Transformation as part of evolving organisational culture in the South African higher education institutions

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Abstract: The practice of organisational culture plays a major role in enhancing organisational and sustainable growth through innovative leadership and a sound sense of community. In order to create the right culture, sustainability must be embedded in the institution’s or organisation’s day-to-day decisions and processes. This paper acknowledges the need to explore organisational culture and sustainability in more general terms and across a more diverse range of contexts, but owing to space restrictions and in a desire to focus and to be concise, the focus is drawn to a particular selected group of higher education institutions (HEIs) in South Africa. HEIs are generally managed according to a mission statement and objectives that are shared commonly in order to build and sustain the organisational culture of these institutions so that they remain relevant and focused. Indeed, it could be claimed that organisational culture is the channel through which the vision of the institution flows or is impeded since a vision is undergirded by the differing values, norms and beliefs of various social groups which are intrinsic to HEIs. Organisational culture in South Africa has been influenced by the historical background of a divided society subject to apartheid laws such as the Natives Land Act.

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PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

Organisational culture is a set of beliefs, values and assumptions that are shared by members of a particular organisation. Values have an influence on the behaviour of members of an organisation since people rely on these values to guide their decisions and behaviours. The concept of organisational culture has become popular within the literature on sustainability as it provides an access point for various fields of studies such as the Human Resources and Industrial or Organisational Psychology. Sustainability, however, is predicated on a reconstructive postmodernism, building on more positive advances of the modern tradition. It is rooted in an earth-based epistemology, cosmology and ontology. Strong sustainability has to do with unlimited growth in a finite natural system that is impossible and limits the human capacity to comprehend and coordinate on a global scale. On this note, the role of HEIs in the creation of social and cultural conditions in society is crucial and the evolution of organisational culture is significant.
(1913), the Group Areas Act (1950), the Population Registration Act (1950) and the Extension of University Education Act (1959). The latter was meant to exclude non-whites from accessing HEIs as per legislations passed by the apartheid regime. In light of this context, this paper examines organisational culture and sustainability in certain (selected) South African HEIs, and analyses elements embedded in organisational culture, which make it difficult for those HEIs to transform according to the expectations of government and society in recent times. The ways in which higher education institutions practise their organisational culture and how they tackle sustainability as part of their transformation remain significant in governance and the development of the HEIs in South Africa.

1. Introduction
Higher education institutions (HEIs) are complex in nature, partly because they are constituted by diverse social groups. On the one hand, academic institutions have certain values which are not easily changeable and to which they adhere. On the other hand, society and external environmental pressure groups have an influence on the primary functions of HEIs which threaten those values. The role of organisational culture at the HEIs is vital in this regard since the progress and development of these institutions is largely dependent on how an institution adapts to society over time. Similarly, the sustainability of HEI is dependent on the evolving cultural practices of that particular institution.

The aim of this article is to address organisational culture in the context of South African HEIs. The paper advocates transformative changes to the underlying culture and implementation of innovative and relevant strategies within HEIs while also maintaining academic standards. The argument on this paper is informed by a focused study on the existing literature and theoretical approaches pertaining to organisational culture. Aspects to be covered in the discussion include a literature review, the context and a synthesis of organisational culture and sustainability, followed by a discourse on the evolving nature of organisational culture and its significance. Transformation in the South African context with specific reference to certain HEIs is explained. A section describing the implications resulting from ineffective organisational cultural practices and governance will be presented before concluding remarks and recommendations are presented to sum up the discussion.

2. Literature review and synthesis of organisational culture and sustainability
According to Wilson (2001:354), the concept of culture has stemmed principally from the study of ethnic and national differences in the disciplines of sociology, anthropology and social psychology. Within the organisational theory, scholars use the concept of culture as a metaphor to study organisations as forums in which meanings are constructed and expressed through social interactions. Wilson (2001) further argues that, with recent developments revolving around management discussions, most researchers who contribute to the literature on organisational culture use culture as a phenomenon which organisations adapt to rather than as a symbol. In this regard, culture tends to be something an “organisation has” as opposed to what an organisation is. Since the 1950s, culture as a concept developed in significance and has been applied and practised by various institutions and organisations as a mechanism to attain goals and to remain relevant.

The theories employed in determining organisational culture are often based on a specific aspect of such culture (Schein, 1997). For instance, neoclassical organisational theory pays
emphasise to human relations and the importance of behavioural patterns, beliefs and values in relation to organisational culture. Classical theorists focus on a comprehension of norms and values in an organisational setting and emphasise the roles of organisational leaders establishing organisational values (Clapper, 2000). Similar to a culture practised in society, organisational culture focuses on organisational practice, that is, on how things get done by people within a particular organisation over time.

Organisational culture is defined as a set of beliefs, values, and assumptions that are shared by members of an organisation (Schein, 1985). Values have an influence on the behaviour of members of an organisation, as people rely on these values to guide their decisions and behaviours. McNeal (2010, p. 127) states that “the organisational cultural perspective is an organisational theory with its own central assumptions that challenge rational perspectives regarding decision-making processes and employee behaviour”. A common belief among organisational culture theorists is that organisational behaviour is controlled by a strong culture. McNeal (2010) further maintains that theory analyses phenomena, such as values, beliefs, assumptions, perceptions, behavioural norms, artefacts, and patterns of behaviour. Organisational culture is concerned with the whole organisation, including informal aspects of the organisation.

Pauzuoliene and Mauriciene (2012) argue that organisations operate according to fundamental norms, customs, and morals and follow particular traditions to achieve their intended objectives. Organisational culture remains an indispensable feature in management principles. Similarly, Kuh and Whitt (2000) maintain that the culture of higher education institutions is a specific type of organisational culture which is based on particular practices influenced by particular traditions and norms which control the behaviour of individuals and groups. Indeed, the manner in which employees and students of a particular HEI act could be understood based on their conduct which offers a frame of reference for such individuals’ activities on and off campuses. For the purpose of this paper, a definition crafted by Pauzuoliene and Mauriciene (2012) is utilised, which eloquently asserts that organisational culture is a system of interacting associations between fundamental norms, values, opinions, traditions and customs that are conveyed within organisational management roles. Associations in this regard will mainly refer to social groups or groups in a society.

The concept of organisational culture has become popular within the literature of sustainability as it provides an access point for the fields of Human Resources and Organisational Behaviour to explain an organisation’s sustainability performance (Linnenluecke & Griffiths, 2010). Strong sustainability, however, is predicated on what Spretnak (1999) calls a “‘reconstructive or ecological postmodernism,’” building on the more positive advances of the modern tradition, but rooted in an earth-based epistemology, cosmology and ontology. Strong sustainability has to do with unlimited growth in a finite natural system that is impossible and limits the human capacity to comprehend and coordinate on a global scale (Lange & Kerr, 2013, p. 211).

As many theorists agree, sustainability ought to be a reframing of thinking habits and a reconfiguring of how society undertakes all human activities (Korten, 2006; Orr, 1992). Thus, the role of HEIs is vital in the creation of social and cultural conditions for sustainability. The HEIs remain the most prominent institutions for Africa’s development aiming to enhance social problems and serve as a model for good governance (Sebola, 2017, p. 181). Furthermore, HEIs usually entail the operations of a particular group of people in the society which embraces certain configurations of sustainability which could be modelled on campuses (Lange & Kerr, 2013).

According to Saudemore, Barkhuizen, and Schutte (2017), the literature suggests that the manner in which a particular group or individuals in a society associate themselves with a particular organisation or institution is dependent on how the organisation is perceived by the society outside the organisation (construed image) and indirectly by how people from within the organisation observe it in reality (corporate image). In this regard, the perception of outside parties (external environment) impacts on how members believe organisations are viewed by others,
which consequently impacts on the image and reputation (identity) of that particular organisation. In light of this knowledge, a small selection of former white Afrikaner-dominated South African HEIs was observed in order to determine what type of organisational culture they currently experience. The discussion occurs in sections following sections below.

According to the laws and practices of the apartheid regime, South African HEIs had, for many years, been segregated along racial lines. The system of apartheid was in many ways meant to ensure that non-whites were excluded from and denied access to good education. It was designed so that even the scant education offered was of poor quality, in no way comparable to the education offered to the white class (Jackson, 1993; Onwuegbuzie, Leech, & Collins, 2012). It was only after 1994 when the new regime of the South African democratic government commenced with some changes initiated to transform the higher education system. These changes were later expanded in 2002 when the then Minister of Higher Education, Professor Kadar Asmal, implemented mergers[1] for certain HEIs (Mzangwa, 2016). Further policies were introduced thereafter to aid transformation of the HEIs.

The policy and processes around affirmative action and/or employment equity standards emanated from the previously institutionalised inequality. Legislations such as Affirmation Action Act (Act 303 of 1995) and the Employment Equity Act (Act 67 of 1997) came into being to redress the imbalances of the past. The original organisational cultural practices of South African HEIs were very discriminative but were viewed as meaningful to a particular group of the society, namely the white Afrikaner group (Ndletyana, 2008). And it would be fair to claim that white-Eurocentric culture is still dominant in many HEIs in South Africa to date (Bentley & Habib, 2008; Van der Merwe, 2017). Effah (2011) portends that in countries such as Tanzania and Ghana, which are black race-dominated countries, affirmative action is aimed more at gender than race since the imbalances in most institutions in those countries were in this category, unlike the case of South Africa which was, and is still, more race-imbalanced than gender-imbalanced. As confirmed by Bentley and Habib (2008), affirmative action was designed for the recognition of professional skills in the black majority and their participation in advancing their education which had been neglected during the years of apartheid. In this regard, affirmative action addresses the inequities described in the previous paragraph and has a direct influence on the organisation culture of HEIs.

The issue of encouraging and nurturing culture needs to be addressed since it forms part of organisational culture. Tierney (1988) argues, in the case of the American higher education system, that organisational culture is a meaningful and relevant model or belief which helps the institution to execute its function and contribute to the understanding of such an institution. This notion could be applied across HEIs globally considering how academic institutions operate compared to other organisations (Birnbaum, 1988). Amongst the many scholars who contribute to the research on organisational culture, Clark (1983), Moassen (1995) and Sporn (1996) maintain that organisational culture has been acknowledged as a significant area of research based on its influence on different types of academic beliefs in various institutions. Sporn (1996) further argues that the influence of culture in HEIs could be explained in two ways. Firstly, that resilient culture in an institution is at the centre of change through support of strategic management objectives. Secondly, the success of an institution is determined by external and internal effects embedded in the orientation and strategy of that institution.

3. The evolution of organisational culture
Organisational culture is often cited as the primary reason for the failure to implement organisational change programmes which in turn leads to delays in organisational development. Some studies, such as those of Cameron, Freeman, and Mishra (1993) and Jarnagin and Slocum (2007), have found that the successful implementation of cultural change for organisational or institutional sustainability is largely dependent on the values and ideological underpinnings of an organisation’s culture. They argue that, in turn, organisational culture has an effect on how organisational sustainability is implemented and what outcomes that can it bring.
The robustness and effectiveness of the strategy of an organisation such as an HEI depends mainly on the influence and linkages of the sub-units and groups which support a particular culture within an organisation. The more unified the sub-unit or group is, the more effectively such an institution develops. On the contrary, the weaker the sub-unit or group is in support of a particular culture, the more likely it is that such an organisation will encounter problems and fail (Denison, 1990). Denison (1990) further maintains that this success or failure depends on the environmental influences where institutions such as the HEI may be facing. The willingness of sub-units and groups to adapt and embrace other social groups in society is the fundamental route to apply “mutual” cultural recognition in assisting organisations to change. The efforts made in this direction can bring about social integration in a variety of social groups and subcultures (Bartell, 2003). This practice could in many ways not only help unify the subcultures but, most importantly, could assist the organisation in finding a new identity, one which conveys meaningful integration which results in achievable strategies and objectives supported by the larger society (Chaffee & Jacobson, 1997).

Baumgartner (2009) contends that it is important to keep organisational culture distinct from concepts such as organisational climate or national culture. Organisational culture provides a sense of identity for members of an organisation and in turn a higher level of commitment to the organisation. Robbins, Odendaal, and Roodt (2003) state that organisational culture has a strong influence on employees’ behaviour and attitudes when they are supplied with guidelines as to norms, values and standards on how to behave in an organisation.

One should not assume that organisational culture is a new concept. In support of scholars such as Scholz (1987) on the growth of the concept of organisational culture, Baumgartner (2009) argues that the concept of organisational culture has evolved over the past five decades [at the time of writing, this would be more than six decades]. Concurring with this argument, Clapper (2000) maintains that the organisation culture perspective did not appear spontaneously but has evolved over time emerging from a long history.

Some organisational cultures are able to cope with environmental influence and changes, whilst others obstruct adaptation to external influences and deny any possible changes (Sporn, 1996, p. 55). Based on this notion, the South African situation serves as an appropriate example whereby, even after two decades since the inception of a democratic government in 1994, HEIs are still under the influence of apartheid principles which, through an “inherited organisational culture”, resist changing to encompass the current scope of society’s perspective (Ndletyana, 2008). In general, it is rather difficult to change the culture practised in an organisation primarily because its members find it hard to change or adapt to changes fast enough (Wilkins & Ouchi, 1983). It is along these lines that some of the former white dominant HEIs in South Africa find it difficult to change to fulfil the social needs of the country. Drawing from Gousmett (1997), Freire ([1970] 2000) and Fish (2014) it is suggested that elements of history and politics are associated with social life based on culture, and deduce that “culture can be used as a weapon or a vehicle to maintain the legacy of a particular group in society irrespective of whether it [culture] is good or bad” (Mzangwa, 2016, p. 363).

The challenges that arise from the political and socio-economic turmoil in an African country such as South Africa require an agile and flexible approach to strategic planning to allow for swift and practical remedies (Barnard & Van der Merwe, 2016). It is precisely such a challenging environment that creates the space for robust and sustainable innovation which emerges from the practice and effects of organisational culture.

4. The significance of organisational culture and sustainability

According to Clapper (2000), amongst other significant aspects of organisational culture is its provision of a sense of identity for individuals and for the organisation. In this regard, organisational culture encourages stability within an organisation and it is the culture within organisations which enhances participation. As a result, organisational culture provides appropriate organisational standards, including standards of employment and other personnel aspects dependent on the structure
and hierarchy of an organisation (Ivancevich & Matteson, 1993). In various organisations, the hierarchy of an organisation represents a well-structured and formalised organisation where formal procedures such as rules, policies, guidelines and procedures are outlined (Omerzel, Biloslavo, & Trnovčević, 2017). The main strategic tasks are to maintain stability in order to sustain the smooth-running of the organisation and to ensure the organisation’s efficiency. The main strategic objectives are meant to build the commitment through mentorship which enables personal growth and a positive working climate. Through this practice, the organisation can be very flexible which enables innovation, growth and sustainability (Omerzel et al., 2017).

Linnenluecke and Griffiths (2010) maintain that the concept of sustainability became known on a global level through the report compiled by the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) termed “Our Common Future” (OCF) (World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED), 1987). The OCF is a well-recognised entity established within and operating closely under the United Nations as a Commission and is also known as the Brundtland Commission. Observations and pronouncements made by the WCED link sustainability to social equity and environmental integrity. This connection has been extended to various organisations and institutions in terms of economic affluence by coining the term sustainability. Based on the WCED definition, a variety of subsequent definitions emerged pertaining to sustainability in relation to organisations. Quoting Bertels (2010, p. 10), “a culture of sustainability is one in which organisational members hold shared assumptions and beliefs about the importance of balancing economic efficiency, social equity and environmental accountability”.

The concept of sustainability has been described and defined in many ways as is the case with the term organisational culture (Linnenluecke & Griffiths, 2010). What is common in these definitions is the assertion that while organisational culture is concerned with common assumptions, values and expected conduct of a particular organisation and its sustainability depends on the enactment of these characteristics. Decisions taken by management and certain demeanours practised by the members of an organisation are contingent on the organisational culture as deemed valuable by all its members. It is for this reason that Bertels (2010, p. 10) description of culture as “the way people or society do things around a particular environment” is most apt. Bertels (2010, p. 10) further states that over time, an organisation builds up its own culture, providing a sense of identity for its members about “who they are” and “what they do.” Moreover, an organisation’s culture is both reinforced and reshaped through the daily practices of its members.

According to Dill and Sporn (1995), the problems experienced by HEIs in applying organisational culture are similar to the problems of the private sector organisations. In a competitive environment, it is important to acknowledge the influence of funding on the degree to which HEIs are autonomous, as they are dependent on the state and have to account for how they operate. In this regard, a cohesive environment is clearly beneficial and depends on the relationship between an institution’s culture and its strategic management. Figure 1 is an illustration of the relationship between HEIs’ culture and strategic management.

Certainly, part of the noticeable functions of the practice and maintenance of organisational culture is that it postulates common patterns of understanding between members of an organisation. In this regard, members of the organisation are able to think about and value certain aspects of the organisation in a particular way which is meaningful to them. Moreover, members of an organisation are able to determine how to act in an organisationally relevant and principled manner. Thus, Jackson (1993) and Clapper (2000) maintain that organisational culture is a control mechanism which forbids certain conduct that is deemed to be outside the organisation’s principles while advocating for the organisation’s values as determined by its beliefs and attitudes.

According to Reddy and Pillay (2012), leaders in various organisations must be able to analyse their own corporate culture and its capacity for change. Leaders within HEIs are increasingly becoming more aware of the concept of culture and its significant role in universities’ potential
for change and development. Furthermore, universities possess distinctive characteristics, which correlate strongly with their respective cultures (Bartell, 2003; Sporn, 1996). At the university level, culture can be defined as the values and beliefs of university stakeholders (i.e., administrators, faculty, students, board members and support staff), based on tradition (Bartell, 2003; Kennedy, 1982). Values and beliefs are thought to greatly influence decision-making processes at universities (Bartell, 2003; Tierney, 1988) and shape individual and organisational behaviours.

Bui and Baruch (2010) are of the view that the primary beliefs, values, and attitudes of staff members are influenced by communication within the institution. They further argue that it is through communication that employees realise that they are recognised, empowered and thus can commit to offer quality service to the institution. Communication by the management of an institution remains key when seeking to involve staff members and in recognising their views and inputs, particularly those which form part of organisational practice Velazquez, Munguia, and Sanchez (2005). Organisational practice is embedded in what constitutes culture within an organisation and is what identifies and distinguishes how each organisation differs from others and the degree to which it is likely to be unique (Roturier & De Almeida, 2000). The other important role of communication within HEI relates to management’s ability to share its objectives and mission with staff members with an aim to attain their views. Bui and Baruch (2010) maintain that this portrays societal collectivism to employees and enables them to be productive, which in turn becomes part of cultural practice.

Amongst other examples of HEI leadership strategy, the University of Johannesburg (UJ) [former Randse Afrikaanse Universiteit] adopted a new strategy in 2010 in response to the ineffective vision, mission and objective that pertained previously, and initiated a programme which they called the New Generation Scholars (NGS) programme, aimed not only at changing culture but also including those social groups which had previously experienced discrimination. This programme makes beyond-the-norm funding available to selected previously disadvantaged students (with the emphasis on meritorious Black students). The programme is aimed at improving access for black students and allowing them to participate in master’s and doctoral research programmes (Barnard & Van der Merwe, 2016). Furthermore, the initiative guarantees them a full-time academic appointment of at least three years’ duration at the institution upon successful attainment of a doctoral qualification. This helps to enhance the recruitment of black academics and assists in achieving the kind of transformation South African universities so desperately need. It is particularly significant that this new strategy was developed by the management of UJ which used to be...
white dominated and which had been initially established exclusively for Afrikaners of a particular political inclination.

Wilkins and Ouchi (1983) suggest that organisational culture plays a major role in affecting the efficiency of an institution. They maintain though that sharing of social knowledge could vary from one institution to the other. The more knowledge (through the vision and objectives set out strategically by the management) that is shared frequently, the more the organisational culture will be supported and contribute to the efficacy of the institution. In support of this view, Tierney (1988, p. 6) points out that organisational culture inspires staff members within an institution:

(1) “to consider real or potential conflicts not in isolation but on the broad canvas of organisational life,
(2) recognise structural or operational contradictions that suggest tensions in the organisation,
(3) implement and evaluate everyday decisions with a keen awareness of their role in and influence upon organisational culture,
(4) understand the symbolic dimensions of ostensibly instrumental decisions and actions; and
(5) consider why different groups in the organisation hold varying perceptions about institutional performance”.

However, Wilson (2001) upholds that secrecy amongst members of an organisation can be harmful as it influences organisational culture and leads to dysfunctional behaviour if people form groups with values totally distinct from the organisation’s mission and values. When a rogue group within the organisation advocates a particular culture and fails to adapt to changes as per management strategies informed by institutional beliefs, values and attitude, then transforming such an institution is likely to fail.

5. Transformation as part of evolving organisational culture in the South African HEIs
Organisational culture in South Africa has been influenced by the historical background of a divided society subject to apartheid laws such as the Natives Land Act (1913), the Group Areas Act (1950), the Population Registration Act (1950) and the Extension of University Education Act (1959) (Mzangwa, 2016). The latter was meant to exclude non-whites from accessing HEIs as per legislations passed by the apartheid regime. HEIs were mainly driven by sub-racial groups even after 1994 which is the year that marked the advent of democracy in South Africa. As outlined by various scholars (Naidoo, 2004; Oakley-Smith, 2016), it is difficult to discuss any issues relating to transformation and/or development in South Africa without referring to the elements of apartheid. Thus, organisational culture cannot be discussed without first addressing the social background of South Africa.

Certain HEIs in South Africa are still being used to advance the language [Afrikaners3] and culture of a particular group which strengthens a sector within a stratified society (Mzangwa, 2016). This is a legacy of the apartheid regime which still haunts South Africans (Kubler & Sayers, 2010) and can be viewed as a one-sided principle which still exists in South Africa where a “minority [white Afrikaner] culture” continues to be used to dominate higher education while oppressing the majority blocks. During the apartheid regime, these practices favoured one race and were used to maintain one particular group’s [white Afrikaner] culture and legacy while intentionally neglecting the others [Blacks, Indian and Coloureds] (Bentley & Hobib, 2008).

Based on this analysis, certain South African HEIs are trapped in a particular way of operating. For instance, the University of Pretoria, Stellenbosch University and North-West University find it difficult to transform at the pace expected by the South African government and South African society, because there are still strong social groups which deem it necessary to prioritise the Afrikaner group, its culture and its way of doing things (Southall, 2016). Communication in these institutions continues to be conducted in Afrikaans even if the majority in these institutions are people from other racial groups. Thus instead of allowing “rapid development” of these institutions through a better
understanding of an organisational culture which is inclusive of all members of society, the influential group undermines other social groups. However, it must be granted that since these HEIs are complex in nature, it will take a long time to implement “common cultural organisational practice”.

According to Van der Merwe (2014), language is not just about speaking but contains elements of culture and identity which recognises and stimulates the sense of belonging of a particular group in society. It should be noted that Van der Merwe’s (2014) arguments are aimed at the view that white Afrikaans-speaking people should be left unchallenged when they refuse to transform and/or disregard the goal of embracing diversity. This renegade notion suggests that the former “Afrikaans established institutions” during apartheid must continue to embrace Afrikaans as a language to the neglect of black people’s languages.

The South African Constitution (Act 108 of 1996) guarantees equal rights to members of society irrespective of race, which is one of the main reasons, since 1994, to establish equitable, inclusive and effective HEIs as a priority (Asmal, 2002; Jackson, 1993). In accordance with the Constitution of South Africa, the transformation of HEIs could be achieved if the management is willing to adapt to organisational change and follow management strategies which are suited to a diverse cultural environment. Such practices and attitudes will enhance developmental change in HEIs.

As part of enhancing organisational change and accelerating sustainable transformation in HEIs, affirmative action can be seen as an enabling tool even though it cannot be concluded that it is the only option (Jackson, 1993). Affirmative action encompasses diversity provided that the management strategies of HEIs are geared towards enhancing equality in terms of race in an institution. Whilst managing diversity, which means acknowledging the existence and practice of other races and their cultures within an organisation, affirmative action is aimed mainly at eradicating those practices of discrimination implemented during the apartheid years (Kemp, 1992). In HEIs, diversity implies the reformulation of what comprises the curriculum and the prevailing pedagogy, and coaxing staff and students towards new ways of thinking about the academic environment. It also means enhancing the skills and acknowledging the abilities of previously disadvantaged students. This, in essence, translates into restructuring and transforming HEIs (Havenga, 1993).

In the light of this and to return to a previous example, in 2010, the University of Johannesburg (UJ) Council approved new strategic thrusts after realising that the vision, mission and values which have been adopted by the university in 2006 after the mergers were not effective. This new strategy was adopted by the university management when realising that its community has changed and the culture had evolved. UJ aimed to be relevant to society and serve humanity through innovative ways and it came, therefore, to a decision that only through adopting a culture which would be meaningful to its larger community, could they transform and be sustainable (Barnard & Van der Merwe, 2016). The University of Pretoria followed suit in 2011 and other South African HEIs, such as the University of South Africa (UNISA) in 2012 when its management adopted a new strategy of shaping the future aimed at being of service to Africa (Southall, 2016).

6. Institutional implications
HEIs serve as reservoirs of knowledge and are no longer just providing knowledge to students but form part of an employment environment where different people from various social backgrounds and cultures meet (Petrides & Nodine, 2003). These institutions manage, blend, and share knowledge among the faculty staff and extend that knowledge through teaching both of which actions are embedded in a particular organisational culture. Thus, knowledge sharing is inherently an important concept in HEIs. This is borne out by the fact that several HEIs failed to transform and to adapt to the social needs cognisant to the society they serve. In such cases, management strategies are either irrelevant or meaningless as the institutions can be seen as having lost touch with the people they serve and their own mandate (Sohail & Daud, 2009).
There are social implications resulting from the linkage of organisational culture with the management of HEIs. Amongst others, Schwarz (1989) contends that through a comprehension of cultural conditions, HEIs become more competitive institutions, and competition in this regard is positive to the development and progress of these institutions. The deliverables of such HEIs would depend mainly on what they intend to achieve based on their goals or objectives. Schwarz (1989) and Sporn (1996) uphold that a strategic implication could well be that, when embracing culture as a unifying principle, HEIs can improve the levels to which staff members identify with the organisation and therefore become more motivated. This underscores the effectiveness of strategic management when well focused on the mission of HEIs.

The values, norms and behaviour shared and practised by a group of employees that are exposed to others represent the “conduct” of an HEI and is a demonstration of organisational culture and what it embraces (Kotter & Heskett, 1992). Since organisational culture is intended to combine various social groups and embrace social diversity and social cohesion, it is also about helping institutions to transform and develop, uplifting the standard of social growth and innovation particular in HEIs in Africa as it has done in many underdeveloped countries. If an organisation is to prosper, free enterprise and innovation should be practiced through the implementation of a culture of sustainability. Such culture promotes the environment advantageously while it simultaneously encourages control and organizational design aimed to protect institutional values and norms and maintain academic standards, thus safeguarding its relevance. This is precisely what occurred at the University of Johannesburg. UJ is to be commended for its positive impact on society and the way in which it has sustained good working relations with other stakeholders (Barnard & Van der Merwe, 2016).

7. Concluding remarks and recommendation
This paper presents organisational culture as a practice performed or experienced in HEIs with specific reference to the South African situation. Since organisations are meant to follow a long-term plan while remaining relevant, sustainability plays a major part in the operations of HEIs and this is taken up in the paper. To a large extent, the discourse of this paper focused on the significance of organisational culture and sustainability of HEIs in South Africa by taking into consideration the past and present forms of the society or community at these institutions. The paper portrayed the difficulties experienced by certain institutions to transform and showcased cases of innovative thinking in the management of certain institutions which helped them to adapt and eventually to be relevant to their communities. As a recommendation:

- HEIs, need henceforth, to effectively support innovative ideas for sustainability. Furthermore, they should have programmes in place that recognise and reward employees who engage in sustainability activities.
- HEIs or its management must equip themselves, be ready and inclined to intensity transformation since that is a quest for social justice mainly in countries such as South Africa where the rule of apartheid system was based on racial segregation and classification in society.
- The issue and agenda on race and class is still a weakness which has a negative influence if not tackled and dealt with appropriately at the HEIs. Thus, through applying recent legislative principles as per the change of regime and the evolving culture, HEIs would be in a position to transform in accordance with a societal and global perspective. An urgent intervention nationwide is needed to enable HEIs to apply transformative measures which will enhance innovation and modern practices to keep these institutions relevant and sustainable.

In this regard, organisational culture equates with identity in a particular institution and that determines what organisational practices are followed, as seen through its community. The strategies and objectives of an organisation are influenced by its organisational culture leading either to development (transformation) or stasis (failure and setback). Thus, there are either challenges or motivating successes attained through adherence to a particular organisational culture. These challenges emanate from the management and its community when they disregard
the existence of diverse societal groups and slow the rate of transformation. Obviously, this has a negative impact on the sustainability of the organisation and its operations. In contrast, when management strategies are based on the organisation’s beliefs, values and attitudes informed by its objectives and mission, such an institution is able to sustain its existence. Based on the prominent functions of organisational culture, the relationship of institutional culture and strategic management was discussed and illustrated to show how HEI culture is tied to its strategies.

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Notes
1. The mergers and incorporations of HEIs took place from 2002 to 2005 as part of restructuring and transformation of these institutions in South Africa as a result of disparities in the HEIs and inequalities based on race and access (Kubler & Sayers, 2010).
2. The former Randse Afrikaanse Universiteit was renamed the University of Johannesburg (UJ) after the merger with the former Technikon Witwatersrand and the former Vista University’s Johannesburg campus (Mzangwa, 2016).
3. A minority group of white Afrikaans-speaking people who do not want to adopt to democratic changes but still maintain that Afrikaans language and its [Afrikaner] culture remain superior in South Africa (Southall, 2016).

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