

Undertaking a Grounded Theory study to Investigate the impact of Quality Assurance on Innovation and Performance in Higher Education Institutions.

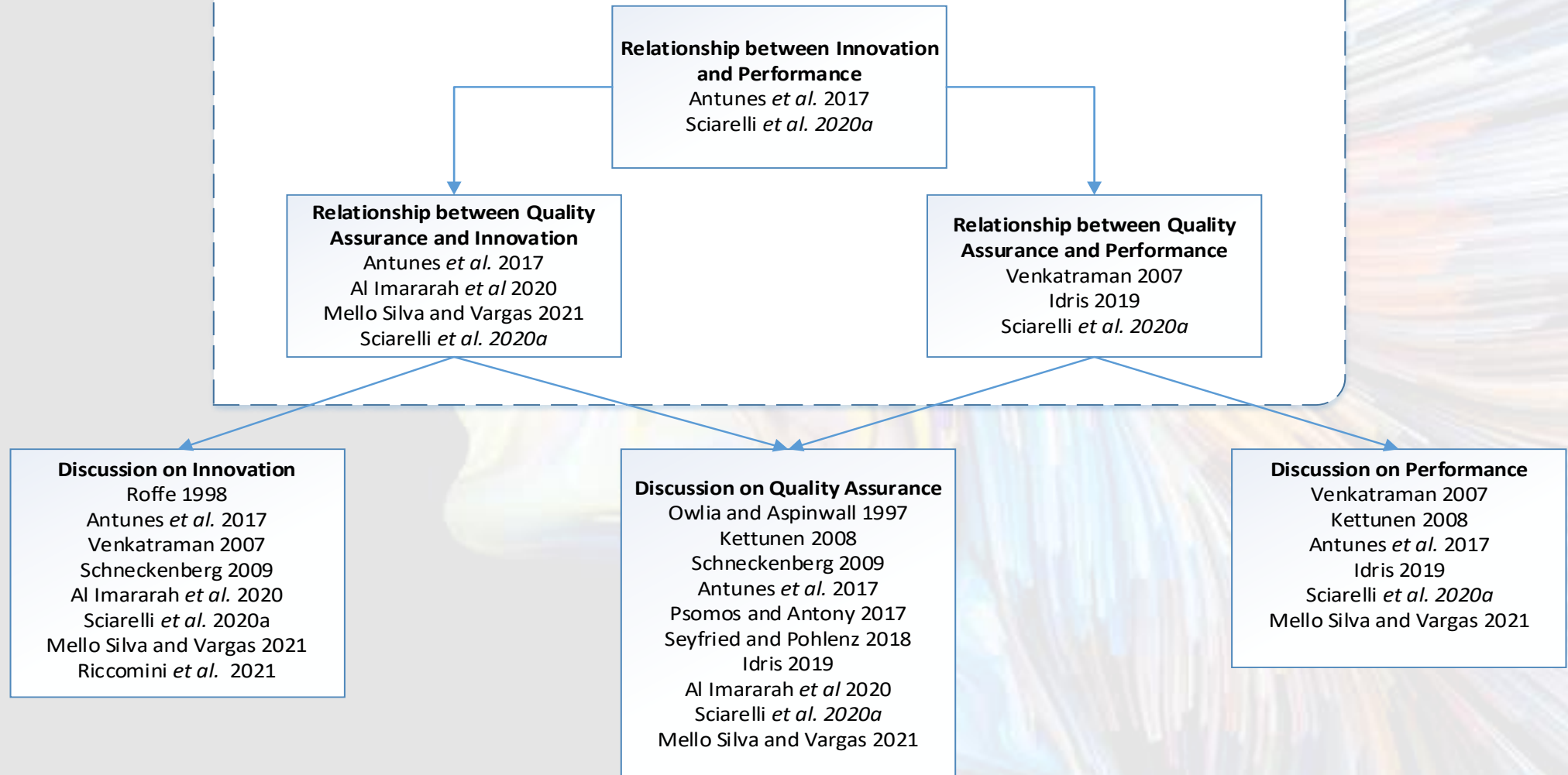
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Aims and Objectives

- This pilot study adopts a qualitative stance using a Grounded Theory methodology and focuses on the effects Quality Assurance systems and processes may have on the organisation's ability to innovate and attain improved performance
- **Objectives of the Grounded Theory Study**
 1. To explore deeply:
 - the nature of the relationship between quality assurance and innovation,
 - the nature of the relationship between quality assurance and institutional performance
 - the relation between innovation and institutional performance
 2. To develop a model that enables higher educational institutions to maximise on the application of quality assurance principles, systems and processes in order to foster innovation and improve institutional

Literature Map

How do quality assurance systems impact innovation and performance of Higher Education Institutions in small island states?



Method

- Mono-method through the use of in-depth interviews that are flexible and unstructured
- There are 157 registered Higher Education institutions on the Malta qualifications database held by the MFHEA
- For the purpose of this preliminary study five unstructured interviews have been carried out with small higher education institutions in the Mediterranean island of Malta.
- Four are privately-funded while one is state-funded
- Two of the institutions can be considered as micro enterprises according to the definition provided by the European Commission and Malta Enterprise

Analysis

- Interviews were transcribed and analysed using Constant Comparative Analysis (Corbin and Strauss, 2008)
- MAXQDA was used for the analysis
- Since this is a pilot study, theoretical saturation has not been reached and this paper only illustrates the preliminary findings that will pave the way for the full research project.
- All codes were then summarized and grouped into categories.
- Summaries provided the opportunity to reflect further on the emerging codes and such reflection motivated the generation of memos as well as identifying links between codes for merging and grouping into categories.
- Paraphrasing of the interviews themselves aside from the coding and summary process aided the reflexive process

Main observations in the data – QA

- All participants have a broad view of QA hence not narrowly perceived as a control aspect while recognizing the importance of soft practices
- Three of the five respondents define quality assurance as a process that should provide trust and enhance the reputation of the institution.
- All participants in this study acknowledge that QA can be a differentiating factor between institutions.
- A particular element emerging from the small and micro institutions in the local context is a more qualitative approach in measurement of QA and performance where the success, career advancement and employability of graduates came to the forefront.
- Respondents also agree that organisational culture such as norms and attitudes have an impact on quality assurance as is the need for technological infrastructure to support learning and teaching activities

Main observations in the data - QA

- Data shows that there is a high dependence of small and particularly micro HEIs on freelance and part-time staff that also has an impact on organisational and quality culture which could affect innovation and performance
- Participants in the study also highlight the inadequacy of top-down approaches alone but recognize the strategic role of middle managers in the implementation of QA
- Emerging elements from the local context include, level playing field and unfair competition, organisational structure and heavy reliance on freelancers, cultural fit, QA system maintenance, governance structures in small organisations, economies of scale, funding opportunities and government support

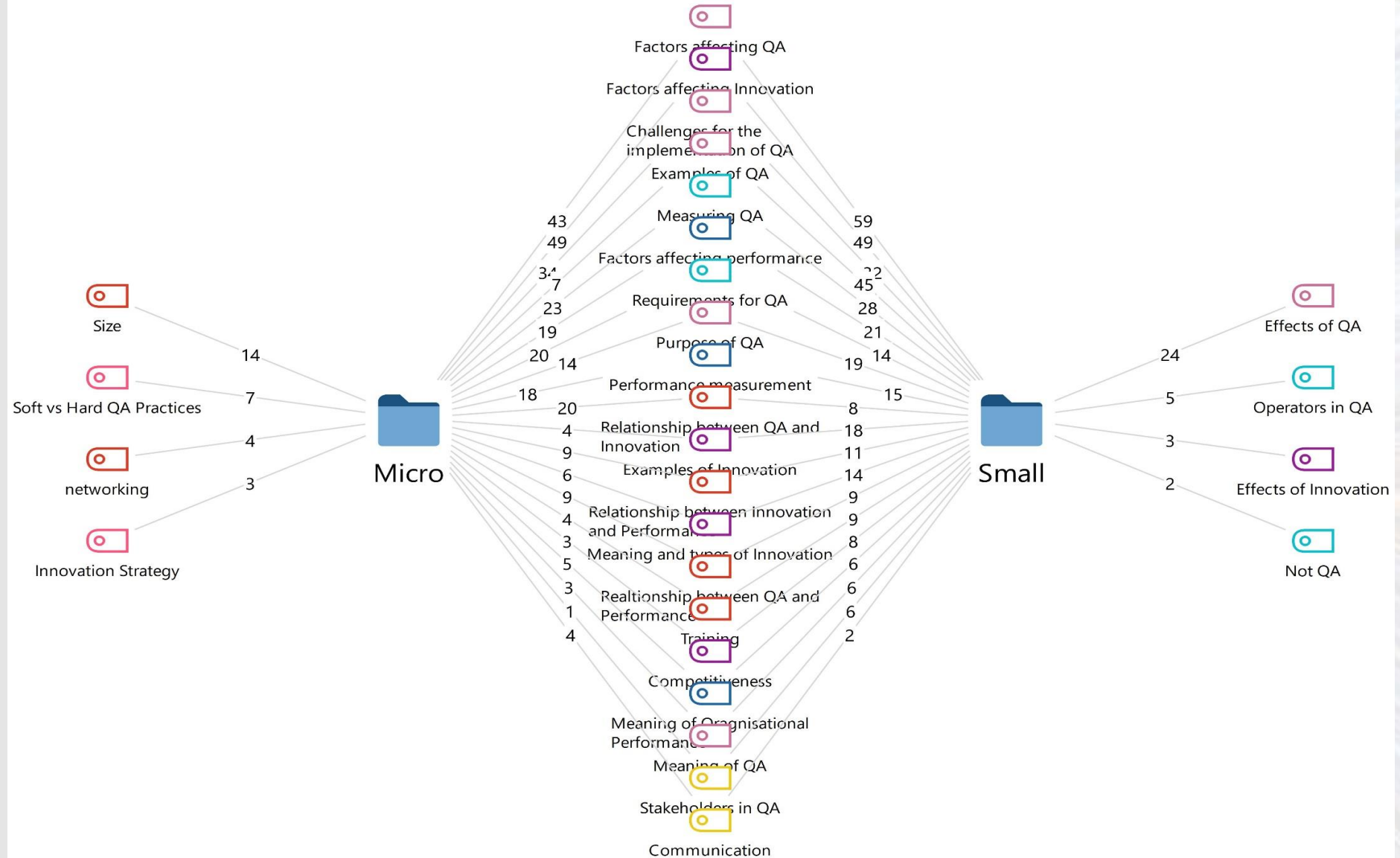
Main observations in the data - Innovation

- The need of small organisations to innovate in order to attract international customers and thus guarantee economies of scale was particularly highlighted by the micro institutions
- A very prominent factor in this study is that leadership is a crucial element for directing creativity and innovation
- The examples of innovation provided in this study refer to innovation in the classroom comprising changes in teaching practices, educational resources and availability of teaching resources, special programs, organisational and human resource practices
- The element of networking is strongly highlighted by three of the participants especially by the micro institutions, something which is also mentioned in literature
- New elements emerging from this study include effects on marketing strategy, the need of full-time core staff and the possibility of failure in innovation due to

Main observations in the data - Performance

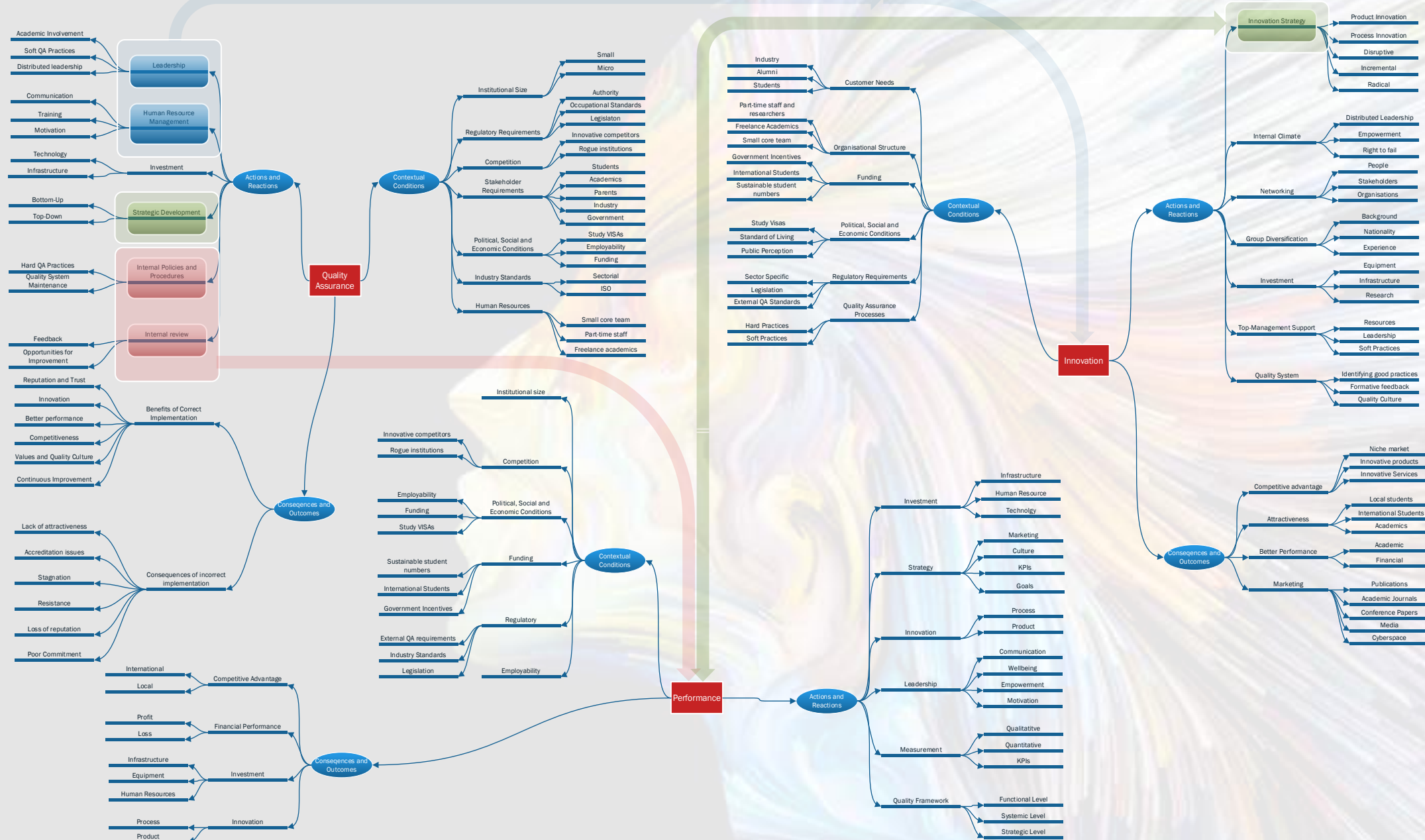
- One stark observation made through this study is that participants do not define performance as necessarily good performance
- An organisation is always performing if there is some type of output, but that it all depends whether the performance is a positive or a negative
- The views by participants on measurement of performance were also different due to more ideas related to qualitative parameters like employability and career advancements
- Other elements highlighted by participants were leadership and quality culture, continuous improvement and innovation in educational processes, employee participation and development, fast response and management of information: customer-driven quality and partnership development

Two-Cases Model - Small vs Micro



Main observations in the data

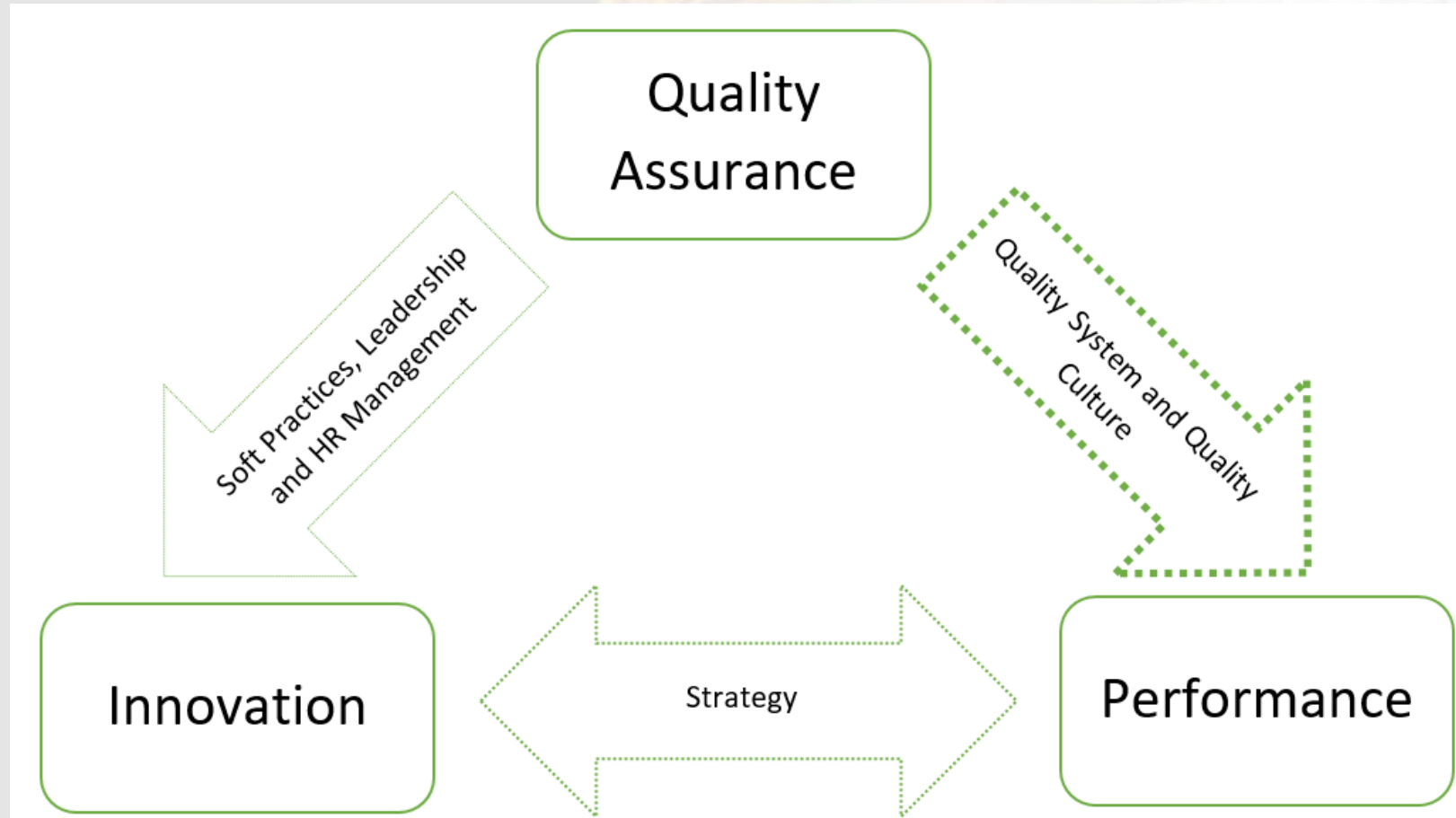
- This study reveals that the effect of quality assurance on innovation and performance can be complex particularly when considering the different dimensions of each of the concepts.
- The full-scale research should delve more into these dimensions in order to establish a more detailed view do the effects and inform the conceptual model that would assist Higher Education institutions to implement quality assurance systems in a way to maximize on performance and support innovation.
- There are aspects emanating from this pilot that require further investigation
 - High dependence of small HEIs on freelance and part-time staff
 - Qualitative approaches to measurement of QA and performance,
 - Level playing field and unfair competition
 - Governance structures in small organisations and economies of scale,
 - Funding opportunities and government support
 - Higher dependence on international students for viability in micro organisations due to local market conditions.



Preliminary Model

- It emerges from the data that quality assurance has a positive impact on organisational performance although further investigation needs to be carried out on which dimensions of organisational performance this direct influence is being exerted
- The impact of Quality Assurance on Innovation seems to be weaker but interviewees have mentioned that soft QA practices, leadership and human resource management as well as customer relationship management are important to foster innovation.
- Innovation is a broad term that could include process and product innovation with several dimensions for each. Hence this impact of quality assurance on these dimensions needs to be investigated further
- Interviewees indicated that innovation may have a positive effect on some dimensions of organisational performance and that their firms need to be innovative in order to survive.
- Investment in research and development that funds and directs the innovation process depends on the financial performance dimension of the organisation.
- Strategy may have an important role in the effect innovation and performance can have on each other.
- It is the intended purpose of the full research project to investigate this further and

Simplified Preliminary Model



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Thank you