CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND PROPOSALS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

7.1   Introduction

In the previous chapter the six phases and the results were discussed. In the final chapter of this thesis, the discussion focuses on the main conclusions, recommendations and proposals for future research.

7.2   General conclusions

7.2.1   The changing higher education landscape

The first three chapters referred to the challenges of globalisation and market competition facing higher education institutions worldwide. These challenges have put enormous pressure on higher education institutions to devise new ways of managing what have become more diverse and complex institutions. Specific reference was also made to the new legislative framework in South Africa and the merging of higher education institutions from 36 to 21 that will be comprised of 11 universities, 4 comprehensive institutions and 5 technikons.

What follows in Table 45 is a summary of the higher education trends/issues/challenges indicated by specialists referred to in Chapters 1 to 3.

Table 45: Trends/issues/challenges facing the higher education sector

Specialist/s	Trends/issues/challenges	Country
Cloete	• Diversify income streams • Reconfigure institutional missions • Forge new kinds of relationships	South Africa
Singh	• Demonstrate efficiency, effectiveness and value for money • Declining investments of public funds • Dominance of managerial and entrepreneurial approaches	South Africa

Specialist/s	Trends/issues/challenges	Country
	• Privatisation of higher education	
Freed and Klugman	• Change management practices • Culture off quality improvement	United States
Gumport	• Industry approach	United States

Van Vught	• Challenges:
	  o from other knowledge producers
	  o students and employers
	  o other education providers
	  o new technologies
		Netherlands

Fehnel	Increased:
	  o diversity in types of institutions and types of programmes and services on offer
	  o reliance on partnerships and alliances
	  o spectrum of interaction between co-operation and competition
	  o reliance on private funding
	  o innovation in teaching, learning, research, institutional management and supporting services
		United States

Clark	• Entrepreneurial university	United States

Gibbons	• From knowledge production to knowledge configuration
	• Innovative and entrepreneurial:
	  o Research
	  o Teaching and learning
	  o Knowledge transfer
		United States

Currie	• Enterprise university	Australia
KPMG	• Corporate governance and risk management	South Africa
Consortium for Excellence in higher education	• Clash between collegiality and managerialism • Competition • Increased demands from employers • Life-long learning	United Kingdom

It is the researcher's opinion that academic self-assessment in conjunction with institutional self-assessment, based on a quality model that has been adapted for the higher education sector, will ensure continuous improvement. The institutional

self-assessment process should take cognisance of all the issues facing higher education institutions and ensure that they are addressed in the strategic plan.

7.2.2   The need for quality assurance in higher education

All the above **challenges** facing the higher education sector, have forced the sector to adopt continuous improvement principles. Both Freed and Klugman are of the opinion that as the problems facing higher education have grown, more institutions have adopted quality principles and practices, and they predict the trend will continue.

The main challenges facing higher education institutions are therefore:
- Change in the scale of higher education
  - o   Internationalisation
  - o   Global competitiveness
- Change in the university organisation
  - o   Increase in number of higher education providers
  - o   Size of institutions
  - o   Mode of delivery
- Public accountability
  - o   Answerable to the broader society
  - o   Focus on good management
- Stakeholder expectations
  - o   Customer expectations
- Competition for public funds

Prof Duma Malaza, Director of Quality Assurance at the University of Pretoria, also points out other trends including the growth in number of quality assurance agencies since the 1970's and the internationalisation of quality assurance comprising the UNESCO Global Forum on Quality Assurance, Accreditation and the Recognition of Qualifications, the World Bank Policy Framework for higher education and the International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE – 1991).

7.2.3   Unique characteristics of higher education institutions

This thesis has acknowledged the fundamental differences and distinguishing features between higher education institutions and other organisations. However, higher education institutions also possess characteristics similar to most forms of organisations and therefore management principles also apply.

Cloete *et al* stated that the distinguishing features of higher education institutions present a challenge to the exercise of effective leadership in higher education.

It is the combination of various characteristics that have given higher education institutions their unique and paradoxical characteristic of being the engine of innovative ideas and practices on the one hand, whilst on the other also being extremely resistant to change.

Gibbons stated that it has long been recognised that higher education institutions, particularly universities, are among the most stable and change resistant social institutions to have existed during the past 500 years.

According to Prof Malaza, the **academic culture** in higher education institutions will be an important factor in quality assurance. The basic elements of academic freedom include the freedom of teachers to inquire into any subject that evokes their intellectual concern; to present their findings to their students, colleagues and others; to publish their data and conclusions without control or censorship; and to teach in the manner they consider professional. For students, the basic elements include the freedom to study subjects that concern them and to form conclusions for themselves and express their opinions.

The justification for academic freedom thus defined lies not in the comfort or convenience of teachers and students but in the benefits to society; i.e. the long-term interests of a society are best served when the educational process leads to the advancement of knowledge, and knowledge is best advanced when inquiry is free from restraints by the state, by the church or other institutions, or by specialist groups.

These are tensions between the ideal and the imperatives facing higher education institutions.

Prof Malaza points out that a university can be viewed in three ways that will influence values and judgements on continuous improvement:

- University as an **institution**: For students and staff, values are driven by the principles of individual and institutional autonomy and academic freedom

- University as an **enterprise**: For administrators, values are driven by the principles of effectiveness and efficiency

- University as an **agency**: For government and other external stakeholders, values are driven by principles of expectations of delivery

7.2.4   The fundamental concepts of quality models interpreted for the higher education sector

Chapter 1 defined the concept of **continuous improvement** as: "the overall way of working that results in balanced stakeholder satisfaction (customer, employees, partners, society, shareholders), so increasing the probability of long term success as an organisation".

In an educational context, this means balancing the needs of students, staff, funding and regulatory bodies as well as those of local communities.

In recent versions of quality models, excellence is also defined as outstanding practice in managing the organisation and achieving results based on a set of **fundamental concepts**.

Throughout the thesis, reference was made to the **fundamental concepts** underlying the three quality models analysed. Scrutinising the visions and missions of South African higher education institutions, it would seem that they adhere to a combination of the following fundamental concepts or values as summarised in Table 46:

Table 46: Quality models – comparison of fundamental concepts

Malcolm Baldrige	EFQM	SAEM	South African Higher Education sector
Visionary leadership	Leadership and constancy of purpose	Leadership and constancy of purpose	x
Customer driven excellence	Customer focus	Customer focus	x
Organisational and personal learning	People development and involvement	People development and involvement	x
Valuing employers and partners	Partnership development	Partnership development	x
Agility			x
Focus on the future			x
Managing for innovation	Continuous learning, innovation and improvement	Continuous learning, innovation and improvement	x
Management by fact	Management by processes and facts	Management by processes and facts	x
Public responsibility and citizenship	Corporate social responsibility	Social responsibility	x
Focus on results and creating value	Results orientation	Results orientation	x
Systems perspective			x

In the following table, the fundamental concepts have been interpreted for the higher education sector.

Table 47: Quality models – fundamental concepts interpreted for the higher education sector

Fundamental concepts	Interpretation for higher education
Leadership and constancy of purpose	Clearly demonstrating visionary and inspirational leadership, which is transparent and open, with a constancy and unity of purpose which is shared by everyone in the institution
Customer focus	Anticipating, balancing and meeting the current and future needs of students, staff and stakeholders, through developing and setting a balanced range of appropriate indicators or targets, tracking performance, benchmarking, and taking appropriate action based on this comprehensive range of information
People development and involvement	Developing, involving and engaging staff, maximising their contribution in a positive way, with shared values and a culture of trust, openness and empowerment
Partnership development	Developing meaningful and mutually beneficial relationships, both internally and externally, in order to gain added value for partners, and support the achievement of both strategic and operational objectives
Agility	The ability to act quickly to the changing demands of students and stakeholders in terms of speed of response and flexibility to deliver
Focus on the future	Understanding the short- and longer-term factors that affect the organisation and the education sector and planning to take account of these
Continuous learning, innovation and improvement	Stimulating, encouraging, managing, sharing and acting on learning and experiences, making changes using innovation and creativity, and enabling continuous improvement to add value in a consistent way
Management by processes and facts	Understanding and systematically managing all activities through a set of interdependent and interrelated systems and processes, with decisions based on sound and reliably evidenced information
Social responsibility	Understanding, appreciating and considering the way in which the institution interacts with and impacts on the local and wider society, from both a practical and ethical perspective
Results orientation	Focusing clearly on and understanding students and other customers, their needs, expectations and values, keeping in consideration and valuing their contribution, and the contribution of other stakeholder groups

Fundamental concepts	Interpretation for higher education
Systems perspective	Successful management of the institution requires synthesis and alignment. Synthesis means looking at the organisation as a whole and focusing on what is important. Alignment means linking key strategies with key processes and aligning resources to improve overall performance and satisfy students and stakeholders.

(HEFCE, EFQM Excellence Model Higher Education Version 2003, 2003:5)

In chapter 3, emphasis was placed on self-assessment as a key driver for improving performance in an organisation. It is also a key concept of all the quality models. The majority of organisations that employ the models use it as a way of finding out where they are now, considering where they want to improve, and then making decisions on how to get there.

The five self-assessment approaches were discussed in Chapter 3. The HEFCE in *Applying self-assessment against the EFQM excellence model* (2003:8) indicates that the different approaches also vary in terms of requirement of resource and skill, and outcomes from the process undertaken. Table 48 indicates some of these differences, although all are subject to change if the assessment processes are enhanced, developed or combined in any way.

Table 48: Maturity of organisation vs effort required for self-assessment

Mature organisation	Appropriate questionnaire	Proforma supported by peer validation	Award simulation
Developing organisation	Questionnaire and workshop Matrix and workshop	Pro-forma Facilitated workshop	Pilot award simulation Pro-forma and workshop
Starting on the excellence journey	Elementary questionnaire Standard matrix	Standard questionnaire	Very detailed questionnaire or tailored matrix
	Low effort	**Medium effort**	**High effort**

(HEFCE – Applying self-assessment against the EFQM excellence model in further and higher education 2003:8)

If it can be assumed that higher education institutions are **developing organisations,** due to globalisation challenges and that they require **low effort** due to time and financial constraints, then a questionnaire and workshop is one of the preferred self-assessment approaches as proposed in 7.3.1 and 7.3.2.

Cognisance is taken of the fact all five self-assessment methods have benefits, as well as risks and issues as do the other three self-assessment methods. The benefits, risks and issues of the questionnaire and workshop methods are summarised as follows:

Questionnaire method

According to the HEFCE (2003:10-11) *Applying Self-Assessment against the EFQM Excellence Model in further and Higher Education*, the questionnaire method is deemed by the EFQM, as one of the least labour intensive, providing an existing questionnaire is used. Electronic versions which are available can make the collation of data quick and easy. Depending on the breadth and depth of the questionnaire, it can collect information on a very wide range of issues. Given a full distribution, it can obtain the views from everyone in the organisation.

The proposed higher education sector questionnaire in 7.3.2.1, has the following benefits, risks and issues as summarised in Table 49.

Table 49: Benefits, risks and issues of proposed higher eduction sector questionnaire

Benefits	Risks and issues
Quick and easy to apply	Prioritisation of strengths and areas for improvement cannot be ascertained
Can involve all the organisation's people	Accuracy of feedback is dependent upon the phrasing of the original questions
Supports communication efforts	There may be questionnaire fatigue within the organisation
Can be used in conjunction with other methods	Expectations can be raised and unfulfilled if timely, appropriate actions do not occur

Benefits	Risks and issues
The questions asked can be customised to suit the organisation	Questionnaires tell you what people think, not why they think it
Enables the organisation to receive feedback which can be segmented by function and by level	Does not allow for direct comparison with scoring profiles of other quality models
Can give a good visual reference if results are graphed	Scores can be derived, but can only be used realistically as trend data, rather than real scores

(HEFCE – Applying self-assessment against the EFQM excellence model in further and higher education 2003:10)

Workshop method

The workshop method can have five distinct phases:

- The development of understanding and shared purpose
- The gathering of information across the criteria of the Model
- Scoring the evidence gathered
- Identification and prioritisation of improvement actions
- Review

This is the most flexible of the methods, and is dependent on the time and resources within the organisation and skill of the facilitator. It is possible to undertake a self-assessment in one or two workshop sessions which are carefully planned, managed, and facilitated. Usually these phases will be undertaken throughout the session, although the review process may need to follow later in order to check progress against actions.

The proposed workshop format in 7.4.1.2 has the following benefits, risks and issues as summarised in Table 50.

Table 50: Benefits, risks and issues of proposed workshop

Benefits	Risks and issues
An excellent way to familiarise teams with the model	It is less robust than some of the other methods, as the information is based mainly on the opinion of those in the workshop
Supports team building	Requires expert facilitation, preparation, planning and management
An agreed list of strengths and areas for improvement is produced which helps drive improvement actions	Evidence of assessment, review and deployment can be difficult to assess
Allows for discussion and agreement regarding the strengths and areas for improvement, allowing a common view to be agreed	Can result in unrealistic, often over generous scoring
Encourages ownership and motivation towards taking the outcomes forward and ensure improvement actions are undertaken	

(HEFCE – Applying self-assessment against the EFQM excellence model in further and higher education 2003:11)

7.2.5 International trends in quality assurance and the South African Quality Assurance Framework

Based on observation on international trends in quality assurance, models in most countries include the following elements:

- A national co-ordinating body or bodies (six in the USA)
- A national framework that promotes development and self-reflection
- Institutional self-evaluation within a fitness for purpose approach
- External evaluation by academic peers; and
- Published reports

In the first two chapters reference was made to the South African Quality Assurance Framework, specifically the legislative framework requiring higher education institutions to comply with the SAQA Act (Act no 58 of 1995) and the

HEQC that has statutory responsibility to conduct institutional audits as indicated in the Higher Education Act of 1997.

It was pointed out that the quality assurance framework and criteria of the HEQC is based on a multi-faceted definition of quality comprising:

- Fitness of purpose based on national goals, priorities and targets
- Fitness for purpose in relation to a specified mission with a national framework that encompasses differentiation and diversity
- Value for money
- Transformation

The **fitness for purpose approach** is perhaps the best suited regarding quality and continuous improvement considering the unique characteristics of higher education institutions. This approach has a fundamental questioning of the "mission" and "purpose" of the institution and all operational unity in terms of:

Table 51: Questioning of the "mission" and "purpose" of the institution and all operational unity

Mission	**What** are we trying to do?
Structures and process	**Why** and **how** are we trying to do it?
Responsibility and accountability	**Who** is doing it?
Feedback improvement	**How** do the **system** and the **people** involved improve?

7.2.6   Which quality model for the higher education sector?

The three quality models were discussed and analysed in chapters 3 and 4, and Table 52 provides a comparison of the three quality models:

Table 52: Comparison of the three quality models

Malcolm Baldrige	EFQM	SAEM
1 Leadership	1 Leadership	1 Leadership
2 Strategic planning	2 People	2 Policy and strategy
3 Customer and market focus	3 Policy and strategy	3 Customer and market focus
4 Information and analysis	4 Partnerships and resources	4 People management
5 Human resource focus	5 Processes	5 Resources and information management
6 Process management	6 People results	6 Processes
7 Business results	7 Customer results	7 Impact on society
	8 Society results	8 Customer satisfaction
	9 Key performance results	9 People satisfaction
		10 Supplier and partnership performance
		11 Business results

Any of these models can be used in a higher education environment. Some institutions would prefer to use the MBNQA or the EFQM to benchmark themselves with overseas higher education institutions. In terns of direct benchmarking, it would be difficult to directly benchmark the criterion and sub-criterion as they are all subtly different. What could be achieved, however, is a more general benchmarking of themes or 'approaches". A look at processes and the process architecture of differing institutions using the different models could be considered eg the HR approaches, the development of performance management systems and indicators could be benchmarked.

The Sheffield Hallam Consortium looked at the Baldrige from a benchmarking perspective as they wanted to see how other higher education institutions have approached and implemented quality management, and some of the initiatives that

were subsequently put in place like communication, leadership development, and performance management.

7.3   Research conclusions and recommendations

The main objective of the thesis was to: "contextualise and integrate quality models to provide a framework for continuous improvement in higher education institutions". The main objective also comprised seven sub-objectives and the conclusions and recommendations are provided in 7.3.1 to 7.8.1.

7.3.1 Phase 1: Proposed self-assessment quality workshops for higher education institutions

7.3.1.1   Conclusions

Prior to the completion of a self-assessment questionnaire, a workshop should be held to explain all the quality concepts and ensure that the respondents all share the same understanding. It is important for the concepts to be explored and interpreted by individuals and then contextualised in individual terms, if the context of higher education institution systems, processes and understanding of their individual and collective situation is to be reflected accurately. Specific concepts like leaders, clients, stakeholders, process should be clearly defined.

7.3.1.2   Recommendations

When introducing quality principles in the higher education sector, it is important to share and understand the concepts fully. Putting the emphasis on the fundamental concepts in a positive way, which is not interpreted as challenging any of the existing values that may already be apparent in the institution, can be a helpful introduction to the SAEM.

To move straight into an explanation of the SAEM itself can create confusion and can lead to issues around the language of the SAEM. On a practical level, it leads to an academic analysis of the SAEM itself, its validity and evidence base,

providing a digression which hinders consideration of the principles on which it is based.

7.3.1.2.1   Proposed self-assessment methodology

It is proposed that the self-assessment methodology should comprise workshops and questionnaires.

7.3.1.2.2   Proposed self-assessment quality workshop

A two-hour workshop should provide an overview of:
- Issues facing higher education institutions
- International excellence models
- Excellence models in higher education
- The SAEM

7.3.2   Phase 2 and 5: Proposed Higher Education Sector Level 3 questionnaire and benchmarking format

7.3.2.1   Conclusions

The SAEM Public Sector Level 3 questionnaire, if adapted, can be used in the Southern African higher education sector. In adapting the questionnaire, the following issues need to be addressed:

7.3.2.1.1   Questionnaire format

- Applying terminology that is used in higher education
- Defining terminology
- Defining criteria
- Clarifying criterion parts
- Clarifying areas to address

7.3.2.1.2   Scoring format

- The four-point scale as proposed by the SAEF should be used.

7.3.2.1.3   Scoring the enablers and results

Scores 1-4 for the enablers, need to be defined as well as scores 1-4 for the results.

7.3.2.2   Recommendations

7.3.2.2.1   Proposed questionnaire format

The adapted SAEM public sector level 3 self-assessment questionnaire is provided in **Appendix 2 – Proposed Higher Education Level 3 Questionnaire**

Table 53: Proposed scoring

SAEM level 3 – Public service				SAEM level 3 – Higher education			
Scoring the enablers and results				Scoring the enablers and results			
1	2	3	4	0	1	2	3
Not started	Some progress	Good progress	Fully achieved	Not started	Some progress	Good progress	Fully achieved

Table 54: Proposed enabler scoring

Areas of improvement are scores of 0 and 1	
Score 0 (not started)	• Someone may have some good ideas, but nothing has happened yet
Score 1 (some progress)	• Some evidence of soundly based, systematic approaches and prevention based systems • Subject to occasional review • Some areas of integration into normal operations
Strengths are scores of 2 and 3	
Score 2 (good progress)	• Evidence of soundly based, systematic approaches and prevention based systems • Subject to regular review with respect to institutional effectiveness • Integration into normal operations and planning well established

Score 3 (fully achieved)	• Clear evidence of soundly based, systematic approach and prevention based systems
	• Clear evidence of refinement and improved institutional effectiveness through review cycles
	• Approach has become totally integrated into normal working patterns
	• Could be used as a role model for other institutions

Table 55: Proposed results scoring

Areas of improvement are scores of 0 and 1	
Score 0 (no measurements	• No data available. No results or information at all
Score 1(some measurements)	• Some results show positive trends and /or satisfactory performance
	• Some favourable comparisons with own targets
Strengths are scores of 2 and 3	
Score 2 (3-year trend)	• Many results show positive trend and/or sustained good continued performance over at least three years
	• Favourable comparisons with own targets in many cases
	• Favourable comparisons with external organisations in many areas
Score 3 (excellent 3- year trend	• Most results show strong positive trends and/or sustained excellent performance over at least three years
	• Favourable comparisons with own targets in most cases
	• Favourable comparisons with external organisations in many areas
	• Many results are caused by approach

IMPORTANT NOTE: Descriptive evidence in the form of charts, graphs and/or tables that demonstrate relevant trends should be included as attachments when answering this particular section of the questionnaire.

7.3.2.3 **Proposed format to benchmark faculties and service departments**

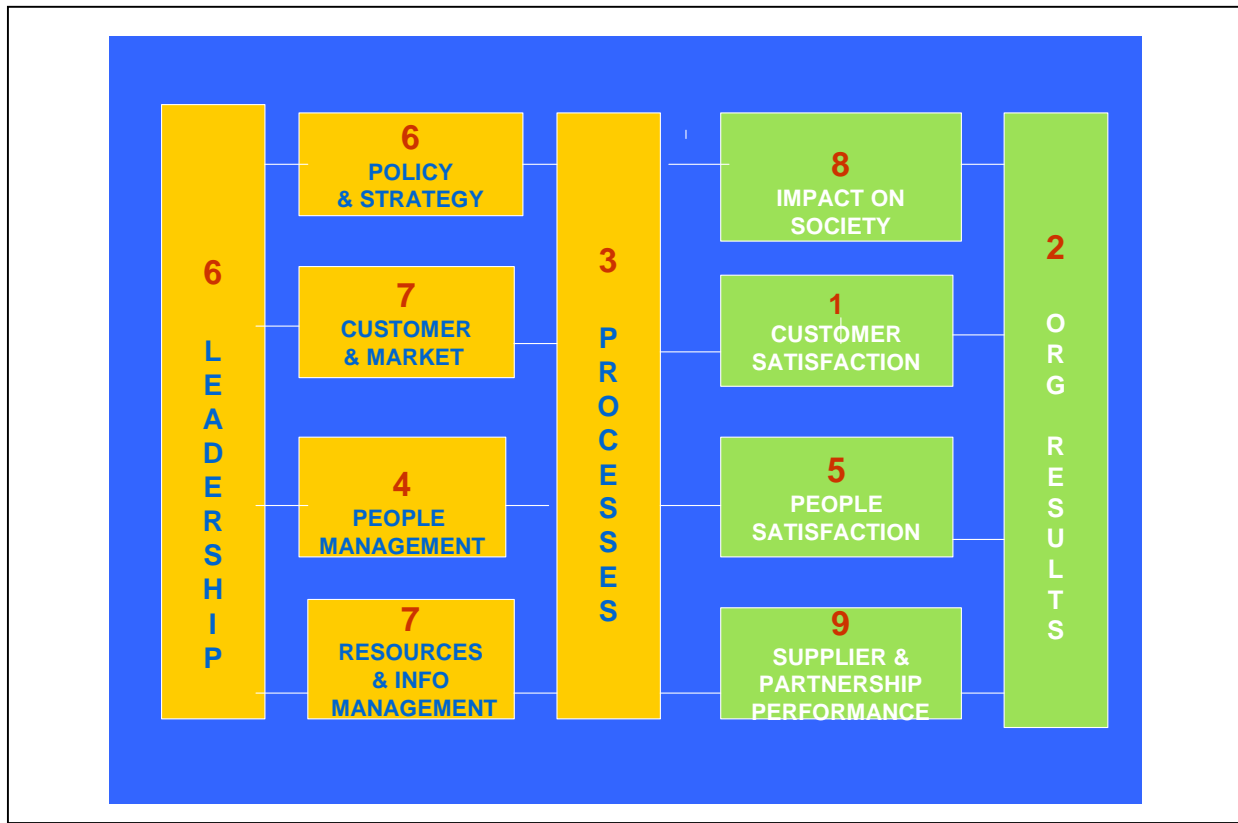**7.3.2.3.1** **Conclusions**

The results of SAEM can be used to benchmark faculties and service departments in a higher education institution. The results can also be used to benchmark institutions in the higher education sector in Southern Africa as well as benchmarking with the EFQM and the Malcolm Baldrige awards to determine best practices.

The summary of the SAEM results provides an opportunity to compare rankings of faculty and departmental criteria and to determine which criteria are most in need of addressing the areas to improve.

7.3.2.3.2 **Recommendations – Proposed benchmarking format**

It is proposed that the criteria where there is the biggest difference between the **actual score** and the **weighted score** be ranked on the SAEM as follows:

Fig 51: Ranking of the criteria where there is the biggest difference between the actual score and the weighted score on the SAEM

7.3.3 Phase 3: Self-assessment results linked to the SWOT strategy and the BSC

7.3.3.1 Conclusions

Positioning self-assessment as part of an integral planning approach, ensures that the **real** strengths and areas for improvement are addressed in the strategic objectives. Using self-assessment as part of the planning process can lead to a greater clarity of focus and more resourceful and strategically focused plans. Furthermore, linking the strategic objectives to the BSC, ensures that the objectives are quantified and measured.

7.3.3.2   Recommendations

It is proposed that a strategy session provide a programme comprising an overview relevant to the specific unit/school/department/faculty. The programme will also comprise a strategic framework and process as set out in Table 56.

Table 56: Proposed strategy programme

Time	Objective	Activities	Responsible
10h30-12H30	Overview	• Issues facing higher education institutions • Higher education quality models • The SAEM • Faculty/Department SAEM results • Prioritising strengths and areas for improvement	
13h00-16h00	Strategy	• Vision • Mission • Actual business • Purpose • Markets and key clients • Technology utilisation • Geographical areas • Competitive advantage • Core values • Image • Organisational structure • SWOT • Priorities • Action plans • Balanced Scorecard	Departments

It is proposed that the following strategic framework (Fig 52) be used during the strategy session as it is applicable to higher education institutions.

Fig 52: Proposed strategic framework

(EFQM – http://www.excellene.shu.ac.uk)

It is proposed that the strategic process (Fig 53) be followed as it is applicable to higher education institutions.
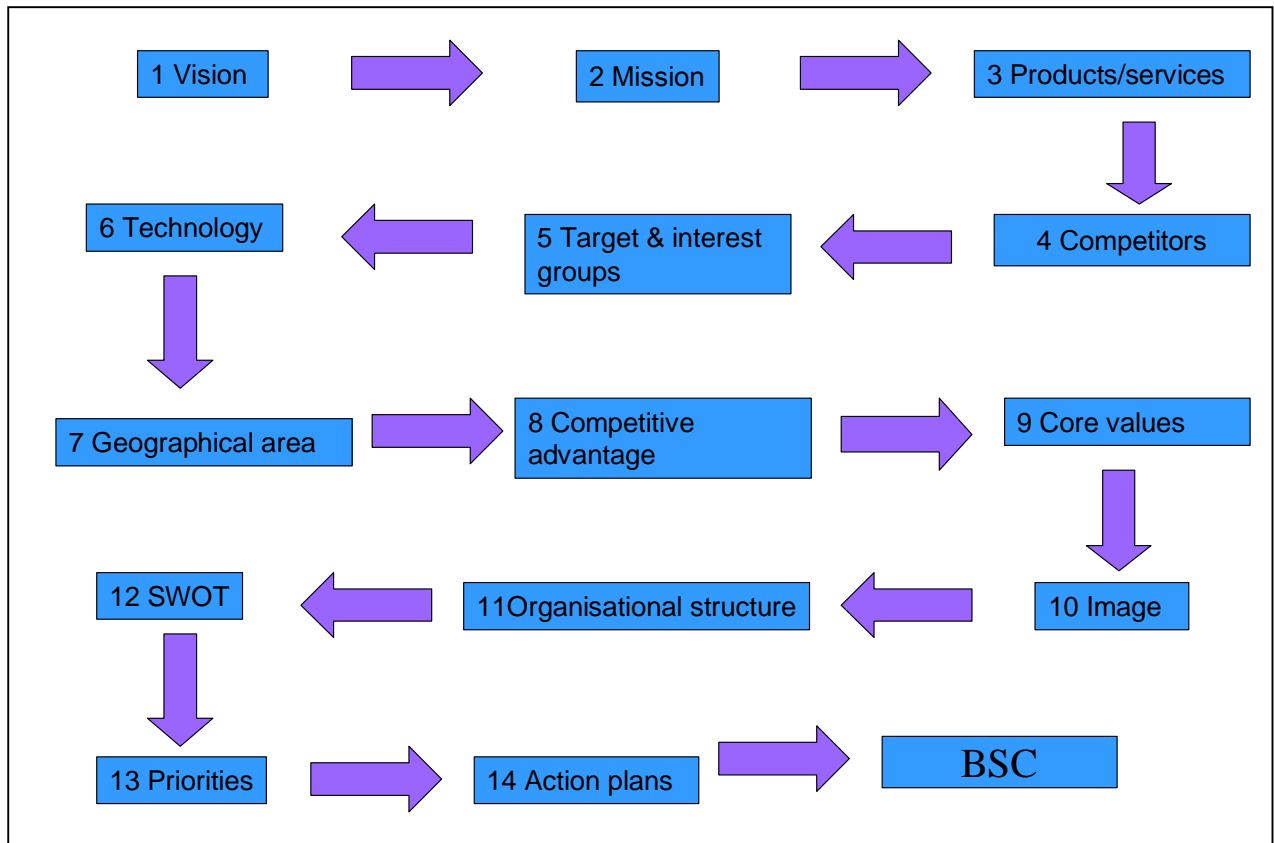
Fig 53: Proposed strategic process

1 Vision	→	2 Mission	→	3 Products/services
6 Technology	←	5 Target & interest groups	←	4 Competitors
7 Geographical area	→	8 Competitive advantage	→	9 Core values
12 SWOT	←	11 Organisational structure	←	10 Image
13 Priorities	→	14 Action plans	→	BSC

Table 57: Proposed format for listing strategic objectives

Objective	Key actions	Resp	Date

Table 58: Proposed format for ranking the criteria

RANKING	CRITERIA	DIFFERENCE
1	Customer satisfaction	27
2	Results	17
3	Processes	16
4	People and people satisfaction	14
5	Leadership	13
6	Strategy and customers	9
7	Social responsibility	8
8	Supplier and partnership and resources	5

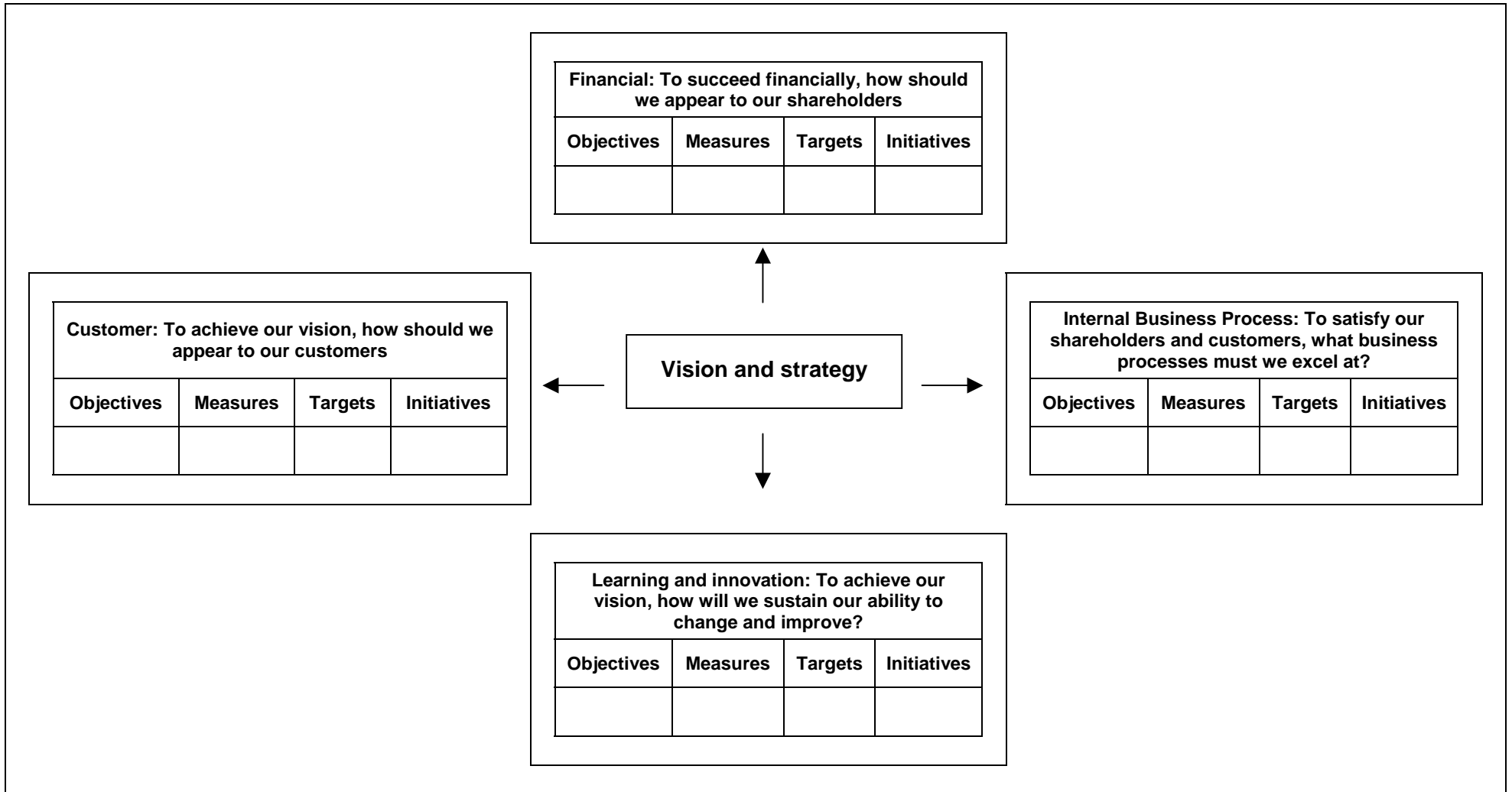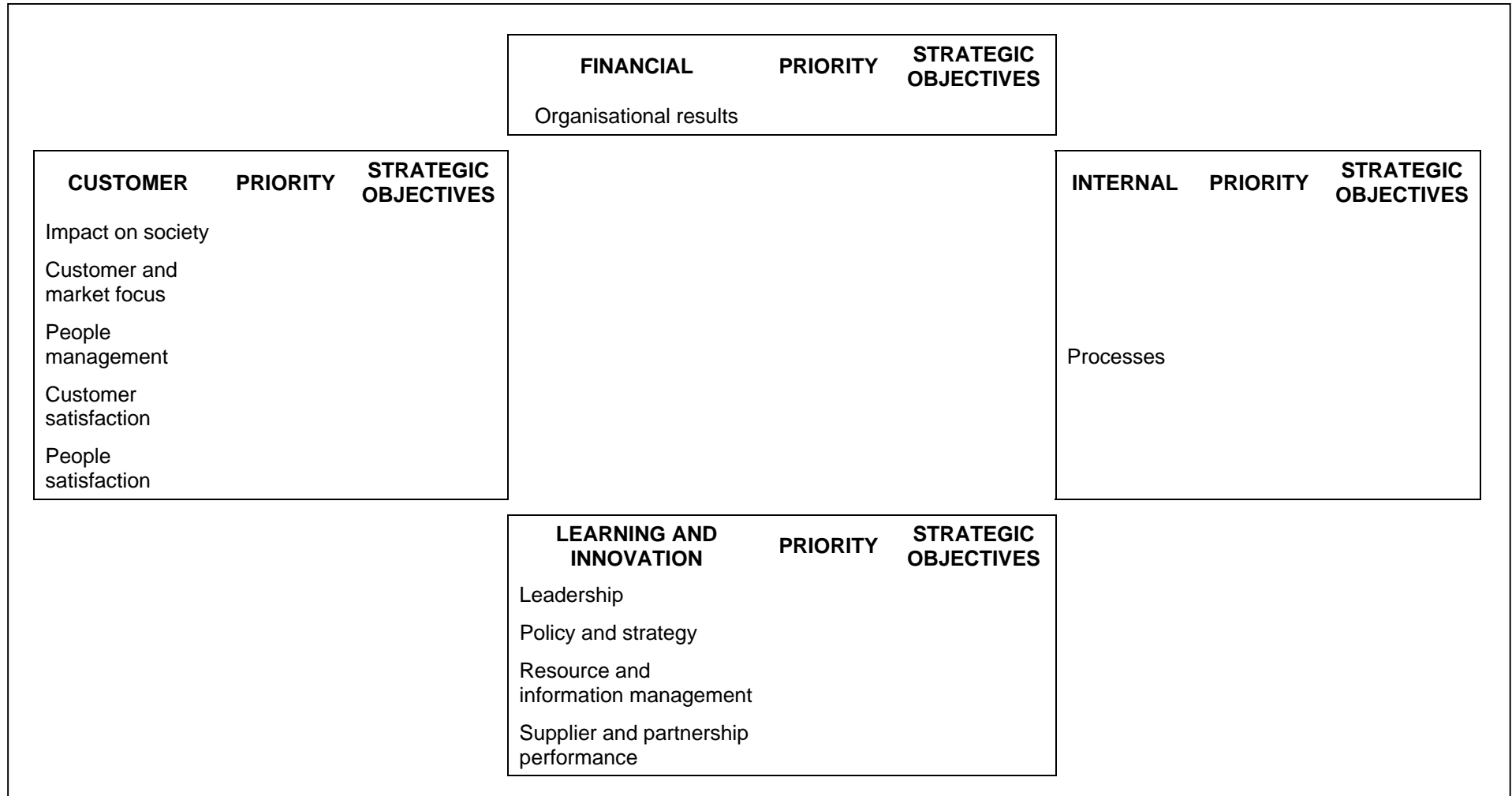**Fig 54: Proposed format to link faculty/department strategic objectives to the BSC**

Fig 55: Proposed format to plot SAEM priorities and strategic objectives on the BSC

FINANCIAL	PRIORITY	STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES
Organisational results		

CUSTOMER	PRIORITY	STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES
Impact on society		
Customer and market focus		
People management		
Customer satisfaction		
People satisfaction		

INTERNAL	PRIORITY	STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES
Processes		

LEARNING AND INNOVATION	PRIORITY	STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES
Leadership		
Policy and strategy		
Resource and information management		
Supplier and partnership performance		

7.3.3.3   Proposed linking of disciplines for example marketing and communication to quality models
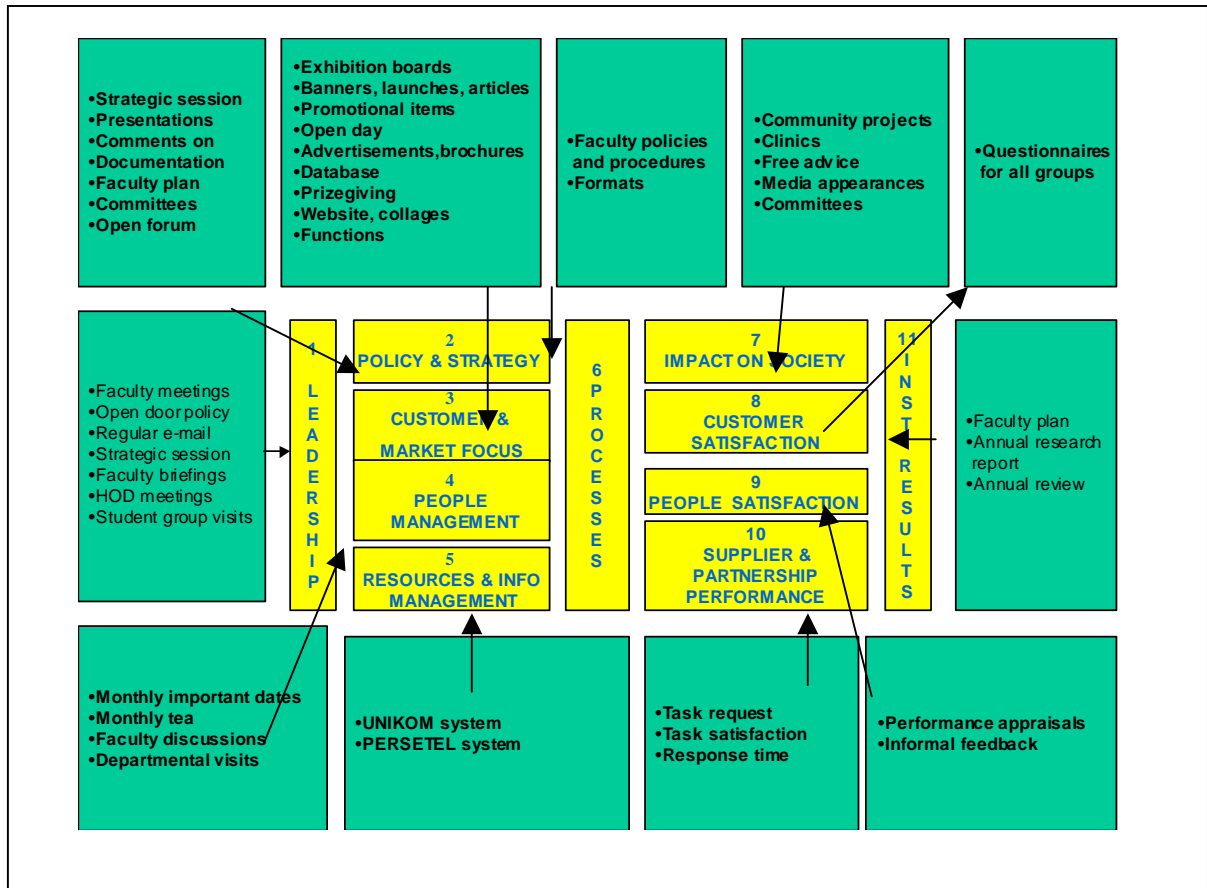
7.3.3.3.1   Conclusions

The initiatives of the various disciplines for example Marketing and communication, HR, Finance, and IT can be linked to the SAEM. This will ensure that all the initiatives are geared at addressing the areas for improvement according to the priority criteria. For example, if Criteria 1 (Leadership) is ranked as the top criteria priority, the disciplines can ensure that their initiatives are prioritised to address this issue.

Each of the strategic objectives could be broken down into the objective, key action, responsibility and date. These key marketing and communication activities could be detailed into the various types of communication for example functions, publications, electronic communication, advertisements, liaison, and research according to a year plan.

7.3.3.3.2 Recommendations

Fig 56: Proposed format to link marketing and communication initiatives to the SAEM

7.3.2 Phase 4: Proposed linking of continuous improvement initiatives for the higher education sector to quality models

7.3.3.1 Conclusions

It is clear from the lessons learnt from the Malcolm Baldrige Award and the EFQM, that higher education institutions need to have certain non-negotiable issues in place to ensure continuous improvement.

Regarding each of the criteria, certain initiatives have emerged that need to considered in the Southern African higher education sector. These initiatives are described in 7.7.2.1.

7.3.3.2   Recommendations

7.3.3.2.1   A framework for linking continuous improvement initiatives for the higher education sector to the SAEM

Based on the lessons learnt from Malcolm Baldrige and the EFQM, certain initiatives should be considered as guidelines when considering initiatives to address criteria

Fig 57: A framework for linking continuous improvement initiatives for the higher education sector to the SAEM
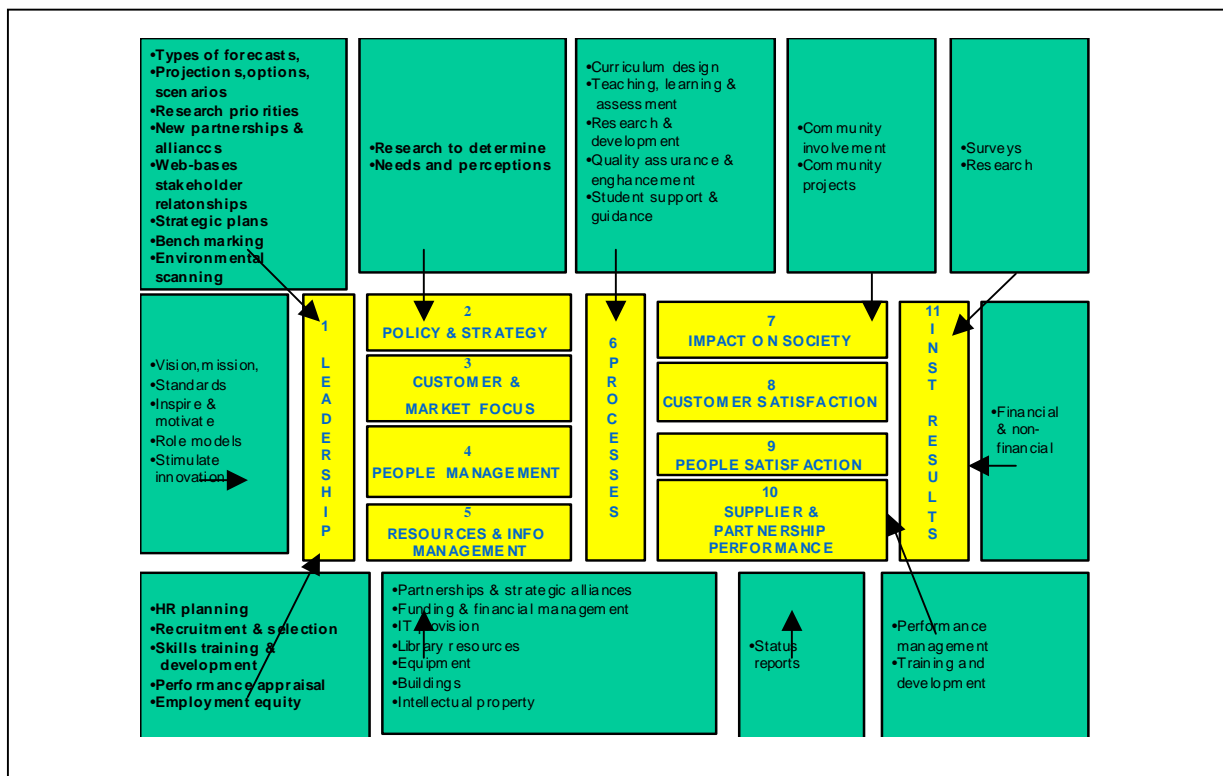
7.3.5. Phase 6: A framework for continuous improvement for the higher education sector, based on quality models

7.3.5.1.   Conclusions

All South African higher education institutions are required to apply for accreditation as stipulated by the HEQC. Although most institutions have been

using **academic self-assessment** methodology for many years, very few, if any have embarked on the journey of **institutional self-assessment**.

Institutional self-assessment is a process and comprises a combination of self-assessment methodologies. It is proposed that a **self-assessment workshop** be conducted prior to the completion of the **SAEM higher education questionnaire**. At the strategic session, it is proposed that the findings of the questionnaire be verified and that the **proposed strategy programme, strategic framework, process** and the **proposed formats for listing strategic objectives, ranking the criteria, linking objectives to the BSC and plotting SAEM priorities and strategic objectives on the BSC**, be used.

It is also proposed that the findings of the self-assessment process be used to **benchmark** faculties, departments at higher education institutions, but that higher institutions also be benchmarked in Southern Africa and then with other quality models worldwide to share best practices.

This whole process is proposed in the framework in Fig 58.

7.3.5.2   Recommendations

Fig 58: A proposed framework for continuous improvement in the higher education sector
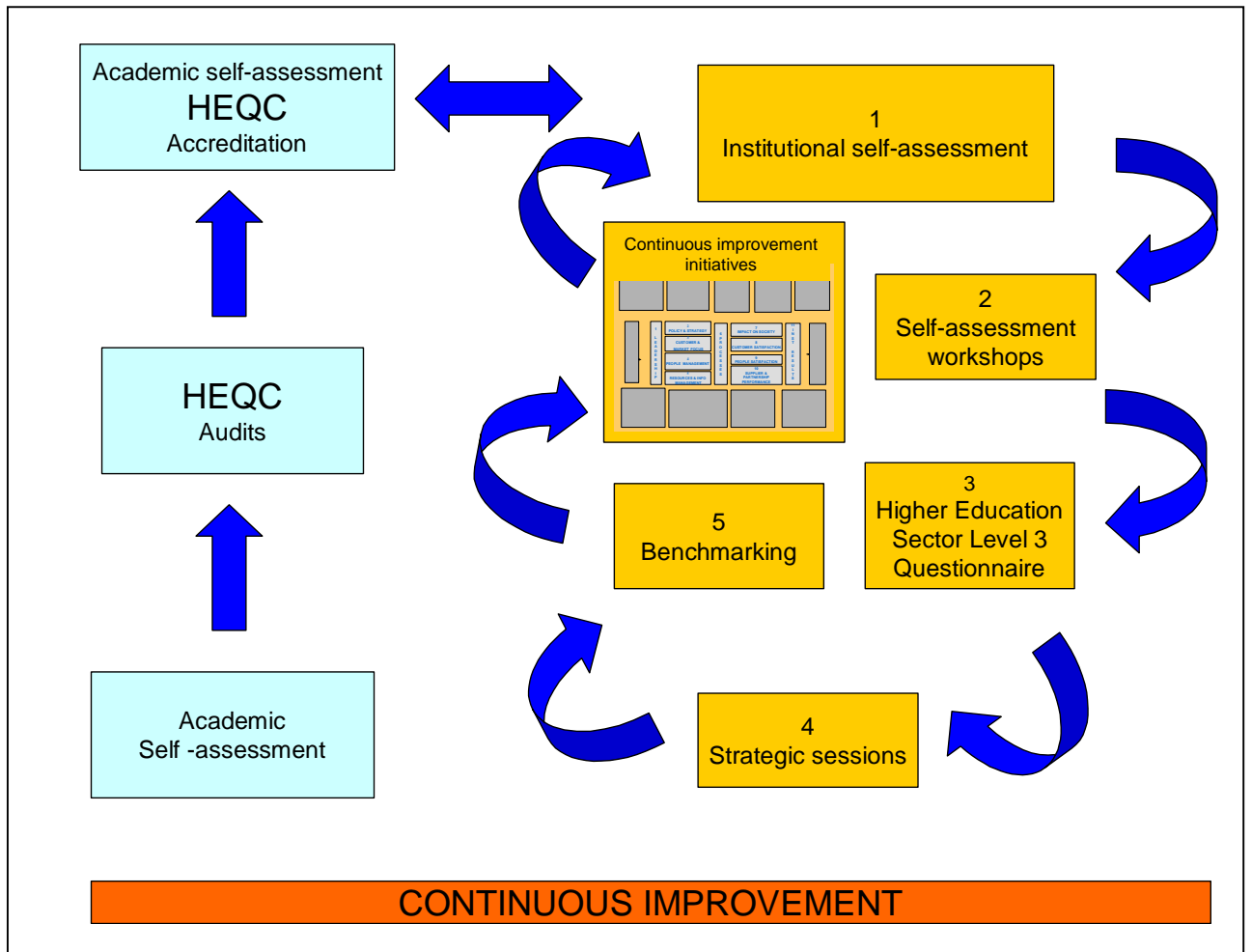
7.4   Proposals for future research

Given the number of role players in the South African Higher Education sector, the possibilities of commissioned research, theses and dissertations on the topic of continuous improvement, and particularly institutional self-assessment, is virtually limitless.

7.4.1 Department of Education research

The Department of Education (DoE), has given the responsibility for quality assurance to the Council on Higher Education (CHE), who in turn have appointed the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) to manage the quality assurance activities of all public and private providers operating in the higher education band.

The first cycle of HEQC audits start in 2004-2009 to measure the actual quality of the outputs to teaching and learning, research and service learning. If the general objectives of the audits are met, higher education institutions will be able to assure themselves, their stakeholders and the HEQC, that their policies, systems and processes for the development, maintenance and enhancement of quality in all its educational offerings are functioning effectively.

These audits, however, will not necessarily measure institutional quality criteria as provided in the quality models. The HEQC could consider complimenting their audits with self-assessment quality models that have been adapted by higher education institutions in the United States and the United Kingdom. This will allow benchmarking of South African higher institutions with higher institutions worldwide.

7.4.2 South African higher education institutions, faculty and departmental research

Higher education institutions, faculties and departments could only benefit by using a quality model and the self-assessment process to research where they are

now, considering where they want to improve and then making decisions on how to get there.

7.4.3   Researching disciplines in higher education institutions

The disciplines like Human Resources, Finances, Marketing and Communication, IT, and Facilities management can use quality models to research where their areas for improvement and strengths are, and align them to the overall strategy of the institution to ensure that they add value to the institution.

7.4.4   Benchmark research

Higher education institutions, faculties and departments can use quality models to benchmark themselves within the institution, with other South African higher education institutions as well as international higher education institutions.

7.5   Concluding remarks

The higher education sector worldwide is being challenged with issues it has never faced before. Although it is acknowledged that these institutions are unique, there is also growing acceptance that general management principles need to be adopted if these institutions are to survive the 21st century.

Academic and institutional quality will be what sets the institutions apart from each other. The commitment to continuous improvement will become a necessity, not an option, for survival.

The continuous improvement journey is a long and arduous one as borne out by this thesis, the lessons learnt from other organisations and higher education institutions worldwide. However, if institutions are willing to commit resources and focus on long-term objectives, they will discover that it is worthwhile in the long run.