopolitan researcher’, and the other two were ‘reluctant researchers’. The other five applied social science participants, all from teacher education, were mainly ‘reluctant researchers’, though two of them were ‘mobile inbreds’ because of having completed their PhDs abroad. To have an outward-looking, more cosmopolitan focus, academics clearly needed exposure to internationally engaged research cultures abroad.

Table 9.1: Participants by Academic Inbreeding and Type of Research Commitment

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<th>Academic Inbreed Type</th>
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<td></td>
<td>Cosmopolitan researchers</td>
<td>Local researchers</td>
<td>Reluctant researchers</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mobile Inbreds</td>
<td>10 natural and applied sciences</td>
<td>1 humanities</td>
<td>1 humanities</td>
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<td></td>
<td>1 humanities</td>
<td>4 applied social sciences</td>
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Horta (2013, p. 507) reports from his investigation conducted in a Portuguese setting that ‘mobile inbreds’ were much more likely to have published in international journals than ‘pure inbreds’, and were also much more likely to be internationally engaged. This pattern is also evident from the profile presented in Figure 9.1 (above). Of the 18 ‘mobile inbred’ participants, only four participants were ‘reluctant researchers’; and, of the 13 ‘cosmopolitan researchers’, 12 were ‘mobile inbreds’, that is, they had worked or studied away from their current place of employment.

In this investigation, it was not possible to compare the research productivity of the participants in the six categories identified in Figure 9.1. Given the concentration of participants from the natural and applied sciences in the ‘mobile inbreds’/‘cosmopolitan researcher’ category, however, it seems safe to assume that the most research productive of the participants were those who had either completed a PhD abroad or undertaken a post-doctoral appointment abroad.

High levels of ‘academic inbreeding’ are not uncommon in developing countries, for example, in Malaysia and China, but also at leading “pinnacle” research universities in Japan (Futao Huang, 2015, p. 62; Horta, Sato, & Yonezawa, 2011, p. 42). They are also reported to be prevalent in the Russian and Portuguese higher education systems (Horta & Yudkevich, 2015, pp. 3-4). In one international survey involving higher education systems in Asia, however, Vietnam was found to have an especially high level of academic inbreeding, with nearly all of those awarded a PhD in Vietnam found to be working at the same university from which they received their PhD.

It is only reasonable to assume in these circumstances that academics in Vietnam who lack any international research experience could not be expected to understand their own national university sector in a broader global context, or to be well able to compare international levels of academic standards.
Most participants expressed a desire to engage with global knowledge networks within their areas of scholarly specialisation, but it was mainly among the participants from natural and applied sciences that this kind of meaningful engagement was reported. The ability of these participants to engage internationally was an important aspect of their academic identity, as reflected in the description given in Chapter 8 to all but one of them as ‘cosmopolitan researchers’. These participants were publishing in international journals and attending peak international conferences in their areas of research specialisation. They were also engaged with their scholarly networks by means of the internet. Engagement in international knowledge networks afforded appropriate opportunities for them to exchange new research ideas, and was both motivating and inspiring professionally. It was also reported that these networks enabled individuals to build close and friendly family-like relationship among colleagues internationally.

Except for two other participants, one from the humanities and one from the applied social sciences, none of the other participants laid claim to any international engagement with researchers. A major constraint for these participants, especially if they were ‘local researchers’, was that they were either not able to read English or were not confident about writing in English, against a background in which English is widely understood to be the language required to engage in international knowledge networks. Other constraints included a lack of financial support for international travel, and, for some, there was limited access to the internet.

More general contextual factors may also have had some impact on the participants who were not internationally engaged. A survey of academics conducted in 2011-12 across a range of Asian countries, including Cambodia, China, Japan, Malaysia, Taiwan and Vietnam found that Vietnamese academics were the least likely to regard having an international connection as of key importance to their work (Futao Huang, 2015, p. 65). Not surprisingly, Vietnamese academics were reportedly the least likely to consult international scholarly resources for the purposes of advancing their mastery of a discipline. This was a great pity because all the participants spoke about the importance to a flourishing academic community of an engagement with researchers internationally.

Until recently, the opportunities available for many scholars in Vietnam to participate in global knowledge networks have been severely restricted by a combination of limited
financial resources and an inwardly-focused form of socialism dominating social values. It is only within the past decade that internationalisation has been regarded as a necessary foundation for Vietnam’s socioeconomic development. As reported in Chapter 2, the Government of Vietnam now regards internationalisation to be equivalent in importance to industrialisation and modernisation as a national goal in the process of socioeconomic development. Opportunities to engage internationally are, therefore, becoming much more available, especially for scholars working in ‘hard’ knowledge areas where there is a stronger sense of need felt to contribute to knowledge that is global rather than local in focus, and where the limitations associated with not being completely fluent in an international language, especially English, may be more easily overcome.

The dominance of English as the “global language of science” (Lillis & Curry, 2010, p. 8; see also Altbach, 2004, pp. 9-10) is having a significant impact on academic culture in Vietnam. As reported in Chapter 2, fluency in one of English, French, Chinese, Russian or German is now a requirement for appointment to associate professor level – with English being by far the most sought-after of these languages to master.

9.5 National Expectations

As reported in Chapter 8, the participants felt a strong sense of commitment to academic life, which they found especially rewarding in social terms, though some expressed a sense of disillusionment because of the inadequate salary rates and the limiting deficiencies of the physical working environment. Being an academic at a leading university in Vietnam was, however, considered to be an important lifetime achievement, to which much social kudos was attached throughout society in Vietnam generally.

It is possible to see in the participants’ responses, however, a developing tension between the traditional Confucian ideal of the teacher, as perpetuated in legends such as that of Thày Đồ, and the contemporary reality of a national economy that is increasingly needing to provide generous rewards for young professionals who produce internationally significant outcomes. Ms Muon, a young lecturer in Chinese literature at University B, expressed this point of view quite forcefully when she declared that:
The golden days were at the time of our ancestors. Those times have passed. .. Now, young people cannot survive for one day by becoming a legendary model. .. My high school classmates, who did not follow this profession [of becoming an academic], whose professions are in areas of international affairs and international trade, journalism, and so on, have better lives and more advantages than I do. They are wealthier; they are high achievers; and they have better working conditions.

The tension between traditional and contemporary expectations in Vietnam regarding the role of the academic raises various issues for consideration. The participants in this investigation were highly qualified individuals who, in general, had made a huge personal commitment to becoming an academic. If, as Ms Muon warned, other young people who are exceptionally clever do not feel that they can make a similarly level of commitment to the pursuit of an academic life, then Vietnam’s aspirations for having ‘world-class’ universities capable of generating significant economic growth and of contributing significantly to individual prosperity and social mobility may be constrained. Clark (1987b, p. 373; 396; 397) refers to the academic profession as “the profession of the professions.” If the academic profession is not enabled by an academically-talented labour force, then all professions in Vietnam will be disadvantaged.

National expectations about the importance of the research role of academic staff members also warrants considerable reconsideration. Vietnam’s Confucian culture has traditionally valued the teaching role of academics rather than their research role (see for example, Pham Thanh Nghi, 2013, pp. 173-174; 2015, pp. 125-127). Mr Kien, a professor of applied physics at University A, had this cultural circumstance in mind when expressing his frustration about the extent to which heavy teaching commitments tended to be regarded as more acceptable than heavy research commitments. He spoke for many when he stated:

*We must change. Universities must do research. The view of many people in universities is so strange: ‘We teach and we earn money for the university. You do research, and you earn nothing for the university.’*

Unfortunately, he was identifying a growing tension that needs policy intervention to reward internationally competitive higher education standards in both research and
teaching. National expectations about academic freedom are another area for reconsideration.

Participants from the humanities and applied social sciences overall reported that they were inclined to select research topics that were not likely to be politically provocative. Mr Huynh, an associate professor of Vietnamese and Southeast Asian history at University D, who was a well-published ‘local researcher’, commented wistfully that: “We still cannot explore and critique concepts freely. I see the need, and the importance, of open dialogue and free critique.” Participants from the natural and applied sciences made no reference to any similar sense of constraint, because their logical framework was deductive rather than inductive. When Ms Quyen, an associate professor of physics at University B, spoke excitedly about a topic that was “hot”, she was referring to an area of research that was fast-moving and highly competitive. In contrast, when various of the humanities participants referred to a topic that was “hot”, they were referring to a topic about which they would not dare openly to undertake research for fear of repercussions. One such topic, which was very much in the news at the time of the interviews, concerned a decision made arbitrarily by a municipal authority to cut down old-growth trees in Hanoi that were cherished by locals. The decision was extremely unpopular. Various participants from the humanities regarded this matter to be suitable for exploration, but they all rejected the possibility of protesting through personal or professional dissemination of their views due to possible political repercussions. Indeed, their university, at the time, had issued a regulation requiring its academic staff members not make any public comment as university staff members without first obtaining prior permission from their university (see Vnexpress 2015/03/10; Người Lao Động Newspaper (2015/03/27).

9.6 National Policies

A theme linking many aspects of the findings reported in Chapters 5 through to 8 concerns national funding policies. These policies relate to salary levels, infrastructure quality and support for research.

The meagre official salary levels for academic staff members was identified by most of the participants as having a significant impact upon nearly all aspects of the academic culture experienced by the participants, and these were repeatedly identified to be an inhibiting factor in terms of the consolidation of a well-developed academic identity by
those participants. As reported in Chapter 2, salary levels are regulated by the Government (Chính phủ [Government], 2004). The salary level for a lecturer currently starts at 2 million VND (US$100) per month and increases over nine steps at three-year intervals (a total of 27 years) to 6 million VND (US$300) per month at the top of the scale. This salary is markedly low when compared with the minimum cost of living in major Vietnamese cities, which was estimated to be about VND 4 million per month in 2013 (Dang Quang Dieu & Hien Thi Thuong Dong, 2015). Members of academic staff in Vietnam typically feel obliged, therefore, to accept whatever opportunities become available to them for part-time and casual employment in addition to their full-time jobs. Mostly, the extra income was reported to be obtained by assuming additional teaching responsibilities in informal courses, in in-service and distance courses, and in private-sector universities and colleges.

Commenting on the effects of this situation, Mr Thuan, an associate professor of social sciences at University D, explained how research is easily neglected under these circumstances, with dire social consequences:

*Lecturers face the need to have rice and money: children go to schools, paying their extra classes, living in cities, and all the other expenses. Therefore, many lecturers choose to offer extra classes to supplement their income. The rate for one hour of supplementary teaching is four to five times the normal rate for teaching by a full-time employee. . . Because of the need to do more teaching, people become distracted from pursuing research and publications.*

This sentiment was widely expressed by the participants, many of whom questioned how their university might ever attain an international status in circumstances where many members of academic staff felt obliged to undertake extra teaching duties simply to maintain an adequate standard of living.

Participants working in the natural and applied sciences were less likely to report having to undertake additional teaching duties for the purposes of improving their family income levels, but only because they were successful at being able to attract research and consultancy funds, some of which could be received personally. Even so, as Mr Kien, a distinguished professor of applied physics at University A, reported:
The University pays salary and then we get additional funds from research projects. . .. Of course, we cannot afford luxuries, just a normal life. We cannot afford an expensive house, or a car.

The financial plight of Vietnam’s academics is a regular feature in the popular local press (see, for example, Lao Động Newspaper, 2015/08/02; Thanh Niên Newspaper, 2016/10/13), and has been confirmed in various research reports (see, for example, Altbach, Reisberg, Yudkevich, Androushchak, & Facheco, 2012, pp. 10-11; Hong Shen & Xiong, 2015, p. 170). From Hong Shen and Xiong’s (2015) comparative study of the dynamics of academic profession in 18 countries, and from the study by Altbach et al. (2012) of academic salaries in 27 countries, academics in Vietnam reportedly earned less than their counterparts in China, Armenia, Russia and Ethiopia. Vietnamese lecturers also earned much less than their counterparts in Malaysia, where the salary rate for lecturers was reported to be US$3,000 per month. Nguyen Thi Lan Huong (2013, p. 211; 2016, p. 246) reports in more detail the difficulties of daily life for resource-starved academic staff members in Vietnam due directly to their low official salary rates.

Poor infrastructure support was also reported by the participants as deterring from the ability of academics to teach effectively and do research. Ms Muon, a young lecturer in Chinese literature at University B, illustrated this widespread concern for all in reporting that:

Our students go to classrooms that are hot, humid, and have no air-conditioning. Sometimes, we chat about the need for the expenditure priority to be more air-conditioners. Very often, we sit in classrooms that are not air-conditioned, sweating from head to toe, and nobody wants to study in such conditions.

Further, Mr Van, a young lecturer in educational evaluation at University C, commented on the office he shared with all other academic staff members in his department: “As you can see, I cannot say that my office at the university is a place to do research. It is a place for resting.”

In general, though, the availability and quality of the infrastructure required for research was reported to be improving, especially in the natural and applied sciences, where
funds were more available generally. Mr Kien, a professor of applied physics at University A, reported, for example: “In Vietnam, the conditions for research are getting better and better.” This sentiment was widely shared among participants from across the natural and applied sciences.

Research funding remains highly problematic, however. Over the past decade, the need to provide more funding for research in the areas of science and technology has been an important national priority. As reported in Chapters 2 and 8, most research funding comes directly or indirectly from the Ministry of Science and Technology. Within universities, researchers may apply for ministerial grants or for institutional grants. They may also apply for grants from NAFOSTED. Research grants from NAFOSTED were widely reported to be preferable to ministerial and institutional research grants due to the greater transparency in their allocation and to their less complicated bureaucracy in terms of guidelines for spending and procedures for monitoring expenditure. However, NAFOSTED grants accounted for only 3% to 5% of all public funding for research. Many participants, particularly from the natural and applied sciences, referred to the need for a single point for coordination for the allocation of all external research funds, and for much more transparent funding mechanisms. They also wanted NAFOSTED to be the main source of all research funds in Vietnam. In 2014, with no more than 5% of all public funds allocated to research, NAFOSTED projects contributed to 25% of all research publications in Vietnam (Bộ Khoa học Công nghệ [MOST], 2015 p. 43). As reported by the participants from the humanities and applied social sciences, however, NAFOSTED is not as beneficial for research in their areas because international publications by the grant applicants are one of the essential criteria for grant allocation.

9.7 Concluding Remarks

This chapter has sought to identify the key themes emerging from the investigation and to contextualise them within the current Vietnamese higher education sector. Attention now turns to the conceptualisation of the findings in terms of the investigation’s theoretical framework and to identifying important new avenues for related research, together with potential policy implications.
Chapter 10

CONCLUSION

This final chapter crystallises the key themes to emerge from the investigation, the purpose of which has been to address a deficit in the literature on higher education in Vietnam by throwing light on the experiences of academic culture and on the formation of academic identity of a group of academic staff members selected from across four leading, research-oriented Vietnamese universities. The chapter begins with a review of the main findings. The relevance to academic culture and to academic identity in Vietnam of the conceptual frameworks adopted for the investigation is then discussed. Policy implications relating to the findings from the investigation are noted, and further comment is made about the methodology employed for the investigation. Finally, possible future lines of enquiry are proposed.

10.1 Review of the Findings

As explained in the Preface, the idea of investigating academic culture and academic identity in Vietnam may be traced back to about 2005 when the researcher first observed a change to sweep through Vietnam’s leading universities that required them to place a much higher institutional priority on research than in the past. This change corresponded with the adoption by the Government of the Higher Education Reform Agenda 2006-2020 (Resolution No. 14/2005/NQ-CP, dated November 2, 2005, Chính phủ [Government], 2005b). For academics in the natural and applied sciences, the change was most welcome because it presented them with more opportunities to engage internationally with their scholarly peers through publishing and participating in peak international conferences. For academics in the humanities and the applied social sciences, however, the change came as a shock, challenging as it did their traditional beliefs about academic life as being wholly concerned with teaching. For these academics, the change also created a sudden pressure to acquire and develop research skills.

The opportunity to undertake the present investigation provided the researcher with an opening to investigate systematically the implications for academic culture and the formation of academic identity in Vietnam resulting from HERA and subsequent extensive reforms. No previous investigation of this nature was evident in the literature on higher education in Vietnam.
The specific research problem identified as key to the investigation required an examination of the experiences of the professional life of a selected group of academic staff members from across a small number of leading, research-oriented universities. As reported in Chapter 1, there are 19 leading, or ‘key’, universities in Vietnam, all of which are supposed eventually to become ‘research-oriented’. At present, less than one-half of them could be truthfully described as ‘research-oriented’, though pockets of research are now becoming evident among those not yet fully ‘research-oriented’.

10.1.1 Conceptual Perspectives

Clark’s (1983) account of the nature of academic culture provided a conceptual starting-point for the investigation. He argued that academics routinely relied upon various cultural reference points to help them define more easily “who they are, what they are doing, why they are doing it, and whether they have been blessed or cursed” (Clark, 1983, p. 72). These “self-defining ideas and beliefs” (p. 74), he argued, were influenced especially by disciplinary culture (Clark, 1983, p. 30), but he also identified the importance of the role play by organisational culture, the culture of a national higher education system, and more global culture of the academic profession.

The works of Tierney, on organisational culture, and of Becher, on disciplinary cultures, then became of great interest. Based upon a sustained examination of the organisational culture of higher education institutions in the United states, Tierney (1987, 1988, 1991, 1992, 1997; see also Chaffee & Tierney, 1988) argued that it was possible to identify a solid framework of elements that underpin the organisational culture of a higher education institution. Through effective institutional leadership, he argued, these elements could be manipulated in ways likely to produce a harmonious and well-integrated academic culture at an institutional level.

In contrast, Becher (1981, 1984, 1987a, 1987b, 1989, 1990, 1994; see also Becher & Trowler, 2001) focused on the more global importance to academic culture of different disciplinary cultures. Drawing upon an extensive body of interview material, collected mainly in the United Kingdom, he argued that disciplinary cultures were a fusion of the epistemological characteristics of a discipline and both the social and the behavioural characteristics of the knowledge community engaged in preserving and extending that epistemology. Though aware of the limitations of categorising them, he identified four broad groupings of disciplinary cultures: the ‘hard-pure’ natural sciences, the ‘hard-
applied’ applied sciences, the ‘soft-pure’ humanities, and the ‘soft-applied’ applied social sciences.

Implicit in these various positions was an appreciation of the importance of academic identity, but it was Henkel (2000, 2002, 2005a, 2005b; see also Henkel & Vabo, 2006) who made clear its importance to the professional life of individual academics. She argued that academic identity was of “central symbolic and instrumental significance both in the lives of individual academics and in the workings of the academic profession” (Henkel, 2002, p. 137). She understood it to be comprised of the values, interests, beliefs, self-images and reputations of academics. She argued that individual academic identity is formed in the context of a continuing process of interaction between the particular histories and choices of individual academics and how they see themselves and their peers in the normal functioning of disciplinary and organisational communities and structures (Henkel & Vabo, 2006, p. 128).

10.1.2 Methodological Approach

To investigate these matters in the context of Vietnam, the constructivist methodology of *Naturalistic Inquiry* (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) was employed. *Naturalistic Inquiry* is well suited to exploring socio-semiotic phenomena such as academic culture and academic identity, and it provides a coherent framework for collecting data by means of ethnographic interviews, unobtrusive observation and documentary analysis. *Naturalistic Inquiry* also requires strict adherence to robust techniques for the collection and analysis of data that contribute significantly to the trustworthiness, or rigour, of the findings from an investigation.

For the present investigation, participants were selected from four academic departments, one department each from four of Vietnam’s leading, research-oriented universities. The participants were selected by means of ‘snowball sampling’ (Patton (2002, p. 237), a technique whereby, after undertaking an initial set of interviews, the interviewees then nominate which of their colleagues might be well placed to contribute more information related to the focus of an investigation. The important requirement was that the participants should be experienced as academics, that they should hold a PhD qualification, and that they should have a reputation for being research-productive. The four academic departments were selected as being broadly representative of the kinds of organisational and disciplinary settings that commonly exist within leading,
research-oriented universities in Vietnam. The process of data collection continued up until a point of data saturation, and hence data redundancy. That point was reached when the 30th participant had been interviewed.

10.1.3 Summary of Findings

The findings reported in Chapter 5, concerning the organisational cultures experienced by the participants, point to various shared perspectives on academic life. The participants mostly regarded generating knowledge and providing advanced training for future professionals to be their main responsibilities, within a context of contributing to the socioeconomic development of Vietnam. All participants were familiar with and generally supportive of institutional commitments to achieving international recognition through research achievements and high quality teaching. They were generally happy with the professional relationships existing between members of staff in their academic department, and, for most, there was a strong sense of ‘belonging’ to their academic department. They made no mention of any formal induction or professional development activities at their university, and so it was through their interactions with their departmental colleagues that they acquired advice about teaching, research, and institutional values and priorities. It was also the case that there were no effective performance management systems and processes in place at any of the site institutions, which meant that colleagues performing at a high level could not be formally recognised for their contribution, while those performing at a low level could continue to receive incremental salary increases and other forms of advancement based principally on seniority. The leadership style at the four site institutions and in the four selected academic departments was generally described as being collegial in nature. There was also a feeling of confidence that appointees to senior management positions were good scholars. The participants felt able to criticise their institutional leaders when academic priorities were at stake. However, strategic decision-making was not a topic that engaged the participants much, though comments for and against some existing institutional directions were expressed.

Widespread concern was expressed about the adverse impact on research productivity of low official salary levels. Participants from the sciences appeared to be able to supplement their incomes through their engagement in funded research projects, but participants from the non-science areas felt compelled to do additional teaching to
secure additional income. It was widely claimed that the official salary levels could not support a family, and so other funding sources were essential, whether from doing additional teaching or from obtaining research funds.

The poor state of the working conditions for academic staff was widely lamented by the participants, not only concerning research-related infrastructure but also office space and resources for being able to prepare for teaching. The situation in this regard was described as symptomatic of the generally poor state of infrastructure across the higher education system in Vietnam. Participants from the natural and applied sciences reported, however, that grants from NAFOSTED and other sources were beginning to provide them with more access to specialised laboratories and more advanced measuring equipment. NAFOSTED was well regarded as a funding mechanism for research, but the flow of research funds from NAFOSTED was not yet considered to be sufficient, and it appeared generally that, because of a strict insistence on international publications when determining eligibility for NAFOSTED grants, the only participants readily able to apply for these grants were those from the sciences.

The key themes reported in Chapters 6 and 7, concerning participants’ experiences of and affiliations with disciplinary cultures, were much more varied than those concerning organisational cultures. This difference clearly reflects the extent to which disciplinary differences were of significance. Three disciplinary-based cultures were readily identifiable: the natural and applied sciences, the humanities, and the applied social sciences.

For participants from the natural and applied sciences, being successful with research underpinned most aspects of their life as academics. Research provided them with context for working collegially within research teams; it enabled them to engage with networks of similarly-minded scholars from across the globe; and it formed a basis for the establishment of an individual academic identity based upon the originality and distinctiveness of the research breakthroughs able to be reported by them in the international literature. Postgraduate teaching, especially doctoral supervision, was welcomed by these participants because of its synergy with research, and, though there were exceptions, undergraduate teaching was regarded by them as burdensome because it was perceived to be a distraction from their passion for research. These participants conformed in very many ways with Becher’s (1989) account of how induction,
networking, publishing, and the acquisition of reputation and esteem occur in ‘hard-pure’ and ‘hard-applied’ disciplinary cultures. He reported, for example, that, in these circles, “credit is earned through the publication of one’s research findings; excellence in teaching counts for little towards recognition by established colleagues in the same field” (Becher, 1989, p. 53).

In the humanities, the influence of disciplinary affiliation was also evident. Consistent with Becher’s (1989, p. 14) characterisation of the ‘soft-pure’ disciplines as being focused on developing highly individualistic interpretations of reality, which were subsequently open to reinterpretation (Becher, 1987b, p. 278), participants from the humanities described how, through their research, they were engaged in the development of new or more nuanced interpretations of social or cultural phenomena. These participants worked much more in intellectual isolation than did any of the other participants, reflecting the nature of the intellectual products they hoped to achieve. Teaching, for them, however, was exciting, at both the undergraduate or postgraduate levels, because it presented opportunities to express, discuss and receive critical feedback on their personal perspectives on topics of research interest to them. The humanities participants were also much more likely to report on the extent to which their own teachers, and especially their doctoral supervisors, had been personally inspirational for them. Networking was important to these participants, but their networks were confined largely to Vietnam. Their lack of English skills worked against their capacity for international engagement, and so too did their mainly local focus in terms of the research topics of interest to them. In general, they were much less concerned than their colleagues in the natural and applied sciences about achieving a long list of research publications.

Of the eight participants from the applied social sciences, five worked in teacher education and three worked in clinical psychology. With only one exception, these participants were mainly concerned with teaching. The clinical psychology participants sought to combine a teaching role with a research role, but only one clinical psychology participant was successful in achieving international publications. The teacher education participants were committed only to producing reports on matters that were closely related to their teaching interests. Two of the clinical psychology participants who were trying unsuccessfully to maintain an engagement with research, and who had both completed their PhD qualifications in the United States, expressed a lack of confidence
about being able to publish independently in English. They claimed that their command of English had diminished since their return to Vietnam, and they felt unable to write in English without the kind of mentorship that had been provided by their former supervisors. A similar lack of confidence about publishing in English affected teacher education participants who had completed their PhDs abroad in English-speaking countries, but these participants also reported that their grasp of research methods was weak, contributing further to a lack of confidence about doing research and writing it up for international publication.

The findings reported in Chapter 8, concerning academic identity, point to three types of participants: the ‘cosmopolitan researchers’, the ‘local researchers’, and the ‘reluctant researchers’. The ‘cosmopolitan researchers’ were highly productive as international researchers and were strongly engaged with global disciplinary networks. Thirteen of the 30 participants fitted this identity, including all but one of the 12 participants from the natural and applied sciences. Nearly all these participants had obtained their PhDs abroad, and most had also completed post-doctoral research programs at foreign research-intensive universities. Except for the fact that they were constrained by limited funding support, they might well have fitted neatly with Clark’s (1985, p. 38) description of faculty members at leading research universities in the United States: where academic life was centred on research, teaching commitments were light, and professors enjoyed the rituals of their disciplines as well as high standing within their disciplinary enclaves. The ‘cosmopolitan researchers’ were, in other words, an elite group with a highly refined sense of academic identity within their international ‘club’. These were the kinds of scholars that the Government and individual ‘research-oriented’ universities will need to rely upon to provide Vietnam with globally significant research-intensive universities.

The eight participants identified as ‘local researchers’ might also have formed part of this elite group had it not been for the fact that they were not internationally engaged through their research. All but two of the 10 humanities participants were ‘local researchers’. These participants, because of their lack of international publications, could not readily access research funds through NAFOSTED. Consequently, at least in part, they were also heavily constrained by teaching commitments.
The remaining participants were the ‘reluctant researchers’. There were nine ‘reluctant researchers’, which was a larger number than had been anticipated because the participants selected for inclusion in the investigation were reputedly research productive. Seven of the nine ‘reluctant researchers’ were from the applied social science areas of teacher education and clinical psychology. It is more broadly indicative of the inward-looking, funds-deprived nature of the teacher education discipline at University C that so many were recommended by their colleagues as being research productive when in fact they were not.

As a group, the ‘reluctant researchers’ were motivated largely by the need to do as whatever publishing was required to meet the minimum requirements for promotion. These participants were, however, also strongly committed to and quite passionate about their undergraduate teaching. Their sense of academic identity was closely linked with the professional esteem they enjoyed because of the importance of their role in preparing young people for admission to areas of professional practice. Some of them claimed to be engaged in research, but, in fact, they were simply developing teaching materials.

10.1.4 The Importance of Teaching

The four site institutions for the present investigation were four of the leading, research-oriented universities in Vietnam. Each was striving to achieve international recognition through its research achievements. Not surprisingly, therefore, much of the interview material focused on the importance of research. For most participants, though, teaching was what they mainly spent their time doing. Some themes from the findings that relate to teaching are, therefore, important to document. For the most part, though, the participants framed their comments about teaching against the background of their views on research.

A useful framework for reporting these comments is provided by Coate, Barnett, and Williams (2001, p. 165), who proposed that teaching and research could either be integrated with one another or be independent of one another. They also proposed that the relationship between teaching and research could be either positive or negative in terms of the impact of one on the other.

In general, the participants in the present investigation were much more inclined to
regard teaching and research to be integrated with one another, rather than being quite independent of one another. Among participants from the natural and applied social sciences, there was a shared outlook on research as being important in informing the teaching curriculum. Among participants from the humanities, research was regarded as a source of new ideas, able to be utilised to enliven classroom teaching. Among participants from the applied social sciences, who as a group were the least likely to be engaged in research, there was agreement, at least in principle, that research should inform teaching. However, they often perceived research in narrow terms as being concerned only with assembling materials in support of teaching.

While most participants reported that teaching and research were well integrated, those participants who were more actively engaged in research also reported that teaching, especially undergraduate teaching, had a negative impact on their research productivity because of the amount of time they had to devote to performing their teaching duties. Mr Kien, a professor of applied physics at University A, spoke for many when he exclaimed: “All day long our professors spend time teaching and do only a little bit of research.” Ms Ninh, an associate professor of clinical psychology at University C, expressed exasperation about the demands on her time of her teaching role: “I often raise my voice at staff meetings, expressing my view that if I have many research project commitments then I would like to have less teaching load to compensate.” Participants who were not as heavily committed to research were much less concerned about the extent of a conflict between teaching and research because teaching was their priority activity.

The international literature available on the extent of the mutuality between teaching and research (see, for example, Fox, 1992, p. 301; Harry & Goldner, 1972, p. 47; Jauch, 1976; Volkwein & Carbone, 1991) tends to support a view that teaching and research are potentially conflicting dimensions of academic culture. Drawing on national data regarding social scientists in the United States, Fox (1992, p. 301) reported, for example, that: “Those whose publication productivity is high are not strongly invested in both teaching and research.” Participants in the present investigation who were highly research productive felt similarly, though they also regarded teaching to be an important academic function. Fox (1992, p. 301) made the additional point that the academic staff members in her investigation perceived that their academic departments rewarded research activities and supported publication productivity, but not achievements in
teaching. The prospect of a similar set of circumstances developing in the academic departments involved in this investigation is entirely conceivable. During the interviews, for example, there were many references to institutional incentives for research productivity, but no mention of institutional incentives for teaching excellence.

**10.2 Relevance of the Conceptual Frameworks**

It was assumed in Chapter 1 that the conceptual framework developed for the present investigation, all frames of reference for which were derived from research in the context of well-developed higher education systems in the West, would be relevant to a developing higher education system in Southeast Asia. In the literature to date, these frames of reference appear not to have been applied explicitly to any significant extent, if at all, to the higher education system in Vietnam. The investigation has demonstrated, however, that they are relevant to Vietnam’s higher education system, despite its developing status. Indeed, they have proven to be of much value in illuminating the characteristics of the higher education system in Vietnam that in turn reflect many aspects of developing higher education systems in the West perhaps 30 to 40 years ago. This finding has important implications for policy-makers in Vietnam, who can learn from the successes and weaknesses of the processes of development of higher education systems not only in the West but also globally.

Table 10.1 provides a broad overview of findings from the investigation in a format which takes account of Clark’s (1983) distinction between disciplinary, enterprise, systemic and global influences on academic culture, and of Välimaa’s (1998) argument that individual academic identity is the product of how the individual academic interacts with significant other groups, defined by their disciplinary, professional, institutional and national characteristics. In Table 10.1, five ‘layers’ of influence upon the academic identities of the participants in the present investigation are identified. One of these is an international layer. Then there are two national layers, one cultural and the other political. An important organisational layer is then identified. Finally, there is a layer that combines disciplinary culture and academic identity, with these shown as overlapping due to the extent of the correspondence between them in these findings.
### Table 10.1: Layers of Influence on Individual Academic Identity

| International                      | Dominant trend favouring a commitment to global research distinction.  
|                                  | Individual and institutional recognition increasingly dependent upon by international ranking systems.  
|                                  | English as the universal medium of scientific communication and publication.  
| National culture                  | High regard to the contribution made by the natural and applied sciences to the nation’s socioeconomic development.  
|                                  | Confucian tradition of high regard for teaching.  
|                                  | Focus on importance of research in universities relatively recent.  
|                                  | Low level of institutional competitiveness, and relative neglect of non-science research areas because of socialist ideology and past reluctance to accept Western values.  
| National policy                   | Inadequate management, evaluation and accountability mechanisms, with inappropriate and uneven recognition of individual academic achievements across disciplinary areas; and uneven knowledge circulation schemes by scientific journals across different disciplines – weak in non-sciences areas (insufficient journals in literature, for example).  
|                                  | Rigid staffing and salary policies that are not responsive to a diversification of institutional needs and that are not contributing to the attractiveness of an academic career for talented young people.  
|                                  | Research funding processes by ministries and institutions are not transparent, not competitive, not based on publication record, ineffective, and often influenced by personal relationships and other associated irregularities.  
|                                  | Positive impact of NAFOSTED, of new policy on professorial appointments, of overseas PhD training programs, of the emergence of ‘cosmopolitan’ and ‘local’ researcher identities, and of the emergence of pressure on scholars in the humanities and applied social sciences to publish.  
| Organizational culture            | Emergence of a coherent vision for building leading, research-oriented universities, but lack of institutional initiative in articulating innovative and distinctive strategies to achieve this aim.  
|                                  | Increasing institutional support for academic departments capable of achieving global recognition for research.  
|                                  | Continued reliance on heavy teaching commitments, and acceptance of the need for academic staff members to load up with additional teaching for the purposes of achieving a liveable income.  
|                                  | Improved administrative support for teaching and research.  
|                                  | Uneven improvements in physical working conditions and in infrastructure to support teaching and research – access to research funds gives some academic departments a big advantage.  
|                                  | Internet and library support improvement, but progress is uneven between universities.  
|                                  | Lack of incentives for excellence in teaching, and minimal commitment to recognition of performance; inconsistent application of incentives for research |
Beginning at the international level, there are well-documented global trends in higher education systems that are having an increasingly important impact on national higher education policies in Vietnam, and hence on the professional life and individual sense of academic identity of individual academic staff members. These global trends have been extensively documented by many scholars (see, for example, Henkel, 2005a&b). They include an increase in the importance of the research role of universities in contributing to the evolution of knowledge-based economies, a corresponding rise in the importance of global rankings of universities based mainly on the research attainments of individual universities, and the emergence of English as the international language of science. As seen in the findings from this investigation, these trends were most evidently having an impact on the participants from the natural and applied sciences, who claimed that it seemed only natural for them to be internationally focused, despite financial and other resource constraints. These were the participants who considered that their research contributed most directly to Vietnam’s economic development. They were also the participants who were best able to rely on English to engage in international knowledge networks. They were also the most ‘rankings-conscious’ of the participants, with Mr Tong, a senior lecturer in applied chemistry at University A, giving expression to a popular viewpoint among these participants when he claimed: 

“The ranking system for universities in Vietnam must be made public. We must speak out. . .. Students must be able see the details of how university departments perform...”
nation ally and internationally.”

In the ‘soft-pure’ and ‘soft-applied’ disciplinary areas of the humanities and applied social sciences, however, this outward-looking focus was largely missing because the participants did not work within a frame of reference whereby the evaluation of their academic performance was linked to international competitive, peer-reviewed standards. Accepting international trends appears, however, to be inescapable for scholars working in the ‘soft’ disciplinary areas. International integration, manifested by the more extensive use of English, an increasing reliance on publications in international, peer-reviewed journals as a benchmark for scholarly achievement, and a more intensive engagement in global knowledge-based collaborations, will increasingly provide a reinforcing layer for all existing organisational and disciplinary processes in the shaping of academic identity. The achievement of international integration will depend, however, upon how well higher education institutions in Vietnam can accommodate international trends and standards by engineering their influence across all disciplines, as elite universities worldwide have done (see, especially, Salmi, 2009). Overall, none of the site universities was wholly effective in this endeavour, but, as noted in Chapter 5, progress is clearly being made, though very slowly.

At another level is the influence of national culture, evidence of which is woven throughout the reporting of the findings. Vietnam’s higher education system is in many respects the product of a mix of educational heritages, from French, American and Soviet sources. It is also strongly overlaid by a long tradition of Confucianism, the impact of which on the academic identity of individual participants was highlighted in Chapter 8. This culture has traditionally privileged teaching over research, but in recent years, as Vietnam’s economy has diversified, modernised and become more globally integrated, an emerging trend favouring the importance of research, especially in the sciences, has become more evident. In this context, it is the non-science areas which risk being left behind. Yet these are also the areas of knowledge that have been most tightly constrained over the many years in which socialist ideology and a stubborn resistance to Western social influences have dominated the forces shaping Vietnam’s national culture.

Vietnam’s contemporary political system, which continues to be characterised by tight central control of important social and cultural institutions, is also a strong influence on
all aspects of academic life. The four site institutions were required, for example, to conform in applying rigid staffing and salary policies that took little or no account of the expressed aspirations of these universities and which provided no accommodation for the fact that these were institutions that attracted the most talented young people in Vietnam, both as students and as members of academic staff. Furthermore, as reported especially in Chapter 9, the research funding mechanisms applied by ministries, and then at an institutional level, were driven mainly by bureaucratic, political and relationship considerations, and rather than by considerations related to research productivity. In this regard, NAFOSTED, which was highly praised by the participants, was widely recognised by them to be markedly different because of its emphasis on merit, transparency and productivity. Of interest, though, is that the four site institutions were in various ways showing signs of independence, which suggests that institutional autonomy will become a more fundamental need for them as research becomes a stronger imperative in shaping their institutional priorities. Though not yet well developed, institutionally-based management, evaluation and accountability mechanisms will need to be developed in response to the need to achieve institutional missions that seek to accommodate global standards in teaching and research. While serving the expressed needs of the national government, this development will seriously challenge the viability of a centralised model of control of the higher education system.

At an organisational level, Tierney’s (1988) framework for analysing the culture of a higher education institution points to the importance of attending to matters related to the institutional environment, the institutional mission, institutional socialisation, the effective flow of information, strategic decision-making, and the quality of institutional and departmental leadership. These matters were generally regarded as being important by the participants, though participants frequently appeared to be much less familiar with matters related to the development of institutional strategies, possibly because public higher education institutions in Vietnam do not have the independence required to develop these strategies for themselves (see, for example, (Dao Van Khanh & Hayden, 2015, p. 315; Hayden & Lam Quang Thiep, 2007, p. 73). In this regard, Tierney’s framework, developed in the context of a highly autonomous system of universities and colleges in the United States, is less relevant to Vietnam’s current circumstances. Nevertheless, the situation in Vietnam is changing, especially for the leading universities that are research-oriented. New Public Management techniques for higher education management, as described by Enders and De Weert (2009, p. 36), are
slowly being applied at these universities, though in ways that are so far relatively unsophisticated. Institutional missions referring to the attainment of excellence in teaching and learning are being articulated, but are not yet well manifested through policies and procedures for recognising and rewarding excellence in teaching and research at the departmental level. The poor official salary rates for academic staff members in Vietnam will continue to undermine this process, though, because of the extent of acceptance of the view that academic staff members, if not able to acquire additional income from research, need to assume additional teaching duties simply to augment their meagre official salaries. Some positive signs were being reported, however, including more widespread access to the internet and library resources, and some improvements in the quality of the administrative support provided for teaching and research. These developments are, however, occurring unevenly, as was evident even across the four site institutions in this investigation. With increased institutional autonomy and more outward-looking leadership, however, positive developments will become more deeply embedded. As they do, though, there may well also develop a far greater level of variation between the leading universities in Vietnam in terms of the distinctiveness of their organisational cultures, thus enabling some to emerge as research-intensive universities, and especially as ‘distinctive, elite universities’.

As has been demonstrated repeatedly in previous chapters, Becher’s (1989) conceptualisation of disciplinary cultures clearly applies in the context of the professional life of the participants in the present investigation. Becher identified four broad disciplinary groupings, including the ‘hard-pure’ natural sciences, the ‘hard-applied’ applied sciences, the ‘soft-pure’ humanities, and the ‘soft-applied’ applied social sciences. The social and cognitive characteristics he attributed to these groupings were readily evident in the accounts provided by the participants concerning their values, beliefs, aspirations and behaviours, though there was some blurring of the distinction between the ‘hard-pure’ and ‘hard-applied’ categories because of the extent to which the relevant participants appeared to straddle these two categories. That Becher’s conceptualisation of disciplinary cultures could be seen to radiate so strongly from the accounts provided by the participants strongly attests to the “endurance of the disciplines” (Becher & Parry, 2006). The disciplinary culture of the natural and applied sciences was the most deeply embedded, suggesting that it already is the academics working in these disciplines who beginning to spearhead the emergence in Vietnam of leading research-intensive universities capable of adopting and applying global
standards in their teaching and research. Participants from the humanities manifested many of the characteristics identified by Becher to be associated with ‘soft-pure’ disciplinary cultures, but the focus of all but one of these participants was local rather than cosmopolitan. Institutional research incentive schemes might contribute to increased research productivity among humanities scholars, but the findings of this investigation suggest that the main needs of participants in ‘soft-pure’ fields, apart from having more time available to do research, include an improved capacity to publish in international journals using English and more freedom in deciding which social and cultural issues to investigate, in line with global trends. Participants from the applied social sciences also conformed to Becher’s characterisation of the ‘soft-applied’ disciplinary areas, especially in terms of their commitment to a focus on improving professional practice (Becher, 1987b, p. 278). These participants were, however, with only one exception, ‘reluctant researchers’, and so little in the way of detail could be documented about their research achievements.

It was Henkel (2000) who comprehensively incorporated all the above elements in a conceptual model of the formation of academic identity at universities in the United Kingdom. Concerning the present investigation, several aspects of her model are of most significance. First, she identified the ongoing identity project of senior scholars at leading universities to be based upon both continuous individual achievement in research (Henkel, 2000, p. 187) and collegial recognition of excellence in teaching (Henkel, 2000, p. 210), though research output was acknowledged to be in many ways the dominant force in shaping academic identity. For the senior scholars at leading universities in the present investigation, a highly comparable scenario appeared to exist. The strength and distinctiveness of their academic identity depended in the main on their achievements in research, as well as on the extent to which teaching, especially at the postgraduate level, could benefit from their research. In Henkel’s framework, experiences of induction to the discipline (Henkel, 2000, p. 166) were those associated with induction to an elite department, and were seen to be necessary to forging disciplinary values and shaping an academic identity. In the present investigation, the participants able to be identified as ‘cosmopolitan researchers’ had nearly all experienced this kind of induction. Subsequent engagement by them in postdoctoral programs at leading international, research-intensive universities often provided reinforcement of their induction experiences.
Second, Henkel’s (2000, pp. 256-257) emphasis upon an individual’s continuous achievements in the discipline to the formation of academic identity was pivotal in the investigation to successfully developing a strong academic identity. Henkel (2000, p. 187; pp. 257-258) acknowledged the trend towards collaborative research among ‘soft’ disciplines because, at the time, the United Kingdom was moving towards making collaborative research a priority. Having strong research teams was becoming a prerequisite for attaining research grants (see also Kyvik’s, 2013, account of research universities in Norway). However, while in the past, the distinctiveness of individual continuous effort was at the core of an academic’s identity project, it is acknowledged that the importance of collective identity has been on the rise across the disciplines. This research trend has clearly begun in Vietnam, with the emphasis on science policy and research funding, as illustrated by NAFOSTED’s approach, to be on collaborative research. As explained in previous chapters, all the participants in ‘hard’ knowledge areas enjoyed the opportunities afforded by working with capable research teams, and at the same time they could develop their own individual research direction; in this way, they were making continuous efforts towards their own academic identity projects. In ‘soft’ knowledge areas, though, these opportunities did not exist, so a global academic identity project for individuals was all but impossible if focused entirely on research achievement.

Third, the argument about the endurance of disciplinary research (see Clark, 1987a; Becher & Parry, 2006) being critical to the development of academic identity (Henkel, 2000, p. 256-258) was evident in the present investigation. It was reflected in the features of research undertaken by the participants (as reported in Chapter 6); and it informs the objective of NAFOSTED to support basic research in the disciplines (as reported in Chapter 2). However, NAFOSTED also supported strongly applied disciplinary research, signalling equivalent preference for Mode 2 research (as described in Chapter 3). Clearly, all participants could benefit from NAFOSTED funding in terms of personal identity formation, but, due to their greater level of preparedness in accessing NAFOSTED funds, participants in ‘hard’ knowledge areas were far more likely to benefit in this regard. It remains to be seen whether and how MOET might introduce systemic accountability frameworks in the higher education sector which, as seen elsewhere, would reinforce the value of more socially and culturally oriented ‘soft’ research activity.
10.3 Policy Implications

While this investigation was not primarily concerned with policy issues, the findings emerging from it have many policy implications. These implications will be briefly addressed here.

The first and most obvious policy implication is that the salary levels of scholars at leading, research-oriented universities in Vietnam are not competitive with the salary levels of equally well-qualified professionals in other industries. This point was made by various of the participants and it is also a recurring theme in the popular Vietnamese press (see, for example, Lao Dong Newspaper, 2015/08/02; Tuổi Trẻ, 2015/11/16; and Thanh Nien Newspaper, 2016/10/13). As reported in Chapter 2, academic salary levels in public higher education institutions are regulated by the Government and are applied uniformly across the higher education system, regardless of any differences in teaching effectiveness or achievement, or in research productivity and research impact. There is no disagreement from any source that the salary levels are insufficient to maintain a family, and so academic staff members are routinely obliged to earn a supplementary income, which of course constrains the attainment of excellence in academic achievement in both research and teaching. The additional teaching workloads taken on by so many lecturers place a heavy burden on members of academic staff, and, for those working at leading universities where research is supposed to be a high priority, it severely restricts the amount of time available for deep, sustained engagement with research. There emerged a strong need for a decentralization of authority to enable leading, research-oriented universities to develop staffing policies, including decisions about work positions, workload allocations, and the determination of staff remuneration, to suit their institutional missions.

The second implication concerns the need for a more systematic approach to the allocation of research funding, as implied earlier. The one key message in this vein to derive from the investigation is that, while research funding schemes should generally reward research excellence, there is a need to invest in the development of research in disciplinary areas that have not yet reached a point where they are internationally competitive. A set of special policies for funding allocations in ‘soft’ knowledge areas is especially required to strengthen the nation’s academy (Nguyen Van Chinh, 2016). The same procedures and criteria for research funding ought not be applied to the ‘hard’ and the ‘soft’ knowledge areas due to the differences in the volume of funds required
across the ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ research, and, within these, to ‘pure’ and ‘applied’ research endeavours.

A third policy implication is that current PhD training scholarship programs need to give more emphasis to PhD training in English speaking countries, and to attracting more candidates in soft knowledge areas who can, upon their return to Vietnam, maintain and further develop their scholarly networks and create greater collaborative opportunities. Current overseas PhD training scholarship programs would be reinforced considerably by more postdoctoral fellowship programs, because these postdoctoral experiences support international exchanges and higher-level contributions to the knowledge base in both ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ knowledge areas.

At the institutional level, there is a need to strengthen the capacity in governance, particularly in policy making and institutional management. While the Government has demonstrated its strong commitment to the development of a multi-tier higher education system capable of responding to the diversified needs from higher education of the state, employers, the market and students, the regulations continue to be of a ‘one-size fits-all’ nature. For example, the same staff positions and workloads continue to apply to all types of universities. Institutional autonomy needs to be increased, therefore, if individual universities are ever to be able to respond to the work expectations and aspirations of categories of academics. As explained earlier, research-oriented universities will need to have more authority in determining appropriate needs in terms of work roles, workload allocations and staff remuneration, as in developed higher education sectors. These universities may also need to become more proactive in diversifying their revenue sources.

The high degree of inbreeding amongst the staff of leading, research-oriented universities may deserve urgent attention. More opportunities for the review and development of institutional policy are needed. The recruitment of new staff under a quality assurance framework favouring excellence in its various forms is critical to the further development of these universities. Above all, recruitment policy under these circumstances must be transparent, and should make provision for the development of a more international academic staffing profile. To enrich and strengthen research and teaching excellence, academics at leading, research-oriented universities must be of the highest possible calibre, as Altbach and Salmi, (2011, pp. 18-20) identified. The track
record of new recruits remains the primary criterion.

10.4 Methodological Issues

The methodological approach of *Naturalistic Inquiry* is not widely utilised in social research in Vietnam, where positivist approaches requiring quantitative analytical techniques based on deductive logic are much more common (see, also, Le Van Canh, 2011, p. 97; Luong Thi Hong Gam, 2016, p. 165). Critically important to the present investigation was the focus on how individual academics interact with one another in a specific set of social and cultural circumstances to understand academic culture and identity, and to form their own identity projects. *Naturalistic Inquiry* takes a constructivist epistemological stance to do this. It allows, therefore, for the existence of multiple realities in terms of how individuals perceive complex social phenomena. Documenting these perceptions of reality provides the basis for developing a nuanced understanding of the social phenomena of interest.

In the present investigation, the researcher sought to enter the professional lives of the participants for the purposes of understanding in depth how they experienced academic culture and what they held to be the “self-defining ideas and beliefs” (Clark, 1983, p. 74) that constituted their sense of academic identity. This process provided a basis for distinguishing between three types of academic identity. The researcher’s familiarity with the site universities, and the essentially ‘emic’ nature of the investigation (Patton, 2002), might have meant, however, that the participants were inclined to tell the researcher what they thought she wished to hear. However, as positive rapport and trust developed between the researcher and individual participants, there was a palpable sense that participants wanted very much for their personal issues, claims and concerns to be heard and to be documented. To this end, ‘member checking’ was extensive and drawn out, as participants thought more about what they wanted their stories to convey. A strength of *Naturalistic Inquiry* (Lincoln & Guba, 1995) is the exceptionally constraining criteria for trustworthiness in data collection and analysis. Although methodologically this operationalization is onerous, time-consuming, resource-intensive and in need of independent auditing, it provides assurance that the researcher can be confident about the rigour of the findings.

There are a few aspects of the methodology that, in hindsight, might have been implemented differently. One concerns the selection of participants from the
humanities. Though the academic department selected from University B seemed likely to provide an opportunity to interview participants from a wide range of humanities specialisations, it transpired that most scholars in that department were from areas of literature. To broaden the data base, interviews were conducted with three more humanities scholars, including a sociologist, from University C, and two historians from University D.

Another concerned the fact that so few of the participants from the applied social sciences were actively engaged in research. In fact, only one of the 8 participants from these disciplinary areas was a ‘cosmopolitan researcher’. How representative this profile is of the applied social sciences across all leading universities in Vietnam is not known, but the pattern was surprising, given that the staff members recommended by their colleagues for interview were supposed to be reasonably accomplished as researchers, as well as to hold a doctoral qualification and to be experienced as teachers.

One final matter concerns the level of complexity involved in the transcription of interviews conducted in Vietnamese into English. The discovery that the software package, NVivo*10, accommodates Vietnamese language, was a valuable discovery. This software does not help, however, in generating themes, nor does it contribute in any way to the immensity of the task of identifying and then documenting those themes, having been identified first in Vietnamese, then translated into English. Vietnamese, like most languages, has a multitude of idiomatic expressions for which counterpart forms of expression in English had to be found, member-checked, triangulated and then independently audited. This process is remarkably time-consuming.

10.5 Further Research

This investigation has drawn attention to an area of research concerning academic culture and identity that to date has received little or no attention in the literature on higher education in Vietnam. It has pointed to many similarities with the West in terms of the attributes of academic culture and the elements that contribute to the formation of academic identity. It has also thrown light on the diverse nature of the academy in Vietnam, and on differences between different disciplinary communities in terms of their level of preparedness for engagement with international knowledge networks. Some further aspects of the nature of academic culture and academic identity in Vietnam, however, remain to be investigated.
First, there is room to examine in more detail than has been possible in this investigation the question of what makes an academic career attractive to young PhD graduates. As reported earlier, there is a high level of social esteem attached in Vietnam to being a teacher, especially at a leading, research-oriented university, but official salary levels are low, and the working conditions of most academic staff members are generally poor. As the economy expands and becomes more complex, there are now other attractive career options for PhD graduates, whether in industry or commerce. The question is, then: what are the conditions impacting on career choice for young PhD graduates in Vietnam, and what are the implications of these conditions for the future of the academy in Vietnam?

Second, there is a need for more studies of academic culture and identity in Vietnam, particularly ethnographic studies that seek to document in depth the workplace experiences of selected groups of academics. One group that needs to be better understood concerns the humanities scholars. The present investigation has drawn attention to the values, beliefs and aspirations of a selected group of humanities scholars, but more needs to be documented about the circumstances of their work that impede their success in publishing, international engagement and community impact. The humanities participants in the present investigation were committed to both teaching and research, but their research productivity was severely constrained by heavily burdensome teaching workloads and a lack of success in obtaining research funding to enable them to buy time for research, amongst other commitments. The risks for Vietnam of allowing these circumstances to prevail include that the nation’s leading research-oriented universities will be narrowly restricted to the natural and applied sciences, and that the nation will miss out on the significant cultural contribution able to be made by having significant scholarship undertaken in the humanities in Vietnam.

Third, there is the need for a closer investigation of the nature and impact of research funding mechanisms other than NAFOSTED. As reported in Chapter 8, research grants are made available by different ministries, in the form of ministerial grants, and by individual higher education institutions, in the form of institutional grants, but the importance of these grants was generally dismissed by the participants in the present investigation because of the lack of transparency associated with how they were awarded. With only 5% of all public funds for research being made available through NAFOSTED, a funding mechanism that was highly praised by the participants, the need
to identify ways of achieving a more effective utilisation of all the remaining public funds made available for research would appear to be long overdue (see also Pham Thi Ly, 2013).

10.6 Concluding Remarks

This investigation has sought to place leading, research-oriented universities in Vietnam, and a selection of participants in them, in a global context by examining aspects of academic culture and academic identity that are familiar enough within an international literature on higher education. Given Vietnam’s internationalisation agenda, particularly for its leading universities, the implications of the investigation are, therefore, important. Of most importance, though, is that the investigation has shown that the conditions affecting academic culture, and the processes that underpin the formation of an individual academic identity, are of immense importance to the future quality of the higher education in Vietnam, and must therefore be addressed at every level within Vietnam’s higher education system.
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APPENDICES

Appendix A: LETTER OF RECOMMENDATION FOR DATA COLLECTION

Southern Cross University
PO Box 157, Lismore, NSW 2477
Australia
November 22, 2013

Dear (Rector’s title and name),
The University’s name

I am writing to seek your approval for one of my PhD candidates to be permitted to interview selected academic staff members from your University for the purposes of advancing research about the nature of academic culture and identity in Viet Nam.

My candidate’s name is Mrs Le Thi Kim Anh. She is completing her PhD through Southern Cross University, with support from a prestigious Postgraduate Endeavour Scholarship awarded by the Australian Government.

Her thesis topic is: Developing the academy in Vietnam: An investigation of the formation of academic identity by university lecturers in Vietnam. Her investigation seeks to provide a better understanding of how academic culture in Viet Nam impacts on the ways in which university lecturers in Viet Nam identify themselves as academics.

Your kind permission is requested for her to approach (Head’s name and name of Department) to interview selected staff members and to observe for a period of up to a month the everyday work experiences of academic staff.

Mrs. Kim Anh will seek to identify the names of about six academic staff members who might be approached for an interview. These lecturers will need to be qualified with a PhD, and to be engaged with research.

Their involvement with her investigation will be entirely voluntary, so they can withdraw from the research at any time. Data will be kept confidential and key findings reported anonymously so that no individual, academic department or university will be able to be identified.

An information sheet on the investigation is attached.

The Southern Cross University Human Research Ethics Committee has approved Mrs Kim Anh’s research project (approval number ECN-13-273).

Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Yours sincerely,

Prof. Martin Hayden, PhD
Dean and Head, School of Education,
Southern Cross University,
Lismore, NSW 2477
AUSTRALIA
Tel. (61) 408 624 170
Email: martin.hayden@scu.edu.au
Appendix B: APPROVAL BY ETHICS COMMITTEE

HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (HREC)
HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS SUB-COMMITTEE (HRESC)

NOTIFICATION

To: A/Professor Sharon Parry/Thi Kim Anh Le, School of Education
    Sharon.parry@scu.edu.au;
    a.le.11@student.scu.edu.au

From: Secretary, Human Research Ethics Committee
      Division of Research, R. Block

Date: 27 October 2013

Project name: Developing the academy in Vietnam: An investigation of the Formation of Academic Identity by University Lecturers in Vietnam

Approval Number ECN-13-273

The Southern Cross University Human Research Ethics Committee has established, in accordance with the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research – Section 5/Processes of Research Governance and Ethical Review, a procedure for expedited review and ratification by a delegated authority of the HREC.

Thank you for your expedited ethics application dated 4 October 2013. This has been considered and approved by a delegated authority of the HREC, Dr Rudi Meir on behalf of the HREC.

Please ensure that you do not use Division of Research letterhead for your participant information. You need to use either the generic SCU letterhead or the School of Education/SCU letterhead.

All ethics approvals are subject to standard conditions of approval. These must be noted by researchers as there is compliance and monitoring advice included in these conditions.

Ms Sue Kelly Dr Rudi Meir
HREC Administration HREC
T: (02) 6626 9139 E. rudi.meir@scu.edu.au
E: ethics.lismore@scu.edu.au
HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (HREC)  
HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS SUB-COMMITTEE (HRESC)

STANDARD CONDITIONS OF APPROVAL FOR ALL ETHICALLY APPROVED RESEARCH PROJECTS

The following standard conditions of approval are mandatory for all research projects which have been approved by the HREC or a HRESC and have received an ethics approval number. All reporting is to be submitted through the Human Research Ethics Office, either at Lismore, Coffs Harbour or GC/Tweed. The email addresses are:
ethics.lismore@scu.edu.au
ethics.tweed@scu.edu.au

Forms for annual reports, renewals, completions and changes of protocol are available at the website:

Standard Conditions in accordance with the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (National Statement) (NS).

1. Monitoring  
NS 5.5.1 – 5.5.10  
Responsibility for ensuring that research is reliably monitored lies with the institution under which the research is conducted. Mechanisms for monitoring can include:
(a) reports from researchers;
(b) reports from independent agencies (such as a data and safety monitoring board);
(c) review of adverse event reports;
(d) random inspections of research sites, data, or consent documentation; and
(e) interviews with research participants or other forms of feedback from them.

2. Approvals  
(c) All ethics approvals are valid for 12 months unless specified otherwise. If research is continuing after 12 months, then the ethics approval MUST be renewed. Complete the Annual Report/Renewal form and send to the ethics office. NS 5.5.5.
(d) The researcher/s will provide a report every 12 months on the progress to date or outcome in the case of completed research including detail about:
Maintenance and security of the records.
Compliance with the approved proposal.
Compliance with any conditions of approval.
Changes of protocol to the research.

3. Reporting to the HREC  
(c) The researchers will immediately notify the ethics office, on the appropriate form, any change in protocol. NS 5.5.3
(d) A completion report, on the appropriate form, must be forwarded to the ethics office.
(e) The researchers will immediately notify the ethics office about any circumstance that might affect ethical acceptance of the research protocol. NS 5.5.3
(f) The researchers will immediately notify the ethics office about any adverse events/incidences which have occurred to participants in their research. NS 5.5.3.

4. Research conducted overseas NS 4.8.1 – 4.8.21  
Researchers conducting a study in a country other than Australia, need to be aware of any protocols for that country and ensure that they are followed ethically and with appropriate cultural sensitivity.

5. Participant Complaints NS 5.6.1 – 5.6.7
General information
Institutions may receive complaints about researchers or the conduct of research, or about the conduct of a Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) or other review body. Complaints may be made by participants, researchers, staff of institutions, or others. All complaints should be handled promptly and sensitively. All participants in research conducted by Southern Cross University should be advised of the above procedure and be given a copy of the contact details for the
Complaints Officer. They should also be aware of the ethics approval number issued by the Human Research Ethics Committee.
The following paragraph is to be included in any plain language statements for participants in research.

*Complaints about the ethical conduct of this research should be addressed in writing to the following:*
*Ethics Complaints Officer*
*HREC*
*Southern Cross University*
*PO Box 157*
*Lismore, NSW, 2480*
*Email: ethics.lismore@scu.edu.au*

All complaints are investigated fully and according to due process under the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research and this University. Any complaint you make will be treated in confidence and you will be informed of the outcome.
Appendix C: INFORMATION SHEET

Dear (participant’s name)

My name is Le Thi Kim Anh. I am conducting an investigation for my PhD thesis in higher education at Southern Cross University in Australia.


Your rector had suggested you as a lecturer at the University, who is experienced in doing both research and teaching, and so I would like to invite you to participate in my research.

For my investigation, I wish to understand the nature of the conditions underpinning the values, beliefs, attitudes and modes of work of university lecturers in Vietnam. This topic is highly relevant to Vietnam’s wish to make higher education the primary force for national social-economic development.

My research questions are: what is the current state of academic identity among university lecturers in Vietnam? what are the conditions impacting on the development of academic identity by university lecturers in Vietnam? and what changes do university lecturers in Vietnam want to see happen to support their future development as academics?

The investigation will involve the use of observation and semi-structured interviews to collect data. I am proposing to conduct interviews with at least 18 university lecturers across three departments at ‘key’ universities. The interviews will not require more than one hour, and I will be interested in hearing about what it means to be an academic in Vietnam, having regard to the conditions of employment and the opportunities for teaching and research. If you agree to be interviewed, I will be asking you questions about why you joined the academic profession, what you value most about being an academic, and how you manage to develop and maintain your sense of academic commitment.

Following the interview, I will send you a transcript of our discussion for checking, and I may also seek some brief follow-up discussion with you about some points from our interview discussion.

I will conduct the interview with you at a place of your choice, probably at your campus. Any follow-up communication could be by email, telephone or Skype. I would also like you to receive a small gift as a sign of my gratitude for your assistance.

Your name and the name of your institution will not be identified in the interview transcripts, the final thesis or any subsequent publications. All discussion between us will remain completely confidential. You will have the right to withdraw from the investigation at any time and for any reason, and you can request that I should return all records and notes relating to our interaction. The transcript of your interview will be kept securely for seven years on a PC hard-drive and in a locked cabinet, as required by Southern Cross University.

When we meet, I will provide you with a printed copy of this Information Sheet, and a copy of the Consent Form. I will also explain again the investigation and its likely value. Upon your agreement to participate to the investigation, you will sign two copies of the Consent Form, one of which you will keep.

I am doing research under the supervision by Associate Professor Sharon Parry and Professor Martin Hayden. Both are experts in higher education. If you have anything that you would like to discuss about my thesis or about higher education issues, you can contact with them. Associate Professor Sharon Parry’s contact email is sharon.parry@scu.edu.au and her mobile number is +61 408 683 052. Professor Martin Hayden’s contact email is martin.hayden@scu.edu.au and his mobile number is +61 408 624 170. My contact is email: al.le.11@student.scu.edu.au and mobile number: +61 401 661 149.

The Southern Cross University Human Research Ethics Committee has approved my research project (approval number ECN-13-273).
If you have concerns about the ethical conduct of this research (or about me as the researcher), you should write directly to:
The Ethics Complaints Officer
Southern Cross University
PO Box 157, Lismore NSW 2480
AUSTRALIA
Email: ethics.lismore@scu.edu.au

All information provided is confidential and will be handled as soon as possible.

Sincerely,

Le Thi Kim Anh (PhD candidate)
Email: a.le.11@student.scu.edu.au
Mobile number+61 401 661 149
Appendix D: COPY OF CONSENT FORM

Title of research project: Developing the academy in Vietnam: An investigation of the formation of academic identity by university lecturers in Vietnam

Name of researcher: Thi Kim Anh Le – PhD Candidate – School of Education, Southern Cross University

Tick the box that applies, sign and date and give to the researcher

| I agree to take part in the Southern Cross University research project specified above. | Yes ☐ No ☐ |
| I understand the information about my participation in the research project, which has been provided to me by the researchers. | Yes ☐ No ☐ |
| I agree to be interviewed by the researcher. | Yes ☐ No ☐ |
| I agree to allow the interview to be audio-taped. | Yes ☐ No ☐ |
| I agree to make myself available for further interview if required. | Yes ☐ No ☐ |
| I understand that my participation is voluntary and I understand that I can cease my participation at any time. | Yes ☐ No ☐ |
| I understand that my participation in this research will be treated with confidentiality. | Yes ☐ No ☐ |
| I understand that any information that may identify me will be de-identified at the time of analysis of any data. | Yes ☐ No ☐ |
| I understand that no identifying information will be disclosed or published. | Yes ☐ No ☐ |
| I understand that all information gathered in this research will be kept confidentially for 7 years at the University. | Yes ☐ No ☐ |
| I am aware that I can contact the researchers at any time with any queries. Their contact details are provided to me. | Yes ☐ No ☐ |
| I understand that this research project has been approved by the SCU Human Research Ethics Committee. | Yes ☐ No ☐ |

Participant’s name: ______________________________________________________

Participant’s signature: ___________________________________________________
Date: ______________________

☐ Please tick this box and provide your email or mail address below if you wish to receive feedback about the research.
Email: ________________________________________________________________
Appendix E: THE AUDITOR’S REPORT

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

My name is Le Thi Tran (Mrs). I am a PhD graduate (2016) from the Southern Cross University School of Education, where I am currently employed contractually.

I am also a lecturer at Quy Nhon College of Education, in Vietnam.

I certify that I performed various tasks of auditing of the data collected by Mrs. Thi Kim Anh Le for her PhD.

These included:
1. accompanying with her and Associate Professor Sharon Parry and Professor Martin Hayden (the two supervisors) to one of the sites for attendance at an international conference;
2. random checking of the authenticity of the transcription of tape records;
3. checking the candidate’s reflective journal; and
4. checking the candidate’s observation diary.

I spent a good deal of time checking randomly the authenticity of quotations for the thesis that were translated from Vietnamese to English. I discussed these translations with Mrs Kim Anh to ensure that the meaning in Vietnamese was effectively conveyed in the English translation.

I performed these auditing tasks with having any vested interest in the success of the thesis.

Yours faithfully,

(signed)

Le Thi Tran (PhD)
Email: tranlethicdsp@yahoo.com
Mobile number: +61 434 397 455
Appendix F: EXAMPLE OF REFLECTIVE JOURNAL ENTRIES

June, 12th, 2014: Các câu hỏi chính, chủ đề chính đưa vào semi-structured interview. Khi phỏng vấn pilot, ngày dời với participant đầu tiên, một thày rất có KN giảng dạy và NC, GV đại học BK, do có những thời gian làm việc trước và tình tưởng rồi, nên hoàn toàn kề về việc học tập, công tác, cho nên cuộc phỏng vấn này đã hoàn toàn biến thành trò chuyện. Tuy nhiên, chính thông có đưa ra các câu hỏi để tập trung vào các thông tin cần thu thập. Qua câu chuyện chỉ tiết này thì thấy rất nhiều themes emerged, ngoài các themes đã đưa ra: vị dự như việc chọn specialization như thế nào, how decision of becoming an academic has been made. Về những khó khăn, không chỉ do là gì, đã ảnh hưởng đến công việc của họ như thế nào, mà còn họ đã vượt lên những khó khăn ấy như thế nào. Tức độ, sau đó, R gets know more about what she doesn’t know. Vì thế đã thêm câu đầu tiên: hãy kể về quá trình học tập và kinh nghiệm công tác của bản thân.

Câu hỏi này lúc đầu đưa ra với mục đích làm quen, làm nóng cho cuộc Interview sắp tới, nhưng lại tỏ ra với từng hiệu. Nếu những người đã quan với Rr, và có nhiều kinh nghiệm, thì cuộc phỏng vấn sẽ biến thành cuộc nói chuyện như đã nói trên, thưa được các thông tin sâu, cụ thể, lý giải ăn sâu hành vi và hoạt động của họ. Nhưng cũng có trường hợp xảy ra là, nếu đã qua quan thói, R với participants đã có thời gian học tập với nhau, thì cũng không hiểu quá (có 02 trường hợp như vậy, số nói ở ngày sau đây), thì lại trở về với chủ đề schedule.

June 20th, 2014: Sau một số interviews, thì có những bài học sau đây được đưa ra: Try to be active listerner and kept speaking at the least as possible: Cái này cũng khó, vì nhiều khi, dễ đồng viên người ta nói, thì đôi lúc đã comments hơi như chén. Cái này đặc biệt xảy ra khi phỏng vấn người đồng nghiệp thân. R see her issue as the R’s. Cái này cũng là cái cần rút kinh nghiệm đối với những R have experiences and familiar with the context of the sites.

Đã đưa vào một mới đổi, câu dẫn, câu introduction như đã nói ở trên.


June 26th, 2014: Probing questions are important to make the story proceed smoothly. For example, when telling about the difficulties, the starting of a new research direction is very important. The probing questions are: could you contact your supervisor? what
help did you receive from your supervisor? what benefit did you get from the meeting with the supervisor?

Sometimes the … questions do not provide the necessary information because the informants tended to tell about how happy they were with the meeting and how their supervisors were invited to speak at conferences: “mình rất sung sướng, mình đưa ông ấy đi tham quan một nơi” (Mrs. *****). So the probing question should be: how important the meeting with supervisor is for your research, especially starting new research direction.