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Assessing the Market Orientation of Higher Education Institutions in Ireland

Research Article

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Abstract: There is a link between market orientation (MO) and higher education institution (HEI) performance. However, conceptualisations of MO in a HEI context are limited in their development. A review of the literature provides a specific higher education conceptualisation. This conceptualisation is utilised to undertake a content analysis of the strategic plans of six HEIs in Ireland. The data can be interpreted as identifying the MO of the HEIs. Furthermore, the MO of different HEI types as well as individual HEIs was determined. This paper provides a conceptual framework to assess the MO of HEIs that can provide guidance on future actions to enhance performance.

Keywords: *Market orientation, market orientated, market oriented, higher education*

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INTRODUCTION

Market orientation (MO), a foundational concept in the discipline of marketing, can be understood as the degree to which a firm undertakes behaviours in generating and responding to information about customers and competitors to create value (Bhattarai, Kwong and Tasavori, 2019; Sahi, Lonial, Gupta and Seli, 2013). Ample evidence supports the benefits of MO on customer, performance and employee-related outcomes (Modi and Sahi, 2018). Furthermore, studies also support the positive impacts of MO for not-for-profit organisations on a range of performance indicators including customer and stakeholder satisfaction which in turn enhance economic performance (Bhattarai et al., 2019).

The link between MO and higher education institution (HEI) performance has also been empirically established (Abou-Warda, 2014; Casidy, 2014). For example, research on the relationship between MO and the performance of academic staff (Flavian and Lozano, 2007; Kűster and Avilés-Valenzuela, 2010), on student satisfaction (Casidy, 2014; Tanrikulu and Gelibolu, 2015; Tran, Blankson and Roswinanto, 2015), as well as on a range of assessments of HEI performance (Asaad, Melewar and Cohen, 2015; Hammond and Webster, 2014), appears quite strong.

The mission, culture and structure of HEIs is different vis-à-vis for-profit organisations (Akonkwa, 2009). Therefore, the transposition of the MO concept for HEIs, while argued as warranted, is far from straightforward (Akonkwa, 2009; Llonch, Casablancas-Segura and Alarcón-del-Amo, 2016; Rivera-Camino and Molero Ayala, 2010). That is the MO concept should be 'context-specific' (Akonkwa, 2009: 312). The 'context-specific' aspects of implementing a MO in a HEI requiring consideration are significant, namely the treatment of students, stakeholders including academic staff and competitors and the measurement of HEI performance.

The treatment of students as customers of a HEI is not appropriate (Guilbault, 2016). Furthermore, HEI's have a variety of additional stakeholders including academic staff both teaching and research, administrative and

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service personnel, employers, donors, sponsors, alumni, potential students and families as well as society as whole (De Sabando, Forcado and Zorrilla, 2018). Thus, a stakeholder rather than customer orientation may be more appropriate (De Sabando et al., 2018). In addition, the relationship of HEIs with other HEIs is different; HEIs collaborate as well as compete (De Sabando et al., 2018; Akonkwa, 2009). Performance measurement is also different, having to take into account the diverse range of stakeholders who need to be satisfied. In summary, while there is significant literature that supports the appropriateness of MO for HEIs (Rivera-Camino and Molero Ayala, 2010), MO as it relates to HEIs is different (Scullion, Molesworth and Nixon, 2011).

Examinations of market orientation in higher education, whether of a specific programme, institution, country/countries or in a public/private context from the United States, the United Kingdom, Spain, Australia and New Zealand, have been published (Caruana, Ramaseshan and Ewing, 1998a; Dubas, Ghani, Davis and Strong, 1998; Dwyer, 2019; Flavian and Lozano, 2006; Hammond and Webster, 2014; Voon, 2006; Yu, Asaad, Yen and Gupta, 2018). However, the conceptualisations of MO utilised can be argued as flawed (Dwyer, 2022 and 2019; Llonch et al., 2016; Rivera-Camino and Molero Ayala, 2010; Akonkwa, 2009) or still needing further advancement (Dwyer, 2022; Llonch et al., 2016; Rivera-Camino and Molero Ayala, 2010; Akonkwa, 2009). Conceptualisations are predominately rooted in the for-profit behavioural and or cultural perspectives of MO and resultantly adapt their survey-based measures. Whereas the contingencies of higher education suggest revisions of the MO concept are required (Llonch et al., 2016) rather than just 'plugging' it in (Akonkwa, 2009; Hemsley-Brown and Oplatka, 2010). Bespoke conceptualisations are as of now still few in number (Dwyer, 2022; Llonch et al., 2016; Rivera-Camino and Molero Ayala, 2010; Akonkwa, 2009).

In the context of the previous discussion the purpose of this paper is therefore twin fold (1) to propose a HEI relevant conceptualisation of MO and (2) to utilise said conceptualisation to assess its value.

There are implications of a less than robust or underdeveloped conceptualisation of MO for the management and development of higher education institutions in reaping the potential performance related benefits (Dwyer, 2019). A refined conceptualisation of MO in a HEI context offers the potential of measurement thus enabling a HEI to know where it is and where it needs to get to.

To meet these purposes, this paper will initially set out literature on how MO is conceptualised, including more specifically in a HEI context as well as proposing a refined conceptualisation. Subsequently, details of the methodology to assess the value of the conceptualisation will be set out - a content analysis categorising the content of the strategic plans of HEIs. Consequently, findings related to the implementation of the conceptualisation will be presented. The paper concludes with an overview of its contribution to the research field.

CONCEPTUALISING MARKET ORIENTATION

This literature review will initially outline the dominant behavioural and cultural perspectives on MO and how they have been adapted with regards to HEIs. Subsequently, more HEI relevant conceptualisations of MO will be outlined prior to setting out a refined conceptualisation.

Behavioural approach

There are various conceptualisations of MO (Lafferty and Hult, 1999; van Raaij and Stoelhorst, 2008), of which the behavioural and cultural perspectives can be argued as seminal (Crick, 2021). The behavioural approach was proposed by Kohli and Jaworski (1990) and is as mentioned seminal (Vaikunthavasan, Jebarajakirthy and Shankar, 2019). Kohli and Jaworski (1990) describe MO as a set of marketing activities or behaviours (Gray and Hooley, 2002; Lafferty and Hult, 1999), hence its description. Specifically, Kohli and Jaworski (1990: 6) outline that 'Market orientation is the organization-wide generation of market intelligence pertaining to current and future customer needs, dissemination of the intelligence across departments, and organization-wide responsiveness to it'. The three behavioural dimensions inherent in the definition were brought together by Kohli, Jaworski and Kumar (1993) in the MARKOR measurement scale.

Researchers examining MO in a higher education context have utilised this behavioural approach to conceptualising MO more than any other (Dwyer, 2022). For example, Tran et al., (2015) in a paper examining the effects of market orientation on student satisfaction conceptualised MO as having three behavioural components, namely, intelligence generation, intelligence dissemination and responsiveness. Likewise, Flavián

and Lozano (2006) in a study to identify factors that influence the level of market orientation adopted by HEI academic staff in their activities of teaching, research and cultural diffusion undertook a behavioural analysis of their generation, dissemination and response capacity.

The behavioural perspective to conceptualising MO is as mentioned significant in the HEI literature. Furthermore, this behavioural approach, has been adapted to the complexities and uniqueness of the HEI context. Thus, the papers look beyond just information gathering from a solely a student point of view to taking a wider environmental and stakeholder view that acknowledges the relevance of industry/employers, employees as well as society (Asaad, Melewar, Cohen and Balmer, 2013; Asaad et al., 2015; Caruana et al., 1998a, Caruana, Ramaseshan and Ewing, 1998b; Felgueira and Rodrigues, 2015; Flavián and Lozano, 2006; Kumar, 2016; Kűster and Avilés-Valenzuela, 2010; Nagy and Berács, 2012; Vaikunthavasan et al., 2019; Yu et al., 2018; Zakaria, Roslin and Daud, 2011).

Cultural approach

No less seminal than the behavioural approach to conceptualising MO is the cultural approach (Vaikunthavasan, et al., 2019). Narver and Slater (1990) describe MO as a culture or philosophy (Gray and Hooley, 2002). Specifically, Narver and Slater (1990) outline 'Market orientation is the organizational culture that most effectively and efficiently creates the necessary behaviors for the creation of superior value for buyers and, thus, continues superior performance for the business' (Narver and Slater, 1990: 21). Consequently, Narver and Slater (1990) measured the implementation of this cultural approach to MO via three behavioural components: customer orientation, competitor orientation and inter-functional coordination; and two decision criteria, long-term focus and profitability. This conceptualisation of MO was operationalised by Narver and Slater (1990) via the MKTOR measurement scale.

A number of papers in the HEI literature draw on the cultural perspective of MO. For example, Hemsley-Brown and Oplatka (2010) in a study focused on MO at a faculty level which adapted the three behavioural dimensions outlined by Narver and Slater (1990). Thus, student orientation assumes faculties understand the HEI's target markets thoroughly and are capable of creating and providing superior value. Competitor orientation assumes the HEI and faculty managers aim to fully understand the strengths and weaknesses of competing HEIs. Finally, inter-functional coordination assumes a core belief shared by all members of the HEI that creating superior value for target customers is significant for success in a competitive marketplace. Furthermore, this inter-functional coordination can only be achieved through the integration and coordination of the HEI's resources.

In summary, similar to the behavioural approach, the cultural approach to assessing MO has been adapted to the specific HEI context taking account of the variety of stakeholders (Hammond and Webster, 2014; Hammond, Webster, and Harmon, 2006; Ross, Grace, and Shao, 2013; Wasmer and Bruner, 2000).

An integrationist perspective

Not surprisingly MO can be considered as a 'hybrid' incorporating both cultural and behavioural aspects (Gainer and Padanyi, 2005: 854; Homburg and Pflesser, 1990). The conceptualisations of MO with regards HEIs have also drawn on this combination of the behavioural and cultural (Casidy, 2014; Tanrikulu and Gelibolu, 2015; Ahmed Zebal and Goodwin, 2012; Akonkwa, 2009; Voon, 2008, 2006). Two particular studies building on the cultural and behavioural MKTOR and MARKOR approaches are of note.

Abou-Warda (2014) proposed a sustainable market orientation (SMO) model. This SMO model incorporates a social marketing approach that takes into account the well-being of society inclusive of stakeholders (employees including faculty, students, the local community, competitors, recruiting firms and media), an environmental/ ecological orientation, an innovation orientation and a sustainable value co-creation approach reflecting the role of HEIs in supporting student value creating processes. This SMO approach means striving for stakeholder value co-creation consistent with the ideal of economic, social and environmental sustainability. This SMO framework has value not only in providing a HEI adapted framework of MO but also reflecting the evolution in the marketing concept.

Also, HEI relevant and taking an integrationist perspective are Rivera-Camino and Molero Ayala (2009) who presented a university market orientation (UMO) model. The UMO model expands on the cultural MKTOR and behavioural MARKOR scales and has the following components: (1) student orientation, (2) employee/faculty

orientation, (3) competitor orientation, (4) company-donor orientation, (5) environment orientation and (6) inter-functional coordination. As a note a company-donor orientation includes donors, government agencies, corporate clients, volunteers and companies that can hire students who have graduated.

These latter two studies cited are the most relevant of the behavioural and cultural frameworks in conceptualising MO for HEIs and thus thematically antecede the next section.

Higher education orientation

The cultural and behavioural conceptualisations of MO, which were developed for commercial organisations and have themselves been subject to significant critique, are argued as not appropriate for higher education (Alnawas, 2015; Hemsley-Brown and Oplatka, 2010). Higher education it is argued needs a bespoke conceptualisation of MO rather than adapted versions to address its uniqueness. Thus, alternatives albeit fewer in number than the behavioural and or cultural approaches have been proposed (Dwyer, 2022; Pavičić, Alfirević and Mihanović, 2009) albeit some are limited in their applicability (Rosi, Tuček, Potočan and Jurše, 2018; Kaklauskas, Daniūnas, Amaratunga, Urbonas, Lill, Gudauskas, D'amato, Trinkūnas and Jackutė, 2012). For example, Rosi et al., (2018) outline a survey-based framework for business schools in HEIs in developing transition economy countries. Similarly limited in its applicability is Kaklauskas et al.'s (2012) 'Life Cycle Process Model of a Market-Oriented and Student Centered Higher Education'. Nevertheless, there is literature that can serve as a guide for conceptualising MO in a higher education (HE) context.

Thus, Alnawas (2015) in a paper propose student orientation (SO). A SO approach advocates that decision making in HEIs should be based on the needs of students as well as academic faculty. A SO approach is about a collaboration between academic faculty and students in meeting their shared expectations. SO is operationalised as an index providing performance indicators to monitor the level of commitment of HEIs in serving the student market. Thus, the SO index evaluates: teaching and learning methods, programme development and management, effective personal tutoring system and coordinating student activities. Alnawas (2015) explains that a SO can build a more market-driven institution. The SO index is argued as "comprehensive, context-specific and tailored to reflect the specificity associated with and the nature of activities performed by HE institutions" when applying the construct of MO (Alnawas, 2015: 643-644). However, the SO approach can also be argued as too narrow a conceptualisation of MO with a limited focus on the external aspects of a HEI such as the market/competition and the broad set of stakeholders. Thus, this conceptualisation meets the criteria of being student oriented but debatably does not provide enough guidance for being a market-oriented HEI.

Similarly, Llonch et al., (2016) developed a multidimensional scale, stakeholder orientation, aiming to better reflect a HEI's long-term benefit to society. Market and stakeholder orientation as concepts are argued by Llonch et al., (2016) as not mutually exclusive but overlapping, however a stakeholder orientation is distinguished as not prioritising any one stakeholder. Specifically, the construct has five components namely beneficiary orientation (focused on stakeholders), resource acquisition orientation (focused on funders and patrons), peer orientation (focused on understanding and collaboration with other HEI's), environment orientation (focused on aligning the HEI with external communities), and inter-functional coordination (focused on the extent to which a HEIs activities are synergistically contributing to the institutional mission). This paper and the previous paper outlined arguably set the agenda for how MO should be conceptualised in a HE setting moving beyond existing MO perspectives to more HEI relevant conceptualisations.

Thus, from the literature reviewed, it is possible to propose a refined conceptualisation of MO relevant to the HE context: 'a culture with resulting behaviours, across all departments of the institution, that seeks to understand and respond to students, collaborating/partner institutions, competitors, parents, employees, employers, funders, other stakeholders as well as wider society and the external environment in an innovative and sustainable way'. Table 1 provides more details of this conceptualisation of MO.

The conceptual framework presented in Table 1 is presented as a comprehensive reflection of the HEI MO literature with eleven component orientations (each with a more detailed description) with the cultural and behavioural roots of MO acknowledged, the key stakeholders of a HEI specifically identified (e.g. academic staff, collaborating HEIs, parents) as well as other additional stakeholders. Furthermore, the societal role of HEIs as well as their need to respond to the environment including in a higher education context is recognised. The conceptualisation also reflects the role of HEIs as regards innovation and the sustainability of their outputs. In summary, Table 1 presents a framework for assessing the MO of HEIs.

Table 1: A conceptualisation of market orientation for HEIs

Components	Description of the component	Sample Supporting literature
Student orientation	A culture and behaviours aimed at understanding and continuing to satisfy the needs of students, including in the co-creation of value, while preserving their long-term welfare.	Abou-Warda, 2014; Alnawas, 2015; Rivera-Camino and Molero Ayala, 2009.
Employee orientation	A culture and behaviours aimed at understanding and continuing to satisfy the needs of employees (inclusive of teaching and research faculty and non-faculty) in the service of stakeholders.	Abou-Warda, 2014; Alnawas, 2015; Pavičić et al., 2009; Rivera-Camino and Molero Ayala, 2009.
Employer orientation	A culture and behaviours aimed at understanding and continuing to satisfy the needs of graduate employers.	Abou-Warda, 2014; Hammond and Webster, 2014; Hammond et al., 2006.
Competitor/ Collaboration orientation	A culture and behaviours aimed at understanding and competitively responding and or collaborating with other HEIs to better serve stakeholders.	Abou-Warda, 2014; Llonch et al., 2016; Rivera-Camino and Molero Ayala, 2010.
Parent orientation	A culture and behaviours aimed at understanding and continuing to satisfy the needs of students' parents.	Hammond and Webster, 2014; Hammond et al., 2006; Pavičić et al., 2009.
Resource orientation	A culture and behaviours aimed at understanding and continuing to satisfy the needs of those who provide sources of funding inclusive of governments and other donors.	Llonch et al., 2016; Rivera-Camino and Molero Ayala, 2010.
Stakeholder orientation	A culture and behaviours aimed at understanding and continuing to satisfy the needs of other relevant stakeholder communities including in the co-creation of value (with media, alumni, potential students, educational institutions etc.).	Abou-Warda, 2014; Alnawas, 2015; Llonch et al., 2016; Pavičić et al., 2009; Rivera-Camino and Molero Ayala, 2010; Rosi at al., 2018.
Inter-functional coordination	A culture and behaviours aimed at co-ordination and integration across the HEI in responding to stakeholder needs.	Abou-Warda, 2014; Llonch et al., 2016; Rivera-Camino and Molero Ayala, 2010.
Sustainable innovation orientation	A culture and behaviours aimed at the development of sustainable products, processes, services and technologies inclusive of research and innovation.	Abou-Warda, 2014.
Environment orientation	A culture and behaviours aimed at understanding and adapting to changes in the external environment including the higher education environment.	Llonch et al., 2016; Rivera-Camino and Molero Ayala, 2010; Rosi at al., 2018.
Societal orientation	A culture and behaviours aimed at understanding and contributing to the sustainability and well-being of society.	Abou-Warda, 2014; Flavián and Lozano, 2006; Pavičić et al., 2009.

METHODOLOGY

A content analysis of the strategic plans of six HEIs (from three Irish universities and three Institute of Technologies (IoTs)) was undertaken to assess the value of the conceptual framework. The research was conducted with the most recent strategic plans available from each of the HEIs at the time when the Irish higher education system was 'principally a binary system with universities and institutes of technology' (Eurydice, 2024). However, IoTs have since transitioned into Technological Universities (between 2019 and 2022). At the time of the study, the strategic plans for the Technological Universities were not developed or available. Thus, the research data presented in this paper does not reflect the new designation, but rather focuses on the strategic plans of six HEIs prior to that transition.

HEIs produce strategic plans with the explicit involvement and approval of the governing bodies and senior management as well being the result of engagement and consultation with staff and students. These strategic plans of HEIs would not be developed for the purpose of demonstrating a MO, thus avoiding a respondent bias albeit still capable of providing insights into the MO of these organisations. A content analysis of these strategic plans allows for the measurement of market orientation at the organisational level, rather than collecting data at the individual level and subsequently aggregating the data which makes the presumption that multiple respondents would respond and or be available. Thus, a content analysis of the strategic plans allows for the efficient collection of otherwise difficult to collect market orientation data without the recall biases and the obtrusiveness of traditional survey methods (Zachary, McKenny, Short and Payne, 2011).

Content analysis has merit as it focuses attention on a document's content by examining what is being said (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005; Vaismoradi, Turunen and Bondas, 2013). It is a systematic and rigorous method for making replicable and valid inferences from texts with the purpose of providing new insights (White and Marsh, 2006; Elo and Kyngäs, 2008; Bengtsson, 2016). Described as the dominant method for the analysis of 'corporate narrative documents' (Merkl-Davies, Brennan and Vourvachis, 2011), content analysis allows the categorising of textual information (Vaismoradi et al., 2013). These categories describing the phenomenon in turn provide

knowledge and understanding of said phenomenon (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005; Elo and Kyngäs, 2008). That is the researcher uses analytical constructs which may be derived from existing theories, in this case the higher education conceptualisation of MO framework, to categorise the text (White and Marsh, 2006). Similarly, the choice of strategic plans meets the criteria for text selection as authentic, credible and representative (Scott, 1990, quoted in Clark, Foster, Bryman and Sloan, 2021).

The content analysis conducted was within the positivist research tradition. That is, the strategic plans that were produced by the HEIs were assumed to be objective, rational, purposeful and goal-directed (Merkl-Davies et al., 2011). In line with this positivist research paradigm the study initially took a deductive approach to the content analysis. A deductive approach uses a priori content categories derived from the underlying theory (Merkl-Davies et al., 2011). Thus, the analysis was operationalised based on the higher education conceptualisation of MO (Table 1). This deductive approach was applied to the manifest content of the strategic plans. Manifest content refers to the actual text of the documents as opposed to the hidden meanings or an interpretation of the text (Vaismoradi et al., 2013). Data coded to the a priori content categories or components was subsequently 'inductively' categorised into further categories or sub-components where required. See Table 2 for a listing of the eleven components and the inductively developed sub-components of the conceptual framework.

In this research project the sampling units were the strategic plans of a purposive sample of Irish HEIs. Purposive in that the HEIs selected were diverse with regards geography and type (Stemler, 2000). The sampling frame was the publicly funded HEIs in the Republic of Ireland excluding private HEIs. See Table 3 for a profile of the HEIs.

Table 2: Components and sub-components of the MO of a HEI

Student orientation
Student orientation - Careers
Student orientation - Co-creation of value
Student orientation - International
Student orientation - Internationalising
Student orientation - Welfare
Employee orientation
Employee orientation - Non-faculty
Employee orientation - Research
Employee orientation - Teaching
Employer orientation
Competitor/Collaboration orientation
Competitor orientation - Collaboration
Parent Orientation
Resource orientation
Resource orientation – Government
Resource orientation - Non-Government
Stakeholder orientation
Stakeholder orientation - Alumni
Stakeholder orientation - Communities
Stakeholder orientation - Media and External Communications
Stakeholder orientation - Potential students
Stakeholder orientation - Regional
Environment orientation
Societal orientation
Societal orientation - Cultural
Inter-functional coordination
Sustainable innovation/research orientation
Sustainable innovation/research orientation - Innovation
Sustainable innovation/research orientation - Research
Sustainable innovation/research orientation - Sustainable

Table 3: Profile of HEI Sample

Name	Type	Location	Size*	Strategic Plan Period
HEI 1	University	Urban – Regional	1	2017-22
HEI 2	University	Urban	1	2020-24
HEI 3	University	Urban	1	2017-22
HEI 4	IoT	Urban – Regional	2	2018-23
HEI 5	IoT	Regional	2	2017-22
HEI 6	IoT	Regional	2	2017-21

*Size of HEIs is based on a categorisation reflecting number of undergraduates, postgraduates, graduates and research income in the academic years 2017-20 (HEA, 2022) with Size 1 HEIs categorised as larger.

In the strategic plans the context units were sentences. The recording or coding units taken from these context units/sentences was a piece of content that was capable of being categorised (Merkl-Davies et al., 2011). Context units may have contained a number of pieces of content or recording units/segments of content that would be categorised (Stemler, 2000). The data analysis involved the use of the conceptual framework to code the data according to the MO components (Elo and Kyngäs, 2008). Coded units were in some cases subsequently assigned to sub-components, as inductively identified in the data. All components and sub-components were then summarised via linked memos with exemplars extracted. This provided 'a narrative of findings' about the phenomenon being studied (White and Marsh, 2006: 39). The generation of tables also provided a quantification of the components and sub-components thus 'the magnitude of the individual phenomena studied appears more clearly' (Bengtsson, 2016: 12). This analysis resulted in a textual as well as numeric 'tabular presentation' (White and Marsh, 2006: 39).

With regards the evaluation of the research, a study such as this can make limited claims to generalisability focusing in depth on a smaller sample (Bengtsson, 2016). Nevertheless, an analysis of the MO of six HEIs is significant with regards an assessment of the usefulness of the conceptual framework.

FINDINGS

The value of the conceptual framework will be illustrated by utilising it to assess the MO of the HEIs, the MO of the HEIs by type as well as the MO of individual HEIs.

The MO of the HEIs

Based on the content analysis of the strategic plans of six Irish HEIs, the nature of the MO in the higher education system can be identified. There are eleven components in the conceptual framework (see Table 1) and the coding references to each of these shows the nature of the MO. The components of student orientation, employee orientation, stakeholder orientation and sustainable innovation/research orientation had the greatest data coded to them or number of coding references, see Table 4.

The table illustrates the components with the most coding references and the components with least coding references, thus highlighting the nature of the MO in the Irish HEIs. In summary, the data indicates the MO of the HEIs is 'student, employee, stakeholder, innovation/research orientated' and this was consistently demonstrated across the strategic plans of all six HEIs.

An analysis of the sub-components of student orientation, employee orientation, stakeholder orientation and sustainable innovation/research orientation can demonstrate an even more specific description of the MO in the HEIs, see Table 5.

Table 5 illustrates the sub-components with the most coding references and the sub-components with the least coding references in relation to the 'student, employee, stakeholder, innovation/research orientated' components. Thus, the MO of the HEIs seeks to understand and respond to: 'the welfare of students and the co-creation of value in educational practise; employees who teach; regional stakeholders and potential students; emphasising research and innovation'.

A review of the components and sub-components that were coded to the least in the data analysis also illustrates additional insights into the nature of the MO in the HEIs and its limitations (see Table 4 and 5). For example, in

Table 4: Coding references to components of MO

Components with most coding references	Coding references*	Components with least coding references	Coding references
Student orientation	269	Employer orientation	61
Employee orientation	202	Competitor/Collaboration	88
Stakeholder orientation	287	Parent orientation	0
Sustainable innovation/research	302	Resource orientation	108
		Environment orientation	32
		Societal orientation	112
		Inter-functional coordination	68

*When a unit or piece of text is coded the coded content is called a 'reference'.

Table 5: Coding references to sub-components of MO

Sub-components with the most coding references		Sub-components with the least coding references	
Student orientation			
Co-creation of value	53	International	25
Welfare	53	Internationalising	34
		Careers	20
Employee orientation			
Teaching	49	Non-faculty	30
		Research	35
Stakeholder orientation			
Potential students	48	Alumni	24
Regional	58	Communities	37
		Media and External Communications	28
Sustainable innovation/research orientation			
Innovation	122	Sustainable	36
Research	144		

the student component 'International' students although a theme in the data was less prominent than HEIs offering an 'Internationalising' experience for students. Also, in the student component the careers service/guidance for students had a somewhat limited emphasis in the strategic plans and specific references to research staff and non-academic staff were less frequent than references to academic teaching staff. In addition, no coding references were made to parents as stakeholders in higher education.

In summary, the MO exhibited by HEIs can be identified by the conceptual framework via the components and sub-components most and least coded to.

MO by HEI type

Many national higher education systems have different HEI types that co-exist, for example Portugal and the Netherlands (Eurydice, 2024). Thus, the MO of HEIs can be further understood by HEI type. In an Irish context Universities and IoTs had acknowledged differences that deem this comparison credible (Eurydice, 2024). Furthermore, the three universities examined in the sample were greater in size. Thus, a cross-case analysis of the MO of the two types of HEIs, Universities and IoTs, was undertaken.

The cross-case analysis of the components, sub-components and linked summaries indicates universities are more competitive with regards references to benchmarks, rankings, student numbers and other metrics. Universities are more 'global' and research focused in this competitiveness as well as placing a greater emphasis on collaboration with other HEIs. The universities have a strong employee orientation particularly employees who teach. Resources including non-governmental sources of funding are a focus in the university plans. Universities have a societal and stakeholder orientation (albeit IoTs are stronger on this aspect). The student orientation is evident (with a greater international and internationalising focus) as well as a research orientation which is more

Table 6: Coding references as a percentage of the strategic plans for each HEI type*

Components of MO	Universities	IoTs
	Total %	Total %
Student orientation	17.22%	17.21%
Employee orientation	14.21%	11.48%
Employer orientation	2.53%	5.46%
Competitor/Collaboration orientation	6.86%	4.23%
Parent orientation	0%	0%
Resource orientation	8.54%	5.05%
Stakeholder orientation	14.2%	27.73%
Environment orientation	2.77%	1.23%
Societal orientation	7.7%	6.56%
Inter-functional coordination	5.29%	3.28%
Sustainable innovation/research orientation	20.7%	17.76%
	100%	*100%*

*Coding references as a percentage of the strategic plan was utilised to negate the effects of different word/page counts between strategic plans.

prominent in university plans. Again, for universities media and communications references tended to be more international and more research focused. Sustainability and the HE environment have a degree more emphasis in university plans however there is less emphasis on employers/industry. The inter-functional coordination aspect is also strong. Across both universities and IoT strategic plans there is a similar emphasis on their alumni (albeit universities reference more 'global' alumni networks) and cultural development (albeit universities have a stronger emphasis on the Irish language).

IoTs have a much stronger stakeholder orientation – this includes the media albeit it is more regional in nature. The IoTs also place more emphasis on potential students and regional stakeholders. A student orientation - with student welfare and the co-creation of value as well as a careers focus is also evident as well as an innovation and research orientation. IoT strategic plans were less resource focused. As an illustration of this cross-case analysis Table 6 presents the coding references to the components as a percentage of the strategic plans for each type of HEI. Sub-components have been omitted from the table for presentation purposes.

Table 6 provides the coding references to each of the components illustrating aspects of the cross-case analysis between HEI types. Thus, universities can be interpreted as being more competitor, resource and research orientated with a greater emphasis on the HE environment. IoTs placed a strong emphasis on stakeholders, the student orientation of IoT's, similar to the universities, was strong as was their research orientation. In summary, an analysis of HEI by type utilising the conceptual framework indicated between type similarities and differences in the MO exhibited.

The MO of an individual HEI

An analysis of the MO of an individual HEI can also be undertaken utilising the conceptual framework. An examination of HEI 1 can illustrate. HEI 1 when contrasted with all the other HEIs had the highest number of coding refences to its environment, employee and sustainable innovation/research components with limited to no coding references to the cultural, potential students and regional stakeholders sub-components. These coding references indicate the strengths and weaknesses of this particular HEI's MO. However, this does not necessarily highlight good or bad practise as the particular strengths and weaknesses may be deliberately selected by HEI 1 management to achieve a particular type of MO linked to its organisational strategy. Table 7 illustrates the coding references to each component and sub-component as a percentage of the strategic plans for HEI 1 as well as for all HEIs as a comparison.

Table 7 illustrates the unique aspects of the MO of HEI 1. Any of the HEIs could be used as an illustration of the organisational specificness of a HEI's MO that the conceptual framework can identify.

The type of MO exhibited by a HEI can be further illustrated utilising the framework by drawing a comparison between HEIs. Thus, the strategic plans of HEI 3 and HEI 5 were compared. The strategic plan of HEI 3, a university,

Table 7: Coding references as a percentage of the strategic plans for HEI 1 and for all HEIs

Components of MO	HEI 1		Total % for all HEIs	
	%	Total %	%	Total %
Student orientation	6.18%		5.37%	
Student orientation - Careers	0%		1.28%	
Student orientation - Co-creation of value	1.12%		3.39%	
Student orientation - International	2.25%		1.6%	
Student orientation - Internationalising	3.37%		2.18%	
Student orientation - Welfare	4.49%		3.39%	
Sub-Total		*17.41%*		*17.21%*
Employee orientation	5.06%		5.63%	
Employee orientation - Non-faculty	8.43%		1.92%	
Employee orientation - Research	0.56%		2.24%	
Employee orientation - Teaching	7.87%		3.13%	
Sub-Total		*21.92%*		*12.92%*
Employer orientation		*1.69%*		*3.9%*
Competitor orientation	2.81%		2.5%	
Competitor orientation - Collaboration	1.12%		3.13%	
Sub-Total		*3.93%*		*5.63%*
Parent Orientation		*0%*		*0%*
Resource orientation	0.56%		3.26%	
Resource orientation - Govt	1.69%		1.15%	
Resource orientation - Non Govt	1.69%		2.5%	
Sub-Total		*3.94%*		*6.91%*
Stakeholder orientation	3.37%		6.4%	
Stakeholder orientation - Alumni	1.69%		1.54%	
Stakeholder orientation - Communities	2.25%		2.43%	
Stakeholder orientation - Media and External Communications	1.69%		2.18%	
Stakeholder orientation - Potential students	0.56%		3.26%	
Stakeholder orientation - Regional	0.56%		4.73%	
Sub-Total		*10.12%*		*20.54%*
Environment orientation		*5.62%*		*2.05%*
Societal orientation	4.49%		5.5%	
Societal orientation - Cultural	0%		1.66%	
Sub-Total		*4.49%*		*7.16%*
Inter-functional coordination		*3.37%*		*4.35%*
Sustainable innovation/research orientation				
Sustainable innovation/research orientation - Innovation	6.74%		7.81%	
Sustainable innovation/research orientation - Research	15.73%		9.21%	
Sustainable innovation/research orientation - Sustainable	5.06%		2.3%	
Sub-Total		*27.53%*		*19.32%*
	100%	*100%*	100%	*100%*

is strong on competitiveness including collaboration. HEI 3 demonstrates inter-functional coordination, a societal orientation and a resource orientation with less emphasis on stakeholders and industry/employers. Whereas HEI 5, an IoT, is more employer/industry orientated and less resource orientated in its strategic plan. HEI 5 also has a very strong stakeholder orientation. HEI 5 places an emphasis on the co-creation of value with students and on their careers but is much less international and while not as strong as HEI 3 on research and innovation it is still a focus in its strategic plan. The examples illustrate the strengths and weaknesses of the MO of each HEI and not necessarily good or bad practise on the part of the HEIs. Table 8 presents the coding references to the components and sub-components of the conceptual framework as a percentage of the strategic plans for HEI 3 and HEI 5.

Thus concludes the findings which were organised under three headings illustrating the use of the conceptual framework to identify the MO of HEIs at a system or national level, by type as well as by individual HEIs.

Table 8: Coding references as a percentage of the strategic plans for HEI 3 and 5

Components of MO	University - HEI 3		IoT - HEI 5	
	%	Total %	%	Total %
Student orientation	5.70%		4.21%	
Student orientation - Careers	1.14%		2.25%	
Student orientation - Co-creation of value	3.42%		5.62%	
Student orientation - International	1.42%		0.56%	
Student orientation - Internationalising	3.42%		1.40%	
Student orientation - Welfare	2.56%		3.93%	
Sub-Total		*17.66%*		*17.97%*
Employee orientation	5.98%		6.18%	
Employee orientation - Non-faculty	0.28%		2.25%	
Employee orientation - Research	3.13%		3.37%	
Employee orientation - Teaching	2.56%		1.97%	
Sub-Total		*11.95%*		*13.77%*
Employer orientation		*1.42%*		*6.74%*
Competitor orientation	4.56%		1.12%	
Competitor orientation - Collaboration	4.84%		2.53%	
Sub-Total		*9.40%*		*3.65%*
Parent Orientation		*0%*		*0%*
Resource orientation	5.13%		1.69%	
Resource orientation - Govt	1.99%		0%	
Resource orientation - Non Govt	3.13%		0.56%	
Sub-Total		*10.25%*		*2.25%*
Stakeholder orientation	3.70%		9.27%	
Stakeholder orientation - Alumni	0.85%		2.25%	
Stakeholder orientation - Communities	1.71%		3.37%	
Stakeholder orientation - Media and External Communications	1.14%		5.34%	
Stakeholder orientation - Potential students	1.99%		4.78%	
Stakeholder orientation - Regional	1.71%		7.30%	
Sub-Total		*11.10%*		*32.31%*
Environment orientation		*2.28%*		*0.56%*
Societal orientation	9.69%		3.37%	
Societal orientation - Cultural	2.28%		1.69%	
Sub-Total		*11.97%*		*5.06%*
Inter-functional coordination		*8.26%*		*3.65%*
Sustainable innovation/research orientation				
Sustainable innovation/research orientation - Innovation	7.69%		7.30%	
Sustainable innovation/research orientation - Research	6.55%		5.06%	
Sustainable innovation/research orientation - Sustainable	1.42%		1.69%	
Sub-Total		*15.66%*		*14.05%*
	100%	*100%*	100%	*100%*

CONCLUSION

MO is argued as a relevant strategy for HEIs to face the changes arising in their environment (Tran et al., 2015; Flavián and Lozano, 2007). MO allows HEIs to reach institutional goals, enhance their reputation and improve facilities and faculty (Hammond et al., 2006) despite the 'marketisation of education' critique (Bruce, 2006). A relevant conceptualisation of MO for HEIs is thus required to enable HEIs to strive towards these potential benefits. Presently, many conceptualisations of MO are lacking a degree of appropriateness and applicability in the context of higher education (Dwyer, 2022 and 2019; Llonch et al., 2016; Rivera-Camino and Molero Ayala, 2010). The purpose of the paper was to propose a refined conceptualisation and to utilise said framework to assess its value.

A literature-based conceptualisation of MO in a higher education context has been proposed: 'a culture with resulting behaviours, across all departments of the institution, that seeks to understand and respond to students, collaborating/partner institutions, competitors, parents, employees, employers, funders, other stakeholders as well as wider society and the external environment in an innovative and sustainable way'. This conceptualisation was further developed into an eleven-component framework that enabled an assessment of the MO of HEIs as well as between HEI types and for individual HEIs.

The framework provides HEIs and those responsible for HE governance with a methodology for assessing the comprehensiveness of their MO in a systematic way, providing measurable indicators of their proposed actions in building more market-driven institutions. The framework can for example help to review a HEI's strength with regards future actions towards a range of specific stakeholders, in attracting resources and collaborating with other HEIs. In summary, the framework can not only identify the strengths but also the opportunities for development of the MO of a HEI.

To date examinations of MO in HEIs have typically but not exclusively been via quantitative surveys of HEI staff (Dwyer, 2022) and thus can reflect not only biases of the sample but the limitations of the methodology. While the methodology and related framework proposed here does offer a complementary method to ensure a robustness in the assessment of MO, it also has several advantages as an alternative. Firstly, the framework can enable the assessment of the MO of HEIs or HEI types nationally or internationally with relative ease in comparison to the logistics which a large-scale survey of HEIs might involve. Secondly, an assessment of a HEI's strengths and weaknesses on the components of the framework vis-à-vis its peer or competitor HEIs can be undertaken, again not easily achieved if even possible utilising other survey-based measures of MO. Thirdly, the framework enables the periodic as well as historic measurements of the MO of HEIs to provide objective time-based comparisons. Fourthly, the sub-components of the framework, as they are inductively developed from the data, can evolve and thus reflect the particular higher education system/type making comparisons over time or internationally more dynamic and reflective of the uniqueness in the MO of HEIs. Finally, the framework acknowledges that not all HEIs are striving for the same type of MO, thus strengths and weaknesses of a HEI's MO are identified, as each HEI may seek to achieve MO in its own unique way linked to its strategy to succeed. The uniqueness of MO by organisation has previously been identified (Ellinger et al., 2008; Kasper, 2005; Harris, 2002). MO is idiosyncratic due to 'history, personalities, and circumstances' (Ellinger et al., 2008: 362), linked to 'organizational and environmental contingencies' (Harris, 2002: 624). Thus, the framework provides a data source for HEI evaluation that reflects the differentiated goals and missions of HEIs.

The MO of HEIs is argued as cultural and behavioural (Tiernan, Dwyer, Mulligan, 2019; Gainer and Padanyi, 2005; Homburg and Pflesser, 1990), where the MO behaviours are linked to a corresponding culture (Shapiro, 1988). The missions, visions and values of HEIs as set out in their strategic plans can demonstrate the HEIs' particular culture, while the implementation processes set out in the strategic plans can illustrate the proposed MO behaviours. While all research designs can present issues of measurement, it is acknowledged that the culture and the consequent behaviours of a HEI are not easily assessed via the methodological approach of this study. The strategic plans may not necessarily reflect the actual culture or future emergent behaviours. There may be implementation issues with the strategic plans and or there are discrepancies between the strategic plans and the lived experiences of members of the organisations. While in an Irish context the implementation of the HEI strategic plans are monitored via the Higher Education Authority which has 'a statutory responsibility ... for the effective governance and regulation of higher education institutions" (HEA, 2024) and thus the plans are indicative of subsequent organisational actions, this may not be case in all higher education contexts.

Recommendations for further research directions with regards the conceptual framework can be offered. Comparisons between European and/or international higher education counterparts may have benefits in providing a yardstick or comparator in assessing the development of the MO of HEIs in national contexts. In addition, a longitudinal comparison of a HEI or set of HEIs might also provide an insight into how a HEI or a comparative set of HEIs are developing their MO; for example with regards to sustainability or internationalisation. Furthermore, complementary research methodologies including the use of questionnaire surveys and or qualitative interviews with HEI staff, students and other identified stakeholders may provide further understanding of the nature and nuances of the MO in a HEI via a triangulation with the framework. Relatedly, the framework can aid in the development of a HEI relevant scale based on its eleven-component structure.

As a final note, the research outlined provides an examination of the MO of Irish HEIs and thus is of note in that regard. Research on MO in a HE context has grown with a greater number of articles in recent years, albeit the

research in an Irish context has not been forthcoming (Dwyer, 2019; 2022). This research addresses that gap by providing a record of the MO of Irish HEIs at a point in time and allowing future assessments of its evolution. This is particularly relevant following the re-designation of IoTs as Technological Universities between 2019 and 2022 and thus their potential further development.

In conclusion, MO has relevance for HEIs as it is linked to performance. Therefore, MO should be measured.

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