

**THE IMPACT OF ORGANISATIONAL
CULTURE ON WORK-BASED
LEARNING PARTNERSHIPS**

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THE IMPACT OF ORGANISATIONAL CULTURE ON WORK-BASED LEARNING PARTNERSHIPS

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Abstract

Higher education institutes (HEIs) and external employer organisations are increasingly recognising the benefits of engaging in work-based learning (WBL) partnerships. However, significant challenges associated with this form of engagement have meant such partnerships are not as widespread as they could be. One of the major challenges identified relates to organisational culture. The purpose of this study is to consider how WBL partnerships between an Irish HEI (HEI X) and external employer organisations can be enhanced by a deeper understanding of organisational culture.

An ethnographic methodology combining a number of different data-gathering methods, including observation, reviewing of documents and interviews with eight HEI X staff, eight WBL learners and five employer representatives, was adopted. The findings reveal how cultural differences in relation to assumptions, timeframes, languages, objectives and general attitudes can be a source of difficulty for the three stakeholders (learner, employer and HEI). According to the findings, cultural issues within the HEI and external employer organisation can also create significant challenges when attempts are being made to initiate or coordinate a WBL partnership. Johnson's cultural web (1988) is used as a framework to present the findings.

The study makes a valuable contribution to knowledge by recognising the requirements of all three stakeholders and discussing the usefulness of the cultural web as a framework for considering organisational culture in WBL partnerships. The study also makes a valuable contribution to practice by presenting recommendations to the HEI and external employer organisation. The recommendations for the HEI involve a change in the "way we do things around here" due to the unique characteristics of WBL programmes, which may mean adapting existing policies, procedures and systems. Recommendations for the employer organisation include providing support to the learner, understanding and respecting the HEI's requirements, and ensuring that internal policies, procedures, practices and priorities support WBL.

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Declaration

I declare that the work contained in this thesis has not been submitted for any other award. I also confirm that this work fully acknowledges opinions, ideas and contributions from the work of others.

Any ethical clearance for the research presented in this thesis has been approved. Approval has been sought and granted by the School Ethics Committee on April 1st, 2014.

I declare that the word count of this thesis is 63,630 words

Name: Oran Doherty

Signature:

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Oran Doherty". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Date: 4 December 2016

Glossary

EU	European Union
HE	Higher Education
HEI	Higher Education Institute
IT	Information Technology
NHS	National Health Service
OECD	The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
QA	Quality Assurance
QAA	Quality Assurance Agency
WBL	Work-based Learning

1 Introduction

1.1 Introduction

This opening chapter presents an overview of the research study. The chapter commences with a brief discussion of work-based learning (WBL) and organisational culture, before providing the context for the study. Section 1.5 provides the research question and objectives, followed by an outline of the methodology adopted. The justification for the research and the contribution it is hoped the study will make to both knowledge and practice are considered. The chapter concludes with an outline of the thesis structure.

1.2 Work-based learning

Lester and Costley (2010, p.562) define WBL as “all and any learning that is situated in the workplace or arises directly out of workplace concerns”. Basit *et al.* (2015, p.1004), whilst acknowledging that WBL is difficult to define, state that it:

“denotes any learning and knowledge that is acquired in a workplace; focuses on issues related to it; may be formal, quasi-formal or informal; and may or may not culminate in qualifications”.

Both these definitions are broad in terms of capturing the type and scope of learning acquired in the workplace. This research predominantly focuses on accredited programmes designed and delivered by a Higher Education Institute (HEI) in collaboration with an external organisation, where the learners are already in employment and where the learning is derived from the needs of the external organisation and its employees.

WBL programmes provide numerous benefits to the three key stakeholders involved in the partnership (employer, learner and HEI). Not only is WBL beneficial to the employer, employee and the HEI, but the State can also gain through improved economic performance (Ahmed, 2013; Ardizzone, 2012; Basit, Eardley, & Borup, 2013; Chisholm, Harris, Northwood, and Johrendt, 2009; Hunt, 2011; O'Connor, Patterson, Chantler, & Backert, 2013). However, WBL partnerships pose significant challenges to the various stakeholders. One of the major challenges associated with WBL partnerships is in relation to organisational culture (Ball & Manwaring, 2010; Basit *et al.*, 2015; Berman, 2008;

Bolden, Connor, Duquemin, Hirsh, & Petroc, 2009; Kozlinska , 2012; Lind & Styhre, 2013; Linehan & Sheridan, 2009; Schofield , 2013; Wilson, 2012).

1.3 Organisational culture

According to Alvesson (2013), culture is central to everything in organisational life, and the behaviour of the members is guided by values, ideas and beliefs accepted within the organisation. Ball and Manwaring (2010) describe how HEIs have different cultures from private employers, and emphasise the importance of understanding each other's culture when engaging in WBL partnerships. Culture differences between the two organisations in relation to goals, language, assumptions and timeframes can make this form of engagement challenging (Collier, Gray, & Ahn, 2011; Cyert & Goodman, 1997; Rohrbeck & Arnold, 2006; Schofield, 2013). However, it is not just cultural differences between the HEI and the external organisation that create challenges in WBL partnerships. Often, cultural issues within the HEI or external employer can create difficulties when attempts are made to initiate or manage WBL (Schmidt & Gibbs, 2009). For example, the traditional model of higher education (HI) that exists within many HEIs has resulted in an organisational culture that does not always support WBL partnerships (Basit *et al.*, 2015; Layer, Moran, & Srivastava, 2010). This point is discussed by Rae (2007) who describes how HEIs often focus inwards on academic issues, whereas WBL requires an outward focus. In addition, Layer *et al.* (2010) refer to difficulties incorporating WBL into the academic calendar, and how administrative infrastructure and processes designed for traditional full-time programmes present challenges to WBL programmes. The organisational culture that exists within external employer organisations where the focus is on productivity, performance and profits can also make WBL partnerships difficult to implement (Basit *et al.*, 2015).

1.4 Focus of the study

The focus of this study is to determine how WBL partnerships between an HEI and external employer organisations can be enhanced by a deeper understanding of organisational culture. The HEI (to be called HEI X from this point forward) is based in Ireland and has significant experience engaging in WBL partnerships, having developed WBL programmes in partnership with local, national and international employers. HEI X commenced operations in the early 1970s and is relatively small, with just over 3,500 full-

time learners and four academic faculties. HEI X is one of the leading providers of WBL in Ireland and delivers a wide spectrum of WBL programmes in the Irish National Framework of Qualifications, from Level 6 (Higher Certificate), through Levels 7 and 8 (Ordinary and Honours Degrees) to Level 9 (Master's Degree). My position within HEI X afforded me the opportunity to understand the experiences and expectations of the three stakeholders participating in the WBL partnership. I was employed as the WBL coordinator in HEI X for over ten years (2006-2016). In May 2016, I was appointed, by the Department of Education and Skills, as the regional skills forum manager for the North-West of Ireland. This position involves promoting collaboration between industry and education/training providers. An important form of collaboration that this position focuses on is WBL partnerships. This new position also involves providing support to HEI X in relation to industry engagement.

When I was employed in HEI X, I engaged with HEI staff, employers and learners in the design, delivery, assessment and evaluation of WBL programmes. I promoted WBL to local, national and international employers, and in many instances was their first point of contact for WBL queries. In addition, I provided support to HEI staff in relation to the design, delivery and assessment of WBL programmes. I was also the first point of contact for learners, and regularly coordinated feedback and evaluation sessions. I have observed the significant challenges WBL partnerships present to the three stakeholders. In some cases, these challenges were due to cultural differences between the HEI and external employer organisations. These contrasting cultures influenced how each organisation felt the WBL programme should be designed, delivered, assessed and evaluated. In other instances, difficulties arose due to internal cultural norms, rituals, routines and practices. For example, the culture that evolved within HEI X was very much influenced by full-time traditional learners and programmes, and the systems, procedures and practices in place did not always meet the needs of the three stakeholders (employer, learner and HEI). Within the external employer organisation, a culture had evolved in response to operating in a competitive business environment, where concern for performance, productivity and profitability took priority over training and education initiatives. I believed that the three stakeholders could benefit significantly from a deeper understanding of organisational culture. However, when I sought to learn more about the influence of organisational culture on WBL partnerships, I was disappointed to discover that little in the way of research was available, and that the limited studies that had been conducted focused

mainly on the needs of the HEI. This study considers the needs and expectations of the three stakeholders, and presents a series of recommendations for the HEI and external employer organisations to consider in relation to their organisational culture.

1.5 Research question and objectives

This DBA thesis aims to contribute to both knowledge and professional practice in the broad area of WBL. More specifically, the aim is to improve understanding of organisational culture issues in WBL partnerships. The research question to be addressed in this study is: ***How can WBL partnerships be enhanced by a deeper understanding of organisational culture?***

To answer this research question, the following research sub-questions have been developed:

1. What are the organisational culture issues affecting the three stakeholders participating in a WBL partnership?
2. What are the expectations of the three stakeholders, in terms of organisational culture in an HEI/external employer organisation WBL partnership?
3. What can the HEI and external employer organisation do to address the organisational culture issues that exist in a WBL partnership?

To support the research question, a number of research objectives have been identified to shape the research strategy:

1. To critically review the literature in the field of WBL partnerships between HEIs and external employer organisations.
2. To critically review the literature in the field of organisational culture in order to determine its influence on WBL partnerships.
3. To develop appropriate methodology and methods to explore the organisational culture issues impacting the three stakeholders participating in a WBL partnership.
4. To present the findings of the ethnographic study using Johnson's cultural web.
5. To discuss the findings in conjunction with the literature and make a contribution to knowledge and practice by considering the practical implications for the HEI and external employer organisation.

1.6 Methodology

The study is conducted from a relativist ontological stance coupled with a social constructionist epistemology. An ethnographic methodology combining a number of different data gathering methods, including observation, interview and document analysis, was adopted. Field notes providing rich data on the experiences, assumptions and expectations of the three main stakeholders (HEI, external employer and learner) were recorded over an eighteen-month period. Interviews were conducted with eight HEI participants (employed in HEI X), eight WBL learners (from six different organisations) and five employer representatives (from five different organisations). In addition, documents and “artefacts” such as quality assurance (QA) policies, strategic plans, WBL programme documents, evaluation documents, emails and press releases contributed to the study. The style of writing used in this study is also influenced by the methodology. In an ethnographic study, the voice of the writer needs to be heard (Scott-Jones, 2010a; Watson, 2011; Wolcott, 2008), so I will not refer to myself as “the author” but will instead use “I”.

The findings are discussed using Johnson’s cultural web (1988). The web consists of six interrelated and overlapping factors (rituals and routines, stories, symbols, power structures, organisational structures, and control systems) which influence and are influenced by the central cultural paradigm.

1.7 Justification for the research

European policy is placing increasing importance on the need for HEIs to collaborate with employers in the design and delivery of programmes of study (Ferrández-Berrueco, Kekale, & Devins, 2016; Kewin *et al.*, 2011; Plewa, Galán-Muros, & Davey, 2015). It is expected that in the coming years, there will be an increase in demand internationally for WBL partnerships between HEIs and external employer organisations (Basit *et al.*, 2015; Confederation of British Industry, 2015; Higher Education Authority of Ireland, SOLAS & Quality and Qualifications Ireland, 2015; McGann & Anderson, 2012). This increased demand is influenced by a number of factors, including: the rise in non-standardised work for employees (Billett & Choy, 2013; Choy, Billett, & Kelly 2013; Mumford & Roodhouse, 2010; Nixon, Smith, Stafford, & Camm 2006), the recognition by the employer that knowledge is a source of competitive advantage (Abduljawad, 2015; Basit *et al.*, 2015; Plewa *et al.*, 2015; Ropes, 2015; Thijssen, 2014), HEIs seeking exposure to

real life business problems, as well as improving their reputation amongst external employers (Harris, Chisholm, & Burns, 2013; Healy, Perkmann, Goddard, & Kempton, 2014), and HEIs seeking additional sources of finance (Basit *et al.*, 2015; Felce, 2010).

Despite the potential WBL provides to all stakeholders, research into WBL partnerships between HEIs and external employer organisations remains under developed (Abukari, 2014; Healy *et al.*, 2014; Kozlinska, 2012; Plewa *et al.*, 2015). Most of the studies on industry/HE engagement concentrates on cooperation and collaboration in the field of research and innovation (Bolden *et al.*, 2009; Davey, Baaken, Galan Muros, & Meerman 2011). WBL offers significant benefits to the employer, HEI and learner (Abduljawad, 2015; Basit *et al.*, 2015; Healy *et al.*, 2014; Higher Education Authority *et al.*, 2015; Plewa *et al.*, 2015; Sweet, 2014), but all three stakeholders face considerable challenges when participating in a WBL partnership (Dowling, 2015; Sheridan & Fallon, 2015; Tartari, Salter, & D'Este, 2012; White, 2012). One of the key factors in learners, HEIs, and external employers finding WBL partnerships so challenging is the organisational cultural issues (Choy & Delahaye, 2011; Collier *et al.*, 2011; Lee, 2011; Lind & Styhre, 2013; McShane & Von Glinnow, 2010; Shaw, Rout, & Wise, 2011; White, 2012).

It is envisaged that the proposed research will make a significant contribution to both literature and practice. The literature on WBL focuses on the needs of the HEI, with only limited reference made to the requirements and expectations of the employer and learner. Only by considering the needs of the three stakeholders will the HEI and external employer organisation understand the cultural implications for their own organisation when engaging in WBL partnerships. The study makes a contribution to theory by describing how Johnson's cultural web can be used by the HEI and external employer organisation to identify and address cultural issues when engaging in WBL partnerships. The research also contributes to practice by presenting a series of recommendations to both the HEI and the external employer organisation engaging or considering engaging in a WBL partnership.

1.8 Structure of the thesis

This thesis is organised into seven chapters. *Chapter 1* introduces the research focus of the study, as well as providing a brief overview of both WBL and organisational culture. It then discusses the motive for undertaking the research and introduces the research

questions and objectives. It also presents an outline of the methodology; and then considers the justification for the research, together with the intended contribution of the study to both knowledge and practice.

Chapter 2 presents the literature on WBL, by first providing a number of definitions and then looking at WBL from an international and Irish perspective. It discusses the benefits and challenges of WBL to the three stakeholders, and then focuses on how the facilitators can ensure a successful WBL partnership. The chapter concludes with a review of the organisational culture issues in WBL partnerships.

Chapter 3 presents the literature on organisational culture, commencing with a number of definitions. It then presents a discussion of the dominant cultures, subcultures and countercultures, and the influences on an organisation's culture are considered. After this, it discusses the different roles organisational culture can play and provides a brief debate on culture change. It then presents a review of the components that make up organisational culture, followed by an overview of cultural frameworks. The chapter concludes with a discussion of cultural elements and frameworks for considering organisational culture.

The research methodology and methods are presented in *Chapter 4*, commencing with a brief discussion of the ontological and epistemological commitments of the research. The chapter then describes the various methodologies available to a researcher, before justifying an ethnographic approach for the current research. This is followed by a discussion of the data collection methods and a description of the analysis of the data. Finally, the quality criteria for the research is presented.

Chapter 5 reviews the findings by describing the experiences and expectations of learners, employers and HEI X staff participating in a WBL partnership. Johnson's cultural web (1988) is used to present the findings.

Chapter 6 discusses the findings from the study in relation to the literature, as well as providing a series of recommendations to the HEIs and external employer organisations, in relation to their organisational cultures.

Chapter 7 reviews how the research question has been addressed, and discusses the contribution to knowledge and practice provided by this study. In addition, it considers the limitations of the study and implications for future research. Finally, it presents some personal reflections.

1.9 Chapter summary

This chapter has presented an overview of the thesis. After introducing WBL and organisational culture, the background to the study was provided. In addition, the research question and objectives have been identified and an outline of the methodology presented. The justification for the research has been considered and finally the structure of the thesis has been outlined. The following chapter reviews the literature in the field of WBL.

2 Work-based Learning

2.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to address Research Objective 1: *To critically review the literature in the field of WBL partnerships between HEIs and external employer organisations.*

This study focuses primarily on a form of WBL that involves an HEI collaborating with external employer organisations where the learners are already in employment, and where the learning is derived from the needs of the external organisations and their employees. The chapter commences with an introduction to WBL partnerships, and compares WBL programmes to traditional full-time programmes. Then a number of definitions and characteristics of WBL partnerships are examined, after which the motives for, and benefits of, WBL for the employer, HEI, learner and the State are discussed. This is followed by a review of WBL from an international and Irish perspective. The challenges WBL presents to the three stakeholders are considered, before the facilitators for a successful WBL partnership are presented. Finally, the importance of organisational culture issues in WBL collaborations is examined.

2.2 Introduction to WBL

Collaboration between HEIs and external employers for training provision is not a new initiative (Abukari, 2014). For example, WBL programmes in accounting have been common in America since the 1950s (Elijido-Ten & Kloot, 2015). However, HEIs have concentrated mainly on preparing learners for employment, rather than providing learning and training for people in employment (Linehan & Sheridan, 2009). According to Choy *et al.* (2013), HEIs need to focus more on the needs of those in employment, because of an increasing emphasis on knowledge, changing work conditions, new work requirements and an extended working life (Abduljawad, 2015; Basit *et al.*, 2015; Ropes, 2015).

WBL is different from traditional learning in a number of ways. Brennan (2005, p.15), when comparing WBL to traditional learning, claims that WBL “transforms the role of higher education into one of facilitating and supporting learning, rather than delivering pre- specified programmes of study”. Carswell, Maguire and Mooney (2010) provide a

useful comparison between traditional HE and workforce learning and teaching in Table 2-1 below.

Table 2-1 Comparison of traditional university and workforce learning and teaching

	Traditional	Workforce development
Location	Mainly university campus	Often employer's workplace
Model of delivery	Mainly face to face	Often blended (distance, face-to-face, work-based) learning
Academic focus	Mainly education	Mixture of education and skills
Nature of curriculum	Significant theoretical and conceptual elements	Significant practice-based elements
Qualifications	Majority pre-packaged (e.g. diploma, foundation degree, taught Master's)	Often bespoke (e.g. non-accredited short courses and specialist postgraduate diplomas)
Student commitment	Usually full-time, with some part-time students	Usually part-time students
Accreditation of prior experiential learning	Limited	Can be substantial
Teaching staff	Mainly full- and part-time university academic staff	Mixture of university academics, employer trainers and third-party tutors
Teaching materials	Developed and owned by university	Intellectual property (IP) often shared (university, employer, third party) and sometimes unknown
Funding	HEFCE [Higher Education Funding Council for England] and student fees	Mainly employer fees
Quality procedures	Well established, with external review, e.g. QAA [Quality Assurance Agency]	Existing procedures often inappropriate and perceived by employers to be cumbersome
Time to market for new course	Slow (years)	Needs to be fast (months)
Age of students	Majority 18-23	Majority mature (23+)

Adapted from Carswell, *et al.*, (2010, p.82).

It is important to consider this comparison presented by Carswell *et al.* (2010), because in some cases it is these differences that make WBL partnerships challenging for the three stakeholders. In WBL programmes, the majority of the learning occurs in the workplace, and the curriculum is derived from the needs of the employer and learner (Kewin *et al.*, 2011). Some academics are reluctant to recognise learning that takes place outside the HEI (Schmidt & Gibbs, 2009), but Billett and Boud (2001) dispute this claim by describing workplaces as “sites for the constitution of knowledge and learning” (p.322). Lemanski, Mewis and Overton (2011) highlight the shift from traditional face-to-face delivery to one that involves a greater focus on blended learning combining face-to-face, online delivery and learning in the workplace. The WBL programmes tend to be bespoke, as opposed to “off the shelf programmes”, which means the learning programmes are negotiated; and this can challenge the HEIs, which are more familiar with designing traditional programmes, where such levels of negotiation are not required (Shaw *et al.*, 2011). Learners on WBL programmes have often acquired significant experiential learning prior to commencing the programme, and this prior learning should be accredited by the HEIs (Boud, Solomon, & Symes, 2001; Costley & Armsby, 2007). In many cases, the employers pay for the programmes (Siebert & Walsh, 2013) and this can present a challenge to the HEIs, because their administrative systems are sometimes designed to invoice learners individually (Kewin *et al.*, 2011). Time to market is a major consideration for employers, as they want the programmes developed as quickly as possible, resulting in additional pressure for the HEIs (Plewa, 2009).

When HEIs try to coordinate WBL programmes in the same way they do with traditional programmes, problems arise (Layer *et al.*, 2010). This is discussed later in the chapter. The following section considers definitions and characteristics of WBL partnerships.

2.3 Definition and characteristics of WBL

Abukari (2014, p.483) defines WBL as “learning experiences gained from work, whether this is formal or informal, paid or unpaid”. According to Sobiechowska and Maisch (2006, p.270), WBL involves programmes of study where “students are full-time employees whose programme of study is embedded in the workplace and is designed to meet the learning needs of the employees and the aims of the organisation”. Sobiechowska and Maisch’s (2006) description of WBL refers to more formal learning, with the mention of students and programmes of study, whereas the definition provided by Abukari (2014) is

more inclusive in what constitutes WBL. Hardacre and Workman (2010) identified a number of different forms of WBL programmes, including in house training, sandwich year, vocational placements, general work experience and numerous forms of part-time learning. As mentioned in section 2.1, this research predominately focuses on the WBL programmes designed and delivered by an HEI in collaboration with an external organisation where the learners are already in employment, and where the learning is derived from the needs of the external organisation and its employees. This form of WBL shares similarities with a description provided by Boud *et al.* (2001, pp. 5-6), who identify a number of characteristics associated with WBL partnerships:

1. A formal arrangement between the education institute and external organisation exists.
2. Learners are employees in the external organisation.
3. The curriculum derives from the needs of the workplace and the learners.
4. The starting point of the programme is established after the learners' current skills and knowledge are recognised
5. The majority of learning projects should take place in the workplace.
6. The educational institution is involved in assessing the learning, maintaining academic quality and awarding academic credit as appropriate.

This description provided by Boud *et al.* (2001) encompasses two additional considerations not mentioned in the earlier definitions. Firstly, the importance of recognising the learners' prior learning is emphasised. Learners completing WBL programmes can have significant prior learning, and the HEI should recognise this (Carswell *et al.*, 2010). Secondly, the final characteristic identified by Boud *et al.* (2001) relates to the HEIs' role in assessing the learning, ensuring academic quality and awarding academic credit. The definitions provided at the start of this section did not restrict the learning to accredited learning. This reference to accreditation is important in the context of this study, which considers accredited WBL programmes where academic rigour is enforced by the HEI. The following section considers the motives for, and benefits of, associated with WBL partnerships.

2.4 Motives and benefits of WBL

Work-based learning provides a range of benefits to each of the stakeholders (Abduljawad, 2015; Basit *et al.*, 2015; Healy *et al.*, 2014; Higher Education Authority *et al.*, 2015; Plewa *et al.*, 2015; Sweet, 2014). Indeed, the benefits of WBL can often be felt not just by the three main stakeholders – the employer, the HEI and the learner – but also by the wider society (Ahmed, 2013; Ardizzone, 2012; Basit *et al.*, 2013; Healy *et al.*, 2014; Hunt, 2011; O'Connor *et al.*, 2013). This section focuses on the motives for, and benefits of, WBL to the employer, HEI, learner and the State.

2.4.1 Motives and benefits for the employer

Mumford and Roodhouse (2010) point to a number of factors that have made initiatives such as WBL attractive to employers. These include the flattening of the traditional hierarchy that exists in an organisation, the need for employee flexibility, and a rise in non-standard work due to restructuring and downsizing. Employers are also attracted to WBL programmes as they recognise the positive influence they can have on productivity, performance and motivation (Basit *et al.*, 2015; McPherson & Wang, 2014). Knowledge is now seen as a major source of competitive advantage amongst employers, and one way to acquire this knowledge is through initiatives such as WBL (Abduljawad, 2015). Ropes (2015) proposed that, by 2025, employees will operate in a highly complex work environment requiring multiple skills, and that employers will need to invest in training and education. In addition, employers who invest in WBL tend to be more innovative, offer improved quality and customer service, and have lower staff turnover (Sweet, 2014). Employers are attracted to WBL programmes because they cause minimal time disruption to the employer and employee, as little time is taken off work to complete the learning (Phillips, 2012). These programmes can sometimes be more affordable than training provided by private consultants (Ardizzone, 2012). In addition, employers receive some reassurance by virtue of the fact that the learning is certified and is therefore subject to meeting educational standards (Hardacre & Workman, 2010). Kewin *et al.* (2011) highlight an additional benefit for employers investing in WBL, in the form of being awarded new contracts from clients as their reputation improves. A further benefit for the employer is identified by Lester and Costley (2010) who suggest that WBL programmes can have wider impacts by gaining external recognition and prestige from clients and

customers. Finally, employees completing WBL programmes can be seen as consultants, spreading their learning throughout the organisation (Johnson, 2001).

2.4.2 Motives and benefits for the HEI

There are numerous reasons why HEIs would be motivated to engage in WBL partnerships. Harris *et al.* (2013) found that academics acquire industry knowledge and exposure to real- life business problems when participating in WBL partnerships, and this knowledge can then be passed on to traditional full-time learners. Engaging in WBL programmes also broadens the contact base with industry partners, thus stimulating future opportunities for research and innovative collaborations (Confederation of British Industry, 2015; Healy *et al.*, 2014). Through this engagement, the reputation of the HEIs can improve within the labour market (Basit *et al.*, 2013). In addition, WBL programmes offer HEIs a source of additional finance, as well as a sharing of the assessment and delivery burden (Basit *et al.*, 2015). Although some HEIs may struggle with the sharing of responsibilities in the design and delivery of the programme, Plewa *et al.* (2015) focus on the benefits by referring to the contribution the employer can make in ensuring the programme meets industry standards.

2.4.3 Motives and benefits for the learner

From the learners' perspective, WBL can be attractive because they can use their existing knowledge acquired in the workplace as a basis for gaining additional knowledge and exploiting the workplace as a learning resource (Basit *et al.*, 2015; Boud *et al.*, 2001). This can reduce the time invested in gaining a qualification. In many instances, the employer pays for all or some of the costs involved in the learning (Siebert & Walsh, 2013), and this may be extremely beneficial to employees who otherwise would be unable to finance education programmes by themselves (Sweet, 2014). WBL learners also benefit by gaining qualifications that are robust and relevant to their needs, and which may be transferable if the employee moves jobs (Hardacre & Workman, 2010; Kornecki, 2012). Another benefit highlighted by Kewin *et al.* (2011) refers to the positive influence on the morale of learners participating on the WBL programme. A further benefit presented to the learner relates to how learning is acquired.

2.4.4 Motives and benefits for the State

The importance for economic progress of WBL partnerships between HEIs and industry has been emphasised by numerous researchers (Ahmed, 2013; Ardizzone, 2012; Basit *et al.*, 2013; Brennan, 2005; Chisholm *et al.*, 2009; Healy *et al.*, 2014; Leitch, 2006; Nicholls & Walsh, 2007; Nixon *et al.*, 2006; O'Connor *et al.*, 2013). If a country is to compete as a knowledge economy, then there are a number of factors that need to exist, including a highly- skilled, well-educated workforce, and significant collaboration between HE providers and external employers (Abduljawad, 2015). In addition, WBL has the potential to reduce the reliance on exchequer for funding HE, as some of the burden is passed to the employer (Hunt, 2011; Sweet, 2014). The following section looks at WBL from an international and Irish perspective.

2.5 WBL internationally and in Ireland

Developments in information technology, increased internationalisation, as well as changes in occupational structures have resulted in an upsurge of interest in workplace learning since the beginning of the 1990s (Thijssen, 2014). WBL is already well established in Australia, Canada and the US (Abukari, 2014; Chisholm *et al.*, 2009) and promoting initiatives like WBL is a core element of the EU's agenda for modernising HE (Chisholm *et al.*, 2009; Davey *et al.*, 2011; Devins, Ferrández-Berrueco, & Kekale 2015; Ferrández-Berrueco *et al.*, 2016; Healy *et al.*, 2014). An increasing number of the occupational positions that are expected to arise in the coming years will require higher-level professional, managerial and technical skills. For example in the US, it is believed that over 30% of all vacancies by 2018 will require a post-secondary qualification (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2014) thus highlighting the importance of industry/HEI collaboration to address the education and training needs of the existing workforce. A number of European countries, in an attempt to incentivise further collaboration between HE and industry, have recently begun to reform their infrastructure and funding systems (Higher Education Authority, 2015). This has largely been in response to calls for HEIs to do more to meet the social and economic needs of society (Abukari, 2014). The transformation of advanced Western economies in the late twentieth century from manufacturing and industry to knowledge has challenged colleges and universities to be the engine for economic growth (O'Connor *et al.*, 2013). However, some researchers have maintained that collaboration between industry and HEIs in Europe

is not as widespread as it should be, and is still only in the early stages (Devins *et al.*, 2015; Healy *et al.*, 2014; Kozlinska, 2012).

In the UK, HEIs are increasingly engaging in WBL (Abukari, 2014; Basit *et al.*, 2015). The UK government has recognised, over the last twenty years, the need for HEIs to play a more active role in boosting the country's economic performance and competitiveness in the global marketplace (Abukari, 2014). The Leitch report (2006) highlights the importance of HE collaboration with private industry within the UK to support economic competitiveness, while the Government White Paper, *Skills for Growth: The national skills strategy* (Adey *et al.*, 2010), emphasises the importance of offering formalised education to those already in employment (Basit *et al.*, 2015).

Jones-Evans and Klosthen (1999) claim the Irish government realised, in the 1980s, that if Ireland was to compete economically, stronger links between academia and industry would be required. The importance of collaboration between industry and HE in Ireland in developing and delivering WBL programmes has been highlighted by a number of researchers (Hunt, 2011; McGann & Anderson, 2012). However, according to Linehan and Sheridan (2009), HEIs put almost all of their focus on those seeking employment, as opposed to those already in employment. Hunt (2011) points out that Ireland has made good progress in increasing the number of people in the workforce with higher levels of education, and this is important because, as the knowledge economy develops, the quality of Ireland's workforce will increasingly depend on the HE provider. The Higher Education Authority of Ireland *et al.* (2015) set out a vision for Ireland that recognises the importance of HEIs and industry collaborating through various means, including WBL, to achieve better skills and jobs. This study is timely in that it seeks to make a contribution to practice that will support such collaborations. Having reported on the benefits that WBL provides, the following section discusses the challenges WBL presents to the stakeholders.

2.6 Challenges associated with WBL partnerships

Shaw *et al.* (2011, p.125) suggest that:

Work-based learning was often found to challenge the learner, sometimes the employer and, in the case of more innovative practice, the very foundations of higher education as an academic-led endeavour.

This section examines the challenges presented to the three stakeholders. WBL partnerships can involve conflict, and many academics still perceive considerable barriers working with industry (Tartari, *et al.*, 2012). The challenges are not restricted to the HEIs. Working in partnership with universities does not come naturally to many business organisations (Waring, Johnston, McGrane, Nguyen, & Scullion, 2013). Sheridan and Fallon (2015, p. 352) comment:

...the higher education institution can present a fragmented interface for the external organisation. Worse, the interface often comprises a confusing array of academic disciplines and acronyms representing research units and centres.

Many of the challenges in WBL partnerships are the result of cultural differences between the HEI and external organisation due to distinct values and beliefs (Cyert & Goodman, 1997; Harris & Simons, 2006; McShane & Von Glinnow, 2010; Schofield, 2013). The challenges presented to the HEI are well documented in the literature, but those posed to the employer and employee are less remarked upon (Shaw *et al.*, 2011). This section examines challenges due to differences between the two organisations, such as belief systems, language spoken and approach to time. Other challenges, which are a result of how the HEI and external employer organisation prioritise, resource and embrace WBL, are also presented. These issues do not just impact the HEI and external employer organisation. The learner is subject to many challenges, due to the nature of the programme and inadequate support from the employer and HEI.

2.6.1 Different processes and procedures

White (2012) suggests that employers find it difficult to understand the HEI's processes and procedures and conversely, the HEI does not always understand how the external employer works. Lind and Styhre (2013) offer a possible reason for this lack of understanding, by suggesting the HEI and industry partner are governed by different belief systems and practices. Rohrbeck and Arnold (2006) describe how the mission of HEIs is to advance public good whilst industry's mission is to make profit. Cronin (2001) makes a similar claim quoting student welfare and profit maximisation as the respective missions for the HEI and external employer organisation. Rohrbeck and Arnold (2006) suggest that because the private employer and HEI operate in different environments, cultural barriers in terms of basic assumptions and expectations will vary. Cultural differences between the two organisations can result in disagreements as to what constitutes knowledge and

learning (Basit *et al.*, 2015). Anohina-Naumeca and Sitikovs (2012) claim that employers are often less interested in qualifications and more interested in performance improvements, whilst the HEIs prioritise knowledge, academic rigour and qualifications. Not only do employers favour productivity over accreditation, but some may even “view the accreditation as detracting”, as it can dictate the learning process and outcomes (Bolden *et al.*, 2009, p.17). According to Healy *et al.* (2014), employers and learners prefer the learning to be based on real-life work circumstances, but achieving this alignment can be sometimes difficult for the HEI, as it involves a shift from the traditional academic environment, where the emphasis is on knowledge as opposed to practical implementation in the workplace.

2.6.2 Language issues

Issues in relation to language can also contribute to problems (Ahmed, 2013; Ball & Manwaring, 2010; Cyert & Goodman, 1997; Rohrbeck and Arnold, 2006). Understanding academic language can be source of frustration for many employers, especially those new to WBL programmes (Choy & Delahaye, 2011; Rounce, Scarfe, & Garnett, 2007). Choy and Delahaye (2011) maintain that the language used in academia is rarely used in industry, and learners and employers can experience difficulties trying to understand academic frameworks, credits and learning outcomes (Basit *et al.*, 2013). The employer should also be careful to use a language that is understood by the HEI, in order to avoid misunderstandings (Basit *et al.*, 2013).

2.6.3 Different perceptions of time

Differences in relation to how time is perceived by the HEI and external employer organisation can also challenge both organisations. Dowling (2015) and Plewa (2009) describe how HEIs and external employers differ in their approach to time, and how time to market is a determinant for success in industry, while academics often operate in longer and less defined timeframes. Most companies think about time in terms of quarterly goals, but for HEIs, timeframes are much longer (Cyert & Goodman, 1997). Kewin *et al.* (2011) describe how employers expect HEIs to be flexible and quick to respond to their WBL requirements, but according to Bolden *et al.* (2009), HEIs are not set up to respond quickly when requested to design bespoke programmes for employers. The time-consuming process of developing new programmes means that responding to employer requirements

remains difficult for the HEI (Ferrández-Berrueco *et al.* 2016; Thayaparan, Malalgoda, Keraminiyage, & Amaratunga, 2014). Kaymaz and Eryiğit (2011) claim that the bureaucratic structure of HEIs can slow down the decision-making process and prevent a programme from being realised at the speed demanded by industry. The academic calendar can also lead to a further barrier in relation to time in WBL partnerships. Kewin *et al.* (2011, p.71) state that employers “do not think in academic calendar terms, in ‘years’ that start in October, but rather in fiscal years from January or April”. Time can also be an issue for the learner, with Lemanski *et al.* (2011) highlighting the difficult learners face trying to balance study, work and a personal life.

2.6.4 Human resources

According to Basit *et al.* (2015) and Schmidt and Gibbs (2009), one of the most serious challenges presented by WBL is in terms of human resources. Keeping up to date with trends in industry can be difficult for those delivering WBL programmes (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2014). The range of skills required by the HEI encompasses contracting, relationship management, project management and evaluation (Hardacre & Workman, 2010). In addition, the academics delivering the WBL programmes may need to adopt more of a facilitative approach from the one they normally take when delivering full-time traditional programmes, as the profile of the learner and nature of the programme are different (Kewin *et al.*, 2011). The HEI may also face challenges in getting academics to embrace WBL (Kewin *et al.*, 2011). This reluctance to accept knowledge acquired outside the classroom often comes from discipline-based academics who act almost as custodians of academic knowledge (Basit *et al.*, 2013). Human resource issues may also be an area of concern for the employer. Lemanski *et al.* (2011) describes how WBL programmes can be a challenge for some employers, who can struggle to cope when the employees are absent from the organisation, completing the programme, and also in retaining the employees once the programme is complete.

2.6.5 Financial costs

The high cost incurred by the HEI and employer in developing and delivering WBL programmes is seen as a major barrier in the promotion of WBL partnerships (Basit *et al.*, 2013; Bolden *et al.*, 2009; Galan-Muros, Davey, & Meerman, 2013; Lemanski *et al.*, 2011; Nixon *et al.*, 2006). For the HEI, these additional costs encompass development costs,

employer relations costs, shorter course lifecycles, and reductions in economies of scale and travel cost (Basit, Slack, & Hughes, 2012). Basit *et al.* (2012) do, however, state that in some cases WBL programmes can be less expensive for the HEI to deliver due to reduced face-to-face delivery, less pressure on facilities, as much of the learning takes in the employer organisation, and reduced administration costs. Nixon *et al.* (2006) describe how cost can also be an issue for the employer, and in particular for smaller organisations. Hardacre and Workman (2010), refer to a number of costs incurred by the employer, including disruption to service, mentoring costs, equipment, and delivery costs paid to the HEI.

2.6.6 Issues specific to the HEI

There are a number of challenges specific to the HEI. These relate to systems within the HEI, the organisational structure, QA requirements and reluctance to share power. Kozlinska (2012, p.155) mentions “conservatism and rigidity of the academic system” and resistance to changes in curricula as obstacles for the HEI when engaging in WBL partnerships. Layer *et al.* (2010) suggest that the HEIs’ organisational culture is heavily influenced by how traditional full-time programmes of study are administered, and as a result, they can find it challenging to adapt their systems to suit non-traditional programmes such as WBL programmes. Johnson (2001) and Kewin *et al.* (2011) also refer to the administrative system in the HEI, and claim it is geared for traditional programmes delivered over one academic year, whereas WBL programmes may span over two years, which can have implications in relation to registering learners on a programme, assessing learning and giving them access to services such as the library and computing facilities.

The organisational structure found in many HEIs can also present a barrier to WBL programmes. According to a report published by the Expert Group on Future Needs (2015), the lines between certain disciplines such as finance, engineering and IT are beginning to become blurred, and future jobs may require skills across a wide range of disciplines. The content of the programme required by the employer may need two or more faculties within the HEI collaborating to design and deliver the programme, which can also be a hindrance, as faculties tend to operate independently (Ardizzone, 2012; Basit *et al.*, 2013).

QA issues in relation to recognising and accrediting learning that occurs in the workplace have also been identified as a challenge for the HEIs (Basit *et al.*, 2013; Chisholm *et al.*, 2009; Costley, 2001; Reeve & Gallacher, 2005). Brennan *et al.* (2006, p.33) describe how some HEIs view WBL programmes as “risky developments” because of their distinctive features, which may not always align to existing QA requirements. Schmidt and Gibbs (2009) believe a paradigm change may be required to remove the resistance some academics have to accepting knowledge acquired outside the HEI. Lester and Costley (2010) suggest that this reluctance may be because WBL programmes do not always follow established and accepted academic practices in relation to curriculum and assessments, and as a result can be viewed as inferior to traditional programmes.

A further challenge facing the HEI relates to sharing power with the external employer in the design, delivery and assessment of the programme. Choy and Delahaye (2009) claim that WBL programmes require a re-distribution of power between the partners. This relinquishing of power can be a challenge for the HEI as it represents a departure from how traditional programmes are administrated (Choy & Delahaye, 2011).

2.6.7 Issues specific to the learner

The challenges highlighted earlier in this section refer to the HEI and external employer organisations but it is also important to consider the challenges the WBL learner faces. According to Boud *et al.* (2001), WBL is a seductive option for the learners, but it is important not to underestimate the challenges they face. Hughes and Slack (2012) and Lemanski *et al.* (2011) identify a number of challenges which WBL presents to the learners, including the difficulties they encounter when attempting to balance study and work, lack of support from the employer, and topics that seem irrelevant to their current role. Johnson (2001) comments on the challenge relating to work-based assessment confidentiality, and suggests that assurances over the disclosure of information provided in the assessments should be sought by the employer. Another difficulty for the employees/learners is that because they do not attend college/university on a full-time basis, they do not feel as part of the community of learners (Lemanski *et al.*, 2011), and can feel isolated (Johnson, 2001). Finally, a major challenge WBL learners often face relates to academic writing. Young and Stephenson (2007) suggest WBL learners often need help in basic issues such citations and styles of writing. Having discussed the challenges, the section now considers the facilitators for a successful WBL engagement.

2.7 Facilitators for ensuring a successful WBL partnership

According to Davey *et al.* (2011), previous research studies on industry/HE partnerships put too much emphasis on the barriers and fail to highlight the drivers and benefits associated with such collaborations. This section looks at some of the enablers for a successful WBL partnership, including the importance of relationship-building; collaboration between the partners; the availability of human resources within the HEI and external employer organisation to support the WBL initiative; the significance of making WBL strategically important within both organisations; and the importance of funding to support this form of engagement. In addition, a number of specific facilitators for the HEI are identified, including the need for flexible processes and systems to administer WBL programmes, new approaches to delivery, and rewards for academics to encourage participation in WBL programmes. Finally, the importance of the employer providing the learner with support when completing the WBL programme is considered. The literature on facilitators concentrates mainly on the needs of the HEI, with limited reference to those of the employer and learner.

2.7.1 Ensuring a good relationship between the stakeholders

A number of researchers emphasise the importance of the relationship between the various stakeholders as key to the success of the WBL partnership (Basit *et al.*, 2013; Benefer, 2007; Bolden *et al.*, 2009; Brennan, 2005; Chalmers, Swallow, & Miller, 2001; Choy & Delahaye, 2011; Dowling, 2015; White, 2012). Eardley, Chibelushi, Trigg and Borup (2012) maintain that the success of a WBL partnership depends on the quality of the relationship between the employer and HEI at a strategic, tactical and operational level. Relying on one or two individuals within their respective organisation to maintain a good relationship with the other stakeholder is risky, as these individuals may leave their role (Dowling, 2015). Research by Andersen, De Silva and Levy (2013) propose that when the parties in the HEI-industry collaboration engage in multiple relationships (e.g. research, training, guest lecturers and placements), there is a greater likelihood that the WBL collaboration will be successful. For this relationship to prosper, the various stakeholders need to trust each other (White, 2012). However, developing trust is not easy and can take a long time to develop, due to cultural differences between industry and education (Foskett, 2003). Choy and Delahaye (2009) recommend that communication between the stakeholders needs to happen early in the development of the programme, and that both the

HEI and external employer need to introduce the other partner to their organisational culture, strategic plans and procedures. This can be achieved through staff exchanges and mixed team-building initiatives (Plewa, Quester, & Baaken, 2005).

2.7.2 Collaboration between the stakeholders

Once a good relationship is established, it is important that the HEI and external employer organisation take a collaborative approach to coordinating the WBL programme (Dowling, 2015). The employer should be involved in the design, delivery, monitoring and evaluation of the WBL programme (Basit *et al.*, 2012; Linehan & Sheridan, 2009). Bolden *et al.* (2009) suggest that the HEI should not be seen as the only learning provider in the collaboration. In addition to the design and delivery of the programme, both organisations can also collaborate in the assessment of the programme. The assessment needs to be aligned with the objectives of the external organisation and satisfy the QA requirements of the HEI (Hardacre & Workman, 2010). While the majority of the literature does focus on the importance of collaboration between the HEI and employer, Basit *et al.* (2013) and Hardacre and Workman (2010) stress the need to involve learners in the design and evaluation of WBL programmes. Hardacre and Workman (2010) also state that the best WBL programmes make the learner a partner early on in the collaboration. On a similar note, Ball and Manwaring (2010) recommend that the learner be treated as a decision-maker, whose contributions should be sought throughout the WBL collaboration. Ball and Manwaring (2010) and Rowley (2005) propose that a collaborative agreement or memorandum of understanding between the three stakeholders is established, so that each party is aware of its respective roles in the WBL partnership. Bolden *et al.* (2009) also emphasise the importance of role clarity in WBL collaborations.

2.7.3 Professional and personal approach

Kewin *et al.* (2011, p.75) recommend that that HEI use a “professional yet personal approach” when engaging with industry, as employers receive so many advances from private training providers. This professional and personal approach needs to be present from the start of the relationship, as the initial contact between the employer and HEI is crucial to the success of a particular collaboration (Basit *et al.*, 2015). Sheridan and Fallon (2015) encourage the HEI to embrace a customer relationship management approach and behave entrepreneurially, in an effort to establish and maintain good relations with

industry. Andersen *et al.* (2013), Basit *et al.* (2013) and the Higher Education Authority *et al.* (2015) also encourage HEIs to adopt more of an entrepreneurial culture when promoting their services to industry. It is important that the HEIs communicate in a language easily understood by those operating outside the academic environment. This should be free of terminology and accessible by all three stakeholders (Hughes & Slack, 2012). The external employer organisations also have a role in ensuring a good relationship in WBL partnerships. Wright (2008) warns that employers should not view the partnership as a vendor type arrangement, but instead focus on building a relationship with the HEI. Edmondson, Valigra, Kenward, Hudson, and Belfield (2012) make a similar point, urging the employer and HEI to take a long-term partnership approach when engaging in WBL collaborations. To achieve a good relationship, it is important that there are regular communications between the HEI, learner and employer (Basit *et al.*, 2013; Brennan, 2005; Frasset, Calderón, & Cervera, 2012; Hardacre & Workman, 2010; Hargreaves, 1996; White, 2012). Both organisations are urged to maintain a good relationship with the learners, and treat them with respect (Ball & Manwaring, 2010).

2.7.4 Human resources

The people coordinating the WBL programme within the HEIs and external employer organisations have an important role in ensuring the partnership is successful (Schmidt & Gibbs, 2009). Edmondson *et al.* (2012, p.10) suggest that WBL collaborations “only work well when they are managed by people who cross boundaries easily and who have a deep understanding of the two cultures they need to bridge”. Experienced academic staff with knowledge of strategic planning and organisational culture should be involved in the WBL collaboration (Choy & Delahaye, 2009). Hardacre and Workman (2010) identify skills in negotiations and persuasion, as well as a willingness to share power, as important traits required by HEI staff participating in WBL partnerships. The academics delivering the WBL programmes may need to adopt a different style of delivery, which involves viewing learners as problem-solvers (Anohina-Naumeca & Sitikovs, 2012) and must be familiar with the needs of the employer and the working environment in which the learning is to be implemented (Carswell *et al.*, 2010). Significant professional development support may be required for the academic staff involved in WBL, so they can adequately meet the challenges posed by this type of engagement (Basit *et al.*, 2013; Carswell *et al.*, 2010). Basit *et al.* (2015, p.1013) encourage HEIs to employ brokers to “build bridges” between the HEIs and external employers, as problems with cultural differences between the HEIs

and external organisations can occur (Bolden et al., 2009). Bolden *et al.* (2009, p.36) suggest that support from the broker “is especially valuable to avoid misunderstandings and ease communication until understanding, or ‘cultural agility’, between the parties has developed”.

There are also a number of people within the employer organisation who play an important role in the WBL collaboration. McEwen, Mason O’Connor, Williams and Higson (2010) propose that the employer appoint a dedicated resource to coordinate WBL. In addition to coordinating the WBL programme internally, this resource would be the point of contact for the HEI throughout the WBL collaboration. This person would learn and understand the processes and language of the HEI, and inform learners and supervisors about the expected outcomes and commitments required for the programme (Choy & Delahaye, 2009). It is also important that the employer appoint a mentor to support the learner for the duration of the programme (Benefer, 2007; Linehan & Sheridan, 2009; Rowley, 2005). Ramage (2014, p.503) states that without the mentor, the learner feels “isolated, confused, devalued and demotivated”.

2.7.5 Making WBL a strategic priority

WBL needs to be a strategic priority for both the HEI and external employer organisation. The importance of gaining senior management support within the HEI is highlighted by a number of authors (Dowling, 2015; Edmondson *et al.*, 2012; Kornecki, 2012; Noble, Frame, & Eustance, 2010). Basit *et al.* (2015, p.1013) identify the “championing of WBL at the senior/executive level” as critical to ensuring that WBL is seen as a strategic priority. Research by Kewin *et al.* (2011) also identified the importance of getting the senior figures within the HEI to take a personal and passionate interest in WBL, as these people are key to getting academics to support WBL. Basit *et al.* (2013) claim that WBL needs to be embedded into the strategic plan of the HEI. WBL should also be of strategic importance to the external employer organisation, and resources need to be available to support the initiative (Boud *et al.*, 2001).

2.7.6 Funding

Removing funding barriers is a crucial step in encouraging collaboration between employers and HEIs (Galan-Muros *et al.*, 2013). Irish employers might engage with bodies

such as Skillnets, which provide subsidised training and education to groups of companies with similar training needs (Quality and Qualifications Ireland, 2014).

2.7.7 Issues specific to the HEI

Within the HEI, there are a number of specific issues that may need to be considered. The processes and systems that were set up for full-time programmes within the HEI may need to be adapted to cater for WBL programmes. The administrative system has been identified as one such system, because in many HEIs, this was developed with full-time traditional learners in mind and may not cater for the needs of WBL programmes, which are different in their design, delivery, and assessment (Johnson, 2001; Kewin *et al.*, 2011; Layer *et al.*, 2010). Lack of flexibility and timescales are often mentioned by employers as major obstacles in WBL collaborations (Ardizzone, 2012; Brennan, 2005; Edmondson *et al.*, 2012). A challenge highlighted earlier referred to the fact some employers are now requesting programmes that combine disciplines of study. Sheridan and Fallon (2015) acknowledge this, and encourage the HEI to adopt a cross-disciplinary response to industry, as opposed to expecting the employer to package their requirement into a single academic discipline. In an effort to improving flexibility, and reduce the time it takes for HEIs to respond to industry requirements, Mumford and Roodhouse (2010) recommend the use of shell frameworks. These shell frameworks have generic aims and outcomes which can then be personalised for individual employers. This means that when an employer approaches the HEI to develop a new programme, the HEI can respond much quicker as the shell frameworks have already been approved and the employer can negotiate the content with the HEI (Mumford & Roodhouse, 2010). Basit *et al.* (2013) make a similar claim by suggesting that these generic frameworks allow for a prompt response from employers, and are more cost effective for the HEI, as the same programme can cater for a variety of employers.

Another issue that is very important to the promotion of WBL within the HEI concerns how participating in WBL partnerships is rewarded. There remains a sense that HEIs do not support, reward or incentivise collaboration with external organisations and until this occurs, WBL will not be as widespread as it could be (Andersen *et al.*, 2013; Confederation of British Industry, 2008; Dowling, 2015; Hughes *et al.*, 2016). Basit *et al.* (2013), Bolden *et al.* (2009) and Davey *et al.* (2011) encourage the HEI to provide rewards and incentives to academics who engage with external businesses. Kewin *et al.* (2011)

describe how some HEIs are incentivising WBL by rewarding staff with promotions and recognition in their appraisals for their efforts in engaging with industry. However, research by Andersen *et al.* (2013) found that engagement with industry was not found to be a significant element in determining promotions within HEIs, and that much more emphasis was put on research publications.

2.7.8 Employers supporting learners

An important facilitator for the learner relates to support from the employer. Learners on a WBL programme require significant support and intervention from the employer when completing the programme (Choy & Delahaye, 2009; Hardacre & Workman, 2010). The employer needs to allow the learner time to reflect upon the academic learning acquired, as well as providing challenges in the workplace so that the learner can test the learning (Nixon *et al.*, 2006; Siebert & Walsh, 2013). Boud *et al.* (2001) suggest that if employers are to develop effective WBL partnerships, then a work environment that accommodates the testing of the knowledge is required. Ball and Manwaring (2010) maintain that this is more likely to occur if a culture within the employer organisation exists whereby professional development is supported.

The vast majority of the literature is based around the needs of the HEI. This is surprising, as the employer has a significant role in supporting the design, delivery and assessment of the learning. In addition, the WBL learner has different needs from the traditional learner, and this needs to be understood if the WBL partnership is to meet the requirements of the three stakeholders. The following section considers the importance of organisational culture in WBL partnerships.

2.8 Chapter summary

This chapter has addressed Research Objective 1 by critically reviewing the literature in the field of WBL partnerships between HEIs and external employer organisations. The benefits of WBL to the various stakeholders have been explained, as well as the challenges involved in designing and delivering WBL. A review of the benefits and challenges provided by WBL is important in the context of this study, because it reveals the expectations of the various stakeholders collaborating in the partnership. In addition, a review of the facilitators for a successful WBL partnership has been provided. Many of

these facilitators, such as rituals and routines, language, orientation towards time, allocation of power, and rewards come under the wide umbrella of organisational culture. This chapter has also demonstrated how cultural differences between the HEI and external employer organisations can make collaborations between the two organisations challenging for the three stakeholders. In addition, cultural issues within the HEI and external employer organisations can create significant challenges when an attempt is being made to initiate or manage a WBL partnership. A major objective of this study is to determine how WBL partnerships can be enhanced by a deeper understanding of organisational culture. Before this can be achieved, it is important to understand what does organisational culture mean, what it covers, how it evolves, can it be changed and how can it be studied. This leads to a justification for the need to investigate organisational culture so its influence on WBL partnerships can be understood.

3 Organisational Culture

3.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to address Research Objective 2: *To critically review the literature in the field of organisational culture in order to determine its influence on WBL partnerships.*

The previous chapter explored WBL and emphasised the importance of organisational cultural issues between and within the HEI and external employer organisations. The literature highlighted the importance of overcoming these cultural differences when engaging in WBL partnerships (Ball & Manwaring, 2010; Bolden *et al.*, 2009; Cyert & Goodman, 1997; Rohrbeck & Arnold, 2006; Schofield, 2013). This chapter deepens the understanding of cultural issues by critically reviewing the literature on organisational culture. It initially provides background information on the topic, followed by a number of definitions of organisational culture. The chapter then examines and differentiates between integrated, differentiated and fragmented perspectives of culture. It then presents the influences on an organisation's culture, followed by the roles played by organisational culture. The debate in relation to culture change is introduced, before an overview of organisational culture studies in HEIs is presented. A review of the components that make up organisational culture is then provided, before a number of frameworks for studying culture are discussed.

3.2 Introduction to organisational culture

According to Brown (1998), anthropologist Edward B. Taylor was the first to introduce the word culture to the English language in 1871. There is some disagreement regarding when organisational culture studies were first conducted. Griffiths and Linnenluecke (2010) maintain that organisational culture studies emerged in the 1970s and 1980s (e.g. Hofstede, 1980 & Pettigrew, 1979) but Fortado and Fadil (2012) argue that Elton Mayo and colleagues in the Western Electric Hawthorne plant in the 1920s and 1930s were the first group to conduct organisational culture studies. Schein (1990) claims that one of the major reasons for the increase in interest in organisational culture during the 1980s was that US organisations were concerned that they were falling behind Japanese companies, and one of the main drivers behind this decline was the perceived superior culture of the

Japanese organisations. Janićijević (2011) describes how the topic still remains one of the most explored areas of organisational behaviour. However, despite this upsurge in interest, the study of culture is a highly contested area that has led to disagreements about its definition and nature (Giorgi Lockwood, & Glynn, 2015; Silver, 2003; Waring & Skoumpopoulou, 2013). Bellot (2011) notes that some of the disagreements relate to whether there is one single culture per organisation or do several subcultures exist. Earlier theorists believed organisational culture was singular but more recent researchers believe an organisation comprises of numerous subcultures (Janićijević, 2011).

3.3 Defining organisational culture

Despite the fact that it has been a topic of much investigation since the 1980s, organisational culture has not yet attained a widely accepted definition (Ramachandran, Chong, & Ismail, 2011; Testa & Sipe, 2013). Schein (1990, p.109) provides an explanation as to why defining organisational culture proves so challenging, by stating that culture “lies at the intersection of several social sciences and reflects some of the biases of each – specifically, those of anthropology, sociology, social psychology, and organizational behavior”. Lewis (1998) offers a similar explanation as to why defining organisational culture is difficult, and adds the disciplines of psychology and political science to Schein’s list. Cameron and Quinn (2011) as well as Testa and Sipe (2013) contribute by suggesting that the ambiguity around organisational culture is caused by two different schools of thought describing how it should be studied. One school of thought sees culture as something an organisation has whilst the other school sees organisational culture as something an organisation is and does. Janićijević (2011) also comments on these different approaches, and states that those who believe organisational culture is something an organisation has (the objectivistic approach) assume culture is a discrete component of an organisation and can be measured by an instrument like a questionnaire, whereas those that assume that culture is something an organisation is (subjectivist approach) believe that culture cannot be measured, but only understood. When one considers the breadth of the topic, and the many reasons for studying culture, it becomes clear why defining the concept is so difficult (Martin, 2002). Insight into the breadth of components that relate to organisational culture is provided by Scott, Mannion, Davies, and Marshall (2003, p.925) who state organisational culture:

denotes a wide range of social phenomena, including an organization's customary dress, language, behavior, beliefs, values, assumptions, symbols of status and authority, myths, ceremonies and rituals, and modes of deference and subversion.

Despite the difficulties associated with defining organisational culture, several widely-quoted definitions exist. Davis (1984, p.1) defines it as “the pattern of shared beliefs and values that give members of an institution meaning, and provide them with the rules for behaviour in their organisation”. Schein (2004, p.17) also alludes to this “shared” nature, when defining organisational culture as:

a pattern of shared basic assumptions that was learned by a group as it solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, that has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems.

Schein's definition refers to basic assumptions, as opposed to values and beliefs. These assumptions operate at a deeper level (less visible) than values and beliefs, and are taken for granted by the members of an organisation because they have worked repeatedly well to solve problems (Schein, 2004). The definitions provided by Davis (1984) and Schein (1992) emphasise that culture is something that is shared. Indeed, other researchers (e.g. Louis, 1985; Sathe, 1985; Tierney, 1988), when describing organisational culture, use the word “shared”. Martin (2002) disagrees with the idea that culture implies a uniformity of values, and proposes that only a part of the organisational culture consists of issues and perceptions that the employees agree on, and that ambiguity should be incorporated into definitions of organisational culture. The notion that culture is a shared phenomenon is also questioned by Feldman (1991), who suggests that different values may be displayed by people of the same culture. This section having provided several definitions, the following one examines different perspectives on how culture could be viewed.

3.4 Different theoretical perspectives of organisational culture

Martin (2002) identifies three theoretical perspectives organisational culture researchers may use when studying culture: integration, differentiation, and fragmentation. The integration perspective focuses on all that is common or agreed within an organisation (McDonald & Foster, 2013). Researchers adopting this approach focus on a common language, shared values, and shared behaviours (Meyerson & Martin, 1987). Schein's

(1996) research on senior managers is an example of a study taking an integrated approach, focusing on the shared tacit assumptions of managers (Martin, 2002).

The differentiation perspective accepts some levels of diversity within the organisation (Gajendran, Brewer, Dainity, & Runeson, 2012). This view assumes that distinct subcultures exist within the organisation, and these subcultures may exist in harmony, independently or in conflict with other subcultures (Martin, 2002). Martin cites Van Maanen's (1991) research on the various subcultures amongst the workers in Disneyland as an example of a differentiation study. Researchers adopting this perspective look for contradictions, e.g. contradictions between formal rules and routine practices (Meyerson & Martin, 1987).

The fragmentation perspective focuses on ambiguity, assuming a lack of consensus or clear disagreement within an organisation (Gajendran *et al.*, 2012; Martin, 2002). Whereas the integration and differentiation theoretical perspectives look for consistencies and inconsistencies respectively, the fragmentation approach looks for ambiguity. Martin refers to Risberg's (1999) research as an example of a fragmentation study. In this study, Risberg focuses on ambiguities in interpretations of situations and statements, whilst carrying out research in a Swedish crane-manufacturing organisation. With this approach, cultural manifestations are not clearly consistent or inconsistent with each other, but are instead characterised by a lack of clarity (Meyerson & Martin, 1987).

This review of cultural perspectives is important in this research, because it will influence how the investigation is carried out and how the views of different subcultures within the HEI and external employer organisations are represented (Martin, 2002). Johnson (1992), whilst acknowledging that different people within an organisation may hold different sets of beliefs, argues there is likely to exist a set of shared underlying assumptions that he refers to as the "paradigm" (p. 29). French, Rayner, Rees, & Rumbles (2011) and Schein (2004) also suggest that a set of shared tacit assumptions are likely to exist in most organisations. The following section examines the influences on culture.

3.5 Influences on culture

There are a number of influences on an organisation's culture. Gordon (1991) highlights the role of the industry in which the organisations operate as having a significant

influence. Thus, within certain industries, organisations share cultural characteristics that differ significantly from the characteristics found in other industries (Gordon, 1991). Deal and Kennedy (1982) claim that the single biggest influence on a company's culture is the broader business environment in which the company operates. Changes in the business environment produce stresses and strains within the organisation that eventually influence culture (Schein, 1990). Organisations operating in the public sector develop a different culture from organisations in the private sector (Brown, 1998) due to differences in customer requirements, products and services offered, competition, technologies and government influences (Deal & Kennedy, 1982). Public sector organisations such as HEIs are more influenced by the government than private organisations are due to policies and legal frameworks imposed (Brown, 1998).

A further important influence on organisational culture relates to the role of the leader (Elashmawi, 2000; Schein, 1983). Chatman and Cha (2003) suggest that leaders use three tools to influence culture. Firstly, they recruit and select people who fit the organisation's culture. Secondly, they influence culture through socialisation and training. Thirdly, they influence culture through the reward system. Schein (2009) makes a similar claim, adding the allocation of resources to Chatman and Cha's list. However, the degree of influence exercised by the leader is questioned by Alvesson (1995), who suggests that not all leaders are powerful or have the capacity to affect others.

Another influence relates to the national culture in which the organisation is embedded (Schein, 2009). Several of the external employer organisations with which HEI X collaborate are foreign multinational firms that have beliefs, systems and procedures which reflect their national culture (Schein, 2009). The following section discusses the importance of organisational culture on performance and behaviour.

3.6 The roles played by organisational culture

The roles played by organisational culture in the organisation have been well documented by researchers (Cadden, Marshall, & Guangming, 2013; Cameron & Quinn, 1999; Campbell, Stonehouse, & Houston, 2002; Dauber, Fink, & Yolles, 2012; Deal & Kennedy, 1982; Peters & Waterman, 1982; van den Berg & Wilderom, 2004; Weber & Yedidia Tarba, 2012). There are good reasons for this, as culture influences everything from dress code, who gets promoted and what decisions are made (Deal & Kennedy, 1982)

to employee motivation, morale, productivity, innovation and industrial relations (Campbell *et al.*, 2002). Cameron and Quinn (2006) report that the study of organisational culture is becoming increasingly important for a number of reasons including company mergers, downsizing and an increasingly volatile business environment. McShane and Von Glinnow (2010, p.424) present three important roles organisational culture can provide:

1. Control system. Culture influences employee decisions and behaviour directing members in ways consistent with organisational expectations.
2. Social glue. Organisational culture bonds people together so they feel part of an organisation and improves morale.
3. Sense making. Organisational culture helps people understand what is going on in the organisation and what is expected of them.

Research by Peters and Waterman (1982) highlights the influence of organisational culture on performance. Their research suggests that successful companies have an organisational culture that is directed towards the needs of the marketplace and by staying close to the customer. However, not all researchers are in agreement regarding the influence of culture. Hatch (1993, p.667) suggests, “other forces contribute to the same activities that are open to cultural influence”. In a similar vein to Hatch, Martin (2002) argues that culture does not cover everything, and proposes that researchers cannot determine all they need to know about an organisation by studying culture alone. Other influences, such as social and political factors, should be considered (Heracleous & Langham, 1996). Alvesson (2013, p.62) also raises questions about the relationship between culture and performance, describing the relationship as “non-linear”. This section having discussed the importance of organisational culture, the following discusses cultural change in organisations.

3.7 Culture change

A major objective of this research is to identify recommendations for the HEI and external employer organisations in relation to their organisational cultures. Some of the recommendations may require a change in the “way we do things around here” (Deal & Kennedy, 1982, p.4). For example, some of the cultural practices within HEI X evolved over the years, in response to the needs of full-time traditional programmes, and may not serve the needs of WBL programmes, which means these practices may need to be reconsidered.

There is still debate in relation to whether or not culture can be changed. Lewis (1998) has concerns about changing something that is not unitary, and if culture is composed of numerous subcultures, how can managers change it? Although McShane and Von Glinow (2010) suggest that it is possible to change an organisation's culture, they admit doing so is not easy, and that change rarely occurs. This claim is supported by Limwichtir, Broady-Preston and Ellis (2015), who contend that change must involve employees at all levels in the organisation. However, according to Bate (1996) and Gordon (1991), organisations must be able to change their culture to react to changes in the external environment, if they are to remain competitive. Bate also suggests that changes to an organisation's culture happens whether it is planned or not. An organisation's culture can change without changing deep underlying assumptions that have been widely accepted by members of a culture (Schein, 2004). These changes Schein refers to may involve the identification of new stories, new heroes, people spending their time differently on a day-to-day basis, and carrying out different rituals (Deal & Kennedy, 1982). Alvesson and Sveningsson (2008) identify a number of means an organisation can consider when contemplating change, including new recruitment and selection procedures so that people in agreement with the new culture are hired; new training programmes to signal a desired culture; and rewarding behaviour symbolising a desired culture.

Cameron and Quinn (2011) illustrate how culture in new and small companies tends to change over time. They describe how organisations progress through a predictable pattern of cultural changes that involves a predominant adhocracy culture (dynamic and entrepreneurial) to begin with, then moving to a clan culture (family like culture) as the organisation gets bigger. This shift in size means the organisation requires structure and procedures, so a hierarchy culture develops; and finally, due to competitiveness and an emphasis on external relationships, a market culture evolves.

Kilmann, Saxton and Serpa (1986) contribute to the debate on whether culture can or cannot be changed by suggesting that culture change depends on how deep-seated culture is, and how many different subcultures exist. According to Kilmann *et al.* (1986), the deeper the organisation's culture and the more subcultures that exist in an organisation, the more difficult and time-consuming culture change will be. The following section reviews some of the literature that discusses organisational culture within HEIs.

3.8 Organisational culture in HE

There have only been a few studies of organisational culture in relation to HEIs, with most of the research gathered relating to industrial or commercial organisations (Ferreira & Hill, 2008). However, Tierney (1988) suggest that organisational culture became a topic of significance to HE researchers in the 1960s. According to de Zilwa (2007), earlier studies on culture of HEIs focused on stories, legends, ceremonies and sagas (e.g. Clark, 1972) and heroes, rituals and symbols (e.g. Masland, 1985). Interest in studying organisational culture from a HEI perspective appears warranted, as organisations operating in the HE sector are facing similar challenges to those organisations in the public sector, including economic restructuring, internationalisation, market forces and demographic shifts (Omerzel , Biloslavo, & Trnavčević, 2011; Ramachandran *et al.*, 2011).

Understanding an HEI's organisational culture can prove difficult, due to the absence of a unitary culture (Astin, 1993; Barnett, 2000; Clark, 1983; Dill, 1982; Silver, 2003). Subcultures relating to academic discipline and level in the organisational hierarchy tend to exist in most HEIs (Harman, 1989). Astin (1993) makes reference to the lack of a "community" in universities and Barnett (2000, p.48) uses the term "multiversity" when describing the HEI's culture, suggesting that such institutions are composed of multiple factions, interests and activities, with notable differences between the academic and administrative subcultures (de Zilwa, 2007). Silver (2003) also comments on the subcultures that exists within HEIs, but does state that there is a greater likelihood of having a homogeneous culture in a smaller HEIs than in a large university. HEI X would be considered a small institute, with just over 3,500 full-time learners. Nevertheless, I am aware that within the institute, the different professions and disciplines are going to have traits, beliefs and assumptions that may be quite different (Barnett, 2000).

3.9 Elements and aspects of organisational culture

Researchers have identified different elements and aspects of organisational culture (Brown, 1998). Martin (2002) recommends that when studying organisational culture, it is important to consider the broadest range possible of cultural manifestations and incorporate both materialist aspects (e.g. physical arrangements, job descriptions, pay arrangements) and idealist aspects (e.g. beliefs and values) as part of the research. It should be noted that different researchers attach different meaning to these cultural

elements. For example, Schein (1983) refers to language under the cultural element of artefacts, whilst language is included in symbols when discussed by Johnson (1988). These and other cultural elements and aspects are reviewed in this section.

3.9.1 Rituals and routines

According to Hofstede, Neuijen, Ohayv and Sanders (1990, p. 291), “rituals are collective activities that are technically superfluous but are socially essential within a culture”. Martin (2002) identifies a number of common types of rituals, including integration rituals (inductions for new staff), enhancement rituals (recognising good performance by staff) and degradation rituals (a recognition of bad performance by staff). Rituals can be uncovered by observing how people behave in meetings and what events are celebrated in an organisation (Hofstede *et al.*, 1990). Other rituals can be observed from training programmes, interview panels, promotion and assessment procedures (Johnson, Whittington, & Scholes 2011). Deal and Kennedy (1982) identify a number of rituals that are important for this study, including communications rituals (how communications is conducted internally and externally), work rituals (procedures for carrying out tasks) and management rituals (how decisions are made within an organisation). White (2012) refers to the differences in work rituals between HEIs and external employer organisations, and how these can present a challenge in WBL partnerships. Routines refer to the ways that employees behave towards each and towards those external to the organisation (Johnson & Scholes, 2001). Routines can represent a “taken-for-grantedness about how things should happen which, again, can guide how people respond to issues and be difficult to change” (Johnson *et al.*, 2011, p. 177).

3.9.2 Stories

According to Johnson *et al.* (2011), the stories told by members of the organisation to each other, to outsiders and to new recruits have a significant influence in shaping an organisation’s culture. These stories are understood by a large number of employees in the organisation, focus on a single event, and the central characters in the story are employees of the organisation (Martin, 2002). Although the content of the story may be unique to each individual organisation, Martin, Feldman, Hatch and Sitkin (1983) identify common themes frequently found in stories. These themes take in stories about rule-breaking, employees being promoted, employees being fired, and how the organisation deals with

obstacles. Kemp and Dwyer (2001) suggest that stories told often relate to success, disasters, heroes, villains and mavericks who deviate from the norm. Stories are important indicators of cultural values and beliefs that are used to communicate cultural norms to new and existing members within an organisation (Brown, 1998; Freemantle, 2013a).

3.9.3 Symbols and artefacts

Symbols are “everything that can be seen, heard, or touched in an organizational context” (Janićijević, 2011, p. 73). Cultural symbols are found in every organisation (Hill & McNulty, 1998), and examples include logos, offices, cars, titles and the type of language used (Johnson & Scholes, 2001). Martin (2002) explains that when an outsider enters a new culture for the first time, one of the first manifestations of culture he/she notices is the language or jargon used. Symbols are rich in meaning, and the cultural researcher needs to interpret what the symbol portrays (Alvesson, 2013). Some cultural elements, such as rituals, routines and control systems, can be both functional in their own right and also symbolic (Freemantle, 2013a).

Schein (2009) refers to a similar cultural element, which he terms “artifacts” to describe, “what you see, hear and feel as you hang around” (p.22). Schein combines a number of cultural elements such as rewards, rituals and routines when considering artefacts. Other writers, such as Hofstede *et al.* (1990) and Johnson (1988), prefer to keep these elements separate. While researchers should be careful not to read too much into artefacts and symbols, the latter do provide clues to values and underlying assumptions (Brown, 1998).

3.9.4 Power structures

Power structures “are distributions of power to groups of people in an organisation” (Johnson, Whittington, Scholes, Angwin, & Regnér, 2013, p.157). Johnson *et al.* (2011), report that the most powerful members within an organisation are likely to be closely associated with the shared underlying assumptions found in the cultural paradigm. For example, in Kemp and Dwyer’s (2001) study, the cultural paradigm represented assumptions that recognised the importance of attracting, developing and retaining employees, and highlighted the significant power held by the human resource department within the organisation. Insight into the power structures of an organisation can also be

gained by observing how staff contribute to decision-making, and are empowered to use their own initiative (Kemp & Dwyer, 2001).

3.9.5 Organisational structures

The organisational structure refers to “the roles, responsibilities and reporting relationships in organisations” (Johnson *et al.*, 2011, p. 178). The organisational structure indicates whose contributions are most valued by their position in the hierarchy (Freemantle, 2013a) and is likely to reflect power structures (Johnson & Scholes, 2001). Kemp and Dwyer (2001), when describing organisational structure, refer to the degree of centralisation, formalisation, complexity, configuration and flexibility in the organisation, whilst Losekoot, Leishman and Alexander (2008) suggest that organisational structures determine whether the organisation is “hierarchical or flat, mechanistic or organic, collaborative or confrontational” (p.257).

3.9.6 Control systems

Control systems refer to measurements and reward systems that emphasise what is important to focus on in an organisation (Johnson & Scholes, 2001). What is monitored and rewarded in an organisation gives meaning to the employees about expected behaviour (Johnson *et al.*, 2011). A similar point is made by Schein (2004), who suggests a change in relation to rewards can be one of the quickest and easiest ways to change an organisation’s culture. Organisations should reward and praise behaviour that is aligned to a desired culture (Freemantle, 2013b). This connection between reward and behaviour is important in relation to the objectives of this study, because it has been implied that WBL needs to be better rewarded and incentivised in HEIs if it is to become more widespread (Andersen *et al.*, 2013; Dowling, 2015; Hughes *et al.*, 2016).

3.9.7 Influential characters

A number of authors refer to special characters who have an influence in shaping an organisation’s culture. Hofstede *et al.* (1990) describe heroes as people alive or dead who possess characteristics highly prized in an organisation. It is important that the culture researcher understands what makes these people heroes, because this provides insight into what is valued within an organisation (Hofstede *et al.*, 1990). These heroes often have great influence on an organisation’s culture by what they do and say (Hofstede *et al.*,

1990). Deal and Kennedy (1982) claim that heroes reinforce the basic values of a culture by providing role models for the employees, setting a standard of performance, and making success seem attainable.

Deal and Kennedy (1982) refer to a number of other people who assume roles in the hidden hierarchy performing “other jobs”. These people make up the cultural network and comprise characters such as storytellers, gossips, secretarial sources, and spies. According to Deal and Kennedy (1982, p.98), every organisation has its own informal cultural network who “broadcast, embellish, and reinforce values”.

3.9.8 Values

Hofstede *et al.* (1990) suggest that values form the core of a culture. Values determine what people think should be done in and are connected to moral and ethical beliefs (Brown, 1998). In addition, values determine what matters should be attended to in an organisation and what takes priority (Deal & Kennedy, 1982). Schein (2009) also identifies values when discussing organisational culture, but unlike Hofstede *et al.* (1990), believes that these values can operate at the conscious level, and describes how they can be found in published documents, such as mission statements and policy manuals.

3.9.9 Underlying assumptions/cultural paradigm

Schein (2009) suggests that organisational culture exists at a level below values. He claims that when a researcher is attempting to understand organisational culture, he/she must consider the shared underlying assumptions, which are “unconscious, taken for granted beliefs, perceptions, thoughts and feelings” (Schein, 2009, p.21). Although difficult to understand, the underlying assumptions can be uncovered by people being sensitive to the clues provided by artefacts and values (Schein, 2009). Mossop, Dennick, Hammond and Robbé (2013) argue that ethnographic studies combining a number of different data-collection methods are the most effective strategy for understanding underlying assumptions. McShane and Von Glinnow (2010) claim that these underlying assumptions only rise to the surface through observing and questioning members of a culture. Cultural assumptions about time often vary between organisations (Schein, 2009), and this is evident in WBL partnerships. Dowling (2015) describes how HEIs and private businesses operate in different timescales, and this presents challenges for both organisations.

Johnson (1988) combines assumptions and values into what he terms the “paradigm”, which he describes as “the set of beliefs and assumptions, held relatively common through the organization” (Johnson, 1988, p. 85). Although individual members of a culture may hold quite different values and beliefs, there is likely to exist at some level a common core set of assumptions (Johnson, 1992). These assumptions, which have evolved over time, may be about the environment the organisation operates in, managerial style, and routines seen as important to achieve success (Johnson, 1992). Before uncovering the paradigm, it is important to be sensitive to the signals provided by the more visible cultural elements, such as rituals, routines and symbols (Kemp & Dwyer, 2001). In addition, the views of outsiders can be valuable to those trying to identify the paradigm (Johnson, 1992). The participants who contributed to this study not only provided insight into their own organisation’s culture, but also provided input into the other organisation’s culture (e.g. HEI X staff commented on the external organisation’s culture and the external employer participants commented on HEI X’s culture).

This section has described many of the elements of an organisation’s culture and provided insight into the breadth and depth of the topic. Understanding these elements is important in the context of this study, because it provides insight into what needs to be investigated when reviewing the organisational culture of both HEI X and the external employer organisations. In addition, it is important to select a framework when studying organisational culture that considers as many as these elements as possible (Martin, 2002). The following section presents models of organisational culture that attempt to represent the relationship between organisational cultural elements.

3.10 Frameworks for understanding organisational culture

This section presents three frameworks researchers can use when studying organisational culture. The three frameworks are as follows:

1. Manifestations of culture by Hofstede *et al.* (1990): from shallow to deep.
2. Schein’s (1985) three levels of culture.
3. Johnson’s (1988) cultural web.

3.10.1 Hofstede et al. (1990) manifestations of culture: from shallow to deep

Hofstede *et al.* (1990) classify manifestations of culture into four categories: symbols, heroes, rituals, and values (Figure 3-1).

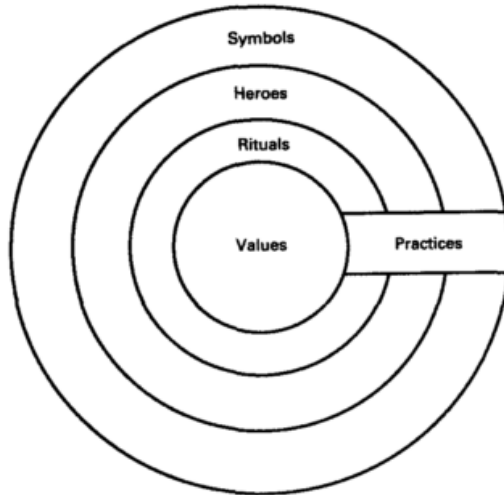


Figure 3-1 Manifestations of culture: From shallow to deep
(Adapted from: Hofstede *et al.*, 1990, p. 291)

Hofstede *et al.* (1990) liken organisational culture to the successive skins of an onion – from the shallow symbols to the deeper rituals. At the heart of the model lie the values that influence the three outer skins. Symbols refer to words, gestures, pictures and objects, and are the most visible layer to an observer. Heroes refer to people who possess characteristics highly prized in the organisation (closely linked to the values), and rituals are events that are celebrated in the organisation and have a long history. Symbols, heroes, and rituals are considered under the term “practices”, because they are visible to an observer, whilst values refer to what members of a culture feel ought to happen (Hofstede *et al.*, 1990). This inclusion of heroes as a separate cultural element distinguishes the framework proposed by Hofstede *et al.* (1990) from other models, such as those of Schein (1985), Johnson (1988) and Hatch (1993). The former (1990) research involved comparing organisational cultures from ten different organisations in Denmark and the Netherlands. Data were collected in relation to the four manifestations (symbols, heroes, rituals, and values) through a combination of in-depth interviews (180 respondents) and questionnaires (1,295 respondents). Each of the four manifestations informed several questions in both the interviews and questionnaires. The data were then analysed using statistical techniques to identify mean scores and analyses of variance. A major finding from their research

supported a claim made by Peters and Waterman (1982) which suggests that companies with a strong culture (homogeneous values) are more results-oriented than companies with a heterogeneous culture.

3.10.2 Schein levels of culture

Schein (2004) describes how culture can be analysed at three fundamental levels, with the term “level” referring to the degree to which it is visible to the observer. The three levels refer to artefacts, espoused values, and basic underlying assumptions, as illustrated in Figure 3-2.

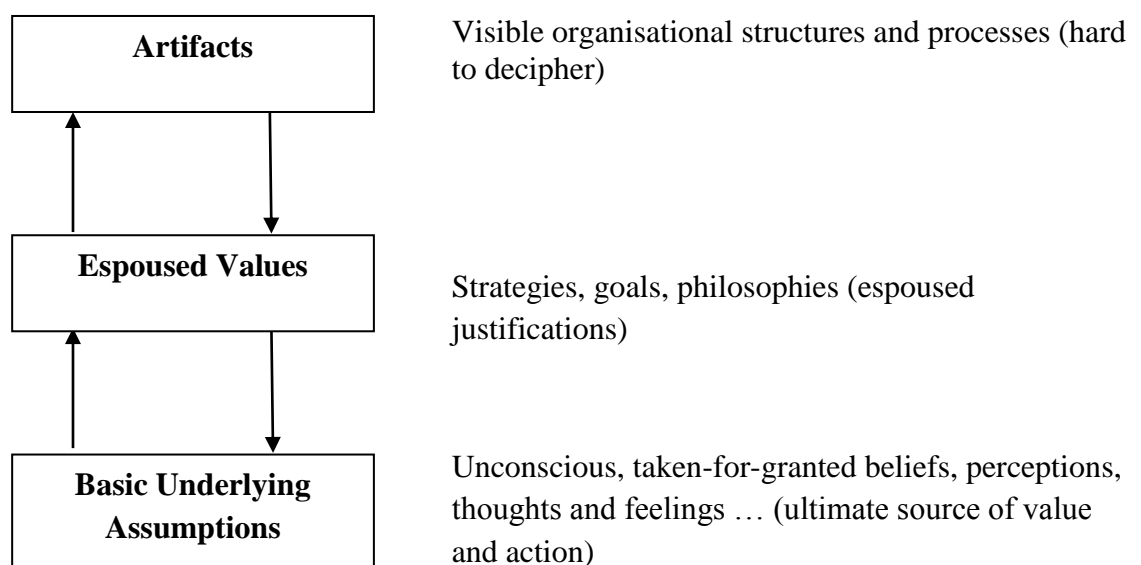


Figure 3-2 The three levels of culture
(Adapted from: Schein, 2004, p.21)

Schein (1985) claims that artefacts are the easiest level to observe, but the clues they provide to a researcher of organisational culture may be misleading if he/she does not know how to connect them to underlying assumptions. The second level refers to espoused values. Schein (2004) explains how different professions have different values, and if these occupations involved intense education and training, these values are stronger. Values at this conscious level predict much of the behaviour that can be observed at the artefacts level (Schein, 1985). The deepest level is basic underlying assumptions operating at the unconscious level. These assumptions may have started out as values, but have gradually come to be taken for granted, and go unquestioned in the organisation (Schein, 1990). Schein (2004) provides some general assumptions that organisations may develop, including assumptions about time (e.g. importance of being punctual), space (e.g. personal

space, layout of buildings), human relationships (e.g. how should people relate to each other), and human activity (e.g. relationship with the environment). In trying to understand culture at this level, the researcher should closely observe members and ask focused questions (Schein, 1990). This reference to assumptions is important from a WBL perspective. It has been reported that HEIs and external employer organisations have different assumptions in relation to what constitutes knowledge (Anohina-Naumeca & Sitikovs, 2012; Basit *et al.*, 2015; Healy *et al.*, 2014) and different assumptions regarding time (Dowling, 2015; Kewin *et al.*, 2011).

Schein's (2004, 2009) approach to understanding organisational culture involves gathering groups of people together and delivering a presentation on the three levels of culture. The first exercise with the group involves discussing the artefacts, by asking people to remember how they felt when they entered the organisation for the first time, and to comment on artefacts such as dress code, physical layout of the workplace, what is rewarded and how promotion works. These values are identified by discussing artefacts at a deeper level, e.g. by asking participants why people dress the way they do. The process continues to consider underlying assumptions by discussing if the values identified really explain all of the artefacts. Discussions regarding contradictions between artefacts and values are particularly useful in uncovering underlying assumptions (Schein, 2004).

According to Hatch (1993), Schein's (1985) model of organisational culture as assumptions, values, and artefacts would be more useful if the importance of symbols within culture was further emphasised. In addition, she proposes that the relationship between the cultural elements should be made more focal.

3.10.3 The cultural web

Johnson (1988) introduced the concept of the cultural web in a journal paper on strategic change as observed in a menswear clothes shop in the 1970s and 1980s (Losekoot *et al.*, 2008). The cultural web is based on six interrelated and overlapping factors, which influence and are influenced by the central cultural paradigm (Johnson *et al.*, 2011). The six factors, together with the paradigm, are described in Figure 3-3 below:

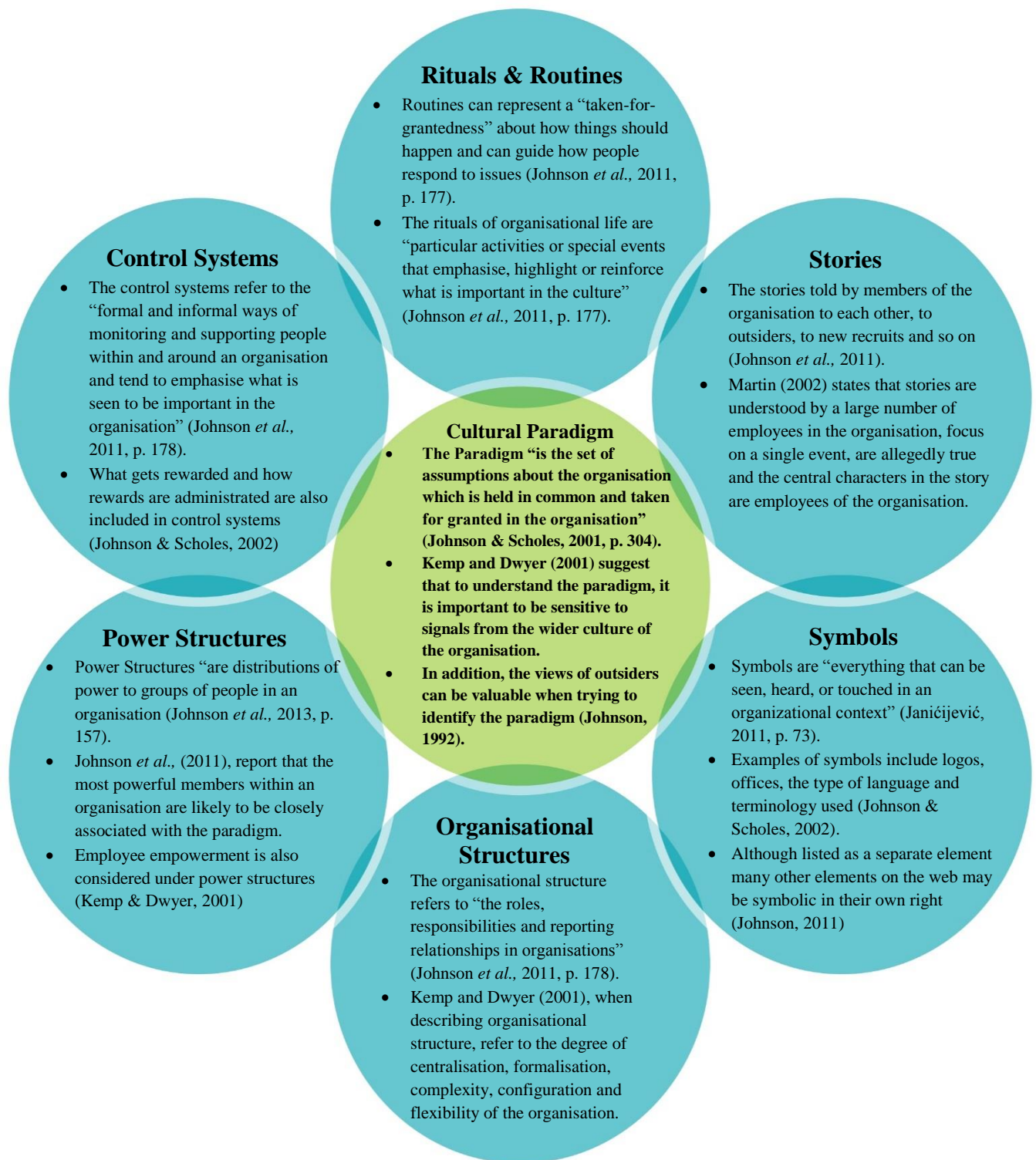


Figure 3-3 Johnson’s Cultural Web (1988) with contributions from various researchers

The web can be used for a wide variety of purposes. Hill and McNulty (1998) present a case study that focuses on organisational cultural change, with the incorporation of a nursing college into a much larger institution within the university sector. To help with the merger, a cultural web of the nursing college was constructed that also identified possible challenges in relation to culture because of the merger. The study illustrates that changing organisational culture is complex, and challenging beliefs and assumptions can be difficult and painful. From completing the cultural web, a number of necessary changes for both organisations involved in the merger were identified.

Kemp and Dwyer (2001) illustrate how the cultural web was applied to a hotel in Sydney to describe the organisation's culture, and explain how cultural influences on behaviour within the organisation come about, and their impact on the organisation. The study demonstrates how culture affects many aspects of operations in the hotel, from how employees interact with guests to how management deal with employees. Data were gathered using a variety of techniques including face-to-face interviews (with management and non-management employees from various departments within the hotel), observation, analysing documents, such as in-house publications, staff bulletins, notices on the boards and advertising material.

In a more recent study, Freemantle (2013a & 2013b) used the web to describe a current and preferred organisational culture for maternity services in the National Health Service (NHS). It was reported that existing routines, rituals, symbols and stories were not always in agreement with best practice. Freemantle (2013a) recommends that researchers, when using the web, should commence by exploring the routines, rituals and stories, before reviewing the remaining elements of the web.

There are a number of other approaches to studying organisational culture that have not been discussed above. For example, Deal and Kennedy (1982) identified four distinct culture types based on two factors in the marketplace (degree of risk, and speed at which companies and their employees receive feedback on whether decisions or strategies are successful). Deal and Kennedy (1982) acknowledge that the division of the world of business into four categories could be over simplistic, and that no company precisely fits into any of the categories. However, they believe the tool can be helpful for managers in identifying the culture of their own organisation.

Another tool is Cameron and Quinn's (1999) organisational culture assessment instrument (OCAI), based on Quinn and Rohrbaugh's (1983) competing value framework (CVF). Similar to Deal and Kennedy's (1982) typology, the CVF is based on four quadrants determined by two dimensions. The first dimension ranges from flexibility to stability and the second dimension is concerned with internal focus and external focus. The OCAI measures six aspects of organisational culture, and the respondent has to allocate 100 marks between the four quadrants of the CVF to determine a dominant culture (Cameron & Quinn, 1999). Neither of these two tools were considered for this study, because the objective of the research was to interpret the culture of both the HEI X and external employer organisation and make a series of recommendations in relation to both organisations; and these tools seem to satisfy a different criteria by focusing on culture typologies.

The cultural web was selected as the framework for this study. The web has already been demonstrated as a useful framework for performing organisational cultural analysis (Freemantle, 2013b; Mossop *et al.*, 2013). The cultural web incorporates many of the ideas and opinions of other theorists into a single framework (McDonald & Foster, 2013). The artefacts identified by Schein (1985) are represented in the six outer layers of the cultural web (Kemp & Dwyer, 2001). In addition, the cultural paradigm is similar in nature to the underlying assumptions stressed by Schein (1985). Hatch (1993) broadly agrees with Schein's model but highlights the importance of symbols when investigating organisational culture, whilst Hofstede *et al.* (1990) include rituals in their study. Furthermore, Martin (2002) makes a case for the consideration of stories when undertaking research in organisational culture. The cultural web represents these different elements, as it shows the behavioural, physical and symbolic manifestations of an organisation's culture (Johnson *et al.*, 2011). The cultural web can be used for understanding the existing culture within an organisation, and also for making recommendations in relation to certain aspects of an organisation's culture (Freemantle, 2013b; Heracleous & Langham, 1996). This was an important consideration for this study, as it was anticipated that certain aspects of the cultures within HEI X and the external employer organisation may need to be reviewed in order to meet the requirements of all three stakeholders in the WBL partnership. The web not only presents the various cultural influences within an organisation (through the cultural elements), but also considers how these cultural elements are influenced by considering the cultural paradigm (Kemp &

Dwyer, 2001). For this particular study, it was important to recognise cultural issues within the HEI and external employer organisation impacting on the WBL partnership and also to appreciate the role of underlying assumptions within both organisations. The web also allows data collected from a range of different sources, such as interviews, observation and documents, to be represented (Heracleous & Langham, 1996; Losekoot *et al.*, 2008). A further reason for selecting the web as the framework for making recommendations to both the HEI and external employer relates to its ability to represent visually a complex phenomenon (Losekoot *et al.*, 2008). This feature of the web helps the researcher appreciate the organisational culture differences between two or more organisations (McDonald & Foster, 2013).

3.11 Importance of organisational culture in WBL partnerships

Organisational culture can have a significant influence on WBL partnerships. Firstly, organisational culture differences between the HEI and external organisation can make this form of engagement challenging for the three stakeholders (Ball & Manwaring, 2010; Collier *et al.*, 2011; Cronin, 2001; Cyert & Goodman, 1997; Rohrbeck & Arnold, 2006; Schofield, 2013). These cultural differences include differences in values, beliefs and assumptions (Anohina-Naumeca & Sitikovs, 2012; Basit *et al.*, 2013; Choy & Delahaye, 2009; Cronin, 2001; Lind & Styhre, 2013; McShane & Von Glinnow, 2010; Rohrbeck & Arnold, 2006; Schofield, 2013), differences in relation to language (Ball & Manwaring, 2010; Basit *et al.*, 2013; Rohrbeck & Arnold, 2006; Rounce *et al.*, 2007) and differences in relation to how time is perceived (Bolden *et al.*, 2009; Dowling, 2015; Ferrández-Berrueto *et al.*, 2006; Kozlinska, 2012; Plewa, 2009; Thayaparan *et al.*, 2014). These differences in culture can result in one organisation negatively perceiving the other (Harris & Simons, 2006).

Secondly, cultural issues within the HEI or external employer organisation can make WBL partnerships difficult to coordinate (Basit *et al.*, 2015; Layer *et al.*, 2010). Within the HEI, these issues include: routines and rituals in designing, delivering and assessing WBL programmes (Anohina-Naumeca & Sitikovs, 2012; Hardacre & Workman, 2010; Kewin *et al.*, 2011; Layer *et al.*, 2010), stories told internally and externally that make the promotion of WBL difficult (Andersen *et al.*, 2013; Dadameah & Costello, 2011), symbols such as language and systems (Hughes & Slack, 2012; Kewin *et al.*, 2011; Young & Stephenson, 2007), organisational structure considerations such as dedicated point of contact for

employers, and cooperation between faculties when designing programmes that involve more than one discipline (Ardizzzone, 2012; Basit *et al.*, 2015; Expert Group on Future Needs, 2015; Hardacre & Workman, 2010; Kozlinska, 2012; Schmidt & Gibbs, 2009; Sheridan & Fallon, 2015), control systems referring to what gets evaluated and rewarded (Ball & Manwaring, 2010; Basit *et al.*, 2013; Bolden *et al.*, 2009; Brennan, 2005; Chisholm *et al.*, 2009; Dowling, 2015; Reeve & Gallacher, 2005), power structures which determine if WBL is seen as a strategic priority, and how power is shared with the employer (Basit *et al.*, 2015; Choy & Delahaye, 2011; Dowling, 2015; Edmondson *et al.*, 2012; Kornecki, 2012; Noble *et al.*, 2010), and underlying assumptions and beliefs held by the HEI which may be in conflict with the requirements of the employer and learner (Rohrbeck and Arnold, 2006; Schmidt & Gibbs, 2009).

Unfortunately, organisational cultural issues within the external employer organisation receives limited attention in the literature. This is somewhat surprising given the important role the employer plays in facilitating learning in the workplace (Choy & Delahaye, 2009; Hardacre & Workman, 2010). In addition, the challenges and expectations facing the WBL learner in relation to organisational culture is also underrepresented in the literature. Finally, previous studies on this form of HEI/industry engagement places significant focus on the challenges without identifying facilitators for successful WBL partnerships (Davey *et al.*, 2011). This study will provide further insight into organisational cultural issues affecting the three stakeholders in a WBL partnership. In addition, a series of recommendations in relation to the organisational cultures of the HEI and external employer organisations are presented for both organisations to consider.

3.12 Chapter summary

This chapter evaluated the literature on organisational culture. A number of definitions of organisational culture were provided. Some definitions, which focus on the notion of shared values and assumptions within the organisation, are disputed by authors, who believe that several subcultures exist within the same organisation. There is also debate in relation to culture change. Some writers question if change can occur, but others argue that change will happen whether it is planned or not, due to factors such as changes in the external environment. A number of different frameworks for understanding organisational culture were presented, and it was decided that Johnson's cultural web would be used for this study. The reason for this was that the model recognises that organisational culture is

made up of several cultural elements identified as being important in the context of this research. In addition, it was reported in the previous chapter that different assumptions existing between HEIs and external employers could make these forms of collaborations challenging. The cultural web recognises the importance of deep underlying assumptions, and demonstrates how these influence, and are influenced by, the cultural elements. Before the web can be used to represent the findings, it is important to consider the research design guiding this study.

4 Research Design

4.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to address Research Objective 3: *To develop appropriate methodology and methods to explore the organisational culture issues impacting the three stakeholders participating in a WBL partnership.*

This chapter describes the ontological and epistemological commitments of the study. For ontology, a relativist perspective is adopted combined with social constructionism as the dominant epistemology. The chapter introduces the methodology before justifying an ethnographic approach for the current research. The ethnographic study combines the recording of field notes over an eighteen-month period, interviews with HEI X, employer and learner participants and the analysis of documents and other artefacts. Each of these methods is reviewed in this section. This is followed by a discussion on the analysis of the data. The chapter concludes by reviewing the quality criteria adopted for the study.

4.2 Factors influencing the research design

The factors that influenced the research design approach are presented in Figure 4-1. These factors include the nature of the research question, how similar research was conducted, and practical issues. Each of these influences is discussed in this section.

4.2.1 Research question

The research question this study seeks to address is as follows: *How can work-based learning partnerships be enhanced by a deeper understanding of organisational culture?*

Simply asking participants about organisational culture would not provide sufficient information to explain organisational culture, because organisational culture consists of underlying assumptions that the members are often not aware of (Schein, 2004, 2009). McShane and Von Glinnow (2010) argue that organisational culture is too ambiguous and complex to be understood through surveys, and instead promote the idea of combining observation, interviews and the studying of written documents. Janićijević (2011, p.70)

depicts organisational culture as a “multilayered, multidimensional phenomenon”, so multiple methods are required when exploring its various layers and dimensions.

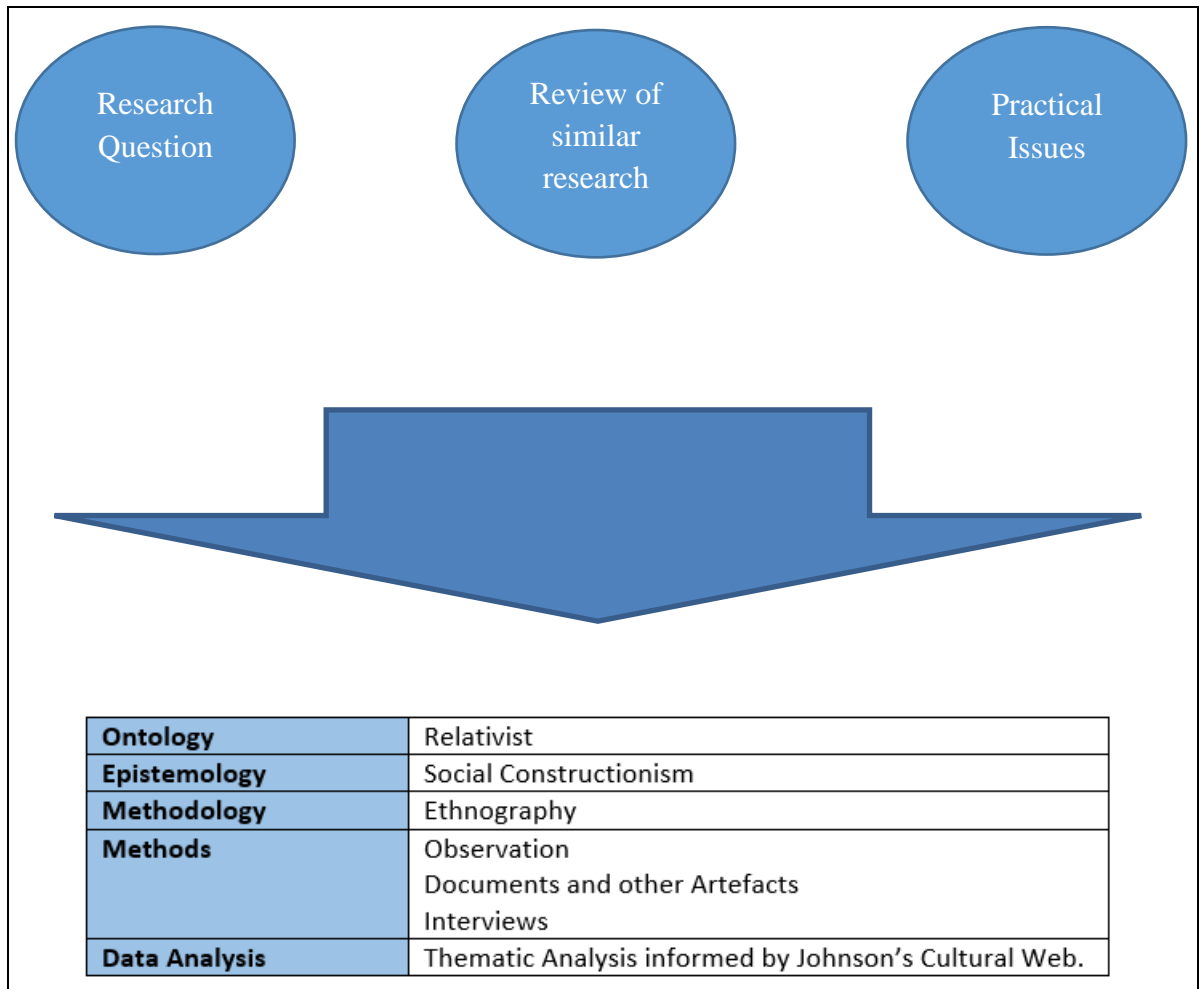


Figure 4-1 Factors influencing research design

4.2.2 Review of similar research

Both qualitative and quantitative approaches have been used in the past to study organisational culture (Martin, 2002). Researchers from different fields have studied culture by different means. Anthropologists have mainly used qualitative methods, while psychologists have preferred to use quantitative methods (Janićijević, 2011). Despite the benefits associated with investigating organisational culture through qualitative methods, researchers have moved away from an overreliance on qualitative methods, such as interviews and focus groups (Bellot, 2011). Taras and Rowney (2009) suggest that Hofstede’s research in the 1980s was one of the first to use advanced quantitative methods to assess organisational culture. However, it should be noted that quantitative tools could

also be problematic when exploring organisational culture. Hofstede (1998) discusses the challenges associated with surveys:

The basic problem in interpreting survey results is bridging the gap between the researcher's and the respondents' minds. If a researcher imposes on the data, she analyzes a framework that does not reflect distinctions made by respondents. Her conclusions are gratuitous: they tell us something about the researcher, but not about the respondent. (Hofstede, 1998, p. 478)

In my choice of approach, I was influenced by the work of Schein (1990, 2004, 2009) and Johnson (1988, 1992) who encourage the organisational culture researcher to look beyond the surface levels of artefacts and beliefs that surveys measure. They stress that to understand organisational culture, the researcher must focus on the underlying assumptions that are less visible and can only be observed. Schein (1990, p.109) suggests that “if we are to take culture seriously, we must first adopt a more clinical and ethnographic approach”.

4.2.3 Practical issues

My position within HEI X allowed direct access to the main stakeholders in the WBL partnership. Employers, learners and HEI staff were observed in their natural setting and I wanted to adopt a methodology that capitalised on this unique position, as opposed to relying on a methodology that required the researcher to be an outside observer. It was my view that my experience and expertise in coordinating WBL programmes could make an important contribution to the study. This section having considered the factors influencing the research design, the following section will discuss the ontology adopted for the study.

4.3 Ontology

According to Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Jackson (2012), failure to consider matters of ontology and epistemology can seriously affect the quality of the research produced. Understanding these philosophical issues helps to clarify the research design by providing a framework to structure the data collection, interpretation and analysis. In addition, if the researcher has knowledge of the different philosophies, then he/she should be in a better position to decide which research designs should be adopted for the proposed research (Easterby-Smith *et al.*, 2012).

Martin (2002, p.30) describes ontology as “a set of assumptions about the nature of reality – how things are”. Easterby-Smith *et al.* (2012) compare two contrasting ontological assumptions (realism and relativism) in Table 4-1 below.

Table 4-1 Realism Vs relativism

Ontology	Realism	Relativism
Truth	Single truth	There are many “truths”
Facts	Facts exist and can be revealed	Facts depend on the viewpoint of the observer

Adapted from: Easterby-Smith *et al.* (2012, p.19)

Realism assumes a single truth that is comprehensible through research, an assumption that underpins most quantitative research. In contrast, relativism assumes that there are multiple constructed realities that differ across time and context (Braun & Clarke, 2013), and that scientific laws are not simply waiting to be discovered but are constructed by people through discussion and agreement (Easterby-Smith *et al.*, 2012). Janićijević (2011) contrasts two opposing ontological assumptions in organisational culture, objectivistic and subjectivist. The objectivistic approach views culture as a discrete component of an organisation, and assumes an organisation has a culture, whereas the subjectivist approach does not view culture as a separate entity, but assumes that the organisation is a culture (Janićijević, 2011).

This study adopts a relativist ontology perspective that supports the subjectivist approach expressed by Janićijević (2011). I do not believe one single “truth” exists, or that facts are concrete. Instead, I believe there are many “truths”. Even with the same research participant, I believe their interpretation of “truth” can vary with time. Because this research is investigating organisational culture from the viewpoint of three different stakeholders (employer, learner and HEI), it would be reasonable to assume that different interpretations will emerge simultaneously and that the role of the researcher is to enable the multiple realities of the various stakeholder voices to be heard. Having discussed ontology, the following section looks at epistemology.

4.4 Epistemology

According to Martin (2002, p.30), epistemology “concerns theories about how we know about the nature of reality – that is, how we know about how things are”. Easterby-Smith *et al.* (2012) discuss two contrasting views of how research can be conducted: through positivism and social constructionism. They suggest, “the key idea of positivism is that the social world exists externally, and that its properties should be measured through objective methods rather than through sensation, reflection or intuition” (Easterby-Smith *et al.*, 2012, p.22). Duberley, Johnson and Cassell (2012), when discussing positivism, refer to the tendency of reducing human behaviour to a number of automatic responses. It is proposed that valid knowledge is obtained through scientific methods which control variables and remove researcher bias (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Positivism is closely aligned to the objectivistic ontology outlined in the previous section, and assumes that because culture is a discrete entity, it can be measured by an instrument such as a questionnaire, with the researcher remaining an independent observer (Janićijević, 2011). I do not believe organisational culture can be measured in such a way, but instead am of the view that culture is a social construct “given meaning by people” (Easterby-Smith *et al.*, 2012, p.23). I was also influenced by Schein (2004), who identifies a number of issues that can arise when trying to understand an organisation’s culture by using positivist methods such as surveys. Schein (2004) argues that the researcher will not know what questions to ask, and the research participant will not know how to answer the question asked, as culture is significantly influenced by underlying assumptions that operate below the conscious level of the individual, and are best understood through researcher observation and participation (Schein, 2004). For this study, social constructionism was adopted as the chosen ontology.

According to Easterby-Smith *et al.* (2012), social constructionism as a concept was developed by researchers such as Berger and Luckmann (1967), Watzlawick (1984) and Shotter (1993) as an alternative to positivism. Social constructionism takes the view that “reality is not objective and exterior, but is socially constructed and given meaning by people” (Easterby-Smith, *et al.*, 2012, p.23). This is not to imply that constructionism as an epistemology suggests that knowledge is simply “made up”, but rather, that knowledge is a product of how we come to understand it (Braun & Clarke, 2013, p.30). The task of the social constructionist researcher is to determine how meanings are constructed (Easterby-Smith, *et al.*, 2012). When a subjectivist ontology is adopted for a study, the researcher

cannot positively identify and measure organisational culture, but can only interpret it (Janićijević, 2011).

The researcher who is aligned to a social constructionist epistemology is involved inherently in the research, and co-constructs with the research participants multiple realities (Mertens, 2014). This characteristic of social constructionism was important for ensuring that my experience and expertise in coordinating WBL programmes would contribute to the study. I felt my position within HEI X, where I engaged with learners, employers and HEI staff, supported my efforts to investigate the HEI and the external employer organisation's culture.

The choice of ontology and epistemology significantly influences how the researcher carries out the research. An ontological assumption of realism and an epistemological assumption of positivism suggest an etic approach, whilst an ontological assumption of relativism coupled with a social constructionist epistemology favours an emic approach (Janićijević, 2011).

Martin (2002) distinguishes between etic and emic viewpoints in relation to cultural research, referring to etic (outsider) research as an objective type of research, where the researcher seeks generalisations and typically uses quantitative tools like questionnaires. Emic (insider) research, on the other hand, is more subjective and seeks breadth as well as depth, and typically uses qualitative tools (Martin, 2002). Martin (2002) argues that most organisational culture researchers follow the lead of sociocultural anthropologists, who favour the emic perspective, and often takes the form of an ethnographic study (ethnography is discussed in the following section). Having discussed the ontology and epistemology position, the following section reviews the methodology selected.

4.5 Methodology

Kramer-Kile (2012, p.12) labels methodology as “a bridge between theory and method, with the central focus on articulating why certain methods are appropriate given one's theoretical stance”. Researchers have a wide choice of methodologies to choose from, including experimental research, survey research, ethnography, action research, grounded theory and case method. Ethnography was adopted as the methodology for this study, and the reasons behind this are explained later in this section.

Ethnography means describing and understanding a culture from the point of view of the participants (Punch, 2009), or a “written account (*graphein*) of a people (*ethnos*)” (Yanow, Ybema, & van Hulst, 2012, p.331). According to Hammersley and Atkinson (2007, p.3):

Ethnography usually involves the researcher participating, overtly or covertly, in people’s daily lives for an extended period of time, watching what happens, listening to what is said, and/or asking questions through informal and formal interviews, collecting documents and artefacts – in fact, gathering whatever data are available to throw light on the issues that are the emerging focus of inquiry.

The definition above identifies a number of important characteristics of ethnography. Firstly, the significance of researcher participation over an extended period is emphasised. Ethnography is unlike many other methods, where the researcher interviews participants and then leaves. Instead, the ethnographer spends an extended period engaging with participants in their natural setting. Secondly, data are gathered by combining methods such as observation, interviews and document analysis. Combining a number of different methods can provide a clearer understanding of the data (Tracy, 2010).

An alternative definition is provided by Watson (2011, p.205), who defines ethnography as a:

style of social science writing which draws upon the writer’s close observation of and involvement with people in a particular social setting and relates the words spoken and the practices observed or experienced to the overall cultural framework within which they occurred.

Watson’s reference to style of writing is worth commenting on. The voice of the researcher should be heard through reflective passages to provide rich insight to the reader. Furthermore, the researcher not only observes culture, but also experiences an organisation’s culture by participating in its activities.

The history of ethnography can be traced back to the nineteenth century, when western anthropologists studied the cultures of groups of people living in lands (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). Scott-Jones (2010a, p.3) identifies Malinowski as the “founding father” of ethnography. Malinowski (1922) published accounts describing his expedition to the Trobriand Islands, studying the local culture. Classic ethnographers like Malinowski did

not share their own thoughts and opinions in their diaries, and this is in contrast with how ethnography has been conducted in more recent times, where the researcher is highly reflective (Scott-Jones, 2010b).

Scott-Jones (2010a, pp. 7-10) identifies a number of core values associated with ethnography. These include: participation (the researcher makes a commitment to participate in the social worlds of their research participants); immersion (the researcher immerses himself/herself within the setting); reflection, reflexivity and representation (ethnography is highly reflective, with the researcher considering his position within the research and showing a concern for the research participants); thick descriptions (the researcher describes the field setting in as much detail as possible); ethical (e.g. gaining consent from the participants and respecting privacy); empowerment (ethnography can empower minority groups by giving them a voice); and understanding (understanding the point of view of the participants).

These values identified by Scott-Jones (2010a) were influential in my decision to select ethnography in order to address the research question. In addition, a major benefit associated with ethnography is its ability to explore the hidden dimensions of organisational life through intense observation and direct involvement (Hatch, 1993; Yanow *et al.*, 2012; Watson, 2011). This is particularly important when researching organisational culture, where many of the taken-for-granted aspects of life cannot be captured using methods like surveys (Hatch & Zilber, 2012; Schein 2004, 2009). These taken-for-granted aspects or underlying assumptions are referred to in the paradigm in Johnson's cultural web (Heracleous & Langham, 1996; McDonald & Foster, 2013). They are rarely talked about, and may only be observed in people's action (Kemp & Dwyer, 2001). Another reason for adopting ethnography was related to data collection. With ethnography, the researcher can supplement observation with interviews, and further supplement what can be learned first-hand with information gathered, or materials prepared by others (Wolcott, 2008). Furthermore, I believed that by immersing myself in the study, a better understanding of the research questions could be acquired (Brewer, 1994). Watson (2011) claims the researcher should closely observe people in an organisation to understand what is going on. Over an eighteen-month period, I engaged with WBL learners, employers and HEI X staff, and attended WBL programmes, review boards, evaluation sessions, new programme development meetings and graduation

ceremonies. In addition, I spoke with WBL learners in the corridors, the canteen and the car park, and attended social events organised for learners. I also visited employers to design and evaluate WBL programmes, and delivered WBL workshops for academic staff and employers. This provided me with excellent exposure to the motives, benefits, challenges, and other issues experienced by the main stakeholders in the WBL partnership.

The reasons for selecting ethnography have been outlined in this section. The multiple data collection methods associated with ethnography proved useful in understanding the organisational cultures of the HEI and external employer organisation (Wolcott, 2008). To understand the underlying assumptions that exist within an organisation, the researcher has to immerse himself/herself in that culture over an extended period of time. In addition, ethnography is recommended as a methodology for understanding organisational culture (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007; Mossop *et al.*, 2013; Watson, 2011; Watt, 2010; Yanow *et al.*, 2012), and as an appropriate methodology for a researcher who recognises that there are multiple versions of reality (Coffey, 1999), seeing themselves as co-constructors and co-interpreters of meanings (Yanow *et al.*, 2012). This section having provided an overview of ethnography, the following section discusses the methods used for data collection in this study.

4.6 Data collection

Punch (2009) suggests that there is a wide range of methods available to the ethnographer but fieldwork is always central. Other techniques include observation (both participant and non-participant), interviewing and document analysis (Light, 2010). Quantitative methods such as questionnaires can also be used, although “quantification and statistical analysis play a subordinate role at most” (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007, p.3). In an ethnographic study, the researcher can expect to spend a prolonged period of time collecting whatever data are available that address the focus of inquiry (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007; Punch, 2009). For this study, data were collected from observation, interviews, documents and other artefacts.

4.6.1 Observation and field notes

The undertaking of some form of participant observation comprises a significant part of the ethnographic research process (O'Reilly, 2009; Palmer, 2010; Watson, 2011). A

number of cultural elements, such as rituals and routines, are best studied through observation, although observation is normally used in conjunction with other data gathering techniques (Janićijević, 2013). Throughout this study, I observed, participated and recorded field notes from a wide range of settings. Some of these settings were formal events, such as programme board meetings, exam board meetings, and new programme development meetings. In other instances, the field notes were the result of causal, unplanned conversations in the canteen or corridor with learners, HEI X employees and employers.

Gold (1958) identifies four roles the ethnographer observer can adopt, ranging from the complete participant (the ethnographer's role is wholly concealed and he/she passes as an ordinary participant) to the complete observer (where the researcher takes no part in the social setting at all but only observes). In between these two extremes are the participant as observer (the researcher is normally part of the group being studied) and the observer as participant (the researcher has only minimal involvement in the group being studied and is not normally part of the social setting). During the course of the research, I undertook a number of these roles. In many instance, I undertook the role I normally played prior to this research, which involved engaging with employers, WBL learners and HEI X staff. Within my own organisation, many members were aware of the nature of the research I was undertaking, but in other situations (e.g. in meetings with external employer organisations), some of the people present were not aware. Playing the dual and simultaneous roles of participant and observer was challenging for me, especially when trying to record what was happening, but at the same time contribute to the task at hand. For example, in meetings with employers or HEI staff, I attempted to contribute to the meeting and simultaneously make field notes.

Kemp and Dwyer (2001) urge the researcher to be very sensitive to clues presented in the organisation when studying organisational culture, because culture is very often taken for granted and it goes unquestioned. Angrosino and Mays de Pérez (2000) suggest that the ethnographer needs to have a good eye for detail, possess good memory and language skills, and be able to fairly represent those under observation. Bogdewic (1999) urges the ethnographic researcher to take notes as soon as possible after the observed action, and not to rely on memory. Taking on board the advice from Hammersley and Atkinson (2007), I made a conscious effort to write up the field notes either during an event or immediately

afterwards. Hammersley and Atkinson (2007) encourage the use of memos and notes to feed into the field notes. Initially, I would write down notes on pieces of paper, but this resulted in a collection of loose notes in different paper sizes and formats that was difficult to manage. I found that emailing myself short notes about something I observed was much better because I could easily store it and sort it according to date. I was able to email these notes on my phone, and would entitle the subject “DBA Notes”, so that these emails could be easily located and sorted in my email account. Bryman (2012) discusses the importance of concentrating on the research questions, to circumvent the researcher ending up trying to record the details of everything. This was something I was guilty of initially, but as the research progressed, I learned to be more focused on the research questions when recording notes.

Spardley (1980) provides a checklist for researchers when recording field notes, which I found useful in this study. He recommends that reference should be made to the physical location of where the instance occurred, the people involved, physical things present, people’s actions, time and sequence of events, emotions felt and expressed, and the goal people are trying to accomplish.

4.6.2 Interviews

The study also made use of interviews as a data collection method. Interviews in ethnographic studies range from spontaneous, informal conversations to formally arranged meetings (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). This section reviews interviews that were formally arranged, because field notes were used to record informal conversations that contributed to the research. Alvesson and Ashcraft (2012, p.240) describe interviews as “reliable gateways into what goes on in organizations” and Janićijević (2011) suggests that they are often used in organisational culture research for gathering data on cognitive cultural elements, such as presumptions, values, norms, and attitudes.

Easterby-Smith *et al.* (2012) present a number of practical considerations that I followed when conducting the interviews. One of the important factors they refer to when conducting interviews relates to obtaining the trust of the interviewee. Before each interview, I outlined the purpose of the research to the participants. Furthermore, I assured all research participants that their identities would not be linked to information provided in the interview (Whiting, 2008).

The language used is another important consideration when interviewing (Easterby-Smith *et al.*, 2012). The language used throughout my interviews was free from technical jargon, and if I sensed the interview participant was unclear in relation to a question asked, I attempted to clarify. Recording the interview can also add to interviewee anxiety (Whiting, 2008). Easterby-Smith *et al.* (2012) encourage the interviewer to consider letting the interviewee turn the recorder on and off themselves when they wish to do so, and I followed this advice. However, this offer was not taken up by any of the interviewees. The location of the interview should also be carefully considered (Easterby-Smith *et al.*, 2012). King and Horrocks (2010) identify three aspects of the location as being especially important: comfort, privacy and quiet. I visited the employer organisation to interview employer participants. These interviews took place in quiet and private rooms free from interruptions. I prepared a sign on an A4 sheet of paper with the text “Quiet Please, Interview in Progress”, which I put on the outside door of the interview room (after getting permission from the interviewee). Many of the learners who were interviewed were completing a WBL programme delivered several hundred kilometres from HEI X, so I booked a room in the location where the WBL programme was being delivered, and conducted the interview either before or after their class. Other learner interviews took place in my office. The interviews with HEI X staff took place in my office at times and dates that suited the interviewee. HEI X staff were given the option to choose the location for the interview, and they all indicated they would like to be interviewed in my office.

A major decision the researcher has to make is in relation to the interview structure. Highly structured interviews were ruled out, as this research required in-depth discussion that could not be facilitated by closed questions. Although unstructured interviews are often used in ethnographic studies (Easterby-Smith *et al.*, 2012; Whiting 2008), I decided to use semi-structured interviews. With semi-structured interviews, the interviewer has prepared an interview guide but does not necessarily strictly follow the wording or sequence of questions (Braun & Clarke, 2013). I identified a number of key themes from the literature and from my own experience. The themes with reference to the literature that helped to inform these themes are presented in Table 4-2.

Table 4-2 Interview themes informed by the literature

Interview Theme	Literature
Motives for engaging in WBL partnerships	Abduljawad, 2015; Abukari, 2014; Basit <i>et al.</i> , 2015; Harris <i>et al.</i> , 2013; Healy <i>et al.</i> , 2014; Higher Education Authority <i>et al.</i> , 2015; Kewin <i>et al.</i> , 2011; Kornecki, 2012; O'Connor <i>et al.</i> , 2013; Plewa <i>et al.</i> , 2015; Ropes, 2015; Sweet, 2014.
Challenges presented to the stakeholders	Ball & Manwaring, 2010; Basit <i>et al.</i> , 2015; Berman, 2008; Bolden <i>et al.</i> , 2009; Galan-Muros <i>et al.</i> , 2013; Hardacre & Workman, 2010; Hughes & Slack, 2012; Kewin <i>et al.</i> , 2011; Kozlinska, 2012; Lind & Styhre, 2013; Linehan & Sheridan, 2009; Schmidt & Gibbs, 2009; Schofield, 2013; Siebert & Walsh, 2013; Shaw <i>et al.</i> , 2011; Tartari, <i>et al.</i> , 2012; Wilson, 2012.
Communications and collaboration between the stakeholders	Ahmed, 2013; Ball & Manwaring, 2010; Basit <i>et al.</i> , 2013; Benefer, 2007; Bolden <i>et al.</i> , 2009; Brennan, 2005; Choy & Delahaye, 2009; Cyert & Goodman, 1997; Dowling, 2015; Rohrbeck and Arnold, 2006.
Learner support	Ball & Manwaring, 2010; Boud <i>et al.</i> , 2001; Benefer, 2007; Choy & Delahaye, 2009; Hardacre & Workman, 2010; Ramage, 2014; Siebert & Walsh, 2013.
Design of programme	Ardizzzone, 2012; Basit <i>et al.</i> , 2013; Choy & Delahaye, 2009; Healy <i>et al.</i> , 2014; Mumford & Roodhouse, 2010; Plewa <i>et al.</i> , 2015.
Delivery of programme	Anohina-Naumeca, & Sitikovs, 2012; Boud & Costley, 2007; Choy & Delahaye, 2009; Ferrández-Berrueco <i>et al.</i> , 2016; Healy <i>et al.</i> , 2014; Lester & Costley, 2010; Linehan & Sheridan, 2009.
Assessment	Abduljawad, 2015; Basit <i>et al.</i> , 2015; Choy & Delahaye, 2009; Healy <i>et al.</i> , 2014; Johnson, 2001; Norman & Jerrard, 2015.
Issues in relation to policies, procedures, priorities and systems within the HEI that impact on WBL	Basit <i>et al.</i> , 2015; Bolden, 2009; Choy & Delahaye, 2011; Dowling, 2015; Expert Group on Future Needs, 2015; Hughes <i>et al.</i> , 2016; Kewin <i>et al.</i> , 2011; Kozlinska, 2012; Layer <i>et al.</i> , 2010; Shaw <i>et al.</i> , 2011; Sheridan & Fallon, 2015; Thayaparan <i>et al.</i> , 2014; White, 2012.
Issues in relation to policies, procedures, priorities and systems within the external employer organisation that impact on WBL	Benefer, 2007; Boud & Solomon, 2001; Johnson, 2001; Lemanski <i>et al.</i> , 2011; McEwen <i>et al.</i> , 2010; Ramage, 2014; Siebert & Walsh, 2013; Wright, 2008.
Issues as a result of cultural differences between HEI and external employer	Anohina-Naumeca & Sitikovs, 2012; Basit <i>et al.</i> , 2015; Cronin, 2001; Dowling, 2015; Healy <i>et al.</i> , 2014; Lind & Styhre, 2013; Plewa, 2009; Rohrbeck & Arnold, 2006.

An interview guide that identified themes to be discussed in the interviews was developed. This guide, which included separate themes for the HEI, employer and learner participants, is presented in Table 4-3 below.

Table 4-3 Interview guide

Learner Participants' Guide	Employer Participants' Guide	HEI X Participants' Guide
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Motive for enrolling on programme • Details about the programme 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Motives/objectives for engaging in WBL partnership? • Details about the programme. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Motives/objectives for engaging in WBL partnership? • Details about the programmes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How was learner informed about the programme? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How did you hear about WBL at HEI X? • What stories did you hear about WBL at HEI X? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promoting WBL to employer • Promoting WBL internally (challenges and recommendations)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Selection of learners • First impressions of HEI X 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Early meetings with the HEI • Communications with HEI • Relationship with HEI X 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Early meetings with the employer. • Communications with employer • Relationship with employer.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What commitment did employer make in relation to support? • Was this commitment kept? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Programme design • Programme delivery • Programmes assessment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Programme design • Programme delivery • Programmes assessment
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Challenges presented to the stakeholders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Challenges presented to the stakeholders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Challenges presented to the stakeholders
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support from HEI • Support from employer 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coordinating WBL internally. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coordinating WBL internally
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What do you like/dislike about the programme? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Benefits of WBL to stakeholders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Benefits of WBL to stakeholders
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What could the HEI do to improve WBL? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What could the HEI do to improve WBL? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What could the HEI do to improve WBL?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What could the employer do to improve the programme? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What could the employer do to improve the programme? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What could the employer do to improve the programme?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advice for employer and HEI 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advice for employer and HEI 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advice for employer and HEI
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Importance of WBL within HEI/employer organisation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Importance of WBL within HEI/employer organisation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Importance of WBL within HEI/employer organisation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluation and reviews 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluation and reviews 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluation and reviews

Although an interview guide was used, I tried as much as possible to let the participants lead the discussion (Kvale, 1994). I was also aware that many of the interview participants knew me, and might presume I already had answers to some of the questions, and this might stop them from elaborating with their responses. I discussed this with the participants prior to the interview, and told them to imagine that I knew very little about WBL. There are also benefits associated with interviewing people you know. Watson (2011) raises doubts about the information interview participants provide for people they do not know, and suggests that interviewees will be more revealing when interviewed by someone they know.

A further concern I had was in relation to my position within HEI X. I was the WBL coordinator in HEI X at the time of the interviews, and I did not want this to influence how participants responded. I explained that I wanted participants to be as open as possible and that the objective of the research was to improve WBL for all stakeholders. I also explained that I had no problem receiving feedback that criticised how HEI X managed WBL.

Williamson (2006) recommends piloting when using interviews as a collection method. For this research, three pilot interviews (one with each stakeholder group) were conducted eight weeks prior to conducting the main interviews. The pilot interviews resulted in amendments to the interview in relation to the wording of questions, sequence of questions and number of questions. From completing the pilot interviews and listening several times to the recordings, I realised that I needed to improve my interviewing skills because I was doing too much of the talking and not probing sufficiently. For the main interviews, I became less reliant on the interview guide and more concerned with getting interview participants to elaborate on initial responses provided. King and Horrocks (2010) make a similar claim by urging the qualitative interviewer to be flexible and respond to issues that emerge as opposed to relying on a set of fixed questions. I also found that it was a good idea to pause for a few seconds after the interview participant finished a sentence before asking the next question to encourage elaboration. In the pilot interviews, I was too quick in asking the next question.

4.6.3 Selecting interview participants

Although the word sampling is often associated with quantitative research, it is also an important consideration for the qualitative researcher (Punch, 2009). The quantitative researcher, in an effort to attain population representation, often employs probability sampling. Probability sampling is much less common in qualitative research, which tends to entail purposeful sampling of some kind (Bryman, 2012; Kuzel, 1992; Miles & Huberman, 1994). Martin (2002) proposes that ethnographers prefer to select participants based on attributes such as insightfulness and willingness to confide in the researcher.

The sample for this research was a purposeful one, selected to represent the three stakeholders involved in a WBL partnership. Creswell and Plano Clark (2011) suggest that purposeful sampling involves selecting individuals who are knowledgeable and experienced in a phenomenon of interest. For this study, I wanted to interview employer, learner and HEI X representatives who had experience participating in WBL programmes delivered by HEI X. This could be viewed as a limitation, as those participants currently not involved in WBL programmes could possibly have provided insight into addressing the research questions. For example, those lecturers currently not involved in the delivery of WBL programmes might have a good reason for not participating, and this might have proven to be relevant to the current research. However, because many of the themes in the interview related to experiences in delivering to WBL learners, I only interviewed HEI participants who had this experience. I used my own judgement in selecting interview participants who would be willing to discuss in detail their views regarding WBL partnerships.

Participants from a range of different WBL programmes were interviewed (see Table 4-4). Within HEI X, I interviewed lecturers from the four different faculties, two heads of departments, a senior manager involved in WBL partnerships delivered by the four faculties within HEI X, and a programme administrator. I approached ten HEI X staff members and eight agreed to participate in the interviews. The other two did not decline interviews, but failed to respond to approaches made.

The learners were selected from three different WBL programmes that being delivered by HEI X during the research study. I approached ten learners from three different WBL programmes being delivered by HEI X. All ten learners agreed to participate, but after

eight interviews with learners, I felt I was generating no new data. I thanked the remaining two for their willingness to participate. The ten learners I approached were selected because I felt they were vocal in expressing their opinions, and had already completed at least one academic year of a WBL programme. I also ensured that I was not involved in delivering or assessing modules to any of the learners selected.

The five employer participants who were interviewed were responsible for managing WBL in their respective organisation, and had experience engaging with HEI X in a WBL partnership. I approached seven employer representatives, and five agreed to participate in the research. One person declined the interview, as he was changing jobs, and the final person postponed the interview on several occasions.

Patton (2002, p. 244) points out that sample size is influenced by the purpose of the research, the importance of research, and time and resources available. After conducting sixty in-depth interviews, Guest, Brunce and Johnson (2006) concluded that data saturation occurred within the first twelve interviews. Bryman (2012) describes saturation as the point where no new insight is being generated. For this study, I stopped interviewing when I felt that no new data were being generated. In total, twenty-one participants were interviewed.

A profile of the interview participants for this research can be found in Table 4-4 below:

Table 4-4 Interview participants

Participant	Organisation	Position in the organisation	Duration (to the nearest minute)
HEI Participant A	HEI X	Senior manager	56
HEI Participant B	HEI X	Administrator	34
HEI Participant C	HEI X	Lecturer	44
HEI Participant D	HEI X	Lecturer	40
HEI Participant E	HEI X	Lecturer	42
HEI Participant F	HEI X	Lecturer	43
HEI Participant G	HEI X	Head of Department	39
HEI Participant H	HEI X	Head of Department	43
Learner Participant A	Medical Insurance Organisation	Claims Examiner	45
Learner Participant B	IT Organisation	Software Developer	46
Learner Participant C	Retail Organisation A	Manager	53
Learner Participant D	Retail Organisation B	Assistant Manager	57
Learner Participant E	Retail Organisation C	Department Manager	50
Learner Participant F	Retail Organisation C	Department Manager	40
Learner Participant G	IT Organisation	Claims Examiner	40
Learner Participant H	Food & Confectionary	Area Manager	44
Employer Participant A	Retail Organisation A	Training Manager	40
Employer Participant B	Retail Organisation B	Training Manager	39
Employer Participant C	IT Organisation	Training Manager	42
Employer Participant D	Training Network	Training Manager	47
Employer Participant E	Medical Insurance Organisation	Training Manager	35

4.6.4 Transcribing the interviews

Originally, I intended to use the services of a professional transcribing agency, but after transcribing the first three interviews, I realised I was becoming more familiar with the data, so decided to do the transcribing myself (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Whilst transcribing the interviews, I found that I was able to critically review my interviewing techniques. I was also able to identify further probing questions to ask subsequent interviewees. In addition, I felt I was getting closer to the data, and this helped with the

analysis. The transcribed interviews included an account of all verbal utterances but did not include pauses, stutters or mumbling. With thematic analysis (the form of analysis used in this study), the researcher does not require the same level of detail that would be required in other forms of analysis, such as discourse or narrative analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). After each interview, I prepared a one-page document that provided context, and summarised any emotions that I interpreted from the interviewee.

4.6.5 Documents and other artefacts

Documents and material artefacts also provide a valuable source of data in ethnographic research (Punch, 2009). The values and strategies of an organisation can be found in documents such as plans and annual reports (Kemp & Dwyer, 2001). Schein (1990, 2004, 2009) suggests that documents can prove useful in providing clues regarding organisational culture, but the researcher should try to avoid making assumptions based solely on information contained in these sources. Examples of the types of documents and artefacts that contributed to this research are: QA policy documents, programme description documents, programme timetables, assignment questions, strategic plans, posters promoting WBL in employer organisations, employer testimonials, emails, evaluation documents, press releases and photos. Not only were these documents a rich source of information in their own right, but they also helped inform some of the questions asked during the interview, as well as helping with observation. For example, when I compared programme evaluation documents from the HEI and external employer organisation, I was struck by the different criteria used by both organisations in reviewing the programme; this, in turn, informed questions in the interviews.

Hammersley and Atkinson (2007) suggest that these documents can provide the only access to certain kinds of information. I agree with this claim, as insight into rules and policies was mainly facilitated through the reviewing of documents. According to Hammersley and Atkinson (2007, pp.132-133), when considering documents and other artefacts, the ethnographer should ask himself/herself a number of questions:

How are documents written? How are they read? Who writes them? Who reads them? For what purposes? On what occasions? With what outcomes? What is recorded, and how? What is omitted? What does the writer seem to take for granted about the reader(s)? What do readers need to know in order to make sense of them?

For example, the QA policy document in HEI X was written in academic language, for an academic audience, and is very much focused on traditional full-time programmes. The strict guidelines in relation to programme development disclosed the importance of developing a quality programme, which takes time to develop, due to the various stages through which all new programmes must pass before they can be validated. This provided insight into the underlying cultural assumptions within HEI X, where significant importance is attached to academic rigour.

4.6.6 Bringing all the data together

A major challenge facing the ethnographic researcher is making sense of the large volume of data, and presenting it in a form that makes sense to the reader (Light, 2010). Although it can be daunting for the researcher to deal with this vast body of data, I found it beneficial that I was considering more than one single source of data. For example, one of the challenges industry representatives face when engaging in WBL programmes is undersanding the academic language. From carrying out an ethnographic study, I was able to observe this in the initial meeting with the industry representative, review HEI X documents the employers were exposed to, before discussing this in more detail in the interview. Had I relied only on the output from the interview, the research anaysis, in my view, would not have been as rich. In some instances, what I observed informed the questions posed in the interviews. There were also contradications. Sometimes, when I was observing the delivery of a WBL programme, I noticed many of the learners leaving the classroom to take a phone call. The interviews with the HEI participants indicated that WBL learners were much more engaged in class. I put this to the HEI participants, and their responses seemed to indicate that it was acceptable for the WBL learners to go outside the room to take phone calls, as the learners were always under pressure from their employers, and that the lecturers just has to accept this. Having presented the ethnographic approach used to design the research and the methods used, the following section briefly presents some of its limitations and challenges.

4.7 Limitations and challenges associated with ethnography

There are a number of limitations and challenges associated with ethnography. Brewer (1990) discusses several practical problems he encountered when conducting an ethnographic study of police work in Northern Ireland, including getting access to the

field, winning the trust of the participants, and personal security. For this study, I was fortunate in that I had no difficulties gathering the data, because I was able to access research participants without encountering any problems, and I had access to documents and other artefacts that contributed to the study. Researchers such as Flick (2002) and Hammersley and Atkinson (2007) suggest that because ethnography is based on only one or a small number of cases, the representativeness of the research findings is always in doubt. It is not the intention of this research to make such generalisations. Instead, the reader is provided with the context of the research and can then decide whether the findings of the research can be transferred to other contexts (Braun & Clarke, 2013). According to Scott-Jones (2010b), another criticism often associated with ethnography is in relation to its context-specific nature. In other words, by the time the research is written up, “the social world it seeks to represent inevitably will have changed” (Scott-Jones, 2010b, p.26). In my view, all research is subject to this limitation.

Because of the insider research nature of this research, where I was employed as the WBL coordinator in HEI X, I was aware of a risk that I might not view the “taken for granted” as being important enough to be recorded. Johnson (1992) suggests that the paradigm may be more easily perceived by those from outside the organisation. I found, in addressing this limitation, that the views and opinions of the employers and learners were useful in understanding the paradigm of the HEI. Likewise, the views and opinions of HEI staff provided significant insight when exploring the paradigm for the external employer.

4.8 Data Analysis

Punch (2009) writes about the great developments that have taken place in qualitative research analysis in the last thirty years. Braun and Clarke’s (2006) paper on thematic analysis played a significant role in advancing analysis in qualitative studies, by providing guidelines for researchers (Brooks, McCluskey, Turley, & King, 2015). The qualitative researcher has a number of methods of analysis from which to choose, including thematic analysis, interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA), grounded theory, discursive psychology, conversation analysis, and narrative analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Initially, I intended to transfer the data directly into the cultural web. However, when I attempted this, I soon discovered that I needed a way to make the vast amount of data more manageable and sorting the data into themes helped with the analysis. The guidelines associated with thematic analysis influenced the analysis of this study.

4.8.1 Thematic analysis

Braun and Clarke (2006, p.79) state that thematic analysis “is a method for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data”. It involves searching across data to find patterns of data (themes). Whereas King and Horrocks (2010) discuss how a theme implies some degree of repetition across the data, Braun and Clarke (2006) caution against relying on repetition, and instead recommend relying on the judgement of the researcher taking into account the objectives of the research. Braun and Clarke (2006) also suggest that themes should be distinguishable from each other.

Another decision relates to how themes are identified. Because Johnson’s cultural web was selected as the framework to present the analysis of the data, the main data themes were already identified by the cultural web elements. The web consists of six interrelated and overlapping factors (rituals and routines, stories, symbols, power structures, organisational structures, and control systems) which influence, and are influenced by, the central cultural paradigm (Johnson & Scholes, 2002). The six elements and the paradigm provided the framework for the analysis, resulting in seven themes. There were a number of reasons why the cultural web was selected as the framework to represent the findings. Heracleous and Langham (1996) argue that the web is consistent with understanding culture within an interpretative frame of reference (seeing culture as something an organisation is) and can facilitate a combination of sources including interviews, observation and document analysis (Heracleous & Langham, 1996; Kemp & Dwyer, 2001; Losekoot *et al.*, 2008). Additionally, Mossop *et al.* (2013) suggest the web as a useful framework for performing organisational culture analysis, whilst McDonald and Foster (2013, p.352) consider it “a sophisticated model which brings together different views of culture which are traditionally dispersed across the literature”.

Themes within the data can be identified through an inductive bottom-up way, or through a theoretical deductive way (Braun & Clarke, 2006). An inductive approach means themes are strongly linked to the data themselves (as in grounded theory), where the researcher does not try to fit the data into a pre-existing coding frame (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In contrast, a theoretical or deductive approach is driven by the researcher’s theoretical interest. Because Johnson’s web has been selected as a framework to represent the findings, this study adopted a deductive approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In advance of collecting the data, I completed a review of the literature to enhance my understanding of

both WBL and organisational culture. This would be expected in a deductive/theoretical approach, but not in an inductive approach, such as grounded theory (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

This approach may be in conflict with the views of Hammersley and Atkinson (2007), who advise against using defined theories as a starting point in the analysis of ethnographic data, instead recommending that the data themes should be allowed to emerge naturally from the data. However, Scott-Jones and Watt (2010, p.158), suggest that the concept of ethnographers starting from a blank slate is a myth, and as researchers we impose “basic interpretive frames on our work, even before data collection”. They go on to argue that adopting an approach where themes are identified prior to the analysis should not be seen as going against true ethnography. In a similar vein, Braun and Clarke (2013) make the point that researchers should be viewed as sculptors rather than archaeologists, as they bring their own history, values and assumptions into the research, and this influences how they analyse and interpret the data. They argue that themes are constructed as opposed to discovered.

A further decision relates to the level at which the themes are to be identified. With a semantic approach, the researcher typically does not look beyond what the research participant says. In contrast, latent or interpretive analysis goes beyond what the semantic approach employs, and examines the ideas and underlying assumptions and ideas contained in the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). With this approach, the researcher attempts to theorise the data in relation to previous literature (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The interpretative nature of this research, and the significant emphasis on underlying assumptions, resulted in my adopting the latent approach. Braun & Clarke (2006) claim that thematic analysis focusing on a latent approach tends to be more constructionist. Braun and Clarke (2006) provide an outline guide consisting of six phases to assist researchers when analysing data. The six phases are presented in the following sections.

4.8.1.1 Phase 1: data familiarisation

Braun and Clarke (2006) suggest that the researcher should become familiar with the data to get an idea of the depth and breadth of the content. I achieved this by reviewing the literature, conducting and transcribing the interviews, and preparing field notes. I also reviewed documents and other artefacts to provide further insight into the organisational

culture of both HEI X and the external employer organisation. When the data was collected, I read and reread the data, and noted down initial ideas (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

4.8.1.2 Phase 2: generating initial codes

After the first stage, a list of initial codes was generated. These codes refer to the most basic segment of the raw data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Examples of initial codes developed for rituals and routines for HEI X are provided in Table 4-5 below.

Table 4-5 Initial codes for rituals and routines HEI X

Web Element	Initial codes
1. Rituals and Routines for HEI X	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bureaucracy and new programme development routine • Problems with academic calendar • Overcoming problems with academic calendar • Pace of delivery in WBL programmes • Style of delivery by lecturer • Delivering WBL online • Making learning relevant to workplace • Communicating to the employer • Relevance of assessments

These initial codes were generated from reading through the entire data set. Data from the documents, interviews and field notes were transferred to an Excel spreadsheet that contained a separate sheet for each of the seven main themes (six cultural web elements and the paradigm). For example, extracts relating to bureaucracy and new programme development are presented in Figure 4-2 below.

	A	B	C	D
	Source	Code	Extract	Line Number
106		Bureaucracy & new programme development	Yeah things like course boards can be a ritual than can confuse industry representatives if they have to attend. Our course boards can be quite formal and there is long lead up to them. Employers might think why there is a need for all of this. Why can't you develop or change a course without all this fuss.	222
107	HEI D			
108	HEI H	Bureaucracy & new programme development	I think employers find the bureaucratic nature of the way we do things challenging. The idea that you finished the document and now it has to go to an internal committee and then an external report and panel is needed before the programme can be validated. The weeks and months past. There are a lot of negative stereotyping out there about the public service about been very slow and bureaucratic and these processes support this stereotyping.	454
109	Field Notes	Bureaucracy & new programme development	I can see why Heads of Departments are reluctant to develop new programmes for employers. It involves so much work getting the programme validated internally and then externally. Today I spoke with a Head of Department before an exam board meeting and he was telling me, he just does not have the time to prepare new programmes because all the procedures associated with validation and panels. He also mentioned that because the process takes so long, employers become agitated and this puts pressure on the relationship between the HOD and employer.	787
<div> <div>R & R</div> <div>Stories</div> <div>Org Stru</div> <div>Control</div> <div>Power</div> <div>Symbols</div> <div>Paradigm</div> <div>+</div> </div>				

Figure 4-2 Recording codes in Excel

Some codes might have been inserted into more than one theme initially. For example, stories about the strategic importance of WBL may have been included in the stories and power themes.

4.8.1.3 Phase 3: searching for subthemes

Having coded all the data, I identified a long list of codes. This phase involved combining codes into subthemes. For example, a number of different codes such as “access to library” and “social activities” were combined into the subtheme “WBL Learner Services”, because it was felt that these services needed to be extended more to WBL learners. This theme was placed into the main theme “Organisational Structure”.

An illustration of how the codes were combined into subthemes is provided in Figure 4-3.

77	Field Notes	WBL Learner Services	Access to library	I have spoken to the learning development manager (provides support in academic writing) and he is making a series of videos he is going to put on-line to help the WBL learners. In addition we will organise a number of workshops to help these learners. The e-
78	HEI C	WBL Learner Services	Access to library	I think for the more advanced learners not been able to use the library is an issue. Even getting a space to study
79	Learner F	WBL Learner Services	Access to library	I find it hard to get reading materials and a lot of the people in my group have said that the college should be in conjunction with some college here in Dublin where we actually can have a library.
80	Field Notes	WBL Learner Services	Social activities	The year 2 learners are doing their last module before January and have organised to go out for a few drinks together after class. I decide to join them for one and I am surprised the turnout. Almost everyone is there and they are mixing very well. Many have made new friends since the programme commenced. Often this benefit is not recognised but for some learners, this is the major reason they commenced the programme. I keep thinking we should try and organise more social events as it is obvious everyone is enjoying themselves.
81	Learner D	WBL Learner Services	Social activities	I know when my sister went to college and she was telling me there was more bonding between all the students and the lecturers. We really haven't had that and I honestly think those 2 nights in October were the first and only time we kind of bonded. Other times we sat in the lectures and went home.
<div> <div>R & R</div> <div>Stories</div> <div>Org Stru</div> <div>Control</div> <div>Power</div> <div>Symbols</div> <div>Paradigm</div> <div>+</div> </div>				

Figure 4-3 Combining codes into subthemes

In the example above, “WBL Learner Services” is a subtheme within the “Organisational Structure” theme. Within the subtheme, several codes are contained (e.g. access to library and social activities).

4.8.1.4 Phase 4: reviewing subthemes

The various subthemes were reviewed and refined to ensure the data within the subthemes cohered together meaningfully, and the subthemes were distinguishable (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Some subthemes were joined together because they referred to a similar concept. For example, the subthemes “lecturer delivery style” and “mode of delivery” were combined into a single subtheme entitled “Delivering WBL programmes”. In other instances, some subthemes were broken down into further subthemes. For example, a subtheme identified in Phase 3, called “learner support in the workplace”, was broken down into two discrete subthemes entitled “lack of formalised mentor support” and “access to key people”, because I believed, these were separate issues. The entire data set was then reviewed again in relation to the themes and subthemes, to ensure that no data were missed earlier. This resulted in moving extracts from one theme to another and renaming themes. For example, the subtheme “administrative system” was originally included under the “organisational structure”, theme but was later moved to the “symbol” theme because it was felt that, from an organisational cultural perspective, the issues with the administrative system were in relation to what the system symbolised (i.e. full-time education).

4.8.1.5 Phase 5: defining and naming themes

This phase involved clearly defining the essence of what each theme was about (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Deciding into which theme a subtheme should be placed presented a considerable challenge throughout the analysis process. To assist with this, I found it useful to review other studies that had used the cultural web. The themes and subthemes are presented in Table 4-6 below.

Table 4-6 The final themes and subthemes

Web Element	HEI X subthemes	External Employer subthemes
Rituals and Routines The routines can make up “the way we do things around here” (Johnson & Scholes, 2002, p.231). “Rituals are special events or activities that are important in a culture” (Johnson et al., 2011).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New programme development • Academic calendar • Communications rituals and routines • Delivering WBL programmes • WBL assessment • Training for WBL lecturers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employees breaking out of the normal routine • Feedback sessions
Stories “Stories told by members of the organisation to each other and to outsiders can shape the organisational culture and can indicate the behaviour required in certain situations” (Johnson <i>et al.</i> , 2011).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Addressing the “bad stories” about WBL in HEI X • Promoting the “good stories” about WBL externally 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Addressing the “bad stories” concerning WBL • Telling the “full story” to the learner
Symbols “Symbols are words, objects, conditions, acts or characteristics of persons that signify something different or wider from themselves, and which have meaning for an individual or group” (Kemp & Dwyer, 2001, p.81).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The administrative system • Language 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Language • Learning facilities
Power Structures “Power structures refer to the pockets of power that have the most influence on decisions made within an organisation” (Johnson <i>et al.</i> , 2011).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategic importance of WBL • Sharing power with the employer 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Power to implement learning • Strategic importance of WBL
Organisational Structures “The organisational structures refers to the roles, responsibilities and reporting relationships in organisations” (Johnson et al., 2011, p. 178).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dedicated WBL unit or department • Lack of collaboration between departments • WBL learner services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dedicated resource to coordinate WBL • Lack of formalised mentor support • Access to key people
Control Systems “The control systems refer to measurements and reward systems that emphasise what is important to monitor in the organisation e.g. products sold or number of customers” (Johnson <i>et al.</i> , 2011).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Academic rigour • Incentivise and reward WBL efforts • Evaluation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Selecting learners and monitoring attendance • Reward learner effort • Evaluation
The Paradigm “The paradigm of the organisation encapsulates and reinforces the behaviours observed in the other elements of the cultural web” (Johnson & Scholes, 2002, p. 235). “Individuals within a culture may hold different beliefs about aspects of the organisation, but there is likely to exist a core set of assumptions held relatively common by members of the organisation and this is what the paradigm represents” (Johnson, 1992).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A quality product requires time for development • We believe in our procedures for administrating our academic programmes • We are guardians of the academic standards. • Learner welfare is our main concern 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • WBL is another business transaction • We value speed to market • WBL should result in instant improvement in the workplace • WBL should not get in the way of productivity and performance

4.8.1.6 Phase 6: producing the report

This phase involves presenting the findings according to the themes and subthemes developed. It should be noted that the six phases presented in this section are not sequential steps. For example, writing occurs in all stages, not just this final stage (Braun & Clarke, 2006). It was important that the voices of the multiple participants were heard. I felt the cultural web facilitated this by allowing the issues affecting the three stakeholders to be represented. The findings were analysed and two cultural webs were constructed (one for HEI X and one for the external employer) to represent recommendations for both organisations.

According to Scott-Jones and Watt (2010), the final stage of data analysis is the framing of analysis with theory. In the discussion chapter, the findings are compared and contrasted with the literature. However, in some instances, comparing the findings with the literature was challenging, due to the limited availability of studies that considered WBL from the learner and employer's perspective.

4.9 Review of the analysis method

In my opinion, the decision to select thematic analysis to analyse the data was justified. I found the guidelines provided by Braun and Clarke (2006) very helpful, because prior to this study, I had had little experience in analysing qualitative data. With theoretical thematic analysis, the researcher's own standpoint and disciplinary knowledge, together with existing data, can help guide the analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2013). This was an important consideration for me when selecting the analytic method, as I wanted to adopt a method where my experience and expertise in WBL could contribute to the analysis. I also believe that the cultural web and the identification of six cultural elements complemented the principles associated with thematic analysis quite well. While earlier studies that used the cultural web provided little insight into how the data were analysed, I found that the guidelines provided by Braun and Clarke (2006) were useful in representing the data on the web. Thematic analysis is seen as a compatible qualitative analytic method for a study adopting a social constructionist epistemology (Braun & Clarke, 2006) and an ethnographic methodology (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). In addition, thematic analysis allows the researcher to compress data into themes (Attride-Stirling, 2001), which was an important consideration for this study, due to the volume of data collected from extensive

field notes, twenty-one interviews, and the analysis of a wide range of documents and other artefacts. Other methods for analysis, such as IPA, are commonly based on smaller data sets (King, 2012).

4.10 Quality criteria for qualitative research

According to King and Horrocks (2010), there are no universally recognised criteria for understanding the quality of qualitative research. They suggest that some scholars argue against using any criteria at all, whilst others argue that qualitative research should follow similar criteria to those is used in quantitative research. Tracy (2010) proposes eight universal hallmarks for high quality qualitative research: (a) worthy topic; (b) rich rigour; (c) sincerity; (d) credibility; (e) resonance; (f) significant contribution; (g) ethics; and (h) meaningful coherence. Tracy's criteria were preferred for this study, because they refer to many of the characteristics associated with ethnography, including thick descriptions (Fetterman, 1998; Scott-Jones, 2010a); reflexivity (Yanow *et al.*, 2012; Watt, 2010); honesty (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007), ethics (Scott-Jones, 2010a); and extensive reference to the research participants (Light, 2010). The eight hallmarks for high-quality qualitative research identified by Tracy (2010) are discussed below.

4.10.1 Worthy topic

Tracy (2010) explains how qualitative research should be relevant, timely, significant and interesting. The present study was undertaken at a time when European policy makers were emphasising the need for further engagement between HEIs and external employers (Ferrández-Berrueco *et al.*, 2016; Kewin *et al.*, 2011; Plewa, 2015). However, despite the potential WBL provides to multiple stakeholders, research into WBL partnerships between HEIs and external employer organisations remains underdeveloped (Healy *et al.*, 2014; Kozlinska, 2012; Plewa, 2015). Organisational culture has been identified as a significant barrier to the promotion of WBL partnerships (Basit *et al.*, 2015; Berman, 2008; Bolden *et al.*, 2009; Collier *et al.*, 2011; Hughes *et al.*, 2016; Kozlinska, 2012; Lemanski *et al.*, 2011; Lind & Styhre, 2013; Schofield, 2013; Wilson, 2012). This research investigates the impact of organisational culture on work-based learning partnerships, and presents a series of recommendations for the HEI and employer to consider in relation to their respective cultures.

4.10.2 Rich rigour

Rich rigour involves providing rich descriptions and explanations through a variety of data sources and contexts (Tracy, 2010). Tracy also encourages the researcher to invest reasonable effort, time and care when conducting the research. This ethnographic study involved recording field notes over an eighteen-month period. I recorded notes in various settings, including the classroom, canteen, corridor, employer organisations, conferences, programme board meetings, programme evaluation meetings and employer training events. Interviews were conducted with twenty-one participants, and documents and other artefacts contributed to the study.

4.10.3 Sincerity

Sincerity can be achieved through self-reflexivity, vulnerability and honesty (Tracy, 2010). According to Stenbacka (2001), the qualitative researcher brings his/her important ingredients to the study, and this should be made visible throughout the research study. In addition, the researcher needs to acknowledge his/her pre-understanding of the phenomenon under study. Reflexivity is really about making the researcher more visible in the research (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Throughout all stages of the research process, I pronounced my role in the organisation as well as my position in relation to framing the research question, collecting the data, and analysing the data. The themes selected for the analysis stage were influenced by my prior understanding of the area under investigation. I did not view my contribution to the research analysis as a source of bias, but rather as a resource that should be utilised (Light, 2010). I felt that my experience in engaging with all three stakeholder groups in the WBL partnership could make a valuable contribution to the research. However, I was also careful not to over privilege my role in the research (Watson, 2011). I ensured that the views and opinions of those who contributed to the research were represented throughout the findings (Fetterman, 1998) by following the advice of Wolcott (2001, p.67), who encourages ethnographic researchers to place themselves squarely at the scene, but not to “take center stage”. Reflexivity also involves researchers in acknowledging the limitations of their study (Light, 2010), and these limitations are outlined in the methodology and conclusion chapters. While I do not see myself as an authoritative figure, who is “master of all” (Light, 2010, p.183), in WBL, I do believe that my experience in coordinating WBL at HEI X for over ten years helped me in interpreting the data gathered. Finally, I did not over privilege my position by adopting an

“‘I know better than you because I was there and you were not’ (Watson, 2011, p.212) approach. Instead, I provided extracts, field notes and documents to support my interpretations.

Tracy (2010) suggests transparency is an important consideration in relation to sincerity. For this study, I have outlined how the data were collected and analysed. I have explained how interview participants were selected and outlined the themes that informed the interviews. I have also provided a description of the documents and artefacts that were reviewed. In addition, insight into the recording of field notes has been provided. The findings section of the study provides extracts from the interviews, field notes and documents.

4.10.4 Credibility

According to Tracy (2010), the researcher needs to provide a credible account, and this can be achieved through practices such as thick description, crystallisation and multivocality. This study has provided thick descriptions not only by telling the reader about the data collected, but also by showing extracts from the field notes, interviews, documents and other artefacts. A further consideration, in relation to credibility, is the notion of crystallisation. According to Tracy (2010), crystallisation involves the researcher gathering multiple types of data, employing multiple methods, and using multiple sources. This study has collected data from multiple sources within the HEI and external employer organisation, using a combination of interviews, field notes and document analysis.

Multivocality involves showing the varied voices of the participants, as opposed to just telling the reader what happened (Tracy, 2010). The stakeholders did not have a homogeneous set of challenges and expectations, and this study has attempted to represent the variety of voices that contributed to the research. According to Tracy, multivocality can be achieved through intense collaboration with participants. For this study, I was not a detached observer, but an active participant who engaged in many of the activities under study, such as meeting with employers, learners and HEI staff, coordinating WBL programmes, and developing and evaluating WBL programmes.

Tracy (2010) also encourages the researcher to share the findings with the research participants. The participants who contributed to this study regularly enquired about the

findings. I met with learner, HEI and employer representatives to discuss the findings. In addition, I coordinated a WBL conference in HEI X in December 2015, where I presented the findings to learner, HEI X and employer participants. I also presented my findings at numerous other events, conferences and workshops, and obtained feedback from those in attendance.

4.10.5 Resonance

Tracy (2010) discusses how resonance can be achieved by aesthetic merit and transferability. Aesthetic merit involves presenting with clarity and writing in a language comprehensible to the target audience (Tracy, 2010). I have attempted to avoid the use of jargon and write in a style that keeps the reader engaged.

Transferability is achieved when readers across a variety of contexts can potentially benefit from the research (Tracy, 2010). A reader who has been provided with the necessary specific contexts, participants, settings and circumstances is in a good position to decide whether the findings can be applied to other contexts (Braun & Clarke, 2013). While I do not claim the findings of this particular research can be generalised, I do believe that many of the findings are relevant to employers, learners and HEIs interested in furthering their knowledge of WBL. This belief was confirmed from discussing the findings with WBL practitioners from Irish and European HEIs.

4.10.6 Significant contribution

Tracy (2010) outlines how the research should contribute to knowledge and practice. This study makes a valuable contribution to knowledge by addressing the limited research into WBL partnerships (Healy *et al.*, 2014; Kozlinska, 2012; Plewa *et al.*, 2015). Davey *et al.* (2011) claim that previous studies into WBL partnerships tend to focus on the barriers faced by the stakeholders, and fail to highlight the facilitators. Unlike previous studies, which focused solely on the needs and expectations of the HEI, this study considers all three stakeholders. In addition, it reviews the usefulness of the cultural web as a framework for considering the organisational culture of the HEI, and external organisations collaborating in a WBL partnership. The study also makes a significant contribution to practice, by providing a series of recommendations to HEIs and external employers when engaging in a WBL partnership. A further contribution to practice

concerns the development of a WBL practitioner programme, which has been informed by the findings of this study. This programme has been developed for HEI and industry representatives engaged, or considering engaging, in WBL partnerships. I have also shared the findings of this research at numerous national and international WBL conferences. For example, in April 2016, I coordinated a ninety-minute workshop at the European Association of Institutions in Higher Education (EURASHE) annual conference in Belgrade. At this event, I shared the findings from this study with European WBL practitioners and experts.

4.10.7 Ethical

Practices outlined above, such as sincerity and multivocality, contribute to ethical research (Tracy, 2010). Tracy identifies a variety of practices the researcher should consider in qualitative studies, including procedural, situational and relational ethics. Procedural ethics is regarded, by larger organisations, as universally necessary. Before commencing any primary data collection, I gained approval from the Research Ethics Committee at Northumbria University. The primary data collection and analysis were undertaken in accordance with the guidelines stipulated in *Northumbria University Research Ethics and Governance Handbook*. Data were not collected from individuals under the age of eighteen, or from adults lacking the capacity to consent to research. Informed consent is one of the core ethical principles highlighted in the handbook. For this research, I informed all the interview participants of the purpose of the research. Participating in the interviews was a voluntary matter for the participants, who did not have to answer questions they were not comfortable answering. The interviewees were also free to withdraw at any time. I never used my position in the organisation to gain participants' consent, nor were they rewarded for agreeing to participate.

As mentioned in an earlier section, observation is an important method used to collect data in ethnography. In most instances, I assumed an overt role, where my status as a researcher was known. In other instances, it was not possible to get the consent of all the people I was observing, and seeking it could have been detrimental to the research (Punch, 1986). For example, it was not possible to get consent from everyone attending events like graduations or conferences. In other instances, such as programme panels, I believed that seeking the consent might potentially influence the behaviour of the participants. I was careful to protect the anonymity of the individuals I referred to in the findings. Procedural

ethics also promotes the safeguarding of participants from undue exposure, by securing all personal data. I ensured that all data collected were securely stored. Any data stored on electronic devices (including electronic sound files from interviews) were password protected, and no-one else had access to the passwords. The names and identities of participants were stored securely in a separate file (password protected). Throughout the various stages of the research process, I endeavoured to respect the information provided by participants, and appreciated the importance of handling their information sensitively, in order to ensure confidentiality and anonymity.

Situational ethics and relational ethics involve the researchers in reflecting on their actions and being mindful of others. Hammersley and Atkinson (2007) explain how the ethnographer must carry out research in a manner that takes into account the values and interests of the people involved. At all stages of the research, I wanted to ensure that no harm would come to the contributors. It was also important that individuals who contributed to the study never felt exploited (Laverick, 2010). In fact, I believe the three stakeholder groups who contributed to the research had much to gain from the findings. The research gave all the stakeholder groups an opportunity to voice their opinions and raise recommendations in relation to how WBL could be coordinated in the HEI and employer organisations. I also believe that those who contributed to the primary research will benefit from the study, and will be receptive to similar research in the future (Brewer, 1990).

4.10.8 Meaningful coherence

According to Tracy (2010, p.848), meaningful coherent studies “interconnect their research design, data collection and analysis with their theoretical framework”. This study uses ethnographic techniques that are well suited to a social constructionist framework (Williamson, 2006). These techniques included interviews, observation, and the analysis of documents and other artefacts. Ethnography has been identified as a useful methodology for organisational culture studies (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007; Hatch, 1993; Janićijević, 2011; Schein, 1990; Watson, 2011). A major benefit of ethnography is its ability to explore the hidden dimensions of organisational life through intense observation and direct involvement (Hatch, 1993; Watson, 2011). These hidden dimensions comprise the cultural paradigm in Johnson’s cultural web, and are best captured using a combination

of methods (Hatch & Zilber, 2012; McShane and Von Glinnow, 2010; Schein 2004 & 2009).

Tracy (2010) also makes the point that the researcher should clarify the aims of the research early on. The introduction chapter in this dissertation provides the context and justification for the study. A research question and a number of sub-questions were also posed in the introduction chapter. The final chapter of the study summarises how the research question and sub-questions were addressed.

4.11 Chapter summary

This chapter has provided an overview of the research philosophy and methodological approach used for this research. The justification for the chosen ontology, epistemology, methodology and methods to gather data has also been presented. An ethnographic methodology combining a number of different data gathering methods, including observation, interview and document analysis, was adopted. Field notes providing rich data on the experiences, assumptions and expectations of the three main stakeholders (HEI, external employer and learner) were recorded over an eighteen-month period. Interviews were conducted with eight HEI participants, eight WBL learners and five employer representatives. In addition, documents and artefacts such as QA policies, strategic plans, WBL programme documents, evaluation documents, emails and press releases contributed to the study. The data analysis method adopted for the study, which involved combining Johnson's cultural web with a form of thematic analysis, has also been highlighted. Finally Tracy's (2010) guidelines for high-quality qualitative research provided a framework for the collection, analysis and reporting of the data.

5 Research Findings

5.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to address Research Objective 4: *To present the findings of the ethnographic study using Johnson's cultural web.*

Johnson's cultural web (1988) is used to discuss the findings of the study. Each of the factors making up the web is presented separately. The six elements of the web, together with the cultural paradigm, inform the main themes for this chapter. The subthemes represent the issues that were identified from the study, and are discussed within the most appropriate cultural web element. Some of the findings presented overlap into more than one element of the web, but to avoid duplication, it was decided to discuss the theme in the web element I felt was most appropriate. Table 5-1 below illustrates the themes and subthemes that are used to present the findings.

Table 5-1 Themes and subthemes for the analysis

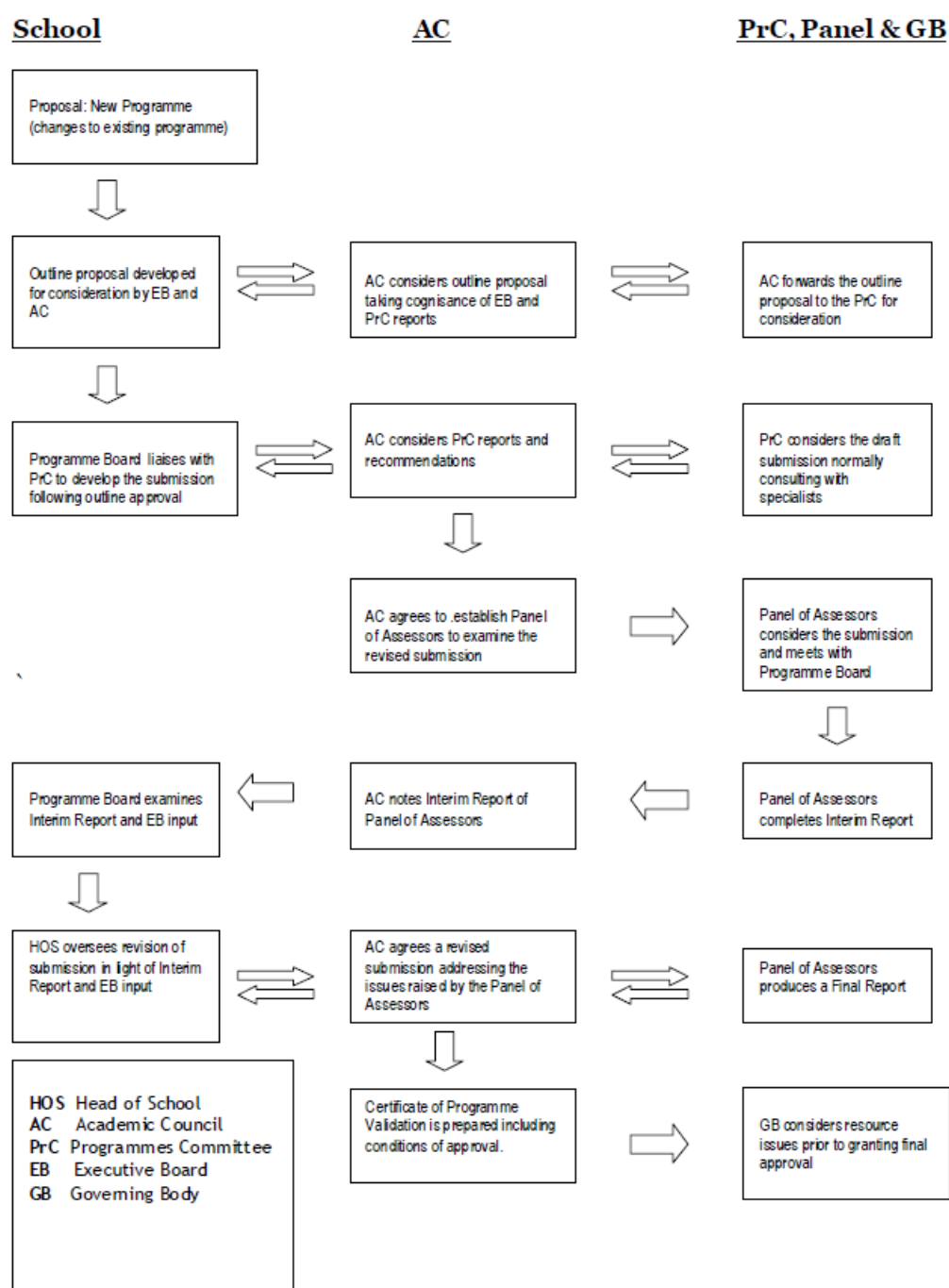
Web Element	HEI X subthemes	External Employer subthemes
Rituals and Routines The routines can make up “the way we do things around here” (Johnson & Scholes, 2002, p.231). “Rituals are special events or activities that are important in a culture” (Johnson et al., 2011).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New programme development • Academic calendar • Communications rituals and routines • Delivering WBL programmes • WBL assessment • Training for WBL lecturers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employees breaking out of the normal routine • Feedback sessions
Stories “Stories told by members of the organisation to each other and to outsiders can shape the organisational culture and can indicate the behaviour required in certain situations” (Johnson <i>et al.</i> , 2011).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Addressing the “bad stories” about WBL in HEI X • Promoting the “good stories” about WBL externally 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Addressing the “bad stories” concerning WBL • Telling the “full story” to the learner
Symbols “Symbols are words, objects, conditions, acts or characteristics of persons that signify something different or wider from themselves, and which have meaning for an individual or group” (Kemp & Dwyer, 2001, p.81).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The administrative system • Language 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Language • Learning facilities
Power Structures “Power structures refer to the pockets of power that have the most influence on decisions made within an organisation” (Johnson <i>et al.</i> , 2011).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategic importance of WBL • Sharing power with the employer 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Power to implement learning • Strategic importance of WBL
Organisational Structures “The organisational structures refers to the roles, responsibilities and reporting relationships in organisations” (Johnson <i>et al.</i> , 2011, p. 178).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dedicated WBL unit or department • Lack of collaboration between departments • WBL learner services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dedicated resource to coordinate WBL • Lack of formalised mentor support • Access to key people
Control Systems “The control systems refer to measurements and reward systems that emphasise what is important to monitor in the organisation e.g. products sold or number of customers” (Johnson <i>et al.</i> , 2011).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Academic rigour • Incentivise and reward WBL efforts • Evaluation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Selecting learners and monitoring attendance • Reward learner effort • Evaluation
The Paradigm The paradigm of the organisation “encapsulates and reinforces the behaviours observed in the other elements of the cultural web” (Johnson & Scholes, 2002, p. 235). Individuals within a culture may hold different beliefs about aspects of the organisation, but there is likely to exist a core set of assumptions held relatively common by members of the organisation and this is what the paradigm represents (Johnson, 1992).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A quality product requires time for development • We believe in our procedures for administrating our academic programmes • We are guardians of the academic standards. • Learner welfare is our main concern 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • WBL is another business transaction • We value speed to market • WBL should result in instant improvement in the workplace • WBL should not get in the way of productivity and performance

5.2 Rituals and routines - HEI X

This study has identified a number of cultural rituals and routines practiced within HEI X that impact on WBL partnerships. These rituals and routines include new programme development, academic calendar, communications with learners and employers, delivering and assessing WBL programmes, and training for WBL lecturers.

5.2.1 New programme development

The process of getting new programmes developed within HEI X is an example of a cultural ritual that is important for ensuring quality programmes. New programmes must successfully progress through a series of stages before being approved. This process is considered necessary for ensuring academic standards. Figure 5-1, extracted from the HEI X QA handbook, provides insight into the various stages through which new programmes must pass before they are validated.



**Figure 5-1 New programme development at HEI X
(Taken from HEI X QA handbook)**

The stages documented in Figure 5-1 serve a purpose in ensuring that the programme meets certain QA standards that are important to HEI X. However, the various stages involved in getting new programmes approved may go against employer requirements:

I think employers find the bureaucratic nature of the way we do things challenging. The idea that you finished the document and now it has to go to an internal committee and then an external report and panel is needed before the programme can be validated. The weeks and months pass. (HEI X Participant H)

The above quote describes a possible cultural misalignment between the HEI and employer. Throughout the study, employers were observed as being much more patient with the new programme development process when it was explained to them in advance, and when informed that these stages would help in developing a programme of the highest quality. However, some HEI X participants were interested in techniques to speed up the process. HEI X Participant H provides a possible solution for reducing the time required for accreditation and validation:

I am currently working on developing a new work-based learning programme and I want to be clever about it. The programme is being designed for a particular sector. When we are designing it, we are keeping the core modules generic but also allow room for electives so it will suit other companies. (HEI X Participant H)

This concept of designing generic programmes is discussed in the following chapter, as it provides a possible solution as to how HEI X can deal with the routine and rituals associated with new programme development. Updating existing programmes within HEI X also requires a series of internal and possibly external reviews. WBL programmes sometimes require urgent updating due, for example, to changes in legislation or technology, and this can challenge the HEI. However, a possible solution is provided below:

I was speaking to a head of department yesterday about responding to employer requests in relation to making updates to existing programmes. She described a very clever technique that allows some degree of flexibility with the module content. Instead of being restricted to a series of fixed learning outcomes, the head of department always includes a learning outcome termed “contemporary issues”. (Field Notes)

This means the module does not need to be revalidated every time something new comes up, and the HEI X can be more responsive to employer requests. Having a learning outcome termed “contemporary issues” does provide the HEI with some flexibility in relation to module content.

5.2.2 Academic calendar

The routine within HEI X is to deliver full-time traditional programmes from Monday to Friday between September and May. Each academic year has two semesters, with the first semester running from September to the middle of January, and semester two running from the end of January to May. This routine works well with full-time programmes, but may not always facilitate WBL programmes:

I would say what might be frustrating from an employer's perspective is that we always have to operate within the academic year. The private sector operate[s] 12 months a year. (Employer Participant C)

Employer Participant E presents an idea that could help to resolve the academic calendar issue:

In our programme, there are three semesters. The first two are delivered in class and the third is the placement which is delivered over the summer so the employees don't have to go to class for that semester. They complete an assignment in the workplace so that is one way of getting over the academic calendar. (Employer Participant E)

Table 5-2 illustrates the timetable schedule referred to by Employer Participant E:

Table 5-2 Sample schedule for a WBL programme

Mondays 9.30am-12.30pm		
Wednesdays 9.30am-12.30pm		
	Teaching Hours	Class Dates
Study Skills	12	September 4th, 9th, 16th & 18th
Computer Systems	27	September 23rd - December 2nd
Operating Systems	27	September 25th - December 4th
Software Development 1	27	January 13th - March 24th
Computer Networks 1	27	January 15th - March 26th
Industrial Placement	0	April - September
Computer Networks 2	27	April 30th - July 2nd
Operating Systems 2	27	April 28th-July 4th
Software Development 2	30	September 15th - November 24th
Database Technology	30	September 17th - November 26th
Mainframe Development 1	30	January 19th- March 23rd
Quality Testing 1	30	January 21st - March 25th,

For this WBL programme, the placement module is completed by the learner from April to September. This placement module involves the learner preparing a report outlining learning that takes place in the workplace, and does not require the learner to attend class. This means the programme does not come to a halt during the summer months and, in addition, learners get recognition for learning that occurs in the workplace (Boud *et al.*, 2001). Other interesting features of this schedule that provide insight into what a WBL programme looks like are worth noting. For example, the times learners attend class (9.30-12.30pm) were chosen because this cohort of learners commence work at 1pm, and the employer wanted minimal disruption to productivity (Lemanski *et al.*, 2011). In addition, the first module completed by the WBL learners is Study Skills, which addresses difficulties they might have with academic writing, exams and assignments (Young & Stephenson, 2007). The schedule is made out for the whole eighteen months' duration of the programme, to allow the learners and employers to work around these dates. However, not everyone agrees that extending the academic calendar is a good move. The underlying assumption of concern for learner welfare is evident in the findings:

People in the companies need holidays also. They are doing a challenging job. They are doing a third level qualification on top of that. You need to factor in holidays so the students can spend time with their families and re-charge the batteries. (HEI X Participant H)

This concern for learner welfare may mean the programme is delivered over an extended time period (by virtue of giving the learner a break during the summer months), and this could go against the wishes of the employers, who often want the programme delivered in the shortest possible timeframe to limit any disruption to productivity. A further concern in relation to rituals and routines, when considering organisational culture and WBL, relates to communications.

5.2.3 Communications rituals and routines

Communications in HEI X for the traditional full-time programme are conducted direct between HEI X and the learner. This is also evident in HEI X when delivering WBL, and can lead to discontent amongst employers, who feel they are outside the communications loop:

I think the communication between the learners and college is excellent. They know there is support there from day one. I would say communications with the employer needs to be improved. More communication is needed. (Employer Participant A)

Employer Participant A feels the employer would benefit more from the WBL partnership if the HEI considers the employer when communicating, rather than communicating only with the learner, which is the normal routine adopted with full-time learners. Although the findings suggest that both the HEI and external employer appreciate the need for regular communications, little evidence of this actually happening was observed during the course of the study. The communications do not have to be formal to be effective, as demonstrated by the extract from the field notes below:

One of the Heads of Departments in the college enjoys a very good relationship with the various employers she engages with and I think I know why. I was over meeting an employer in their new premises and I noticed a large bunch of flowers on the table. The employer representative informs me that the flowers were sent from one of the heads of departments within HEI X. The head of department also sent Christmas cards and thanked all the employers at the end of the year for their continued support. This is something the employers really appreciate. I would see her regularly having coffee with different employers in the college canteen. Although these may seem like small gestures, they are nevertheless important in maintaining a good relationship with the employer. The good relationship means the employers feels they can get in touch with her whenever they need to because she is very approachable. (Field Notes)

These simple gestures are valued by the employer. Deal and Kennedy (1982) identify communications (how people within an organisation address each other and those externally) as an important ritual when considering organisational culture.

5.2.4 Delivering WBL programmes

From looking through the various programme timetable documents within HEI X, it became apparent to me that WBL programmes are delivered with much less face-to-face delivery time. In the full-time traditional programmes, a standard five-credit module in HEI X is normally delivered over thirty-nine hours (three hours per week over thirteen weeks) of classroom delivery. However, the same five-credit module is delivered over a period of fourteen-thirty hours in a WBL programme. This intense form of delivery requires the WBL lecturer to adopt a different approach from the routine employed in full-time programmes, and this can challenge the lecturer:

I suppose some lecturers try and cover too much material. They try to cover the same material they would use to deliver to a full-time course. When we are covering a module in a 2-3-day period, we don't have time to cover everything. If we do that, there is no time for discussion. It works best when the lecturer covers the important elements of the module in the classroom and allows time for discussion. (Learner Participant H)

The style of delivery also differs in WBL programmes. One of the HEI X participants explained how he adopts a different style of delivery in WBL programmes:

I have to have business speech with these people [WBL learners] and you don't speak to them like you would to students who just completed secondary school. It's a different language altogether. They are more up there like members of my team. So I take a team leader approach. We talk in terms of teams. (HEI X Participant D)

The reference to language and talking style in the extract above demonstrates overlap between cultural routines and symbols. The mode of delivery may also need to be considered:

These learners do not attend college five days a week but still need to cover the same module content as our full-time learners. Therefore, it is essential that there is a user-friendly online learning mechanism that addresses the content of the module. (HEI X Participant B)

HEI X Participant B is highlighting the importance of online learning in WBL programmes. WBL programmes may require the lecturer to deliver more of the learning online with video clips and discussion forums. HEI X has encouraged lecturers to put more emphasis on online learning in WBL programmes. The extract below (Figure 5-2) is taken from a HEI X WBL programme document:

Use should be made of Virtual Learning Environments (VLE) such as Blackboard ©, to promote distance and independent learning. Blackboard © includes a resource area in which notes, videos and podcasts can be uploaded, an assessment and assignment area which has a self-correcting application and also a discussion forum, in which students can communicate with the lecturer and students at any time.

Figure 5-2 Programme document extract

HEI X has invested heavily in developing a virtual learning environment in recent years, but the feeling within the institute is that it is still underutilised. Employers, however, appear to be in favour of face-to-face delivery:

I prefer face to face. Because it is work-based, these people have full-time jobs. Online would involve too much risk and they might not engage with it.
(Employer Participant B)

I think the class face to face is probably better. (Employer Participant A)

This preference for face-to-face delivery exerts pressure on the HEI to deliver the learning in the classroom, as opposed to relying on online tools. Having considered the routines and rituals associated with the design and delivery of WBL programmes, the following section looks at WBL assessment.

5.2.5 WBL assessment

Kemp and Dwyer (2001, p.83) label rituals as “formal organisational processes”. An example of such a process within HEI X is the administration of exams and assignments. For the traditional full-time programme, the main form of assessment is the end of semester examination accompanied by continuous assessments submitted during the semester. These assignments are often based on fictitious case studies. With WBL programmes, the lecturers have the opportunity to base the assignments on real issues occurring in the workplace:

I think some of the assignments could be structured in a way that rather than the student explaining to the lecturer what they know about the subject, the student should really be doing an assignment that leads to an improvement in the workplace. (Learner Participant H)

These projects are based on making improvements in the work place and are closely aligned to the needs of the employer and employee, but at the same time meet the QA requirements of the HEI. An example of such an assignment taken from one of the HEI X WBL programmes is presented below in Figure 5-3.

Discuss two new retail technologies that your organisation could embrace.

Describe the features of the new technology plus the benefits and challenges the technology would present.

Figure 5-3 WBL assignment question

For this particular assignment question, the learner is expected to research the new technologies available and discuss it with others in the organisation. The employer gains from receiving a review of technology that could potentially benefit the organisation. The extract below (Figure 5-4) is taken from a testimonial from an employer that collaborated with HEI X.

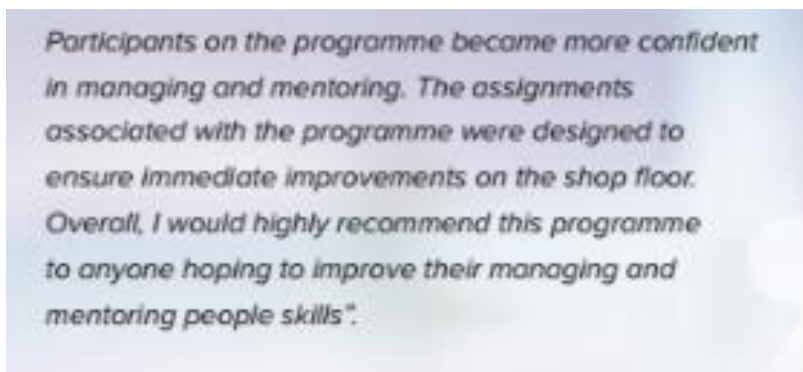


Figure 5-4 Employer testimonial

In the testimonial (Figure 5-4), the employer refers to the fact the assignments were linked to making improvements in the workplace, and this is something employers clearly value. They want a return on investment that is visible, and clearly one way this can be achieved is through linking assessments to issues and opportunities in the workplace.

5.2.6 Training for WBL lecturers

The above sections indicate that WBL requires a different form of delivery and assessment to that used in traditional programmes, and the lecturer may require training for these types of programmes.

The emphasis should be on developing lecturers to deliver at that high standard and therefore colleges need to invest in training for the lecturers so they understand the sector and the needs of the employer. We are talking quality here and that is what industry demands. (Employer Participant D)

Employer Participant D is referring to the expectations employers have in relation to the lecturers delivering the WBL programme. Within HEI X, academic staff involved in some of the WBL programmes have opportunities to go on study tours. These are organised by the external employer organisations in collaboration with HEI X, and typically involve a trip to visit a number of multinational organisations operating in the same sector on which the WBL programme focuses. I have gone on a number of these trips and found them excellent in developing lecturers by exposing them to best practice.

5.2.7 Summary of rituals and routines for HEI X

A number of organisational culture issues in relation to routines and rituals were highlighted in this section. The process of developing new programmes in HEI X was seen as somewhat bureaucratic and time-consuming by many of the research participants. Issues were also raised in relation to the academic calendar. In addition, employers felt that they should be included more in communications coming from the HEI. It was suggested that the routines associated with delivering and assessing WBL programmes needed to be different from the way traditional programmes are delivered and assessed. Finally, the importance of offering training and development opportunities to WBL lecturers was highlighted. The following section considers the rituals and routines for the external employer organisation.

5.3 Rituals and Routines – external employer organisation

This section considers the importance of rituals and routines for the employer organisation when participating in a WBL partnership. Two issues relating to rituals and routines have been identified. The first refers to the challenges faced by learners when the WBL programme interferes with the daily routine of work. The second relates to ensuring that communication between the employer and learner becomes an important ritual for the duration of the WBL programme.

5.3.1 Employees breaking out of the normal routine

Throughout this study, the challenges faced by the WBL learners when they do not receive support from their employers were observed:

I spoke to learners in a WBL programme this morning before their class and I was interested in how they were getting on with their studies. They felt they were not getting the support they required from their employer. Their supervisors did not want the WBL programme to interfere with work and no allowances were made around exam time. (Field Notes)

Well the work need to get the 37 and a half hours out of you anyway whether you are doing the course or not. (Learner Participant B)

Well when I am lecturing them [WBL learners], I would notice they are constantly checking their emails in class. (HEI X Participant E)

These extracts expose the challenges the learners face when the employer does not make allowances for them. Completing a WBL programme puts extra pressure on the employee and it may affect their performance in the workplace. For example, the learner may be absent from the workplace to attend class. Completing a WBL programme interferes with the daily routine of work, and the employer needs to make allowances:

Some of the student team leads didn't give them [learners] the support they needed. They maybe were in busy teams and pressure was put on to complete work and complete overtime rather than attend college. (Learner Participant A)

This extract from Learner Participant A highlights a challenge WBL presents to employers. Supervisors in many instances are often under pressure to meet targets and deadlines, and WBL programmes can affect productivity in the workplace if the learner has to be absent to attend college.

5.3.2 Feedback sessions

Employers routinely gather feedback on employee performance in the workplace through a number of mechanisms, including observing the employee in the workplace, talking to the employee's supervisor, and conducting performance appraisal interviews. However, evidence from this study would suggest this routine is absent when it comes to employers gathering feedback in relation to how learners are getting on in their WBL programme:

I guess we don't talk about it that much in here. I mean once I get my timetable I wouldn't really speak to anyone here about it. I think more meetings might help. (Learner Participant E)

One of the few examples of employers looking for feedback from their employees is acknowledged in the field notes extract below:

I was speaking to a few of the learners today in the canteen before their course commenced and one of them made reference to the fact that his training manager regularly contacts the learners to see how they are getting on with the course. She is very interested in learning about ideas that could be implemented in the organisation and she has already brought some of these ideas e.g. new techniques for employee appraisals and new technology in the sector, back to senior managers within the company. (Field Notes)

This extract demonstrates some of the benefits associated with gathering feedback from the WBL learner. Not only does it signify that the employer is interested in the learning acquired, but it shows that some ideas can be brought back to the employer. Throughout the study, there was very little evidence of smaller employers conducting feedback sessions with their employees. This was somewhat surprising, because learners and employers who contributed to this study all agreed that feedback sessions would be beneficial for all stakeholders in the WBL partnership.

5.3.3 Summary of rituals and routines for the external employer organisation

The organisational culture in relation to rituals and routines within the external employer organisation may need to be reviewed to facilitate WBL programmes and partnerships. It was found that employers expected the learners to complete the WBL programme without any disruptions to the workplace. In addition, little evidence of employers gathering feedback from WBL learners was found from the study. The following section presents the findings relating to the stories theme for both HEI X and the external employer organisation.

5.4 Stories – HEI X

Within HEI X, it was found that negative stories about WBL were in circulation. In addition, it was felt by some participants that HEI X does not promote itself enough to employers and, as a result, employers are often unaware that HEI X engage in WBL partnerships.

5.4.1 Addressing the “bad stories” circulating within HEI X concerning WBL

Throughout this study, I came across stories circulating within HEI X that make the promotion of WBL challenging:

I believe that one of the reasons why WBL is not more widespread within the college is due to stories that are being passed around by academics who do not support this type of an initiative. For example, one such story that I only learned of today relates to an incident involving a lecturer refusing to lecture on a WBL programme because he believed it lacked the same academic rigour as the full-time programmes and the delivery time is too intense. (Field Notes)

I know one senior lecturer in here that tells everyone to stay away from work-based learning because he believes there is no way a college can deliver 180 credits over three years when you are only seeing the students a few days per month. He tells everyone that these WBL courses lack rigour and they put too much pressure on the lecturers. (HEI X Participant B)

These types of stories can make the promotion of WBL within HEI X challenging, and need to be redressed by the many good stories associated with WBL. In an attempt to reverse the negative stories, and promote the merits associated with delivering on WBL programmes, I organised a conference in December 2015, where academics involved in WBL programmes were given an opportunity to share their stories. Employers and learners also described their experiences. This proved very useful in correcting some of the negative stories. It is important that the HEI is aware of the negative stories circulating about WBL internally, and takes actions to address this matter.

5.4.2 Promoting the “good stories” about WBL externally

Despite their expertise in this area, it appears that HEI X does not transmit to the employers stories relating to the many successes it has enjoyed in WBL:

They [HEI X] don't promote themselves enough to industry. They are good at promoting themselves to people who are not working. (HEI X Participant C)

It [WBL] has been very successful for us but it is like the best kept secret in higher education. No one knows about it. (Employer Participant D)

HEI X Participant G promotes the idea of writing up case studies and ongoing news stories to promote WBL to industry:

We should have a few case studies written up that describe how it works and the ongoing news stories. There is so much happening that is good and really current and we have so many high profile companies we are working with and that needs to get out there. We are not good at promoting ourselves. (HEI X Participant G)

Transmitting case studies that outline the benefits of WBL programmes could encourage employers to engage with HEI X. HEI X does have a good story to tell in relation to WBL. The many success stories from engaging in WBL partnerships with external employer organisations need to be shared with external audiences.

5.4.3 Summary of stories for HEI X

Cultural norms and values are transferred throughout the organisation by the transmission of stories (Freemantle, 2013a) so HEI X should try and ensure the stories told support the preferred organisational culture. The findings reveal that some negative stories about WBL were in circulation internally, and this was making the promotion of WBL challenging. In addition, it was found that HEI X does not externally promote their WBL offerings sufficiently. The following section looks at stories in relation to the external employer organisation.

5.5 Stories – external employer organisation

The stories told within the external employer organisation also have an important role to play in creating an organisational culture that facilitates WBL partnerships. This section discusses the importance of spreading the many good news stories describing the benefits WBL can provide to the external employer organisation. In addition, the significance of telling employees the “full story” before they enrol on a WBL programme is presented.

5.5.1 Addressing the “bad stories” concerning WBL

Employer participants who contributed to this research stated that stories about industry-education partnerships collapsing were still very evident and may have contributed to the lack of WBL partnerships not just within HEI X, but nationally:

I attended the WBL conference today hosted by HEI X and I posed a question to the panel of employers. I wanted to know why more employers are not embracing WBL. One of the employers responded by suggesting that employers pass on

stories to each other about partnerships with colleges and universities collapsing and this makes employers nervous of such initiatives. (Field Notes)

These stories can result in senior managers in the employer organisation forming a negative impression of WBL, and missing the opportunities WBL can present. One of the employers HEI X engages with is very good at publicising the WBL opportunities available within their organisation. They regularly transmit their good news stories relating to WBL in the media. An example is provided below in Figure 5-5



...delighted to celebrate 84 newly graduated team members from the ...
... at a ceremony at The Shelbourne Hotel, Dublin on 5 November, attended by Minister for Education

Figure 5-5 Good news stories regarding WBL

Transmitting positive news stories like this is good for the image of the employer, and also provides insight into the importance of WBL within the organisation. The following section reviews the importance of telling the learner the “full story”.

5.5.2 Telling the “full story” to the Learner

From a communications perspective, learners on the programme believe that they do not always receive the “full story” about the programme from their employer, and they sign up to these programmes based on promises made by the employer that are subsequently broken:

The information I received from the college was accurate. The information I received from the employer was not accurate. We were promised mentors from the company but this never materialised which was disappointing. (Learner Participant G)

Learners suggested that employers do this in an attempt to make the programme attractive to the learner. For example, employers promised mentor support and allocated study time, but this did not always materialise. Some employers failed to inform the learners about the challenges presented by WBL programmes. The field notes below provide further insight into the importance of telling the learner the “full story”:

I am amazed by how often I come across learners who enrol on WBL programmes without really understanding the content of the programme or the effort required. Today I was delivering an induction for an 18-month WBL programme delivered in HEI X and when I was delivering the induction, I noticed a number of learners felt uneasy. They were under the impression that the programme was a management programme for developing their leadership skills. However, this programme was an IT programme that included modules such as Data management and Network management. When this was explained, two of the learners decided to leave the programme. When I investigated further, I was informed that very little information about the programme had been supplied by the employer. (Field Notes)

Sometimes, employers are so busy that they do not allocate sufficient time to promoting and describing the WBL programme internally. On other occasions, employers may find it difficult to recruit enough learners onto a WBL programme and therefore allow all applicants to enrol on it.

5.5.3 Summary of stories for the external employer organisation

Stories also have a role in creating an organisational culture for the external employer organisation participating in WBL partnerships. Stories are important because they convey the organisation’s shared values or culture (Peters & Waterman, 1982). This study has found that employers share stories about WBL partnerships collapsing, and this can influence the perception held by employers in relation to WBL programmes. In addition, it was found that learners are sometimes not told the “full story” about what the WBL programme involves, and this can result in learners enrolling on programmes which may not match their requirements or expectations. The following section presents the findings relating to symbols for both HEI X and the external employer organisation.

5.6 Symbols – HEI X

The administrative system within HEI X, as well as the language used when communicating internally and externally, are considered in this section. Other symbols that

are often considered when presenting the cultural web, such as the way people dress, the way they address each other, and office layout, are not included in this study as their influence is not seen as being that significant in the context of the research question.

5.6.1 The administrative system

Some cultural web elements may be both symbolic and functional (Johnson *et al.*, 2011), and the administrative system within HEI X appears to fall into this category. The administrative system not only performs a number of functions, but it is also a symbol representing an important aspect of organisational culture within HEI X. It symbolises what is important to monitor (e.g. attendance and assessment grades), as well as the nature of the typical learner profile for whom the system was designed (full-time learner).

Issues relating to the administrative system within HEI X catering for WBL programmes were raised during this study:

Today an employer wanted to pay for each student in one bulk payment but the system could not facilitate this as it was designed for full-time learners who pay individually. It is not flexible enough to facilitate the employer paying one bulk payment for all their learners. I know this is going to cause more problems later. I remember in the past WBL learners getting invoices for courses their employers had already paid for and the learners could not log into their emails or online learning notes until the problem was resolved. (Field Notes)

These work-based learning students do not get grants but I still have to fill out roll sheets in the classroom and waste 15 minutes of the class for something that is of no value whatsoever. There needs to be a different administrative system for work-based learning programmes. (HEI X Participant D)

The administration system and processes were designed for full-time learners and programmes, and can sometimes struggle to cope with WBL programmes. Difficulties are encountered when registering WBL learners, paying WBL lecturers, facilitating exams outside the dates identified for full-time programme, issuing invoices to employers, providing access to services such as the library and online learning tools, as well as accessing emails and assessment results. The traditional full-time programmes within HEI X run from September to May and are typically delivered over two semesters. However, WBL programmes are not always delivered in this timescale, and some are delivered over three semesters. On some occasions, the administrative system automatically assumes that the learner is finished for the year at the end of Semester 2, and therefore access to the

online learning material may be interrupted for WBL learners completing a programme over three semesters. The language used, which is discussed in the following section, is another cultural symbol that needs to be considered.

5.6.2 Language

The language used by members can symbolise what is important within that organisation (Kemp & Dwyer, 2001). This is evident within HEI X when developing new programmes, where so much emphasis is put on credits, levels, academic rigour and learning outcomes. These terms may mean very little to those employed outside the higher education sector. This issue concerning academic language is not surprising, as those employed outside higher education rarely come across these terms. I have often received emails from learners who cannot understand the language used in HEI X. The email below in Figure 5-6 illustrates where learners struggle:

Hi

Just a quick mail re: exam questions in general. I tend to be losing marks as I'm answering questions incorrectly. Is there a guide i can use to improve ...? Just unsure how to go about questions such as Discuss, Evaluate etc.

Regards

Figure 5-6 Sample email from learner

Even when WBL learners receive their results, problems arise:

A WBL learner has received her results today but cannot tell if she has passed all the modules. What is confusing her is the module credits. Other terms such as exemptions and electives are also confusing her. She doesn't understand 5 or 10 credit module implications when calculating overall average. (Field Notes)

The academic jargon used when communicating results to WBL learners can be confusing. These learners sometimes do not understand terms such as exemptions, deferrals, credits and compensation. There was also evidence to suggest that learners are challenged with academic writing, and in particular with references and plagiarism. This style of writing is significantly different from the style used in the workplace, and making the transition can be difficult:

I was doing an evaluation session today and when I asked them what was the most challenging aspects of the programme, they were in agreement that it was academic writing. WBL learners normally struggle with academic writing as it is so different to what they are used to. (Field Notes)

The employer can also find it challenging understanding the language of academia:

I suppose the structure of modules and how credit is awarded or associated to modules can be difficult to understand for a non-academic person. People from industry struggle to get their heads around that. (Employer Participant D)

The language used by academics is not always understood by those employed outside this profession, and it is important the HEI X employees use a language that the external employer can comprehend, otherwise the employer might lose interest.

5.6.3 Summary of symbols for HEI X

A number of issues in relation to cultural symbols were identified in the findings. Firstly, it was found that the administrative system in HEI X was designed to meet the needs of full-time learners and programmes, and does not always meet the requirements of WBL programmes and learners. Secondly, learners and employers often do not understand the academic language used in HEI X. The following section looks at symbols from the external employer organisations' perspective.

5.7 Symbols – external employer organisation

The importance of language is also highlighted when considering the organisational culture of the external employer organisations participating in a WBL partnership. In addition, the availability of study facilities within the employer organisations was mentioned as a symbol that supports the learners completing the WBL programme.

5.7.1 Language

The issue of language used in HEI X was discussed above, but academic staff sometimes have difficulties understanding the language used by the external employer. Employers from the technology sector in particular tend to speak a language that encompasses many technical terms only understood by those employed in that sector:

Employers would use acronyms all the time and no one understands what they are talking about so I have to get them to provide a terms of reference for all their acronyms. They speak acronyms. They talk about BPRs. They mightn't speak one full sentence without mentioning acronyms and that is a major issue. (HEI X Participant D)

The problem of understanding acronyms used in industry was not restricted to academic staff:

Well our company would over use acronyms I think. Whereas it is different down here in the college. Everything is talked in acronyms up there. (Learner Participant G)

Sometimes, when employers present their learning requirements to the HEI, they use a language that is acceptable for internal communications, as it refers to jargon understood by members of their own organisation, but the technical terms and acronyms may not be comprehended by external people. A further symbol that is important to consider in WBL partnerships relates to providing learners with resources to support their learning.

5.7.2 Learning facilities

Because WBL is typically delivered in intense blocks in the HEI, the learner is expected to undertake significant independent study. Getting time to come and visit the HEI library can be difficult for the learner:

I can't remember what time the library shuts at now but we wouldn't really have a chance to come into the library because we are at work and by the time we are finished we are too tired for studying. (Learner Participant B)

In addition, many of the WBL programmes are delivered three to four hours away from the HEI X campus, and therefore the learner is not able to access the facilities. The employer may have a role to play here by providing learning resources. In completing this study, it became evident that very few employers invested in learning and study facilities in their own premises to support the learners.

However, during this study, I came across one employer that recognised the importance of providing such facilities to the learners. This employer created a purpose built study/learning room equipped with seven computers, printer, projector for presentations and small library. I was invited by the employer to see the facilities and the employer even

asked me to recommend books that could be purchased for their own internal library. The internal library symbolises the importance of education and learning within the organisation. It also symbolises that the organisation is willing to support the learner during the programme.

5.7.3 Summary of symbols for external employer organisation

The language used by the external employer organisation can sometimes be difficult for the HEI to understand. This can result in the HEI misinterpreting messages and this might have an effect on the design of the WBL programme. A further cultural symbol relates to study facilities for the WBL learners. WBL learners might not be able to access facilities such as the library or computer labs as easily as full-time learners, and therefore may require support from the employer. The following section presents the findings relating to the power structures for both HEI X and the external employer organisation.

5.8 Power structures – HEI X

This section examines the strategic importance of WBL within HEI X. In addition, it presents the issue of sharing power with the external employer organisation when it comes to designing, delivering and assessing WBL programmes.

5.8.1 Strategic importance of WBL

The strategic importance of WBL within HEI X was questioned by a number of participants:

I think it is discussed. I am not sure it is discussed sufficiently when you consider the numbers we have on work-based learning programmes. I am not sure it gets the time and consideration it deserves. We are already making a name for ourselves in this space but there is only so much one person can do. (HEI X Participant G)

I feel within the college that work-based learning is not high in their agendas. They talk about it surely and say it is important but when you get into it, the full-time students get almost all the attention. (Employer Participant D)

Well the college needs to build it into their strategic plan exactly what their view and opinion is in relation to work-based learning. They should for example say in their strategic plan that we want, for example, 10% of our students to be on work-based learning programmes. (HEI X Participant D)

HEI X Participant G is calling for the investment in more resources to better manage WBL. The number of WBL learners and programmes are increasing, but the perception seems to be that the HEI is not investing sufficient resources to support this growth, or to realise potential growth. Employer Participant D believes that WBL is not getting the attention it deserves, with the HEI focusing mainly on full-time programmes. HEI X Participant D offers a possible way for ensuring more attention is given to WBL by setting targets for academic departments to achieve in relation to WBL learners.

Employer engagement does receive significant attention in the current strategic plan. One of the core values in the plan focuses on engaging with local, national and international employers. Particular emphasis is put on serving the needs of employers in the region, as documented in Figure 5-7.

v) **Region** – We are focused on delivering for this nationally strategic region through engagement with development agencies, employers and the broader community.

Figure 5-7 Extract from HEI X strategic plan

WBL is not specifically mentioned in the strategic plan, but it could be assumed that this is one form of employer engagement. Despite this, participants continue to question the strategic importance of WBL within the institute. Many feel it needs more of a voice, with a dedicated unit highlighting its strategic importance.

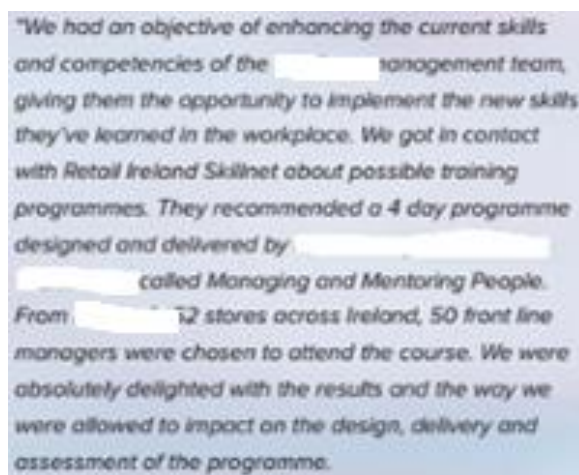
5.8.2 Sharing power with the external employer organisation

HEI X holds almost all of the power when designing traditional full-time programmes of study. In other words, it decides the content of the programme, and how it is delivered and assessed. However, when designing and delivering WBL programmes, HEI X involves the employer in the decision-making process. There were mixed reviews amongst employers regarding the level of input they get when designing programmes:

We have input but as I mentioned this level of input from employers in work-based learning programmes is very rare. That is why our programmes are a success.
(Employer Participant D)

If the college wants employer engagement in work-based learning I think they need a more structured and serious approach. There needs to be a commitment from the college where they genuinely want the input from the employer. Often that relationship is not there. It is talked about but it is not there. (Employer Participant B)

Within HEI X, there appears to be an acceptance that involving the external employer in the design of the programme is beneficial for all stakeholders. The extent to which power is allocated to the employer within HEI X varies from faculty to faculty, but the willingness to share power has evolved over time, as the HEI and external employer better understand and trust each other. Employers clearly appreciate their input into the design of programmes. One of the employers that HEI X collaborated with in the design for a short accredited management programme wrote the testimonial below (Figure 5-8).



"We had an objective of enhancing the current skills and competencies of the [redacted] management team, giving them the opportunity to implement the new skills they've learned in the workplace. We got in contact with Retail Ireland Skillnet about possible training programmes. They recommended a 4 day programme designed and delivered by [redacted] called Managing and Mentoring People. From [redacted] 12 stores across Ireland, 50 front line managers were chosen to attend the course. We were absolutely delighted with the results and the way we were allowed to impact on the design, delivery and assessment of the programme.

Figure 5-8 Employer testimonial

The testimonial taken from an employer document remarks that the employer was allowed to contribute to the design, delivery and assessment of the WBL programme:

They need to be involved in delivering the programme. Often we mightn't have expertise for certain elements of the programme so we need to borrow people from the company to deliver these parts. (HEI X Participant D)

In most instances, the employer's involvement in the delivery of the WBL programme involves providing guest lecturers to support the HEI X lecturer. This typically involves presenting a workshop for one to three hours. The importance of sharing the responsibility of programme delivery was mentioned by a number of stakeholders:

I was speaking to the guest lecturer after yesterday's module and I would liken him to the bow that ties everything together because I know they have had all these modules completed so far but this guy comes in and he talks for three hours and he pulls together so much of it. (HEI X Participant F)

I actually think the guest lecturers are very good. It might be no harm if we had more of that. (Learner Participant D)

Within HEI X, there seems to be an acceptance that sharing the power when it comes to delivery is beneficial for all stakeholders. On some occasions, this sharing of power extends to the employer delivering complete modules, as the expertise is not available within HEI X. During this research study, I observed very limited evidence of employer involvement in assessment. This involvement was mainly restricted to evaluating employer performance in placement modules, as opposed to actually grading assignments.

5.8.3 Summary of power structures for HEI X

The findings reported that some HEI X participants felt WBL does not exert enough influence on strategic decisions made within the HEI, and that it could receive more resources as the number of WBL programmes increase. The findings revealed that the HEI does consult with the employer in the design and delivery of WBL programmes, but that further sharing of power could be facilitated by encouraging employer to contribute to decisions made regarding the WBL programme. The following section looks at power structures from the external employer organisation's perspective.

5.9 Power structures – external employer organisation

This section considers the importance of ensuring employers empower the learners to implement the learning they receive in the classroom. Issues in relation to ensuring that WBL receives strategic support within the external employer organisation are also presented.

5.9.1 Power to implement learning

Kemp and Dwyer (2001), when discussing power structure in their cultural web study, highlight the importance of empowerment, and this is something that is relevant in this

research. The WBL learners need to be empowered to implement the learning they receive from the HEI in the workplace.

Maybe it's just myself but I haven't had a chance to test out my learning in the workplace. My supervisor does not give me the impression that I have the freedom or power to go about testing ideas I learn in college. (Learner Participant B)
They [the learners] need to be highly motivated with sufficient power in their respective organisation to implement work-based learning. (Employer Participant D)

We can read theory supplied to us from the college but we need to see it being implemented in the workplace as well. (Learner Participant G)

The research identified very little evidence of employers actually encouraging the learner to implement learning acquired in the classroom in the workplace.

I think the manager has to engage with the employee when they are doing the course. The employee should be asked how the learning on the course can be used in the company. They need opportunities to test the learning from the course and put it into practice into the company. (Learner Participant H)

Learner Participant H is promoting the idea of the employer actively encouraging the learner to implement the learning in the workplace. The learner needs to be empowered to test the knowledge acquired in the classroom.

5.9.2 Strategic importance of WBL

The issue of strategic importance of WBL within the external employer organisation was raised by a number of participants. Learner Participant A outlines how the senior managers within the organisation can contribute to the WBL programme:

I think senior management in the company need to inform the learner's immediate supervisor that ok, possibly in the short run this programme may not benefit their team and the learner will be absent from work on occasion but it will benefit the company in the long term. The immediate supervisor needs to provide the learner with support. (Learner Participant A)

Learner Participant A seems to be making the point that in order to guarantee the learner is able to attend all classes in a WBL programme, individuals with the most power within the

organisation need to sanction it. The field notes below also provide some insight into the importance of gaining strategic support for WBL:

The importance of receiving strategic support for WBL in the employer organisation was discussed today at a meeting with a number of employers we engage with. One of the training managers pointed out that if WBL is to succeed then the support of the senior managers within the organisation is vital. In her organisation training and education are discussed at the top level and the senior managers regularly attend training sessions and discuss the training with the employees. The organisation also has a dedicated training department. Employees in the company are expected to participate in the various training programmes available. There appears to be a culture in the organisation whereby training and learning is highly valued. (Field Notes)

The field notes above refer to a dedicated training department. Not every organisation can afford a dedicated training department. However, employers should consider appointing someone in a senior position to coordinate training and education if they are considering engaging in WBL partnerships:

The success of work-based learning in the employer organisation is so dependent on the competence of the training manager. They need to be highly motivated with sufficient power in their respective organisation to implement work-based learning. (Employer Participant D).

Some employers that contributed to this research view their WBL partnership as an important strategic tool in developing future managers. Figure 5-9 below illustrates a poster used by one of the employers to promote WBL within their organisation.



Figure 5-9 Poster promoting WBL
(Source: External employer organisation website)

This particular organisation enrolls all their trainee managers on a WBL programme delivered in conjunction with HEI X. Upon successful completion of this management programme, the trainee manager is promoted to a more senior level. This provides insight into the strategic importance of WBL in this organisation as well as indicating an organisational culture where education and training are valued.

5.9.3 Summary of power structures for the external employer organisation

This section has highlighted the importance of power structures for the external employer organisation participating in a WBL partnership. During the study, little evidence of employers empowering the learners to implement learning acquired in the classroom was observed. The findings highlighted the importance of ensuring WBL is strategically important within the external employer organisation. The following section presents the findings relating to the organisational structures for both HEI X and the external employer organisation.

5.10 Organisational structures – HEI X

A number of organisational structure issues were identified for HEI X. Participants called for the establishment of a dedicated WBL unit to coordinate WBL. It was also felt that more collaboration between the different departments was required to respond to

employers who request programmes that combine a number of disciplines. Finally it was felt that some of the learner services available to full-time learners were not available to WBL learners.

5.10.1 Dedicated WBL unit or department

Both employer and HEI X participants highlight the need for a dedicated WBL department to deal with clients:

I think when you consider the potential work-based learning offers an institute, you could very easily justify the creation of a dedicated learning office or department. (HEI X Participant B)

I would have a work-based learning department here in the college. That department would be the single point of contact with employers. (Employer Participant D)

Both of these participants are suggesting HEI X should consider the establishment of a dedicated WBL department. Perhaps this is a fair assessment. For the duration of the study, WBL learners accounted for almost 10% of total HEI X learner numbers. In my role as WBL coordinator in HEI X, I often found it difficult to deal with the wide range of roles and responsibilities associated with the position, and believed that the HEI were missing out on a number of further WBL collaborations due to lack of resources. However, I was fortunate in that the organisational structure within HEI X had lower levels of bureaucracy, compared to larger HEIs (Healy *et al.*, 2014). Getting access to the senior decision-makers was normally achieved without too much trouble, which was important when collaborating with employers, as they seek quick answers.

5.10.2 Lack of collaboration between departments

Another issue in relation to organisational structure relates to how HEIs are set up. Johnson *et al.* (2011) discuss relationships between the different units of an organisation when presenting organisational structure, whilst Losekoot *et al.* (2008), when describing the cultural web, refer to collaborative and confrontational organisational structure cultures. Within HEI X, there are a number of academic departments, each of which coordinates programmes for their own particular discipline. This tends to work well for administering traditional full-time programmes, which do not cross disciplines, and

therefore collaboration between academic departments is rarely required in relation to designing and delivering programmes of study. Furthermore, academic departments within HEI X are in competition with each other for student numbers and resources. This healthy organisational culture of competition may be acceptable when dealing with full-time traditional programmes, but can lead to problems in WBL programmes.

In recent years, employers have been requesting WBL programme where the content crosses disciplines (e.g. the modules on the programme combine those from different departments such as Computing and Engineering). The demand for programmes that require the input from more than one academic department was highlighted during this research:

Although the companies are beginning to say that even though they are a computing company, and a lot of my companies would be computing because I am primarily a computing lecturer, the companies are saying the computing people are missing the business side of things which computing is not delivering so there is actually a cross over between one or two departments which we are also missing. And they [employers] would like to give us programmes that span both departments. We are not set up for that, to be cross disciplined. (HEI X Participant D)

I held a meeting today with an employer in the food industry and we discussed the changing nature of the sector. He believed that in the coming years, colleges and universities delivering food-related programmes would need to put more emphasis on business related topics such as marketing, finance and technology as opposed to solely focusing on food-related modules such as nutrition, culinary techniques and food science. (Field Notes)

If the quotes provided above reflect the type of WBL programmes employers now require, then HEI X may need to consider how academic departments can cooperate in the provision of WBL programmes.

5.10.3 WBL learner services

The organisational structure in HEI X was primarily set up to deal with traditional full-time learners. These learners can easily access the student services provided by the institute. Because WBL programmes in HEI X are often delivered off-campus, some of these services might not be available to them:

We aspire to have as near similar educational experience as you would have for our full-time learners. In truth that is impossible because they are simply not here. They are also extremely busy people. I don't think we extend our services like counselling, career, nursing as well to these people [WBL learners] as we should. (HEI X Participant A)

I think the full-time learners have much more access to the IT people who work here and are able to support them. (HEI X Participant C)

I find it hard [difficult] to get reading materials and a lot of the people in my group have said that the college should be in conjunction with some college here in Dublin where we actually can have a library, because books are expensive. (Learner Participant F)

This issue in relation to the library raised by Learner Participant F is of particular importance to HEI X when considering WBL. Many of the WBL programmes delivered by HEI X are delivered off-campus, and the learners can be employed in organisations located several hundred kilometres away. These learners are sometimes not able to access the HEI X library on a regular basis, and this puts them at an immediate disadvantage. The lack of social events organised for WBL was also highlighted:

I know when my sister went to college and she was telling me there was more bonding between all the students and the lecturers. We really haven't had that. (Learner Participant D)

We all work in different companies so we mightn't see each other apart from coming to class once or twice a month so going for a few drink now and again after class can help bring the class together. (Learner Participant H)

Also, it might be a good idea to organise some social activities for these learners as that is an important aspect of completing a higher education programme. This is often neglected and work-based learning students are entitled to enjoy this aspect of study but they often miss out. (HEI X Participant B)

The social side of completing an academic programme of study can be a major attraction for some learners. Learner Participant H makes the point that going for a few drinks after class could be beneficial for improving the class morale. If an organisational culture that meets the needs of all stakeholders in the WBL partnership is to be established within HEI X, then the services available to full-time learners need to be made available to WBL learners.

5.10.4 Summary of organisational structures for HEI X

This section has emphasised the importance of organisational structures for HEI X when identifying a culture that takes into account the needs of all stakeholders in the WBL collaboration. The importance of employing a dedicated WBL resource within the institute was emphasised, with some participants calling for a dedicated WBL department. It was also found that employers are now requesting programmes that cross academic disciplines, and this could challenge the existing organisational structure. Finally, some participants felt that WBL learners could not always access the learner services offered to full-time learners. The following section considers the organisation structure for the external employer organisation.

5.11 Organisational structures - external employer organisation

Issues relating to organisational structure are also important within the external employer organisation. This section discusses the importance of appointing a dedicated resource to coordinate WBL, ensuring mentor support, and facilitating access to key people.

5.11.1 Dedicated resource to coordinate WBL

The majority of the larger organisations that contributed to this research had in place a dedicated person to coordinate training and education, but very few of the smaller organisations had such a person in place. This point is highlighted in the two extracts below:

The employer needs to have the proper structures in place in the organisation first of all. They need a good HR or maybe even a training department that is responsible for managing training in their organisation. (Employer Participant D)

We often hear employers complain about how difficult it is to get in touch with a HEI as they often don't have an industry point of contact. Well this can be just as bad when the HEI tries to contact an employer or employer representative body. I have spoken to three people today within a certain organisation and I feel like I am going around in circles. When I ask who is responsible for training and education, I am passed from the HR manager to the General Manager to the Customer Care department. It's another reminder that it can be extremely frustrating working with organisations without a dedicated training person. (Field Notes)

The above extracts allude to the strategic importance of education and training within the external employer organisation. It can be very difficult for the HEI to collaborate with an external organisation in a WBL partnership when there is not someone appointed to coordinate training and education. My experience from engaging with employers suggests that when the employer does not appoint someone to coordinate training and education, the WBL programme suffers consequently.

5.11.2 Lack of formalised mentor support

One role of particular importance in WBL partnerships is that of the mentor. The lack of mentoring support within the employer organisation was highlighted as a problem by a number of participants:

Well we thought the company was going to support the people on the course through mentoring more than they actually did. And that led to a failing. (HEI Participant D)

There were parts of the programme we completed that I would have no exposure to in the workplace. This is where the mentors would have been useful. The mentors could have added to the theory we obtained in the college. (Learner Participant G)

Learner Participant G describes the detrimental effect this has had on him:

It has probably motivated me to look externally to see what other companies have to offer because of the way I have been treated. I was promised things and then when the course started these promises were broken. (Learner Participant G)

This comment from Learner Participant G highlights one of the risks associated with WBL from the employer's perspective. If learners do not receive support from the employer, then they may feel let down and form a negative impression of their employer.

Learner Participant A commented on the identity of the mentor:

I don't think it would be feasible if one of your mentors was one of the guys doing 10 or 12 hours' overtime. I think if it was more management where they had time and were able to schedule half an hour or an hour to set aside with one of the current students, it would definitely be a good help. (Learner Participant A)

The mention of time in the extract above is very relevant. During this study, I observed instances where the mentoring did not occur because the person who was due to provide

the mentoring was not allocated time for this. In other instances, there may be an opportunity for learners to mentor each other:

There are one or two [learners] who are particularly strong compared to the rest of them and they are willing to support and mentor the others which is very important. (Employer Participant E)

In an earlier section, the importance of collaboration between the HEI and the external organisation was highlighted, but there also needs to be a culture of collaboration and support within the employer organisation, and mentoring is one way this can be facilitated. In addition to mentors, the learner also benefits by having access to people within the organisation who have expertise in areas relevant to the WBL programme.

5.11.3 Access to key people

WBL tends to work well when the learners on the programme can get direct access to key people within the organisation. Key people in this sense include subject matter experts who could support the WBL learners by sharing their knowledge and expertise. Learner Participant H describes the benefits of getting access to these individuals:

We covered HR and customer care recently in class so I was able to contact the relevant people in the company. I was able to go to the Marketing department. It is a massive advantage. (Learner Participant H)

The findings from this study indicate that employers are not putting systems in place to help learners benefit from the expertise within the organisation, and this needs to be formally managed. Without a formal system, learners only receive limited support:

I know I looked for support in my company e.g. marketing support from marketing departments, financial support from finance department and so on. I asked for help and some came back to me and some didn't. But if HR had told the different departments we have got people doing courses at the moment and please help them if they require it. (Learner Participant D)

Learner Participant D is suggesting that access to key people only works when the likes of the HR department get involved and put systems in place to support the learner.

5.11.4 Summary of organisational structures for the employer organisation

This section has emphasised the importance of organisational structures in the employer organisation when considering a culture that meets the requirements of the different stakeholders. It was found that when employers fail to appoint someone to coordinate WBL, problems arise. In addition, the need for a formalised mentoring support structure was stressed. Finally, the WBL learner needs access to key people within the organisation to support learning acquired within the HEI. The following section presents the findings relating to the control systems for both HEI X and the external employer organisation.

5.12 Control systems – HEI X

There are a number of issues relating to control systems that HEI X can consider when managing WBL programmes. These issues include ensuring academic rigour in WBL programmes, incentivising and rewarding academic staff for engaging in WBL programmes, and evaluating WBL programmes during and after delivery.

5.12.1 Academic Rigour

The importance of maintaining rigour in all programmes, including WBL programmes, is evident from reading through the various HEI X QA documents. An extract referring to academic rigour is presented below (Figure 5-10).

The procedures and guidelines for the design and institutional approval of new programmes must be rigorous and effective in order to develop coherent new programmes of study.
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Figure 5-10 Extract from QA procedures document regarding academic rigour (Source: HEI X procedures and guidelines for the design and validation of new programmes document)

Employers however are sometimes less interested in academic rigour and more concerned with outputs:

Maintaining academic rigour with WBL programmes can be challenging. Today, for example, I met with an employer who wants the college to deliver a four-day management module to supervisors in his organisation. However, he is not interested in certain aspects of the programme already approved in the college and he also wants a different form of assessment from that which has been approved for the module. (Field Notes)

This extract above refers to a challenge I encountered regularly in this study. Because the programme referred to in the extract is accredited, all the learning outcomes must be covered (so employers cannot pick and choose certain aspects of the course they want to include). Academic rigour is a major concern for the HEI. However, external employers are not as concerned with academic rigour, and sometimes cannot understand why the HEI cannot be more flexible around this issue.

The academics within HEI X were especially keen to enforce the same rigour around WBL assessments, and ensure that exams were part of the assessment, despite a preference for assignments from employers and learners:

The one danger with work-based learning and it is an area where it might lose its rigour is if we go down the road of all assignments. (HEI X Participant F)

It was already mentioned in section 5.4.1 that academics could view WBL with suspicion, claiming it lacks academic rigour due to the absence of exams and focus on practice. This point made by HEI X Participant F is worth considering. Employers also had issues with rigour but their concerns were more to do with enforcing assignment deadlines:

The problems with assignments is we get feedback from learners saying they are still doing assignments in December. My understanding is that they should have these completed by November. Maybe sometimes the college is a little bit too lenient with the learners, (Employer Participant A)

I received a phone call today from a training managers who has a number of learners on one of our WBL programmes. She was critical of lecturers offering learners extra time to complete assignments. She spoke about one of the lecturers that was very strict in relation to assignment deadlines and this impressed her. (Field Notes)

The lecturer sometimes offers extensions to the WBL learner because they recognise the challenge they are under trying to balance work, study and a personal life; and there exists an underlying assumption that concern for the learner is very important. This may be because many of the WBL lecturers are completing courses themselves, and appreciate the challenge of combining work, study and having a personal life.

5.12.2 Incentivise and reward WBL efforts

A further dimension of control systems relates to rewards. It was found HEI X participants felt that WBL needed to be better rewarded and incentivised:

There is no incentive for a HOD [Head of Department] to develop and deliver a WBL programme. I recently developed a WBL programme and spent some money advertising it. This came out of my department budget but when the money came in from the employer to pay for the programme, this money went into the large pot and not to me. (HEI X Participant H)

HEI X Participant H feels there is no reward for the effort required to develop WBL programmes, as any revenue generated goes into the HEI X account, and the department that designed and delivered the programme does not gain financially. HEI X Participant A proposes a possible solution:

One of the ways to incentivise uptake is to reward those departments that are producing the additional income streams or the additional funding via additional students. (HEI X Participant A)

In recent years, HEI X has addressed this concern by implementing the recommendation proposed by HEI X Participant A. Academic departments that engage in WBL partnerships can retain up to 50% of the profit generated from the WBL programme. However, some academic staff within the institute were not aware of this.

WBL also needs to be made more attractive to the lecturers. The findings from this study suggest that WBL programmes require much more preparation work from the academics, as the learners go through the programme much more quickly, and require additional case studies and reading material, as well as significant online support:

I think the work lecturers do on the online part of their module on work-based learning programmes is not appreciated. You still have to prepare the same material, but you are only being paid for the part you teach. A massive amount of hours is spent on developing online material. (HEI X Participant C)

HEI X Participant C feels that lecturers delivering on WBL programmes are not adequately compensated for the additional effort involved in delivering on these types of programmes. Because WBL programmes are delivered in an accelerated fashion, due to low contact hours, the WBL lecturers have to prepare much more additional reading

material for the learners to cover in their own time. The findings have shown that a major barrier in the promotion of WBL within HEI X relates to the lack of rewards and incentives.

5.12.3 Evaluation

Within HEI X, academic programmes are monitored by evaluation sessions, which involve learners providing feedback in a number of areas including module content, knowledge acquired, assessment strategy, delivery style, facilities, equipment and workload. In addition, focus groups with a number of learners from each programme are held throughout the academic year to gather further feedback. This form of evaluation is useful when reviewing full-time programmes, but may need to be modified for WBL purposes, to take into account the needs of the WBL learner and employer, and this raises issues:

Do the employers accept our evaluation, which is exam results, or does evaluation need to consider impact on the workplace conducted by the employer? If we deliver the course and they are still not able to do the job the course was designed to address, then this is an issue (HEI X Participant H).

This quote from HEI X Participant H highlights again the need to include the employer in all stages of the WBL programme from design to evaluation. Not only must the programme satisfy the needs of the learner, but WBL programmes must also focus on the needs of the employer that commissioned the WBL programme.

5.12.4 Summary of control systems for HEI X

This section has highlighted the importance of control systems in presenting an organisational culture for HEI X that takes into account the needs of the various stakeholders participating in the WBL collaboration. The findings emphasise the importance of maintaining academic rigour for WBL programmes, especially around assessments. In addition, participants suggested that there are not sufficient incentives or rewards for lecturers or heads of departments to encourage them to participate in WBL partnerships. It was also suggested that changes might be required in relation to how WBL programmes are evaluated. The following section considers control systems for the external employer organisation.

5.13 Control systems – the external employer organisation

There are a number of issues the employer needs to control and monitor in the WBL partnership, including the selection of learners, attendance, reward systems and evaluation of the programme.

5.13.1 Selecting learners and monitoring attendance

Procedures describing how employers should select the WBL learners to complete the WBL programme receive very little attention in the literature. It is, however, something the employer should carefully monitor:

I think the selection of students for these courses needs managing. It shouldn't be just about applying and you are automatically accepted. (HEI X Participant E)

During the course of this research, I asked employers who had a good track record in terms of learners completing the programme how they select their learners, and I was struck by the diligent approach they took:

Well they first fill out an application form. A panel of three made up of someone from HR, someone from operations and myself would rate these applications and from that shortlist the applicants who would then have to do an interview and presentation. (Employer Participant A)

Unfortunately, the findings from this study would suggest that very few employers put as much effort into selecting learners as Employer Participant A. In some organisations, learners who applied to complete the WBL programme were automatically selected.

Control systems emphasise what is important to monitor within an organisation (Johnson *et al.*, 2011) and in WBL programmes, learner attendance is an issue that requires monitoring. The accelerated nature of WBL programmes puts greater significance on attendance, as missing one class can mean the learner misses a significant component of learning. For some of the WBL programmes delivered at HEI X, attendance is a major concern:

I have just finished a course there last week and basically attendance was a big issue. They just could not get away from their place of work. (HEI X Participant D)

Learners on the WBL programme have also commented on the importance of getting the support of the employer to attend college:

I think the employer has a lot to answer for in relation to attendance. If a business need comes up, college has to take a back seat. I think the employer has to guarantee that the employee will be given time off to attend all modules. (Learner Participant G)

Very few of the employers that collaborate with HEI X closely monitor the attendance of their learners. When an employer invests in WBL, it is important that the learners are in a position to attend all classes/lectures. This is more likely to occur if the employer monitors attendance.

5.13.2 Reward learner effort

Learners invest significant effort when completing a WBL programme, and sometimes they can feel this effort is not recognised. Some learners believed that the employer gained the most from the learner completing a WBL programme:

Because ultimately it is the employer who benefits from the learning we receive. It is the employer who gains getting access to the skillset we have developed. (Learner Participant G)

During this study, I came across very little evidence of employers actually acknowledging or rewarding the effort from the learner. Indeed, I got the impression from some employers that the learner should be thankful for being selected for the WBL programme, and it was the learner who was mainly benefitting from the programme.

The employers in this study reward good performance in the workplace through financial and non-financial means, but the same recognition is not afforded for the effort invested by the learner completing a WBL programme. This could potentially suggest to the learner that the organisational culture is just focused on productivity and performance.

5.13.3 Evaluation

Employers make a significant investment when collaborating with a HEI in the development and delivery of a WBL programme and, like all other investments, there should be a cost-benefit analysis conducted by the employer (Hardacre & Workman,

2010). The evaluation of the WBL programme only occurred in the larger employer organisations which employed a dedicated training manager:

We would get immediate evaluations from the students themselves first of all. Then it is documented using formal procedures. We want to see that the original objectives of the programme are being achieved. We also want to ensure that learning acquired from the programme is being applied. We also do a further evaluation three months after the course is completed. We would determine from the employees what part of the programme was most beneficial to them, what was not beneficial at all. We then bring this feedback to the college (Employer Participant C).

I think like we said earlier that if the coordinator from the company sat down and asked – what came out of that module? In fairness to our training manager, she phones us before every exam and after every couple of lectures we hear from her. (Learner Participant C)

Employer Participant C mentions that the feedback is then brought back to HEI X, which is interesting to note. Not many of the employers actually come and present the feedback to the college. It is something that should be considered, as it ultimately benefits all stakeholders. It is also important to consider how the employer evaluates WBL programmes. Figure 5-11 provides an evaluation sheet used by an employer that engages with HEI X:

Evaluation of training					
Name of Learner: _____	Date of Training: _____				
1. Please rate on the scale below your level of satisfaction with each of the following: (1 very unsatisfied 5 very satisfied)					
Quality of Training	1	2	3	4	5
Quality of Handouts	1	2	3	4	5
Training Acquired	1	2	3	4	5
Appropriateness of training to the workplace	1	2	3	4	5
Appropriateness of assignment to workplace	1	2	3	4	5
2. Do you believe this training has improved your Managing People skills?					

3. How relevant was the training for your current position?					

4. What are you doing different in the workplace now as a result of this training?					

5. How could the training be improved?					

Figure 5-11 Employer evaluation document

The evaluation sheet refers to training, and the focus of the evaluation is to determine the affect the training is having on the workplace. It is more of an input-output form of evaluation to determine if this business transaction resulted in a good return on investment. This contrasts significantly with the evaluation used by HEI X, where emphasis is on knowledge acquired.

5.13.4 Summary of control systems for the external employer organisation

This section has highlighted the importance of control systems in presenting an organisational culture for the external employer organisation participating in the WBL collaboration. The findings emphasised the importance of investing significant time and effort into the selection process, as well as closely monitoring the attendance of learners. It was found that WBL learners were not receiving recognition for the effort invested in completing the WBL programme. Finally, it was found that programme evaluation was carried out by the larger employer organisations employing a dedicated training manager, but not by the smaller organisations.

5.14 The cultural paradigm – HEI X

The paradigm of the organisation “encapsulates and reinforces the behaviours observed in the other elements of the cultural web” (Johnson & Scholes, 2002, p. 235). The paradigm closely corresponds to what Schein (1985) refers to as underlying assumptions. These underlying assumptions are seldom discussed and difficult to change (Pettigrew, 1990). This section considers the paradigm for both HEI X and the external employer organisation. If we consider HEI X, this research has uncovered a set of core assumptions not uncommon within the HE sector:

1. A quality product requires time for development.
2. We believe in our procedures for administering our academic programmes.
3. We are guardians of the academic standards.
4. Learner welfare is our main concern.

5.14.1 A quality product requires time for development

If the course is to be accredited, then it will take time to go through the normal process we have to put all our courses through. It is important you stress you are operating as quick as you can but that it will take time. (HEI X Participant G)

It has already been documented in section 5.2.1 that designing quality higher education programmes takes time. This is exemplified by the number of stages through which all new programmes must proceed through delivery can commence. This can prove problematic for both employers and academics. However, it should be noted that all these stages in the process serve a purpose in ensuring that the programme meets the HEI QA requirements. Furthermore, it should be explained that these stages are in place, so that all new programmes follow best practice guidelines in the area of higher education, which should also be reassuring for the employer.

5.14.2 We believe in our procedures for administering our academic programmes

Well we are bound by QA policies so whether students are work-based or traditional full-time, [they] are bound [by] the same policies. (HEI X Participant G)

HEI X has developed various procedures for administering programmes of study in relation to design, delivery, administration, assessment and evaluation. Some practices go

back to when the HEI commenced operations over forty-five years ago, and have served the institute well since this time, and attempts made to amend these will be resisted (Schein, 2005). However, many of these procedures were developed with full-time traditional learners in mind. For example, some of the procedures associated with registering learners, monitoring attendance and evaluating programmes do not always suit the requirements of WBL programmes.

5.14.3 We are guardians of the academic standards

Maintaining high academic standards remains at the core of what HEI X stands for. There is a preoccupation with ensuring that the standards associated with higher education are always addressed in HEI X. This has implications for how programmes are designed, delivered and assessed. These standards put significant emphasis on knowledge. Often the employer is more concerned with the practical implications of the programme:

Employers often want training. They want their employees to complete this training and go back to the company and be able to hit the ground running with what they have learned on the course. Companies want training but we want to educate and I think that is a problem. (HEI Participant D)

The various stages new programmes must go through before being validated reveals the importance of guarding academic standards. In addition, the findings have shown that employers prefer WBL projects linked to the workplace over exams, but lecturers like to include some standard end-of-semester examinations because this is the norm in traditional full-time programmes.

5.14.4 Learner welfare is our main concern

This was mainly manifested in the way HEI X goes to great lengths to put the learner at the centre of all learning. Evidence of this can be found in the strategic plan for HEI X, where prioritising the student experience emphasised (Figure 5-12).

Prioritise the student experience in all aspects of Institute activity by embedding a service ethos that is focused on excellence, informed by strong engagement with students and is underpinned by documented quality assurance procedures.

Figure 5-12 Extract from strategic plan regarding learner welfare

Many of the academics involved in the delivery of WBL programmes also deliver on full-time programmes. The majority of the full-time learners are aged between 18 and 22, and sometimes the lecturers adopt a paternalistic style of delivery, demonstrating a concern not just for the academic delivery but also for the wellbeing of the individual:

They are our learners; we have an overarching responsibility to give them time and space to actually become educated in the middle of all of this process where everyone wants lumps out of them – their employers, their families; so I think in some ways we are like a strength and conditioning coach of a team and very often that is missed by everyone. (HEI X Participant A)

HEI X Participant A refers to the learners as “our learners”, and how the HEI has a responsibility for the learner. I have observed on occasion lecturers adopting this style without really being aware of it for the WBL learners. This concurs with Cronin (2001), who argues that a university’s *raison d’être* is social welfare rather than profit maximisation. Respect for learner welfare is also highlighted by Clark (1983). This prioritising of the learner can sometimes go against the wishes of the employer. For example, I have seen instances where employers prefer the programme to be delivered in a shorter period, but academics within HEI X are concerned about learner burnout, and worried that the learner may not have time to digest the learning.

5.15 The cultural paradigm – external employer organisation

Although this study focuses on a number of external employer organisations, all with different organisational cultures, a number of shared underlying assumptions were identified that have implications for WBL:

1. WBL is another business transaction;
2. We value speed to market;
3. WBL should result in instant improvement in the workplace;
4. WBL should not get in the way of productivity and performance.

5.15.1 WBL is another business transaction

This underlying assumption was mainly manifested by how the external employer organisations source suppliers of higher education before selecting the most suitable partner:

Well, employers look at every metric about the college before getting involved with one. (HEI X Participant E)

In addition, the focus of the employers' intentions seemed to be on outcomes – how will this programme influence productivity, performance or profits? There was an input-output comparison:

From a selfish perspective, employers are going to consider what benefit will this programme provide to them? They are going to ask what are the individuals who do the course [going to] do differently as a result of this course? What additional skills will the course provide us with? They will look at it as a business proposition. (Employer Participant C)

Employers appeared to treat the WBL partnership as a business transaction. The employer is purchasing a service (WBL programme) from HEI X. This notion that employers view WBL as a business transaction, where a return in investment is sought, supports a similar claim by Becker (1993). Wright (2008) warns against this purchaser/vendor approach when engaging with HEIs, and recommends that the employer should adopt a partnership approach, where the WBL collaboration is a joint programme.

5.15.2 We value speed to market

From observing employers and engaging with them, it became apparent to me that “time to market” was a major consideration. This was especially the case for employers new to WBL, who put pressure on HEI X to get the programme up and running as fast as possible. The urgency seemed to stem from operating in an environment where so much focus is put on developing products as quickly as possible. Plewa (2009) discusses how HEIs and external employers differ in their approach to time, and how time to market is a determinant for product success in industry, whereas academics often operate in a longer and less-defined timeframe. In a commercial setting, being first to market obviously has positive implications, and there was a feeling this also needed to be applied in WBL:

They are a multinational, they want to grow, and they want everything quickly. A week for them is a significant amount of time so you always feel that you are on a go-slow when you explain to them about your timeline, for example, getting programmes approved, validated and that normally and naturally takes a few months. So to someone in industry that is an outrageous amount of time. (HEI X Participant G)

HEIs in comparisons move to a different beat. They see themselves as guardians of academic standards, and the process of new programme development involves proceeding through a number of stages before the programme can be delivered.

5.15.3 WBL should result in instant improvement in the workplace

It was mentioned above that employers view WBL as a business transaction. They pay a fee and want a return on this investment. The return in investment the employer seeks is an almost instant improvement in the workplace:

The first thing employers look at is what did we get out of this programme? They will want to get a return on investment. (Employer Participant D)

The bottom line is what change has the course made to the business. (Employer Participant A)

The employer wants a return for the investment made in relation to time and money. (Employer Participant E)

This expectation for an instant return on investment could be viewed as being unreasonable. The HEI can provide the knowledge, skills and competencies to the learners completing the WBL programme, but this alone does not ensure the return on investment sought by the employer. The employer needs to provide support and an opportunity to implement the learning. This may require empowerment, mentoring and access to projects to test the learning.

5.15.4 WBL should not get in the way of productivity and performance

A major concern many employers have with WBL programmes is ensuring that the programme does not interfere with productivity:

They [employers] are purely business focused and profitability [is] the primary issue; and they see employees being billable; and when they are not on the job but down here on a course, that is a problem for the company because they are not doing their job. (HEI X Participant D)

Work commitments can change, so even though we have the dates for college well in advance, something can come up at short notice in the company and that has to take precedence. (Learner Participant H)

This prioritising of productivity in the workplace over the WBL programme is to be expected, with the main concern for employers focusing on productivity, performance and profitability. When an employer invests in a WBL programme, there may be some short-term disruption to productivity. For example, learners may need to attend lectures during working hours, or may need support with assignments. The employer should recognise this when considering WBL.

5.16 Chapter summary

This chapter has described the experiences and expectations of learners, employers and HEI X staff participating in WBL partnerships delivered in Ireland. The findings referred to field notes, interviews, documents and other artefacts. The findings were presented using Johnson's cultural web elements. The following chapter discusses the findings and makes recommendations to both the HEI and external employer organisations.

6 The Cultural Web of Work-based Learning

6.1 Introduction

The previous chapter identified many of the organisational culture issues that affect HEI X and the external employer organisations when collaborating in a WBL partnership. The objective of this chapter is to address Research Objective 5: *To discuss the findings in conjunction with the literature and make a contribution to knowledge and practice by considering the practical implications for the HEI and external employer organisations.*

This chapter evaluates the findings in relation to the literature and proposes recommendations to both HEI X and the external employer organisations. Research into WBL partnerships remains under developed (Healy *et al.*, 2014; Kozlinska, 2012; Plewa *et al.*, 2015), with most of the studies on industry/higher education collaboration focusing on research partnerships (Bolden *et al.*, 2009; Davey *et al.*, 2011). In addition, the vast majority of the WBL literature focuses on the needs of the HEI, with only limited reference made to the requirements and expectations of the employer and learner. As a result, I found that making comparisons with the literature was difficult for some themes. The chapter presents each of the cultural web elements separately, before offering a cultural web of recommendations for HEI X and the external employer organisations to consider.

6.2 Rituals and routines HEI X

Recommendations in relation to rituals and routines for HEI X to consider relate to new programme development, the academic calendar, employer communications, delivery and assessment, and training for WBL lecturers.

6.2.1 Consider the new programme development process

The study found that some employers felt the cultural rituals and routines associated with new programme development were bureaucratic and unnecessary. This supports a claim made by Kaymaz and Eryiğit (2011) and Healy *et al.* (2014), who suggest that the bureaucratic stages in new programme development can prevent a programme from being delivered at the speed required by the employer. Ferrández-Berrueco *et al.* (2016) and Thayaparan *et al.* (2014) identify response time in developing new programmes as a

major barrier to addressing employer requirements. When organisations differ in the meaning they attach to time, problems often emerge (Schein, 2004), and throughout the findings illustrations of this were presented.

This process of developing new programmes can see a cultural conflict between the HEI and employer organisations. On the one hand, HEI X has underlying assumptions such as “a quality product requires time for development”, but on the other hand, an underlying assumption identified in the paradigm for the external employer stresses “speed to market”. According to Johnson (1992), making changes to an organisation’s cultural paradigm is difficult as it involves attacking beliefs central to the organisation. Thankfully, a change in the cultural paradigm might not be necessary. HEI X Participant H provided a possible solution by developing and accrediting a relatively generic programme with a large number of electives that can then be customised for an individual employer. This means that when an employer approaches HEI X for a WBL programme similar in nature to the already approved generic programme, delays can be avoided. This recommendation for the development of generic frameworks concurs with research by Basit *et al.* (2013) and Kewin *et al.* (2011). Furthermore, the findings also disclose that the impact of this culture collision can be reduced when the HEI describes, in advance, the stages through which new programmes must progress before they are validated. The HEI needs to explain to the employer organisations the purpose of each of the various stages and emphasise that these stages are necessary to meet the various QA requirements within the institute.

Whereas the literature does highlight the bureaucratic nature of new programme development, little focus is given to the challenges associated with updating existing WBL programmes. This study has found that employers sometimes request urgent changes to existing WBL programmes due, perhaps, to changes in legislation or technology. Updating existing programmes also requires internal and sometimes external validation, and this can be time-consuming for the HEI and frustrating for the external employers. This study has found that the problem can be addressed somewhat by including a learning outcome called “contemporary issues”. This will facilitate the inclusion of new learning material in a module, without the need to go through a bureaucratic process every time changes are required.

6.2.2 Consider facilitating learning outside the normal academic dates and times

Issues in relation to the academic calendar were raised in the findings, with some participants suggesting that the HEI almost comes to a stop during the summer months. This issue with the academic calendar was also identified by Ball and Manwaring (2010). Kewin et al. (2011) describe how employers do not think in academic calendar timeframes. This research acknowledges the issues associated with the academic calendar, and makes a valuable contribution by proposing an option that could be considered to address the challenge. WBL programmes within HEI X normally contain a placement module, which involves documenting how learning is being implemented in the workplace. In some WBL programmes delivered in HEI X, these placement modules are delivered over the summer months, as they do not require significant input from academic staff, apart from the actual assessment (the academic staff normally assess the placement in September when they return from their summer break). This idea of scheduling the placement module over the summer months can overcome issues relating to the academic calendar. Interestingly, some participants have commented on the benefit of having two to three months off in the summer when completing a WBL programme, as this allows the learners time to recharge their batteries and spend time with their families. This is especially true for the WBL programmes that are delivered over two or more years. Perhaps WBL learners could have the option of deciding whether to complete the placement over the summer months or during the academic calendar. I feel that WBL learners completing a programme that extends beyond one academic year do need a rest period to recharge their batteries.

6.2.3 Include the employer in communications

The findings reveal that employers felt they were not receiving adequate communications from HEI X. The norm in relation to communications within HEI X seemed to involve direct communications with the learner, with little dialogue regarding the progress of the programme taking place with the employer. According to Deal and Kennedy (1982), how an organisation communicates with those internally and externally is an important ritual when considering organisation culture. In this study, employers indicated they preferred more communication from the HEI, and to be informed about guest lecturers, changes to schedules and any events worth attending, but they felt the HEI sometimes forgot about the employer when communicating. Rather than forgetting to communicate with the

employer, the HEI may have been respecting the learners' confidentiality. The HEI does not share learner information with any external stakeholders (e.g. parents) in the full-time programmes and takes the same approach with WBL learners, when employers request information. Employers who pay for their employees to complete the WBL programme can feel aggrieved by this. Whilst it may be acceptable for the HEI not to share confidential information about the learner (e.g. assessment results), this should not mean that the employer is left out of the loop altogether when it comes to communications. Research by Frassetto, *et al.* (2012) found that when the HEI and external employer organisations communicate regularly, conflict between the two is reduced, and any conflict that does exist tends to be constructive. The importance of regular communications between the HEI and employer organisations is well documented in the literature (Basit *et al.*, 2013; Brennan, 2005; Hardacre & Workman, 2010; Kewin *et al.*, 2011; White, 2012). Basit *et al.* (2013) suggest that engaging with employers in WBL partnerships requires the HEI to open up dialogue in relation to programme design, delivery and assessment. Some of the emails sent to the learners regarding guest lecturers, conferences and changes in the market place could also be forwarded to the employer. In my experience, WBL partnerships work well when the HEI and external employer organisations build a relationship with each other. This may involve regular meetings (often informal over a coffee).

6.2.4 More discussions in class as opposed to lectures

It was uncovered in the findings that the style of delivery in WBL programmes is quite different from the routine used when dealing with full-time learners. One WBL lecturer in HEI X illustrated how he used a team-led approach to deliver the learning, treating the learners as members of his team. He said the learners could relate better to this style of delivery and contributed more in discussions. This view is echoed by Anohina-Naumeca and Sitikova (2012), who suggest that WBL learners should be viewed as problem-solvers, bringing their knowledge and skills from the workplace into the learning situation. This style of delivery may challenge some HEIs, where a didactic culture can be evident in the way the lecturer delivers to traditional learners.

The HEI could also consider the use of online tools to support delivery, but the findings show that these tools are underutilised. Within HEI X, lecturers are encouraged to place learning resources on the online learning platform. This is particularly important in WBL

programmes, which tend to be delivered in an accelerated mode, where learners are required to study independently to compensate for the reduced classroom contact time.

6.2.5 WBL assessments that recognise needs of all stakeholders

The findings reveal that WBL assessments should be aligned with problems or opportunities relevant to the workplace. This is a major attraction for employers and learners engaging in these types of programmes (Abduljawad, 2015; Basit *et al.*, 2015; Johnson, 2001). WBL assessments need to address the needs of the employer, learner and the HEI (Ball & Manwaring, 2010; Norman & Jerrard, 2015). One of the underlying assumptions identified in the cultural paradigm for HEI X suggested that they were “guardians of the academic standards”, which resulted in the HEI being very cautious with assessments. Lecturers sometimes preferred the tried and tested assessments of exams and fictitious case studies.

In WBL programmes, the workplace provides a live case study, which can be the basis for many assessments. However, it is also important to consider academic rigour when it comes to assessments. WBL assignments linked to the workplace take place in a variety of contexts, providing different levels of complexity, and this can be a challenge for the lecturer when trying to maintain parity (Costley & Armsby, 2007). Assessments need to be “reliable, consistent and demanding so that the qualifications they support are credible proofs of competence” (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2014, p. 17). Addressing the need to maintain academic rigour can be challenging when trying to meet the needs of the HEI, employer and the learner. Not only does this have implications for the cultural routines and rituals within HEI X, but there is a certain amount of overlap with the element of control in ensuring that academic standards are addressed. Perhaps a blended approach combining several assessment techniques works best. WBL assignments linked to making improvements in the workplace are attractive to employers and learners, but some of these learners may progress to other higher education programmes in the future, and they do need exposure to exams. In addition, incorporating exams may help to overcome some of the stigma associated with WBL in HEI X in relation to academic rigour, due to the absence of examinations.

6.2.6 Invest in training for WBL lecturers

The findings reveal that delivering WBL programmes is significantly different from delivering traditional full-time programmes. WBL programmes are more industry focused and the lecturer is expected to be familiar with the employer requesting the WBL programme. Johnson and Scholes (2002) refer to the training programmes offered to members of an organisation as an important ritual in organisational culture. The findings indicate that the HEI might need to invest in training to develop WBL lecturers. Although the need for staff training in relation to delivering WBL programmes is highlighted in the literature (Basit *et al.*, 2015; Carswell *et al.*, 2010), little information is provided on what the training should involve. Within HEI X, an accredited programme to support academics and industry representatives participating in WBL partnerships was developed.

The learning outcomes of the programme are included in Figure 6-1.

1. Describe the characteristics of a WBL programme.
2. Explain the key trends in relation to WBL nationally and internationally.
3. Analyse the benefits WBL provides to the main stakeholders.
4. Examine best practice in relation to designing and delivering WBL programmes.
5. Identify the key challenges associated with WBL.
6. Describe the importance of overcoming cultural differences between industry and Higher Education Institutes when designing and delivering WBL programmes.

Figure 6-1 WBL practitioner programme learning outcomes

I developed this programme in response to a need identified in this research. The content is very much informed by the findings from this study. For example, this programme stresses the difference between WBL programmes and traditional programmes, and how this influences design, delivery, administration, assessment and evaluation. Some of the contemporary issues in WBL (e.g. multi-disciplined programmes and shell frameworks) are reviewed in the programme. The challenges facing all three stakeholders are reviewed, and this is very important because each stakeholder faces different challenges in these types of engagements. As documented in the review of the literature, and from the primary

research, organisational culture differences between the HEI and external employer organisation contribute to further challenges. In addition, the internal culture within the HEI and external employer organisation may present a further obstacle when promoting WBL.

Learners (HEI staff and employer representatives) enrolling for the programme are expected to complete two assignments. The first assessment involves representatives from industry and academia collaborating in the design of a WBL programme. The second assignment involves learners making recommendations about how their own organisation can embrace WBL better. It involves reviewing organisational culture in their own organisation, and identifying actions that can be taken to improve the WBL offering. The recommendations for HEI X in relation to rituals and routines are presented in Figure 6-2 below.

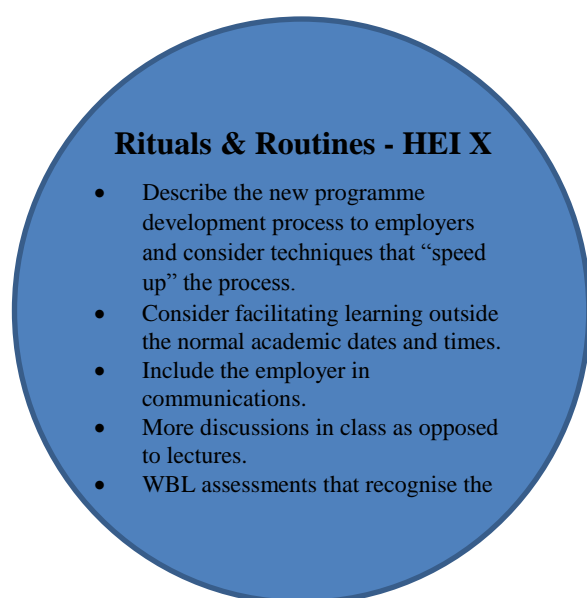


Figure 6-2 Rituals and routines – HEI X

6.3 Routines and rituals –external employer organisation

Recommendations in relation to rituals and routines for the external employer organisations to consider relate to recognising that WBL now forms part of the learner’s working routine, and ensuring regular feedback sessions with the learner.

6.3.1 Recognise that WBL now forms part of the learner's working routine

The findings reveal that completing a WBL programme can interfere with the daily routine of work, and the employers need to make allowances for the learners. Some learners indicated that work always came first and WBL second, and therefore attending college was not always possible. Lemanski *et al.* (2011) highlight employers' reluctance to release learners to attend college as an issue in WBL programmes.

The research also found that even when learners were in class, they were receiving emails and texts from their employers. This is not surprising, when the cultural paradigm for the external employer organisation is considered. One of the underlying assumptions identified in the cultural paradigm suggests that WBL programme should not get in the way of productivity and performance. However, WBL does temporarily get in the way. Learners need time not only to attend class, but also time to reflect on the learning acquired (Ball & Manwaring, 2010; Billett & Boud, 2001; Brennan *et al.* 2006; Siebert & Walsh, 2013). WBL learners may be required to attend college during working hours, and this may affect productivity. It is important employers realise that an objective of the WBL programme is to improve performance in the workplace, and completing the WBL programme may mean they have to make allowances to the learner for the duration of the programme.

6.3.2 Regular feedback sessions between learner and employer

Regular communication between the learner and employer representative should be seen as a routine that occurs in WBL programmes. The findings demonstrate that very few of the employers contributing to this study actually gathered feedback from the learners during the programme. This was quite surprising, because the cultural paradigm for the external employer organisation identifies WBL as "another business transaction", and therefore a review of how the programme is helping performance would be expected. Learners were expected to take ownership of the programme themselves, and the normal routine feedback sessions that are present in other business transactions were ignored. Healy *et al.* (2014) propose that employers should get the learners to make presentations to management or staff, but there was no evidence of this reported in the study.

When feedback sessions between the learner and employer occurred, they were restricted to the larger employers which had a dedicated training manager. If an employer is to create

a culture within its organisation that supports WBL partnerships, then more emphasis needs to be put on regular feedback sessions between the learner and employer. The findings report that employers often pass the responsibility for learning over to the learner and the HEI once the programme commences, and wait until the programme is completed before getting involved again. Johnson (2001) portrays how WBL learners can feel isolated when completing a WBL programme, therefore employers do have an important role in conducting regular feedback sessions with them. The recommendations for the external employer organisation in relation to rituals and routines are presented in Figure 6-3 below.

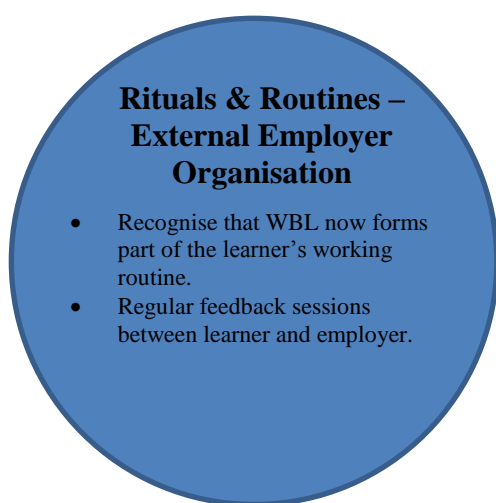


Figure 6-3 Rituals and routines – external employer organisation

6.4 Stories – HEI X

Recommendations in relation to stories for HEI X to consider relate to addressing the negative stories circulating within the institute regarding WBL and promoting the good stories about WBL.

6.4.1 Address the negative stories circulating within HEI X about WBL

The literature does not appreciate the influence of internal stories in the promotion of WBL within the HEI. However, the findings from this study identify stories in circulation within HEI X that make the promotion of WBL challenging. These stories relate to academic rigour and the intense nature of the programme. The issue of academic rigour is shared by Basit *et al.* (2013, p 44), who suggest some academics still think that WBL programmes “dilute the knowledge creating functions of academia”, and Abukari (2014),

who describes the views of some academics who believe the HEI is the only place where knowledge is acquired. However, little attention is given to how these negative stories can be addressed. Stories can be a powerful tool in establishing cultural norms and values (Freemantle, 2013a), so it is important that the HEI monitors these internal stories. According to Johnson and Scholes (2002), stories typically relate to successes, failures, heroes, villains and mavericks. HEI X needs to share stories highlighting its successes. Sourcing these positive stories should not be difficult, as the findings identify many benefits that WBL partnership can offer the HEI. Benefits such as access to real-life case studies, increased revenue and improved reputation in the marketplace were identified in this research, and these support claims identified in the literature (Basit *et al.*, 2013; Hardacre & Workman, 2010; Harris *et al.*, 2013; Healy, 2014; Rogers, 2011; Ropes, 2015).

According to Brady and Haley (2013), an organisation sometimes need to update or add to a story in order for a culture to change. The stories highlighting the benefits provided by WBL need to be shared through mechanisms such as internal newsletters, staff meetings and internal conferences and events. The findings reveal that a WBL conference held in HEI X in December 2015 proved useful in addressing some of the myths associated with WBL. This conference was also useful in promoting WBL to employers. Representatives from several national and international employer organisations attended, and have since commenced WBL programmes with HEI X.

Some HEI X participants questioned the academic rigour associated with WBL programmes, and used this as a tool to avoid these types of programmes. I believe that in some instances, academics share negative stories about WBL programmes because they are concerned by the challenges presented. In WBL programmes, lecturers are exposed to learners who, in many instances, have significant practical experience, and the lecturer can feel intimidated. Rather than feeling intimidated, they should use the knowledge already in the classroom and adopt the role of a facilitator, as opposed to that of lecturer.

6.4.2 Promoting the “good stories” about WBL externally

The findings highlight the need for HEI X to raise its profile by promoting itself more positively to industry. One participant termed WBL at HEI X as “the best kept secret in higher education”. Kewin *et al.* (2011) and Plewa (2009) also make this point, urging HEIs

to improve in their marketing skills. Similar claims are made by Andersen *et al.* (2013), Basit *et al.* (2013) and the Higher Education Authority *et al.* (2015).

The smaller organisations, in particular, might be unaware of WBL (Dadameah & Costello, 2011; Sheridan & Fallon, 2015; Sweet, 2014). This need for HEI X to promote itself better support claims by Nixon *et al.* (2006), who suggest that very often, private employers would not see HEIs as the obvious provider of training and education needs for their employees. However, this emphasis on external focus may prove challenging for the HEI, as the prevailing culture within many colleges and universities is to focus inwards (Rae, 2007). Evidence of this prevailing culture was identified in the findings with HEI X Participant A stating:

“We very rarely celebrate success. We very rarely write stuff up”.

HEI X should make more of a marketing effort by branding its WBL offering, developing brochures and case studies describing WBL activities within the institute, communicating with employers and employer representative bodies, hosting information evenings, and engaging in media advertising. Giorgi *et al.* (2015) suggest that the senior leaders in the organisation hold a powerful position when it comes to telling stories. The findings reveal that within HEI X, WBL is promoted by the senior managers through publications, press releases and radio interviews. Martin (2002) and Peters and Waterman (1982) describe how the stories told provide insight into what is considered important in an organisation's culture. It is important that HEI X transmits stories to employers that portray its competence and experience in WBL partnerships. The recommendations for HEI X in relation to stories are presented in Figure 6-4 below.

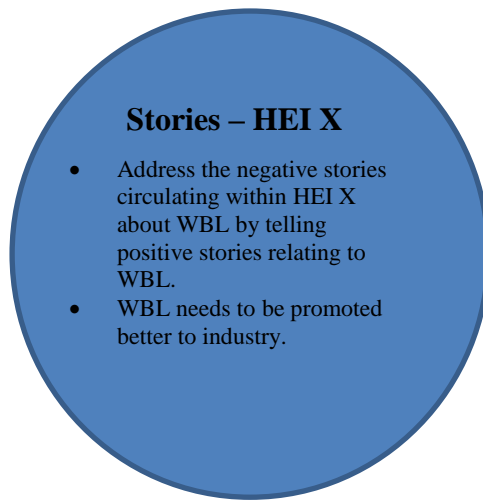


Figure 6-4 Stories – HEI X

6.5 Stories - external employer organisation

Recommendations in relation to stories for the external employer organisations to consider relate to describing the benefits of WBL to the various stakeholders, and telling learners the full story when promoting WBL.

6.5.1 Describe the benefits of WBL to employees, senior managers and customers

The findings reveal that stories referring to WBL partnerships collapsing are being shared by employers, and this makes employers nervous about entering into such partnerships. Employers should speak to other companies that have had successful WBL partnerships with HEIs and learn from their experiences. The person responsible for promoting WBL within the external employer organisation needs to promote the many benefits WBL can provide. These stories need to be shared to senior managers, supervisors and non-managerial level employees. Many of the benefits WBL provides to the employer identified in the findings, such as productivity, performance, employee retention, reputation and employee motivation, are already highlighted in the literature (Basit *et al.*, 2015; Choy & Delahaye, 2011; Healy *et al.*, 2014; Kornecki, 2012; Leitch, 2006; Norman & Jerrard, 2015; Sweet, 2014).

If stories about the many benefits WBL can provide to the external organisation are relayed to senior management, then there is a greater likelihood that WBL will receive strategic support within the external employer organisations. Cameron and Quinn (2011) identify stories as a powerful tool in creating a desired culture. The external employer

organisations should tell stories about how WBL has resulted in improvements in performance or productivity to create a culture where WBL is valued. Employees are interested in working in organisations where there are opportunities for personal and professional development (Abduljawad, 2015), and employers should be promoting the WBL opportunities within their organisation when recruiting new staff.

The stories relating to WBL partnerships should also be transmitted externally to clients and customers. Berkeley (1998) states that any employer engaging in WBL can present a positive image to its customers, suppliers, employees and shareholders. Kewin *et al.* (2011) also make this point, by suggesting that employers may be awarded extra business from clients, as their reputation improves by investing in WBL.

6.5.2 Telling the “full story” to the employee

Surprisingly, the importance of telling employees interested in completing a WBL programme the full story about the WBL programme has received little mention in the literature, as this was an issue raised by learners in this study. The findings reveal that some learners believed the employer, in an attempt to promote WBL to their employees, failed to tell the full story about the programme. Learners who were not told the full story were disappointed with their employer, and this is something the employer needs to consider. The employer should ask employees who have previously completed similar WBL programmes to share their stories with prospective learners, so that they have an opportunity to hear about the commitment required.

The findings outline instances where the employer promised mentor support and study time to learners, but when the programme commenced this never materialised. Employers need to be cautious about making promises they do not keep. In Section 5.11.2, Learner Participant G stated that broken promises from the employer about mentor support may lead him to look elsewhere for employment. This form of storytelling, where the employer focuses on selling the product (i.e. the WBL programme) to the learner by making the WBL programme seem more attractive than it possibly is, may be influenced by an entrepreneurial culture within the organisation. This culture involves highlighting (and even exaggerating) the benefits of the product, and failing to share any negative aspects. This claim is in agreement with Deal and Kennedy (1982, p.107), who suggest that if an organisation operates in an environment where hard selling is required, “the culture will be

one that encourages people to sell and sell hard”. However, the implications of this hard selling can be significant, and can often result in the learner dropping out of the programme. This can then affect the learner’s confidence and may result in him/her forming a negative opinion of the employer. Employers need to be honest with employees about the WBL programme. The recommendations for the external employer organisations in relation to stories and routines are presented in Figure 6-5 below.

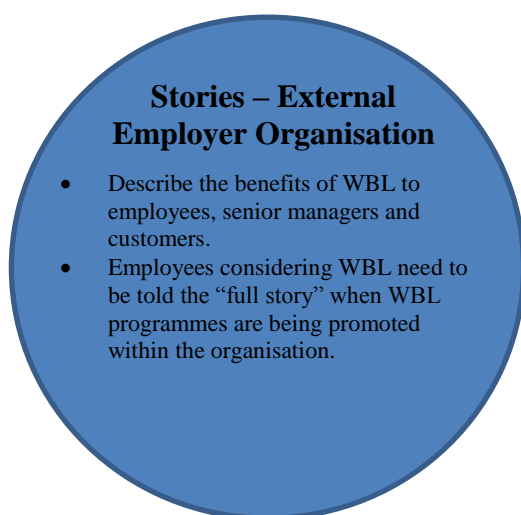


Figure 6-5 Stories – external employer organisation

6.6 Symbols - HEI X

Recommendations in relation to symbols for HEI X to consider relate to the administrative system and language used.

6.6.1 Review the administrative system and procedures

The findings identified some of the challenges WBL presents to the administrative system and procedures in HEI X. Garnett, Costley, Abraham and Abraham (2015) report that even HEIs with a long track record of success in delivering WBL programmes can struggle to align their administrative systems and procedures to meet the needs of WBL programmes. The findings from this research suggests the administrative system and procedures within HEI X would need to:

- Be capable of handling bulk payments from employers (where the employer pays for all the learners in one payment as opposed to learners paying individually).

- Register WBL learners for more than one academic year without the need to re-register each year (as some WBL programmes extend over a number of academic years).
- Compensate WBL lecturers at a different rate than lecturers delivering traditional programmes are compensated (to reflect the additional effort required on WBL programmes).
- Facilitate multi-discipline programmes (programmes combining a number of academic disciplines e.g. a mixture of Engineering and Business).
- Allow WBL exams and exam boards (where exam results are approved) to be held outside dates identified for traditional programmes if required.

This may require HEI X to invest in a new administrative system or contact the vendors of the existing system to determine if WBL can be better accommodated.

6.6.2 Use a language understood by all stakeholders

The findings reveal that the academic language used in HEI X could cause problems for both learners and employers. Learners struggled with academic terms, especially when it came to assignments. They found it difficult to distinguish between terms like discuss, review, define, describe and critically evaluate. This supports the work of Young and Stephenson (2007), who suggest WBL learners often need guidance in academic writing. The findings from this study extend the difficulties associated with the language used in HEIs by highlighting the difficulties learners had comprehending their exam results. Learners at HEI X got confused by terms like credits awarded, credits missing, compensation, award class and deferrals. Whereas full- time learners are more familiar with these terms, because they attend college four to five days per week and can call into the examinations office if they need assistance, WBL learners are often based large distances away and only attend college two to three days per month. Learners who misinterpret their assessment results could end up believing they have successfully passed modules they have actually failed. It is important that the HEI, when communicating with WBL learners, use a language that is easily understood and not open to misinterpretation. I would recommend that in advance of completing a WBL programme, the HEI should organise workshops to provide support to the learner in areas such as academic writing and academic policies and procedures.

The findings also found that employers do not always understand the language used in HEI X. The study found that this is particularly true in the early days of the collaboration with the HEI, when the programme is being designed. The HEI needs to be aware of this, and should take time to explain the academic terms to the external employer organisation. The language used by members of an organisation can symbolise what is important within that culture (Martin, 2002), and the academic terms and concepts used by the HEI members are central to their culture. However, it is imperative that the HEI appreciates that academic terms familiar to people within higher education can often confuse externals. The literature highlights issues in relation to language differences (Ahmed, 2013; Basit *et al.*, 2015; Choy & Delahaye, 2011), and suggests that the HEI should use a language understood by all. However, little has been written on the practical steps that can be taken by HEIs to overcome this problem. I would recommend that the HEI should include a glossary in all documents shared with the employer. In addition, a brochure could be prepared which explains terms and concepts such as academic levels, credits, new programme development, QA procedures, qualification frameworks and learning outcomes. The recommendations for HEI X in relation to symbols are presented in Figure 6-6 below.

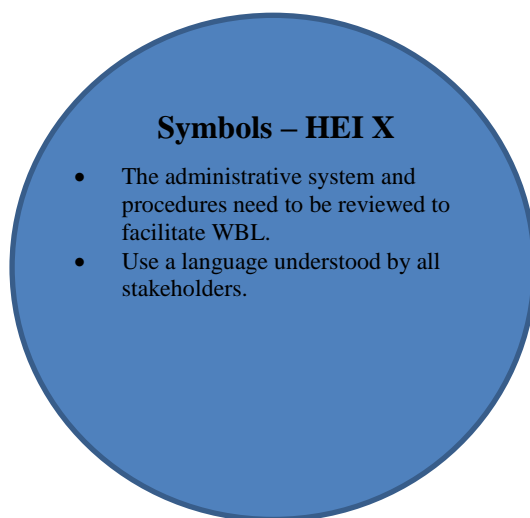


Figure 6-6 Symbols – HEI X

6.7 Symbols – external employer organisation

Recommendations in relation to symbols for the external employer organisation to consider relate to the language used and investing in study facilities to support the learner.

6.7.1 Use a language that is understood by all the WBL stakeholders

The literature focuses on the difficulties employers have with academic language, but this study found that HEI X employees can sometimes struggle with the language used by the external employers. This was especially true for employers operating in the technology sector, where acronyms and technical terms are frequently used and may not be understood by outsiders. Many organisations can have their own list of acronyms, and this can cause problems for outsiders (Watt & Scott-Jones, 2010). The findings refer to problems encountered by HEI representatives who did not always understand terms that were taken for granted within the employer organisations.

Basit *et al.* (2013) calls for the careful translation of languages by the employer to avoid misunderstandings. The HEI representative can misinterpret what the employer requires from the WBL programme, and this may result in the HEI designing a programme that fails to meet the needs of the employer. In order to work together, organisations must develop a mutual understanding through the use of a common language (Brown, 1998). The employer needs to avoid the use of jargon in the early days of the collaboration, and introduce terms to the HEI. It might also be a good idea to prepare a brochure/flyer describing many of the acronyms and jargon used within the employer organisation.

6.7.2 Consider investing in study facilities to support learners

Little or no focus is given in the literature to the importance of employers investing in study and learning facilities for the WBL learner. The study has found that investing in study facilities for learners completing WBL programmes can be very beneficial. The use of symbols can be a very powerful tool in achieving a desired culture (Cameron & Quinn, 2011). To create a culture where learning is viewed as being strategically important, the employer needs to support the learner as much as possible. WBL learners cannot always access the same study facilities that are available to full-time learners (such as computer labs and libraries). The employer can address this by investing in these resources and making them available to the learners. Hatch (1993) explains how some artefacts can be translated into culturally significant objects because of what they symbolise. The investment in study facilities, such as study rooms, computer labs or small libraries, symbolise to the learner that the employer is supporting them with their studies. Symbols like physical buildings provide powerful cultural clues to what is important in an

organisation, because they are so easy to see (Martin, 2002). Not every employer can afford to invest in these facilities, but even simple gestures, such as offering financial support with the purchase of books or computers, can symbolise the importance of learning within the organisation. The recommendations for the external employer organisation in relation to symbols are presented in Figure 6-7 below.



Figure 6-7 Symbols – external employer organisation

6.8 Power structures - HEI X

Recommendations in relation to power structures for HEI X to consider relate to the strategic importance of WBL within the institute and sharing power with the employer.

6.8.1 The strategic importance of WBL needs to be more evident

The findings reveal that the strategic importance of WBL within HEI X was questioned by some participants, who felt that WBL was not adequately resourced and it did not receive sufficient attention in the HEI strategic plan. Evidence demonstrated that the HEI X strategic plan highlighted employer engagement (although did not specifically refer to WBL) as a core value. Basit *et al.* (2013) claim that WBL needs to be embedded into the strategic plan of the HEI, thus indicating that more coverage of WBL may be required in the HEI X strategic plan. The senior managers within the HEI need to demonstrate to employers that WBL is strategically important. Senior managers within HEI X supported WBL through allocating budgets for WBL activities, highlighting WBL successes in internal and external communications, and encouraging research on the topic. Basit *et al.*

(2015) suggest that conducting research on WBL might be a good idea to change the attitude of some academic staff, who still view it as training rather than education. The importance of gaining senior management support is also highlighted by Edmondson *et al.* (2012), Kornecki (2012) and Noble *et al.* (2010). Kewin *et al.* (2011) recommend that the senior leaders within the HEI need to champion WBL and make it a strategic priority. According to Schein (2004), a critical issue in any culture is how power and authority are allocated. For much of this study, I coordinated WBL within HEI X, but was not in a management position and therefore had limited authority in relation to decisions made. Senior managers in the college regularly consulted with me for input into strategic decisions, which ensured WBL had a voice. However, it could be argued that the strategic importance of WBL within HEI X would be strengthened by ensuring that the person responsible for coordinating it held a management position.

6.8.2 Share power with the external employer organisation

The findings report mixed reviews regarding how HEI X shared power with the employer when designing, delivering and assessing WBL programmes. Some employers felt they were happy with the level of input they were afforded in this regard, whilst others felt the HEI required a more structured approach to facilitate their input. HEI X participants seemed to be in favour of sharing power with the employer in the design of the programme, describing the benefits of involving the employer. Benefits included better quality programmes, and an increased likelihood of getting the programme approved by an external panel. These benefits are agreed by Healy *et al.* (2014) and Plewa *et al.* (2015), who describe how employer involvement in the design of an educational offer lends the programme more credibility. Lemanski *et al.* (2011) suggest that sharing power with the employer in the design process could lead the HEI to perceive a loss of control over the programme content and quality. However, the findings from this study suggest that academics in HEI X were happy to share power with the employer when designing the curriculum for the WBL programme.

The findings also reveal that HEI X shared power with employers in delivering programmes. In some programmes, this involved an employer providing a guest lecturer to support the lecturer in a one- to three-hour workshop. In other instances, an employer representative delivered the complete module, as the expertise was not available within HEI X. In these instances, the employer representative delivering the module should be

briefed on the content and learning outcomes of the module, as well as the nature of the assessment. Because the industry representative may be quite new to delivering academic programmes, he/she may require support from academics within the institute.

The sharing of power can also be extended to assessment in WBL programmes. The findings reveal that HEI X was not as willing to share power when it came to assessments. This is not surprising, as members of an organisation are often slow to share all the power with outsiders, in case of a threat to their underlying cultural assumptions (Schein, 2004), and academic integrity was recognised in the paradigm. The employer contribution to assessment was restricted to providing an evaluation of the learner's performance in the workplace, as opposed to the grading of assignments. This reluctance to share power may be because of the underlying assumption identified in the HEI X cultural paradigm that, "we are guardians of the academic standards"; and these standards can be guarded by taking ownership of the assessment even when decisions regarding design and delivery are shared. It should be stated that employers did not show much interest in actually assessing the assignments and seemed content leaving the actual assessing to the HEI. This should not mean that the employer has no contribution: its contribution could be more in the form of suggesting assignment titles and supporting the learner with assessments. The recommendations for HEI X in relation to power structures are presented in Figure 6-8 below.

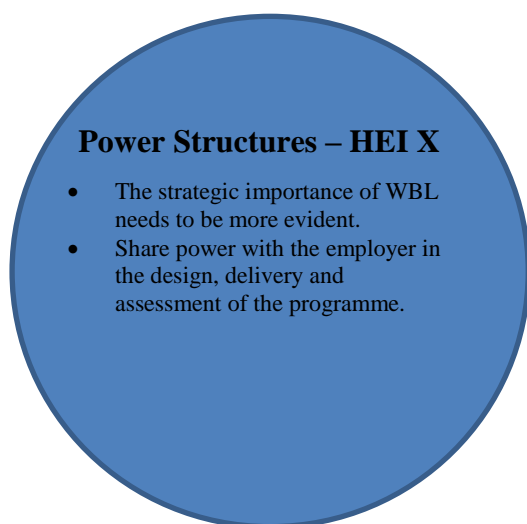


Figure 6-8 Power structures – HEI X

6.9 Power structures – external employer organisation

Recommendations in relation to power structures for the external employer organisations relate to empowering learners to implement the learning in the workplace, and ensuring that WBL is seen as being strategically important.

6.9.1 Give WBL learners the power to implement learning

The findings emphasise the importance of employers providing the learners with the power to implement the learning acquired from the programme. This would support similar claims made by Nixon et al. (2006) and Siebert and Walsh (2013). However, very little evidence of employers actually granting the learners power to implement the learning was identified in the study. Lester and Costley (2010) argue that WBL can be potentially limiting if the employer fails to provide opportunities to meet the learners' needs.

Learners should feel they have the power to implement learning acquired from the HEI in the workplace. The findings show that the supervisor has a role to play here in encouraging the learner to test the learning in the workplace. To do this, the supervisor needs to be familiar with the learning outcomes of the WBL programmes. Ideally, the supervisor should be aware of the nature of the assessments, so that these can be linked to problems or opportunities in the workplace. The supervisor should empower the learner to implement the learning. The senior managers in the employer organisation also have a role in encouraging supervisors to support WBL learners.

One of the key underlying assumptions for the employer identified in this research was that “WBL should not get in the way of productivity and performance”. However, if WBL learners are to be empowered to test learning out, then this will, in some instances, “get in the way”. When the learner is given the power to try new ideas out, the employer needs to be patient and consider the potential longer-term gain associated with WBL partnerships, such as improved performance and employee motivation.

6.9.2 WBL needs to be strategically important within the employer organisation

The findings reveal that senior managers in the external employer organisation need to view WBL as being strategically important. They need to ensure that everyone within the organisation appreciates the importance of investing in education and training. Knowledge

is now viewed as a major source of competitive advantage for employers (Abduljawad, 2015; Sweet 2014), so initiatives such as WBL are becoming more strategically important. Ropes (2015) proposes that in the coming years employees will work in a highly complex environment which may mean the employer will have to invest more in training and education.

The findings reveal how some learners were unable to attend class when their supervisor insisted that they remain in the workplace. Learners need to be given a commitment that if they enrol on a WBL programme they will be supported. Sometimes, the benefits of engaging in WBL programmes are not immediately evident to employers. Senior managers within the organisation need to be aware of this and be patient. The primary benefits of WBL for the employer are often long-term orientated (Davey *et al.*, 2011; Plewa *et al.*, 2015), but many employers are not patient (Abduljawad, 2015), and want an immediate return. This once again highlights the importance of speed to market for the employer organisation.

The findings reveal the importance of ensuring that the person in the employer organisation responsible for overseeing WBL is in a senior position within the company. When this is the case, education and training has a much better chance of being properly managed. Johnson and Scholes (2002) claim that the most powerful individuals in an organisation are probably those most closely associated with the cultural paradigm. The cultural paradigm for the external employer organisations identified in this study appear to relate to productivity, performance and speed to market. This suggests that the people in powerful positions in these companies are more likely be people associated with operations and productivity, as opposed to training and education. The person responsible for education and training needs to have the power to ensure that those attending WBL programmes are receiving sufficient support within the organisation. Training and education should be viewed as being strategically important, if a culture that supports WBL is to be realised. This relationship between the cultural paradigm and strategic importance of WBL in the external employer organisations makes a valuable contribution to WBL knowledge and practice. The importance of ensuring that WBL is strategically important in the external employer organisations has already been highlighted (Boud *et al.*, 2001), but little evidence is provided regarding why external employers do not support WBL. In addition, this study reveals that ensuring the person responsible for coordinating

WBL is in a powerful position within the company can signify the strategic importance of WBL within the organisation. The recommendations for the external employer organisation in relation to power structures are presented in Figure 6-9 below.

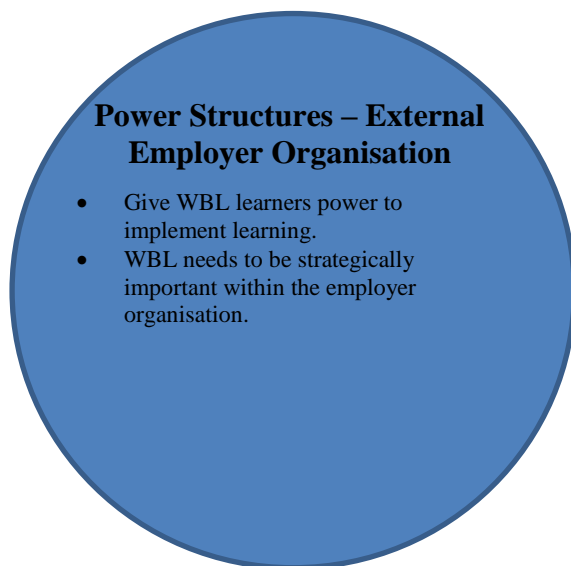


Figure 6-9 Power structures – external employer organisation

6.10 Organisational structures – HEI X

Recommendations in relation to organisational structures for HEI X relate to the establishment of a dedicated WBL unit within the institute, multi-discipline WBL programmes, and extending student services to WBL learners.

6.10.1 Consider the establishment of a dedicated WBL unit

When considering the organisational structure for HEI X, it is important to consider the role of the WBL Facilitator. I was employed as the dedicated WBL facilitator at HEI X for over ten years, and my role was similar in nature to that played by the WBL broker referred to by Basit *et al.* (2015) and Edmondson *et al.* (2012). This role involved acting as a point of contact for employers interested in collaborating in a WBL partnership, and then coordinating WBL activities once the programme was up and running. Some participants in this study suggested that WBL was under-resourced in HEI X, and as one participant stated, “there is only so much one person can do and a team needs to be built around it”. The findings also reveal that the establishment of a dedicated WBL unit within HEI X would have the potential to increase the number of WBL programmes and partnerships,

and at the same time lead to improvements with existing partnerships. This call for a dedicated WBL unit supports a similar claim made by Basit *et al.* (2013), Bolden *et al.* (2009), and McEwen *et al.* (2010). However, Dowling (2015) warns that partnerships between industry and HEIs can be fragile if they revolve around a few people, and recommends that contacts between people should happen across multiple tiers in both organisations. There is much merit with Dowling's claim, in that if all WBL transactions within the HEI are managed by a single point of contact, there is a risk that the single point of contact can become the single point of failure. To overcome this, the WBL unit needs to work in collaboration with the academic departments within the HEI, acting almost like a broker between the employer and HEI, as opposed to just a single point of contact for employers.

According to Johnson and Scholes (2002), organisational structure emphasises what is important in an organisation. The absence of a dedicated WBL unit could suggest that WBL is not a strategic priority within the HEI. The findings reveal how some participants questioned the strategic importance of WBL within the institute, and this was previously discussed in relation to power structure. However, this also has implications for organisational structure. It is essential that the organisational structure is consistent with the preferred culture (Schein, 2009). This study identified a number of instances where the current organisational culture within HEI X did not always facilitate the requirements of the three stakeholders. Issues in relation to academic calendars, administrative systems and procedures, learner services and language used have been raised, whereby WBL is expected to fit into a system designed for full-time learners. Some of these issues could be resolved if a dedicated WBL unit were to be established, governed by a set of policies and procedures that facilitate WBL. The development of a dedicated WBL unit within HEI X would also symbolise the strategic importance of WBL within the institute. The overlapping nature of the cultural web is again evident, if the possible consequences of a dedicated WBL is further considered. By creating a dedicated WBL unit, academic departments within the HEI might lose a certain amount of control, so a certain resistance to this would be expected. The problem could be overcome if the academic faculties were assured that they could retain the final say in relation to design, delivery, and assessment. In addition, issues such as who invoices and retains profits if a dedicated department is established would need to be considered. This tension around who controls the WBL

programme is also highlighted by Basit *et al.* (2015), who identify the need for synergy between the WBL unit and academic departments.

6.10.2 Organisational structures in place to support programmes that cross academic disciplines

The findings reveal that employers sometimes require WBL programmes that cross academic disciplines (e.g. a mixture of engineering and business), and that HEI X is not structured to facilitate this. Although the upsurge in demand for cross-discipline programmes has been identified in the literature (Ardizzzone, 2012; Expert Group on Future Needs, 2015; Sheridan & Fallon, 2015; Thayaparan *et al.*, 2014), little discussion about the challenges this presents, or how these challenges can be overcome, is provided. It was reported in the findings that a culture of competition, rather than collaboration, could exist between academic departments within HEI X. This possibly stems from the competition that exists between departments when competing for full-time learners and resources. However, a culture of collaboration, rather than competition, is required to provide programmes that cross disciplines. Systems need to be put in place that help facilitate collaboration between the different departments in the design and delivery of WBL programmes. Issues such as which department coordinates the WBL programme, invoices the employer, and accredits the learning, need to be considered. A policy regarding the design and delivery of cross-discipline programmes may also need to be developed to clarify how such programmes are managed.

6.10.3 Extend learner services to WBL learners

This study found that many of the services available to full-time learners such as library, computer labs, career guidance and study skills were not always accessible for WBL learners in HEI X. This concurs with research by Lemanski *et al.* (2011), who refer to the importance of making WBL learners feel part of the academic community. All HEI X learners, whether full-time, part-time or WBL learners, should have an entitlement and a mechanism to engage with the various learner services available within the institute. HEI X delivers WBL programmes in locations throughout Ireland, and it is not always feasible for the learners on these programmes to access the HEI X library or computer labs. In cases like this, the HEI could ask other HEIs in the appropriate regions to make their facilities available to HEI X WBL learners (and this could be a reciprocal arrangement).

Within HEI X, a cultural paradigm of “learner welfare is our main concern” was identified, and this needs to be extended to all learners – not just the traditional full-time learners.

The study also found that social activities organised for full-time learners were not extended to WBL learners. WBL learners indicated they would like some social events organised throughout the programme. Surprisingly, there is very little mention about this issue in the literature. The findings in this research reveal that WBL learners do want to experience some of the social experiences enjoyed by full-time learners, and that the HEI should consider this when delivering WBL programmes. The recommendations for HEI X in relation to organisational structures are presented in Figure 6-10 below.

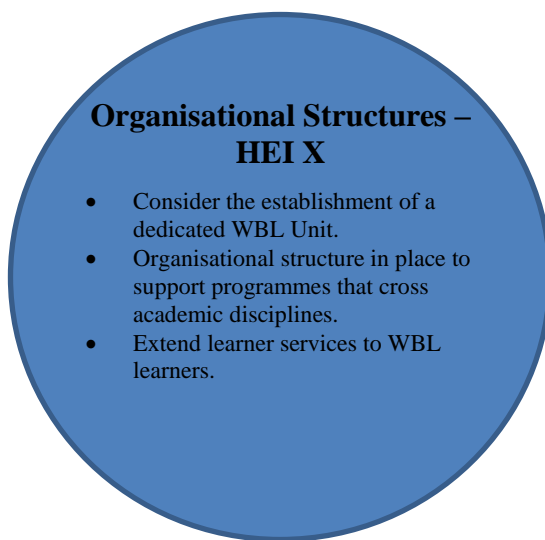


Figure 6-10 Organisational Structure – HEI X

6.11 Organisational structures – external employer organisation

Recommendations in relation to organisational structures for the external employer organisation relate to appointing someone to coordinate WBL, and ensuring learners have access to mentors and other key people within the organisations.

6.11.1 Appoint a person within the organisation to coordinate WBL

The need for a dedicated resource to coordinate WBL within the external employer organisation was highlighted in the findings. Choy and Delahaye (2009) and McEwen *et al.* (2010) do mention this, but very few other studies highlight the importance of ensuring someone in the external employer organisation is appointed to coordinate WBL internally

and engage externally with the HEI. This is surprising, because in my experience, engaging with employers for over ten years in WBL partnerships, I have found that employers really benefit from appointing someone internally to coordinate the WBL programme. When the employer does not appoint someone to coordinate education and training, problems tend to arise, which can result in the WBL programme failing to meet the objectives originally intended. In a small organisation without a dedicated training manager, someone still needs to take responsibility for coordinating WBL. This person might be the business owner or manager, but it should be someone with reasonable power within the organisation. In some organisations, the job is given to someone who has numerous other tasks to fill, with training and education down the list of priorities. The organisational structure is likely to reflect what is important in an organisation (Johnson & Scholes, 2001). The absence of a dedicated person to coordinate WBL within the employer organisation suggests that training and education are not viewed as priorities within the organisation.

6.11.2 Formalised mentoring structure in place and access to key people

The findings reveal how the lack of mentoring support within the employer organisation led to problems for the HEI and learner. This supports claims by Ramage (2014, p.503), who states that without mentor support, the learner feels “isolated, confused, devalued and demotivated”. In WBL programmes, the learning is delivered in an accelerated mode, as the learners are in full- time employment, and employers want minimal disruption in the workplace. To compensate for this, learners are expected to complete significant independent learning and avail of mentor support in the workplace (Benefer, 2007; Johnson, 2001; McGann & Anderson, 2012). Although the importance of mentoring is well documented in the literature, the difficulties in ensuring that mentoring actually takes place is less remarked upon. In a study conducted by Billett (2003), it was found that mentors identified lack of time as a serious issue in their efforts to providing support to mentees. This issue with time was also highlighted in this study. This may be related to an underlying assumption identified in the study that suggests, “WBL should not get in the way of productivity and performance”. The study found that mentoring only works when the appointed mentor is allocated a block of time, for example, one to two hours per week to provide the mentoring.

This study has found that in addition to mentoring support, learners can benefit from getting access to people in the organisation possessing certain skills relevant to the WBL programme. Learners working in larger organisations with dedicated specialised departments often have an advantage here. However, it should be noted that learners working in smaller organisations might have extra responsibilities and exposure to a wide range of issues, compared to learners working in larger organisations, with narrowly-defined functions. This can counterbalance the dedicated expertise available in the larger organisations.

According to Janićijević (2013), the organisational structure directs the behaviour of employees, as well as determining how they interact with each other. It is important that within the external employer organisation, the organisational structures support WBL learners to access mentors and other employees with the knowledge and skills relevant to the WBL programme. When a collaborative culture exists in an organisation, where learners are able to approach and seek assistance from their colleagues and superiors, then there is a greater likelihood of learning occurring in the workplace. The findings indicate that this collaboration is only likely to occur when senior management within the organisation direct it. The recommendations for the external employer organisation in relation to organisational structures are presented in Figure 6-11 below.

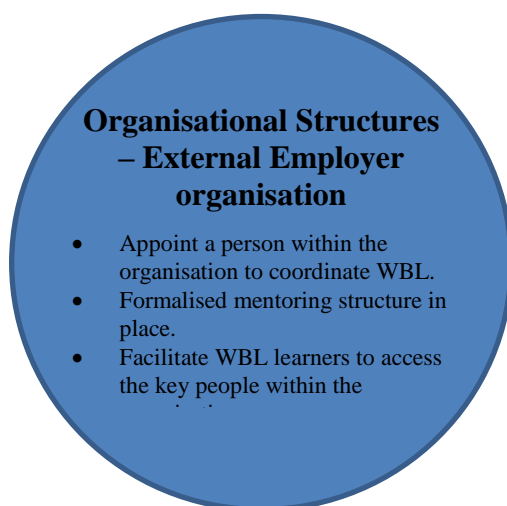


Figure 6-11 Organisational structure – external employer organisation

6.12 Control systems – HEI X

Recommendations in relation to control systems for HEI X to consider relate to stressing the importance of academic rigour to the stakeholders, incentivising and rewarding WBL effort and evaluating WBL programmes.

6.12.1 Stress the importance of academic rigour to all stakeholders

The findings suggest that some academics within HEI X view WBL with suspicion, due to its focus on practical issues, as well as its accelerated style of delivery. This supports a claim made by Basit *et al.* (2015) and Chisholm *et al.* (2009), who report that some academic staff may view WBL as training rather than education. It is important that the HEIs promote, to the external employers, the significance of academic rigour in WBL programmes. They should stress that this rigour is required for accreditation, and that accreditation indicates high standards (Confederation of British Industry, 2008). One of the underlying assumptions identified in the cultural paradigm for HEI X (“we are guardians of the academic standards”) highlights the importance of academic rigour within the institute, and any challenge to this will be resisted (Johnson, 1992). It is important that the HEIs maintain the same high standards of academic rigour when delivering WBL programmes, to ensure it that these programmes are not seen by some as inferior (Lester & Costley, 2010).

The research also found that within HEI X, some academics could be lenient when it came to submission dates for WBL assignments. These academics understand the challenges the WBL learners are under, trying to balance work, life and study, and therefore give them extra time to submit assignments. While some lecturers extend assignments submission dates, others do not. It is important that consistency be maintained in this regard, if WBL programmes are to avoid suspicion in relation to academic rigour. Interestingly, employers in this study tended to favour the strict enforcement of deadlines, which again supports the cultural paradigm of “we value speed to market”. Johnson and Scholes (2002) suggest control systems indicate what is important to monitor within an organisation and within HEI X, academic rigour is a major consideration. HEI X needs to maintain the same QA standards with WBL programmes, despite requests from some external employer organisations to be more flexible around academic rigour. To do otherwise would only

threaten the core, basic, cultural assumptions that are taken for granted within HEI X and raise further suspicions regarding WBL.

6.12.2 WBL effort needs to be better incentivised and rewarded

The findings reveal that a major reason why WBL was not more widespread within HEI X was because academics felt they were not sufficiently rewarded for the effort they invested in this form of learning. Academics suggested that delivering WBL programmes involve significant additional effort and expertise compared with what was required in traditional full-time programmes. This is due to several reasons, including the nature of the WBL learners (often mature learners with significant practical experience) and the intense delivery of the programme. Dowling (2015) raises this issue by suggesting that HEIs do not sufficiently support or reward academics who collaborate with industry. Andersen *et al.* (2013), Bolden *et al.* (2009), Davey *et al.* (2011) and Hughes *et al.* (2016) encourage the HEI to provide personal incentives to academics who engage with external organisations. The findings reveal that WBL lecturers may need to be compensated differently, to reflect the additional effort required. In order for this to happen, the HEIs may have to introduce a different rate of pay for lecturers delivering on WBL programmes. Kewin *et al.* (2011) describe how some HEIs are incentivising WBL by changing the promotion criteria to include industry engagement, and also by changing the way staff are appraised, so that more emphasis is put on employer engagement.

Schein (2004) makes the point that a change in the reward system is one of the quickest and easiest ways to alter certain aspects of organisational culture, and the findings suggest that HEI X may need to change the way academics are rewarded for their WBL efforts, if this system is to be embraced within the institute. Within HEI X, it was revealed that Heads of Departments could be encouraged to collaborate with industry by ensuring that any profits made be retained by the academic department delivering the WBL programme. To an extent, this is already happening within HEI X, but not enough staff are aware of it, and so the perception remains that engaging in WBL is not rewarding. The cost of designing and delivering WBL programmes can be a barrier for HEIs (Basit *et al.*, 2013; Nixon *et al.*, 2006; Reeve & Gallacher, 2005), so additional funding may be required to departments new to WBL. Basit *et al.* (2013) identify costs such as development costs, employer relations costs, shorter course lifecycles, reductions in economies of scale, and travel costs.

6.12.3 Evaluate WBL programmes by consulting learners, employers and HEI staff

The findings reveal that the evaluation of WBL programmes requires input from all three stakeholders, if it is to be conducted properly. The process of evaluation within HEI X involves obtaining feedback from the learner, but the employer should also contribute, as it is the employer who observes the learners implementing the learning in the workplace.

The evaluation procedure within HEI X for WBL programmes tends to focus on the acquisition of knowledge. This may be influenced by how the full-time learner evaluation sessions are conducted, and this method of evaluation is then adopted for WBL programmes. Ball and Manwaring (2010) and Hardacre and Workman (2010) suggest the employer needs to play an active role when the HEI is evaluating the programme. The person within HEI X who evaluates the WBL programme should arrange to meet the external employer representative and formally evaluate the programme. A major objective of any WBL programme is to improve performance in the workplace, so this needs to be incorporated into the evaluation process. The HEI needs to understand how employers evaluate these programmes. The findings present an example of an evaluation document used by employers to evaluate a WBL programme, which differs significantly from how the HEI evaluates programmes. This evaluation form provides insight into what employers expect from WBL programmes. The HEI is more likely to meet the needs of the employer if the academics involved in the design and delivery of the programme are aware of the metrics used by the employer to evaluate the WBL programme.

It is important to consider what the evaluation method used by HEI X tells us about its organisational culture. According to Johnson and Scholes (2002), what gets measured indicates what is important to the organisation. If employer input is not obtained when evaluating programmes, then it could be perceived that the opinion of the employer is not important. The views of the employer need to be gathered, to determine how learners are implementing the learning in the workplace, and to emphasise the importance of meeting employer requirements in the WBL partnership. The recommendations for HEI X in relation control systems are presented in Figure 6-12 below.

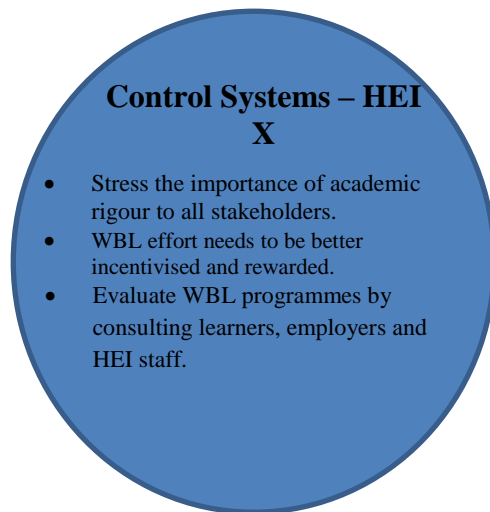


Figure 6-12 Control systems – HEI X

6.13 Control systems – external employer organisation

Recommendations in relation to control systems for the external employer organisation to consider relate to selecting learners, rewarding learners, and evaluating the programme.

6.13.1 Invest time and effort when selecting learners and monitor attendance

Employers have a major decision to make when selecting learners to complete the WBL programme. During the course of this study, I observed that the bigger employers with a dedicated training/education coordinator had in place a formalised system of application that combined written submissions, interviews and presentations. Surprisingly, the literature places little emphasis on the selection of WBL learners. From my experience, effort invested by employers in selecting WBL learners is rewarded once the programme commences.

The importance of the employer monitoring the learner's attendance has been highlighted in the findings section but has received little attention in the literature. Learner and HEI X participants reported that attendance was a significant issue in WBL programmes. When employers invest in WBL programmes, there needs to be a commitment that the learners be afforded the time to attend them. The accelerated nature of WBL programmes makes the issue of attendance even more important. The HEI can assist here by ensuring the dates of delivery are provided to the learner and employer well in advance of programme commencement. Interestingly, in this study the learners with a dedicated training manager had a better record of attendance than those learners coming from organisations without

this dedicated resource to coordinate the programme. It would be a recommendation that an attendance record is taken and monitored by the HEI and then communicated to the employer.

6.13.2 Reward learners for WBL effort

The findings reveal that employers in this study put little emphasis on acknowledging and rewarding the effort made by learners in completing the WBL programme. This is important because what is rewarded within an organisation tells us much about organisational culture (Freemantle, 2013a; Johnson & Scholes, 2002; Kemp & Dwyer, 2001). To emphasise the importance of WBL within the organisation, employers could give learners recognition for their efforts in completing the WBL programme. The implications of this for this study would be that if employers seek to develop an organisational culture that supports WBL, then the effort made by the learner in completing the WBL programme needs to be acknowledged and rewarded. The findings reveal that learners could perceive the effort they invest in completing the WBL programmes is not acknowledged. WBL should contribute to the performance appraisal review conducted in organisations. Furthermore, bonuses and promotions should not only be based on performance in the workplace, but should recognise the significant achievement made by learners who complete a WBL programme. One of the employers that contributed to this research rewarded learners who successfully completed the programme with a promotion, and this emphasised to the learners the importance of the programme. This is another issue that receives very little attention in the literature, despite its potential benefit.

6.13.3 Evaluate the programme during and after its completion

The findings reveal that employers use a different method to evaluate programmes compared to the HEI, and this provides insight into cultural differences between higher education and private industry. It was found that the HEI prioritised the acquisition of knowledge whilst the employer was more concerned with outputs such as improvements in performance. This is broadly in agreement with research conducted by Anohina-Naumeca and Sitikovs (2012) and King (2007), who suggest that employers are less interested in qualifications and more interested in performance, which may include quantity, quality, timeliness and cost effectiveness.

Hardacre and Workman (2010) state that, despite the significant resources companies invest in WBL, very little formal evaluation of the programme takes place. Research conducted by Healy *et al.* (2014, p.41) suggests that employers often rely on “gut-feeling” rather than a formal evaluation. The findings from this study would suggest that the larger employers with dedicated training managers do formally evaluate the WBL programme. The cultural paradigm for the external employer organisation identified speed to market as a major consideration, but employers need to be patient when evaluating programmes. Not all WBL programmes result in an immediate improvement in the workplace. Schein (2009) proposes that managers in an organisation impose cultural values by highlighting what they believe is important to control and measure regularly. If WBL is to be valued within an organisation, it is important that senior managers be seen to be paying attention to it. Employers investing in WBL programmes need to regularly evaluate the programme not just at the end, but also during the course of the programme. This evaluation may flag issues that need to be rectified, and possibly prompt potential improvements for the programme. The findings also reveal that one of the employers contributing to this study takes the feedback to the HEI. It could prove beneficial to all stakeholders if possible improvements are identified and acted upon. The recommendations for the external employer organisations in relation control systems are presented in Figure 6-13 below.

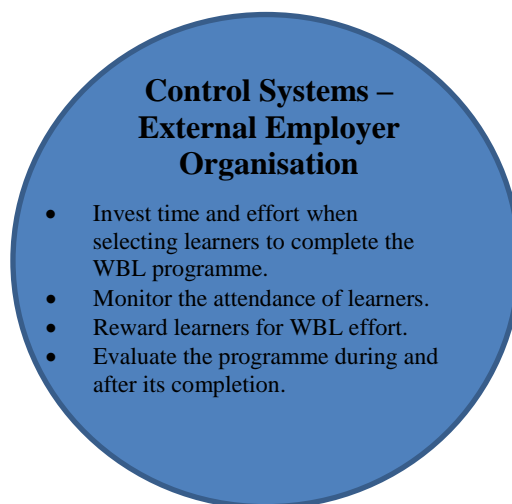


Figure 6-13 Control systems – external employer organisation

6.14 The cultural webs of work-based learning

The recommendations described in this chapter for the HEI and external employer organisations collaborating in a WBL partnership are represented in Johnson's cultural web in Figure 6-14 and Figure 6-15.

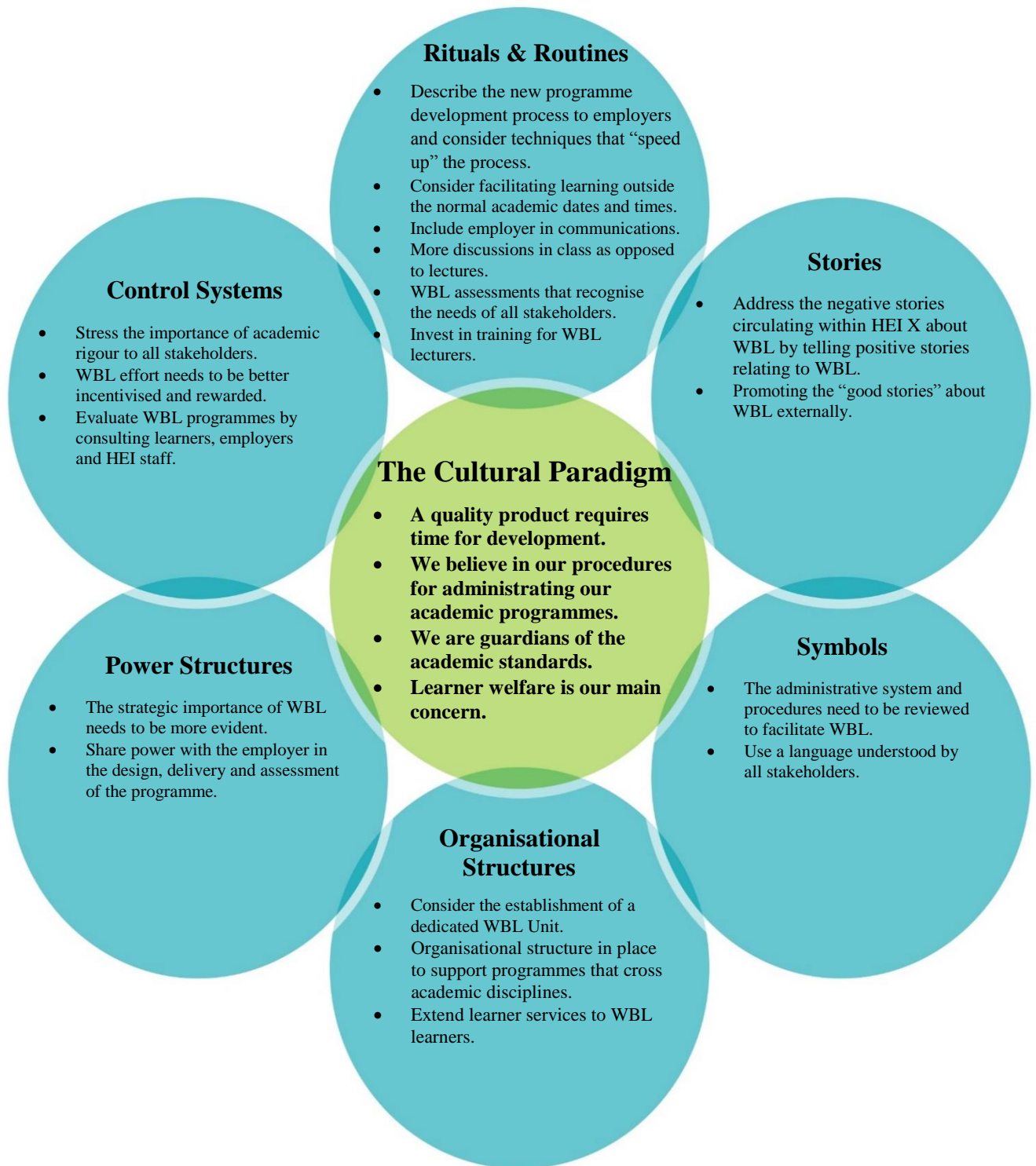


Figure 6-14 The cultural web for HEI X

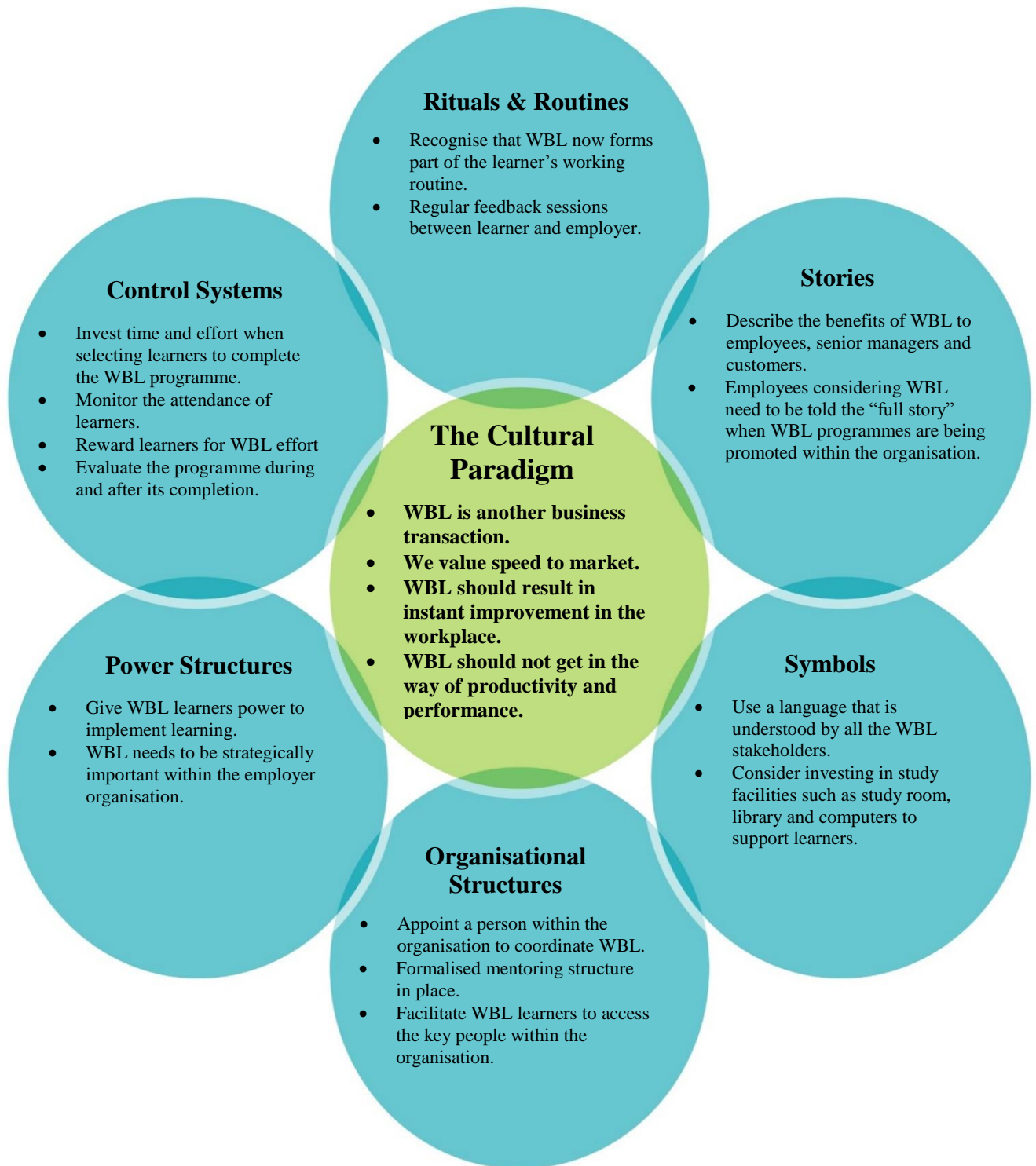


Figure 6-15 The cultural web for the external employer organisation

6.15 Final considerations

The findings have revealed that WBL partnerships can be enhanced by considering the organisational culture of the HEI and external employer organisation. Laver *et al.* (2010) describe how the traditional model of higher education has resulted in a culture within many HEIs, based on a certain administrative and academic infrastructure making initiatives such as WBL challenging. Organisational culture within HEI X has evolved since its formation over forty-five years ago, and is very much based on serving the full-time traditional learner. It would be unreasonable for the external employer to expect the HEI to abandon the cultural paradigm to serve the needs of industry. Changes in the paradigm tend to happen slowly over a long period, and are often in response to changes in the external environment (Schein, 1990). Interestingly, the external environment in which HEIs operate has been undergoing a number of changes in recent years. In the face of government cutbacks, HEIs have been expected to look for methods to generate income (Plewa *et al.*, 2015). In addition, European policy is placing increasing importance on collaboration with employers in the design and delivery of programmes of study (Ferrández-Berruete *et al.*, 2016; Galan-Muros *et al.*, 2013). These changes may eventually bring about changes in the paradigm.

Similarly, the underlying assumptions that exist in many private employer organisations can prove problematic when trying to accommodate WBL. The primary concern for productivity and profitability can mean initiatives such as WBL have to take a back seat. HEIs cannot expect the external employer to abandon a culture that has developed in the business world. Both organisations need to understand that their respective cultures are different, but this should not mean WBL partnerships are to be avoided. From my experience of engaging in WBL partnerships, both the HEI and external employer become more accepting of the other organisation's culture with time.

The importance of time in WBL partnerships has been emphasised in this study and in the literature (Bolden *et al.*, 2009; Collier *et al.*, 2011; Dowling, 2015; Ferrández-Berruete *et al.*, 2016; Kewin *et al.*, 2011; Thayaparan *et al.*, 2014). When the cultural paradigms identified in this research are considered, this emphasis on time appears warranted. An underlying assumption for the external employer stressing “speed to market” has been identified. If this is contrasted to an underlying assumption identified for HEI X – “a quality product requires time for development” – then a cultural collision appears all the

more likely. The study has revealed how different orientations towards time have affected the design, delivery and assessment of the programme. The study found that employers can find the stages involved in designing new programmes very time-consuming, but the HEI can view these stages as a prerequisite for a good programme. It was also found that employers prefer the programme delivered in an accelerated fashion to reduce disruptions in the workplace, but that the academic calendar does not always facilitate this. Issues in relation to time were also found to exist in the assessing of WBL programmes, with employers not happy that deadlines were being extended by the HEI. Other issues in relation to time have also been highlighted throughout the findings. I considered adapting the cultural web model to recognise this overarching theme of time, but eventually decided that the existing elements in the web, and in particular differences in relation to underlying assumptions found in the cultural paradigm, could represent these concerns.

6.16 Chapter summary

This chapter has discussed the findings in conjunction with the literature, and considered the implications for the HEI and the external employer organisations. Johnson's cultural web has been used to present and discuss a series of recommendations that the HEI and external employers can consider when participating in a WBL partnership. These recommendations recognise the requirements of the three stakeholders in the WBL partnership.

7 Conclusions and Contributions

7.1 Introduction

The previous chapter discussed the findings in relation to the literature and outlined recommendations for both the HEI and external employer organisations. This chapter concludes the thesis by reviewing how the study has addressed the research question. In addition, the contributions made to both knowledge and practice are considered. This is followed by a section outlining the limitations of the research and implications for future research. The chapter ends with some final personal research reflections.

7.2 Addressing the research question

The research question addressed by this study is: *How can work-based learning partnerships be enhanced by a deeper understanding of organisational culture?*

To answer this research question, the following research sub-questions were identified:

1. What are the organisational culture issues affecting the three stakeholders participating in a WBL partnership?
2. What are the expectations of the three stakeholders, in terms of organisational culture for the HEI and external employer organisations?
3. What can the HEI and external employer organisations do to address the organisational culture issues that exist in a WBL partnership?

This section describes how each of the sub-questions have been addressed.

7.2.1 What are the organisational culture issues affecting the three stakeholders participating in a WBL partnership?

The findings presented organisational culture issues affecting the learner, HEI and external employer organisation participating in a WBL partnership. The contrasting underlying cultural assumptions (see Figure 7-1) identified in this study provides much insight into the challenges faced by the three stakeholders.

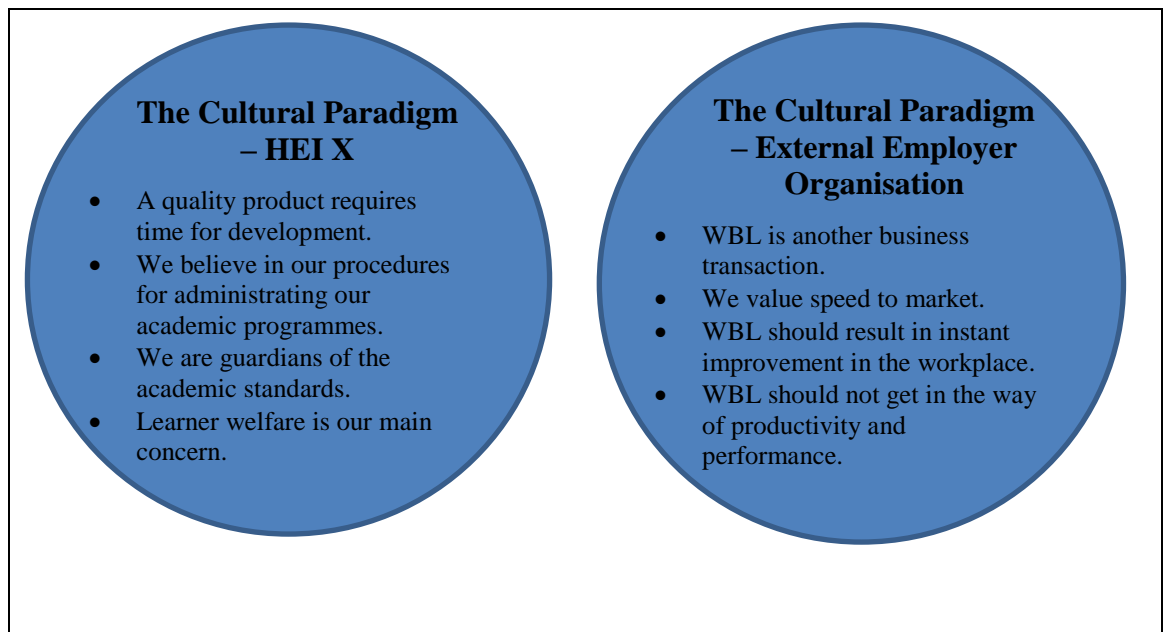


Figure 7-1 HEI X paradigm Vs external employer organisation paradigm

On the one hand, the underlying assumptions represented in the HEI paradigm highlights the importance of developing high-quality programmes, which must go through a number of internal and external panels before being approved, but, on the other hand, speed to market is a major concern for the employer organisation. Furthermore, academic integrity and concern for learner welfare, which were identified as further assumptions within the HEI X, may lead to a cultural collision when the employer's primary concern for productivity and profitability is considered.

In addition, the findings reveal that many of the HEI's cultural rituals and routines, policies, procedures and systems developed over time, in response to dealing with full-time programmes, and do not always address the needs of WBL programmes. It was found that internal stories questioning the academic rigour associated with WBL programmes could make the promotion of WBL difficult within HEI X. A further issue raised was in relation to the organisational structure within HEI X. It was felt that academic faculties were operating as independent units, and that a culture of collaboration was required to respond to the increasing need of multi-discipline programmes from employers. Other issues in relation to language used, administrative systems, processes and procedures, rewards and incentives were also identified.

The external employer organisation's culture affected WBL programmes and partnerships in a number of ways. Many of the policies and procedures, rituals and routines practised within the external employer organisation have evolved in response to the fact it is competing in a competitive business environment. As a result, the organisation's culture, in which the emphasis is on productivity and profitability, does not always support initiatives such as WBL. WBL may result in learners being absent from the workplace, and therefore productivity and profitability may be affected in the short term. It was also found that the underlying assumption of "WBL is another business transaction" could be detrimental in WBL partnerships. The HEI should be viewed as a partner and not a vendor.

The learner, to an extent, is caught in the middle of two contrasting cultures. The employer organisation expects the learner to perform as normal, and the WBL programme to not interfere with productivity. However, because the learner now has to complete an academic programme, he/she is expected to prepare for exams and complete assignments. Furthermore, the underlying assumption identified in the cultural paradigm for the external employer organisation stresses instant improvements in the workplace. Completing a WBL programme will put additional pressure on the learner and can affect performance in the workplace and eat into the learner's personal life. In addition, the findings reveal that the WBL learner is sometimes expected to operate in an HEI environment where a culture has evolved in response to the needs of full-time traditional programmes. Because WBL programmes differ significantly from traditional programmes, in relation to delivery style, learner profile, content and assessment, the WBL learner can encounter difficulties. The findings also reveal that the WBL learner might find it difficult to access the learner services available to full-time learners, even though they are subject to many of the challenges traditional learners' experience.

7.2.2 What are the expectations of the three stakeholders, in terms of organisational culture in an HEI/external employer organisation WBL partnership?

The findings reveal that the HEI has expectations in relation to its own culture and in relation to the organisational culture of the external employer organisation when collaborating in a WBL partnership. Firstly, some HEI X participants felt that the routines, rituals, systems, policies and practices within the institute needed to be revised to respond to the needs of WBL. In addition, it was felt that WBL needed to be strategically more important and better resourced. It was also revealed that the HEI X participants felt that the

HEI needed to adopt more of an entrepreneurial culture to meet the needs of industry. Secondly, in relation to culture within the employer organisations, HEI X participants suggested that the learners requires more support from mentors and key people, and need to be given opportunities to implement the learning acquired in the classroom. Some HEI X participants felt that learners needed to be given time to reflect on the learning acquired but this was not afforded by many employers, as the focus was on performance and productivity. When learners were not afforded this employer support, there was an over reliance on the HEI to deliver the learning for the learner.

External employers also revealed their expectations in relation to organisational culture when participating in WBL partnerships. Within their own organisation, some employers felt that WBL needed to be strategically important, and that more support could be offered to the learner. In relation to the HEI X culture, employer participants suggested that the HEI should move away from a culture that developed in response to dealing with full-time programmes, and recognise that WBL programmes include an additional stakeholder (the employer). Employers felt that the HEI needed to include them in communications, decision-making and evaluations. It was also felt that many of the systems, policies, practices, rituals and routines needed to be revised to support the needs of industry. There was an expectation that the HEI should adopt a different approach to time and “speed up” in relation to new product development and programme delivery. Employers also felt that the organisational structure within the HEI needed to better address cross-discipline programmes.

Learners had a number of expectations regarding the HEI and external employer organisation cultures. Within their own organisation, they felt they required additional support from supervisors, mentors and key people possessing knowledge and skills that could be shared. In addition, learners felt that the employer needed to ensure that systems, policies, procedures and practices supported WBL and were not solely focused on performance, productivity and profitability. Learners felt the policies, procedures, rituals and routines within the HEI needed to be reviewed to meet the needs of WBL learners, in terms of how programmes were delivered, assessed and administered. Learners also felt that some of the services provided to full-time learners, such as the library and social clubs and societies, needed to be more effectively extended to WBL learners. As opposed to being caught in the middle of two contrasting cultures, learners feel that both the HEI and

external employer organisation need to carefully consider their respective cultures, so that learner requirements are recognised.

7.2.3 What can the HEI and external employer organisations do to address the organisational culture issues that exist in a WBL partnership?

This study has presented a series of recommendations for both HEI X and the external employer organisations collaborating in a WBL partnership. Some of these recommendations are novel, in that they have not been emphasised in previous studies. For example, within the HEI, the importance of developing WBL training programmes for academic staff has been raised, and an example of an accredited programme provided. The importance of transmitting positive stories internally to counteract negative stories that may be in circulation has been highlighted. The importance of learner services such as social activities has not received much attention in the literature, but was deemed significant in this study. A further recommendation related to providing support to the WBL learner in the areas of academic writing and HEI procedures and policies prior to commencing the programme.

Within the external employer organisation, a number of novel recommendations were also made. For example, the importance of telling WBL applicants the “full story” in relation to what the WBL programme involves was emphasised. Furthermore, it was recommended that the employer should invest in study facilities to support the WBL learner and symbolise the importance of WBL within the organisation. In addition, the importance of rewarding and acknowledging the effort invested by the learner was raised. This study also identified the importance of investing time and effort in the selection process of WBL learners. These recommendations and others are provided in Table 7-1.

Table 7-1 Recommendations for the HEI and employer

WBL Partnership Recommendations		
	HEI X	External Employer Organisation
Rituals and Routines	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Describe the new programme development process to employers and consider techniques that “speed up” the process. • Consider facilitating learning outside the normal academic dates and times. • Include employer in communications. • Discussions in class as opposed to lectures. • Recognise the needs of all stakeholders when developing WBL assessments. • Invest in training for WBL lecturers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognise that WBL now forms part of the learners working routine. • Conduct regular feedback sessions between learner and employer.
Stories	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Address the negative stories circulating within HEI X about WBL, by telling positive stories relating to WBL. • Promoting the “good stories” about WBL externally. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Describe the benefits of WBL to employees, senior managers and customers. • Tell WBL applicants the “full story” when WBL programmes are being promoted within the organisation.
Symbols	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review the administrative system and procedures to facilitate WBL. • Use a language understood by all stakeholders. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use a language that is understood by all the WBL stakeholders. • Consider investing in study facilities such as study room, library and computers to support learners.
Organisational Structures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider the establishment of a dedicated WBL Unit. • Put an organisational structure in place to support programmes that cross academic disciplines. • Extend learner services to WBL learners. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appoint a person within the organisation to coordinate WBL. • Put in place a formalised mentoring structure. • Allow WBL learners access to key people within the organisation.
Power Structures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emphasise the strategic importance of WBL. • Share power with the employer in the design, delivery and assessment of the programme. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Give WBL learners power to implement learning. • Emphasise the strategic importance of WBL.
Control Systems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stress the importance of academic rigour to all stakeholders. • Incentivise and reward WBL effort. • Evaluate WBL programmes by consulting learners, employers and HEI staff. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Invest time and effort when selecting learners to complete the WBL programme. • Monitor the attendance of learners. • Reward learners for WBL effort. • Evaluate the programme during and after its completion.

7.3 Summary of the contribution to knowledge

WBL has the potential to provide significant benefits to a number of stakeholders, including the HEI, external employers, learners and the State (Abduljawad, 2015; Basit *et al.*, 2015; Higher Education Authority, 2015; Hunt, 2011; Plewa *et al.*, 2015; Sweet, 2014). Despite this, few studies have investigated curriculum-related university/business cooperation (Healy *et al.*, 2014; Kozlinska, 2012; Norman & Jerrard, 2015; Plewa *et al.*, 2015). Most studies that focus on collaborations between industry and higher education tend to concentrate on research and innovation (Bolden *et al.*, 2009; Davey *et al.* 2011). This is somewhat surprising, as it is expected that, in the coming years, there will be an increase in demand internationally for WBL partnerships between HEIs and external employer organisations (Basit *et al.*, 2015; Higher Education Authority of Ireland *et al.*, 2015; McGann & Anderson, 2012).

The importance of organisational cultural issues in WBL partnerships has been identified in the literature (Ball & Manwaring, 2010; Collier *et al.*, 2011; Cyert & Goodman, 1997; Rohrbeck & Arnold, 2006; Schofield, 2013). However, these studies tend to focus on the organisational cultural barriers, with little insight provided into how these barriers can be overcome (Davey *et al.*, 2011). This study acknowledges these barriers, but proposes recommendations for the HEI and external employer organisation to consider. In addition, the majority of the literature focuses on the needs of the HEI, with only limited reference to the needs of the external employer and learner. This study has consulted with HEI, employer and learner representatives to gain insights into the practices of WBL, and presents the cultural implications for both the HEI and external employer organisation.

As far as I am aware, this is the first study to use Johnson's cultural web (1988) to consider organisational culture issues in WBL partnerships. The web proved to be a useful framework for representing the findings. I was satisfied the voices of the various participants were represented on the web. The web allows multiple truths to be represented, which is a key requirement in a study underpinned by a relativist ontology. For example, the stories of different learners, academic staff, and employers can be represented by a single cultural web. McDonald and Foster (2013) claim that most researchers who use the cultural web do not explain how raw data are moved into the web. This study has provided details in relation to this, and has described how thematic analysis can be used in conjunction with the web, thus making a methodological contribution. I

would recommend that future researchers adopting the cultural web for WBL partnership studies consider adding an additional cultural element to take into account the business environment. Deal and Kennedy (1982) claim that the single biggest influence on a company's culture is the broader business environment in which the company operates. According to Brown (1998), organisations in the public sector operate in a different business environment from those in the private sector. For this study, I referred to the influence of the business environment when discussing the paradigm (e.g. external employers operating in a competitive business environment, where speed to market is deemed important, whereas in the HEI environment, concern for learner is more significant), but perhaps allocating a separate cultural element should have been considered.

One of the key findings from this study, which makes a significant contribution to the literature, is the identification of the cultural paradigms (using Johnson's cultural web) for both the HEI and external employer organisation (see Figure 7-1). Previous WBL studies have referred to barriers such as impatient and demanding employers, inflexible HEIs, and differences in relation to language, motives and timeframes. This study also presented these issues, but by identifying the cultural paradigms for both organisations, the source, rather than the symptoms of the barriers, was identified. Until the cultural paradigm for both organisations are understood, there is little point in presenting a culture for the HEI and external employer organisations, because we cannot understand the culture of an organisation until the underlying assumptions are identified (Schein, 2004). Previous studies on WBL put too little emphasis on identifying these underlying assumptions when discussing organisational culture in WBL partnerships.

This study makes a number of other significant contributions to knowledge. For example, the academic calendar has been raised in the literature as a major barrier in WBL partnerships (Ball & Manwaring, 2010; Kewin *et al.*, 2011; Layer *et al.*, 2010). This study suggests that a placement assignment requiring little involvement from the academic, apart for the assessment, could be completed by the learner over the summer months to help overcome this issue. This finding is important because previous studies have highlighted the academic calendar as a significant barrier in WBL partnerships (Kewin *et al.*, 2011). By allowing the programme to continue outside the academic calendar, the HEI can address the employer's requirement of "speed to market".

Another finding from this study that contributes to the literature relates to the importance of employers informing WBL applicants about the “full story” regarding the WBL programme. Previous studies pay little attention to how employers promote WBL internally to their employees. This study found that employers, in an attempt to promote WBL programmes internally, could sometimes fail to transmit all the information to the learner. This practice was deemed to be a manifestation of an underlying assumption identified in the cultural paradigm of the external employer organisation, whereby the emphasis is put on highlighting the benefits of a product (in this case the WBL programme), in an effort to make a sale. This finding is very important, because learners can feel let down by their employer when they are told stories that do not refer to the challenges associated with completing WBL programmes. Often, this results in learners exiting from the programme and forming a negative impression of the employer. In other cases, the findings from this study has enhanced existing literature. Having considered the contribution to knowledge the following section discusses the contribution made to practice.

7.4 Summary of the contribution to practice

The contribution to practice is presented from the HEI/external employer organisation perspectives separately. Within each of these sections, the requirements of the learner are discussed. In addition, the development of the WBL practitioner programmes is also considered.

7.4.1 Implications for HEI X

The study demonstrates that “the way we do things around here” for full-time programmes may need to be adapted to facilitate WBL programmes, which are significantly different. Not only are WBL learners already in full-time employment, but they come to the HEI with significant knowledge and skills that the HEI needs to acknowledge. The cultural *routines and rituals* associated with how programmes are designed, delivered, and assessed may need to be reconsidered, to take into account the needs of the employer and learner.

The promotion of WBL within the HEI can be difficult due to *stories* that highlight a misalignment between the cultural paradigm of the HEI, and the needs and expectations of

the employer and learner. Addressing these stories may require the HEI to transmit stories highlighting the many benefits that WBL can provide for the HEI. In addition, the HEI may need to transmit stories externally that highlight the benefits which WBL can provide to the employer, because it was found that many external employer organisations were unfamiliar with the WBL initiatives delivered by HEI X.

The cultural *symbols* that are evident within HEI X, such as the language used and the administrative system, can pose problems in WBL programmes. Employers and learners are sometimes not familiar with the academic language used in HEIs, and the HEI needs to recognise and appreciate this. In addition, the administrative system and procedures within HEI X symbolise what is important in full-time programmes, but does not always facilitate WBL programmes, and this can cause problems registering WBL learners, invoicing employers, and even allowing learners access to vital services such as the library, emails, and online learning material. The current administrative systems and procedures need to be reviewed to take into account the needs of the WBL stakeholders.

In relation to *organisational structures*, participants identified the need to establish a dedicated unit to coordinate WBL activities. It was felt employers did not always know who to contact within the institute and that HEI X was missing out on WBL opportunities due to lack of support for the initiative. A further issue in relation to organisational structure highlighted the increasing demand from employers requesting WBL programmes that cross academic disciplines (e.g. a programme that combines modules from a number of disciplines). It was revealed that HEI X needs to put systems and structures in place for these types of programmes. The findings also illustrate that because many of the WBL learners were based several hundred kilometres from HEI X, some of the services available to full-time learners such as library, study skills and social clubs were not extended to WBL learners. A number of suggestions were presented including the possibility of HEI X asking other HEIs throughout Ireland to make their facilities available to the learners.

The importance of sharing *power* with the external employer organisation was also highlighted in this study. This sharing of power can challenge the underlying cultural assumptions identified in HEI X such as “we believe in our procedures for administrating our academic programmes” and “we are guardians of the academic standards”. Employers

need to feel that they have input into the design and delivery of the programme, and be encouraged to present ideas for assessment titles. The study found that the HEI could benefit from this sharing of power resulting in a programme that meets the requirements of all the stakeholders.

Issues in relation to *control systems* were also identified as important when attempting to ensure an organisational culture that meets the needs of the three stakeholders participating in a WBL partnership. The HEI needs to maintain the same QA standards when administering WBL programmes. To do otherwise would only threaten the core basic cultural assumptions that are taken for granted within the HEI and raise further suspicions academics may have about WBL. Reward systems are also considered under this cultural element of the web and play an important role when considering WBL partnerships. The study found that some academics felt that the effort required in designing and delivering WBL programmes was not recognised sufficiently within HEI X and changes needed to be made if WBL is to be more widespread within the institute.

Although the recommendations above are directed at HEI X, they do provide a useful framework for others HEIs considering WBL partnerships. These recommendations have been presented to representatives from Irish and European HEIs and it seems that many of the challenges HEI X faces in relation to WBL partnerships are common to other HEIs. However, it is important to consider some of the characteristics of HEI X that may limit the transferability of the study's findings. HEI X is a relatively small HEI with just over 3,500 learners and in my opinion has lower levels of bureaucracy compared to large universities. In addition, HEI X is an Institute of Technology (not a university) and this may have some bearing on some of the recommendations made. Furthermore, for the majority of this study, HEI X had a dedicated WBL coordinator in place who offered support to the three stakeholders.

7.4.2 Implications for the external employer organisation

The study illustrated a number of implications for the employer participating in the WBL partnership. The employer should not expect that the “way we do things around here” stay the same when learners are completing a WBL programme. The findings reveal that WBL interferes with the learner's work *routine and rituals*. The workplace supervisors need to

support learners by providing opportunities to test the learning and ensuring the learner can get time off work to attend classes.

The employer organisation should ensure that *stories* highlighting the strategic importance of WBL are transmitted throughout the organisation. Stories about WBL partnerships should also be shared with clients and potential employees in an effort to create a favourable impression of the organisation. An issue that came up in the findings related to a practice employed by some organisations whereby they failed to tell learners the “full story” before enrolling on a programme. This resulted in learners enrolling on programmes based on information that was not accurate. This practice should be avoided as it can lead the learner to form a negative impression of the employer and in some cases affect the learner’s confidence if they decide to leave the programme.

The issue of language used was also identified as an important cultural *symbol* for the external employer organisation. The findings reveal that some employers communicate with the HEI using a technical language that can be misinterpreted by the HEI and this could have implications for the design of a WBL programme. In an effort to symbolise the importance of learning and training, the employer organisation could consider investing in study and learner facilities. This effort was effective in creating a culture where learning was viewed as being strategically important and was useful in symbolising the importance of employer support for the learner. In WBL programmes, the learner needs opportunities to acquire knowledge, skills and competencies in the workplace. This responsibility cannot be passed on to the HEI. Therefore, the external employer should consider investing in study rooms equipped with resources such as PCs, books and journals.

In relation to *organisational structures*, the findings illustrate that the employer should identify mentors and ensure these mentors are allocated time to support the learners. The employer should also facilitate learners in accessing subject matter experts within the organisation, and this tends to work well when a culture of collaboration exists internally.

In addition, the person responsible for coordinating WBL should be in a management position with sufficient *power*, so that WBL remains strategically important. The study also found that employers should empower learners to implement the learning achieved in the WBL programme.

There were a number of issues related to *control systems* that were relevant when considering an organisational culture for the employer participating in a WBL partnership. The findings suggest that employers should monitor the selection process and attendance of learners. The study found that employers who put effort and time into selecting learners for the WBL programme benefit in the long term. It was also found that learners completing WBL programmes should be rewarded for their efforts in completing the WBL programme. Learners invest significant effort when trying to combine work and study. This extra effort needs to be recognised by the employer, otherwise the learners can feel unappreciated. Finally, employers should also remember that any investment in WBL programmes should be evaluated, and the outcome of the evaluation shared with the HEI.

Again, the recommendations provided in this study could be considered for other employers considering WBL programmes. I have presented the research findings to numerous employer representative bodies. I also include the findings when presenting to employers considering WBL for the first time, so they can be informed about the challenges WBL poses. In addition, I offer recommendations for them to consider.

7.4.3 WBL practitioner programme

The significant challenges facing all stakeholders participating in the WBL partnership prompted me to develop an accredited programme for HEI and external employer representatives involved in, or considering getting involved in, the design and delivery of WBL programmes. This programme is accredited at Level 7 of the national framework of qualifications in Ireland. The learning outcomes of the programme are as follows:

1. Describe the characteristics of a WBL programme;
2. Explain the key trends in relation to WBL nationally and internationally;
3. Analyse the benefits WBL provides to the main stakeholders;
4. Examine best practice in relation to designing and delivering WBL programmes;
5. Identify the key challenges associated with WBL;
6. Describe the importance of overcoming cultural differences between industry and HEIs when designing and delivering WBL programmes.

The programme syllabus has been informed by this study. The last workshop on the programme (Learning Outcome 6) highlights the importance of organisational culture in WBL partnerships. Those that complete the programme are expected to use the cultural web to identify a culture for their organisation that recognises the requirements of all the stakeholders in the WBL partnership.

A number of Irish and European HEIs have already expressed interest in the programme, and I have received interest from a number of Irish employer representative bodies. It is hoped that this programme will further promote WBL collaborations, and assist HEIs and external employers to participate in WBL partnerships.

7.5 Limitations of the research and implications for future research

The underlying cultural assumptions identified in this study rely on what Martin (2001) describes as an integrated perspective. The integration view ignores ambiguities within a culture, and instead concentrates on the shared values within an organisation (Martin, 2001). One could question whether it is possible to identify a single organisational culture for a HEI or external employer organisation. Silver (2003) does acknowledge that a homogeneous culture is possible in a smaller HEI, and HEI X falls into that category (3,500 full-time learners). This is not to suggest that there is no ambiguity within HEI X, in terms of organisational culture. However, I believe there exists a significant amount of shared deeper assumptions that comprise the central paradigm (Johnson, 1992; Schein, 2009). Differences in cultures within the organisation are recognised in the outer elements of the cultural web. For example, differences in opinions between management and lecturers in relation to how WBL should be resourced and rewarded have been identified. In the employer organisations, differences of opinions were identified between learners, senior managers and supervisors. The organisational culture presented for the external organisation is based on the contributions from a number of different employers, and I have attempted to represent the various cultural issues shared by these organisations. The web does allow multiple voices to be heard. For example, the contrasting experiences and accounts of learners, employers and HEI participants can all be represented by the model.

Questions could also be raised about the fact that I was researching an organisation I have been employed in for over ten years. Deal and Kennedy (1982) suggest an insider can go much deeper when reviewing organisational culture, but that maintaining objectivity can

be difficult. However, I believe my role in the organisation helped with the research (Light, 2010). I was able to access employers, learners and HEI X participants, and had exposure to many documents that contributed to the research. It might be argued that this role could influence how and what data were collected, who contributed to the study, and how the data were analysed. However, I stressed throughout the data-collection stage that a major objective of this study was to improve the experiences of all the stakeholders participating in the WBL partnership, and this could only be achieved if the concerns and expectations of the learners, employers and HEI X participants were recognised. The participants who contributed to the study all had something to gain from this research, and I believe this was instrumental in getting their cooperation.

This study considered the views of stakeholders who had experience of engaging in WBL partnerships. The views of HEIs, employers and learner participants with no experience in WBL were not considered. This could be seen as a possible shortcoming of the research, because those not engaging in WBL programmes could provide insight into organisational cultural issues in WBL programmes. This could perhaps provide a focus for future research on this topic.

Furthermore, this study focused on collaborations with *private sector*, external employer organisations. Research into collaborations with *public sector* employer organisations could reveal different findings, especially in relation to the cultural paradigm. Finally, it would be interesting to conduct a similar study for a large university, as I believe different challenges would emerge.

7.6 Personal research reflections

Reflections have been presented throughout this study due to the methodological perspective adopted. However, there are a number of general reflections I feel are important to make in this section. The issue of highlighting problems in how both organisations administer WBL could upset some people. However, my intention throughout was not just to identify problems, but to offer recommendations. From carrying out the study, I learned to appreciate the challenges faced by the various stakeholders participating in collaborating in a WBL partnership, and how these challenges can be influenced by the cultural paradigm of both organisations. This is something I did not

appreciate prior to the study. Rather than attempting to change the cultural paradigm, I made recommendations that affect the cultural elements identified in the web.

I believe I have developed a number of skills since commencing this thesis. My research skills have evolved, and I am now much less inclined to jump to conclusions. I appreciate the need for careful consideration, and the importance of seeing things from the point of view of all stakeholders. In addition, my time management and organisation skills have improved. Although undertaking this doctoral study has been the most challenging task I have ever embarked on, the journey has been also very enjoyable and rewarding. I believe that from completing this research, I have become a much more confident person, and the research has already benefited me in number of ways. In 2016, I was appointed the Regional Skills Forum Manager for the North West of Ireland. This position involves promoting collaborations between education/training providers and external employers. In addition, since commencing the research, I have been invited to deliver workshops and speak at conferences throughout Europe. I was fortunate enough to be the keynote speaker at an international conference in Belgium (Master Class in Work-based Learning Conference in Leuven, May 2015). I also had the opportunity to share my research findings at an international conference in Belgrade in 2016 (EURASHE Annual Conference in April 2016). At this conference, I delivered a ninety-minute workshop on the influence of organisational culture in WBL partnerships, at which many of the findings of this study were presented. The findings have been very well received, and I have been asked to participate in other international events and conferences in 2016 and 2017. I was somewhat surprised to learn that many of the challenges facing HEI X in coordinating WBL were also present in HEIs from other countries.

In addition, a number of Irish and European HEIs have asked me to provide WBL consultancy to them in the coming years. However, it is not only HEIs that are recognising the benefit of this research. More recently, I have agreed to support a number of employer representative bodies in their efforts to promote WBL to private industry. The research has broadened my understanding of WBL and the cultural issues underpinning it.

It provided me with immense satisfaction that many of the recommendations I suggested for HEI X have been recognised and reviewed by senior management within the institute. Indeed, many of the employer organisations that have contributed to this research were

also keen to learn about the outcomes of the research. Because WBL is now such a hot topic in Ireland, I plan to organise a conference at which the research outcomes can be shared.

7.7 Chapter summary

This chapter has described how the research question has been addressed. The chapter has provided a summary of the contribution made to knowledge and practice. The research has informed the knowledge and theory of WBL by obtaining the views of all the stakeholders, and describing the implications not just the HEIs, but also for the external employer organisations and learners. A further contribution to theory was achieved by my adoption of the cultural web to present an organisational culture, for both organisations, which recognised the requirements of the three stakeholders. The contribution to practice was achieved by my series of recommendations made to the HEI and external employer organisation. Another contribution to practice was the development of a WBL practitioner programme that was informed by this study. The chapter also provided some of the potential limitations of this study, and ideas for future research, before concluding with some personal reflections.

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