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Practitioners' perspective on competitiveness: A
Bourdieuian approach

A thesis submitted to the University of Manchester for the
degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

In the Faculty of Engineering and Physical Sciences

2015

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Declaration

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Abstract

UK policy-makers, politicians and practitioners over the past few years have based the narrative of competitiveness around the idea of 'rebalancing the economy'. This entails viewing competitiveness as a rational process (through the Porterian lens) and identifies strategies from a top-down perspective. However, there is generally a lack of understanding of how competitiveness is practiced from the bottom-up. Therefore, this study adopts a practice-based perspective to investigate competitiveness from a practitioner's perspective.

In this thesis, Bourdieu's habitus and reflexivity is used along with Maclean, Harvey and Chia's notion of life history storytelling through the lens of sensemaking and legitimacy. The thesis employs a constructivist perspective to collect and analyse qualitative evidence from 41 practitioners during the two phases of data collection. The data was analysed using thematic analysis, codes generated and inferences made. In the pilot-study (Delphi-study and semi-structured interviews), senior strategists (20) practicing in local enterprise partnerships (LEP's), universities, regional development agencies, manufacturing associations and various manufacturing firms confirmed the initial assumption that policy is prescriptive and rationalistic. The second phase consisted of semi-structured interviews (21) with senior, middle and lower level practitioners belonging to various types of manufacturing firms and allied services.

The main contributions of the thesis are that (1) reflexive practitioner's past experiences shaped existing practices and perceptions of competitiveness and (2) three distinct thresholds of competitiveness inform the position of the practitioner and their desire to be competitive. This has implications for policy and practice.

Acknowledgements

In the name of Allah, the compassionate, the merciful (Praise be to Allah). First and foremost, thanks and praise to Allah, the most Gracious and most Merciful. I would hereby like to commence by sending my gratitude and appreciation to my supervisor Dr Paul W. Chan, for having provided this research opportunity and for his continuous guidance and support throughout the duration of this study. Special thanks are due to my dad Barrister Jamal Uddin Qazi, My wife Shabana, children Rida and Bilal Qazi; Nosheen, Mariam and Naeesha Ali, sister Hina and brother-in-law Dr Shahid Yousuf, and Sofia my niece for their patience, encouragement and continuous support throughout the busy years of the study. Thanks and gratitude to my research colleagues Balkiz, Moheeb and Farhad for putting up with me; Santi, Seunguk Na, and Anood for being every so close; friends Fahad Siddique, Mudassir Ali, George, Adeel, Manzoor, Zaheer and cousin Tan; work colleagues Robert Teal, Paula Singleton, Garry Carr, Alfred, Simon, Gill, Chris, Phil, Suneel and others for encouraging me. My mother and nephew Saad who are no longer with us will be pleased.

Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 Introduction to chapter

This chapter provides the context to this study. It begins by detailing the rationale of the study, positioning the unit of analysis and the statement of problem. The chapter then further goes on to present the research aims and objectives, scope and original contributions of this study. The chapter then concludes with an overview of each of the subsequent chapters.

1.2 Rationale of the study

Rebalancing the British economy by focussing on manufacturing (Berry and Hay, 2015) has been a prime objective of government policy since the 2008 global recession (Froud et al., 2011). Manufacturing, as an engine of growth (Leon-Ledesma, 2000, Martin et al., 2014), a critical contributor to productivity, and innovation and trade, has slipped from being the centre of economic growth activitiesⁱ (Berry, 2015, Berry and Hay, 2015, Song, 2015). In his 2010 budget speech George Osborne argued that the economic profession was in broad agreement and in support of a more balanced economy (Osborne, 2014b):

“A resilient economy is a more balanced economy with more exports, more building, more investment – and more manufacturing too [...] We’ve got to support our manufacturers if we want to see more growth in our regions.”

To address the economic imbalance (Gardiner et al., 2013, Hildreth and Bailey, 2014), recent governmental policy priorities have been between correcting apparent imbalances between exports and imports, saving and spending, and

protecting manufacturing industries (HM Government, 2010). According to the McKinsey Global Institute¹ manufacturing's global share of the GDP is 16%, responsible for 62 million jobs in the year 2000 and 45 million in the year 2010. Manufacturing is regarded as an essential and uniquely powerful economic force across advanced countries and economies (Tasse, 2014). It is perceived to be a source for creating wealth and well-paid jobs (Manyika, 2012, Litan et al., 2013, Fealing, 2012). In the recent decades studies on growth and productivity (Porter, 1990, Krugman 1990, 1994, 1996, 1997, 2005, Martin and Tyler, 2003, Kitson et al., 2004, Whittington, 1996, 2002, 2003, 2006(Sousa, 2013) have been dominated by discourses that have put the attention on competitiveness to be the intended outcome of macro and meso policy (Gardiner et al., 2013).

The political rhetoric centres the manufacturing sector as the key to economic growth. Competitiveness, in this context, is seen through the discourse of growth (Berry, 2015. Huggins et al., 2013), productivity (Bhasin, 2015), Dunning 2013), and socio-economic prosperity (Huggins and Thompson, 2012). Dominant to this discourse is the corporatist view of competitiveness, which draws heavily from the popularity of a Porterian view. Such a view entails viewing competitiveness as a way firms ought to practice and become competitive. At a practical level firms adapt everyday practices (strategies) according to what 'they' seem fit.

However, the literature on strategy discipline knows very little about how competitiveness actually takes place in the everyday practice of management strategies. The literature on management tends to be prescriptive and put forward theories and concepts on how firms should adapt strategies that lead to become competitive (Whittington, 2002) (Haar, 2014) (Salman et al., 2011). Mintzberg (1994) suggests that strategic management is too complex an issue and cannot be defined by brief sentences or paragraphs such as a firm's mission statement or its long and short-range objectives because, according to him, this

¹ See *Manufacturing the future: the next era of global growth and innovation*. McKinsey Global Institute, 2012. Report on the future of manufacturing

involves a plan, ploy, pattern, position and perspective (Ibid). The 'practice' approach in the management literatures examines strategy not as something a firm 'has' but something a firm 'does' (Jarzabkowski, 2004) reversing the conventional assumption that strategies are 'what' organisations *have* and instead emphasise strategy as something that people in organisations *do* (Rasche and Chia, 2009, Jarzabkowski and Wilson, 2006). Hence, the current study is primarily interested in unpacking the real practices (Gorli et al., 2015) of people working in the manufacturing sector (hereafter called manufacturing practitioners) and brings to the surface the actual doing of competitiveness. By doing so, the thesis presents a fresh way of understanding competitiveness.

1.3 The context of the unit of analysis

Much attention has centred on top-down government dictates on competitiveness. The conventional strategic view also looks at how firms ought to respond to external pressures, with many prescriptions of what firms ought to be doing. Policies remain rhetorical (Hildreth and Bailey, 2014, Celata and Coletti, 2014) and do not produce the same results when applied to the practitioner. There is an overwhelming neglect of what competitiveness means for everyday practices, and what firms and ultimately practitioners actually do. The study presents a different perspective and puts forward a novel way of understanding competitiveness policy and practice. It is argued that the study of competitiveness through the viewpoint of the practitioner makes competitiveness policy and practice relevant.

A pilot study² was conducted to better understand the issues around competitiveness at macro, meso and micro level. The research strategy adapted in the pilot study was to capture the perception of competitiveness amongst policy-makers (policy-enablers) within the manufacturing sector. Perception of competitiveness between both sides of the spectrum were captured; Policy-

² Details of the pilot study is documented in chapter 4.

enablers belonging to trade associations, government agencies and quango's engaged in dissemination of policy at one end were consulted' at the other end policy-enablers of manufacturing firms (senior management level) were approached for their views on competitiveness.

The pilot study confirmed the initial assumptions of the literature review (chapter 2) that policy matters were rather rationalistic, procedural and broad brushed and did not differentiate between government policy and manufacturing practitioners. The perception of competitiveness amongst government based policy-enablers was focussed around growth and productivity and considered the firm as the basic economic unit. While manufacturing policy-enablers with more concerned with skills, training, enterprise culture, access to finance, trade barriers and so forth. Furthermore, the firms learning from the economic cycles and subsequent recessions ((Hauser, 2010, Rowley, 2011) necessarily did not want to grow but wanted to shrink and be competitiveness on their own grounds and perceptions. Thus warranting a need to assess what competitiveness means within the context of the United Kingdoms (UK) economic growth policy and how this interacts with firm level strategy of competitiveness (Simsek et al, 2003).

The thesis argues that the daily routines of manufacturing practitioners in the workplace (visible practices) are outcomes of expressions of intentions, rules, plans and laws that constitute the operating discourse of the current practice-led iteration in strategy. By taking the position of a consideration of the habitus of the individual practitioner, the research explores the true nature of practice. In other words, the research seeks to advance the knowledge and understanding of competitiveness and uncover the actual micro-practices and everyday routines of strategy formulation of the individual practitioner as a unit of analysis.

The extent to which competitiveness policy translates into practical strategies for practitioners at all levels (senior, middle and team member level) in the firm is currently unknown. By capturing the individual perceptions of the practitioners

irrespective of the firm enabled the researcher to bring out the true nature of competitiveness. The study argues that it is people, specifically the practitioner in the economic field that create wealth. Policies will remain rhetorical (Hildreth and Bailey, 2014, Celata and Coletti, 2014) and do not produce the same results when applied to the practitioner. With this in mind and using the lens of Bourdieu's habitus and reflexivity the study analyses qualitative data gathered from interviewing 41 manufacturing practitioners (in England). By doing so, this research brings to surface the 'disconnect' between policy and practice and explores how current manufacturers practice and perceive competitiveness.

1.4 Statement of problem

The accepted use of competitiveness is problematic and warrants exploration. At one side of the spectrum, competitiveness discourse is loosely used by people and businesses to express willingness or desire to strive and be successful. While at the other end of the spectrum politicians and policy-makers alike associate competitiveness as being a key driver of the economic growth agenda. Competitiveness remains a blurred and abstract concept, which has nevertheless become the dominant doctrine in economic competitiveness policy and practice (Bristow, 2010). From a management perspective policy issues are related to efficiency and distribution of resources in the supply chain (Gereffi and Lee, 2012). Present day studies related to competitiveness are deeply embedded in the resource-based view (Barney, 1991, Barney, 2001) and remain ambiguous and largely undefined. While relying on the Porterian views of competitiveness, the extant literature have ignored the practitioner's perspective on competitiveness. As such, this thesis fills the gap by reviewing the manufacturing practitioner's practices and perception of competitiveness.

1.5 Aim of the research

The research aim is to examine how the manufacturing practitioner, through their everyday practices, perceives competitiveness.

1.6 Research objectives

The research aim was met by formulating the following research objectives:

1. To explore and locate competitiveness in the context of manufacturing policy and practice at different levels (national, regional and local) of policy.
2. To conduct a comprehensive literature review of competitiveness policy and practice.
3. To analyse how the actual micro-practices and everyday routines of individual practitioners make them become competitive.
4. To compare and contrast the practitioner's viewpoints of competitiveness against policy perspectives.
5. To discuss and recommend theoretical and practical implications of being and becoming a competitive manufacturing practitioner.

1.7 Contribution of this study

This research outlines a novel way of interpreting the perception of competitiveness by manufacturing practitioners by drawing on post-structuralism and, in particular, the notion of habitus and reflexivity. It is suggested that such an approach can help to overcome the divisions between policy and practice, and view the manufacturing practitioner in a new light – as a reflexive practitioner.

The relationship between policy and practice is a messy one in many (inter)organisational study areas. This is true for practitioners in manufacturing and for practitioners providing policy guidance to the sector. This research draws on the work undertaken in the narration of life-history stories of manufacturing practitioners to suggest a pedagogic framework based on habitus, reflexivity, the sensemaking process, and self-legitimising. The mapping and locating of various manufacturing practitioners in different settings is not in itself innovative; the question of boundaries and networks are central to the field of manufacturing practice. Being clear about the limits of one's own perception and what is offered

by others elsewhere is central to organisational performance. Hence, the originality of this research will emerge in the mapping of competitiveness and locating its meaning through the perception of the manufacturer; it is argued that this will be a potentially useful innovation in the pedagogy of competitiveness practice.

To the rationalist manufacturing practitioner, this approach may appear unfamiliar, a somewhat 'abstract' and 'theoretical' approach. However, it is this challenge that this study undertakes precisely by finding a way of mediating the theory-practice divide that is made possible through habitus and reflexivity. By positioning practice in the competitiveness debate and analysing the life stories of manufacturing practitioners, this research unpacks the often conflicting perceptions of competitiveness policy and its implications on competitive organisational strategies. The research draws upon the hermeneutic tradition of meaning-making in the study of competitiveness, suggestive of the interpretative nature of competitiveness itself, and recognising the need to approach practice in an interpretive way. Practice theory begins with the premise that actors or agents are fundamentally influenced by society and culture. Societies and cultures impact on the world in which one lives. Sociologists have adapted the theoretical stance taken by practice theorists to understand the dynamics of societies based on 'what people do' (Bourdieu, 1977a, Giddens, 1984, De Certeau, 1998a, Johnson et al., 2003, Jarzabkowski et al., 2007). Drawing on the works of Bourdieu in this context, practice is 'recurrent, materially bounded and situated action engaged in by members of a community' (Orlikowski, 2002), and the reflexive agents engage in producing, reproducing, or transforming the structures (Bourdieu, 1977a, Giddens, 1984) which, in turn, allow and limit people's actions. In Bourdieu's view, the society of today consists of multidimensional spaces and structures which the individual enters. In this case, the individual is the manufacturing practitioner and the individual enters these spaces (or field), which in the context of this study can be seen as the manufacturing sector. Manufacturing practitioners bring along with them their habitus; that is, the total

of their symbolic resources, which are the combination of the amount and the composition of different types of capital (Bourdieu, 1990).

Understanding the becoming of a manufacturer through a storytelling and sensemaking lens is under-researched. The effort to do so in this study will thus contribute to the literature of legitimacy by providing a more nuanced understanding of manufacturing practitioners attempts to capture their accounts of success in their respective careers. The research contributes to theory by responding to the call for more research on sensemaking processes in narratives (Maclean et al., 2012c). This research contributes by identifying and explaining the three processes – locating, meaning-making and becoming – as taken from the stories told by manufacturing practitioners. By doing so, this research highlights the significance of storytelling as a method of engaging and sharing their experiences with practitioners within a firm specifically or the practitioners' wider community, and thus becoming a vehicle for practitioners' claim to legitimacy of being competitive.

Sensemaking is a rational and intellectual process (Cunliffe and Coupland, 2012). By connecting sensemaking and self-legitimising through storytelling and life-history, the current researcher aims to contribute to the scarce understanding of manufacturing practitioners and their actions. In doing so, the research hopes to contribute to the perception of competitiveness as it is practised today, and its policy implications. The research assumes sensemaking to be a collaborative activity that is used to create, legitimise and sustain competitiveness practices (Holt and Macpherson, 2010, Maclean et al., 2012c). In relation to the manufacturing practitioners, sensemaking offers credible insight and narrative rationality (Cunliffe and Coupland, 2012) to the accepted story(s) offered by practitioners' in their description of how they became who they are today. In other words, the research examines manufacturing practitioners through the dual lens of sensemaking and storytelling as recounted in life history interviews. Maclean, Harvey and Chia's (2012) analysis points out, among other things, that

sensemaking stories are tied closely to self-legitimation and have significant organisational implications.

This study also opens up new conceptual possibilities for the understanding and possible application of Bourdieu's theory of practice. To date, the literature concerning competitiveness has emphasised that firms need to be assessed from an economic standpoint of social order. In contrast, Bourdieu's notion that (social) actors learn and enact typical ways of thinking, understanding and viewing (interpreting) the structure (fields) in their surroundings can, therefore, provide a fresh perspective on why a disconnect may exist between competitiveness policy and practice. It has been argued that 'traditional' rationalist theories explaining this may now contain certain limitations within these new contexts, and that a new way of interpreting these may shine new light on how competitiveness is viewed; namely, the framework of habitus and reflexivity, and how this may affect competitiveness. A detailed discussion on the contributions of the research is done in chapter nine (9).

The competitiveness thresholds of practitioners' have implications for policy and practice. For policy-makers, by understanding the perceptions of practitioners and what it means to them enables the policy-makers to realign and adjust policy so to make it more relevant to growth and productivity. In this way the benefits of growth and productivity can be effective. For businesses and entrepreneurs these findings provide the opportunity to better understand their staff, future recruits, customers and stakeholders. This study will enable managers, leaders, policy-makers and practitioners in the manufacturing sector in planning future strategies that enable their firms to compete. In general the results will give public and private sector institutions a way to gain a clearer insight in how practitioners perceive competitiveness, this way policy can become more relevant and effective.

1.8 Structure of the thesis

This thesis is presented in nine chapters. This first chapter has set the scene for the thesis by providing a general overview of competitiveness, its problems and how the thesis intends to answer these issues.

Chapter-2 presents the key debates around national competitiveness policy in the UK (aimed at becoming a leading knowledge-driven economy) by locating competitiveness at three levels – national, regional and local. The chapter focuses on a variety of analytical tools used to explain competitiveness and capture it within policy (Buckley et al., 1990, Fagerberg, 1988), and argues that several of these, such as the factors of productivity, are in themselves inadequate. For example, in Chapter 2, a key argument is that regions have different problems and types of competition, and being ‘competitive’ is not possible across all regions (Krugman, 2005). The chapter lays out the knowledge gaps and takes a practice view of competitiveness, arguably enabling this concept to become more relevant to exploring how practitioners’ perceive competitiveness.

Chapter-3, the research presents the need for a practice view of competitiveness as a novel way of approaching policy and practice. This chapter raises the possibility of breaking away from economic metaphors such as resources (Czarniawska, 2005, Carter et al., 2008a) and other Porterian methods of analysis, in order to explore the disconnect between policy and practice through the factors of capital as theorised by Bourdieu in explaining habitus: economic capital (the UK’s inherited economic and business structure, including the degree and type of specialisation, labour force skills and qualifications across the regions), social and cultural capital (knowledge, networks, connections and creativity of the social capital), and symbolic capital (cultural embeddedness in honour, prestige and recognition of the social capital). The case put forward is that the individual manufacturer has their unique space (environment) in which they compete, and in which decision making is related to their internal and external environment (social space or field). These manufacturing practitioners, whether

employed, self-employed or business owners, are constantly negotiating their position within their social field and hence have a direct impact on competitiveness policy. Chapter 3 thus explains how the research adopts a new approach of viewing competitiveness through the practice theory lens, reflecting the recent shift in mainstream strategy management literature away from a rational approach to a practice and/or activity based approach (Whittington, 2006, Johnson et al., 2003, Jarzabkowski and Wilson, 2006) that enables new ways of considering the social world to emerge (Langley and Abdallah, 2011).

Chapter-4 presents the methodological standpoint of the researcher and research design employed. Through a constructivist standpoint, the study comprises two distinct but interrelated methods of data collection. The first phase was the pilot study, intended to draw out the assumption identified in the literature review that the reductionist view of policy is inadequate in explaining a complex issue such as that of competitiveness in policy and practice. The pilot consisted of an online Delphi study and semi-structured interviews with a wide range of policy enablers (within manufacturing firms and Quangos at local/regional level). The second phase was the main study, consisting of semi-structured, face-to-face interviews with manufacturing practitioners across England. The chapter focused on the process of the main study, how the data was analysed, and the findings that emerged.

Chapter-5 presents the findings and discussion around the phase-1 pilot study in detail. The pilot study was exploratory in nature and traced the competitive agenda of the UK's manufacturing sector, as set out by the ministry of Business Innovation and Skills (BIS). It was during this exploratory phase that the scope of the research was verified, insofar as the data showed that general narratives on competitiveness tended to be reductionist in nature and employ a rationalistic approach. Furthermore, policy initiatives were disseminated with a top-down approach and policy targeted firms as a unit of analysis, which in the view of the study is problematic. The perception of competitiveness amongst government

based policy-enablers was focussed around growth and productivity and considered the firm as the basic economic unit. While manufacturing practitioners were more concerned with skills, training, enterprise culture, access to finance, trade barriers and so forth. Furthermore, the firms learning from the economic cycles and subsequent recessions ((Hauser, 2010, Rowley, 2011) necessarily did not want to grow but wanted to shrink and be competitiveness on their own grounds and perceptions. Thus warranting a need to assess what competitiveness means within the context of the United Kingdoms (UK) economic growth policy and how this interacts with firm level strategy of competitiveness (Simsek et al, 2003). This chapter paves the way for the second phase of the research by showing that by breaking away from the firm and focusing on the socio-cultural perspective of the individual manufacturing practitioner as a unit of analysis competitiveness becomes more relevant, and hence presents a novel way to analyse competitiveness.

Chapter-6 presents the analysis and discussion based on this novel way of interpreting the meaning of competitiveness. The chapter introduces the voices of the manufacturing practitioners and their perspectives on the ways in which they make sense of competitiveness. This is done by exploring the practitioners' habitus and reflexivity through the processes of sensemaking and self-legitimising. By doing so, the chapter emphasises that the lifelong experience (social and professional) of practitioners has an influence on how they perceive competitiveness. This then helps to address the research aim of how the manufacturing practitioner, through their everyday practices, perceives competitiveness. It is argued that becoming a manufacturing practitioner has a fundamental bearing on being competitive, thus laying the foundation for the theoretical framework of how competitiveness could become more relevant to policy and practice.

Chapter-7 theoretically underpins the concepts of habitus and reflexivity, drawing on Bourdieu's concepts of the field and capital to illustrate how manufacturing practitioners mediate the field of manufacturing and, by doing so, bring in their own perception of being competitive. The chapter also discusses, from the findings of the main study, how practitioners develop unique competitiveness strategies (in their respective field of practice) that may then hold implications for competitiveness strategies employed by various firms and policy initiatives alike.

Chapter-8, the penultimate chapter, connects the manufacturing practitioners' perceptions on competitiveness with policy, and draws out the connections and disconnects therein, as well as their key implications for policy and practice. The chapter argues that competitiveness cannot be seen as a 'fit-unfit' (Schoenberger, 1998) abstract concept.

Chapter-9 is the concluding chapter of this thesis. It presents a summary of the key findings of the research and the theoretical view of the study that competitiveness has three thresholds, each of which mitigate an understanding of policy. The chapter argues that the existing literature tells us how competitiveness should be practiced, whereas this research shows how it actually *is* practised. Rather, it is argued that competitiveness has three thresholds – survival mode, progressive mode and striving mode. These thresholds inform the position of the practitioner and their desire to be competitive. The chapter analyses these three modes in detail. Finally, chapter nine presents the key contributions of the present study, considers its limitations and the implications of those, and outlines a further research agenda.

Chapter 2 Competitiveness

2.1 Introduction

In examining the issue of competitiveness, research scholars represent an authoritative voice warranting a strong position that can shape policy and practice. The vast literature that exists on competitiveness has been used to develop policies, information and practices that, in turn, have proven a major force in shaping the actual experience of being competitive in the context of the manufacturing sector globally. This chapter examines the literature on competitiveness in three ways: firstly, by locating within it the manufacturing sector and its interpretation of competitiveness policy; secondly, by clarifying what is meant and understood by the word 'competitiveness' and its usage; and, third and finally, by exploring the determinants of becoming competitive. By using this approach, this chapter aims to deconstruct and make sense of the issues around competitiveness and its implications for policy and practice, thus responding to the core aim of this research, which is to examine how the manufacturing practitioner, through their everyday practices, perceives competitiveness. This is done in two chapters, this chapter (2) will locate manufacturing in the context of competitiveness and drawing conclusions as to the importance of manufacturing as being a key driver of productivity and growth in the competitiveness agenda. It will then go on to show the current narratives of policy on determining how policy perceives competitiveness. Chapter-3 will introduce the need for a practice view, and deconstruct how actually can the competitiveness debate benefit from a practice view.

2.2 Locating the rebalancing agenda in manufacturing

The British economic policy priorities as presented by the politicians, policymakers and practitioners alike in the past years has based around the narrative of rebalancing the economy. The motif behind the rebalancing rhetoric

is an attempt to frame the rationale of economic growth in publically accessible language and capture policy objectives across a range of fields. More recently the Conservatives' public discourse in advance of the 2010 and (recent) 2015 election 'rebalancing the economy' became a defining and central feature. In a speech in Manchester, George Osborne (Chancellor of the Exchequer) emphasised that rebalancing the UK economy was a government ambition (Osborne, 2014a). David Cameron the Prime Minister of UK in his election campaign said:

... my vision has always been of a truly balanced economy, one built to last ... one which is seen not just on the screens of the traders in the City of London... but in the great manufacturing plants of the West Midlands and North East...

From the plan for growth and economic balance, several priorities emerge from the plan, the discourse includes: reducing private debt, increasing private savings, increasing business investment, improving the trade balance, boosting sectors other than finance particularly manufacturing, and boosting regions other than London and the South East (Berry 2015). The coalition government spread the word steadily the need to boost the manufacturing sector. In 2011 the 'plan for growth' had singled out 'advanced manufacturing' as a priority but with limited success (Schwartz, 2015). Manufacturing itself in the UK has become increasingly unprofitable (Vogel et al., 2015, Berry, 2015) as the rebalancing agenda has little impact (Petitis, 2015).

The next section deals with manufacturing and positions it in the competitiveness narratives, by doing so, the issues with manufacturing competitiveness become relevant and worthy of investigation.

2.3 Locating manufacturing in competitiveness

Competitiveness, as a narrative (Chorianopoulos et al., 2014, Haar, 2014) is widely used in all aspects of social (Boland, 2014, Clegg et al., 2013), business (Minguillo et al., 2014) and government policy (Crafts, 2013, Congress, 2013). Manufacturing is seen as the key driver of economic growth (Tohmatsu, 2013, Crafts, 2013) having a vital part in the rebalancing of the economy (Davis et al., 2012, Gardiner et al., 2013). This research focuses on the use of ‘competitiveness’ in the manufacturing sector, where the concept has become the preferred referent of policy-makers with regard to delivering growth (Huggins et al., 2013), productivity (Camagni and Capello, 2013, Dunning, 2013) and socio-economic prosperity (Waheeduzzaman and Ryans Jr, 1996, Begg, 1999, Porter, 1985, Huggins and Thompson, 2012). This section explores the origins of manufacturing and its roots in British industrial heritage, and locates manufacturing within the discourse of competitiveness.

To begin with, it is useful to start with the question: what is manufacturing? In its broadest sense, manufacturing is the conversion of raw materials into a product. This process can be traced back to as early as the book of Genesis in the Bible (4:22), where Tubal-Cain refers to the person converting raw materials into products as a ‘smith’ who hand-made sharp tools (Creese, 1999, Mackenzie, 2008) and then used these tools to make (manufacture) products. The smith (or we may say the craftsman), would craft (make) products in what was known as the ‘workshop’ (Kalpakjian, 1995). Over time, this workshop has evolved into what is known today as the manufacturing firm. In essence, the manufacturing firm has been transforming raw materials into objects of purpose and usage since those earliest workshops, in that the craftsman adds value (Mital, 2008) to the raw materials that have been obtained from the local surrounding areas. In this way, the craftsman was able to provide himself, his family and the local community with a valuable service.

Originally, therefore, the purpose of the smith was two-fold: to provide a livelihood for himself and his family, and also to generate a source of income for the local community. Over the centuries, this role has, arguably, not changed significantly. Today's manufacturing firms have a knowledgeable team of craftsmen who are involved in many activities such as designing, materials selection, process selection, purchasing, and the production of quality tools and products that can then be marketed to 'best' suit the needs of their customers (Cohen and Zysman, 1987).

However, before the industrial revolution in the 19th century, the manufacturing of products was a limited trade and a viable livelihood for only a minority of skilled people as, for countless generations, most people had lived off the land and agriculture was the dominant way of making a living. The industrial revolution in the late 19th century then saw an unprecedented explosion of new ideas and technological inventions that transformed the landscape of the UK into the industrial powerhouse it became known as by the 20th century. Today, agriculture as a source of income and livelihood exists to a much lesser extent in the UK (Kirwan and Maye, 2013) as people have transformed themselves and adapted to this new way of making a living, also widely embracing the urban way of life.

This giant leap from a predominantly rural and agriculture-based economy to industrialisation and urbanisation was made possible by the use of key tertiary resources; namely, political, economic and intellectual might, which contributed to the success of the process of industrialisation and played a vital role in shaping the UK's subsequent wealth and position as one of the world's leading nations. The mass production of goods that were once handcrafted was a key factor in creating wealth and spreading prosperity more widely across the population.

2.3.1 The meaning of competitiveness and its usage

This section lays out the various definitions of competitiveness, firstly by explaining its root meaning, then going on to explain how the term has been used and defined at the micro, meso and macro levels. In the context of this thesis, the concept of the micro level refers to the firm-level usage of competitiveness by practitioners in the manufacturing sector the meso level is understood as the regional and industrial conceptual usage of competitiveness by policy makers to generate growth and productivity; and the macro level refers to the usage of competitiveness by policy makers at the national and international level, where countries or regions drive policy in order to create wealth and prosperity.

2.3.1.1 The word competitiveness

The word 'competitiveness' cannot be avoided; it is seen and used in all aspects of social life, work, sports, business, etc. (Fagerberg, 1996). In particular, 'competitiveness' has been a prominent theme of research and publication in the field of business and management for many decades (Chaudhuri and Ray, 1997). This section deconstructs the original meaning of the term.

The meaning of 'competitive' (as an adjective, where 'competitiveness' is a noun), according to the Oxford English Dictionary (OED) originated in the early 19th century from the Latin word 'competit', which means 'to strive for'. The OED explains 'competitive' to be 'relating to, characterised by, or based on competition' (for example, competitive sports). The OED further defines 'competitive' to mean 'inclined, desiring, or suited to compete' (for example, having a competitive personality). The word 'competitive' can also relate to something that is 'depending for effectiveness on the relative concentration of two or more substances' (for example, competitive resources). Considering these definitions, competitiveness can thus be seen as a multidimensional concept that holds different meanings to different people depending on the context. In the context of this research, it can be considered at three different but interrelated levels: country, industry and firm level (Ajitabh and Momaya, 2004). It can also be

seen to describe an important feature of the world's economy, as something that drives the distribution of wealth across the world (Martin, 2004).

2.3.2 The competitiveness turn to policy

In the 1950s, the UK was the second richest economy in Europe; however, by the 1970s it had slipped to being the seventh richest, by the 1980s to ninth, and by the 1990s to eleventh in Europe (Kitson and Michie, 1996). It has been argued that lack of incentives (Walker and Sharp, 1991), subsequent government failure (Pitelis, 1993, Cowling et al., 1999) to support the industry, and privatisation (North, 1993) were to blame. During the 1990s, the framework for policy development was based on economic performance and the continuous spiralling of the economy led to much debate on how to respond to the sluggishness of the manufacturing sector. Industrial policy was questioned with a view to reassessing its effectiveness vis-à-vis a wider approach to tackling the economic downturn. The shift from supporting individual sectors to the manufacturing sector as a whole inferred that the new industrial policy should take a 'competitiveness turn' (Ketels, 2011) and include a broad range of measures aiming to create the optimum conditions to stimulate growth (Porter and Van der Linde, 1995).

Current policy initiatives are largely made up of 'new' science and technological applications (Tassey, 2014, Dumont et al., 2014, Galvin and Goracinova, 2014) such as bio/medical/life sciences, microtechnology and manufacturing, to name but a few. Strategic policies and plans reflect the relative strengths and comparative advantage (physically and virtually) in science and knowledge infrastructure that a location or company has based on its proximity to universities, research labs and industrial hubs (Evans, 2009). Such complexities still make it unclear how countries themselves compete with one another (Krugman, 1994, Cheshire and Gordon, 1998, Begg, 1999, Polenske, 2004).

Towards the end of the twentieth century the word 'competitiveness' had become firmly linked the economic policy and markets impartial behaviour

(Conner, 1991). This echoed the theory of Adam Smith, for whom the concept of competition was related to winning and losing; for example, if a trade is not making a profit, it will lose its position and ability to trade. Unless it is able to improve its performance, a firm's market position becomes untenable and is not fit to survive; hence, it will ultimately 'cease to exist' (Krugman, 1994). In other words, competitiveness can be seen as a win-or-lose proposition (Wilson, 2008). Despite the fact that issues around national competitiveness have constituted part of public policy for many decades, with this being a key phenomenon in understanding the distribution of wealth both nationally and globally, the phenomenon of competitiveness itself is still ill-defined (Waheeduzzaman and Ryans Jr, 1996, Begg, 1999, Porter, 1985, Boland, 2014) and problematic (Morgan, 2014).

2.3.3 The UK's manufacturing landscape

Prior to the 1960s, the UK's industrial structure included a high degree of vertical integration and specialisation, where the distribution of intermediate and final products relied upon a well-developed market mechanism (Elbaum and Lazonick, 1984, Wardley, 1991). Firms tended to be small in size and mostly owner-proprietor or family run (Spence et al., 2000, Spence and Rutherford, 2001, Spence and Schmidpeter, 2003, Hudson, 2011, Hudson, 1992).

Since the end of the European colonial age in the 1960s and onwards, overall levels of productivity in manufacturing have sharply increased worldwide (Lucas, 2000b). While the UK in the 1960s was enjoying its new found wealth and prosperity, competition from other countries began to unfold. Countries like Germany, the USA and the Soviet Union were catching up with more abundant and cheaper supplies of energy and raw materials, thus creating serious competition to the UK's stronghold as the key exporter of manufactured goods. In other words, the markets were playing their role according to Adam Smith's theory. The UK's economic growth rapidly lost steam within sectors such as arable farming, textiles, iron and steel, and engineering, with several consumer

goods seeing the worst decline. In particular, the coal mining sector, textiles and steel mills that once dominated the industrial horizon were no longer seen.

After the 1960s, the role of the firm in the UK saw a dramatic shift, with both public and private sector investors wearied by the problems they faced in industrial actions, low productivity, and cheaper and better imports. With manufacturing firms divesting from a heavy reliance on in-house productivity to relying on external supply chains, the era of competing with other market players evolved from local competition to the global stage. Following this dramatic shift, industrial policy came to prominence in the 1980s. This moved away from rent-switching industrial growth policy to a more investment-driven policy, where productivity growth depended on investment in tangible and intangible capital such as education, skills, technology, infrastructure and innovation (Crafts, 2012, Krugman, 1987, Krugman and Venables, 1990), with the public and private sectors working together to achieve this growth (Porter, 1998d, Porter, 1986, Porter, 1990b, Freedman and Stonecash, 1997). Productivity performance was also measured through various policies (conduct), such as pricing policy, research and development (R&D) and investment policy (Porter, 1980, Teece, 1993).

With these shifts, the format of craft manufacturing, which still exists today (Stinchcombe, 1959, Bartholdi and Eisenstein, 2005), has necessarily evolved. It began as a trade where craftsmen would individually make or produce a single piece of work or object (Rolstadås et al., 2012). This became less viable when the twentieth century saw a rise in demand for cheaper, larger quantities of produce (Gahan, 1991), and the rise of mass production/volumes of all types of products including cars, ships, airplanes, needles, writing instruments, crockery, utensils, and myriad others (Duray, 2002). Resource allocation, productivity and efficiency became the key focus for firms. The focus also shifted towards profitability and efficiency; with the help of technological advancements and the development of production systems (Alsmadi et al., 2012) (such as Lean Manufacturing), the

culture of combining high volume with high quality became steadily embedded in firms' strategic objectives (Pavnaskar et al., 2003, MacBryde et al., 2013).

With firms encountering growing opportunities to enter into mature markets with customised products, new business models evolved, aided by extensive empirical and theoretical studies (Piller, 2004, Kaplan and Haenlein, 2006). By the mid-1970s and 1980s, a critical mass of firms was drawn towards wider issues than profitability alone; namely, the external environment in which the firms operated was becoming a very important part of the equation. In particular, sustainability – in terms of how firms used and allocated resources – became a topical issue as firms' decisions regarding resource usage needed also to meet wider societal and environmental agendas (Jovane, 2008). Firms ultimately needed not only to be concerned with their product and the specific processes involved in manufacturing, but with their entire supply chain, including the manufacturing systems across multiple product life-cycles (Jayal et al., 2010).

Towards the end of the twentieth century, UK policy rhetoric shifted in line with changing needs to identify the real role of manufacturing in its economy. Manufacturing matters (Howes and Singh, 2010, Helper et al., 2012, Morton et al., 2013) and contributed to one in seven British jobs, and to two-thirds of exports through a service led economy, as Dyson wrote (2004). Dyson argued that manufacturing was still at the centre of economic activities, but in a different way. He went on to say that the actual manufacturing of products does not have to be done within UK borders, but can be conducted across the global value chain (BERR, 2008). However, he also emphasised that the real value was in idea generation, research and development, technological development, and advances in branding and marketing, all of which should remain in the UK, thus arguably blurring the boundaries of the traditional manufacturing firm³.

³ However, the Dyson group has moved its manufacturing to China (POLITICS, B. 2011. Cameron urges economy 'rebalance' to restore growth.

The future of manufacturing lies in ‘advanced manufacturing technologies’ (Davis et al., 2012). The BIS Growth Review has described the advanced manufacturing as that part of the manufacturing sector which is knowledge and capital intensive (Emons, 2013); usage of high levels of technology and R&D and intangible investments to support innovation (O’Sullivan et al., 2013). This requires a flexible workforce with strong specialist skills in the areas of science, technology, engineering and mathematics and design (Borras and Edquist, 2014, Iammarino et al., 2013); to compete in international and domestic markets (Lockyer and McCabe, 2011, Girma et al., 2013).

It is clear that the meaning and enacting of manufacturing has undergone significant transitions in the UK context and globally, particularly within the last century. In policy terms, the emphasis has shifted from understanding and promoting industrial growth to an explicit focus on competitiveness and how it can best be harnessed to the benefit of the manufacturing sector and its role in boosting the UK economy as a whole. The following section examines the way in which ‘competitiveness’ itself has been constructed and used.

2.4 Meaning-making of Competitiveness

Three fundamental arguments arise in making sense of competitiveness. First competitiveness takes a corporate view in policy. Second, after the popularity of Porter’s cluster theories, regions became a key player in competitiveness strategies, however, the rhetoric is still the same and the view from which competitiveness is viewed still remains corporatist. Thirdly, national competitiveness is much murkier. The globalization of economies, free flow of finance across borders, cross border movement of skills and decentralization of policy has made competitiveness boundaries much fuzzy and further complicating the key determinants / factors for growth and productivity. The following sections will unpack the issues around competitiveness and draw conclusions as to why it is necessary to understand competitiveness from a

different perspective and how by taking a practitioner's view on competitiveness, competitiveness may become more relevant for policy and practice.

2.4.1 Manufacturing policy: a corporatist approach

Small, local firms have been seen as 'the economic core' (Kirchhoff, 1994) of a country's economy, as well as a source of employment and social good (Thurik and Wennekers, 2004). Not only do they create economic wealth, but current governments see them as a mechanism to confront rising unemployment, job creation and international competitiveness in their respective regions and the global market. In this sense, firms are key drivers of competitiveness:

Competitiveness is primarily a firm-level concept; any understanding of the determinants of competitiveness must begin at that level. (Asian Development Bank, 2004)

The determinants of firms' competitiveness are based around three sets of interrelated factors: product, cost, and users' perception about the match between the product/service and their needs (Chaudhuri and Ray, 1997). Competitiveness of a firm is measured through its ability to export goods and services; for example, the House of Lords' select committee on overseas trade (HMSO, 1985) defines competitiveness as the following:

Competitiveness is synonymous with a firm's long-run profit performance and its ability to compensate its employees and provide superior returns to its owners.

When it comes to competitiveness policy-making the UK policy-makers do not distinguish between national and firm level competitiveness (Chaudhuri and Ray, 1997) and consider competitiveness to be the ability to produce better than other firms the right goods or services of right quality, at the right price and the right time. It means meeting customers' needs more effectively and more efficiently than other firms (ibid).

A key source of guidance in conceptualising competitiveness for firm and policy strategists alike has been Porter's seminal work on local competitiveness and, in particular, his 'diamond model', which is grounded in microeconomic theory (Martin and Sunley, 2003). Porter's works originate from a business and management tradition, which focuses on developing and formalising competitiveness strategies of the firm. Porter in his book "Competitive Advantage of Nations" in 1990 aimed at determining a link between the extant academic literature in strategic management and international economics and unravels the basis for developing national policies on competitive advantage. Porter argues that firm's primary purpose is to grow and suggests that firms in order to grow must gain competitive advantage over rival firms by putting effort into strategies that will enable the firm to gain advantage over competition. He suggested that certain firms were able to implement better strategies than other firms. The book theoretically linked the strategies with firm's competitive advantage by identifying the elements that determine the competitive advantage. Through the 'diamond model' Porter identified four country specific 'determinants' that interacted together to shape the competitive environment, these were factor conditions, demand conditions, related and supporting industries and firm strategy, structure, and competition as the decisive factors. Porter linked two external variables to the diamond model namely: chance and government. These determinants interacted together to shape the environment in which local firms compete and promote or impede the creation of competitive conditions.

Factor conditions are explained as the nation's factors of production, including natural resources and created factors, such as infrastructure and skilled labour. Demand conditions are the nature of home demand for products or services and the degree of sophistication of buyers. Whereas, related and supporting industries are the presence or absence of supplier and related industries that, themselves, are internationally competitive. The fourth determinant is firm strategy, structure and rivalry which means the domestic rivalry of firms and the

conditions governing how companies are created, organized and manage (see Porter, 1990, p. 71).

Porter stresses an element of concentration (or clustering of these determinants) of firms in a particular area facilitates the work of the 'diamond', and therefore promotes local and regional competition (Porter, 2000a). A further component of the diamond includes the presence of capable, locally based suppliers, and competitive related industries. Lastly, the presence of sophisticated and demanding local customers encourages companies to maintain continuous product and process innovation (Porter, 2000a). However, these resources and 'dynamic capabilities' are exposed to external factors that could erode their advantage (Mintzberg and Waters, 1985). Dynamic capabilities are seen to be temporal in nature (D'Aveni et al., 2010) and thus difficult to sustain over a long period of time. This, in turn, makes existing models of strategy inadequate in enabling firms to compete in the existing environment (Friesl and Larty, 2012).

Physical assets (resources) and capabilities enable a firm to improve its competitiveness. The assets of a firm are also the knowledge of the employees working in the firm (Miller, 1983) and are a key resource (in the form of social capital). However, these resources are less empirically verifiable as they consist of interpersonal relations between various agents in varying complex business interactions (Chen et al., 2007) posing challenges (Reed et al., 2006), such as individual trust amongst agents (Praxmarer-Carus, 2013). Given these factors, the inclusion of social as well as human capital (employees' skills and knowledge) in this thesis' study of the firm will provide additional insight into how firms can gain or sustain a competitive advantage.

Moving from firm level to regional level, Porter, for example, compares firm level competitiveness to regional level competitiveness. Governments, in Porter's view, create the market conditions to allow firms to exploit each regional

economy's competitive advantage. Specifically, Porter (2002) argues that regional competitiveness and productivity are equivalent terms:

A region's standard of living (wealth) is determined by the productivity with which it uses its human, capital, and natural resources. The appropriate definition of competitiveness is productivity.

Here Porter emphasises that the productivity of a region is set ultimately by the productivity of the firms that exist within it. He delineates a clear connection between productivity and regional living standards by arguing that productivity has a major influence on the cost of living, the cost of doing business and the level of wages in a region. However, he falls short of implying that regional competitiveness and regional prosperity are equivalent notions (Bristow, 2005).

As this section has discussed, there have been varying conceptualisations of what it means for firms to be competitive at local and regional level. Furthermore, Porter's analysis of productivity and standard of living of the people within a region are difficult to connect and relate. Porter's work, in particular, has played an important role in the conceptualisation of micro-economic, productivity and output-related theory of regional competitiveness, hence, leaving a gap that how people relate to productivity when it comes to standard of living.

The UK government takes a liberal-market stance (Ellison, 2014, Konzelmann and Fovargue-Davies, 2013) to firms governance, expecting that firms fend for themselves (Pearce et al., 2009). In other words, the UK government has adopted a 'corporatist' approach to helping independent firms compete such as the rebalancing of the economy (BIS, 2010) will achieve results and firms will engage with policy. These engagements will ultimately developing a competitive market environment within the UK. However, it has been shown that not all manufacturing firms engage with policy. Numerous studies conducted around

competitiveness policies and practice agree that national competitiveness and individual firm performance need to link together better as they are not already sufficiently linked, in contrast to government policy makers' assumptions (Francis, 1992, Bobillo et al., 2010, Griffiths and Zammuto, 2005, Parker, 2008, Parker and Hine, 2013). Government policy has largely been seen as broad-brushed across sectors, with a lack of academic research on its actual effects on practice (Pearce et al., 2009) and focus is on new ventures and start-up firms (Mason and Brown, 2013).

While various scholars have debated the implications of competitive policies, most of them have positioned themselves within the socio-economic framework, thus advocating both societal and economic benefits. To integrate socio-economic factors into policy, the EU policy on productivity and growth emphasises full employment as a measure of growth (Commission, 1994). However, the UK has neglected to establish full employment as a target (Oughton, 1997). Oughton (1997) argued that 'the difference between the two policies can be reduced to the level at which competitiveness is applied or measured'. This slight difference in the underpinning of employment as a matter of priority makes the firm level policy much clearer, as it can achieve such competitiveness through adjusting its variable costs such as labour. However, at the national level governments cannot adjust their books by downsizing jobs. The key factor underpinning the difference between the UK's and EU's approach is the fact that the EU considers the wider issue of 'standard of living' a priority, within which having employment is integral to this standard, while the UK does not give priority to unemployment.

Competitiveness as central to standard of living has also been highlighted at global level. For example, the aim of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) as stated in Article 1 of the convention signed in Paris on 14th December 1960, and enforced on 30th September 1961, emphasises that their policies will be designed to:

Achieve the highest sustainable economic growth and employment and a rising standard of living in member countries, while maintaining financial stability, and thus to contribute to the development of the world economy.

The most common measure of standard of living (or living standards) is per capita income: 'income per person in an economy varies directly with one measure of labour productivity, value added per hour worked, in this sense, measuring labour' (OECD, 2001). Within microeconomics, standard of living is associated with choice and the efficient use of scarce material resources, where all choices involve trade-offs. It is argued that the individual's perception of policy will evaluate these trade-offs and arrive at the choice that may suit them most (as in the case of the manufacturing practitioner). As people have different skills, characteristics and attributes, and live in different situations, they may need different levels and types of resources (both economic and others) in order to achieve a given level of capability. In this view, therefore, the efficient use of scarce resources is a key element of ensuring that people can participate in productive activities⁴.

It has been argued that competitive advantage, and indeed competitiveness as a whole, occurs only through market conditions which are imperfect (Durand and Giorno, 1987, Durand et al., 1998) and hence limit practitioners direct implementation of policy owing to the conflicting agendas of the practitioner. Pearce (2009) argues that governmental effects on management and organisational practice are problematic in two major ways. Firstly, governmental influence is overly generalised across sectors; secondly, the effects of governments on organisational and management practices has not made its way into mainstream intellectual work. With the first problem, Pearce argues that

⁴ see: SEN, A. 2004. Elements of a theory of human rights. *Philosophy & Public Affairs*, 32, 315-356. for a detailed explanation of how standard of living is associated with the capabilities discourse.

there is no coherent understanding of the specific mechanisms whereby governments impact organisations and their management. With regard to the second issue, he emphasises that the literature on organisational theory has concentrated mainly in a decontextualised way on organisational outcomes that are solely the result of market, technical, or interpersonal considerations (ibid) missing out the connection between policy and standard of living. (Rahm, 1994) of the people it should be benefiting.

2.4.2 Competitiveness of a region

Regions are becoming a key arena for wealth production and economic governance (Scott, 1999, Porter, 1998b). Since the early 1990s, UK policy makers have accepted the concept of regional competitiveness (Strange, 1998, Scott, 1999). The UK Government has made it a priority that local regions have the responsibility for making their regions competitive (Commons, 2000) and considers regional competitiveness a vital component of the economy.

During the 1980s, theories of economic development began to consider knowledge as an important factor of productivity. The economic policy of the 1980s shifted away from a welfare state paradigm towards the liberal market paradigm, with a focus on competitive advantage (Stimson and Stough, 2009) of industrial clusters (Krugman, 1997, Porter, 2008). The change also implied a shift from sectoral to territorial approaches in regional policies (Shucksmith, 2000). The territorial approach emphasised a bottom-up style of governance in which local knowledge and local preferences would guide regional policy making (Stimson and Stough, 2009).

Porter (1990) introduced the concept of national and regional competitiveness within the context of a global economy. He explained that a group of localised cities or regions (or close proximity countries) could group together to become a cluster, where the sharing of resources and capabilities can be accumulated to

develop a stronger and more competitive marketplace that can then compete within the global market. Porter clarifies the meaning of 'clusters' as:

Geographic concentrations of interconnected companies, specialised suppliers and service providers, firms in related industries, and associated institutions (example universities, standards agencies, and trade associations) in particular fields that compete but also cooperate. (2000b)

He further clarifies this concept by saying that:

A cluster is a geographically proximate group of interconnected companies and associated institutions in a particular field, linked by commonalities and complementarities. (Porter 2000b, p. 16)

A region's competitive advantage is dependent on localised clusters of specialised export-orientated industries, and associated supporting supplier and institutional networks. This enables firms to compete amongst themselves which, in turn, increases local productivity. It has also been argued that a well-developed and regionally embedded set of formal and informal institutions, including business, trade associations, educational and training institutions, as well as entrepreneurial culture, civic trust and other forms of social capital, all with a common sense of purpose, provide a highly favourable environment for economic development and expansion (Martin, 2005).

According to Porter, cluster development is made possible by giving importance to local external economies associated with the surrounding group of economic activity. The local clusters that are able to export their goods and services (through a pool of specialised labour, dedicated suppliers, and networks of supporting institutions) to other surrounding clusters because of their industrial specialisation, are thus key to regional success. Common grouping, or similar

clusters of similar and related firms, generates various external economies that are sources of increasing productivity for the firms. The over-capacity of one cluster leads to the inward-spill of skills, dedicated suppliers and network of institutions to provide their resources to corresponding clusters within the region. However, this can take several years to develop and requires a combination of government investment in infrastructure, communications, transport and education, to name a few key elements (Boschma, 2004). Given that the development of clusters is so highly investment intensive, various regions and nations compete for specific local or foreign direct investment (FDI). Thus it is impossible for all regions to equally develop and gain from the opportunity of a cluster (Boschma, 2004).

Social capital in terms of local attitudes, traditions, and forms of social association, is also emphasised in the making of competitive regions, although this is more difficult to measure and identify (Fine, 2002, Casey, 2004). Fine and Casey argue that cultural accounts play a significant role in regional development by having an open and diverse cultural base that promotes creativity, and helps to develop a 'creative class' (Florida, 2002).

The UK government has focused on the competitiveness of its regions, cities and, more recently, city-regions, as part of its aim to improve the productive and innovative performance of the national economy as a whole (Martin, 2005). The key policy areas that influence regional competitiveness here are: macro-economy, education and training, labour market, innovation, management, fair and open markets, finance for business, communications and infrastructure, the commercial framework, and, finally, the business of government and public procurement (Dunning, 1998, Sklair, 1998, Bailey, 2003, Lucas, 2000a, Amable and Petit, 1996).

The globalisation of economies has shifted the emphasis away from national (single country) to regional-level competitiveness (Krugman, 1997, Porter, 2008),

where regions are understood to be clusters, as in the Porterian view. The success of a region can be seen as having a tradable base from where productivity and technological advances are stimulated (Rowthorn and Ramaswamy, 1999). A region that is able to attract educated and skilled human capital is a key source of local economic growth that leads to high-valued growth and a knowledge-base (Martin and Sunley, 2003). Hence, an emphasis on education and skills is seen as a mechanism to accumulate skilled and knowledgeable workers (Martin and Sunley, 2003). These workers enable regions to gain from new product development and efficient processes through innovation and entrepreneurship. In addition, local economic specialisation through rivalry between similar and competing firms, or local economic diversity, enable regions to become productive and gain a competitive advantage (Martin, 2006).

The transition to a 'Single European Market' suggests that cost savings owing to higher value added productivity will create opportunities not only for the firms operating in the single market, but will also enhance productivity in the long-run (Steinle, 1992), as well as the general well-being of the region (Camagni, 2002). However, this transition may also mean that uncompetitive regions that cannot sustain high growth and continuous innovation will lose out on opportunities to grow (Martin, 2005), that unemployment will rise in the in less industrially astute regions, and that standards of living in these regions will be affected. There is no consensus on how within a single market regions will compete with each other, or no single all-encompassing theoretical or conceptual framework for analysing regional competitive performance (Martin, 2005). For Krugman, the term 'competitiveness' is another way for policy makers to discuss international trade: 'the debate over competitiveness is simply a matter of time-honoured fallacies about international trade being dressed up in new and pretentious rhetoric' (1996).

The internal dynamics of regional clusters has also been widely debated. For example, Martin and Sunley (2003) relay Porter's argument that, within a global

economy where transportation, communication, and market accessibility are no longer an issue, competitive advantage is localised and concentrated due to the increased concentration of a highly skilled workforce and knowledge, institutions, rivalry, related businesses and sophisticated customers. The OECD, too, recognises the difficulty of defining regional competitiveness, based on the fact that most regions in OECD countries were production centres which were increasingly losing out to lower-cost locations, and were thus realigning their strategic activities to higher value-added non-manufacturing industries, or R&D-intensive manufacturing niches (Maguire and Davies, 2007). The OECD regional cluster report emphasises the need for regions to develop policies by linking firms, people and knowledge at a regional level, as a way of making regions more innovative and competitive (Maguire and Davies, 2007).

The UK's growth policy has typically focused on employment and output, and used principle instruments such as fiscal and exchange rates as mechanisms of competitiveness (Cripps and Godley, 1976). Government policy supports entrepreneurship (Storey, 1993) and allocate resources towards encouraging the growth of the newly formed firms (Jennings and Beaver, 1995). The declining manufacturing base of cities (Tallon, 2009) across the UK has created a challenge for the policy makers to strike the right balance between the availability of resources in the form of labour, finance and infrastructure to support the efforts of the Government, and the need to still be seen as driving a culture of long-term sustainable (Aiginger, 2006) free market economy, creating employment and improving the living standards of its people, to name a few expectations. Aiginger (1998) emphasises that a dynamic evaluation of the competitiveness of nations must be done with respect to the ultimate goals of these nations; namely, to increase the wellbeing of its people. Aiginger's argument is that countries are not big businesses and that the social responsibility of a country is not the same as a business that purely aims to maximise profits and shareholder value. This understanding has led to an ideological shift from macro-level to micro-level (Porter, 1996, Porter et al., 2007) policy making, with more emphasis on social

capital engagement (Johnson et al., 2009), where micro-level firms are encouraged to participate and engage in the agenda (Metcalf and Georghiou, 1997). This method of engagement embraces the notion that society at large needs to be involved in the shaping of competitiveness (Johnson et al., 2009, Birch, 2006, Nunn, 2006). Within this approach, the main drivers of policy are free market conditions (Thomas, 1994), and 'knowledge-intensive' and 'high-valued service' clusters (Lloyd and Payne, 2006, Pitelis, 2009). However, social capital engagement as a bottom-up approach of engaging the public in the decision-making process (Saxby, 1996) creates its own challenges, namely the conflicting agendas at local, regional and national levels, such as between community representatives (bureaucrats and politicians), regional administrators, and Whitehall policy makers.

Michael Storper (1997) presents another way of considering regional competitiveness. He places the microeconomic (firm level) and macroeconomic (economy level) at equal footings. Storper defines regional competitiveness as the capability of a region to enable firms to keep a stable or increased level of market share in the firm's chosen activity, while at the same time maintaining a stable or increased standard of living for its employees (and wider stakeholders) that take part in the competitiveness agenda (output related competition). This definition is a direct application of a 'national competitiveness definition' and that adopted by the OECD, reflecting the same global competitiveness agenda promoted by the Porterian School of thought but shaped by national and international policy discourse (Bristow, 2005).

2.4.3 Competitiveness of a nation

The word 'competitiveness' in policy was made popular partly by Bill Clinton's famous analogue that each nation is like 'a big corporation competing in the global marketplace' (Krugman, 1997). However, the term is still controversial and lacks a coherent definition at national or macro level. This section examines the literature covering the major definitions of competitiveness that have been used

in this context. Jones and Teece (1988) mention three definitions of national competitiveness that regularly appear in the literature:

Competitiveness is the ability of an economy's GNP⁵ and GNP⁶ per capita to grow as fast as another major economy.

Competitiveness is the degree to which a nation, in a world of open markets, produces goods and services that meet the tests of the market place while simultaneously expanding GNP and GNP per capita at least as fast as any other major trading economy.

Competitiveness is the degree to which a nation can, under free and fair market conditions, produce goods and services that meet the tests of international markets while simultaneously maintaining or expanding the real income of its citizens.

The above definitions are based on free market conditions and the inherent assumptions that growth is vital to the economy of a country, and that, in order to grow, nations must increase productivity. When comparing productivity between two nations, it is not easy to measure one country's growth from the other as each country may have different levels of productivity (Heap, 2007). For example, the ability of governments to collect reliable productivity numbers for some service sectors in any given country can be a problem. As Cohen argues:

“a near-exclusive focus on productivity has some dangers and problems [...] because national productivity data have technical

⁵ GNP: Gross National Product. This is the total value of all final goods and services produced annually by a nation.

⁶ GDP: Gross Domestic Product. This is the sum of the market value of all final goods and services produced in a country in a given period (European Parliament, 2009, Policy Department: Economic and Scientific Policy).

difficulties that radically reduce the reliability of the numbers”
(Cohen, 1994, p. 196)

Another example would be that of services provided ‘cash in hand’ that cannot be priced and taxed, making productivity calculation impossible. Furthermore, it becomes even more problematic to compare the service productivities between two countries at different stages of development. For example, how can the productivity of a factory labourer in Bangladesh be measured in relation to his/her counterpart doing a similar job in the UK? Does a Bangladeshi factory worker improve his/her productivity by moving from Bangladesh to the UK where the minimum wages are 20 times than his/her previous income for the same kind of factory job? High relative or absolute productivity levels do not necessarily lead to competitiveness (Reinert, 1995, p. 24). Reinert explains that, although it is difficult to be competitive if you have low productivity or efficiency, he argues that it is not obvious that the most efficient producer of an internationally traded product makes a country competitive in the sense of enabling a rising standard of living; in reality, some very efficient producers and nations are desperately poor (ibid). For example, while Bangladesh is highly productive in garments manufacturing, the living standards of its people are very low. Therefore, it is arguably not the productivity or efficiency but the kind of production that makes a nation competitive.

These tensions around the definition of competitiveness have been acknowledged in the literature; for example, Porter (1998c, 1985) states that that there is no one accepted definition, asserting that ‘the only meaningful concept of competitiveness at the national level is national productivity.’ Porter (1990) argues against using the balance of trade indicators as measures of competitiveness of a nation, and underplays the role of macroeconomic variables such as exchange rate as sources of competitiveness. According to Porter, to understand a nation’s prosperity or its national competitiveness is to measure the high and rising standard of living of citizens. However, as stated earlier, the

underlying principle of measuring the progress of a nation is primarily done by measuring one's national productivity.

This is reflected in internationally sanctioned language, such as that used by the OECD, which defines competitiveness as:

“The degree to which, under open market conditions, a country can produce goods and services that meet the test of foreign competition while simultaneously maintaining and expanding domestic real income”. (1992)

Similarly, Porter's view (quoted in Blaine 1993) on national competitiveness as the:

“National competitiveness as ability to produce and distribute products and/or services that can compete in international markets, and simultaneously increase the real incomes and living standards of the nation's citizens” (Blaine, 1993, p. 24)

According to the International Institute for Management Development's (IMD) World Competitiveness Yearbook, the primary definition of competitiveness relates to ‘how nations and enterprises manage the totality of their competencies to achieve prosperity or profit’ (Garelli, 1995, Garelli, 2003). Garelli further states that:

“Competitiveness of nations is a field of economic theory, which analyses the fact and policies that shape the ability of a nation to create and maintain an environment that sustains more value creation for its enterprises and more prosperity for its people” (2003)

Scott (1985) provides a more specific (USA) example of a national-level definition of competitiveness, which echoes these motifs:

“National competitiveness refers to a nation state’s ability to produce, distribute, and service goods in the international economy in competition with goods and services produced in other countries, and to do so in a way that earns a rising standard of living”

The World Economic Forum (WEF) and the IMD place significant emphasis on free markets as enabling the business environment of any country. Although the addition of ‘real income’ or standards of living is used, the implicit definition of competitiveness that is conveyed is that it is an economic measure (Chesnais, 1986 in: Papadakis, 1994) of productivity. In these definitions, competitiveness is seen as being a key determinant of a country’s economic growth.

Porter, in his seminal work *‘Competitive Advantage of Nations’*, describes how countries, regions and firms can drive their economies through exploiting factors such as labour endowments, national resources, and investing in products, services and innovation. In the UK, the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS, 2003) has embraced these Porterian concepts and measures competitiveness through determinants such as productivity, employment and labour market participation (Porter, 2008). Like the UK, other countries, too, have been seen as competing for this competitive ‘fitness’ by jumping on the bandwagon (Krugman, 1987) without a real sense of direction and how policy enhances socio-economic prosperity (Begg, 1999). Whereas it can be argued that countries competitiveness is measured by the strength of its industry. According to Papadakis:

“The single most important criterion of national competitiveness is the strength of these firms compared to foreign firms within domestic markets” (1994)

2.4.4 Competitiveness and the EU agenda

With the formation of the EU, competitiveness in the UK context has taken on a far wider meaning when it comes to regional competitiveness. The UK, as part of the EU along with its local and regional policies, now needs to consider the wider concepts of the EU when practicing competitiveness. Competitiveness as a strategy is rooted in the EU policy framework and is underlined by three key words: ‘competitiveness, cohesion, and subsidiarity’ (De Propriis, 2007, Rivolin, 2005, Wishlade, 1996, Spence, 2012, Cellino and Soci, 2012). The micro economic element of the strategy is mainly channelled through two sets of policies: enterprise policies (comprising innovation policy, industrial policy, entrepreneurship and SME policy, internal market policy and sustainable development policy), and cohesion policy, which relates to the integration of regions across the EU (Pollack, 2000, De Propriis, 2007). However, the cohesion policy is fragmented and scattered across the EU in a way that makes it confusing for policy makers and policy enablers to follow and implement, creating difficulties in the socio-economic convergence and competitiveness (Spence, 2012) that creates jobs, economic growth, and improves quality of life.

Subsidiarity is another important factor within the competitiveness debate here, and is a principle component of the EU. It was introduced by the Treaty of Maastricht and has been used and seen as a way of encouraging decision making (policy) at the regional and local level within the EU (Regent, 2003, Jouen, 2008). As a reflection of this, the Local Economic Partnerships (LEPs) in the UK have replaced the Regional Development Authorities (RDAs), taking on the role of empowering local communities and councils to deliver economic growth, increased productivity levels and, in turn, competitiveness to the regions (Pugalis, 2011, Harrison, 2011, Pugalis, 2012, Pemberton and Lloyd, 2011).

Wealth creation across the EU is driven through cluster formations (regional clusters of high valued growth). It is believed that market imperfections within these formations over time generate wealth by lowering prices (i.e. the cost of manufacturing) and thus creating a balance between the competing regions. This, then, increases flows of funds across regions and aids the social integration of cross-border societies within the EU, spreading wealth and social cohesion (Reinert, 1995). In reality, however, this has not yet occurred. The cluster policies have created pockets of wealth and a concentration of production, with governments supporting 'easy wins' from among those firms and opportunities that can enhance the growth agenda, at the peril of low performing or less growing firms (Reinert, 1995).

2.5 The determinants of becoming competitive

What makes a firm competitive, and what are the inherent challenges within this process? It can be argued that the firm, as a conceptual entity, has kept the same basic format and purpose it was created for; that is, serving its stakeholders. At practice level, firms have adapted and transformed according to what 'their' perception and understanding of competitiveness is, which will itself be further explored as a central element of this study.

While building a quality product is a critical part of being competitive in the global economy (Flynn et al., 2010), it is not enough. The manufacturing marketplace in the new economy no longer requires a good quality product – it 'demands' it. Today, manufacturing firms must be geared towards building products that meet or exceed customer expectations. In some cases, firms are far ahead of the customer and develop ground breaking competitive products that shape and influence customer perceptions. Many firms have embraced the global changes and have re-evaluated their business strategies to address this competitiveness, particularly in relation to threats faced by emerging low-cost suppliers (Zammuto and O'Connor, 1992, Piercy, 2012). As one commentator argues, the very purpose

of a firm is to seize competitive opportunities by creating or adopting innovations that make rivals' positions obsolete: 'the firm exists to achieve welfare-enhanced objectives through market imperfections' (Conner, 1991). In order to survive in this new competitive environment, some firms have had to diversify into other areas of business away from manufacturing (such as to trading, distribution, services, etc.), while others have had to shut down their operations altogether, namely those that have not been able to cope with market dynamics, which in many cases has resulted in the loss of both white and blue collar jobs. This is not only troubling for the business owners but has ramifications for the wider communities and supply chain within which they perform their business activities.

Firms that have embraced the globalisation of economies have improved their market share (Knight, 2000, Bayo-Moriones et al., 2013, Freeman and Styles, 2014) by selling products and services within the global economy with successful results (Negoita, 2013). However, some firms have not adapted to the full extent, and have been achieving success within the parameters of their own perceptions of growth and competitiveness. This is the case in the small and medium enterprise (SME) manufacturing sector operating in the UK.

The UK government's rhetoric is that manufacturing confidence is slowly and progressively growing (Zhang, 2013); however the same level of confidence is less evident at practitioner level (Clements, 2010, O'Brien, 2013). Manufacturing firms for the past three decades have experienced first-hand the rapid increase of flow of trade across borders, with the bottom-line of profit maximisation and higher outputs being the key performance measure (Oakley, 2011, Mulderrig, 2011). This flow has been achieved via the de-unionisation of the labour force, reductions in tariffs, and regulations enabling the easy flow of capital. The key notion fuelling these major shifts has been that freedom for capital, goods and services with inbuilt self-regulations can naturally balance supply and demand, and ultimately improve wealth distribution. In other words, a market-based

economy has been encouraged, not just within the UK but globally. It has been perceived that sustainable economic growth would bring human prosperity, less government interference, greater advantage to underdeveloped countries, and privatisation of the public sector that would then remove so-called inefficiencies. While many since then have argued that these policies have not, in fact, brought about significant change to the UK's economy, or indeed to that on the world stage (Froud, 2011, Pessoa and Van Reenen, 2012, Bernard and Boucher, 2007), others have argued that these policies have helped to steer economic prosperity (Huggins and Thompson, 2012) for the benefit of the UK's citizens. However, subsequent recessions have eroded confidence of the general and adversely affected prosperity, and inspired a different policy approach towards competitiveness.

2.6 The determinants of being competitive

A competitive region is formed by having primary sources as core inputs that the region can use to exploit its advantage over other regions in terms of productivity and growth agenda. Inputs can include a well-educated local population as the result of a strong tradition of good local schooling; a local culture of entrepreneurship; natural advantages of climate or resources; and sustained public policy differences, such as differences in tax rates or quality of infrastructure (Krugman, 2005). These inputs then create the potential or the conditions for a region to produce certain outputs, such as growth, investment, and labour employed.

There is some confusion in understanding precisely which activity is working and which input the region is benefitting from. This is because the productivity (growth) as the primary sources (or inputs) of a region's competitiveness is seen as a key aggregate measure of revealed competitiveness (Treasury, 2001), where revealed competitiveness is the actual output that the region achieves by increasing its growth (or productivity). The confusion thus lies in distinguishing between inputs and outputs. The following sections deal with this distinction,

examining the dynamics between inputs and outputs, and how they relate to a region's competitiveness.

2.6.1 Regional competitiveness as inputs

A region's fundamental inputs are essentially specific to that locality, and embedded in non-tradable assets or endowments that are immobile between regions (Camagni, 2002). Inputs such as education, entrepreneurial culture and public infrastructure are linked to the competitiveness policy statement that drives the UK's competitiveness agenda. Single measures of competitiveness do not capture all the elements of the concept (Henricsson et al., 2004). For practitioners these measures have been seen as confusing, with the emphasis being rather prescriptive (Wren, 2004) and narrow (Wren, 2001) failing to explain how and what to do at the practitioner level. In this context, the role of the regional authorities is to set their own tasks and goals in terms of drawing the required inputs in their region's favour; however, this is often conducted with little understanding at the practice level. For example, is the region competitive because it is able to draw a higher per capita income in its workforce? Or is a region competitive because it has higher employment in the region compared to others? In other words, is a region highly productive because it is able to obtain higher output per head or per employee from the region? In addition, measuring competitiveness becomes difficult as inputs and outputs are difficult to identify. The inputs that are the primary source of the region's competitiveness transform into outputs, as the following section discusses.

2.6.2 Regional competitiveness as outputs

Until recently, economists have tended to account for regional economic growth via measurements of 'capital' and 'labour' (Huggins et al., 2005). Here, capital refers to physical units of, or fixed investments in, production such as land, plants, machinery and equipment, while labour is defined by the number of heads in employment or the working population (Huggins et al., 2005). These

outputs are developed over time and eventually become part of the primary source of inputs (as a cyclical process). Where access outputs are utilised by surrounding regions, for example, a skilled worker in the North West (NW) of England could find employment in the North East (NE). So is the region competitive because it has provided full employment and opportunities for its human capital? Or is it competitive because it is providing jobs elsewhere in neighbouring regions (external economies)? It can, therefore, be argued that measuring and understanding real competitive advantage, and whether this is an outcome of inputs or outputs, becomes problematic, with the policies guiding these realisations of inputs and outputs not lending much insight to practitioners.

A further problem for practitioners is that the primary sources and their interaction with external economies vary from one region to another. For example, a specific type of high-tech manufacturing cluster in one region will attract resources and a particular type of entrepreneurial culture and labour skill that are specific to that particular region. High-tech industries have a tendency to attract a high talented pool of educated individual skill sets. This high-tech cluster may possibly encourage further research and development in the university of the region and create university-industry links, as well as networks and institutions that aid the dissemination and flow of ideas from the university back to the high-tech industry. As an output, therefore, the region will gain in innovation and new business spin-offs. The specific labour skills required in this instance may not necessarily match the external region's industrial development and hence may not be able to benefit from the spill-over capacities of human capital, excess productivity, wages and wealth creation of the corresponding regions.

2.6.3 Conclusion

The focus of this research is to explore the practitioner's perceptions of competitiveness. Notably, the research argues that there is a 'disconnect' between policy and practice, and that by understanding how manufacturing

competitiveness policy is perceived by practitioners', policy can benefit and become more relevant. This chapter has engaged with this argument by discussing in detail the principles that surround the competitiveness policy rhetoric. It has done this firstly by conceptualising 'competitiveness' based on its origins and general use, highlighting how it has become a multidimensional and relative concept (Ambastha and Momaya, 2004, Bernard and Boucher, 2007), and how competitiveness policy has, effectively, replaced industrial policy as the new mantra (Gardiner et al., 2013). It is here that this review has identified a weakness in the literature; namely, that most studies on competitiveness have defined and measured the use of competitiveness policy using a variety of analytical tools (Buckley et al., 1990, Fagerberg, 1988), rather than a streamlined measure. Policy-makers are concerned about the issue from the perspective of the economy as a whole, or multiple industries, and sometimes of a single industry (Chaudhuri and Ray, 1997). Conversely, industry analysts and associations view competitiveness from the perspective of their respective industries, while firm owners, directors, and CEOs are more concerned with firm level analysis; managers are more interested in business and product level analyses (Chadhuri and Ray, 1997). In the past decade there has been an over-emphasis on market efficiency, risk management of the financial sector which is inadequate for the task at hand (Mulheirn, 2013).

This fragmented research approach towards competitiveness stems from the fact that scholars from various disciplines such as economics, international business, organisational theory and strategy, and marketing, have all used competitiveness to suit their own statistical measures (Buckley et al., 1990), and have adapted the concept of competitiveness based on their own interpretations and understanding. While lending valuable insights to the concept, it has made it difficult to reach a coherent definition of the term.

The chapter further explained how the concept of competitiveness is embedded in the economic principles of productivity and growth for firms, regions and

nations (Martin et al., 2014, Huggins et al., 2014). This was done by tracing the historical approach of the UK's competitiveness policy and showing how that policy rested on a series of implicit assumptions and explicit goals that are, arguably, incompatible with a rapidly changing global market place. One of these key assumptions has been that policy should primarily be supply-side focused, involving a general withdrawal of state intervention. Policy assumes that free market competition would weed out inefficient firms (Meese, 2013) in the name of 'competition' and 'survival of the fittest'. Policy makers further assume that economic performance can be achieved through eliminating inefficiencies, rigidities and inflexibilities on the supply-side of any firm or region (Boyer, 2014). In making these assumptions, policy makers have implemented a broadly 'one size fits all' (Krugman, 2005) approach in discussing productivity and competitiveness, with a common set of drivers seen as key, including skills, innovation, entrepreneurship, investment and a competitive environment.

This thesis argues that such competitiveness policy is overly prescriptive in nature, promoting capabilities that lead to competitiveness in rather abstracted, generalised ways, with little emphasis on practice. Policy also tends to be vague and unclear on how manufacturing practitioners' perceive policy in their daily activities.

In particular, government policy is targeted at regional competitiveness, where there is much confusion regarding the role of inputs and outputs as determinants of regional competitiveness (Haar, 2014). In critiquing these approaches and highlighting that most of the literature on competitiveness is based either on the rationalist approach (Salman et al., 2011), or on narrowly developed theories to enable strategy makers at firm level, this chapter has created a space for a new perspective on competitiveness policy in manufacturing to be considered; that is, through practice theory. Fundamentally, policy does not take into view the perception of the practitioner on competitiveness. Little is known about how practitioners generate their primary source of competitiveness and practice

competitiveness strategies so as to gain from competitiveness activities. This research aims to draw attention to this problem and introduce the practitioner's perspective on competitiveness as a possible alternative.

Chapter 3 The need for a practice perspective

3.1 The case for a practice perspective

This chapter argues that there is a need for a practice perspective in competitiveness policies on two levels: competitiveness policies and competitiveness strategies. With regard to the first level, as debated in the previous chapter (2), it is argued that the way in which competitiveness is seen through policy is important. Debates concerning policy range from the short-term economic centred argument of markets and growth (Haar, 2014, Mulheirn, 2013) to a broader concept of economics and socio-economics (Wilson, 2008). Competitiveness policy is perceived as a zero-sum (win-lose) situation (Martin and Tyler, 2003, Wren, 2001) between competing nations, regions and firms. Where national and regional policies focus on knowledge and innovation (Pitelis, 2014) as drivers for sustainable growth (Rodriguez et al., 2009, Di Maria and Micelli, 2008), this perspective has placed particular emphasis on the role of research and development (R&D) and training (Brunner and Prasad, 2014, Moore et al., 2013) as the drivers for competitiveness, with science-based knowledge (Huemer et al., 2013) at the forefront. Large engineering firms, universities and research centres have been considered the main players in knowledge production and management (Antonelli, 2006) and play a positive role in competitiveness. Hence, in terms of the policy framework, those players within the manufacturing sector (as in the case of this study) become relevant as independent driving forces able to push innovation (Terziovski, 2010, Baregheh et al., 2014) and to support economic processes and improvements locally in their communities (Baregheh et al., 2014), or in the wider area of the region.

Considering the second level, that is, the literature concerning competitiveness strategy, the emphasis here is on manufacturers needing to be assessed from the Porterian standpoint of social order (Moisio and Paasi, 2013). This emphasis does not recognise that firms are composed of living social actors who have to cope

with economic instability and market dynamics (Miztal, 2013). An alternative perspective to this is practice theory, which posits that (social) actors also learn and enact typical ways of thinking, understanding and viewing (interpreting) things in their surroundings. Viewing competitiveness strategy from this perspective can, therefore, provide fresh insights as to why a disconnect may exist between competitiveness policy and practice. Moreover, there has been a shift in perspective from understanding the 'manufacturer' as a 'premise of change' to a complex maze of 'dynamic activities' (strategy-making) in organisational life (Tsoukas and Chia, 2002), thus encouraging study into the making (or the 'how') of strategy itself. From a constructivist viewpoint, Tsoukas (1996) claims that 'organisations are seen as being in a constant flux [...] organisational members do follow rules but how they do so is an inescapably contingent-cum-local matter' (p. 22), which means that people do not follow rules to the letter and make sense of the rules as they practise in their field. The practice theory approach applied in this research allows the organisational change perspective to be shifted from an emphasis on organisational stability to an on-going change process activity (Flottorp et al., 2013).

Thus practice theory shifts the research priority from the firm's resources and capabilities to the role of the person (agent/actor), in this case in the field of manufacturing, enabling the relevant focus on the core aim of this research; that is, to explore how current manufacturing practitioners' perceive competitiveness. The following sections examine in more detail the benefits of adopting a practice theory approach and its components in the context of this thesis.

3.1.1 Benefits of a practice perspective

The impact of various policy changes has not only driven businesses further afield (Grant, 2013), but has caused long-term sectoral restructuring (Syrett and North, 2010, Evangelista et al., 2013) and labour market change (Nunn, 2011). The global economy requires manufacturing companies to review current processes and practices to ensure they are competitive (Porter, 1990b, Prahalad, 1994, Hay,

2011). Manufacturers have to gain confidence and believe that they are competitive and can contend successfully in the global economy. This confidence starts at home, first in the factory, then nationally, subsequently leading to internationalisation (Bell et al., 2004). However, companies are embracing new techniques and the latest processes in order to increase their competitiveness in the world market. With the assistance and guidance of the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) in the UK, local manufacturers have begun to implement the necessary strategies to be competitive players. It is worth noting here that, while many companies are preoccupied with implementing world-class manufacturing strategies (Lloyd and Payne, 2014) in order to gain an advantage over others, it is failure to follow these practices that often leads to the loss of their competitive edge (Voss et al., 2002, Dangayach and Deshmukh, 2001, Jones, 2013).

Most policy initiatives over recent decades have failed to reinvigorate the UK's old industrial regions (Mankiw et al., 1995), leaving a geographical gap in society and leading to the fragmentation of traditional resources (Kitson et al., 2004; Martin et al., 2004). Although current economic growth is based around the UK being a knowledge-based economy and the clustering of resources, there is still a lack of coherent policy (Mankiw et al., 1995).

Like policy itself, the business-level strategic management approach has also evolved over the past few decades, raising the issue that there is a need to revisit the core practices that firms face in these challenging times. Firms are now competing in a global context where regulations and barriers such as environmental laws, trade tariffs, concessions and so forth, mean the difference between success and failure for UK manufacturers. Exports to emerging markets are seen as a vital source of growth, invoking the challenge of tapping into these lucrative markets; and with this expansion of markets come wider challenges for the manufacturing firm managers of today. The lack of research on the inter-organisational relationships and their reliance on government policy (Nordqvist

and Melin, 2010, Wilson and Jarzabkowski, 2004) is a subject of interest to the current study, raising the question of how practitioners' perceive competitiveness policy. Are policy makers listening to their business community? And does the business community understand what is going on at the policy level, or does this need further clarity?

3.1.1.1 The reflexive nature of practice theory

Unlike the economic scholarship of strategy, practice theorists do not explain behaviour in terms of the actions of an individual or groups of actors. In contrast, and owing to its reflexive nature, practice theory is primarily concerned with the network of social practices, thus bridging the understanding of how social structure and human agency link together to clarify why people 'do what they do'. In other words, in order to make sense of the human agent, one first has to take into account the context of situation and environment in which he or she is immersed across time and space. Practice-based research is an inductive process of reflecting on empirical data (Feldman and Orlikowski, 2011). Practice theory as a lens provides researchers with the opportunity to look at organisations and how people/actors use the resources available to them to carry out intelligent actions, and how they give those actions sense and meaning (Gherardi, 2012).

The following sections introduce the concept of practice in competitiveness; that is, how practice theory can help to deconstruct the dynamics within competitiveness. It should be noted here that practice 'theory' is composed of many components, and hence may be better understood as a framework rather than as a unified theory. Following an initial discussion of the different ways in which the term 'practice' has been used, the remainder of this chapter will aim to bring clarity to the key contributors to this framework whose theories are also relevant to the current research; namely, Bourdieu's theories of habitus and reflexivity. It is argued that the determinants of habitus and reflexivity present a clearer understanding of competitiveness at the policy and practice level, and help in understanding the relationship behind the (dis)connect between policies

and practice. These determinants are: economic capital (the UK's inherited economic and business structure, including the degree and type of specialisation, labour force skills and qualifications across the regions), social and cultural capital (knowledge, networks, connections and creativity of the social capital), and symbolic capital (cultural embeddedness in honour, prestige and recognition of the social capital).

3.2 Understanding practice in strategy-as-practice

Over the past few decades, practice theory (or the practice turn) literature has seen a surge in enquiry within social sciences (Lounsbury and Beckman, 2014, Kitchin and David Howe, 2013, Alvesson and Sandberg, 2014, de Araújo Wanderley and Cullen, 2013, Jarzabkowski and Kaplan, 2014, Guérard et al., 2013). However, the practice perspective as a lens can be noted from the seminal works of Wittgenstein (1993) and Heidegger (1962) from the 1950s and early 1960s respectively. According to Vaara and Whittington (2012), numerous scholars have informed the practice approach. For example, philosophers such as Foucault stress that power and knowledge are influenced by ethical practices as an act of becoming (Foucault and Gordon, 1980).

Strategy-as-practice (SAP) literature has gained much recognition within the practice literature, focusing on the micro activity-based approaches to understanding strategy (Whittington, 2006, Whittington et al., 2003, Wilson and Jarzabkowski, 2004, Jarzabkowski, 2004, Jarzabkowski, 2005, Jarzabkowski et al., 2007). SAP helps the advancement of social theories in strategic management by providing important insights into methods of practices (strategy-making). SAP also aids the understanding of the flow of activity that takes place in their respective praxis and, more importantly, the role and identity of the practitioner involved in strategy-making activities.

The field of strategy management is dominated by individualistic models of decision-making; SAP enables scholars to focus on the ways in which actors

(enabled by the wider organisational and social practices) make decisions. Therefore, SAP provides a distinctive contribution to research on the strategic management process (Vaara and Whittington, 2012). Furthermore, SAP enables researchers to embody their research with an epistemological and theoretical depth in terms of conceptualising how strategy is practised (Parmigiani and Howard-Grenville, 2011).

Jarzabkowski and Spee (2009) confirm that 'practice' has been widely but inconsistently studied, and encourage the need to connect the practices. For these scholars, practices are things done in organisations such as meetings and workshops (praxis). For example Jarzabkowski (2014) argues the use of a 'sociological eye' (Whittington, 2007) to better the understanding of tools used in strategy work. She further emphasises that sociological eye encourages close attention to tools as they are used in the context of the practitioner.

3.2.1 Inclination towards strategic planning

SAP, responded to strong economic views of policy and macro level strategy of the Keynesian economic idealisation of the 'rational actor' to explain day-to-day processes of decision making or decision makers (Jarzabkowski et al., 2007). Focusing the SAP literature to narrowly take into consideration the problems of the inattention to why individual managers and practitioners do what they do (Suddaby, 2010). SAP neglected the individual perceptions are embedded in the socially constructed actor (Hwang and Colyvas, 2011) and are a result of a more deeper cognitive interaction between social institutions and the environment the actor practices. SAP turned towards a more processual understanding of organizational activities through an activity-based view that emphasised the doing. The 'practice turn' emphasised on the wider social context that shapes and is shaped by observable activity. The practice turn view was that strategising was an activity based on: 'actors in their micro-situations are not acting in isolation but are drawing upon the regular, socially defined modes of acting that arise from the plural social institutions to which they belong (Jarzabkowski et al., 2007).

Moreover, the SAP scholars have institutionalised routines and activities of practitioners transcending organizational boundaries and fields focusing on the daily routines of practitioners such as meetings and the use of tool and techniques and in somewhat using the phrase of toolkit (Jarzabkowski et al., 2009).

It is argued that a focus on what practitioners actually do and their shared cognitions in creating a shared meaning shows each other and offer significant learning to organization studies more broadly (Suddaby et al., 2013, Seidl and Whittington, 2014). Over the past few decades, macro, institutional and resourced-based approaches have dominated the literature on strategy analysis relating to the micro processes and practices of organisational life (Chia, 2004). Robert Chia emphasises that the SAP literature has taken up what was started by Mintzberg (1987), Pettigrew (1992) and others, and has contributed some important insights towards the understanding of the organisational and institutional 'nitty-gritty'. However, Chia also argues that the SAP literature has lacked the detailing of what these micro practices and everyday routines of strategy actually constitute (Chia, 2004).

3.2.2 Reconnecting the micro-practices

It is argued that strategy benefits from a practice approach as this departs from other, more traditional approaches and concentrates on understanding why people do what they do (Lee and Boud, 2009, Jarzabkowski, 2004). This research abandons the long held view of strategy as a linear process (Sull, 2007) on the basis that linear models available to practitioners' (and policy-makers) lack clarity. The linear models have been seen as too simple to be adequate (Kline, 1985, Gardner and Ash, 2003) in this complex world. As Bourdieu argues, strategy should not be viewed as a top-down process by taking the 'short cut which leads from each signifier to the corresponding signified,' and therefore bypassing practice complexity (Bourdieu, 1990b). By adopting Bourdieu's practice perspective, this research explores the 'many more facts' which are generated

from 'a dense network of relationships' which exist within the practice world and influence the way that policy is created and implemented (ibid, p.8). The following section introduces the social element in competitiveness and how, by integrating this concept, the understanding of competitiveness can benefit.

3.3 Social aspects of the competitiveness policy agenda

As explained in the introductory chapter to this thesis, the purpose of the firm is embedded in the economic theory argument of profit maximisation, stakeholder and shareholder interest. The myth that economics is the 'physics of society' (Hatgioannides and Karanassou, 2011) dictates that economic theory takes precedence in this context over other social sciences. Scholars have widely debated the existence of a mathematical calculation that could prove the validity of economics as the key to delivering optimum policy solutions (Blendon et al., 1997). The traditional economic models of public choice are based on market clearance and maximisation theory (Akerlof, 1989). In his paper 'The economics of illusion', Akerlof (1989) argues that the agential side of policy is ill-defined and needs debating in the mainstream policy making agenda. By bringing the debate in line with the social sciences (anthropology, psychology, and sociology), policy will thus be able to connect to human society debate and be better understood at the practice level. In other words, to enable public choice to perceive policy favourably, policy-makers would benefit from understanding the issues that surround the public perception of policy.

On the other hand, Christopher Weare (1996), in his paper 'The illusion of reform', states that the process of policy development is disjointed and chaotic, with fundamental conflicts inherent in structural policy. He argues that regulators are not able to recognise sound economic principles and, furthermore, that there is no realistic, unproblematic alternative upon which policy makers can rely (Weare, 1996). Michael Fitzsimmons (2006) also conveys this dilemma that policy makers may experience through two quotes that he borrows from a Danish

saying and Neil Peart (2) respectively: ‘Predictions can be very difficult – especially about the future’ (Sherrin, 2005)⁷; ‘if you choose not to decide, you still have made a choice’ (Peart, 1980). Fitzsimmons (2006) points out that, after the end of the Cold War and the subsequent technology boom, coupled with international political uncertainty, it was difficult to predict and forecast even a few years into the future. This arguably left policy makers with the choice either to make a decision based on the available knowledge, or to wait and see what other policy makers would do and follow their lead (Fitzsimmons, 2006). The way in which competitiveness is construed through policy is, therefore, key.

3.3.1 How is competitiveness interpreted

For the past two decades, the debate around policy has shifted from the short-term economic centred argument of markets and growth to a broader concept of economics, i.e. socio-economics (Wilson, 2008). Wilson argues that prevalent conceptualisations of competitiveness are not redundant but, rather, understanding the factors that drive productivity through the components of economic development (social, welfare and democratic dimensions) can potentially facilitate better integration of competitiveness into policy. His main concern with competitiveness policy is that competitiveness is perceived as a direct ‘win-lose’ situation between competing nations and regions, with the narrow objective of income growth. The competitiveness policies of regions themselves imply that one region will ‘lose’ in relation to another. Furthermore, Wilson argues that the unequal distribution of resources and capabilities available to every region is not even, and that there will inevitably be winners and losers (2008). Owing to this economic and social disparity, the practical implications of competitiveness policy will have a social impact on competing firms nationally, regionally and locally; the re-discovery, re-invention and localisation of culture.

1. ⁷ A Danish saying, often attributed to Niels Bohr. See Ned Sherrin, ed. *The Oxford Dictionary of Humorous Quotations*, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

Globalisation had blurred the boundaries of nations, with most countries being integrated with each other's economies, such as that of the Eurozone. The economic competitiveness of a nation, then, must be echoed in both international and domestic performances concurrently. For example, countries in the Eurozone are internally and externally connected to their respective GDPs; thus it is wrong to say that one country is competitive if its living standard is low and its cheap products are sold internationally, whereas a country enjoying a high living standard but that does not have any internationally competitive products, firms or industries, is not competitive. Thus it can be argued that a high and rising living standard is the ultimate test of countries' competitiveness and economic health, irrespective of what contributes to such success – be it outstanding trade performance or high domestic productivity. Living standard alone does not provide a complete answer to the competitiveness question. The UK's Department of Trade and Industry's (DTI) White Paper on Competitiveness links trade performance with the economic well-being of citizens and describes national competitiveness as:

[t]he degree to which it can, under free and fair market conditions, produce goods and services that meet the test of international markets while simultaneously expanding the real incomes of its citizens (HMSO, 2005)

Economic analysts and researchers (from the standpoint of technology, labour power, prices and profits) have also contributed to the growing interest in non-economic factors in competitiveness, where non-economic factors are concerned with social practices contributing to regional dynamism, such as (but not limited to) social and cultural capital. The origins of this can be traced to the works of Putnam (1994) and his systematic study of how institutions develop in order to adapt to their social environment. Porter's work on clusters (1998) also conceptualised the role of non-economic factors in developing regional growth, and contributed considerably to regional competitiveness studies. Putnam was of

the view that the recognition of social capital is important and can occur through the 'integration' of sociological traditions. He argued that factors such as 'trust, norms and networks' facilitated cooperation and mutual benefit to society; under these conditions, the dissemination of policy across society would be voluntary and participative (Putnam et al., 1994).

Conversely, Bourdieu takes a more critical view of social capital. He views the development of social capital through economic infrastructure and disagrees with Putnam's analogy of friendly negotiation for the benefit of the entire community, emphasising instead that development is an individual's struggle for power and recognition, not cooperation (Bourdieu, 1991). This research draws specifically on Bourdieu's conceptualisation of social capital (which will shortly be discussed) and the non-economic factors (of habitus), enabling the study to draw attention to the non-market conditions of economic growth and social development.

This section has highlighted the importance of incorporating social aspects into both the understanding and rhetorical usage of competitiveness at the national, regional and local levels. The following section will analyse what influences competitiveness through the practice lens.

3.3.2 Competitiveness in the context of this research

It should be noted here that the scope of the research is not to question the validity of the Porterian and Keynesian universal theories, but to accept them as widely practiced methods applied in policy making and practice alike. What this research aims to contribute is a new exploration into what can be seen when competitiveness is viewed through a practice theory lens. This will be done specifically with reference to Bourdieu's concept of habitus and by deconstructing the actions and power relations at play within competitiveness in this context. By doing so, this study will contribute new insights into the connections and disconnects that exist between manufacturing policy and practice.

3.4 *Understanding social practices and practice theory*

3.4.1 Social Practice: definitions and concepts

A general definition of social practices as used by social scientists is the actions of individuals or groups. Conceptually, these actions include not just physical behaviour but also mental activities such as theorising or learning. Since the 1980s, sociologists, social historians and anthropologists have influenced debates concerning the way in which individual or isolated practices interact with persistent formations of structures. From a sociology standpoint, Giddens' (1979) structuration theory views practice as everyday activities where agency and structure come together reflexively to create, reproduce, and/or restructure social systems in intended and unintended ways. In contrast, Bourdieu (1977b) argues that cultural rituals and individual habits reflect dispositions or subconscious understandings of the world (or 'habitus', which will be explained in detail further in the chapter). Foucault (1997) considers practice as a structuring tool for governments to enact social control; for example, developing and maintaining statistical databases such as the 'World Competitiveness Yearbook' by the IMD (Garelli, 2001) is seen by Foucault as a 'field' and a structured mechanism for government intervention and domination.

Social psychologists, symbolic interactionists and ethnomethodologists such as Goffman and Garfinkel emphasise the role of communicative and discursive practices as ritualised or framed social performances or techniques of interpersonal communication (Garfinkel and Wieder, 1992, Goffman, 2002). Habermas (1984) focuses on the role that communicative practices can play in helping individuals achieve a shared understanding between social groups and in creating a fairer political system. More recently, actor-network (ANT) theorists such as Callon (1986) and Latour (2005) have argued that communicative practices offer insight into the ways and means of translation; that is, the process through which various actors exert power, mobilise material objects and perform

socially so as to achieve particular objectives (Callon, 1986, Latour, 2005). The following section will consider the different definitions of 'practice' and explain how it will be used in the context of this study.

3.4.2 Making practice more relevant

The term 'practice' has been used in many ways, 'some deliberate and others less so. In fact, anything can, in principle, be a practice since, in its most literal sense, the term refers simply to the action of doing something' (Lee and Boud, 2009). One way of using 'practice' has been as a counterpoint to theory or the application of theory. The words 'theory' and 'practice' go hand in hand with the scientific tradition where theory produces knowledge that can then be practised (or applied) (Schwandt, 2005). Through the use of practice as applied to theory, the academic scholarship can generate authenticity, rigour, validity and objectivity of knowledge. Schwandt (2005) further explains that practice is embedded and enacted among practitioners' in the daily context of performing work. Practitioners' enact theoretically informed practices that they often gain through formal professional training and education. Another body of thinking posits 'practice' specifically as a human activity and the primary building block of the social world (Lee and Boud, 2009), where meanings are made, understood and enacted (Barnes, 2001).

In the practice theory scholarship, the body is not just an instrument of the mind; rather, it is an inseparable part (component) of the mind-body of the actor who carries out social practices and learns to enact particular ways of moving, using and being of the body. In other words, 'ways of handling objects' (Reckwitz, 2002a) and 'ways of speaking or expressing' (Schatzki, 2002) are part of a social practice. Building on this, the current study will use the term 'practice' to show or reveal the act of doing a certain activity or set of activities so as to achieve goals or objectives in the workplace. In this way, we can refer to the act of strategy by manufacturers as a doing of certain practices so as to achieve (organisational) manufacturing goals and ends (Johnson, 2000). It is at this juncture that 'practice'

becomes very relevant to competitiveness. The following section discusses the relevance of practice theory to this research.

3.4.3 Key elements of practice theory

Various theoretical perspectives on practice theory have been well documented, such as those of Dreyfus, 1991; Taylor, 1985; and Turner, 1994 as well as other authors (Nayak & Chia, (2011); Orlikowski et al., (2010); Sandberg and Tsoukas, (2011); Schatzki, (2012). This section will focus on the theoretical perspectives of Bourdieu (1997), Giddens (1984), Schatzki (2012) and Foucault (1980), and explain how they are positioned within this research. Most importantly, this section will explore how the use of Bourdieu's 'habitus' as a conceptual framework can enable the research to construct a picture of how social forms of capital influence strategic decision-making and, in turn, have an impact on a firm's competitiveness. In other words, this thesis will use the holistic framework of habitus to explain the impact of social phenomena on competitiveness, and how both policy and practice can benefit from such an approach.

Practice theory begins with the premise that actors or agents are fundamentally influenced by society and culture. Many philosophers and theorists have explored the purpose of societies and how those societies' actions impact on the world we live in. Sociologists have adopted the theoretical stance taken by practice theorists to understand the dynamics of societies, based on 'what people do' (Bourdieu, 1977a, Giddens, 1984, De Certeau, 1998a, Johnson et al., 2003, Jarzabkowski et al., 2007). In this context, practice is 'recurrent, materially bounded and situated action engaged in by members of a community' (Orlikowski, 2002), and the reflexive agents engage in producing, reproducing, or transforming the structures (Bourdieu, 1977a, Giddens, 1984) which, in turn, allow and limit people's actions.

3.5 The work of Bourdieu

Bourdieu, a French critical theorist, was interested and concerned with the ways in which social advantages and disadvantages were maintained. His explanatory framework offers a critical analysis of class relations. People's habitus are a reproduction of the social structure (Bourdieu, 1990). Bourdieu explain that habitus is to be understood as a system of lasting and transposable dispositions that integrate past experiences of people and constantly function as a mix of perceptions, appreciations and actions that enable people to, without thought, achieve complex and infinitely diverse tasks (Bourdieu, 1977; p. 82-83). Bourdieu explains that habitus can be conceived as a necessity that is internalised (embodied) within a person which then out of necessity of the individual converts into a characteristic (disposition) that produces meaningful practices and meaning-giving perceptions (Bourdieu, 1984; p. 170). In Bourdieu's view, society consists of multidimensional spaces and structures which the individual enters. When the individual enters these spaces (or 'field'), they bring along with them their 'habitus'; that is, the total sum of their symbolic resources, which is the combination of the amount and the composition of different types of capital (Bourdieu, 1977b). The following sub-sections discuss this in detail.

3.5.1 Habitus

Habitus is based on the notion that individuals hold certain positions within various groups, that these groups themselves have their own positions within 'fields', and that these fields, in turn, are positioned within particular cultural, socio-economic and historical spaces. All of these spaces operate in relationship to each other, creating a multidimensional 'meta' structure within which fields, groups and individuals are then located (Brickson, 2007). These highly contextualised layers mean that, within social interaction, the individual then mediates his or her position through their own contextualised currency with which the field is negotiated; that is, the amount and type of capital they possess. Capital, in this sense, covers four particular 'forms' over which actors have

varying degrees of command and ownership: economic, cultural, social, and symbolic capital. Bourdieu emphasised that each of these components of capital can have an impact on one other and must be understood together as an interweaving network of capital, habitus and field to generate practice, or social action (Nice, 1984).

Habitus is, therefore, a mental or cognitive system of structures. It is an internal embodiment of external social structures that a person acquires over the course of a lifetime. Habitus is also the structure through which we produce our thoughts and actions; this internal structure then mediates our external social structures. There is a deeply iterative process at play here, in that habitus structures the social world and is in turn structured by it. Hence habitus can be thought of as the collective individuated through the biological individual. As habitus can be similar among individuals within groups of people, it can also be seen as a collective phenomenon (Nice, 1984). What differentiates habitus from other theoretical streams is that habitus constrains but does not determine thought and action. This is because habitus only suggests what a person should think or how they should act as, according to Bourdieu (1992), people are not fools and do not act blindly. Bourdieu believed that people only act on practical sense. Practical sense is not the same as formal logic; it simply means that people will react reasonably in given situations.

3.5.1.1 Habitus and the Practice Approach

The significance of habitus to this research and its interaction with practice theory in this particular context lies in the fact that practice theory enables one to calculate or measure the habitus (symbolic resources) that are played out in social practice. This, in turn, can enable an original understanding of how strategy making, competitiveness and being competitive respectively are enacted 'on the ground' by various actors in different firms. Ultimately, this will enable the research to reflect on the relationship between policy (theoretical 'macro' social acts located within a certain matrix of power) and practice ('actual' micro acts

located on another matrix of power), and where/how these interrelate and/or disconnect.

Moreover, in a practice environment, the practice perspective enables us to understand the nature of the field which the manufacturing practitioner socially occupies. As the agent continuously develops his/her capabilities (that is, gains knowledge) by continuously practicing within a work environment (Suchman, 1987), each working environment can thus be said to be a field. Each field or manufacturing firm therefore has individual agents exerting their power (via strategy) for the purpose of mutual interest that is acceptable to the firm's stakeholders. However, manufacturing firms all differ from one another and do not necessarily practice in a similar fashion to their competitors, generating different kinds of resources (capital) that are used as a basis of power. The following sections detail the key elements of the field, and how they will be used to critically examine the connections and disconnects between policy and practice in competitiveness.

3.5.2 Field

By 'field', Bourdieu refers to the space within which the various resources within the 'forms of capital' are used by agents. Fields are, therefore, a network of historical and current relationships between objective positions (Bourdieu, 2008b) that are anchored in capital (Naidoo, 2004). Bourdieu likened these conceptual fields to magnetic fields in physical science, in that they exert a 'pull' on objects within them, and themselves contract and expand according to the energies conducted within. The objects, or occupied objective positions within habitus fields, are agents who have a stake within the field. Their positions are determined by the amount and weight of the capital they possess.

These fields are therefore also spaces of simultaneous conflict and competition as agents compete to gain a monopoly in their respective field using the forms of capital that are most effective within that particular field. An example of this

would be the case of management practice which, at the turn of the twentieth century, underwent revolutionary change. The bureaucratic organisation of Max Weber (Giddens, 2013), once prevalent in management practices, has today evolved into the 'servitized firm' (Neely, 2007), where the role of the servitized firm combines in-house manufacturing with a strong customer-focussed front office support mechanism. Present and future firms are competing in a global, multi-cultural, network oriented, reactive, decentralised landscape, and thrive on strong cultural, information, knowledge and political (power) relationships (Thompson, 1993). Thus manufacturers have moved away from the bureaucratic style of management in order to compete in the respective field, and the notion of the bureaucratic firm has since been given less attention (Giddens, 2013). The presupposed position of policy that manufacturers are ready to compete, and must compete 'or die' (Schoenberger, 1998), has had an impact on how practitioners' perceive their role in this field, where the post-bureaucratic firm's managers face wider challenges due to global, multi-cultural, networked and knowledge-based business relationships (Osborne and Plastrik, 1998, Child and McGrath, 2001).

3.5.3 Forms of capital within habitus

Individuals within society have different objectives within their socio-economic settings, thus creating a system of competition for obtaining an 'end' to whatever they desire or need. Some people realise their interests more than others do; hence, when it comes to the matter of how people in societies function and interact with each other, every person has their individual interpretation of 'needs' and 'desires'. This difference creates a passive resistance and friction (i.e. a power play) between individuals and groups in terms of how to obtain those needs and desires. The understanding of this power play enables one to make sense of the struggle and relationship of individuals within a field. Power in its institutionalised form produces reality and objects of truth (Feldman, 1997). Power in itself is the relationship between 'people and people', 'institutions and institutions', or even 'people and institutions' and 'institutions and people'; that

is, power resides within the institutional form (Foucault, 1982). Therefore, power can also be seen as a complex form of strategising, with the ability to sub-consciously control agents' behaviour (Mason and Ren, 2012).

How people negotiate their position (power) in the habitus is of interest to this research. Foucault, in his 1982 paper, 'The subject and power', describes power not as the subject of interest but in terms of how the subject 'objectivises' him/herself. In other words, Foucault is interested in understanding how humans are influenced by society and culture at large, and how they are transformed into 'subjects'. Foucault explains that the objectification of the subject occurs in three ways: firstly, by the way one speaks; secondly, the ways in which he or she is productive; and thirdly, through the sheer fact of being alive. Foucault emphasises that his notion of understanding the 'how' of power can be achieved through asking questions such as: 'by what means is it exercised? And what happens when individuals exert (as they say) power over others?' (Foucault, 1982). In this sense, the analysis of power consists of analysing the relationship between individuals and/or groups (in the context of this research, it is both the individual and the group), where the use of power of one over the other determines the actions that influence strategy.

In the context of the current study, it is this power that emerges from relationships of communication – specifically, the communication transmitted by means of language (the spoken words), a system of signs, or any other symbolic medium – that can help deconstruct what happens in the space between policy makers formulating a policy and practitioners' coming to know about it and deciding what to do in relation to it. These elements of communicative relationships are mutually constitutive (Feldman and Orlikowski, 2011) and overlap and support each other. Foucault goes on to explain that coordination (overlapping) and sense making of communicative relationships in a given society or space does not entail a general equilibrium between the finalised activities (power relations). However, power relations can be guided or managed by the

environment in which the specific communication takes place. It is, therefore, important to understand the current context (and the history) through which the embodied actions transform into actual bodily actions.

Although the 'sources of power' indicate the elements of 'how' power is used, power distribution is inherently unequal (Tan and Chong, 2003) and differs from environment to environment. From a structuralist standpoint, organisations use their previous knowledge as a power tool. Foucault's perspective liberates the theory of the organisation from structure by positing the notion that the organisation is run by people who have motives, intentions and other attributes of subjectivity that are worth understanding. In this context, another commentator argues that 'here lies the true power of the organisation not the structure' (Clegg, 1994). Clegg illustrates how the firm's actors (e.g. the managers) use discourse in enacting strategy, which can be seen as the real power, and that the firm inadvertently then adopts this strategic architecture.

The following sections will introduce the forms of capital that inform the socio-cultural viewpoint of this research, and how the use of these forms of capital can benefit the understanding of the manufacturing practitioner's perspective of competitiveness policies.

3.5.3.1 Economic capital

Economic capital is the term phrased by Bourdieu (2008b), which Putnam (1993) terms 'physical capital'. Economic capital is at the root of all forms of capital, and is the most easily recognisable and influential of the forms of capital Bourdieu theorised, as it immediately and directly converts to money, and may be institutionalised in the form of property rights. The other forms of capital are more disguised and indirect, with more subtle effects, as will shortly be discussed.

As discussed in the literature review, the economics view posits that a firm's level of competitiveness depends on its available resources, i.e. its 'core capabilities' (Prahalad and Hamel, 1993), which manifest through activities such as innovation and research & development. Conversely, according to Bourdieu, the economic forms of capital within habitus provide the funding for physical force (Bourdieu, 2005); that is, economic capital consists of more tangible elements than those propounded by core capabilities. Concretely, this involves the availability of finance, assets, plant and equipment, raw materials, intellectual property rights (IPRs) and labour, to name a few. Understanding how practitioners' use these resources will enable this study to gain an insight into how the practitioners position themselves within their respective working environment (field), and how they perceive their role according to their habitus.

3.5.3.2 Cultural capital

Cultural capital is associated with social class (Bourdieu, 2008a). Bourdieu explains that this is the ability to act 'cultured' by embodying the language, accents, and mannerism of elites. This source of capital can be objectified by cultural goods such as art and literature, the argument being that the latter can only be properly understood by the same type of people that possess cultural capital in the first place. In essence, Bourdieu argues that cultural capital cannot equally be obtained by every person, as not everyone can have the same knowledge, experience and connections in any specific field (or social space), thus making it a position that can be exploited (i.e. a source of power) by those who have higher levels of cultural capital. Cultural capital is, therefore, a power resource, or a way for groups to remain dominant or gain status (Dumais, 2002).

Cultural capital can also be converted into social capital (discussed in detail in the following section) through the use of knowledge, experience, and connections held by a person or group. As Boutillier (2008) suggests, individuals own their cultural capital and can take the decision to invest for their own individual needs and social relations in order to obtain a higher position within the social field;

hence one's social relations, networks and group memberships become valuable resources to the individual.

Cultural capital is important to consider in relation to competitiveness policy because the institutional and cultural explanations of regional competitive advantage are what enable policy to focus on the role of various 'soft' factors in shaping economic growth and performance. Supportive institutions facilitate business development, innovation, labour skill formation, and trust and cooperation amongst local firms – they can help form a common sense of purpose and direction in the local economy (MacLeod, 1997). By understanding and taking into account the attitudes, traditions and forms of social association, the role of cultural capital, the way it translates into social capital, and its impact on competitive advantage, can be easy to measure and identify (Fine, 2002, Casey, 2004).

Likewise, cultural accounts of practitioners' are unique to their culture and have an effect on any region's competitive advantage as they enable firms to attract the 'creative class' (Florida, 2002). The attractiveness of regions and cities to these creative and enterprising workers is itself argued to be highly influenced by the range of a region's or city's cultural amenities and infrastructure, which enhance the local quality of life (Bontje and Musterd, 2009, Martin-Brelot et al., 2010). It is argued that, by probing the cultural aspects of the manufacturing practitioner, this research will benefit by examining the manufacturing practitioners' perception of their life stories and how their perception of competitiveness reflects in their career progression. To date, there has been a gap in knowledge about the manufacturing practitioners contribution to the local economy (Sungu-Eryilmaz, 2009, Tomaney and Bradley, 2007). In relation to this research, exploring both practitioners' and policy enablers' varying degrees and uses of capital will aid the understanding of their specific reactions towards policy.

3.5.3.3 Social capital

Social capital came to prominence through the studies of Bourdieu in the 1980s, where his aim was to go deeper into the analysis of social relations. Bourdieu defines social capital as:

The aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to the possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalised relationships of mutual acquaintance or recognition (1986).

Social capital can be either individually owned or a group resource. Group resources, or organisational social capital, are resources that represent the character of social relationships within a firm and enable the firm to exploit external resources and generate internal coordination within the firm (Kraiczy, 2013), hence strengthening a firm's resource competence. Considering this from the perspective of the firm, an agent, for example, may bring into the firm (field) an accredited membership of an association (network) of practitioners' that then enable the agent to exert power and gain considerable competitive advantage over other firms.

Social capital exists in the form of trustworthiness, information flow and norms (Coleman, 1988). Sociologists see the actor as socialised and his/her action as governed by social norms, rules, and obligations, whereas economists view the actor as having goals independently and being born wholly out of self-interest. Coleman further reiterates that social capital is defined by its function and has two elements in common: social structure and the actions of the actors. Coleman defines social capital by:

[i]ts function, it is not a single entity, but a variety of different entities having two characteristics in common: they all consist of

some aspect of social structure and they facilitate certain actions of individuals who are within the structure. (1988: 98)

He emphasises that social capital is productive, making it possible to achieve certain ends that in its absence would not be possible (ibid). Putnam, in his studies of American democracy and community engagement, describes social capital as 'features of social organisation such as networks, norms, and social trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit' (1995: 67).

Self-interest has been a practice that people have undertaken for centuries, and which still today defies ordinary logic (Bourdieu and Nice, 1980). Bourdieu argues that people acting out of self-interest can 'only work by pretending not to be doing what they are doing' (1980: 261). Self-interest in economic terms is understood through the concepts of opportunity and transaction cost (Williamson, 1979), where it is believed that people will conform to the laws of transaction cost and act as rent appropriators. However, Bourdieu argues that this is a narrow way of understanding people, and that they have their own self-interest that cannot be understood through pure transaction cost analysis. Miller (1992) argues that self-interest in place-based politics has not been adequately theorised, which is why a self-interested individual would engage in collective actions (such as follow the competitiveness agenda) when his or her impact is negligible and the benefits of collective action are public and free.

Like self-interest, opportunism or opportunistic behaviour is assumed in both transaction cost theory and agency theory (Wright and Mukherji, 1999), and is often perceived as self-interest (Williamson, 1979) with deception. Hence, it is expected that economic actors may mask, misinform, misrepresent or even cheat as they practise within a field. According to transaction cost theory, measures such as accounting are put in place to curb opportunism. Similarly, in agency theory, incentives and monitoring mechanisms are established with the intent of reducing opportunism (Wright and Mukherji, 1999). To understand why people

take such actions or dis-actions, Williamson (1979) explains through the 'theory of communicative action' of Habermas (1984) that knowledge is embedded in a person and the person when acting (actions) relies on the embodied knowledge. In other words, a person behaves rationally when he/she believes in the truth of the knowledge they possess and acts accordingly. Hence what constitutes a 'rational' decision may vary greatly from person to person. People's self-interest is based on their belonging (bond) to a community, and rational behaviour is based on the notion that people 'belong to' and identify with partners, friends and the human race (Donaldson, 1990). These bonds are thus a way of understanding how people react/act in a self-interested way within their community. However, as individuals also have conflicting goals and risk preferences, they may thus seek individual self-interested goals rather than promoting the principal goal of the community (ibid).

Policy making takes for granted that social capital will follow policy, as policy enables jobs and creates wealth. However, people have inherent bias in their nature when it comes to analysing information and making decisions. More specifically, in this research it is assumed that individuals may be inclined towards self-interest, and that understanding their self-interest will benefit the study by enabling a fuller picture of practitioners' perceptions of competitiveness to emerge.

The socio-cultural embeddedness of economic life has become a prominent topic in regional economic development and is a broad concept, which usually refers to norms, values, networks, reciprocity or trust which are held in a community and can lead to positive social and economic outcomes (Huber, 2009). Social capital can also generate regional externalities; for example, in the current era of a knowledge-based economy, the role of social capital for regional innovation and local knowledge externalities can be linked to theories of economic clusters that generate economic prosperity (Huber, 2009).

In studies of regional development, social capital is typically considered as a collective phenomenon for the good of communities, regions or nations. This, however, does not take into account the understanding of the specific social mechanisms at play (Hadjimichalis, 2006, Huber, 2009). For example, the works of Porter on economic clusters do emphasise the role of social networks, but do not rigorously theorise and empirically investigate the specific mechanisms behind them, lacking the understanding of individual actors (Hadjimichalis, 2006). It can be argued that the socio-cultural issues of social capital such as trust, norms, values or reciprocity are best understood from the individual actor's point of view.

Individuals' possession of social capital depends on how s/he uses it (Foley and Edwards, 1997). The individual manufacturer faces many challenges in managing his/her acquired resources to create a competitive advantage. The firms' (manufacturers') resources are increasingly under pressure to seek complimentary resources other than what may be considered tangible assets to out-perform competitors. Social capital is an important source for creating inimitable value generating resources that are inherent in the firm's network of strategic relationships (Barney et al., 2001, Adler and Kwon, 2002). Individual manufacturers join groups and societies to achieve self-interested objectives that favour the productivity of their field; thus social capital in its wider scope has a positive impact on productivity and encourages lower production costs and economies of scale to improve. This is based on the notion of rational self-interest and mutual help, and that collective goodwill benefits the individual (Casey, 2004).

3.5.3.4 Symbolic capital

Social positions and the division of economic, cultural and social capital are legitimised through symbolic capital. As previously discussed, social capital is a resource in the social struggles of an individual (for example) that he/she carries out in different social arenas or fields. Symbolic capital's effectiveness is seen in

its usage (i.e. in practice). In this perspective, symbolic capital cannot be institutionalised, objectified or incorporated into the habitus. Economic capital and cultural capital have their own forms of reality, such as money, shares, examinations and diplomas, and so forth, but symbolic capital exists only in the 'eyes of the others' (Siisiainen, 2003) and thus is an ideological function that gives legitimacy to the beholder. The things that are meaningful to people involve combinations of physical and social aspects, and social behaviour has to be understood in terms of the meanings that these have for those involved (Layder, 2005). For example, the UK's ranking in the world competitiveness yearbook is not just an entry in a book that lists nations that are competitive, but a representation of the achievement of the country that has achieved great success in high levels of growth and productivity.

Symbolic capital is also the ability of an individual or group of people to understand and take part in collective rituals and lean practices, such as in the area of process improvement for a firm's productivity and growth. It can also mean the possession of a 'good name', or honour that represents the recognition of the status and/or achievement of an individual or group. Bourdieu states that symbolic capital also refers to the understanding of cultural rules, such as the interval that should pass between the bestowing of a gift and the offering of a reciprocal gift (Bourdieu 1990, p.140). The types and forms of symbolic capital relevant to this study are honour, prestige and recognition.

In applying Bourdieu's (1991) concept of symbolic capital, this thesis demonstrates how manufacturing practitioners possessing some characteristics of a wider and heteronomous manufacturing sector play important roles in structuring the narrative line and content of their fellow practitioners' accounts and stories (Collison and Mackenzie, 1999). The use of these forms of symbolic power by policy makers will help to highlight the way in which the users position themselves in social spaces and exert power to generate certain behaviours that are linked with the competitiveness agenda.

3.6 Reflexivity and reflexive practice

In the field of social science research, specifically management and organisational studies, reflexivity has gained a prominent place (Chia, 1996, Antonacopoulou and Tsoukas, 2002). In this study, reflexivity will enable the researcher to gain insight into the embedded practices of the organisational actors (Maclean et al., 2012a).

Giddens proposes the theory of structuration (1984), where the division in sociological thinking between structure and action is addressed through the understanding of knowledgeability, reflexivity, structure and duality, systems, and agency. Giddens' primary objective was to establish a better understanding of the existence of the human species, and specifically of social practices across space and time (Giddens, 1984); however, he avoids giving priority to the 'individual actor' or society.

Giddens' premise is that humans, i.e. the agents, have a purpose in life, and that this purpose continuously unfolds as life goes on. Throughout this unfolding, the agent gains knowledgeability by practically enacting his or her daily life through consciously and unconsciously accepted rules and norms. Giddens suggests that the continuous day-to-day enactment of these norms and rules is made possible through social encounters with other members of society.

People's capability of 'doing' is what Giddens terms 'agency' (Giddens, 1984), suggesting that the agent's doing is conscious, as whatever is done in any given situation can (although in some cases cannot) be altered by him or herself. Here, Giddens relates the actions of the agent to the notion of power, where power is not something that is embedded in social or political systems, but develops through the unfolding of the actions carried out by the agent. The agent has at his or her disposal many resources that they can draw upon in different ways, and the exercising of power occurs in interactions with other agents in order to

achieve desirable outcomes. However, at the same time the agent over whom power is exercised may exercise power themselves, thus creating a power play or resistance.

This notion of power play by agency leads to the concept of 'reflexivity'. Reflexivity is the process of carrying out activities and contributing in one's social surroundings. Giddens explains reflexivity as a monitored process where the agent monitors his or her actions against expected and intended outcomes, thus continuously adjusting their actions and reactions according to the participants' intentions. This is where the agent gathers knowledge (through experience of interacting) of social events, and alters and adjusts his or her actions in the present and in the future (Giddens, 1984). These interactions have a structure of their own and are grounded in the history that is known and understood, but that at the same time may evolve and change over time and situations.

This grounding of history as a structure is dealt with by Giddens in his explanation of 'duality' (Giddens, 1979, Giddens, 1984). Here, Giddens argues that structural properties within social systems are both the medium and the outcome of the actions carried out by the agents who make up the system, and that the structure at times enables the agent to practice and at other times constrains them from practicing. Furthermore, he explains that this enabling and constraining is an ongoing, evolving process, thus making actions (or the use of power) a catalyst for continuous change within the social system and structures. However, Giddens also emphasises that this knowledge of rules and resources is limited to the agent's social structure; the reflexive nature of the agent enables them to adjust and learn from their own and other agent's experiences, newer knowledge, and other power playing strategies. In other words, duality is the production and reproduction of social practices that are involuntarily changed consequences evolving from the continuous play acting of practices by the agents.

Bourdieu views reflexive practice as the 'un-thought categories of thought that delimit the thinkable and predetermine the thought' (Bourdieu, 1990a, p. 178) and considers social structures to be reflected in mental structures. The use of reflexivity in the understanding of career strategies enables one to better understand the identities of the researched; thus it can be said that reflexivity enables one to make sense of a practitioners' career path, and how the individual becomes what he/she is at present in terms of work identity (Maclean et al., 2012).

Bourdieu's understanding of reflexivity is closely associated with his notion of habitus (which, as previously discussed, is a system of internalised dispositions that is socially constituted and acquired through experience). Bourdieu argues that actors can be positioned within a social structure according to the varying amount of capital they possess (economic, cultural, social and symbolic).

3.7 *Competitiveness practices*

Chapter-two discussed in detail the issues concerning competitiveness within the manufacturing sector and how, over the decades, the understanding of the word 'competitiveness' has evolved and changed. This discussion not only traced the evolution of the dynamics of competitiveness in manufacturing firms, but also highlighted how the traditional role of the craftsman in his/her workshop has transformed into today's multi-dimensional, globalised and complex network of suppliers and distributors, not only focusing on the manufacturability of the product in hand, but also on how to move up the value chain and exploit business activities (Baines et al., 2009). By exploring the potential of a practice approach, this chapter has built on the previous discussion by identifying a possible disconnect between practice and policy.

Most of the literature reviewed, to date, has taken a forward procedural perspective on solving issues regarding competitiveness, with a focus on how organisations should practice in order to conform and rationalise. While the

practice turn and the discursive turn are not as well defined, they are nonetheless generating innovative contributions based on new ways of considering the social world (Langley and Abdallah, 2011). Mainstream strategy management literature is shifting from a rational approach to a practice/activity based approach (Whittington, 2006, Johnson et al., 2003, Jarzabkowski and Wilson, 2006). Strategy and knowledge scholarship are regularly making 'practice theory' their method of analysis. While policy makers tend to understand routines within organisations as a single communicative event and are mainly interested in the 'purpose' and motivation of agents to practise routines and its overall impact on performance as an output of productivity, organisational theorists are more interested in the 'practice' of routines, focusing on the 'parts', how they operate and how they are reproduced or changed as people enact them (Parmigiani and Howard-Grenville, 2011). Strategy practice has evolved from the rationalist approach over the last century into being a discourse in its own right, as discussed earlier in this chapter. Policy agendas have subsequently presented novel ways of mending the economic growth plan. On the other hand, organisational theorists have neglected to assess the macro environment conditions (Salman et al., 2011) and have narrowly developed theories to enable strategy makers at the firm level.

Most studies on competitiveness have taken the approach to define, measure and explain (Buckley et al., 1990, Fagerberg, 1988) the process of competitiveness. This is done by focusing on a variety of analytical levels: product, firm, industry, industry cluster and nation (micro, meso and macro levels respectively). In the previous chapter (2) it was explained that competitiveness concepts are used in a variety of disciplines. These disciplines vary from economics, international business, organisational theory, to strategy and marketing. Various schools of thought emphasise input or the resource side of competitiveness, while some focus on the efficiency side of the organisation's processes whereas others consider performance (Buckley et al., 1990). By doing so, most scholars ignore the practitioners' perspective of competitiveness and

view competitiveness to be a narrow top-down rationalist approach. However, this research aims to focus on the fact that people make decisions and decision making is complex and messy. Every individual practitioner has their own interpretation and understanding on competitiveness. This research aims to draw out these differences and provide a clearer understanding of competitiveness. By doing so, the use of competitiveness in policy may become more relevant.

The challenge for strategy practitioners' and theorists alike is to make sense of the relationships within an inter-organisational or network context (Börzel, 1998). Practice theorists are grounded in sociology and are concerned with the internal dynamics of the organisation. The scholarship principally agree that practice theory is concerned with the consistent, consequential human social interaction within society and the workplace occurring everyday (recursively) (Giddens, 1984, Vaara and Whittington, 2012), generating narratives that influence decision making within firms (Feldman and Orlikowski, 2011). The lens of 'practice' emphasises the 'how' (Parmigiani and Howard-Grenville, 2011). Practice theory literature also concentrates on the workplace, workforce and social interaction as a process to drive the productivity and performance agenda – in other words, processes (Chia, 2004).

For its part, the literature on competitiveness emphasises that firms need to be assessed from the Porterian standpoint in such a way as to enable firms to adapt to a new competitiveness agenda and avoid simply looking at what is preventing the firms from competing. From the structural tradition in social constructivism (or even from an interpretive and structuralist theory point of view), Bourdieu (1989) views that not only is social order a mentally constructed coding mechanism that guides humans to make decisions, but social order is materially embedded in the social practices (Rasche and Chia, 2009). In other words, Bourdieu was convinced both that human actions are embedded in socially constructed schemes and that dispositions are expressed through embodied activities situated in time and space (2009: 716).

Practice theory takes the view that the body is not just an instrument of the mind, but part and parcel of the actor (practitioner) as an inseparable mind-body feature. The practice theorist believes that social practices take a pivotal role in daily life and shape the moving, using and being of the body. In other words, 'ways of handling objects' 'ways of speaking or expressing' are part of a social practice (Reckwitz, 2002b, Schatzki, 2002). (Social) Actors also learn and enact typical ways of thinking, understanding and viewing (interpreting) things in their surroundings. Cultural theories and practice theories can be seen as comparable in terms of their ways of understanding knowledge, the world, the self, and other actors who enact (know) what and how to do and use objects (Gherardi, 2008, Schatzki, 2002). Hence, practice can be seen as a fundamentally social conceptual space, where meanings are made, understood and enacted (Barnes, 2001).

Agency and structure (structuration) co-exist as independent forces in practice theory, rejecting and transcending beyond dualism. This has enabled strategy and practice researchers to take a more epistemological and theoretical perspective towards research, and to bridge the institutional theory and strategy-as-practice (SAP) domain by changing the focus of the scholarship from 'how change is understood' to a more fundamental approach of 'how strategy is constructed'. The shifting perspective from understanding the organisation as a 'premise of change' to a complex maze of 'dynamic activities' (strategy-making) in organisational life (Tsoukas and Chia, 2002) enables the scholarship to study the making (how) of strategy itself. Change within the organisational context is an ongoing process affected by the habits, beliefs and conduct of actors as they try to make sense of what they should and could do so as to achieve 'their' purpose. The actors adapt their morals and beliefs to become legitimate 'ethical subjects' (Bernauer and Mahon, 1994, O'leary, 2006). The practice theory approach has enabled the organisational change focus to shift from organisational stability to ongoing change process activity. In other words, the ontological priority is no longer the organisation but the role of agency and how this impacts the

structures and routines of organisational knowledge that contribute to the continuous, emergent property of change.

To make sense of knowledge, Foucault's chosen method of analysis was discursive formation, or what he termed the 'archaeology of knowledge' (Foucault, 1970). In *The Order of Things*, Foucault included generalised grammar, natural history, and the analysis of wealth (class) in the early ages of modernity and philology, biology, and political economy in the modern period (1800-1960), as ways of analysing discourse (Kendall and Wickham, 1999). The 'archaeology of knowledge' here is concerned with the rules that are created in the fields of knowledge. These rules shape the way objects are defined, the way concepts are ordered, and the way various theories are formulated within human sciences (Foucault, 1970). For example, in the *History of Madness*, Foucault examines medical reports, clinical examinations, criminal typologies and penal codes to show how the object of 'madness' is defined in the field of psychopathology. In another example in *The Order of Things*, he describes the sequences that statements take, the modes that describe data, and the methods of systematically gathering and channeling information to make sense of how knowledge is gained in natural history. Thus, Foucault's 'discourse of doing' is seeking to describe the rules of the formation of objects, concepts and theories with a view to determining 'how' a field of knowledge is read so as to come closer to the 'true statement' that can stand the test of time.

In their research, users of Discourse Analysis (DA) seek guidance and direction from Foucault's extensive theoretical work in the area of discourse in society. Within society, discourse is everywhere and is perceived by everyone differently with regard to their own perceptions. The discourse most of interest to Foucault was that of everyday practice, including sexual practices, mental health care, and schooling. His method of understanding or uncovering this discourse is referred to as the 'archaeological approach'. One area in which Foucault's method of discourse may fall short is in the use of transcriptions (e.g. interviews,

observation) in his work (Fairclough et al., 2011, p. 305). However, his method of enquiry was to extract knowledge (archaeologically) from the 'real' context of practice, conveying that the researcher must examine real practices such as power.

Sociologists such as Giddens (1984) following the lead of de Certeau (1998b) emphasised the external environment of the actor and how everyday culture and social activities (structuration) play a role in informing decision making. Cultural theorists such as Bourdieu (1992) refer to the lifestyles, values and influence of social groups (habitus) in everyday life as having an impact on structuring the mind and, consequently, actions. Bourdieu was both a practitioner and a theorist, and believed that theory and practice should not be separate, as one cannot do practice without theory and vice versa. His work aimed to bridge traditional social dichotomies.

While the process of how strategic decisions are made has been widely discussed, it has not been fully understood at the research level (Chakravarthy, 1997, Prahalad and Hamel, 1994). The interpretivist scholarship of strategy-as-practice (which dominates the literature) relies on quantitative traditions to formulate 'causal models' (Jarzabkowski and Kaplan, 2010, Child, 1972). The problem here is that scientific analyses, be they rationalist, interpretivist or poststructuralist, are all developed within a particular complexity of power and knowledge; therefore, one must not reject the rationalist and interpretivist scholarship as imperfectly scientific, misleading or ideologically biased (Ezzamel and Willmott, 2010). Conversely, a constructivist approach to analysing strategy can arguably enable the research scholarship to approach strategy in such a way as to make sense of 'how' strategy and management practice are constructs of discourse and a legitimising form of identity (Bueger and Gadinger, 2014). Hence, in this thesis, organisational knowledge is understood through what Ezzamel and Willmott (2010) consider to be 'strategy': executive identity is the 'strategist' and management practices are 'strategising'. Furthermore, knowledge and power are

seen as inseparable in strategy making (Flyvbjerg, 2006, Cong and Pandya, 2003), where knowledge is the 'doing' of strategy and enables one to analyse 'how' strategy is played out through 'symbolic interaction' within specific social relations (time and space) (Whipp, 1999, Spender and Grant, 1996).

3.8 Conclusion

The research problem driving this thesis, and specifically the focus of this chapter, has been to understand competitiveness within a policy and practitioner perspective, with a view to selecting the qualitative methods that may prove most useful to exploring and deconstructing those perspectives and the process of competitiveness as they experience it. It is argued that strategy theory will benefit from the argument that strategy is something that done by the practitioner, rather than by firm. This is the central argument of a practiced-based approach to strategy (Splitter and Seidl, 2011a). Both this and the previous chapter have presented a literature review with the key emergent point that knowledge and power are fundamental components of strategy, and the practice theorist can capture knowledge and power through situational enquiries into local operational practices (i.e. at the firm level, in this study).

This chapter introduced the notion of 'practices' as 'working practices', emphasising that working and organising are situated processes, that knowledge-in-practice is a 'situated knowing', and that practice itself is an emerging act of activities carried out over time. In order to unfold the implicit and tacit elements of practice, the researcher needs to be close to practice and view the work internally to make sense of local operational practices and abstract knowledge for theory building (Jansson, 2013).

This chapter has also highlighted that practice theorists have distanced themselves from the reductionist tendency of explaining people's behaviour as a rational process, arguing instead that collective social human activity (or praxis) is entrenched in the individual's actions (as an outcome). Thus, the inference can be

made that the research method chosen to gain insight into local practices and practitioners' internal processes would be best distanced from the biased economic and psychological agenda of the mainstream capitalist scholarship that drives the competitive agenda of today.

The works of Bourdieu (1977; 1986; 1990; 1991; 1992; 2005; 2008) enable the researcher to consider an in-depth analysis of practice, specifically in three ways: firstly, as a social tenet; secondly, as a theoretical approach for explaining social phenomena; and, finally, as a theoretical approach that could be applied to the study of organisations.

Sociologist scholarship that examines practice theory is fundamentally involved in capturing the everyday activities of the practitioner, from a view to investigate, analyse and explore organisational routines and practices that are involved linked to the internal processes of the organisation (Jarzabkowski et al., 2012). The scholarship is concerned with the consistent consequential human social interaction within society and the workplace occurring in everyday events (Giddens, 1984, Vaara and Whittington, 2012) and is generating narratives that influence decision-making within firms (Feldman and Orlikowski, 2011). However, this research aims to take a non-processual view of practice within organisations. The research aims to capture the perception of competitiveness as viewed by the practitioners everyday practices and how they make sense of competitiveness in practice.

The long-held view of strategy is that it is a linear process (Sull, 2007). This study argues that competitiveness is far too complex (Bourdieu, 1990) and existing concepts available to the practitioner are far too simple to be adequate (Kline, 1985, Gardner and Ash, 2003). By unearthing the 'many more facts' (Bourdieu, 1990: 8) about strategy and the practitioner's perception of competitiveness, the research will be able to better explain how the policy and practice are influenced, created and implemented (ibid).

The conceptual tools provided by practice theory provide an original way of examining competitiveness practices, the process of strategising itself, and indeed the gap between policy and practice in the context of the manufacturer. What this approach ultimately recognises is the importance of the people – i.e. the agents – within a field. The field itself only exists as a theoretical entity without those actors, who themselves are what create both the field and its state of competitiveness.

This chapter has also examined the concepts of self-interest and opportunistic behaviour within the framework of habitus, and how they can be used to explain people's bonds to a certain community of practice, and the behaviour that is contingent on that belonging. These bonds are a way of understanding how people react/act in a self-interested way within the fields of power, and how they perceive competitiveness.

This research argues that by taking a practice perspective, policy-making is better informed by taking the view of human capital in using competitiveness policies. It is argued that it is necessary to explore not only what is done but what is not done, that which is not practised, that which is not said, as signs of what might be but is not (Carter et al., 2008b). The analysis of the literature reveals that the manufacturing practitioners (as in the case of small business owners) objectives may not always be simply to grow and maximise profit (Spence, 2000b), but are influenced by the society in which the owner lives (Casey, 1995). Reflecting back on the concept of habitus, different actors within varying fields of power, and wielding varying forms of capital, have constructed this cross-cultural, cross-geographic form of capital, which in turn has helped shape a perception of competitiveness in today's global market. This suggests that (social) actors also learn and enact typical ways of thinking, and understanding and viewing (interpreting) the structure (fields) in their surroundings can therefore provide a

fresh perspective on why a disconnect exists between competitiveness policy and practice.

The remainder of this study will present the research methodology and the findings from fieldwork with both policy-enablers and manufacturing practitioners, aiming to explore their thinking and strategies concerning competitiveness. These findings will be analysed primarily using the conceptual tools afforded by the theory of habitus, as well as with reference to the other theoretical approaches that have been discussed. These findings will also be critically examined in light of the extent to which they reflect varying degrees of connection and disconnect between manufacturing policy and practice in the manufacturing context, ultimately drawing out the key implications of this for policy and practice.

Chapter 4 Research Methodology

4.1 Introduction

The research methodology is central to any research project, as it binds together the rationale and the findings. This chapter starts by clarifying the key terminologies involved in this research and by explaining the philosophical considerations behind the research methodology employed. This will be followed by introducing the two-phased research method applied: phase-1 the pilot study consisting of an online Delphi study and interviews with policy-enablers and practitioners' respectively; and phase-2 the main study, interviews conducted with practitioners within the manufacturing sector. The chapter will elaborate on the analysis techniques used thereby showing how the researcher has interpreted the issues concerning the practices and perceptions of competitiveness by practitioners'.

The critical review of past research into competitiveness has traced competitiveness in the UK manufacturing context. These debates have largely focused on growth and productivity. A dominance of scientific rationalism and a reductionist approach has mostly been applied in unveiling the factors affecting competitiveness. Insufficient attention has been paid to competitiveness in practice. There is little is known how competitiveness is played out by social actors themselves. It is the contention of this research that a more holistic approach, drawn from social science perspectives on competitiveness and focusing on how competitiveness is actually practised by actors, can better aid the understanding of the connections and disconnect between policy and practice in competitiveness. To that end, this chapter reviews the research methodology and methods used in this research, justifying the particular choices made with regard to this contention and the aim of this study.

4.2 The Research approach

In considering methodologies, a central debate since the 1960s has been that outlining the tensions between quantitative and qualitative research. For example, Punch (2005) discusses research within the broader context of the social sciences, listing a number of common social research methods and introducing these two main streams of research methodology. Towards the middle of the twentieth century the traditional dominance of quantitative methods, as the way of doing empirical research in social science, was challenged. Scholars thought that only quantitative approaches should be used to study human behaviour. But towards the end of the twentieth century the benefits of applying the two approaches together were beginning to gain ground in social research. The central debated was centred on whether or not social research can successfully quantify human behaviour (ibid).

In the social sciences, while there are many classifications used to differentiate research, most have three fundamental elements: ontology, epistemology and methodology. Ontology is the concern of the nature and form of how reality is perceived in the physical world, while epistemology is the way in which that reality can be known (or the way of knowing). Methodology is concerned with the rationales behind the ways (procedures) used to research a phenomenon (Creswell, 1994, Guba and Lincoln, 1994).

Johnson and Scholes (2008) argue that a researcher's epistemological position lies on a continuum between two extremes: positivism and anti-positivism. Positivism reflects the philosophical stand typically adopted within the natural sciences. It has its basis in realism, idealism or representationalism, which hold that the world we live in and see is an exact replica of the real world itself. The positivist researcher believes that the world works according to certain laws and, therefore, can be discovered through scientific methods. On the other hand, anti-positivism assumes that there are no universal truths outside our minds; in other words, there is no 'one' absolute reality (Easterby-Smith, 2002).

4.2.1 Positivist and Constructivist paradigm

Denzin and Lincoln (2000) argue that the positivists perceives the world as 'real'; they call this 'naive realism', where reality is seen as something that can be identified and captured, meaning that any research findings under the positivist paradigm can then be seen as 'true', and the knowledge obtained as objective. Given this understanding, positivist approaches claim to deal with the issue of research bias by containing precisely this objective viewpoint. Moreover, as research in this context takes place in a controlled setting where hypotheses can be verified through quantitative methods, the results are thus believed to be either true or false.

Management studies such as the current one (of competitiveness) are not so easily quantifiable. This is because the 'reality' is at times highly ambiguous; the results are unclear and open to the researcher's interpretation and, to some extent, bias. The reason behind this is that management is socially constructed and its reality is, therefore, dependent on the research context. As the researcher's preconceived notions of reality play a vital role in the analysis and discussion of any research outputs, in this more ambiguous context adopting a positivist approach would arguably not suit the nature of the research being conducted.

Post-positivism as a viewpoint differs from the positivist paradigm in the sense that its perceptions of the world are less 'naive' and more critical. In other words, a post-positivist scholar will view reality in a more critical way. The post-positivist scholar believes that reality can be apprehended, but only partially and hence is problematic in nature. The scholar here will only indicate (to some unavoidable degree of bias) that there is a probability that the hypotheses are true or false, hence adding a more critical dimension to the research.

This paradigm is more suitable to management studies than positivism since there is a more critical understanding of the world that needs to be brought into the understanding of competitiveness and how it is perceived by practitioners'. However, for a study like this – which aims to hear the voices of respondents – a more open-ended approach is necessary. The researcher is not trying to look for a 'true' or 'false' answer to the question of how competitiveness is understood and enacted in practice but, rather, is trying to make sense of the meanings behind respondents' opinions about competitiveness.

4.2.2 Constructivist

In the constructivist paradigm, how one sees reality is relative; the ontological view here is that there is no meaning or truth without the minds of humans, therefore meaning is constructed rather than discovered (Crotty, 1998). Reality is socially constructed, and knowledge that is obtained about reality (for example from research findings) is subjectively created by the researcher and research participants. Moreover, the respondents' realities are subject to the researcher's own realities, and vice versa. Interpreted differently, constructivist theories may be seen to say not that humans create meaning from a blank slate but, rather, that they engage with the world they are interpreting, and from that process of engagement construct meaning. Hence, different people may understand or respond differently to constructing meaning or truth even if they are in the same situation or responding to the same phenomenon (Burr, 2003). Methodologically, constructivism dictates that reality is constructed or reconstructed through informed consensus. As such, qualitative methods are seen as the optimum data collection tools for research.

Bourdieu brings together objectivity and subjectivity in what he terms 'constructive structuralism', using the term 'structuralist' and 'constructivist' intermittently and giving both equal weightage. Bourdieu (1989) states that:

[w]ithin the social world, there are objective structures independent of the consciousness and will of the agent, which are capable of guiding and constraining their practices or their representations. (1989: 14)

In Bourdieu's view, the subjective side is also structured in terms of 'schemes of perception, thought, and action' (1990: 54); what he termed as 'habitus'. The concept of habitus and its use within this research have been explained in detail in Section 3.5.1. However, as it is important to clarify the theoretical and philosophical underpinning of the research methodology, the following few paragraphs will explain how habitus informs the research methods specifically.

Bourdieu preserves the integrity of structure and agency as domains of interest but also treats the dichotomy as problematic in explaining how structure and agency (forms of knowledge) are constructed. When structure and agency are analysed through the relationship between the individual and society, Bourdieu would argue that the individual has a free choice to choose his/her actions yet at the same time his/her actions are determined by the society in which they interact. This struggle between structure and agency is dealt with in Bourdieu's theory of social action (Wacquant, 1998). Bourdieu offers a way of deconstructing social structures through an appreciation of how agents incorporate a practical sense of what can or cannot be achieved; that is, the objective possibilities of what the person thinks is achievable through past collective experiences. Bourdieu conveys this through the concept of habitus and emphasises that the structure of the past is embodied in the person (Bourdieu, 1990c).

In engagement with structure and agency, there is a difficult theoretical tension between the relationship of objective and constructive moments through the material world (Allan, 2012). For example, Allan argues that in the material world of capitalist production, the primary objective of the firm is to maximise profits, while overproduction creates tension (Allan, 2011). Here, policy tries to mediate

productivity and overcome overproduction, thus generating tension between policy and practice.

According to Bourdieu, this tension occurs between the 'field' and the 'habitus', where both are structures; habitus is 'incorporated history' (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, p. 13) and the field is considered to be the 'objectified history' (Bourdieu, 1988, p. 786). The tension occurs between the individual and collective struggles or practices that transform or preserve these structures through specific practices (Allan, 2011). Bourdieu (1989) suggests that an individual (in the case of this research the manufacturing practitioner) has many thoughts, feelings, and actions that constitute his/her habitus. The social position and the distribution of resources of the manufacturing practitioner are thus considered to be his/her social field. These varied structures create a dialectic (tension) relationship with one another through the strategic actions and practices of practitioners' when practicing day to day strategies within a business (firm) environment. As a consequence of this dialectic relationship, every time a practitioner makes a decision in his/her firm, a new and different scenario emerges in the form of challenges, opportunities and threats to the manufacturer in performing its fundamental purpose (that is, the maximisation of profit).

In the case of this research, this struggle reflects on tension between policy and practice in the manufacturing competitiveness agenda. Thus, a constructivist approach can be seen as most appropriate in enabling this research to understand the practitioners' views on policy and the extent of their engagement with it, as the aim of the research is to explore how current manufacturing practitioners' practice competitiveness, it is argued that constructivism is indeed a research choice to shape a management study such as this one.

In particular, Bourdieu's methods of enquiry encouraged an iterative relationship between theory and empirical work, where theory guides the work to be conducted, which then reflects back on the theory itself to formulate theory at a

different level. This research adopts this approach, where the thematic analysis of interviews with practitioners' will be able to construct a better understanding of the way in which competitiveness is viewed and enacted.

4.2.3 Research philosophy employed

Philosophies have an important part to play in formulating a research. A good philosophy may not necessarily produce good research but can aid our perception of understanding the social world (Patton, 1990). The current research is focused on understanding the rationale behind how manufacturing competitiveness policies are perceived by practitioners'. As mentioned earlier, most of the research in this area has, to date, been dominated by a reductionist approach in unveiling the factors affecting competitiveness. Conversely, this research argues that adopting a practice-based framework to explore these factors can probe the realities of competitiveness practice 'on the ground' in such a way that policy, based on more reductionist approaches, may not understand. Bourdieu (1990b) argues that sociological analysis must establish the conditions of possibility and validity of organisational strategy. People perform, not only in all social walks of life, but also within organisational practices. Practices are done and expected to be done as they are the right thing 'to be done', should be 'seen to be done', and because one cannot do otherwise (Bourdieu 1990, p. 18). Therefore, the research emphasis here is to seek to restore the meaning of these 'done' practices and to grasp the logic of how manufacturing practitioners' perceive competitiveness.

4.2.4 Research approach employed

The following sub-sections will present the research approach applied.

4.2.4.1 An inductive approach

An inductive and qualitative approach is used in this research. Induction enabled the researcher to build theory from the collected research data, in contrast to which deduction tests deduces from hypotheses existing in theory (Saunders,

2009). In inductive method of inquiry theory and models are inductively extracted from the analysis of contextual data (Baptista Nunes et al., 2010). Hence analysis comprises of the continuous exploration of concepts as theory emerges from data until sufficiently stable defining properties, explanatory categories, and linking sets of relationships are achieved (ibid). As an approach Induction is appropriate for this research because it is exploring an area (competitiveness policy and the impact of the socially constructed competitiveness) where there is very little existing research or enquiry.

There is of course an agreement that both the social and the economic factors are important to a firm, region or nations competitiveness. This sets the research field. In the literature what are not known are the precise elements that are important in the perception of competitiveness by the practitioner. Some elements of rational and reductionist approach to competitiveness are well known (as explained in chapter 2), but because there is little research on the practice side of competitiveness it is possible that other elements are not represented in the literature. Therefore, the researcher kept an open but informed mind when starting the research, allowing the data to reveal the theory.

4.2.4.2 A qualitative approach

Qualitative methodology is generally used in inductive research. This flexible style (Nelson, 1994, McAllister et al., 2003) of research enables one to obtain an understanding of meanings and contexts (Kaplan and Maxwell, 2005) within a natural (Creswell, 2013) and dynamic situation (Cassell and Symon, 1994, Barry et al., 1999). The literature review demonstrated that the manufacturers of today face a complex and challenging environment. Practitioner's constantly need to make decisions that have a direct impact on competitive performance. Social science approaches enable the researcher to understand the activities of the manufacturer and the manager. In particular, a qualitative research approach can enable the researcher to gain an understanding of the often complex rationales for particular courses of action both at policy and practice levels (Bock and

Sergeant, 2002), through identification, description and interpretation. Thus it enables the researcher to understand the different patterns, processes (Hossain, 2008, Creswell, 2013) and pace of competitiveness amongst manufacturing practitioner's in the England.

Based on these factors and the review of different research methodologies used in management studies, a qualitative research approach underpinned by a constructivist approach was found to be most suitable for the current study. This is because, firstly, the dominance of scientific rationalism in understanding competitiveness has, to date, engendered certain weaknesses that could explain the lack of translatability of policy into practice. Secondly, as the central interest is in understanding how current manufacturing competitiveness policies are perceived by practitioners in a socio-economic environment, a qualitative, constructivist-based research methodology that considers the way in which actors construct their social realities is arguably favourable. Thirdly, as contrasting to a static social world, it is assumed that practitioners have some choice and control of their destiny based on their perceptions of the world and their field (Bourdieu, 1990b). Fourthly, through the eyes of the practitioner and the study of the dialectic relationship between structures (habitus and fields) can enable the researcher to gain a better understanding of the perception of policy. It is for these reasons that a qualitative research methodology has been employed for this study.

4.3 Research design

A research design is an action plan or logic that links the data to be collected with the conclusion to be drawn (Rowley, 2002). The research procedure is influenced by various considerations such as timing, weighting, mixing and theorising (Creswell, 2009). Timing is of particular importance (Creswell, 2009, Tashakkori and Teddlie, 2003) to this study as the research design involves a process whereby the data was collected in two phases. Figure 4.1 shows how these two research phases have been constructed so as to meet the aims and objectives

(See Section 1.5 and 1.6) of this study the phase-1 consists of an exploratory Delphi-study and semi-structured interviews. Phase-2 constitutes the main study, consisting of semi-structured interviews.

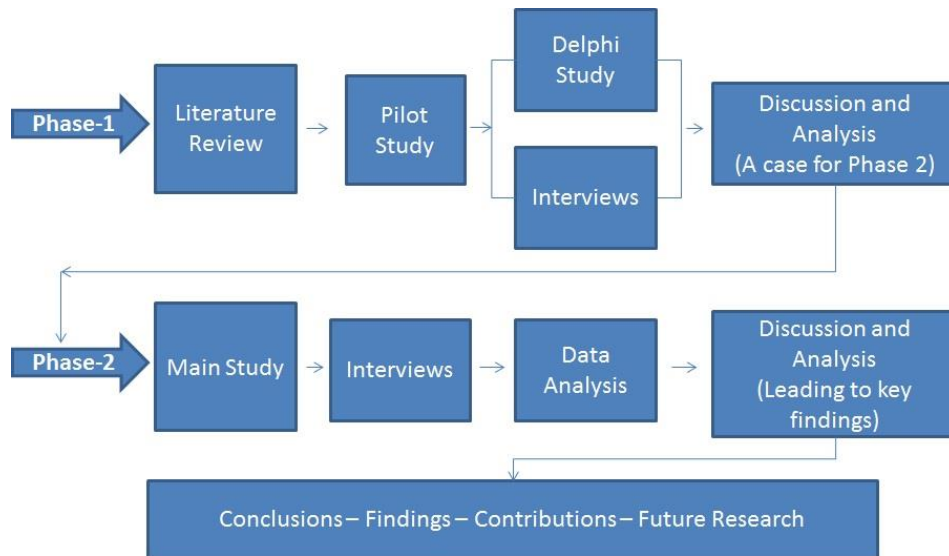


Figure 4-1: Research design

At the start of the research an initial literature review was conducted to explore the area of interest (that is, manufacturing and competitiveness), gaps within the literature were identified and the research aim was confirmed. The research aim was to examine how the manufacturing practitioner, through their everyday practices, perceives competitiveness. To ensure the overall aim of the research was met the researcher explored the connections and disconnects between competitiveness policy and practice.

4.4 The data collection scope

The initial reason for selecting manufacturing as a sector is that manufacturing is at the heart of economic prosperity and competitiveness (as detailed in Chapter 2) debate and has not delivered its promise (Petitis, 2015). To explore the reasons of this the research has located manufacturing in the competitiveness agenda in conjunction with the rebalancing debate, where the rebalancing scope is

focussed across the UK with an attempt to rebalance the economic dependency on the financial and service sector. The second reason to take a practitioners perspective of competitiveness is that most of the current literature on competitiveness is modelled and theorised around the Porterian view of firm level policy. The literature review (of this research) concluded that the competitiveness debate can benefit from a non-rational view by taking into consideration the views and perceptions of the practitioner on competitiveness. Third reason to adapt a practitioners' perspective is that the phenomenon of competitiveness has different meanings for different people be it a policymaker or manufacturing practitioner. To be able to make sense of competitiveness at the practical level, collecting views, opinions, and insights from practitioners on how they perceive competitiveness the study enables the researcher make better sense of the phenomenon.

4.4.1 Conceptual practice-based approach

As Orlikowski (2000) brings the attention towards a practice lens, he states that "a practice lens assumes that people are purposive, knowledgeable, adaptive, and inventive agents who engage with technology in a multiplicity of ways to accomplish various and dynamic ends." Individual level practices that are created as a part of the cultural practices of communities and societies. Hence, the identification of user needs would have to be directed to practices instead of single acts to be able to define the context of how people behave. It is strongly believed that in the context of competitiveness, the significance of individual differences, ways, and habits can be studied through the concept of practice. Further, the field of practice is one form of cultural theory that is based upon a distinct social ontology (Skatzki, 2001).

In framing competitiveness the focal point is the manufacturer in the field of manufacturing. Routinised actions are seen as subcomponents of practices emerging in a certain context, or in other words they can be seen as stages which are required to carry out wider practices. For instance, when a manufacturing

practitioner is pricing for a tender there are several essential steps before the tender is complete. The characteristics which the practitioner adapts to be competitive are supposed to affect and be interconnected with actions and practices.

For the purpose of this research, the key benefit of adapting a practice approach is that it offers conceptual tools for the exploration of the myriad of everyday practices – routinised ways of thinking and acting. These somewhat mundane social practices play a part in shaping practices, and involve a complex set of actors, events, and relations that significantly shape the meaning of competitiveness. Consequently, it is the identification and exploration of practices that becomes a key research task in understanding competitiveness.

This study's data collection began in November 2011 and finished in March 2013. The data collection had two phases; the first phase was a pilot study and consisted of two methods of data collection (an online Delphi-study coupled with interviews) while the second phase consisted of interviews.

4.4.2 Policy-enablers and manufacturing practitioners

All the participants classified as policy-enablers and manufacturing practitioners were working in the field of manufacturing in England. As part of the pilot-study 8 individuals participated in the Delphi-study. In addition, these 8 participants were further interviewed as a follow-up of the Delphi-study. A further 4 were interviewed as they were willing to participate in an interview and not a Delphi-study.

In the main study (phase-2), 20 participants were interviewed whom had backgrounds in manufacturing. They were either currently or had previously practiced in the sector. Participants either worked in manufacturing firms or owned their own manufacturing business, education sector, quangos or consultancy.

The data collection strategy was set to invite practitioners from a wide spectrum of manufacturers and quangos across the UK. Through the FAME database, BIS and local government websites 295 prospective participants were approached to participate in the first phase. In order to secure participation, the researcher also used personal connections to generate a higher rate of participation. After numerous attempts to contact and convince the participants via telephone, email, and one to one informal discussions only 20 responded and participated in phase-1 (Delphi-study and interviews). During the second phase, a further 73 manufacturing firms were contacted across the UK from which 20 participants agreed to participate. The respondents were either living and/or working within the UK and had businesses and interests nationally and internationally.

4.5 Dealing with a small sample size

While not universally advocating any single methodological approach for all evaluation situations (Bock and Sergeant, 2002) the use of qualitative research rich data can be obtained from a small number of samples (Flick, 2002). This research seeks to penetrate social life beyond appearance and manifest meaning (Crouch and McKenzie, 2006) and aims to understand the social world from the viewpoint of respondents, through detailed descriptions of their cognitive and symbolic actions, (Myers, 2000) and generate rich valuable data so as to examine how the manufacturing practitioner, through their everyday practices, perceives competitiveness.

In order to capture the views of manufacturing practitioners the researcher, prior to the data collection phase used a variety of sources to broaden the reach of participants. At the first instance, the FAME database was used so as to gather information of the manufacturing sector firms (see above). The research strategy used for the FAME database was based on the standard industry code (SIC). The SIC enabled the researcher to refine the list of firms to those that were involved in manufacturing. For instance, manufacturers of food products, tobacco, textile,

paper, chemicals, metal, machinery equipment, and medical precision and optical instruments etcetera (see full list in Appendix 8). This generated a large list of firms involved in manufacturing, further refinement was done in order to get a targeted approach was to limit the firms that had names and address (including phone numbers) of the company directors, had a website, been in operations for more than 5 years, and had a maximum of 250 employees. The maximum number of employees of 250 suited well for this research. The main unit of analysis in this research is the practitioner, thus to ensure that the data captured the practitioners perspective it was essential that the participants day to day practices and work was captured.

Through the FAME database, 295 prospective participants were approached to participate in the first phase. In order to secure participation, the researcher also used personal connections to generate a higher rate of participation. After numerous attempts to contact and convince the participants via telephone, email, and one to one informal discussions only 20 responded and participated in the Delphi-study and interviews. During the second phase, a further 73 manufacturing firms were contacted across the UK from which 20 participants agreed to participate. The respondents were either living and/or working within the UK and had businesses and interests nationally and internationally.

It is acknowledged that the research involves a limited population which is too few to draw meaningful statistical inference and is avoided (Hossain, 2008). This study investigates personal experience in a largely subjectivist framework (Crouch and McKenzie, 2006) of policy-enablers and manufacturing practitioners (associations, local enterprise partnerships, regional development companies, educational institutions and manufacturer's) based in the UK. Rich data is available by interviewing manufacturing practitioners and policy-enablers who were readily accessible, justifying the use of qualitative methods and small sample size.

Alternatively a quantitative study using questionnaires in large numbers to produce results that are said to be accurate, testable and repeatable would have been used. However, the need for a statistically significant number of subjects, there are problems with such an approach in the context of the present research. To explore the everyday practices and strategies that practitioners do many of the influences were qualitative in nature. Dealing with complex issues such as relationships, life-history, daily routines in an organisational setting and social life ordinal data using a Likert (or similar) scale for questionnaire answers may fail to capture this complexity.

4.6 Phase 1: The pilot study

The sub-sections present the research methods applied for the pilot study.

4.6.1 The need for a pilot study

In social sciences some advocate the importance of a pilot study (Swedberg, 2014). The literature review built a case for a practitioner's perspective of competitiveness. The researcher made the assumption (conclusion of the literature review) that (1) Policy as it stands is a top-down strategy that inherently assumes that practitioners will follow. (2) The extant scholarly literature on competitiveness provides numerous prescriptive conceptual and theoretical justifications to support the top-down rationalistic approach of policy. Hence, the researcher found the need to capture the views of practitioners and verify this claim. Thus the researcher decided to conduct a pilot-study so as to gain a better understanding of the assumption of practitioners being disconnected with policy. With this in mind the researcher conducted a pilot-study.

4.6.2 The Pilot study method

The exploratory nature of the research the significance of a pilot study in this research was due to the fact that the narratives evolving from the literature review needed to be tested for correct (Creswell, 2012) and meaningful interpretation (Due et al., 2014, Coolican, 2014). This ensured adequate and

effective data collection methods were employed across participants so that useful data could be obtained (Coolican, 2014). Furthermore, in studies such as that of exploratory nature authors increasingly report not just what they have found from a piece of research but how they have gone about doing it hence gaining initial experience and a clearer picture about the research in hand (Sampson, 2004) and thus paving the way for the phase-2 of the research.

The pilot study consisted of two separate yet inter-linked qualitative research strategies: a Delphi study (online survey) and semi-structured interviews (See Figure 4-2). In order to inform these methods and help with sampling and accessing appropriate participants, secondary data was collected through: desk research of current and historical journal articles; policy documents from government websites such as the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS), Her Majesty’s Revenues and Customs (HMRC), the FAME Database and British Library archives, trade associations, various newspapers, and magazine articles.

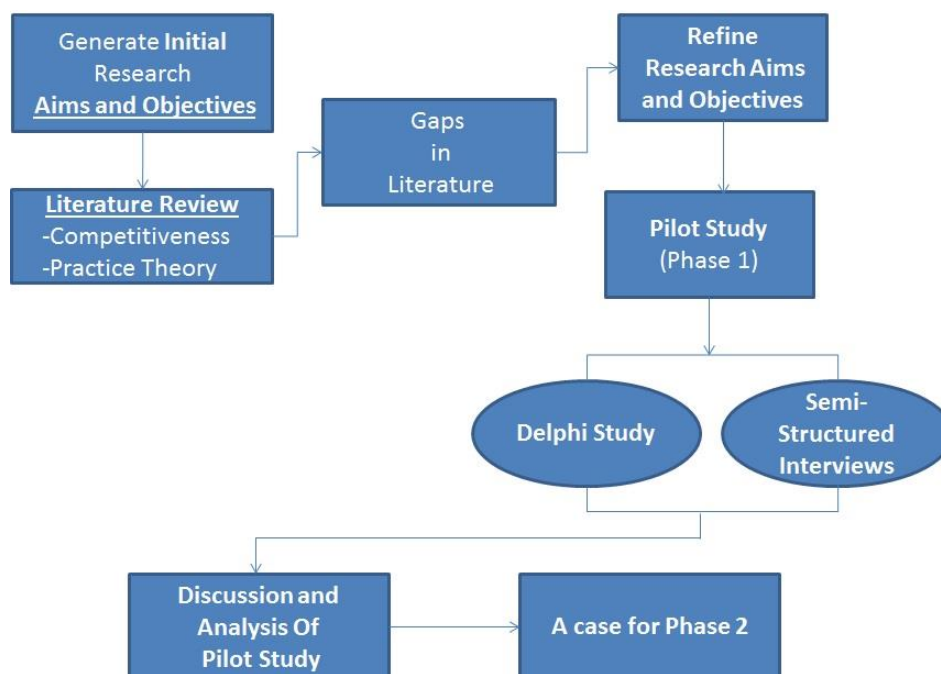


Figure 4-2: Phase 1 - pilot study

4.6.3 Pilot study – sampling strategy

As the research aims were to explore how manufacturing practitioners perceive competitiveness through their everyday, the main criteria for the selection of the Delphi study and interview participants were as follows: practitioners (in a senior management role) of policy and decision making within manufacturing firms, practitioners within the public sector (quangos, associations, bodies, local authorities etcetera) that are involved in the dissemination of policy. To this context both of these are referred to as ‘policy enablers’.

At this juncture, it should be pointed out that the purpose of the research was not to understand or explore the actual process of policy making; rather, participants were selected based on the ways in which they ‘use’ policy. The usage of policy here refers to the way in which a practitioner develops policies and strategies (of their own), which are then adapted in practice to be competitive. The Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) within a region, for example, is responsible for the articulation and formulation of strategies that ensure the dissemination of Whitehall policies set by government ministers. The LEP practitioners would translate these policies into workable sector specific policies that would guide, assist, and help manufacturers to actively participate in the government’s competitiveness (productivity and growth) agenda.

The participants were approached and contacted through a variety of methods:

- The FAME database⁸, which was used to identify possible firms within the manufacturing sector. The sample search strategy employed to collect the information of firms and their employees can be seen in appendix-5.
- The BIS website, which was used to locate the list of LEPs operating in the UK. It should be noted at this stage that the LEP (also known as the ‘New Economy’)⁹.

⁸ A database maintained by the UK Government for the purpose of registering firms and institutions for tax collection and monitoring

- Lists of manufacturing companies, which were obtained through the researcher's personal contacts (such as trade associations and via former colleagues within the sector) and then using the snowballing technique to gain further access.

Once an in-house database was formed using these sources, the researcher called prospective participants via telephone and emailed them (please see Appendix-1 for a sample invitation email). All logs of telephone calls and emails were kept as records for future reference and ethical research purposes. A total of 200 emails were sent out to invite participants for the study, out of which 20 responded and participated in the Delphi study and interviews (8 and 12 respectively). Following the access and sampling stage, the Delphi study and interviews were conducted. The following sections explain the Delphi study process, its purpose, and how it was designed and executed, after which the interviews process is detailed.

4.6.3.1 The Delphi study strategy: 'why' and 'how'

National policy matters and decisions have always been a critical and complex affair. After the Second World War (WW2), the Rand Corporation in the USA developed a forecasting technique that enabled the post-war American defence team (Gupta and Clarke, 1996) to make decisions related to policy. This is now known as the Delphi technique. It is based on the idea that, when an open debate or committee is deciding on policy, this may bring mixed opinions because of diverse experiences, political differences, domination by grouping up, and strong personalities into the negotiations (Gupta and Clarke, 1996). This diversity is seen as critical to maintain for the purposes of transparency and objectivity. It was Linstone and Turoff's (1979) efforts that properly defined and documented the technique. A Delphi technique, they argue, is most suitable for policy matters

⁹ New Economy is a think-tank formed in 2009 after the disbanding of the regional development agency to provide local councils with economic intelligence and regular analysis to underpin strategic direction of the local authority. The think-tank provides leads on idea generation and project initiation up to the point of delivery

where decisions are mostly communicated, discussed and decided in the corridors of power and authority. This, then, makes the use of this technique suitable for the current study of how policy is translated into practice. By adopting the Delphi technique, the current research was able to achieve valid and reliable consensus among policy enablers on the challenges, opportunities and barriers faced by manufacturing firms in the UK. The Delphi technique also enabled the researcher to obtain stakeholders' views on what is meant by competitiveness and growth, and how firms strategise in reaction to government policy.

Gutierrez (1989) formed a relative assessment of different techniques and suggested that Delphi does not require a consensus view to be formed; hence, disagreements are regarded as valid outcomes of the communication process. As De Meyrick (2003) states Delphi has predominantly been used to achieve consensus views across groups of experts, it can be argued that the Delphi process is fundamentally a communication process, and does not predefine that the outcome should be either consensus or disagreement – both are valid outcomes. This method of data collection suited the research, as it was expected that the participants may have a diverse view on competitive policy and its meaning.

The Delphi study was conducted through Lime Survey, an online platform. Respondents were contacted via the methods previously explained. Once they agreed to participate, the online platform's automated emailing system was activated to contact them. Invitations were sent out and each respondent was assigned a unique identification code for the purposes of anonymity and confidentiality.

4.6.3.2 Delphi study participants

According to Gordon (1994), best suited candidates (participants) for a Delphi study should be selected based on their expertise on the topic under study. The

profile of participants in a Delphi study can be defined by age, nationality, knowledge, expertise, qualifications, occupation or position. In terms of a Delphi study's group size, Adler and Ziglio (1996) observe that the literature on the subject suggests that, with a homogeneous group of experts, good results can be obtained even with small panels of 10-15 individuals. In situations where various reference groups are involved, the size of the sample may be considerably larger. (Linstone, 1975) references work done by (Brown et al., 1969) and (Dalkey and Rand, 1969), where it was found that a suitable minimum panel size is seven; accuracy deteriorates rapidly with smaller sizes and improves more slowly with large numbers.

As the Delphi study aimed to elicit the key thinking of manufacturing practitioners and policy enablers with regard to competitiveness policy and practice, the Delphi-study consisted of three rounds and is explained in the next section.

4.6.3.3 The three rounds of the Delphi-study - process

With reference to the work of Linstone (1978), in order to ensure that the stability of opinions if marginal changes between rounds are less than 15%, the Delphi should be terminated. In other words if there is no change in thoughts of the participants after the second round, then the process should be stopped and concluded. Other users of Delphi have argued stability of participants opinions matter and if in 1-3 rounds there is no change in thoughts after the 2nd round the process should be stopped and concluded (Erffmeyer et al., 1986, Gottschalk, 2000).

For the pilot study, the Delphi was conducted in three rounds (see structure of the process in Figure 4.3). In the first round, respondents were asked a set of questions (detailed section 4.7.3) and were free to suggest that the competitiveness adopted by BIS was correct and that no actions were warranted. For the second round, the respondents evaluated the suggestions made during the first round by all participants, and were free to reassess their initial positions.

In the context of this research, three rounds were deemed appropriate. In the first round, respondents were asked a set of questions (detailed shortly) and were free to comment and suggest their opinion on manufacturing competitiveness. In the second round, respondents evaluated the suggestions made by participants during the first round and were free to reassess their initial positions.

Figure 4-3: Delphi study process

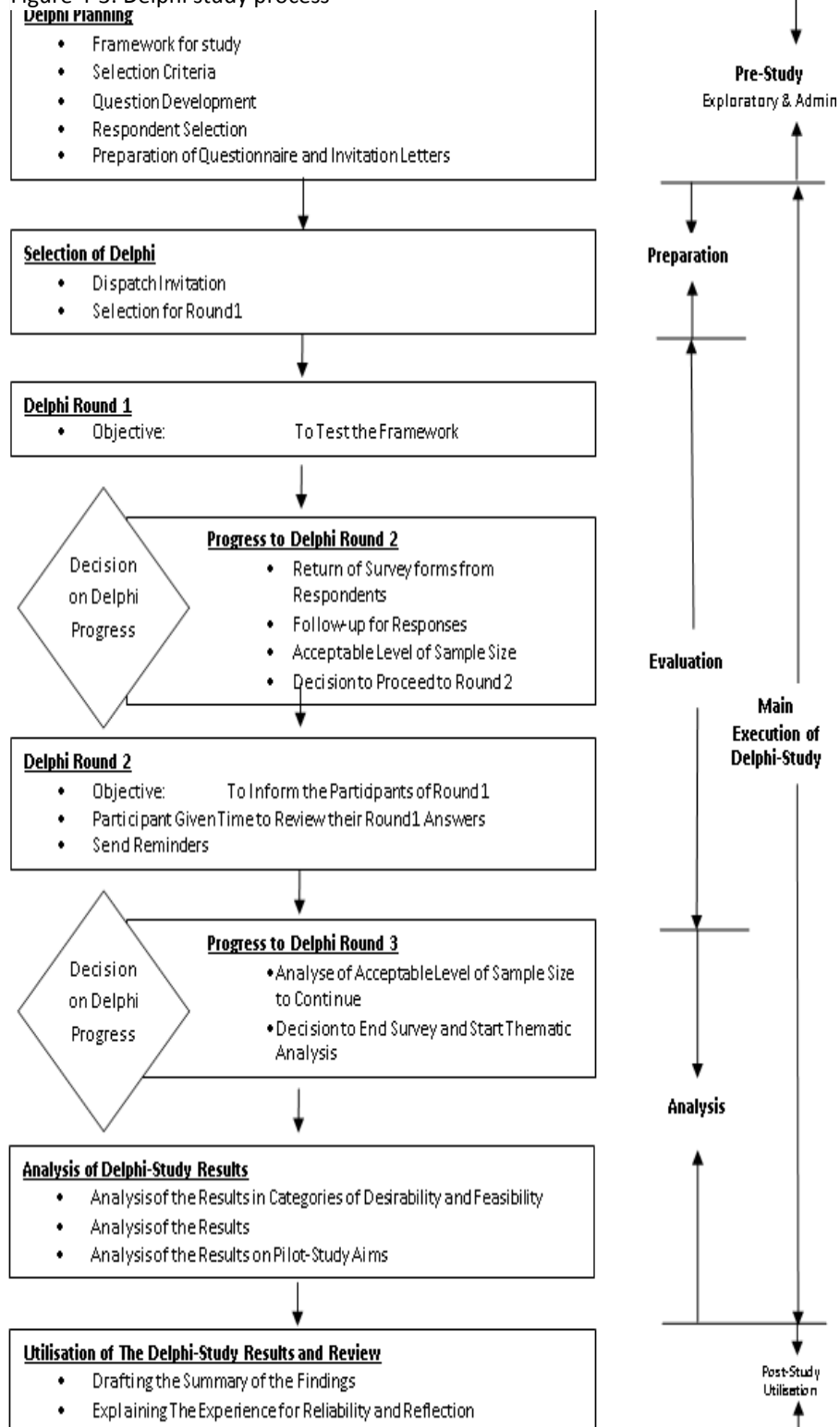


Table 4-1: Intentions of the Delphi-study

Round 1	
1	To determine stakeholder interpretations of growth
2	To determine stakeholder views of the most important factors for competitiveness in the manufacturing sector
3	To determine why the observed actions of the strategy practitioners diverge from the growth policy
Round 2	
1	To explore stakeholder views on the purpose and scope of competitiveness
2	To obtain stakeholder views on suggested competitiveness strategies for the sector
Round 3	
1	Collect the responses from previous rounds 1 and 2
2	Through the use of thematic analysis, data is analysed and used to reflect both upon the overall research aims and inform the main study

The third and final round aimed to refine and rank the participants suggestions. The suggestions were grouped and assessed for consensus / disagreement followed by their reasoning for the matter. Figure 4.1 outlines the intentions of each round of the Delphi study.

4.6.3.4 Delphi study questionnaire design

The stakeholders in the manufacturing sector are wide and diverse; in light of this, the questions posed in the Delphi study were generic so as to accommodate participants varying backgrounds. Participants were asked that, while answering the questions, they should reply according to their knowledge and understanding of the future competitiveness of the manufacturing sector. This was done in recognition of the uncertainty surrounding the current economic climate, and the

fact that this presents a dilemma to those responsible for determining an appropriate response to the problem. The basic four economic growth pillars as extracted from the government's white paper (BIS, 2010) as a reference point. These were: stability in the business environment; the option of reforming market dynamics by removing barriers; Government support for investment and growth; and individual workforce support. The participants were introduced to the first round of the questionnaire with the assumption that there is high uncertainty surrounding the UK economy and the government's growth plan.

As shown in table 4.2, the questionnaire had separate sections covering each of the four basic areas. For each of these four sections, questions were asked regarding stability, reform, investments, and skills. The participants were asked to respond from their personal perspective and were free to choose as many sections as they could suggest and comment on. The unambiguous and generalised suggestions analysed from the first round were used to conduct the second round.

The second round consisted of two sections. The first section listed all the unambiguous and generalised suggestions from the first round. The participants were asked to read the list and then to confirm and briefly explain why they considered these suggestions to be important to the growth plan in each area.

The third round: Responses from both rounds were subsequently analysed and used to reflect both upon the overall research aims and to inform the subsequent main study, which is discussed and analysed in chapter 5.

Table 4-2: The Delphi study questionnaire rounds

BASIC FOUR ECONOMIC GROWTH PILLARS (BIS 2010)			
Section 1	Section 2	Section 3	Section 4
Stability in business environment	Reforming market dynamics by removing barriers	Government support for investment and growth	Individual workforce support
Round ONE Questionnaire			
<i>What are the government policies and initiatives to bring stability to the manufacturing sectors?</i>	<i>What are the government policies and initiatives to reform market dynamics in manufacturing sectors?</i>	<i>What are the government policies and initiatives to support investment in the manufacturing sectors?</i>	<i>What are the government policies and initiatives to support the individual workforce in the manufacturing sectors?</i>
Expected outcomes are suggestions from individual respondents			
Suggestions 1 Suggestions 2 Suggestions 3 And so on	Suggestions 1 Suggestions 2 Suggestions 3 And so on	Suggestions 1 Suggestions 2 Suggestions 3 And so on	Suggestions 1 Suggestions 2 Suggestions 3 And so on
Round TWO: 'Consensus Round' of suggestions			
Suggestions 1 Suggestions 2 And so on			
Round THREE: Refinement of suggestions			
Analysis of study (Post Study) <i>(See Figure 4.1 for details of the implementation plan)</i>			

4.6.3.5 Pilot study interviews

The second part of the pilot study entailed conducting interviews with 12 manufacturing practitioners and policy-enablers. This section details the reasoning behind, and conduct of these interviews.

According to May (2011), four main types of interviews can be applied within a research design: structured, semi-structured, unstructured, and group interviews. This research adopted the semi-structured interview protocol as this was considered to be more flexible than the structured interview approach, and thus more appropriate for the objectives of this research. This protocol was particularly useful as it was uncertain at the start how much information would be made available through the interviews (King, 1994); the respondents were busy senior executives working in organisations and so it was anticipated that they would have limited time and capacity to participate. In addition, the semi-structured interview protocol enabled the voices and opinions of respondents to be collected.

The researcher had a set of guiding, rather than rigid questions to ask the participants. Allowing the participants to feel free and relaxed in providing additional information that they deemed useful (Bryman, 2012). By conversing with respondents on a specific topic in this way, the researcher was able to generate rich data and enhance the understanding of competitiveness and the government's growth policy, and gather as much understanding of participants' perceptions of the manufacturing growth agenda set out by BIS in order to bring manufacturing back into the centre of the British economy.

4.6.3.5.1 Interview process and questions

To begin with, the researcher introduced himself to the participant and explained the interview procedure; namely that he would be taking notes and recording the session for future reference and data analysis. Participants consent to this was taken and also recorded.

The researcher then started the interview by asking some general questions, with a view to encouraging the participant to relax and be comfortable. These questions included asking the participants about their individual role in the firm, and how s/he was contributing to the firm's strategy. Subsequent questions enabled the participants to engage with the issue of how businesses, and specifically their firm, were coping in the current economic climate.

The questions asked (presented below) were linked to the overall aim of the study, which was to gain an understanding of the perception of the manufacturing growth agenda amongst policy enablers and manufacturing practitioners.

Q1: Is the business meeting its stakeholder expectations?

Q2: Do government policies help you in achieving your business objectives?

Q3: How do policy makers interact with manufacturing businesses to develop policies?

These questions were asked to enable the researcher to obtain a better understanding of the role of government in rebalancing the economy rhetoric (Froud et al., 2011). In other words, the question aimed to elicit whether or not practitioners felt that policies were primarily developed to obtain short-term objectives (Freel, 2000).

Q4: How can better coordinated business policies amongst policy enablers and business practitioners help improve your business?

This question was intended to engage with business leaders' concerns that competitiveness policies are made in isolation, and also with the idea that the business community may not share the same level of enthusiasm as the government where economic growth is concerned (Clements, 2010).

Q5: *As a business, where do you see your company in the next 10-15 years?*

This question delved deeper into the issues and challenges faced by firms, and how they struggle with the dilemma to be competitive. All of these questions were intended to provide indicative responses, and the researcher refined the questions at the time of interview based on the flow of the interview. Based on the discussions, key barriers to growth were categorised and a detailed analysis conducted to investigate any disconnects between policy and practice.

4.7 Phase-1 Pilot study – the method of data analysis

The primary objective of the pilot study was to tease out the disconnect between policy and practice and develop themes that would connect the aims and objectives of the study and literature reviewed in the study. For analysis through thematic analysis a framework was developed (See Table 4.3 – 4.5). Through the use of sensemaking and legitimising the data was analysed so as to develop themes. The framework enabled the researcher to collate the raw data and develop on how competitiveness policy in the UK manufacturing sector translates into practice (See Table 4.3).

Table 4-3 Framework of descriptive codes for pilot study

Themes	Definition	Semantic descriptors
Sense making	A collaborative activity that is used to create, legitimise and sustain (Holt and Macpherson, 2010, Maclean et al., 2012c) competitiveness practices	Skills, funding, supply networks, network linkages, lending from banks, strategic planning, engagement, knowledge, governance growth, regionalism, organisational culture, experience, insight, narrative rationality, accepted stories, how they became who they are today, life history, journey, presenting, points of stability, fluidity of organisational life, change
Self legitimising	Enabling practitioners to gain recognition, respect, and the right to hold the position they are in.	Legitimising, recognition, respecting, honouring, privilege, prestige, education, class, government, governance, social norms, acceptance, persistence, accomplishing, culture, commitment, authority, looking after concern

Thematic analysis focuses on identifying and describing both implicit and explicit ideas from the data (such as Delphi-study findings and interview transcripts) in the form of themes (See Tables 4.4 and 4.5).

Table 4-4 Pilot study coding process - sensemaking

Raw data	Pattern code	Analytical codes	Descriptive codes
<p>So in terms of how that then <u>relates to the manufacturing sector</u>, we as an <u>organisation have done quite a lot of research</u> on interviews about manufacturing and <u>I can share as a draft</u> with you for the week what we have, which just looks at Greater Manchester (GM) as a whole, looking at what manufacturers are out there, what the model nature of it is, <u>how much of it is considered to be advanced</u> or relatively advanced. <u>We try</u> ... the various official stats, you know, the various sorts of databases, we try and do that. <u>It was bloody difficult</u> actually to get some sense of all of them and understanding</p>	Struggle	Locating the manufacturer	Sense making
	Funding		
	Lending from Banks	Meaning-making stories	
	Negotiating		
	Responsible	Becoming competitive	
	Governance		
	Skills		

Table 4-5 Pilot study coding process - self legitimising

Raw data	Pattern code	Analytical codes	Descriptive codes
<p>certainly to an extent as you know from <u>being in Oldham then the north</u> had the place in the sun and it used to freeze lightly because you don't see that much sun here but when <u>the industrial revolution</u> came so depending on how you think I wouldn't have want to <u>live during those times</u> even though there was <u>wealth there was also so much deprivation, people cramped into these little houses,</u> well that was when the <u>North and of course not just the social side</u> of it, you also have the <u>ethical side</u> of it which wasn't particularly great so Liverpool was one point in the triangle to be fair they <u>have officially apologised</u> to make people aware of the past but <u>Liverpool got wealthy</u> on the back of things like that and <u>some of the Northern town</u> facing they were there when the <u>Britain had this empire</u> then again it was <u>taken advantage of India</u> when it was one country.</p>	Market driven reform	Accomplishment	Self legitimising
	Empowering		
	Balanced approach	Resilience	
	Growth	Succeeding through abilities	
	Governance	Giving back	

The use of thematic analysis enabled meaning-making of phrases or sentences in a qualitative setting. Details of thematic analysis process and its explanation are presented in Section 4.11.

4.8 Reliability and limitations of the pilot study

The meaning of validity is not the same in qualitative research as in quantitative research (Rolfe, 2006), a key difference being that the findings from qualitative research typically lack the same degree of generalisability (Creswell, 2009). Assuring the reliability of this qualitative study entailed checking the of the findings through also referring to multiple data sources connected with participants (Voss et al., 2002) to increase internal trustworthiness such as reviewing published documents available on relevant websites and brochures. In addition, a field diary was maintained to enable a detailed log of events and the pilot study procedures. The reliability of the interviews during the pilot study was further maintained by transcribing the recorded interviews and sending the participants their copy for verification (See Appendix 8), thus ensuring the clarity and consistency of perspective held by the participants.

Table 4-6 Validating the pilot study codes

Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	Step 4	Step 5	Step 6
Activity	Activity	Activity	Activity	Activity	Activity
Read Delphi-study data and Interview transcripts	Refine initial pattern into codes with the literature review	Looking back at the literature review and initial pattern codes	Repeat Step 1 and rewrite pattern codes	Compare Step 2 patterns with Step 4 pattern codes	Refine and rewrite themes and link to theory
Key Results	Key Results	Key Results	Key Results	Key Results	Key Results
Developed initial patterns	Contextualised initial pattern codes	Refined initial pattern codes	Further refinement to become analytical codes	Verification of initial analytical codes	Developed descriptive codes

However, certain challenges were experienced over the course of the pilot study which incurred some limitations. Firstly, during the Delphi study, getting participants to engage with the online study was difficult and cumbersome as the Delphi required at least a minimum of one to two rounds to maintain its trustworthiness, as previously discussed. Initially during the Delphi study, 12 respondents had committed to participating; however, by round two, the number of participants had dropped to eight. The researcher then had to send the participants numerous emails, and made telephone calls reminding the participants of the importance of the study to the researcher. Thus the data collection process of the Delphi study took more than six months to complete.

4.9 Phase-2: Main study – Semi-structured interviews with practitioners

The second phase (figure 4.4) of the research constituted the main study. The strategy for data collection in this phase was similar to that in the pilot study. It consisted of semi-structured interviews intended to reflect the key themes of this research, build on the pilot study, and form part of the raw data for analysis and discussion. These interviews were conducted with 21 manufacturing practitioners (senior managers, middle managers, and staff). These practitioners were the unit of analysis, hence a wide range of participants were approached for their views on competitiveness policy. The task was to generate as clear a picture as possible to fully understand the issues concerning the manufacturing growth agenda as perceived by the practitioners. The interviews were designed to provide a better understanding of the role that policy plays in shaping the practitioners’ self-interest regarding practice, and its ‘real’ impact on competitiveness. The selection criterion for interview participants was the same as for the pilot study; tables 4.7 and 4.8 provide a summary of the main study interview participants and their characteristics.

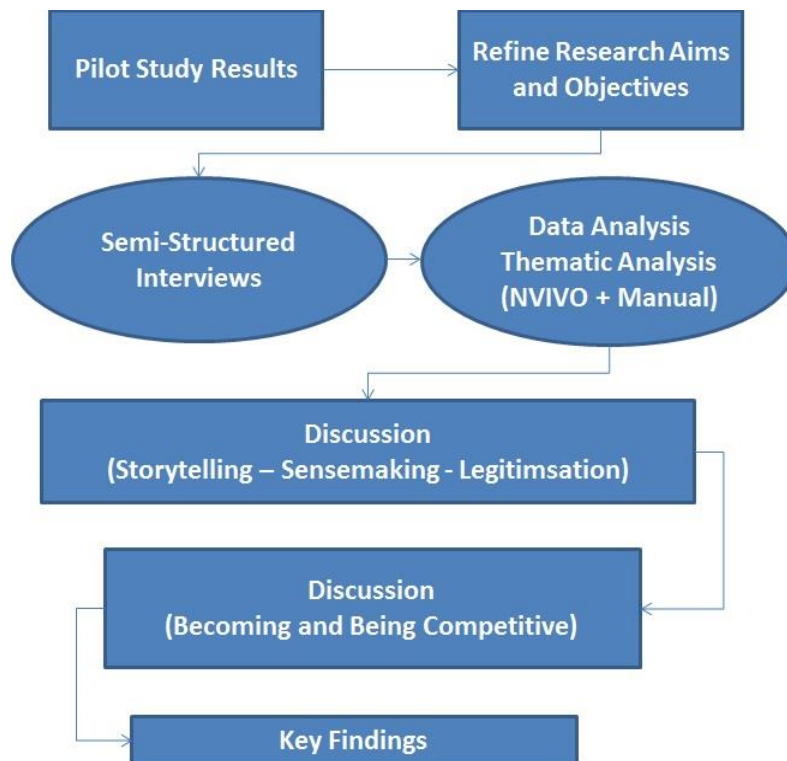


Figure 4-4: Phase-2 main study

Table 4-7: Summary of participants

Summary of Participants				
Pilot Study			Main Study	21
-Delphi-study	08		Grand Total	41
-Interviews	12			

Table 4-8: Summary of participants in pilot study interviews

Delphi-Study Participants				
Code name	Role in sector	Type of firm	Location (England or UK-wide)	Role
DS-1	Education	Large Institution / Nationwide	North East	Curriculum Development
DS-2	LEP	Large Institution / Regional	North West	Head of Strategy
DS-3	LEP	Large Institution / Regional	North West	Head of Strategy
DS-4	Education	Large Institution / Regional	North West	Operations Team
DS-5	University	Large Institution / Regional	North West	Operations Team
DS-6	University	Large Institution / Regional	North West	Operations Team
DS-7	University	Large Institution / Regional	North West	Operations Team
DS-8	Association	Large Institution / Regional	North West	Operations Team
Total Number of Delphi Interview Participants: 08				
Pilot-Study Interview				
PE-1	Regional Development Company	Large Company	North West	Manager Business Development
PE-2	Manufacturing Association	Large / Nationwide	North West	Business Development
PE-3	Farming Products Association	Small Nationwide Association	UK-wide	Business Development
PE-4	LEP	Regional Advisory	North West	Head of Strategy

Delphi-Study Participants				
Code name	Role in sector	Type of firm	Location (England or UK-wide)	Role
PE-5	LEP	Regional Advisory	North Wales	Head of strategy
MP-1	Farming Infrastructure Manufacturer	Small Regional Company	North East	Project Engineer
MP-2	Manufacturer of Garments	Small Regional Company	North West	Owner / Manager / Admin
MP-3	Paper Products Manufacturer	Small Company	Midlands	Owner / Manager / Business Development
MP-4	Farming Product Manufacturer	Small Company	North East	Business Development
MP-5	Pharmaceutical Manufacturer	SME Company	North West	1 R&D
MP-6	Precision Tools Manufacturer	Large Global Company	UK-wide	Business Development
MP-7	Manufacturer of Residential and Commercial Fencing Systems Globally	SME / Family Owned Business	South East	General Manager & Director of Operations
Total Number of Pilot-Study Interviews 12				

Table 4-9: Summary of participants in main study interviews

Main Interviews				
Code Name	Role in Sector	Type of Firm	Location (England or UK-wide)	Role
MP-8	Manufacturer of Residential and Commercial Fencing Systems Globally	SME / Family Owned Business	South East	Chairman and Managing Director
MP-9				Senior Manager
MP-10				Senior Manager
MP-11				Senior Manager
MP-12				Production Team Leader
MP-13				Production Supervisor
MP-14				Production Manager
MP-15	Manufacturer of Safety Signs	SME / Family Owned Business	Midlands	Managing Director and Head of Engineering
MP-16	Worldwide			Sales / Commercial Director
MP-17	Aerospace	Freelance	North West	Project Design Engineer

Main Interviews				
Code Name	Role in Sector	Type of Firm	Location (England or UK-wide)	Role
		Consultant		
MP-18	Manufacturer of Shutters for Shops	Small Regional (NW / NE) Company	North West	Owner / Manager / Engineer
MP-19	Aerospace	Large Global Company	South	Project Engineer
MP-20	Aerospace / Education	Large Global Company	Midlands	Project Engineer
MP-21	Pharmaceutical and Automotive Parts Manufacturer / Education	Large Global Company / University	North East	Project Engineer / Principal Lecturer
MP-22	Advanced Manufacturing Firm / Education	Large Global Company / University	North West	Project Engineer / Senior Lecturer
MP-23	Auditing / Alternative investment Market	Large Global Company	North East	Director
MP-24	Automotive Parts Manufacturer	Large Global Company	North West	Team Leader Production
MP-25	General Supplier to Manufacturers	Large Nationwide Company	North West	Business development / Sales
MP-26	Optical Frames Manufacturer	Large Nationwide Company	North West	Design Engineer
MP-27	IT Systems Manufacturer	Large Nationwide Company	South	Systems Engineer
MP-28	Chemicals Manufacturer	Large Global Company	North East	Technical Business Development
Total Number of Main Interviews 21				

4.10 Asking the questions

As the main study was composed of in-depth, semi-structured interviews, the questions asked aimed to develop a detailed discussion around participants' understanding of competitiveness and competitiveness policies. These questions were guided by the overarching research aim: how the manufacturing practitioner, through their everyday practices, perceives competitiveness. The questions guiding the interviews are outlined in table 4.10, together with the purpose in asking each of them:

Table 4-10: Main study interview questions

	Question	Purpose
1	What is your background?	To understand why participants chose manufacturing as a profession, and locate this reasoning within their respective habitus
2	What do you do as a manufacturing practitioner?	To probe participants' roles and responsibilities, knowledge, experience and interaction with other practitioners in the place of work so as to situate the participant in the field of manufacturing and social capital
3	How do you make decisions?	To link strategies used by the practitioner (such as teamwork) and the interaction between other practitioners in the place of work so as to situate the participant in the field of manufacturing
4	How do you perceive competitiveness?	To understand the socio-economic context of the word 'competitiveness' and link this with participants' practice (habitus)
5	What are the current manufacturing competitiveness policies?	To probe participants' awareness of current policies, further understand the socio-economic context of the word 'competitiveness', and link this with habitus
6	How has your lived experience informed you to be competitive?	To understand the connection between socio-economic factors mitigating their circumstances and their perception of competitiveness

4.11 Phase-2 - The method of data analysis

This section outlines the method(s) used in this study and provides a framework on which the perspective of the practitioner can be captured so as to meet the overall aims of the research.

4.11.1 Positioning the data

The researcher followed the practice of Miles and Huberman (1994) and Saldana, (2012) whom advocate the process of data analysis a concurrent, recursive and dynamic process. Thematic coding, as explained by Flick (1999), is rooted in the works of Strauss ([1987](#)), in which the groups and themes under study are derived from the research aims and objective. In the case of this qualitative research, the research aim is to examine how the manufacturing practitioner, through their everyday practices, perceives competitiveness. Through the data collection process the researcher was able to gather perspectives on the phenomenon of competitiveness. The underlying assumption was that views of this phenomenon varied across different organisations and social settings. In order to assess this assumption and to develop a theory of different ways of seeing and experiencing competitiveness, an inductive coding technique was applied to analyse the collected data.

Prior to proceeding to thematic analysis and to ensure that the inductive inquiry was grounded in data, the researcher first listened repeatedly to the interviews, subsequently transcribing the data to create text. This initial process enabled the researcher to gain some provisional understanding of what was happening and develop initial research themes. The process of listening to the interviews helped the researcher to develop some sense of direction and order and see patterns emerge.

Once patterns emerged the process of thematic coding and writing started. Evidence and citations from the competitiveness and practice literature were

collected. Boje (2001) explains that inductive thematic analysis in practice evolves from a deductive approach, such as the case in this research. The phase one questions confirmed some specific issues such as that of the rational individual (a deductive theme) that was prominent in the early interviews. However, as the interviews proceeded and when the researcher questioned the interviewees about the rationalistic individual their perceptions varied. The varied perceptions led to inductive themes to evolve.

4.11.2 The process of coding

Specifically, in interpreting the data collected through the interviews, thematic coding was applied in multiple steps, although it is important to mention here that these steps did involve a 'back and forth' process that underpins many qualitative systems of analysis. Braun and Clarke (2006) emphasise that qualitative research is a recursive process and not linear, hence takes a lot of time. The storage and retrieval of the data in a safe and manageable way was essential to prevent data miscoded, mislabeled, and mislinked (Huberman and Miles, 1994). Where, Huberman and Miles recommend a manual storage and retrieval methods. This can be done more expeditiously and safely with computer software (Dembkowski and Hanmer-Lloyd, 1995, Drisko, 2013). Whether to use a manual or computerized method of data collection and analysis as Saldana (2012) says is a 'matter of taste'. While it is possible to undertake this method manually, the researcher took an integrated approach to coding. Initially transcriptions of interviews were developed on MS Word and then imported to 'computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software' or CAQDAS to conduct the analysis. This decision was based on the fact that textual data obtained from the interviews needed to be stored and filed in an organised and systematic fashion. An occasional hard-copy printout of code lists and coded data is recommended by Saldana as he says that it 'to permit you to work with traditional writing materials such as red pens and highlighters to explore data in fresh ways (p. 23). The primary benefits of using an appropriate CAQDAS are that it enables the development of layers of codes that then enable subtleties and nuances to

emerge, and also allows the researcher to store the raw data in a centralised manner along with information related to the sources of the data and links to external sources. Following the view of Saldana (2012) the researcher decided to take both a manual and software approach to coding and analysis. There was a need in this study to link, group and/or define subsets of the data and assign relationships between different subsets, this was done through the use of a software. However, in between, printouts were taken of the codes and categories, this helped the researcher to visualise the data in a different way and gain a deeper understanding.

The specific CAQDAS used for this study was NVivo 10, a research program that enables the user to code relevant sections of their data to individual themes and sub-themes (or 'nodes' as they are termed in NVivo). These can be both decided by the researcher and altered/added to as the analysis progresses, thereby allowing the research the necessary flexibility and reflexivity with which to accurately engage with the data, and to extract the most relevant analyses.

4.11.3 Validating the codes

In qualitative analysis, it is common practice to layer the text data with codes, code notes, and coding of the coding notes in such a way that the meaning is built up through layers of textual interpretation that comes to resemble the layering of an onion (Guest et al., 2011). Guest et al. (2011) go on to explain this process of layering, commenting that it is a cumbersome and lengthy process and requires much skill and care.

Table 4-11: Code Validation process

Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	Step 4	Step 5	Step 6
Activity	Activity	Activity	Activity	Activity	Activity
Read Interview transcripts	Refine initial pattern into codes with the literature review	Looking back at the literature review and initial pattern codes	Repeat Step 1 and rewrite pattern codes	Compare Step 2 patterns with Step 4 pattern codes	Refine and rewrite themes and link to theory
Key Results	Key Results	Key Results	Key Results	Key Results	Key Results
Developed initial patterns	Contextualised initial pattern codes	Refined initial pattern codes	Further refinement to become analytical codes	Verification of initial analytical codes	Developed descriptive codes

In order to validate and ensure reliability the themes (See Table 4-11) six steps were taken. This iterative approach towards code building was adapted from Guest et al. (2011, p.70). The researcher first read the interview transcripts more than three times before suggesting any initial codes (highlighting key words / phrases / sentences and underlining them). Then the themes were refined into codes with a sound logic and understanding of the context in which it was said. After which the researcher after a gap of a few days reflected back with the research supervisor on the appropriateness of the codes. Between constructing the first codes and writing fresh emerging codes from the discussions and meetings with the supervisor the transcripts were revisited and re-read the

transcripts after a gap of a few weeks. The previously written codes and themes were cross verified with each other which resulted in codes that were used to further analyse the data in lieu with the literature review.

4.12 The thematic analysis process

The philosophical foundation underlining this research has provided the researcher with a framework for enquiry; the data collection and analysis process, and the outcomes of those processes, are also crucial to this study. The researcher takes the view that qualitative research is any research that uses data which are in the form of text, images, and sound (Guest et al., 2011). Thus the meaning of data in the context of this research is non-numeric and text based. The study was an attempt to theorise and seek connections between the emerging narratives like practices of practitioners' and their perspective of becoming and being competitive. With that in mind, and given the fact that the nature of this research is exploratory and descriptive, the analysis method of choice for this study was thematic analysis. This choice is underlined by the fact that the study of competitiveness as a phenomenon requires the researcher to interpret the meaning and understanding of the words of practitioners of competitiveness themselves, in order to understand the rationale behind how competitive policies are translated to practice.

The search for themes (Saldana 2009) in the data was part of the research design, alongside that of aims, objectives, conceptual framework and literature review. The framework enabled the researcher to collate the raw data and develop on how competitiveness policy in the UK manufacturing sector translates into practice. Thematic analysis focuses on identifying and describing both implicit and explicit ideas from the data (such as interview transcripts) in the form of themes. The choice of thematic analysis stems from the view that thematic analysis is a comprehensive way of directing and a subtle way of emerging an all-inclusive and comprehensible narrative. The use of thematic analysis enables meaning-making of phrases or sentences that define what a unit of data means

(Saldana, 2009: 139). Saldana (2009) reiterates that coding in a qualitative setting is the process of making sense of the raw data and is done by linking this to particular questions, themes and characteristics that can be both pre-determined by the researcher, and emerge throughout the analysis process as the researcher reflexively looks over and explores the data.

Once the initial themes were identified, the relationships between these and the key concepts presented in the literature review were explored. This enabled the researcher to check whether the emerging concepts could be put together as a plausible story that both reflected affirmatively and challenged the data and literature review. This was critical, as it enabled the researcher to develop analytical memos and track insights, trends and connections between individual participants' narratives and contrary views on similar phenomena.

The researcher followed both Miles and Huberman (2014) and Saldana (2012) terminology and way of coding and categorised the coding process into three sequential steps, descriptive, analytical and pattern, which reflected the logical steps of the constructivist process of ranging from descriptive to inferential levels of analysis. In this phase, the researcher dealt with theoretical concepts that make up the structure of this thesis which is shown in Table 4-12 below:

Table 4-12: Framework of descriptive coding

Themes	Definition	Semantic descriptors
Sense making	A collaborative activity that is used to create, legitimise and sustain (Holt and Macpherson, 2010, Maclean et al., 2012c) competitiveness practices	Understand, meaning, experience, insight, narrative rationality, accepted stories, how they became who they are today, life history, journey, presenting, points of stability, fluidity of organisational life, make sense of change, locating the self in time-space-context, connections, unstable reality, an articulation of the unknown, explain the unknown, illuminating the change
Self legitimising	Enabling practitioners to gain recognition, respect, and the right to hold the position they are in.	Legitimating, gaining, recognising, respecting, honouring, getting status, prestige, elite, white collar, class, government, social norms, acceptance, persistence, accomplishing, cultural class, being committed, authority, being capable, desire, looking after concern
Habitus	A mental or cognitive system of structures. It is an internal embodiment of external social structures that a person acquires over the course of a lifetime	Status, Given situations, work environment, culture, needs, desires, economic capital, social capital, cultural capital, symbolic capital, money, resources, plant and equipment, finance, raw material, knowledge, experience, connections held by people, creative class, quality of life, life stories, networks, social networks collective, opportunistic, belong to, partners, friends, values, religious belief, goodwill, quality management tools,
Reflexivity	Enables one to make sense of a practitioner and how the individual becomes what he/she is at present in terms of identity	Education, qualifications, networks, skills, communications, standard of living, elites, career, hardship, opportunities, challenges, roles in firm, job title, hurdles, standards of living, peer pressure, parental pressures, respect, immigration, luck, break, passion

4.12.1 Storytelling, sensemaking and legitimisation

The role of narratives in qualitative research that aims to respond to an organisational agenda is generally recognised to be that of obtaining a better understanding of organisational phenomena (Czarniawska-Joerges, 1998).

Rhodes and Brown (2005) argue that, in organisational theory, organisational story and storytelling research have been able to produce a rich body of knowledge and have the potential to increase the organisational knowledge scholarship. This research, by listening to the voices (Czarniawska-Joerges, 1998) of the manufacturing practitioners and narrating their stories, will thus lend primary legitimacy to these voices.

Sensemaking is an embodied, rational and intellectual process (Cunliffe and Coupland, 2012). By connecting sensemaking and legitimising through storytelling, the researcher was able to contribute to the currently scarce understanding of manufacturing practitioners and their actions. Furthermore, by doing this, the research contributed to the perception of competitiveness as it is practised today, and its policy implications.

Maclean, Harvey, and Chia (2012) present the notion of life history storytelling by elite actors through the lens of sensemaking processes and becoming, for the purposes of articulating how legitimising is achieved. For Whittle and Mueller (2012), sensemaking is portrayed as a way in which people interpret themselves and the world around them. In this way, meaning-making becomes a mechanism that resonates with Maclean et al.'s process of sensemaking. Maclean et al. explored the relationship of sensemaking processes and used the case of elite bankers' careers, examining how they self-legitimised being a banker, and what actions they carried out in order to 'become' this work identity.

Similarly, the current research assumes sensemaking to be a collaborative activity that is used to create, legitimise and sustain (Holt and Macpherson, 2010, Maclean et al., 2012c) competitiveness practices. In relation to manufacturing practitioners, sensemaking arguably offers credible insight and narrative rationality (Cunliffe and Coupland, 2012) to the accepted story(ies) offered by practitioners in their description of how they became who they are today. In other words, the research examines manufacturing practitioners through the dual

lens of sensemaking and storytelling as recounted in life-history interviews. Maclean, Harvey and Chia's (2012) analysis points out, among other things, that sensemaking stories are tied closely to self-legitimation and have significant organisational implications.

4.12.1.1 Positioning the sensemaking process

From the range of stories collected, the sensemaking process examines how manufacturing practitioners present themselves within storytelling to legitimise their perception of competitiveness (See Table 4-13). Most organisational realities are based on narration (Weick, 2012); in this study, narration will help to crystallise the story of the journey that participants have taken in order to become competitive, which is important to sensemaking as it provides the opportunity to create points of stability within the fluidity of organisational life. The stories the manufacturing practitioners narrate are helpful towards sensemaking by highlighting how individuals make sense of change: locating the self in time, space and context; making meaning from its connections with the unstable reality; and joining into an amalgamated self in a continuous process of becoming competitive.

Table 4-13: Legitimising through sensemaking

Self-legitimising	Sensemaking process		
	Locating the manufacturer	Meaning-making stories of the manufacturer	Becoming competitive
Accomplishment	Through Struggle	On Courage	Inclined to
Resilience	Through Determination and Persistence	Being committed to the cause	Desiring
Succeeding through abilities	Progression through abilities	Ability and respect amongst others	Being suited to compete
Giving back	Prestige and honour	Kindness towards others	Sharing success

4.12.1.2 Positioning the Self-Legitimising Process

The field of manufacturing is fluid and dynamic. Individual stories of the manufacturing practitioners must likewise be understood as historical effects of social relations within the field of manufacturing and their shared experience, which then enables sensemaking. The strategies and ways in which practitioners make decisions in their daily routines of work and social life enable one to extract meaning from what people actually do in practice. The practitioners constantly create a sense of their own self and overcome the hurdles that stifle personal development. Sensemaking of the individual thus enables the research to connect the past to the present and beyond, and to explore the position the individuals occupy. It is important here to remember that, while individuals practise manufacturing with a goal, a key element is the formulation and reformation of that goal (Czarniawska-Joerges, 2004), hence establishing self-legitimacy.

The socially constructed nature of success (or failure) underlines the significance of the manufacturing practitioners claim to legitimacy in the current environment, and can be seen through the legitimate actions taken by them within a wider system of social norms and values (Dowling and Pfeffer, 1975). The manufacturing practitioner gains respect, honour and prestige through legitimacy; as Goffman (1959) states, when an individual:

makes an implicit or explicit claim to be a person of a particular kind, he automatically exerts a moral demand upon the others, obliging them to value and treat him in the manner that persons of this kind have a right to expect (1959, p.no).

Legitimacy, in the context of the current research, enables the manufacturing practitioners to gain recognition, respect, and the right to hold the position they are in. With regard to this, four thematic categories were identified from the data: accomplishment (ability to succeed despite hardship); resilience (holding

steadfast over the years); succeeding through abilities (self-acclaimed skills and capabilities); and giving back (sharing the success with others).

Table 4-14 shows layout of researcher’s thinking through the initial phase of descriptive coding. Two themes emerged from going back and forth between literature review and data sets: sense-making and self-legitimising. The researcher then defined each theme in the table, which assisted the development of a list of keywords (semantic descriptors) that would guide the researcher while digging into the datasets (data-mining) to generate the descriptive codes. Once Table 4-14 was finalised, the process of coding started. After descriptive codes were developed, the researcher then analysed them through going back and forth between literature review and datasets (analytical coding). For example, sensemaking was analysed and categorised into three categories (Locating the manufacturer, Meaning-making stories, Becoming competitive).

Table 4-14: Coding structure of Sensemaking

Raw data	Pattern codes	Analytical codes	Descriptive codes
<u>I have seen that they are trying to push manufacturing to sort of bring more specialist like bring textile back instead of relying so much on the imports you know, bring manufacturing back because over the past twenty years we have become more of a service industry, more than a production ...</u>	Practical person	Locating the manufacturer	Sensemaking
	White collar social elite		
	Still surviving	Meaning-making stories	
	Joblessness		
	Struggle		
	Networks	Becoming competitive	

Taking an overview from right to left indicates how the coding system was structured. However, taking an overview from left to right indicates how the coding structured was processed. The researcher has gone thought interview

transcripts many times locating the pattern codes underlining the text that potentially qualify for a pattern code. Finally those underlined text were refined until it ended up with a refined list of pattern codes. The full list of codes (descriptive, analytical, and pattern) is shown in APPENDICES 4 and 5)

Table 4-15: Coding structure of self-legitimising

Raw data	Pattern code	Analytical codes	Descriptive codes
<u>I knew that statement was flawed</u> so you don't put your hand up and make them look bad, that's the last thing you do. <u>I went to our management, I said under the Treaty of Rome and the Maastricht Treaty, all financial movements of trade and of skills are interchangeable across borders and they cannot be held up.</u> In other words someone from <u>France or Germany, Italy</u> , can come and work in England and providing they have a good command of English and their degree is equal, they can come and get a job here but the <u>General Optical Council</u> told them they couldn't have them, they couldn't bring anybody in and their own legal department, who they're <u>paying a retainer</u> to, said they have a thing where you can't get them in <u>but I knew that was wrong.</u> <u>He wrote me a handwritten letter thanking me because he didn't know you could</u> bring someone in from Italy or <u>France or Germany</u> , an optician, and break the stranglehold the opticians had here. <u>He didn't know</u> that and <u>he's the head of Europe and I'm a zero</u>	Struggle	Accomplishment	Self legitimising
	Support		
	Being committed	Resilience	
	Negotiating		
	Responsible	Succeeding through abilities	
	Authority		
	Capable		
	Looking after concern	Giving back	

Subsequently, inferential relationships amongst codes started to emerge as shown in Table 4-15. For example, the researcher related the analytical code (Locating the manufacturer) from the descriptive code (Sensemaking) with the

analytical code (Accomplishment) from the descriptive code (Self-legitimising) that resulted in a theoretical framework of how the practitioner legitimises through sensemaking.

The patterns that emerged in the form of narratives in the second stage inductively developed theoretical relationships between habitus and reflexivity. Furthermore, the theoretical relationships between the dimensions of 'habitus and reflexivity' are an important link in becoming competitive. A significant outcome of the thematic analysis was the evolution of competitive thresholds as a theoretical contribution of the thesis. This is explained and presented in Chapter 9 (Also see appendix 6 for list of codes).

4.12.2 Theoretical relationships between habitus and reflexivity

To develop a typology on which competitiveness can be conceptualised the concepts of habitus and reflexivity provides a platform for which to understand the practitioner's perspective of competitiveness. Strategy from a strategy as practice perspective has been defined 'as a situated, socially accomplished activity, while strategizing comprises those actions, interactions and negotiations of multiple actors and the situated practices that they draw upon in accomplishing that activity' (Jarzabkowski et al. 2007, 7-8). Where, the practice turn of strategy are concerned with studying: practitioners (those people who do the work of strategy); practices (the social, symbolic and material tools through which strategy work is done); and praxis (the flow of activity in which strategy is accomplished) (Jarzabkowski 2005; Whittington 2006). The practice theory approach to competitiveness provides a lens through which practitioners perspectives and perceptions can be collated and analysed to bring out the true meaning of competitiveness.

Habitus is a complex concept, which Bourdieu defined as 'systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles which generate and organise practices

and representations [...] without being in any way the product of obedience to rules, they can be collectively orchestrated without being the product of the organising action of a conductor.’ (Bourdieu, 1990: 53). Habitus restricts the perception of the practitioner whereas reflexivity enables the practitioner to break away from the principles that people gained over a lifetime of practice and further their position within the field of (as in the case of this study) being competitive.

Table 4-16: Coding structure of Habitus

Raw data	Pattern codes	Analytical codes	Descriptive codes
<p>I still <u>very much believe</u> in the concept of the <u>family business</u> ... I wouldn't say it happens a lot ... but there is a lad that works in the <u>metal shop</u> ... he has worked with us for about 7-8 years he has had <u>various loans</u> from us and his wife is in ... where the hell is it? ... Albania and he wants to bring her over here and he wants a loan to do it ... can he have it ... and he's been turned down by the <u>line manager</u> and turned down by the other and he asked me ... and said that I know I shouldn't be asking but can I have it? ... and then <u>I had a chat with him</u> ... what about the wife you bought over a couple of years ago when you had a similar <u>loan</u>? Well he's <u>divorced</u> her and he has ended up with a loan! ... Now there's two ways I can go ... <u>he would either remain incredibly loyal to me or he will bugger off with money</u> ... He hasn't bugged off with the money ... so I presume <u>he's been incredibly loyal</u> to me... and I do firmly believe in the <u>family company ethic</u> ... we have had various people with cancer, two ladies with breast cancer and they have been supported through it ... 8-9 months leave and they have been paid to <u>make sure they are comfortable</u> which again in a big company would be a rule that after 'X' weeks of sick leave that's it!</p>	Resources	Economic capital	Habitus
	wealth		
	experience	Social Capital	
	creative class		
	knowledge	Cultural Capital	
	goodwill		
	values	Symbolic Capital	
	religious belief		

Successively, narratives amongst codes started to emerge as shown in Tables 4-16, for example, the researcher related the analytical code (goodwill) from the descriptive code (Habitus) that resulted in a conceptual understanding of how the practitioner embodied external social structures that he/she had acquired over the course of their lifetime. In Table 4-17, for example the raw data suggested enabled to develop patterns, analytical and descriptive codes.

Table 4-17: Coding structure of reflexivity

Raw data	Pattern codes	Analytical codes	Descriptive codes
<p>Yes, some days, because like I said earlier, every day is not the same. <u>A client must have had a bad day</u> and they come to the office and then the computer is not working and then he calls you, he calls our office and I'm there to do it. Yeah, <u>you will—you notice that stress</u>, the way the person talks to you. He might be holding on the computer but there is more to it but if you have clues to the person ... when I mean clues, <u>clues in the sense that you have a relating with this job with him, you've done jobs for him before and he's satisfied.</u> Some of them <u>open up and say oh this bit was rubbish</u> or I don't know what happened this morning, I'm coming. But with my experience, I <u>tried to identify with them</u>, identify with their problems and at the same time know why I'm there and then do my job. So I will not say <u>I've had a major problem</u>, this is just general, and it comes once in a while only so that was it, yeah.</p>	Personal Capital	Absorption Mode	Reflexivity
	Embodied Opportunities		
	Overcoming Hurdles	Attempt To Resolve Mode	
	Learning from Hardship		

In turn, reflexivity enabled the researcher to make sense of (through reflexive practices) (Table 4-17) how the individual practitioner becomes what he/she is at present. For example, the narratives developed were formed when the

researcher related the pattern code (Embodied Opportunities) from the analytical code (Overcoming Hurdles) to the descriptive code (Reflexivity) that resulted in a conceptual understanding of how the individual becomes what he/she is at present, in other words how the individual becomes a competitive manufacturing practitioner.

4.13 Dealing with data reliability

In qualitative research, the meaning of validity is not the same as that in quantitative research. As qualitative research is not conducive to mass reliability or generalisability, qualitative validity of data entails that the researcher has checked for the accuracy of the findings by applying certain procedures (Creswell, 2009). The notion of data reliability in the case of the current qualitative research should thus not be thought of in terms of whether or not the results can be proved, but whether or not the research is defensible. Are the research process and ultimate claims of knowledge trustworthy? (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). In this sense, validity should not only be considered as a method used by the researcher to collect and analyse data.

In quantitative research the concepts and connections are predetermined in the form of a hypothesis and are imposed upon the data. The essence of a constructivist approach to research is that concepts and connections arise from the data. In this form of inquiry the researcher must be able to make meaningful conceptualisation from the raw data segments. Thus one may say that the researcher must know enough about a subject to extract concepts (Finfgeld-Connett, 2014) from the data (theoretical sensitivity) but not so much, or have so many ready-made ideas, that the data is forced to fit chosen concepts. The quality of the research is not judged by the rigorous application of previously agreed strategies and procedures but by the wise judgement and keen insight of the reader (Rolfe, 2006).

With this in mind the researcher carefully organised (through memoing, diagramming, and reflection) the data and themes evolving into matrices so as to integrate, interpret, and synthesize the data and their meanings across different study reports. Consequently, qualitative findings slowly took the shape of meaningful themes and discussion points.

The person conducting the research is also of significance to the outcome of the research (Sarantakos, 1993, Saunders, 2009). The reliability of this research was ensured by taking steps and measures to ensure that interviewer (researcher) trustworthiness was eliminated and the quality of the scientific knowledge produced was of high moral integrity. The skill required to enable the researcher to be able to conduct unbiased interviews was ensured by a method of training, feedback and reflection of the process of interviewing and asking relevant questions. During the pilot study, the Delphi study and pilot interviews were checked and rechecked with the supervisor in order to ensure the credibility of the research(er). The supervisor was also present as an observer during the first interview (in the pilot study) to give feedback. Minutes of meetings with interview participants were prepared and sent to the participant for verification of thoughts and comments written by the interviewer. All the interviews were recorded and transcribed (full verbatim). In addition, a further step was taken to ensure that the research was credible, which was to cross-check the transcriptions with interview participants and the academic supervisor. The analysis and conclusions of the data, once collected into themes, were then reviewed thoroughly with the academic supervisor to ensure that research bias was eliminated and the analysis represented the data.

Finally, further credibility of the analysis of the data was achieved by sharing findings with to the participants. Van Manen (1990) suggests that this is a powerful way in which to ensure that the results of the research are credible. Thus a reflective feedback loop was organised with participants in order to

determine whether they could identify with the findings, and whether they felt the findings were valid for them.

4.14 *The reflexive researcher*

For this research like any other qualitative research it is recognised that to some extent the researcher's opinion exists in the research. Thus to reduce the researchers influence and improve trustworthiness of the research an explicit recognition of the sources of influence were dealt with. The experience and personal inclination of the researcher, his culture, class and training (trained as a Mechanical Engineer and worked in the manufacturing sector) was seen to be a source of influence. The researcher believes that:

- Manufacturing is perceived as an integral part of the UK economy
- Manufacturing is a sustainable and viable sector
- Manufacturing creates value to the standard of living of the society
- Manufacturing sector as a whole is struggling to survive in the current economic climate
- Trained in Entrepreneurship and enterprise, neoclassical economic theories frame the perception of the business world, and
- People are embedded in a society and the society actively shapes their economic behaviour

In recognition of these beliefs, the data collection strategy consisted of an online Delphi-study supported by semi-structured interviews.

4.15 *Ethical issues*

For the purpose of the research interviewees were usually contacted by email and then by telephone to arrange an appointment. There were two exceptions first was the interviews with the team at the manufacturing plant of residential and commercial fencing systems. In this case formal permission to interview staff was gained through a personal contact that worked at the firm. The contact

introduced the researcher and obtained written permission from the managing director. Subsequently the researcher visited the firm and interviewed the staff. All participants were briefed of the nature and purpose of the research and permission was sought to record and make notes of the interview. In all cases informed consent was gained. In the second case the researcher visited a farming exhibition in the North East of England. Here the researcher approached various proprietors and staff present at different stalls and introduced himself and gained permissions / consents to record the interview. Similarly in all cases, informed consent was gained. In many cases (LEP's, various manufacturers) asked for written questions but failed to respond to this letter (even after some prompting), thus they were deemed not to have given consent and the interview was not pursued. At occasions during the course of a recorded interview, the interviewee indicated that some comments were not to be reproduced. These were left out of the transcripts. Exact verbatim transcripts were deemed unethical because they violated human dignity for the fact that all direct speech is grammatically incorrect, full of inconsequent sounds and unnecessary repetitions. Copies of the transcripts were sent to the interview participants for confirmation and approval. In many cases, there was no response, which was taken to mean that the transcript was accepted. A handful requests were received by participants to make minor changes to the transcript which were made to the final version. An example of manufacturing plant for fencing systems request to verify the transcripts is recorded in Appendix-6. Permission was asked to include quotations from the transcripts and these are to be found in the analysis chapters.

4.16 Conclusion

In terms of the research design, it was envisioned that a qualitative line of enquiry would enable the researcher to focus upon unanticipated outcomes, the identification of inconsistencies and potentially conflicted policy take-up by practitioners, and also provide insights into the solutions to problems devised by business owners without policy intervention (Marshall, 1995). Specifically, this

qualitative research design entailed two phases – the pilot study composed of the Delphi study and semi-structured exploratory interviews, and the subsequent main study composed of interviews. Both of these stages enabled strong engagement with the research questions and overall research aims, and a reflexive layering of the most appropriate lines of enquiry to pursue with participants by reflecting on the pilot before moving onto the main study. The subsequent data were analysed through a thematic analysis approach, again in line with the constructivist nature of the findings sought; that is, how policy makers and practitioners construct strategies around competitiveness within their own socially constructed realities of the policy making environment and firm respectively.

The research strategy best suited to successfully accomplish the objectives (See Section 1.6) was driven by two major principles: the set of objectives of the study, and the philosophical basis of the research. After discussing the key epistemological frameworks which could have been applied to this research, it was decided that constructivism was the most appropriate research paradigm to shape a management study such as this one, where the aim is to explore how competitiveness is perceived by the practitioner. As part of this overall aim, the study needed to explore that these connections and disconnects are viewed and created by practitioners in a specific ‘field’, i.e. the manufacturing sector, and how the reality of this field is both interpreted and constructed.

Bourdieu’s (1990) habitus and reflexivity is used along with Maclean, Harvey and Chia’s (2012) notion of life history storytelling through the lens of sensemaking and legitimacy. Thematic analysis of the data enabled to construct a better understanding of practitioner’s engagement with competitiveness, and draw relevant theoretical strands on the perception of competitiveness by manufacturing practitioners.

Chapter 5 The pilot study

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the phase 1 of the research which is called the pilot study. The study aimed to investigate the understandings of competitiveness by policy enablers and manufacturing practitioners alike. The data analysis and the results will be presented. The chapter will conclude by discussing the lessons learned and their impact on subsequent relevant further research.

The data collection process began with a literature review of the competitiveness discourse within the UK's manufacturing sector. The review resulted in a list of prioritised statements and rhetoric about the role of policy in constructing the competitive strategies. These statements and rhetoric were then used to develop a strategy to explore gaps in literature. The phase-1 was exploratory and comprised two data collecting techniques: an online Delphi-study and semi-structured interviews across a wide range of policy enablers and manufacturing practitioners involved in strategic and day-to-day decision making and/or directly involved in competitiveness policy dissemination. The organisation's from which these policy enablers were drawn included Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs), investment agencies, manufacturing associations, educational bodies supporting and promoting government policy on competitiveness, and interviews with those holding key positions in a wide range of manufacturing firms across the UK. The results of this pilot study produced narratives on the role of policy on practice, and vice versa. These narratives were then developed into further questions which were used in phase-2 of the research.

5.2 Pilot study: findings and discussion

This section discusses the findings from the pilot study, presenting key comments from both the Delphi study and interview participants, and highlighting the key themes that emerged with reference to the relevant literature. A summary of the findings from each of the rounds can be found in tables 6.1 and 6.2; the following sections discuss these findings.

5.2.1 Discussion and findings from round 1

As previously discussed in chapter two, the competitiveness of individual nations is typically measured through productivity (Porter, 1998c). At the aggregate level, countries' productivity depends on the relevant institutions responsible for business and economic growth in that society, and on how the country utilises its available resources to negotiate its relative position on the global production frontier. The level of output in an economy and its rate of growth depend upon the quantity of inputs into the production process. In terms of the manufacturing sector, these inputs can be seen as physical capital assets and human capital. Manufacturing firms are under constant pressure to improve their capabilities in terms of both physical and human capital in order to compete within a global market.

Following the post-WW2 period, productivity levels across the three largest economies of the future EU – the UK, France and West Germany – were comparatively similar. However, the UK lagged behind its European counterparts due to many factors, such as low rates of capital investment (Matthews, 2007). Mathews argues that between 1950 and 1973, Britain's manufacturing output was slow in comparison to other future EU member states, suggesting that this was primarily due to a weak export record and low profitability of goods manufactured in the UK. This failure was crucial, and had a serious impact on the welfare of the British people generally (Matthews, 2007).

Today, the UK Government's growth agenda is directed towards filling this gap in the lack of investment both in physical and human capital through schemes such as the National Innovation Policy. However, when the question was asked: What are the government policies and initiatives to bring stability to the manufacturing sectors? In the Delphi study, there was a mixed reaction towards the sincerity of central government in driving forward the agenda, given the perceived disparity between rhetorical policy intentions and the actual resources dedicated to this. As two participants commented:

General policies try to address economic stability and usually deal with aspects of growth, investment, exporting, skills, regulation and finance aspects (e.g. taxation) [...] but also tend to deal with varying sums of money and differing allocation processes. (DS-4)

The Government is attempting to rebalance the UK economy: from public to private, from south to north, from service industry to manufacturing. The national plan for growth is the key policy document but the financial initiatives to support it are grossly inadequate. (DS-8)

This comment also highlights the North-South regional divide in England. Since the Second World War, the pattern of regional development has had two dominant characteristics: a progressive concentration of economic activity and employment in the South and East of England, and a progressive growth and extension southwards of a relatively depressed North, leading to a fall in manufacturing employment overall (Martin, 1988). DS-4 said:

The North, once the 'manufacturing heartland' of England, has seen local economies suffer and less appetite for investments and regional growth (Martin, 1988). Kitson (2004) engages with this regional effect by arguing that measuring

productivity in itself is an elusive affair and neglects wider societal aspects that affect employment. He points out that, if Porter's competitive advantage is created through a highly localised process, then this creates a local and regional development problem.

Other commentators have also argued that regional competitiveness or firm-based competitiveness cannot be resolved by macro level policies (Cellino and Soci, 2012). Regional competitiveness policy has, until recently, been firm-centred, standardised, incentive-based and state driven (Amin, 1999). There has also been a reliance on income redistribution and welfare policies to stimulate demand in the less favoured regions, with the offering of state incentives at the firm level. Amin argues that there is a common assumption in policy quarters that top-down policies can be applied universally to all regions (1999); in other words, there exists a one-size-fits-all approach to operationalising institutions at the regional level (Rodríguez-Pose, 2013). This agreement seems to draw on the belief that at the heart of economic success lies a set of common factors such as 'the rational individual, the maximising entrepreneur, the firm as the basic economic unit, etcetera.' (Rodríguez-Pose 2013). Stewart (1993) argues that when the state makes policy, policy makers take into account the stereotyped 'economic man' who is driven solely by self-interest and not the needs of the citizen more broadly (Vriend, 1996), resulting in a stereotyped and limited range of policy instruments considered to be legitimate. In other words, individuals may change their behaviour when incentivised or sanctioned in terms of their calculation of gain versus pain (Stewart, 1993).

As round 1 of the Delphi study indicates, there was still confusion within the policy enablers as to what was the real motive of the government when it came to stability within the manufacturing sector. General consensus was on the national innovation strategies, with a focus on improving the skill set of the labour force and reducing bureaucracy and red tape. However, a balanced

regional growth agenda and public-private initiatives (PPI) were seen as a way forward to improve the UK's manufacturing competitiveness.

This policy making approach has been successful to some extent where a region is able to capitalise on its physical and human resources; however, this approach has been less successful in the economically deprived regions. Some of the reasons behind these challenges that were given in the Delphi study were: bureaucracy, red tape, lack of culture of competitiveness in some regions due to lack of competition, and non-uniform distribution of incentives and infrastructure investments (see Appendix-2).

Regional developmental policies all over the world (Silva-Ochoa, 2009) have remained very much embedded in the tradition of national development policies, which is rooted in the belief that replicating top-down infrastructure, education and industrialisation policies is sufficient to generate greater growth and promote economic convergence (Pike et al., 2006). Hence, a template approach to regional development has been seen not only in policy but also in strategies adopted by firms. However, this one-size-fits-all approach certainly does not work across all regions (Mohl and Hagen, 2010).

5.2.2 Discussion of findings from round-2

Appendix-3 presents a summary of findings from round-2 of the Delphi study. The second round was a consensus round where the views of the participants were anonymised and analysed into evolving themes. The strong themes that came from the analysis were that the lack of a competitive culture was holding back growth in some areas of the UK. All regions were not treated equally and uniformly at the policy level creating disparity and resentment amongst policy enablers. There was a general feeling that Whitehall kept the power and control over resources and capital decisions away from the local and regional level, hence a lot of red tape and bureaucracy.

5.2.3 Discussion of interview findings

During the interviews Amin's (1999) argument came to prominence, economic success as Amin argues, lies in the assumption that economic policy is based around the premise that practitioners' will enact policy in a rationalistic way (the rational individual). Competitiveness policy is designed and focused on attracting new businesses (entrepreneurship) and 'the firm' is the basic unit of analysis when it comes to policy-making. In other words, the rhetoric regarding policy is that policy assumes that people (i.e. manufacturing practitioners in this case), will act rationally, entrepreneurs will create wealth and policy ultimately benefits the firm which in turn benefits the practitioners by raising living standards (1999).

In line with this argument, some interview respondents indicated that firms engaging with the competitiveness policy rhetoric were doing well. For example, one participant who was a senior manager at a manufacturing firm that produced agricultural (farming) equipment stated that government subsidies and support through Research & Development had enabled them to grow from strength to strength:

Since 2007 we have won a few awards and we have been growing bigger as well ... so yes! ... everything seems to be pretty good at the moment. (MP-1 referring to the grants awarded to the firm with regard to green technology)

MP-1 also commented on their firm's supply chain and how over the years they have grown through international supply chains:

We do buy most of our stuff British but again you know ... a lot of stuff is made in China and other places and it gets imported.
(MP-1)

Similarly, a respondent from a tools manufacturing firm emphasised the difficulty of sourcing particular resources in the UK – ‘no, you can’t make these tools in the UK’ (MP-6), referring to the specialised process of manufacturing their product. Later, he also mentioned that the ‘manufacturing process was labour intensive and highly skilled’ and that policy had ‘driven away skills, experience and apprenticeships’ (ibid) This contradicts the policy approach that it will always benefit practitioners’, clearly showing that vital resources in the form of labour and human capital had been reduced owing to policy. This was further underlined by the fact that the latter firm has expanded into Europe, with their manufacturing plant based in Germany where they have the right skills and technology infrastructure to support their type of manufacturing ability. In other words, the company has found its unique regional cluster in Germany where the necessary infrastructure is available to support the industry, in contrast to the situation they found in the UK.

While interviewing a policy enabler from an LEP, he underlined the above firm’s concerns about the lack of appropriate resources in the UK to support manufacturing growth, stating that ‘the trends in manufacturing offering employment keep falling’ (PE-4). However, his optimism was high when it came to: ‘capital investment in technology intensive equipment.’ He emphasised the LEP’s current focus on investing in technology, but also acknowledged the downside to this:

You may even be in a perverse situation where the more successful you are, and the more you invest in advanced technologies, the less people you employ (PE-4)

Ultimately, however, he held to the view that the manufacturing sector was growing, albeit evolving to new forms, such as the servitised firm, a notion previously discussed in the literature:

Manufacturing is indeed increasing. We are seeing manufacturing as it becomes more advanced and more sort of service-like in its activity. So, at a number of levels, I mean obviously for a long time manufacturing has increasingly outsourced its service type functions, so buying from other companies rather than just doing them themselves, is obviously good for their region. (PE-4)

Reflecting on this, the changing role of manufacturing is seen to take newer dimensions. The servitised role of the manufacturer has dominated the manufacturing agenda over the past two decades, and more firms are extending their capacities and capabilities in providing end-to-end services (Neely, 2007).

However, not all is flourishing in the manufacturing sector. While talking to a respondent from a small firm involved in garment manufacturing in the North West of England, the challenge of cheaper labour and resources abroad was emphasised again:

All the manufacturing has gone abroad ... cheap labour, where here you have got a minimum standard to keep in wages, tax, insurance, this has gone up. The cost of living has gone up so it's very hard to make any profit. (MP-2)

The UK's poor productivity performance in the late 1990's in the aggregate is partly due to a pronounced fall in productivity growth rates in manufacturing and increased regional inequalities (O'Mahony, 2002, López-Bazo et al., 1999). López-Bazo (1999) argues that the industrial crisis of the 1980's deeply affected some of the early industrialised regions of the UK, which were forced to face a profound crisis in their productive structure. Consequently, not all manufacturers were able to shift to more productive activities at the same speed as their counterparts in the EU.

5.3 Conclusion and implications

Phase-1 of the research consisted of a combination of desktop research, an online Delphi study and semi-structured interviews. These strategies enabled the researcher to elicit participant's understanding of the key issues and gain deeper insights into the manufacturing sector and what competitiveness means to them. More importantly, the pilot study enabled the researcher to begin to respond to the main aim of the research; that is, to examine how the manufacturing practitioner, through their everyday practices, perceives competitiveness.

This pilot study aimed to investigate policy-enablers perceptions of competitiveness within the manufacturing sector. Policy-enablers were asked their opinion on competitiveness and how they perceived the future of the sector. It was found that firms continue to experience the growing complexity and uncertainty of today's dynamic business environment. Ways of developing strategies that meet and suit today's and, more importantly, tomorrow's needs in the macro-environment, are crucial in building a competitive edge. Government policies need to go far beyond the fiscal and monetary alone, as factors such as globalisation, international trade, skills development, and culture need to be considered when developing national competitive strategies (Kitson et al., 2004, Martin, 1988, Amin, 1999). However, in order to achieve these conditions, there is a need for better coordination and integration at the government policy level between governments and regions. One may argue that in spite of the barriers to economic growth, the complexity and uncertainty in international trade require a new set of drivers. The question then arises of how the manufacturing sector can make better use of sector specific initiatives such as those that are driven at the LEP level.

Specifically, the pilot study engaged with and reflected on the policy rhetoric set out by BIS in the UK, including policy on the resources that needed to be made

available in order for businesses to be competitive. Key issues that stemmed from the pilot study were funding, skills, trust, and adequate supply chain.

Table 5-1: Pilot study findings

	Descriptive Codes	Key Barriers for growth from the Literature
1	Funding	Buckley (1989) and Bora et al. (2000) highlighted funding as a key barrier
2	Skills	Argote (2002) and Curran (2000) highlighted internal competence
3	Supply chain	Vlaar et al. (2006) highlighted trust and identification of suitable partners
4	Networks and linkages	Freel (2000), Beech and Huxman (2003), Kingsley and Maleck (2004), and Frobler et al. (2007) focused on the linkages (networks)

While policy support for UK manufacturing firms has been present for the past few decades, little attention has been given to whether this support represents good value for public money (Curran, 2000), nor has there been an evaluation of the impact of these policies at the firm level (Bora et al., 2000, Curran, 2000). Most theoretical literature talks in isolation about SME strategies and government policies developed to improve competitiveness. In contrast, the firm-level literature prioritises the understanding of the relationships between firms within supply chains (Frobler et al., 2007, Ring, 1997), and takes a performance improvement perspective in terms of how competitiveness can be increased within the market (Vlaar et al., 2006, Cosson and Giusta, 2004, Newell and Swan, 2000). For its part, the government literature focuses on policies related to the ‘rational, self-interested economic man’ (Vriend, 1996). This approach is arguably insufficient to understand the complexities of today’s competitiveness agenda;

what is needed is an increased focus on individual manufacturing practitioner as the unit of analysis and thus bringing out the true perception of competitiveness.

The pilot study thus provided the researcher with valuable data which then brought out further questions to support the research aim and how policies are actually perceived at the practice level. The study also gave the researcher an opportunity to reflect back on the concepts relevant to the manufacturing sector and its link with the competitiveness agenda, opening the way for the subsequent main study to probe the perception of practitioner's on competitiveness.

The pilot study heard the voices of various trade associations, government institutions and manufacturing practitioners regarding the challenges, opportunities and barriers faced by the manufacturing sector. Crucially, the pilot study identified a potential gap between policy and practice. The rationalistic approach towards policy based on the self-interested economic man (the rational individual), the maximising entrepreneur, and the firm as the basic economic unit, is self-defeating and, paradoxically, leads to a more interventionist role for the state (Stewart, 1993).

The concept of the profit-maximising firm has moved on (Spence, 2000a). Manufacturing practitioners are now more concerned with skills, training, enterprise culture, access to finance, trade barriers and so forth. Firms do not necessarily want to grow; rather, they want to be competitive. The impact of the economic cycles and subsequent recessions over the past century (Hauser, 2010, Rowley, 2011) has lessened the appetite of the self-interested manufacturer for development (NORMAN, 2011). There is, therefore, a need to assess what competitiveness means within the context of the UK's economic growth policy and how this interacts with strategy at the firm level (Simsek et al., 2003). By introducing the socio-cultural perspective of manufacturing practitioners through the lens of habitus and practice theory, the remainder of this research envisions

to bring a fresh perspective to the understanding of competitiveness and its agenda.

It was seen that organisations are symbolic concepts of social systems that are intertwined in structures of power and domination (Clegg, 1989). In this instance, where the focus of interest was the connection and disconnection of policy and practice in the context of competitiveness as viewed by practitioner's, the choice of appropriate theory was structured by the need to tread a fine line between deterministic accounts of practice by the agent and individualistic accounts which neglect the contextual importance of the practitioner. This implied that views on firms that are primarily systematic, structural or processual must be rejected for the purpose of this research.

Chapter 6 Becoming competitive: manufacturing practitioners' perspectives

6.1 Introduction

In conceptually exploring the landscape of competitiveness as it relates to the UK manufacturing sector, this research has argued for the possibility and benefits of viewing competitiveness with new eyes; that is, through Bourdieu's lens of 'habitus'. The aim of this chapter is to examine how manufacturers become competitive. This chapter thus responds to two related research questions posed in the introduction chapter that are both concerned with understanding the practitioner's perspective of manufacturing competitiveness. Firstly, how is reflexive behaviour seen in those who become manufacturers? And, secondly, how do manufacturing practitioners acquire and expand reflexive behaviours? This chapter engages with these questions by presenting the empirical data constructed from both phases of the research with managers and staff at various levels within different manufacturing firms across England.

This will be done firstly by introducing the participants' backgrounds, geographical position and lifestyles, as these are the factors that enabled the researcher to locate each participant's perception of competitiveness within their respective fields of practice. This will be followed by an examination of how these practitioners make sense of the field of power within which they operate, how they negotiate this field using the resources and capabilities they possess, and how they legitimise their own roles therein. By deconstructing the different layers of capital and the action of the field the chapter will then present how the practitioners understand competitiveness and legitimise these perceptions.

6.2 Overview of participants

Participants were asked about their backgrounds in terms of where they lived when they were a child, what their parents do/did for a living, the kind of socio-economic environment they grew up in, their choice of education/skills development, and some of the factors that impacted on their decision to take up manufacturing as a career. A common factor that became evident was that all of the participants came from working class (Bourdieu, 1979) backgrounds. For example, one respondent who had migrated from Pakistan in his thirties commented that: 'well, in my childhood, it's been as a family. We are a blacksmiths, and the family background was in the metal business' (MP-18). Other participants similarly said that their family, particularly their fathers, had influenced their career decisions: 'it comes from my father ... I've been in the building trade, I've done all sorts of things' (MP-15); and: 'he [my father] had a job working for the newspapers and he was a proof reader' (MP-19).

All participants were affected in some way by the various recessions that had occurred in the UK over the past 50 years. Indeed, these proved to be symbolic events in the structuring of their career choices and the way they subsequently developed their careers. These factors, as well as their socio-economical origins, all impacted upon the career choices they made. In other words, their choice to go into manufacturing was shaped by the communities (fields) they grew up in.

The reason these fields may be considered significant in the context of the theoretical framework being used here, is that Bourdieu's (1990c) theory of practice situates actors within the historical accumulation of experience that he terms 'habitus'. The habitus provides schemes of perception, thought and action that define appropriate practices for actors (Whittington, 2001). The case put forward in this discussion is that individuals and firms have their unique space (environment) in which they compete for a position in their respective fields (habitus). Firms do not exist on their own; rather, people (actors) run firms who come with differing background information from different fields, and are faced

on a daily basis with the task of making decisions that have an impact on their position in the field. In other words, the practitioner's decision-making becomes intertwined with the internal and external environment. What is significant to consider here is that these actors, whether directly working for a firm or as employees/owners of a firm, are under the influence of their social, economic, cultural and symbolic capital. Hence these actors are constantly strategising and making decisions according to their perceptions and understanding of the situation, ultimately impacting on the process of becoming competitive.

The following section builds on these findings by elaborating how the practitioners in this study make sense of their career trajectories and legitimise them, and the meanings that they ascribe to 'being competitive'.

6.3 Competitiveness through sensemaking in action

The range of people who participated in the research was diverse; the firms where they worked also covered a wide range of manufacturing activities, representing the dynamic role of the manufacturing sector. The common denominator is that all participants bring with them varying aspirations about the work-life balance and perceptions of how they thought they had progressed over the years in their careers and life in general. Typically, they have had long-standing careers in manufacturing and multi-positional roles within the field of power (Bourdieu, 1996).

The following sections explore in detail the growth trajectories of the manufacturing practitioners involved in this research, and how participants themselves may have affected this. The sections also examine how manufacturing practitioners make sense of, narrate and legitimise their personal experiences of choosing manufacturing as a way of managing their careers. This will be illustrated by excerpts from interviews with the participants. The sensemaking and legitimising process is adapted from the works of Maclean, Harvey and Chia (2012b). Table 6.1 outlines the ways in which sensemaking and

legitimising interact in the context of this research, reflecting the previous discussion of these terms in chapter 3.

Table 6-1: Sensemaking and self-legitimising

Self-legitimising	Sensemaking process		
	Locating the manufacturer	Meaning-making stories of the manufacturer	Becoming competitive
Accomplishment	Through struggle	On courage	Inclined to compete
Resilience	Through determination and persistence	Being committed to the cause	Desiring
Succeeding through abilities	Progression through abilities	Ability and respect amongst others	Be suited to compete
Giving Back	Prestige and Honour	Kindness towards others	Sharing success

6.3.1 Meaning-making stories of the manufacturer

The practitioners in the sensemaking process locate their experiences and stories that enable them to understand the reasons why they chose the path of a manufacturer. This dynamic of locating is demonstrated in table 6.2, which presents an example of one participant’s life story of becoming an engineer.

Table 6-2: Example of sensemaking narrative (participant MP-26)

Born 1957 in a small town [country in Africa]
First professional job in the 1980s in the telecom sector as an exchange technician
Took a break from the job mid-career for further studies and joined the teaching profession
Joined a steel plant in his country as an Instrumentation and Controls Engineer
Moved to the UK in the early 2000s
Joined various computer repairs and servicing firms in supervisory roles
Currently registered for a PhD in Technology Education and running a private business in computer repairs to support himself, his wife and two children

MP-26 was the eldest of five brothers and sisters born to ‘illiterate parents’. He recounted that his parents ‘had a strong urge to educate their children and that his ‘father held engineers in high esteem.’ He started his education in a grammar school in his country of origin and funded his own education (secondary school onwards) by making and selling bird cages and go-karts in his neighbourhood. He attributed his success to the fact that he ‘had a flair for practicalities [...] anything that has to do with repairing.’ By locating himself in time, space and social context, this participant was then able to convey how he feels about himself in today’s world:

As a technologist or a technician, you are socially embarrassed when you are talking before a legal student, a lawyer [...] they feel they are better. (MP-26)

He indicated that he was able to legitimise this struggle through his choice to do a PhD in technology education, and thus bestow honour and prestige on himself

and his family. His reference to lawyers, through which he appropriates a well-known discursive resource, propels him to an epic style of self-narrative, instilling in the mind of the listener the image of the suited, white collar social elite. He further commented that today's living standards and education have taken away the younger generation's pride in being a 'practical person', and feels 'that is why the company cannot find skilled and qualified people to work.' This also reflects on the challenge that the existing manufacturing sector in the UK is facing in terms of skills shortages.

This example evokes certain key points from the literature on sensemaking. Jeong and Brower (2008) suggest that the way in which practitioners cope with sensemaking is developed through the three stages of noticing, interpretation, and action, which vary as a function of the ecological, institutional, and social relational contexts in which they are constructed. Starbuck and Milliken (1988) emphasise that sensemaking refers to comprehending, understanding, explaining, attributing, extrapolating and predicting, where interpretation is the process by which the actor seeks clarification of the presence of something in a way that makes it meaningful to them. In the case of MP-26, for example, his father understood that an engineering career and position meant honour and prestige, influencing MP-26's career development and motivation towards what he perceives as becoming an engineer.

The experiences of individuals have an impact on the meaningfulness the actor makes of a particular situation, culminating in an opinion, belief, or a lesson for others (Maclean et al., 2012c). For example, another participant, speaking of the retired chairman and founder of the company she worked for, said the following:

He had a very scary temper. People were scared of him[...] For instance, when I came to work for him in the 90s ... he made me sign an employment contract that meant that every other Saturday I had to work ... because that was the way he was

brought up and, you know, he ... we clashed. We didn't always get on and I think that's probably why I managed to cope with staying here so long was because I was not a 'yes' woman and I would challenge him, which is probably why he kept me around because I think he probably recognised that I would challenge him, whereas even members of his family wouldn't argue with him. (MP-11)

MP-11's challenging the authority of the chairman gave her a sense of accomplishment because she had the moral courage to stand up for what she believed in, which she felt ultimately helped her gain respect in the eyes of her employer. She further stated that:

It was a question of principle because his father always made him work at the weekend so he thought that everyone else should have to do that no matter what year it was, 1919 or 1990, so it's that sort ... that's what I mean about old fashioned values.

This conveys the ways in which meaning-making is transmitted generationally, as the company's founder, according to this participant, was reproducing the same 'story' as his father.

These stories and the values associated with them can be seen, from the findings, to impact upon practitioners' perceptions of competitiveness. For example, one participant who was a retired technician at a major High Street spectacles manufacturer based in the North West of England, recounted the fate of the workers at his former company once the company was no longer competitive:

In the mid-80s, [...] the retail sector fleeced the manufacturing to profit up because it's been run badly, and eventually they shut it. The manufacturing paid but the retail didn't [...] and shut the

company down, but it's the workforce that lost their jobs. (MP-27)

MP-27 realised that competitiveness meant job losses because of poor manufacturing processes. These processes, which may also be seen as internal resources and capabilities, are difficult to sustain and are temporal (D'Aveni et al., 2010). They are also less empirically verifiable as they are part of the social capital the firm employs, and depend on interpersonal relationships between team members and various agents in business interactions (Reed et al., 2006). These interpersonal relationships thus endow the practitioners with legitimacy in the firm that then helps them endure competitiveness. The primary message conveyed here is that, in order to be meaningfully competitive, firms must aim towards more than financial gain alone. MP-11's courage to speak up and MP-27's meaning-making of competitiveness show that manufacturing practitioners in this study not only make meaning for themselves, but notably also for others within their companies and beyond.

Another example can be taken from MP-2, a garment manufacturer located in the North West of England. The participant's firm had equipment that was more than 40 years old, which MP-2 justified in terms of efficiency and cost effectiveness:

We are still running machines from the 1960s and 1970s ... we can still make a very good garment from the old machines that we have got.

This firm is a family owned business that had invested in their plant and equipment in the 1970s, and has been using this ever since. The strategy behind their investment became clear when MP-2 said that they were 'still surviving'. The current market for garment manufacturers in the UK is highly competitive, with much competition coming from low cost countries such as Turkey (Oz,

2002). Strategists such as the garment manufacturer and first-tier supplier of components (to name a few) at firm level have no other choice but to follow mainstream best practices and endeavour to deal with the challenges and opportunities that come their way (Ernst and Kieser, 2002, Lipartito, 1995).

These challenges that are faced by the manufacturer then create tensions and challenges for decision makers within the firm (Whitley, 2006, Castells, 2011). This was found to be the case in this study, with certain key variables affecting competitiveness strategies. One of these variables was size – larger firms tended to compete in a complex and dynamic way, and to be effective users of their internal resources and capabilities. For example, when MP-19 was asked about how his firm managed resources and capabilities, he said that it had close ties with universities and was consistently involved in Research & Development and finding new and innovative ways to manage processes. This echoes the literature suggesting that large firms have a number of ‘core competencies’ which fundamentally underpin their dynamic competitiveness by embedding activities such as innovation and Research & Development repetitively over a long period of time (Prahalad and Hamel, 1993) in order to exploit rent and maximise profitability. In contrast, smaller firms in this study tended not to be as structured as larger firms in practising well-established (best practice) processes. Yet, small firms, such as MP-2 (with all the competition that it faces from overseas) are ‘still surviving’. The existence of limited resources available to the firm internally, and no help from the external environment, have driven a certain type of practice of behaviour when it comes to managing the firm. In contrast, the larger firms that have a pool of resources available to them are more likely to manage the firm by way of a structured approach.

Bourdieu (1992) believed that when a person’s habitus matches the field in which they have evolved, they make sense of the situation and react instantaneously. The practice perspective enables us to understand the nature of field in the context of this study. The practitioners continuously develop social relationships

through their respective networks by continuously practising and learning within their working environment (Suchman, 1987). This working environment is their field. Each field then has an impact on both strategy and the agents exerting their power (via strategy) for the purpose of achieving mutual interest that is acceptable to that specific field (stakeholders). However, all fields differ from each other, and would not necessarily involve similar practices to other fields (i.e. competitors). Considering this dynamic and how it varies from one firm to another reflects on the way in which firms generate different kinds of resources (capital) that are then used as a basis to negotiate their social positions. The following section uses this idea to reflect on how manufacturers see their firms as becoming competitive.

6.3.2 Becoming Competitive

A key motif among participants relevant to becoming competitive was 'initiative'. For example, MP-17, when asked what competitiveness meant to him, replied that this signified primarily pricing and cost, and further commented that:

Initiative [...] America is a great place to learn about competitiveness, I think the word competitiveness is from there! If you go there, you'll see lots of different types of businesses and they are all like 'how can I reduce something by a pound – a dollar and get the order?'

As participants' perceptions here demonstrate, there exists a rich diversity of views regarding what 'being competitive' and 'competitiveness' mean. This also reflects on the way in which firms have re-evaluated their business strategies to address the notion of competitiveness, particularly in relation to threats faced by emerging low-cost suppliers (Zammuto and O'Connor, 1992, Piercy, 2012) adopting innovations that make rivals' positions obsolete (Conner, 1991). One response to this has been firms diversifying into other areas such as trading,

distribution, services, etcetera reflecting the dynamic changes in the role of the manufacturer.

6.4 Competitiveness through self-legitimising

Participants' interview narratives exhibit an ongoing desire to legitimise their chosen profession, with an overlapping and instilling of the sensemaking process. This explores traces of each of the four modes of legitimacy-seeking identified through which manufacturing practitioners cast themselves as competitive: – accomplishment, resilience, succeeding through abilities, and giving back.

The owner and manager of a small manufacturing unit in the South of England, MP-15, explained how he chose manufacturing as a career:

I've always been very good with my hands... I've been in the building trade, I've done all sorts of things and if there's a job needs doing at home, I'll go and do it ... I hate paying anyone to do anything ... It's not because I'm tight.

MP-15 says that he inherited his handyman skills from his father, who was also in the building trade until he retired. Starting his own manufacturing firm emerged from an opportunity when a friend asked him to undertake a small printing job. From this modest beginning, MP-15 began his manufacturing firm in the early 1980s, which has since then grown at a steady pace and reflects on the mode of accomplishment.

Locating the sense of 'accomplishment' the participants have achieved through the struggles they have had to face from early childhood also demonstrated their reasoning for choosing manufacturing as a career. Often, this was inspired by their parents' potentially difficult lives: 'my father was actually in the army' (MP-9); 'he worked on a farm as a prisoner of war' (MP-12); and 'when my father was 17-18, one of his friends said oh yeah there are loads of jobs down at the docks in

Belfast' (PE-2). These examples indicate the struggle the participants' parents had to endure and the possible sensemaking and legitimised actions of the practitioners towards their position on being competitive (in their view).

Other participants took a different view, legitimising their accomplishment in terms of a good work-life balance. For example, MP-15, the owner of a manufacturing firm, employed only one other member of staff on a regular basis, and another on a seasonal basis. Supported by his wife (and business partner in the firm), the three of them were able to generate a turnover of just under half a million pounds per annum. While automation was not the only key to their strategic mix, they had a marketing strategy that defied the traditional norms of best practices applied by their competitors. However, MP-15 and MP-16 (his wife) were not keen on growing the business further and preferred anonymity as a strategy for being competitive. They described what success means to them in the following terms:

We've got a flat in [name of town], so that could always be our base, or we've got the little house down south and we could go there, maybe buy somewhere abroad and just keep some money in the bank, maybe sell the business if it doesn't pan out.

This comment indicates that they are more focused on enjoying their lifestyle than nurturing ambitions in relation to the business that can be related to the government's growth plan for the manufacturing sector. This example indicates that a small business owner's objectives may not be simply to grow and maximise profit, but are influenced by the society in which the owner lives (Casey, 1995). In other words, MP-15 and MP-16, as 'social humans', are prejudiced by the culture (Bourdieu, 1984) they live in and want to have a good work-life balance. Indeed, their perceptions of the work life balance and attitude to competitiveness suggest that profit maximisation and an upwards growth trajectory is not always the goal of businesses (Spence, 2000b). Spence (2000) suggests that small firm owners are

more concerned with areas such as social responsibility towards society at large, and tend more to manage their firm's expectations based on their immediate and own purpose (Suominen and Mantere, 2010).

The drive for legitimacy was also made by participants through their accounts of 'resilience', bestowing their legitimacy as resolute in the face of organisational instability. Practitioners outlined a range of practical lessons learned from 'determination and persistence' and being committed throughout their cause (career/profession). A key lesson was that of trust, and learning ways of ensuring and negotiating that with clients, as well as mitigating the situation when that trust was broken. For example, start-up companies such as that of MP-3 had to start trusting their clients from early on as they had to supply products on credit terms. As this participant stated:

You have to go with that instinct and see if everything is running smoothly (MP-3)

According to Bourdieu, Swedberg (2005) argues that symbolic capital exists in the use of symbolic resources such as recognition and goodwill. In MP-3's case, trusting his instincts was a key tool in establishing that goodwill and trust level. This is also significant at the level of the firm itself, as 'trust' as a form of social capital is a key resource within the network of firms (Brown et al., 1997) and influences people's beliefs that their decisions are to be respected within the field. This 'trust' takes time to develop, with the notion of reciprocity being key (Schuller et al., 2000), but is not well defined in economic theory (Dasgupta, 2000). This reciprocity dictates that both firms are obligated to abide by the relational trust (Dasgupta, 2000). However, in the traditional role of the rent seeking firm, this relationship is not reciprocal but appears to be a straight forward transaction that is institutionalised within the firm's purpose for existing (Dasgupta, 2000).

In reality, the situation is not that straightforward; for example, MP-3 lost out on a credit line his firm had extended to the buyer. This, in turn, damaged the relationship with that particular client, highlighting the vulnerability of social capital to disintegrate if that trust is lost (Jovane, 2008). Hence, social capital can be seen as both a foundation and a consequence of good relationships in business deals; it is not only the trust between two contracting parties, but also operates internally within the firm and stakeholders across the organisation, whose support is needed to ensure that resources are allocated to the transaction at hand.

Participants also learned the value of 'being committed' in order to develop stronger ties amongst the workforce. When interviewing participants from the firm that made timber products, based in the South East of England, participants recounted having learned the importance of high quality social relationships amongst the stakeholders of the firm within the firm itself. The Managing Director (MD) showed this through his ability to be flexible in his firms policy and procedures, and stated:

We do have all the policies but we also have the ability to put the line through them and say that it doesn't apply in this case' (MP-8).

The internal power dynamics here, i.e. that staff are given the freedom to implement what they deem best, conveys that this firm is able to utilise its knowledge capital in maximising available resources and competencies.

When making decisions, whether these are internal concerning an employee's job responsibility, or external, such as a client's request for a certain product with certain specifications, the people in MP-8's team have the common sense and sufficient autonomy to override any rigid company policy and reach a better and wiser decision to satisfy the client. As another respondent, MP-11 the marketing

manager, commented: “it’s [the firm] got people that are almost like the guardians of the business.’

Legitimising through the ‘abilities’ of the staff to act autonomously reflected the sensemaking process of the employees to make decisions based on the authority that the firm had bestowed upon them; for example, MP-25 discussed his autonomy to make decisions in the factory he worked in, saying that: ‘we’re told what we need on a daily basis (daily targets) and it’s up to us to get them targets out the door.’

While firms have structures and layers of responsibility built into their manuals to increase their productivity and meet targets, the people doing the job are the ones who actually make these procedures succeed and generate results for the firm. This, in other words, reflects on a firm’s ability to utilise its dynamic capabilities to gain competitiveness, where dynamic capabilities form a process that an actor adopts to allow the firm to generate returns by doing things differently, and hence gain a competitive advantage (Blyler and Coff, 2003). The position of the actor within the firm is itself mediated by virtue of membership in social networks and the power they have amongst them, i.e. their social and symbolic capital.

These findings convey that, contrary to theories positing firms as merely economic actors or bundles of resources, firms are in fact complex social systems that incorporate a variety of interests. The way the firm handles its affairs as an ‘actor’ in itself arguably problematises the firm’s existence; this is beyond the explanation offered by theories of the firm or resource-based approaches. Various actors contribute to the symbolic capital of the firm’s name, which is continuously produced and reproduced and exerts official influence over practice.

The legitimacy seeking recounted by practitioners also demonstrates how different forms of capital have the capacity to influence actions (Bourdieu, 1991),

through: varying degrees and forms of knowledge (cultural capital); symbolic capital such as honour and prestige; economic capital (the control over assets); and social capital (connections).

Arguably, competitiveness for most firms should not be seen as a challenge but as an issue that can be legitimised through efficient management under conditions of rapid technological, social and economic change. Respondents MP-15 and M-16 discussed the ways in which their firms were 'suited to compete' while conveying (through the sensemaking process) the competitive edge of their firm to be contained in the combination of product, pricing, quality and service. As they succinctly put it, the value and aspirations they shared in the firm's growth was noted in their statement when they referenced their method of competitiveness by saying: 'anybody can become a sign maker ... (we stay competitive by) not being greedy.'

Both respondents (MP-15 and MP-16) are competing in a mature market and have developed a niche product, maintaining its competitiveness by staying 'anonymous'. By keeping their costs down and, according to them, not marketing their product aggressively, they have developed a strategy to stay competitive.

Likewise, it can be said that today's manufacturing firms have realised that the basic manufacturing of products is not the only way to compete and hence see competitiveness as a combination of efforts put in by the firm to stay ahead of its rivals. MP-2, while saying that her firm was one of the few remaining manufacturers in the UK, was confident that her firm's competitiveness lies in the fact that 'we keep an eye on everything.' This reflects on the notion of maximising the resources available to the firm in order to deliver a product or service that is inimitable and non-substitutable (Barney 1991) – a strategy that enables the firm to compete.

Reflecting on the fourth mode of legitimacy – ‘giving back’ – there were frequent instances of this mentioned by participants. For example, MP-15 and MP-16, manufacturing firm owners, have a disabled son living with them at home and aim to achieve a good work-life balance that would also enable them to look after their son, rather than to maximise the profit of their firm. In other words, ‘giving back’ to their family (as well as a good work-life balance for themselves) are the key factors mitigating their attitude towards their firm’s competitiveness, rather than the need to grow and be profitable *per se*. In addition, the employees ‘desiring’ the firm to succeed felt that they owed a lot to the firm, and were dedicated and devoted to the betterment of the firm as they knew that the firm also looked after their concerns.

Another example of ‘giving back’ as a mechanism of legitimising one’s perspective of actions can be through MP-10’s comment that:

For someone he (the MD of the firm) felt was worth looking after he would go to some trouble to help him out; perhaps the company would make personal loans to employees who would want to buy a new car, he would try and use his influence to get people medical appointments if they were in difficulties with their health, you know, those types of things (MP-10)

Another respondent, MP-20, referring to the firm as being his ‘family’, emphasised the importance of kindness for others:

What’s important is that you maintain the respect within your sphere of influence, especially within your family because you need the respect to make sure people don’t suffer in your family.

These quotes convey that practitioners value the social capital they possess and share with others. Most of the participants in the study were aged 40-60 years, reflecting the fact that their family backgrounds were rooted in a time when the UK's economy was largely based on industry and agriculture (Buchanan, 1983). At this time, i.e. around the mid-20th century, firms tended to be small in size and mostly owner-proprietor or family run (Spence et al., 2000, Spence and Rutherford, 2001, Spence and Schmidpeter, 2003, Hudson, 2011, Hudson, 1992). However, as new technological inventions throughout the 20th century steadily transformed the landscape of the UK's economy, agriculture as a source of income and livelihood became extinct as people increasingly adapted to the urban lifestyle.

6.4.1 Perception of competitiveness

When asking participants what competitiveness meant to them, the researcher found that, overall, most of the firms and people interviewed conveyed mixed responses to what they perceived as being competitive. For example, in an interview with MP-25, a team leader at a manufacturing plant based in Derbyshire, insight was gained into how large firms compete internally against each other for business. The globalisation of trade had enabled their firm to locate their business units in strategically advantaged places across the world from where they can gain maximum benefit and economies of scale. His perception of competitiveness was:

Competitiveness! I think at our place it's just basically you've got to be competitive or else we don't have any work. I think that's what we get told really, you know. I mean at our place, even within the group, there are competitors inasmuch as we're dying for business from sites in the same group. It's not always competitive; it's 'this site' against the other site in Brazil maybe or something like that.

Another respondent defined competitiveness simply as being an: 'understanding of what one wants' (MP-27). He further went on to say that being competitive for his firm meant 'to arouse interest' in attracting new customers as well as keeping existing clients on board. However, he also pointed out that once this need or 'arousal' had been made, maintaining inimitability was fundamental to the survival of the firm, thus indicating that these strategies legitimised the decision they made and impacting on their perception of competitiveness.

Participants also named the quality of the technical resources used by the firm as a key element mitigating competitiveness. The resources available to the firms were seen to be mostly technology based; hence the firms tended to rely heavily on process automation for manufacturing good quality products. However, there was a degree of manual labour involved where automation was either too expensive or the firm did not have the required knowledge and skills. For example, in the case of MP-15's firm, automation was a key element of its business competitiveness. The level of automation allowed this firm to have both a degree of flexibility in production and also to sustain a high standard of quality. MP-15, when explaining the firm's plant assets, commented that:

These things nowadays, these machines that you can buy now, I mean they're just fantastic. I mean that one prints and cuts the thing out for you.'

6.5 Discussion

The manufacturing practitioners narratives captured in this chapter illustrate how organisational circumstances (Sveningsson and Alvesson, 2003) evolved at a particular juncture in their career and ambitions explaining why they chose manufacturing as a career. The research identifies and clarifies the sensemaking process embedded within the stories as told through the practitioners life-history. The sensemaking process is: locating, meaning-making and becoming.

Locating is concerned with the making of a reference point in time and space, where narratives provide spatial arrangements which control the transition from one context to another (De Certeau, 1998a). Meaning-making refers to the interweaving of events and episodes that the manufacturing practitioners have undergone over their lifetime. Understanding the ways in which practitioners make meaning thus enables the researcher to develop a coherent story that intimates their sense of becoming. Moreover, the storytelling and sensemaking processes of the manufacturing practitioners are a mechanism (mode) of self-legitimation.

Sensemaking exists through the relationship between locating, meaning-making and becoming, and is self-legitimised through accomplishment, resilience, succeeding through abilities and giving back (Table 6.1). The process of sensemaking and legitimising can be seen as a never-ending struggle for legitimacy (Stone and Brush, 1996). The manufacturing practitioners portrayed themselves to be successful and content human beings located in a particular time, space or organisation to which they belonged, and within which they were required to make meaning to convince a social audience to identify with their messages and build their futures in the field of power.

'Accomplishment', the first mechanism observed within self-legitimising, locates the practitioners in situations of great struggle. The ability of the practitioners to challenge the status quo and think of their future enabled them to become winners (Vaara, 2002). Resilience, the second mechanism, anchors them as worthy and trusted team players, showing loyalty to their firms, determination and a competitive drive for the firm to grow (Brown, 1998). Participants' references to succeeding through ability, the third mechanism, depict an individual practitioner's journey through his or her sheer hard work, skills and willingness to be a team player, that are often applied to boost the competitiveness of the firm. The final mechanism, 'giving back', locates the practitioner as having accumulated material success and a good reputation

courtesy of being, by implication, a compassionate individual who places the well-being of the firm, and society in general, above their narrow self-interest. In other words, the stories expressed by the manufacturing practitioners depict the becoming of a more complete human being who is sincere and authentic (Bourdieu, 1997) and selflessly shares his or her successes with others rather than focusing on self-interest and personal rewards (Suchman, 1995).

In staking these claims to self-legitimacy, therefore, the storytelling of business leaders is linked to the dynamics of power because, as active agents occupying command posts, they are in a position to deploy interpretations of events that further their personal and organisational interests, legitimating preferred outcomes (Maclean et al., 2012). The participants' stories that have been analysed and discussed in this chapter demonstrate a fitness to compete (Schoenberger, 1998), and the narration of such stories amongst fellow practitioners within the firm arguably forges a common bond that strengthens the social capital of the firm and generates a feeling of belonging which, in turn, fosters growth and competitiveness through a sense of shared ambitions and desires to succeed.

6.6 Conclusion

The current practice literature is indeed nothing short of being inspiring. The practice-based form of enquiry adopts a process approach towards making sense of strategy, and does not unpack the actual micro-practices and everyday routines of strategy formulation (Chia, 2004). Strategy-as-practice (SAP), as discussed in chapter 3, as well as strategy-as-practice disciplines specific to management studies, are under pressure to respond to the pragmatic concerns of the practitioner (Chia, 2004). Much of what is generally construed as strategy work involves talk, presentations, committees, resource allocation meetings and the routines of everyday activity. Chia poses the question of whether these visible practices are really strategy-shaping or whether they are, in fact, the mere manifestations of an underlying unconscious pattern of dispositions that provides

consistency to managerial actions that we might more accurately call strategy-in-practice.

This chapter has argued that the daily routines of manufacturing practitioners in the workplace are outcomes of observer-led causal logic and expressions of intentions, rules, plans and laws that constitute the operating discourse of the current practice-led emphasis in strategy. By avoiding the causal logic theoretical position and adopting instead the framework of habitus, the current research can uncover the true nature of practice. In other words, the research seeks to advance the knowledge and understanding of competitiveness and unpack the actual micro-practices and everyday routines of strategy formulation. Through the lens of habitus, it makes it possible to suggest what a person should think or how they should act, as according to Bourdieu (1992) people are not fools and people do not act blindly. Bourdieu believed that people will only act on practical sense. Practical sense is not the same as formal logic; it simply means that people will react reasonably in given situations.

This chapter's analysis of becoming a manufacturer through self-legitimising and sensemaking points towards a link between reflexivity and becoming competitive. Within the 'social context', knowledge is situated in the class structures that sometimes hinder reflexivity, which could be seen as ideological traps that inhibit one's ambitions and eagerness to move forward in life. By discussing manufacturing practitioners backgrounds and thus their reflexive practices in the context of this study, this chapter has situated knowledge in the social context and draws out the various dimensions of competitiveness as perceived by these practitioners. This chapter has also shown how various people use social capital to negotiate their position to their benefit.

In considering the reflexive thinking that manufacturing practitioners exhibited in this study, two particular modes of reflexive practice were seen: an 'absorption mode', through which manufacturing practitioners reflexively accumulate capital,

positions and perspectives; and an 'attempting to resolve mode', through which they reconstruct the self in response to contingencies, contexts and insights gathered. These will be analysed and discussed in the next chapter.

Understanding the becoming of a manufacturer through a storytelling and sensemaking lens has been under-researched. The findings from this chapter therefore contribute to the literature of legitimacy by providing a more nuanced understanding of manufacturing practitioner's attempts to capture their accounts of the success in their respective careers. This also responds to the call for further research on sensemaking processes in narratives (Maclean et al., 2012c) by identifying and explaining the three processes – locating, meaning-making and becoming – as taken from stories told by manufacturing practitioners. By doing so, this chapter also highlights the significance of storytelling as a method of engaging practitioners within a firm and encouraging them to share their experiences (potentially with their wider community), thus becoming a vehicle for the practitioners' claim to legitimacy. The greater experience of navigating the social landscape may facilitate the perspectives of manufacturing practitioners by seizing opportunities and navigating their careers in becoming competitive.

Through the lens of reflexivity and habitus, a new direction for research that combines becoming and SAP will be to re-theorize our understandings of actors and agency. The importance of traditional management theory is ever so relevant, by reifying the practitioner with mainstream SAP body of knowledge top management teams, effective leaders, and entrepreneurs can benefit. These practitioners are embedded in the habitus. By understanding this disconnect they are able to make effective choices that improve the efficiency, survivability, or adaptability of the firm or institution. This combined perspective will offer a more nuanced view of actors and agency, in which actors have a limited degree of reflexivity about their relationship with the social structures that they have constructed and a relative degree of capacity to change them.

For example, one interesting path for applying this perspective would be to explore the opportunity to re-theorise today's modern firm. By setting aside the traditional understanding of the rational structure designed to 'profit-maximisation or shareholder value' researchers may, instead, spend some time inside these organizations and attend to what the lived experience is inside a corporation—in other words, examine what practitioners inside their field of work actually do. The next chapter (7) discusses 'being' a competitor.

Chapter 7 Being a competitive manufacturer

7.1 Introduction

Class structures often become obstacles to reflexivity that are burdened with ideological traps that may narrow one's opportunities and achievements. Thus, a structured career could offer a potential means of breaking away from these limitations by providing the platform for the self to 'become' (Giddens, 1991). This chapter builds on Bourdieu's practice framework to examine how manufacturing practitioners develop and practice reflexivity in their daily lives, and suggest that reflexive practice is especially significant to the career development of less privileged social backgrounds. Reflexive practice provides the opportunity to develop new perspectives and insights of 'the self'. In other words, reflexive practice enables the individual to transcend their social conditions and break away from the structures that may inhibit their ability to compete and improve.

This chapter will take data from the main study interviews conducted with manufacturing practitioners. The participants selected for this discussion originated from across the social spectrum (as demonstrated in table 7.1), had competed with other practitioners also working in manufacturing, and had largely enjoyed success in their careers.

This chapter argues that through reflexive practices, these practitioners are able to negotiate their position in their social spaces (fields of power) and improve their social class, hence negotiating the 'field of power' (Bourdieu, 1998). In other words, at times when the manufacturing practitioners lacked social mobility, coupled with economic, social and cultural hardship within their families and the environment, they were nonetheless able to manoeuvre their position (in their respective field); often, the opportunity of education enabled them to move 'up' the social class system and become elites (Bourdieu, 1998; Maclean, 2012).

Table 7-1: Social origins of interview respondents

S. No.	Pseudonym	Social Origins¹⁰	Role
1	MP-8	2	Chairman and Managing Director (MD)
2	MP-10	3	Senior Manager
3	MP-11	2	Senior Manager
4	MP-14	3	Production Supervisor
5	MP-15	2	MD and Head of Engineering
6	MP-16	2	Sales / Commercial Director
7	MP-17	2	Project Design Engineer
8	MP-18	3	Owner / Manager / Engineer
9	MP-21	2	Project Engineer / Principal Lecturer
10	MP-24	3	Production Team Leader
11	MP-26	2	Design Engineer
12	MP-28	3	Systems Engineer

There is currently a knowledge gap in terms of how manufacturing practitioners seek to leverage themselves through internal mechanisms and reflexive manoeuvres into positions of power. This is especially true for non-privileged elites who, when embarking on their careers, initially lack the economic, cultural, social and symbolic resources compared with those originating from the upper tiers of society. This chapter aims to contribute to this knowledge by exploring practitioners' drives to be competitive in their working lives; that is, how they become competitive manufacturers.

¹⁰ Social origins equate to family background, where 4 = lower class, 3 = lower-middle class, 2 = upper-middle class, and 1 = upper class (HALSEY, A. H. 1986. *Change in British society*, Oxford University Press Oxford.

This will be done firstly by examining the theoretical alignment between habitus and reflexivity. This will be followed by an exploration of interview participants' own reflexive practices, focusing on three main 'modes' that emerged: 'absorption' mode, 'attempt to resolve' mode, and the 'combined' mode. Subsequent sections will engage with the role of personal capital in informing these practices, as well as the dynamic of embodying opportunities, overcoming challenges and learning from hardship. The chapter will conclude with a discussion of findings and highlight how these relate to the overall research aims and objectives of this thesis.

7.2 Mediating the field – the role of habitus and reflexivity

The analysis in this chapter draws on the concept of 'field' and the various forms of capital, trajectory and habitus drawn from the work of Bourdieu. The key concept engaged with here is that a person's social history is important and impacts on his/her future practices. The habitus framework relates social background to practice, where social background is not static but an ongoing social process with local and global aspects. The 'field' in this context may be understood as a structured network of social practices and positions related to a trade or an area of production. Bourdieu (1993) explains that a person may hold many – or a sequence of – positions in different fields.

Habitus is thus an organising principle that works through the body from the intellect, and is accumulated over past experiences gained by the person; however, it also affects the future in the sense that it generates an individual's preferences, choices, perspectives, reasoning, and so on. Of particular relevance to this research is the notion that the individual's self-interest and opportunistic behaviour, perspective and reasoning can exert significant influence over that individual's (in this study, practitioner's) competitive strategies and, crucially, his/her perception of competitiveness. Figure 7.2 illustrates this theoretical

interplay between habitus and reflexivity, particularly as it relates to manufacturing practitioners.

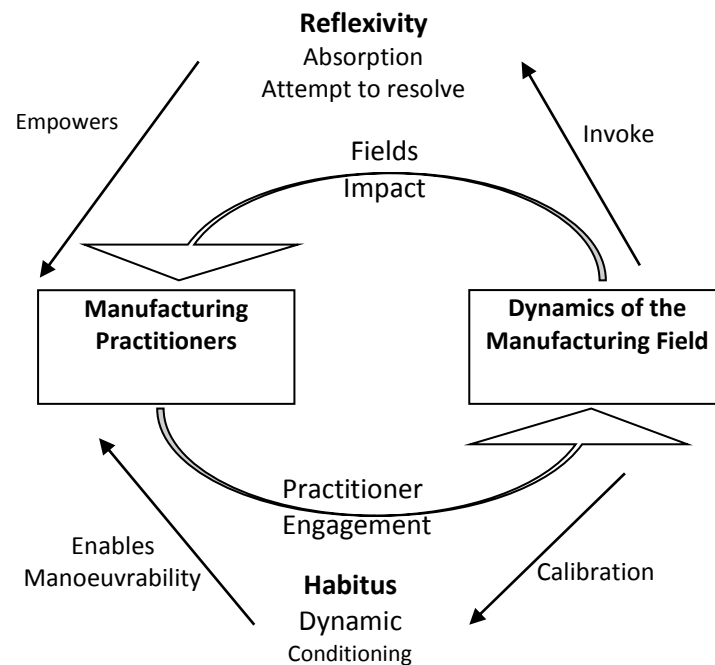


Figure 7-2: Practitioners' mediating the field

(Adapted from (Maclean et al., 2012b))

By analysing participants' narratives and life trajectories with reference to this interplay between reflexivity and habitus, certain key themes emerged from the interview data that point strongly to the notion that practitioners continuously learn by seizing on the opportunities available to them and by building on their personal capital. Specifically, three main reflexive practices emerged: the absorption mode, the 'attempt to resolve' mode, and the combined mode of the two. In addition, several factors were found to inform each of these; namely: personal capital, embody opportunities, developing personal practice strategies, overcoming hurdles, and learning from hardship. Figure 7.3 illustrates the interaction between these reflexive practices and the key factors informing them.

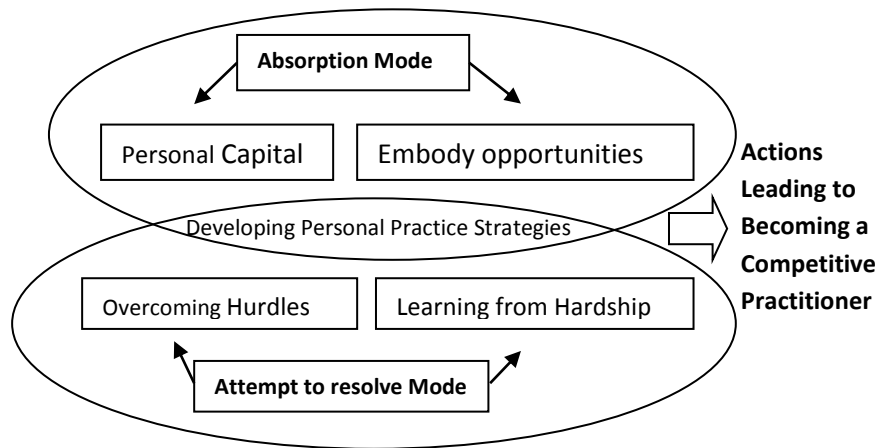


Figure 7-3: Reflexivity modes leading to the competitive practitioner

The following sections discuss these themes in detail by drawing on participants' narratives.

7.2.1 Reflexivity in practice

Habitus is a structure that sets expectations and provides individuals with a contextual understanding of different situations through their exposure to habitual circumstances in everyday life. In the 'theatre of symbolic struggle', Bourdieu (1990a) explains that the individual competes for status and resources. Likewise, in this study, it was found that not all manufacturing practitioners are on a level playing field; existing practitioners have a symbolic position and are placed and privileged in the ranks of manufacturing practitioners by virtue of having existing status within the field, albeit at different levels. Through reflexive practice, manufacturing practitioners realising their social predicament seek ways to overcome their habituated circumstances and work towards improving their position and standard of living. Thus, while habitus offers powerful initial advantages for existing practitioners, newcomers may re-position themselves and create a competitive environment within the field to compete for symbolic position.

Reflexivity is obtained and refined through critical events that spur the individual actor into reaching beyond their existing status (Bourdieu, 1990), enabling higher-level learning (Maclean et al., 2012a) and disrupting the existing habitus of the manufacturing practitioners (existing field), ultimately triggering reflexivity. In other words, situating reflexivity in relation to capital, field, dispositions and social class provides the aspiring manufacturing practitioners with an acquired capacity to act and overcome initial hardships, as well as to make the most of the opportunities to compete (Maclean et al., 2012a) and become competitive manufacturing practitioners. Three major categories evolved in the analysis of the data through the reflexive lens: the absorption mode, the attempt to resolve mode, and the combined mode. Absorption mode is when personal capital is collected by the practitioner in which he/she feels strong and confident about; for example education qualifications, networks, skills, communications, etc. 'Attempt to resolve' means how the practitioner developed an understanding of the situation at hand and acted. These will now be examined.

This will begin with a set of case studies that illustrate each of these modes in turn using participants' own voices, before a more detailed discussion that uses these and other participant examples drawn from the interviews (some of which may be used to convey more than one theme). It will be seen that practitioners constantly deliberate efforts so as to gain and absorb personal capital (economic, cultural, social and symbolic) through 'embodying opportunities' within their field of practice. It will be seen that reflexivity enabled practitioners to 'attempt to resolve' the situations posed by the field, and overcome hurdles and hardships during the course of life, and thus by doing so become competitive manufacturers.

Table 7-2: Case studies from interview narratives

1 Absorption mode of reflexivity	
<p>1.1 Personal capital</p>	<p>It's a long story. I used to be a very keen golfer [...] I came up with the idea of doing a county-wide book explaining how to play each golf hole on each course and we got most of Hertfordshire done and my local club said, well, you've got all these pictures of the golf course now, can you make us some signs. So I got someone to make signs for them and I went back with the price and they said that's too expensive, can you sell advertising. So we started selling advertising and the sign company that was making these things went bust so I started making them myself and that's how I got into making signs, and I've been doing it ever since 1989. MP-15</p>
<p>1.2 Embody opportunity</p>	<p>We are a blacksmiths; the family background was in the metal business and the background in my early days at the age of say 14, 15 till 19. I came to this country and obviously I had experience of that, a bit on welding, a bit on lathe and steel what I was involved in [name of country] <i>[MP-18 then moved to the UK in 1977 and started his career]</i> ... He went to say: At first, I started with somebody manufacturing trousers, skirts, garments and then moved on to another factory [...] Then after the 80s, '81, '82, I bought a little grocery shop ... I did it for a long, long time, 18 years up till 1998. In 1994 actually I bought this [referring to the premises where the interview was conducted]. Then slowly, slowly there came the stage of what business I'm going to start up on because obviously at this time we were running the grocery store and repairing this as well [...] I bought a few machines later to do the steelwork, so one or two guys were very kind in the community and they encouraged me. They said I need my shutter putting in ... no, no, you can do it. So what I did was to do this building up, it was just personally, just got friends of the family together and worked on it and that's it. And then they said why don't you do mine, why don't you do mine and then obviously ok, that's just light in the tunnel and I started up. MP-18</p>
2 Attempt to resolve mode of reflexivity	

<p>2.1 Overcoming hurdles</p>	<p>I think the majority of my family, or even the extended family also, they have got the basic education. But I was the first one who has gone to university and then the degree and then moved on from there. I think ... it's the circumstances I think that made you do certain things so I think the circumstances has, at that time, the circumstances which I was going through ... that's the only way forward for me to get something different ... and to get into the UK basically because there's a lot of examples in front of me if I would stick to the same principles or the same following with my cousins or my elders are doing so maybe I was in the same place so I want to do something different. It was ... so I didn't like it basically. I'm the sort of person who's, er, not comfortable in a fixed routine for a while. I need change, I'm always looking for projects that people don't like to handle. So basically I get bored after 1½ years as a ... in the process industry. So the next step, I was just looking for a Masters opportunity and then the calls for University of [name] came up. It was manufacturing engineering and systems management so that bring me to [name of city] back in 2002. I did my masters in manufacturing for one year and then after that I got an opportunity to work for a ... as a trainee engineer in a company for six months. There I learned different Lean tools and basically built up from there. I found it quite challenging in a sense that ... generally speaking the Lean principles it's a big tool kit. You are coming across all different sort of scenarios and all different sort of problems and each ... every problem is not going to be the same all the time and so that lead me into a bit more into the Lean manufacturing or manufacturing management side and then I got this opportunity for this KTP associate as a fresh graduate and it all starts from there. MP-14</p> <p>So I took off from there and you remember I said my parents were illiterate but they encouraged me. My father has that high reputation for engineers and when we talk, we're always talking in that direction but why, that is not so important in how my career followed, this is because I think I have that flair for practicalities. If I think back to my childhood, I was—I started making cages to catch birds—at the age of nine, 10. And there my parents started, became part of my life again because they were</p>
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	<p>poor, so when I finished my primary school, there was no hope of going to secondary school because they can't afford it. But when I made these cages I sold them ... Yes, I had that business inclination already. I sold them and if I catch birds and sell together with the cage it becomes more expensive so I got more money. So that generated my common entrance fee. So I paid my common entrance fee to go and sit for the exams, and then I came out with three schools offering me admission. So the ball was now in my parent's court ... how do they (parents) now pay the school's fee.</p> <p>But before that time, from seven, eight, we used to have this children's play, child's play, where you design things. I started doing these motor cars, racing cars at the age of eight [explaining how he made go-karts] I don't know what you would say or how you would explain it but this is how it goes: we go to the carpenter shed and pick their leftovers. And then you pick some other woods like this then get some nails also from the carpenter, fix them, all right, so we have these now, the results. You go to the mechanic shop again, the mechanic this time ... and pick these ball bearings ... I was doing this at the age of eight ... I used to sell them ... So this was how I started and then I found myself in the telecommunications and then I found myself in the computer and then in the industry repairing all this. Anything that has to do with repair. And then I'm doing my PhD in technology education so steeling myself on my private business centred on maintenance and that's what that did. MP-27</p>
<p>2.2 Learning from Hardship</p>	<p>Well, when I was growing up my dad was an engineer and a draughtsman; he had his own business running—selling specialist equipment too, like not robots, but like machines to make stuff to assemble together or do automated tasks - that was his speciality. My mum was a teacher and they told me don't be an engineer or a teacher. Ironically I am now both. But I guess at school I was really good at maths, I was excellent at maths and I was at physics and chemistry, but I didn't want to be a scientist. I did look at being a—doing cosmology actually which is a particular branch of physics. But it was when the recession was on so when I was looking to decide what to do, I wanted to get a job and so I ended up doing engineering because I thought I'd have more chance. So</p>

	<p>I did my A levels in '87 to '89, yes ... They were tough times.</p> <p>I grew up in [name of a city] so it was a big manufacturing base which was decimated, you know, the steelworks, that was a period of massive change and, you know, I did engineering and I did general engineering because I could do ... one of the reasons I went to [name of a university] was the fact that it was a good place to go, was that you could do everything for two years then specialise, because I didn't know really what I wanted to do. I left my options open.</p> <p>My dad got a job. He used to work at [name of an industrial park]. He'd had a tough time in various business areas and that partly informed my career choices.</p> <p>He was working for [name of company] a big corporation, doing engineering, various bits and bobs and he got made redundant. He went to work as an MD, he was sales director because he was a good salesman so engineering sales, like technical sales, and then he went to be—the MD left and he became MD of this business and what [name of a company] was, one of the directors of the business went off to [name of a country] with all the money, just like that —and the business went bust.</p> <p>My dad had no job so he set up his own business ... but he went out of business. He ran his own business for like 20 years but about 15 years in, somebody else ... he did a big job like £250 grand which was a lot of money in them days, and the guy just didn't pay. He went—he built a machine or something and the guy went off again to [name of a country] ... same destination, different person and that finished it off. So I swore I'm not going into business for myself because I saw the devastating effect it had on my family and my father and still to this day, because my parents like, you know, had a huge house and they had to give the money to the bank and, you know, they've got problems still stemming from that issue. So it informed my view about what I wanted to do [...] And that's why I came to work in a university, there's a little bit of a degree of security there amongst other things. MP-21</p>
3 Combined Mode	

<p>3.1 Personal practice strategies of reflexivity</p>	<p>I still very much believe in the concept of the family business ... I wouldn't say it happens a lot ... but there is a lad that works in the metal shop ... he has worked with us for about 7-8 years he has had various loans from us and his wife is in [name of a country] and he wants to bring her over here and he wants a loan to do it ... can he have it ... and he's been turned down by the line manager and turned down by the other and he asked me ... and said that I know I shouldn't be asking but can I have it? ... and then I had a chat with him ... what about the wife you bought over a couple of years ago when you had a similar loan? Well he's divorced her and he has ended up with a loan! ... Now there's two ways I can go ... he would either remain incredibly loyal to me or he will bugger off with the money ... He hasn't bugged off with the money ... so I presume he's been incredibly loyal to me... and I do firmly believe in the family company ethic ... we have had various people with cancer, two ladies with breast cancer and they have been supported through it ... 8-9 months leave and they have been paid to make sure they are comfortable which again in a big company would be a rule that after 'X' weeks of sick leave that's it!</p> <p>Yes! We do have all the policies but we also have the ability to put the line through them and say that it doesn't apply in this case [...] I am not a Christian in any way, form or fashion, but I do believe the Lord's prayer has a lot of good things for the people to live by 'doers should be done unto' or whatever the wording is ... and 'respect' that's one of the other things that I get personally very angry about ... If one employee is not showing the other employee 'respect' regardless' of whether they are the boss, or they are the cleaner or they are two equal people, that I feel very strongly about ... you know at the end of the day everyone's coming here to do the job and whether you are the cleaner or not, you all have your part to play in the jigsaw. As you touched on earlier, if everyone is pulling together, chances are it will all happen.MP-8</p>
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7.2.1.1 Absorption mode of reflexivity

The absorption mode of reflexivity emerged from analysing the life stories of the interview participants and, specifically, from how they had made the journey to becoming manufacturing practitioners.

7.2.1.1.1 Personal capital

As a sub-theme of the absorption mode of reflexivity, 'personal capital' is seen as the journey taken by interview participants to accumulate, over time, personal capital (economic, social, cultural and symbolic). As the manufacturing practitioner intermittently gains experience and their career progresses, such resources tend to grow. In the case study in table 7.2, MP-15, the son of a builder from Hertfordshire, tells how he became a manufacturer of signs while writing a book on how to play golf across the UK. His local club, seeing that he had collected many details and pictures of golf courses, asked him if he could provide them with signage. Using his existing connections, he first outsourced the sign but quickly saw that there was a gap in the market that he could exploit, and started manufacturing signs himself. He currently runs a profitable business that has a niche in health and safety signs, and competes with only a handful of other UK manufacturers. His approach, reflexively, was to use his social capital to his advantage and learn the intricate details of sign making. This move increased his cultural capital, and brought him precious contacts (social capital) and reputation advantage (symbolic capital).

The thoughtful use of non-economic forms of capital – cultural, social and symbolic – emerged through all the interviews, with certain degrees of difference. With regard to cultural capital, participants reflexively sought out people who could be their 'gatekeeper' for entering into the manufacturing field and learning the skills required to become a practitioner. MP-11, for example, identified a friend as a connection whom she used to enter the field:

I knew the girl who was doing the job before me and she was emigrating to Florida and she knew I had some design skills ... and I sort of fit ... slightly fit the profile of the person that [name of the company] would be looking to replace her with, and so I

thought, well, I was doing lots of different freelance work at the time and I thought I'll give it a go.

In the form of personal capital, MP-11 had a varied career before joining her existing employer. In her previous employment she lacked organisational skills and thought it had an implication on her performance with her existing employer. MP-11 shared her experience of lacking in 'organisational skills' and how this impacted on her ability to keep up with the workload:

No, it's just that you have to make sure that you could keep an organised mind and I think I learned that from him [her manager, the chairman of the firm]. He always wrote things down in a very methodical way ... me being sort of an arty type, I was all over the place, you know, but I learned that lists of things to do today ... you feel good ticking those off and I learned that from him.

MP-21 established enduring and valuable ties with employees in the firm in which he started his career as a manufacturer. He recognised the importance of accruing social capital with his peers, with whom he had to deliver improvement projects on the factory floor, commenting that:

If you look at some of these improvement projects, a lot of the time we spent winning support from people, the actual idea was a very small part of it. The rest of it's kind of like convincing people, collecting data, running pilots, you know, assume you get it right and all that kind of stuff so it was a big part of that environment I was working in.

Symbolic capital, expressed through honorary awards, titles and appointments, is acquired reflexively by combining the recognition for major achievements with a

reputation for selflessness (Bourdieu, 1996). MP-23, for example, advanced within the field of power while training to be a chartered accountant with one of the big four accountancy firms. Eventually promoted to Associate Director, MP-23 draws out the power he needed to negotiate through the various activities he undertook outside of his work in order to progress in his career, such as the charity he chairs, as Deputy President of a trade association, and as committee member of a government agency. All this, he concluded, raised his profile beyond being a businessman alone:

So to me, selling in this context is more about building that rapport very quickly and then being able to, on the back of that, build a relationship.

Thus the fundamental dynamic here is one of 'trust' and relationships; i.e. social capital wielded in order to accrue symbolic and economic capital.

7.2.1.1.2 Embody opportunities

Reflexivity enables the individual practitioner to possibly increase their chances in a competitive way. The notion of 'embody opportunities' was a theme that emerged throughout the interviews. In table 7.2, the case study of MP-18 shows how he ended up becoming a manufacturer. Coming from a working class family background, he came to the UK when he was in his teenage years. His decision to better his life by immigrating to the UK reflects the confidence he had in his personal capital and also his willingness to embrace opportunities in order to improve his life. In reflexive terms, his decision reflects his capacity to think reflexively about the future.

For the majority of the participants interviewed, however, opportunity seeking did not always translate to business creation but to more straightforward opportunities for career development in established companies. This was the case for MP-27, who opted for a more stable career option by building on the

skills he had developed in another country. He began working in the UK within the IT sector and has recently enrolled in a PhD programme to enhance his job prospects.

Opportunity seeking is also seen among newcomers. For example, MP-17, an aerospace design engineer from an upper-middle-class background, emphasised that in careers 'you make your own luck' by recognising a 'break' and what you are really good at:

I wanted to be a diplomat because it was a very fascinating role, working in international diplomacy. I applied to the Foreign Office in my second year of university and they said you should try the civil service, which I wasn't interested in, so I then applied to join the Royal Navy as a fighter pilot but my eyesight let me down. So I then took something with the aerospace, which is working with jet engines and aircraft. I had a knack for just generally talking to individuals and extracting information from them, even sometimes very difficult people under various pressures. Like that was a passion... I think people can apply themselves to a lot of different things, you know, and it doesn't matter where you come from or what your original ideas were, and maybe engineering isn't my strength and I thought about that. My strengths could be actually what I did the very first thing 20 years ago, which is talk to people [...] I think it's good to have a number of ideas of what you want to do when you're young and, you know, like I've always wanted ... to represent a company internationally or travel internationally, which I've done as a consultant.

Embodying opportunities strongly emphasises the need for reflexive practice. So as to possibly increase the practitioner's chances in their careers, this narrative

reflected strongly throughout the themes. However, participants embodied the meaning of the opportunities differently. Here reflexivity takes part on behalf of the participant, for example MP-17, MP-18 and MP-27 all realised that opportunities can sometimes take unexpected forms that may contain concealed potential for self-enhancement, and they were open and able to embrace these.

7.2.1.2 'Attempt to resolve' mode of reflexivity

'Attempt to resolve' was the second main mode of reflexivity that emerged from analysing the life stories of the interview participants in terms of how they had made the journey to becoming manufacturing practitioners through the reflexive lens. The key factors informing this mode were 'overcoming hurdles' and 'learning from hardship', discussed in the following sections.

7.2.1.2.1 Overcoming hurdles

Interview data revealed that reflexivity enables practitioners to see the big picture and the possibilities available to them in their field. In table 7.2, the case study of MP-14 illustrates this. MP-14 came from a lower middle class family that had little (or basic¹¹) education. His act of being the first to go to university was, in itself, overcoming the education ceiling present in his family, followed by the subsequent challenge of traveling to the UK for further life improvement. Such action strategies may be directed at overcoming constraints and hurdles. His frustration at being stuck in the same situation as his family was what prompted him to kick-start his career. He was acutely aware of how his parents and family perceived him, and sought to impress them by studying at university and getting a job first in his country of origin, and then by moving to the UK.

These competencies that MP-14 demonstrated, especially when viewed through the lens of Figure 7.2, suggest that reflexivity, when invoked, was a powerful tool for overcoming the hurdles that constrained and influenced his habitus. By

¹¹ Basic education in his country of origin is comparable to primary level education in the UK.

influencing action strategies, learned through educating himself and acquiring reflexivity, MP-14 was able to defy convention and elevate his family from being lower to middle class, winning him much pride and respect within his family and community (symbolic capital). A similar finding emerges from the interview with MP-26, where he narrates his struggle with his initial career path to eventually becoming a manufacturing practitioner producing spectacles/frames for a large multinational engineering firm:

Table 7-3: Example of reflexivity in practice (MP-26)

I was a motor mechanic, an apprentice, but I soon realised I was covered in mud and oil and rubbish every day, it wasn't consistent with having a good lifestyle and the financial remuneration wasn't right. Well, in those days you got ... if you go back to the Middle Ages, you were indentured to your liege lord. The aristocracy and the lords, it was a family you were indentured to, you couldn't leave the job. The modern day equivalent of that is the apprenticeship, so for three to five years you'd learn your trade and at the end you'd get a City & Guilds award saying that you could do the job. But my mum said it's costing me more in clothes than you're earning in wages so I soon realised it maybe wasn't such a good deal. Because it was very, almost feudal by today's comparison, with no heating, doors open all the time, very cold in the winter and that's not me, it's just not me at all. So then you'd see people walking [...] down the high street as a young man, you see people in spectacles but it never occurs to you where they come from. Who makes them? Where do they come from? So when I left this garage, the filthy job, I went to the youth employment as it was called in those days and they said [...] do you have a good eye and eye coordination? Do you have a good eye for shapes? I said, yeah, I'm quite artistic, at school I could sculpt better than the art teacher [...] I was arty to say the

least. So they said would you like to make optical frames, handmade ones, and I thought I'd love to do that, it appealed to me. So I went to a company, Optical, which in those days was in [name of city]. I got the job and found myself making spectacles.

Like this account, most of the interviews in this study dwelled on difficult times. Having strategies devised to progress careers formed a consistent theme across participants' narration of their life struggles, representing defining moments and, irrespective of background, being informative in explaining how reflexive behaviours are formed and deployed.

7.2.1.2.2 Learning from hardship

Reflexivity enables the practitioner to continuously improve their position within the field by learning to overcome their deficiencies. In table 7.2, the case study of MP-21 illustrates this. Although this respondent came from a middle class, educated family, during his youth he was witness to much hardship and struggle within his family to keep a roof over their heads. The experiences his parents had to endure somewhat 'informed his opinion' on a career choice. He narrated how his father used to work in a firm and then was able to become the MD of the firm, but then lost his job when the firm went bankrupt. This deeply affected MP-21, as he stated:

So I swore I'm not going into business for myself because I saw the devastating affect it had on my family and my father, and still to this day.

While reflexive practices might be evident earlier among newcomers, demanding encounters in business arising from field dynamics and contingencies invoked reflexive capabilities for MP-21. Similarly, other participants related formative

events during their early life and careers – moments of significance when they entered unaccustomed territory, experienced a sense of displacement, and sought to keep a clear head to achieve a good outcome.

7.2.1.3 ‘Absorption’ & ‘attempt to resolve’: combined mode of reflexivity

In the development of personal tactics, the dynamics of learning, knowing and practising unite, revealing the participants as ‘ordinary theorists’ in the sense suggested by Calori (2000, as quoted in Maclean et al., 2012). Here, the two modes of reflexivity combine to enable practitioners to develop and implement action strategies as the practitioner reflects on him/herself. The following section discusses this combined mode in further detail.

7.2.1.4 Personal practice strategies of reflexivity

Reflexivity enables the practitioner to develop the capabilities (skills) strategies of manufacturing practitioners, thus arguably increasing the competitiveness of the firm. The case study of MP-8 (see table 7.2), the MD and chairman of a large timber products manufacturing firm, provides an example of this. At the manufacturing firm in which MP-8 was the MD, the researcher had the opportunity to interview seven other members (MP-8 to MP-14, see list in Chapter-4 Table 4.1). MP-10 and MP-8 were in the same firm. MP-10, discussing the MD’s action strategy, stated that the company had all the policies and procedures in place for the smooth and efficient running of the business, but that the MD knew when to draw the line under a policy in favour of the client. MP-10 said while praising the business ethos:

Table 7-4: Example of Reflexivity - Personal Strategy (MP-10)

Although the company obviously had its own interest ... it was very customer orientated ... that again came from [name of the MD], he would make decisions about ... he would sacrifice efficiency in the interest of the customer, if he felt that for example the customer had ... a poor deal then he would take the remedy on to the company if you like to put that right, he would ... I've known occasions when we have made gates to a customer's design ... and he has contacted the customer ... the salesman has contacted the customer and suggested improvements that 'we' could make at 'our' own cost, because he felt that it would be a better gate for the customer rather than ... even though it was made to his requirement we could suggest improvement ... if you like... there is a clear understanding of what was right ... and ... there was again no conflict of people, people were rewarded at that stage, people on production were on piece work, so their interest was in line again... if they were making good money the company was making good money... and ... everybody understood what was expected and what was good behaviour and what was bad behaviour, what the next step was ... if you like ... in any set of circumstances. It was a ... sufficiently small and integrated team, people knew what to do rather than discuss possible ways forward ... if you like ... the outcomes, the methodology was clear and the outcomes were agreed.

Similar confirmatory narratives and others evoked during the interviews, such as that of 'drawing the line under the policy', stand as shorthand for behaviours that their authors perceive as crucial to their businesses competitiveness and success. These were first learned reflexively, then practised and refined until dispositional indications of their reflexive practice and personal beliefs were able to emerge.

7.3 Conclusion

This chapter explores the impact of reflexive practice in shaping manufacturing practitioners' perception of competitiveness, in terms of their own competitive journeys to become the practitioners they are today. The lens of habitus enables an understanding to emerge of the ways in which manufacturing practitioners think, feel and act in determinant ways, which then guide them (Wacquant, 2005) towards becoming competitive. As the case studies in this chapter show, practitioners' perception of competitiveness is created through a social rather than individual process that is developed over time, and that is specific to socio-economic and family context. Practitioners past experiences, as understood through the reflexive lens used in the analysis (absorption and 'attempt to resolve' mode), have shaped their current practices and perceptions.

Habitus as a framework examined how manufacturing practitioners develop and practise reflexivity in their everyday lives, suggesting that reflexive practice is important to them in their perception of competitiveness. The reflexive lens, in relation to the nature of the capital and field of practice, provides a newer perspective and understanding of how manufacturing practitioners overcome structures and, through initial hardships and opportunities, compete to become competitive. The task at hand was to understand the internal mechanism and reflexive tactics applied by manufacturing practitioners while negotiating the field of practice.

Through the analysis of the interviews conducted with manufacturing practitioners and drawing on the themes that emerged through their life stories, it can be argued that reflexivity takes on two major modes, and a third that combines them: 'absorption' and 'attempt to resolve' modes. Practitioners were found constantly deliberating efforts to gain and absorb personal capital (economic, cultural, social and symbolic) through embodying opportunities

within their field of practice. Reflexivity enabled them to 'attempt to resolve' the situations posed by the field, and overcome hurdles and hardships during the course of life which in turn shapes their understanding of competitiveness and being competitive. These modes enable the practitioner to develop personal practice strategies that can then lead them to be competitive in their own way and figure out the 'rules of the game'; progressively replacing the initial habitus-related advantages (Maclean et al., 2011).

By applying the concept of habitus to manufacturing practitioners, it was seen that these practitioners brought to the field of manufacturing ways of being, habitual states, aspirations, ambitions, predispositions and inclinations that were common across this group, and which were produced by the material conditions of their prior existence. Practitioners brought with them their notions and expectations of what it means to be a manufacturing practitioner, reflecting the values, beliefs and dispositions of their relatives and close social groups. Practitioners struggle to control the level of uncertainty over their future actions thus became the primary factor informing their drive to be competitive.

Chapter 8 Disconnect - policy and practice

8.1 Introduction

Theoretically underpinning Bourdieu's habitus in relation to reflexivity (1990) and allowing for the possibility of incremental change and re-socialisation (Vaara and Faÿ, 2011), people can make a difference to their social cocoon which constrains the individual and to an extent their being disadvantaged (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992). Reflecting back on the concept of habitus and how different actors within varying fields of power wield varying forms of capital, and have constructed this cross-cultural, cross-geographic form of capital, which in turn has helped shape a perception of competitiveness in today's global market. This chapter probes how policies are perceived and are manifested in practice. The chapter examines how a firm strategises and practises competitiveness taking into account other competitors, the economic climate, and global patterns of competitiveness. By doing so, the chapter presents how firms have responded and impacted on their strategies regarding competitiveness. Ultimately, this will further inform this research's investigation of manufacturing practitioners' perceptions of competitiveness strategies in policy, which itself aims to respond to these external factors.

8.2 Practitioners' perceptions of competitiveness policy

The notions of growth and competitiveness continue to be contested terms as policy makers continue to develop policies in the wider context of economic policy. This section will highlight practitioners' perspectives of manufacturing policy, using the data drawn from the main study interviews.

As discussed in the literature review, this study assumes that individuals may be inclined to self-interest. The inference here is that the socio-cultural assumptions, in the context of the manufacturer, could contribute to the ways in which competitiveness is perceived by the practitioner. With this in mind, the

interests/self-interests of manufacturing practitioners and how they perceive policy is of interest and importance.

When the participants in this study were asked to describe the Government's policies on manufacturing, the following were common replies:

Not really! [...] No, I couldn't state one policy that I have been made aware of that there is to help us as is (MP-8)

I've no idea (MP-11)

Not really, I know ... they're saying that they would like to see an increase in manufacturing but it's no more than words if they don't do anything to encourage it (MP-9)

I think they're not that helpful to manufacturing (MP-14)

No on manufacturing (MP-13)

The cited participants were top, senior, middle and lower management staff of the same manufacturing firm in the South East of England that was growing despite the recent recession. Their replies clearly illustrate a fundamental lack of awareness of Government policy relating to manufacturing, and also a criticism that the Government is not doing enough in this area.

Public perceptions of economic reality are not always wrong simply because the public perception does not match the official government statistics on any economic data; it has been argued that perceived economic performance is segmented according to the social and economic circumstances of the perceiver (Graves, 2001). Graves suggests that moving away from official economic data such as GDP, productivity, and employment rates, in the social science realm is not clear; however, he does state that there is a close relationship between perceived and 'real' economic indicators and public opinion concerning the

economy. This can be seen in some manufacturing practitioner's scepticism when asked their opinion of the idea that the government was interested in boosting the manufacturing sector. As one participant commented:

How the hell are they going to do that? [...] how on earth after letting all the manufacturing in the country dwindle and die and be taken elsewhere because we're not competitive, suddenly there'll be a big sway towards doing it again here? I don't think so. I can't see it. (MP-11)

Graves (2001) argues that affluent and educated members of society are more likely to be aware of and agree with economists' accounts of performance. Public insecurities (Elliott and Atkinson, 1999) such as fear of job loss or the perceived sense of loss of control of one's personal economic future can trigger fear and lack of confidence in the government's ability to provide stability (Krause, 1997), especially among well informed segments of society (Putnam, 1993), which, in this case, includes manufacturing practitioners. Elliott and Atkinson (1999) express that certain market mechanisms in today's socio-economic life nurture insecurities in the name of competitiveness and market uncertainties. Conversely, over the past two decades, there has been a concentrated effort in policy makers' rhetoric to increase the public's sense of security, to engage the public to become productive (Rutherford, 2008), and to improve the standard of living of the general public.

Bristow (2005) emphasises that Porter falls short of linking regional competitiveness to regional prosperity but makes a clear connection between productivity and regional living standards by emphasising that productivity has a major influence on the cost of living, the cost of doing business and the level of wages in any region (Porter et al., 2003). This link was also borne out by some of the interview data in this study; for example, a garment manufacturer commented that she finds it 'difficult to find the right kind of skill set [...] nobody

is coming in ... you rarely find a young person coming into the machining trade' (MP-2).

Voicing concerns about local governments supporting local jobs, another participant stated that: 'if you can't support your local industry, a lot of people are losing jobs over here' (MP-3). A participant who worked for a multinational tools manufacturer that had its head office and Research & Development in Germany, similarly commented of the UK context that policy had 'driven away skills' (MP-6). Interestingly, one respondent based at the LEP for Greater Manchester, who is responsible for the strategy for generating the regional economy, confirmed these views, stating that 'with progression come fewer jobs, certainly in the manufacturing industry anyway' (MP-21).

Attracting the right type of skill set (Wagner, 2010) is seen as a challenge to the participants. However, emphasis was more on employee/ firm culture being a primary concern for new employees and employers alike. Regional and local governments are responsible for providing an environment that enables firms to actively pursue their growth objectives. This responsibility is not only at the national level but is directed down to the regional, and city level. For example, a consultant for an auditing firm that represents many firms in the North of England said that:

Their local council have, through legislation, restricted their firm from outsourcing all manufacturing to overseas operations and have protected local jobs. (MP-23)

In contrast, a manufacturer in the South of England said that 'we have a constant battle with the [tax] rates we pay' (MP-15), suggesting that, even in areas where there is regulation to protect jobs, small manufacturers are still facing hardship through local government taxation. In support of the local and regional government, the strategy head for a local LEP said that:

“In theory in [county] they’ve got all the infrastructure in place to effectively deliver” **PE-2**

Here, the policy-enabler mentioned that the micro-economic element of manufacturing competitiveness strategy could be seen through the positive policies in favour of local and regional development and the ability to attract positive investments into the county. He said by recognising this that their responsibility as policy-enablers to provide strategic direction for supporting activities to contribute positively in the growth agenda was made much easier. He said that the universities, enterprise research activities, network hubs and infrastructure links into the county were all working towards growing the county and he saw no reason for the county to be competitive.

While encouraging firms to recruit skilled workers, regional governments are also encouraging entrepreneurship so as to bridge the employment gap; however, as one consultant in this study pointed out: ‘there are far fewer risk takers than there are (the) risk adverse’ (MP-23). This implies that in order to grow, people in general need to take risks (the concept of the ‘rational individual’ where if the environment is healthy enough the people will take risks). By taking risks, the people will generate more wealth and economic activity within their field which in turn impacts on the field’s competitiveness. However, if the people see policy to be fragmented, difficulties arise in socioeconomic convergence and competitiveness (Spence, 2012). Fewer jobs are created, there is less economic growth, and subsequently there are impacts on the individual’s quality of life. For example, the surrounding areas of Derby have seen a concentration of aerospace manufacturers, such as Rolls-Royce, which have through regional support been able to secure a Research & Development base and centre for high end manufacturing of aircraft and marine engines in the UK. As two consultants to Rolls-Royce (and the wider manufacturing sector) commented: ‘I think Marine is

quite a developing area' (MP-19); and: 'in 10-15 years they'll be selling a lot of engines to shipbuilders' (MP-22).

A bottom-up method of including social capital in the decision making and implementation process of policy (Johnson et al., 2009) by engaging local leadership in meso-level policy making is seen to be encouraged. However, what is not realised is that micro-level leaders may be supporting conflicting agendas at any given time. For example, there may be some tension in having a local quango that is run by the municipal council also generating investment in the region by investing in advanced manufacturing firms. The tension here could be twofold. The funding of a high-tech firm in the region attracts wide publicity and generates greater revenues for Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC), but does not create many local jobs. As a business development manager (policy enabler) at a large engineering association commented, although the regional infrastructure is in place, there is 'still no money for the LEPs' (PE-2).

The implication here is that local level politics mostly have a social agenda, which may sometimes be at loggerheads with macro-level politics (McGuire, 1997). Florida (2002) suggests that human talent¹² is an important factor in economic development. Traditional theories of economics suggest that natural resources and physical assets are important for growth and competitiveness. Such economic theories were used to inform strategies that were then typically based on various incentives and on trying to alter the proximity of the resources in favour of the firm.

However, over the past two decades, other theories have emerged. One of these emphasises the role of clusters of related and supporting industries. As discussed in the literature review, the work of Michael Porter (2000a) is prominent here.

¹² 'Talent' is defined as individuals with high levels of human capital, measured as the percentage of the population with a bachelor's degree and above. Human capital, as Schulz (1961) explains, is the endowment of educated, trained and healthy workers that determines how productively the people can be utilised.

According to his work, clusters work as geographically concentrated collections of interrelated firms in which local sophisticated and demanding customers are coupled with strong rival firms that then drive competitiveness. Another relevant debate is associated with Lucas (1988) and Glaeser (1998). Their focal point is human capital; they argue that highly educated people are not evenly distributed across the world, and that those locations that do contain these highly educated people are more prosperous and grow more robustly. The third relevant line of thinking is Florida's emphasis on the role of creative capital. Florida (Florida, 2002) argues that those locations that are more open to diversity and can attract the appropriate type of talent, i.e. educated people, are thus more likely to foster growth and competitiveness. Such talented and educated people tend to be concentrated in large city-regions where the diversity of the urbanisation of economies is ample. Thus large cities have a far better chance to form clusters or develop growth strategies. Therefore, in capitalising on human capital to develop clusters of growth, the emphasis of politicians and planners should not be simply directed at the firm at the macro-level but should also attract human capital to the required locations.

8.3 Competitiveness in action

Competitiveness in policy is unambiguous and theoretically beneficial to a region's economy. For example, the MD and chairman (MP-8) of a manufacturing firm in the South East of England expressed his views on how he legitimises his firm's 'progression through abilities' to compete in the market:

[We installed a new] treatment plant in South England [...] so certainly in the South East of the United Kingdom we were one of the first plants to put in ... so that was a huge step ... that was adding to the quality of the product [...] and then about 10 years ago we put in a powder coating plant which again has allowed us to put our destiny in our own hands. (MP-8)

It was competition from domestic and foreign markets that drove the decision of MP-8 to respond and place a firm footing in the market to give the symbolic signal that the firm was here to stay and compete. As Krugman (1994) would say, the firm takes steps to position itself in the market and improve its performance, otherwise it will 'cease to exist', or even 'deserves to die' (Schoenberger, 1998). Practitioners, through the unthought (Bourdieu, 1990) process of reflexivity, make sense of their field to protect their position. For example, a garment manufacturer mentioning the dynamic market in which their customers wanted cheaper goods, has adjusted the quality of their products: 'they want the quality that's made here (in the UK) for less money' (MP-2). From the firm's perspective, the strategy was clear: to reduce costs and allocate adequate resources to enable the firm to compete with external market pressures. This respondent went on to say that:

We are very fortunate that we are still running because we keep an eye on everything. It's a family business and we try and keep the price down [...] I am still coping ... whatever is asked of me I do! (MP-2)

Cheshire and Gordon (1998) argue that not all policies have an economic welfare impact; for instance, when a policy-enabler was asked about regional policies and their impact on the surrounding communities, he stated the following:

If you just take the unemployment figures [...] like up to Birmingham and you get to the North East, which is where the highest unemployment is, and there's some big employers up there, Nissan, but, you know, without Nissan the North East would be on its backside, [...] there's people out there want to work, people out there just want jobs. (PE-2)

This quote clearly reflects on the pressure on regional competitiveness policies to deliver localised jobs and employment.

The ways in which firms use and allocated resources has also become a topical issue, as firms' decisions concerning resource usage need also to meet the wider societal agenda (Jovane, 2008). Firms have responded to this by not only being concerned with their product and the specific processes involved in manufacturing, but with their entire supply chain (Jayal et al., 2010). As one respondent illustrates, strategy making in a firm can be a reactive process following poor economic performance:

So we're in the throes of doing that through the internet because through the internet you can be quite anonymous still, and we do supply other people on the internet which again is a slight issue [...] trying to sort of not be in competition with them but, you know, it's inevitable it will happen at some point down the line. (MP-16)

Realising the pressures from external competitors and market dynamics, MP-16 is forming a newer identity in the form of an internet presence, while still trying to maintain the firm's anonymity; to her, 'being anonymous' is a key core competence of their firm.

Other practitioners alluded to the shifting role of the traditional manufacturer and how some are now trying to compete with other players in the market by providing consultancy services to clients in terms of how they can improve their processes and deliver better goods. For example, one respondent commented:

Recently we've been doing a lot of PR (public relations) and teaching to try and resolve the situation (of poor quality products) and also we've been looking into alternative practices,

advising our customers of progress [*but then emphasises that this too is a short measure in terms of competitiveness, further saying that*] I think it's fair to say that our competitors have jumped on the bandwagon. (MP-28).

These strategies and concerns about competitors reflect the shift away from the traditional scope of the manufacturing firm and how its practitioners are responding 'through their abilities' to the dynamic field of the market.

This section has documented practitioners' different experiences of competitiveness and demonstrated the ways in which they act. Practitioners are constantly adjusting to the changing environment and positioning their capital so as to respond positively to the changing nature and expectations placed upon the manufacturing firm.

8.4 Discussion and conclusion

Competitiveness is restricted to activities of growth and productivity, where 'being competitive' or 'fit-unfit' (Schoenberger, 1998) to compete in the micro sense, as perceived by the practitioners in this study, does not resonate when applied to national competitiveness (Krugman, 1994, Krugman and Venables, 1990, Krugman, 1996). This research aims to examine how the manufacturing practitioner, through their everyday practices, perceives competitiveness by divorcing from issues of growth, productivity or efficiency as examined by the mainstream theorists and policy makers. Respondents' views in this chapter and the previous one have conveyed the sense that 'being competitive' does not necessarily entail actual growth by manufacturing practitioners. Similarly, practitioners have also been found to diverge from policy's assumptions that competitiveness is unproblematic (Bristow, 2005) and a 'must do' (Hall et al., 2007, Schoenberger, 1998, Lall, 2003) activity within an economy at the cost of

being left behind by other competing entities¹³. For example Bristow (2005) quotes Barclays Bank as stating that:

The critical issue for regional-economic development practitioners to grasp is that the creation of competitive advantage is the most important activity they can pursue.
(Barclays, 2002)

The unambiguous and unproblematic portrayal of competitiveness here is in no doubt as to where policy and strategies should point. However, the fact remains that competing entities have contradicting interests (for example quality or other performance measures), which may differ from one entity to another. These contradicting interests such as qualities and other performance related activities can be evaluated against each other and present a clearer meaning to the managerial practitioner. A practitioner can analyse the potential direct and indirect future interests of their firm, and strategically manage the situation so as to gain an advantage over the rival firm. Therefore, competitiveness can be seen as something that occurs between two (or more) entities, expressed by their desire to be more successful than the rival entity. In so doing, competitiveness signifies a capability to co-exist with other institutions in the conditions of differing interests.

Competitiveness as an ability has always been associated with a certain economic entity. Studies in this area have perceived competitiveness as an ability to perceive their (practitioners') position and either improve that or at least keep it stable. Existing studies have conveyed this aspect of competitiveness rather vaguely, and treated competitiveness as relating to the abilities of 'countries, industries or firms' (Porter, 1990a, Porter, 1998a, Porter, 2002). More recent studies have also suggested and extended the study of competitiveness to sub-regions and supranational organisations (Martin, 2005). This research aimed to

¹³ An entity is seen as a country, industry, enterprise or household

break away from this traditional approach and draw on habitus and the reflexivity of the practitioner on how he/she becomes competitive.

The research conducted with manufacturing practitioners can be seen as three distinct modes of competitiveness. The struggles of becoming manufacturers justify the rationality behind the adoption of a survival mode taken by the practitioners to develop systematic efforts to improve their position of competitiveness. Sensemaking to the progressive practitioner is a complex embodied struggle for meaningful narrative by grasping fragments of interplay between societal discourses, work practices (Cunliffe and Coupland, 2012). The reflexive individual organises the information of those episodes (opportunities, hurdles and hardship) into personal meaningful narratives with a different extent of logic and rationality. The final chapter (9) presents a novel way of viewing competitiveness and how this approach enables policy to be more relevant to practise.

Chapter 9 Conclusion, contribution, limitation, and further research agenda

9.1 Introduction

The discussion of competitiveness in an era of performance indicators and rankings has become ever so problematic. Firms, regions and nations as a theoretical, empirical and policy debate are measured against each other in terms of their economic performance. The notion of competitiveness is a much more complex and richer concept and has meaning and value to it. Competitiveness policy that focuses more on the determinants and dynamics of shares of markets and resources fail to understand that ultimately it is the people who make decisions and strategies to be and become competitive. But given the current fashion for ideas of determinants of competitiveness as a way to measure prosperity and success there is a strong need to rethink and examine the fundamental foundations of competitiveness in policy. This study enables policy to revisit the existing notions of competitiveness and view competitiveness through the lens of the practitioners.

The thesis has enabled the study of competitiveness to draw on the practice of competitiveness in strategy and thus understand how practitioners enact different strategies in their respective fields to become competitive. As argued in the literature review, competitiveness policy is prescriptive in nature and broad-brushed. Policy offers prescriptions of capabilities that lead to competitiveness in a rather abstracted, generalised way with little emphasis on practice. This concluding chapter revisits the core aim and objectives of this study; provides a background to the study; a summary of the overall findings; and ends with limitations, contributions and a further research agenda. This thesis argues that competitiveness has three thresholds – survival mode, progressive mode and

striving mode. These thresholds inform the position of the practitioner and their desire to be competitive.

9.2 Research aim and Justification

The overall aim of the research was to examine how the manufacturing practitioner, through their everyday practices, perceives competitiveness. Since there was no previous research specifically into this area, primary data was collected in two phases (figure 4.1). A qualitative research approach was adopted using thematic analysis with data gathering through an online Delphi-study and face-to-face semi-structured interviews. The first phase comprised of a pilot-study which was conducted in two stages; an online Delphi-study and semi-structured interviews amongst 8 and 12 participants respectively. The second phase consisted of semi-structured interviews amongst 21 participants. The participants (totalling 41) of both phases of the research represented the manufacturing sector either in the capacity of policy-enablers or manufacturing practitioners, with all participants classed as practitioners being in the manufacturing sectors.

The research is important because the manufacturing sector is central to the economic growth of the UK. Over recent decades, policy has failed to reinvigorate the UK's old industrial regions (Mankiw et al., 1995) and lacks a coherent policy (Mankiw et al., 1995). The UK's manufacturing sector has to compete within a global context with other manufacturing countries and economic regions. Competitiveness narratives have entered into the policy and practice rhetoric without much real in-depth understanding of the drivers of competitiveness. The lack of research on the inter-organisational relationships and their reliance on government policy (Nordqvist and Melin, 2010, Wilson and Jarzabkowski, 2004) is a subject of interest to the current study. The existing literature on competitiveness in general and manufacturing competitiveness in the strategy-as-practice literature and organisational studies discipline specifically, tends to be processual in nature and perceives competitiveness to be something that

practitioners do, thus concentrating on building our understanding and knowledge on how competitiveness should be practised. However, this research breaks away from this tradition and explores how competitiveness is actually practised. This is done by exploring the practitioners' everyday practices and perspectives on competitiveness, reasons on how they become a manufacturing practitioner, and by doing so being competitive makes more sense.

This study has addressed the research aim stated in Section **Error! Reference source not found.1.5** concerning competitiveness by examining how the manufacturing practitioner, through their everyday practices, perceives competitiveness. The study has met its set objectives (See Chapter-1 Section: 1.6) which were:

Table 9-1: Summary of research objectives

Research objectives	Section
1. To explore and locate competitiveness in the context of manufacturing policy and practice at different levels (national, regional and local) of policy.	Chapter 1-2
2. To conduct a comprehensive literature review of competitiveness policy and practice.	Chapters 2-3
3. To analyse how the actual micro-practices and everyday routines of individual practitioners make them become competitive.	Chapters 5-8
4. To compare and contrast the practitioner's viewpoints of competitiveness against policy perspectives.	Chapters 8
5 To discuss and recommend theoretical and practical implications of being and becoming a competitive manufacturing practitioner.	Chapter 9

The study has defined the role of the manufacturing sector in UK's economy and explained its importance. The study identified the current manufacturing competitiveness policies; investigated the meaning of competitiveness in manufacturing policy and how it is seen at different levels (national, regional and local) in policy. The practice turn of strategy adapted identified that practice theory could benefit from 'a Bourdieusian approach to competitiveness'. The importance of using a practice theory lens was evident in the use of habitus and reflexivity as two inter-connecting theories that enabled the researcher to unpack (through notions of sensemaking and legitimacy) competitiveness. Hence, presenting an argument that competitiveness becomes more relevant for policy makers and practitioners alike. The study developed important themes evolving through analysis on how manufacturing practitioners practiced and perceived competitiveness, the next section present key findings, contributions, limitations and recommendations for further research.

9.3 Key findings of the research

This study suggests that manufacturing practitioners' perception of competitiveness is a complex phenomenon to understand. Each individual practitioner is unique and interprets competitiveness in their 'own unique way' (Suddaby et al., 2013, Splitter and Seidl, 2011b). Studies in competitiveness view competitiveness through the economic lens (see Amin, 1999, Altman, 2005, Krugman, 1994, Porter, 1990a to name a few) where competitiveness is seen as a zero-sum situation (Wren, 2001, Martin and Tyler, 2003) between competing parties. This study, unlike the economic scholarship of strategy, takes a practice perspective of competitiveness. Due to the reflexive nature of practice theory, this approach allows investigation of the network of social practices, thus bridging the understanding of how social structures and human agency link together to clarify why people do what they do. (Feldman and Orlikowski, 2011). Through thematic saturation, the research was able to obtain a clearer understanding of the perception of competitiveness by manufacturing practitioners.

Overall, the evidence suggests that there is a strong need for a practice perspective in competitiveness; otherwise such competitiveness policies would be merely rhetorical. The research has benefited from translating Bourdieu's framework of practice to the study of competitiveness in manufacturing practice, and policy enables it to break away from the mainstream concepts of organisational study. It is argued that by engaging with the critical concepts of habitus, reflexivity, power, culture, attitudes and human capital in organisational studies, the research has captured the layered intersubjective and interdependent nature of the social phenomenon. The research advances the discussions of relational methodologies and theory building in the field of organisational research by linking agency and structure (Ozbilgin and Tatli, 2005, p. 855, Johnson and Duberley, 2003, p. 1280), by situating individual practitioners within the context of the organisation and in their relations to each other, as well as by situating the organisation's competitiveness and organisational culture within the context of the society (Splitter and Seidl, 2011b) (its field of practice). Thus the Bourdieuan concepts enable this research to obtain an intimate understanding of the way in which manufacturing practitioners organise, produce and legitimise (Chia and Morgan, 1996, p. 58) competitiveness in practice. The research finds that the perception of competitiveness begins to make sense in the early stages of becoming a practitioner. Thus being a competitive manufacturing practitioner has a significant bearing on the way the practitioner has made sense of his/her life experiences.

9.3.1 Findings – Becoming Competitive

By exploring the actual micro-practices of manufacturing practitioners, the research has been able to uncover the underlying unconscious dispositions that provide consistency to the actions of competitiveness practitioners. More precisely:

1. The research has situated knowledge in the social context, drawing out the dimensions of competitiveness as perceived by these practitioners.

This was done by capturing of knowledge of the practitioner through the linking of reflexivity with sensemaking and self-legitimising. By doing so, the research responds to the call by Maclean, Harvey and Chia (2012) for further research on sensemaking in narratives.

2. Through the method of storytelling, the research has engaged with manufacturing practitioners and has captured their accounts of how they became manufacturers. The research claims that becoming a manufacturer initially and then becoming a competitive manufacturer must be contextualised through the sensemaking process of locating, meaning-making and becoming. The economically biased rational, self-interested individual only interested in personal rewards (Suchman, 1995) is not a good enough explanation to explain how practitioners perceive competitiveness. The stories expressed by the manufacturing practitioners depict the becoming of a more complete human being that is seen to be sincere and authentic (Bourdieu, 1997) and selfless. The manufacturing practitioner shares his or her accumulated success with others and is motivated by other non-materialistic rewards such as prestige and honour, kindness to others and sharing success.

9.3.2 Findings – Being Competitive

Reflexive practice shapes manufacturing practitioners' perception of competitiveness due to the journeys of becoming the practitioners they are today.

1. Habitus enabled the research to explore the ways in which manufacturing practitioners unthought (Bourdieu, 1990) thought, felt and acted (Wacquant, 2005) towards becoming competitive. The practitioners past experiences, as understood through the reflexive lens used in the analysis (absorption and attempt to resolve mode) shaped existing practices and perceptions of competitiveness.

2. Practitioners carried with them their concepts and prospects of what it meant to be a manufacturing practitioner in their own way. It was seen that the practitioners' struggle to control the level of uncertainty over their future actions thus became the primary factor informing their drive to be competitive.

9.3.3 Findings – Competitiveness Thresholds

Practice theory places emphasis on the importance of interconnectivity between practitioners of organisations as well as the role of relationships. The use of habitus and reflexivity enables us to explain the underlying patterns and processes of being and becoming a competitive practitioner, providing a useful analytical framework to explain the underlying patterns and process of competitiveness policy and practice. Indeed, what should be borne in mind is that practice theory does not provide recipes for success; it provides a new mental model to understand the actual 'doing' of competitiveness behaviour. To the practitioner, being and becoming competitive is a complex embodied struggle for meaningful narrative between societal discourses and work practices (Cunliffe and Coupland, 2012).

More precisely, the current research aimed to break away from the prescriptive and broad-brushed rationalistic approach of competitiveness studies and drew on habitus and the reflexivity of the practitioner on how he/she becomes competitive. This approach has enabled the study of competitiveness to draw on the actual day-to-day practice of competitiveness in policy and strategy and thus understand how practitioners act in different ways in being competitive (in their respective fields). By doing so, the study has been able to theoretically contribute to the sparse literature on the connection between policy and practice of competitiveness in SAP.

Since the demise of the European colonial age in the 1960s, productivity in the manufacturing sector has increased rapidly (Lucas, 2000b). Both public and

private sector investments helped to fuel this rapid growth (Krugman, 1987, Porter, 1990). With this growth, public prosperity and well-being began to improve with the common person on the street feeling the difference from the hardships of the pre-world-war era. However, the hardship and resilience remains in living memory to this day. These memories embedded in the manufacturing practitioner have unthoughtfully (Bourdieu, 1990) created different behaviours in different practitioners when it comes to perceiving competitiveness policy and practice.

Competitiveness as an ability is always associated with a certain economic entity. Studies in this area have perceived competitiveness as an ability to perceive their (practitioners) position and either improve that or at least keep it stable. Existing studies have offered this aspect of competitiveness rather vaguely and treated competitiveness to be 'countries, industries or firms' (Porter, 1990a, Porter, 1998a, Porter, 2002) ability. More recent studies have also suggested and extended the study of competitiveness to sub-regions and supranational organisations (Martin, 2005). This research intends to break away from this traditional approach and draw on habitus and the reflexivity of the practitioner on how he/she becomes competitive. This approach enables the study of competitiveness to draw on the practice of competitiveness in strategy and understand how the practitioner enacts different strategies in their respective fields to become competitive. As argued in the literature review, the notion of competitiveness policy is prescriptive in nature and broad-brushed. Policy offers prescriptions of capabilities that lead to competitiveness in a rather abstracted, generalized way with little emphasis on practice. This research argues that competitiveness has three thresholds – survival mode, progressive mode and striving mode. These thresholds inform the position of the practitioner and their desire to be competitive and are explained below.

9.3.4 Competitive thresholds discussed

Manufacturing practitioners through their own stories were notable for the ways in which discursive devices justified their actions of being competitive. The individual practitioner have their unique space (environment) in which they compete, and in which they are faced making decisions that are related to their internal and external environment (social space or field). These manufacturing practitioners whether employed, self-employed or business owners are constantly negotiating their position within their social field. Competitiveness has three thresholds – survival mode, progressive mode and striving mode. These thresholds inform the position of the practitioner and their desire to be competitive (illustrated in figure 9.1). The research conducted with manufacturing practitioners can be seen as three distinct modes of competitiveness. The struggles of becoming manufacturers justify the rationality behind the passive adoption taken by the practitioner's to develop systematic efforts to improve their competitiveness position. Sensemaking to the progressive practitioner is a complex embodied struggle for meaningful narrative by grasping fragments of interplay between societal discourses, work practices (Cunliffe and Coupland, 2012). The reflexive individual organises the information of those episodes (opportunities, hurdles and hardship) into personal meaningful narratives with a different extent of logic and rationality. These are explained.

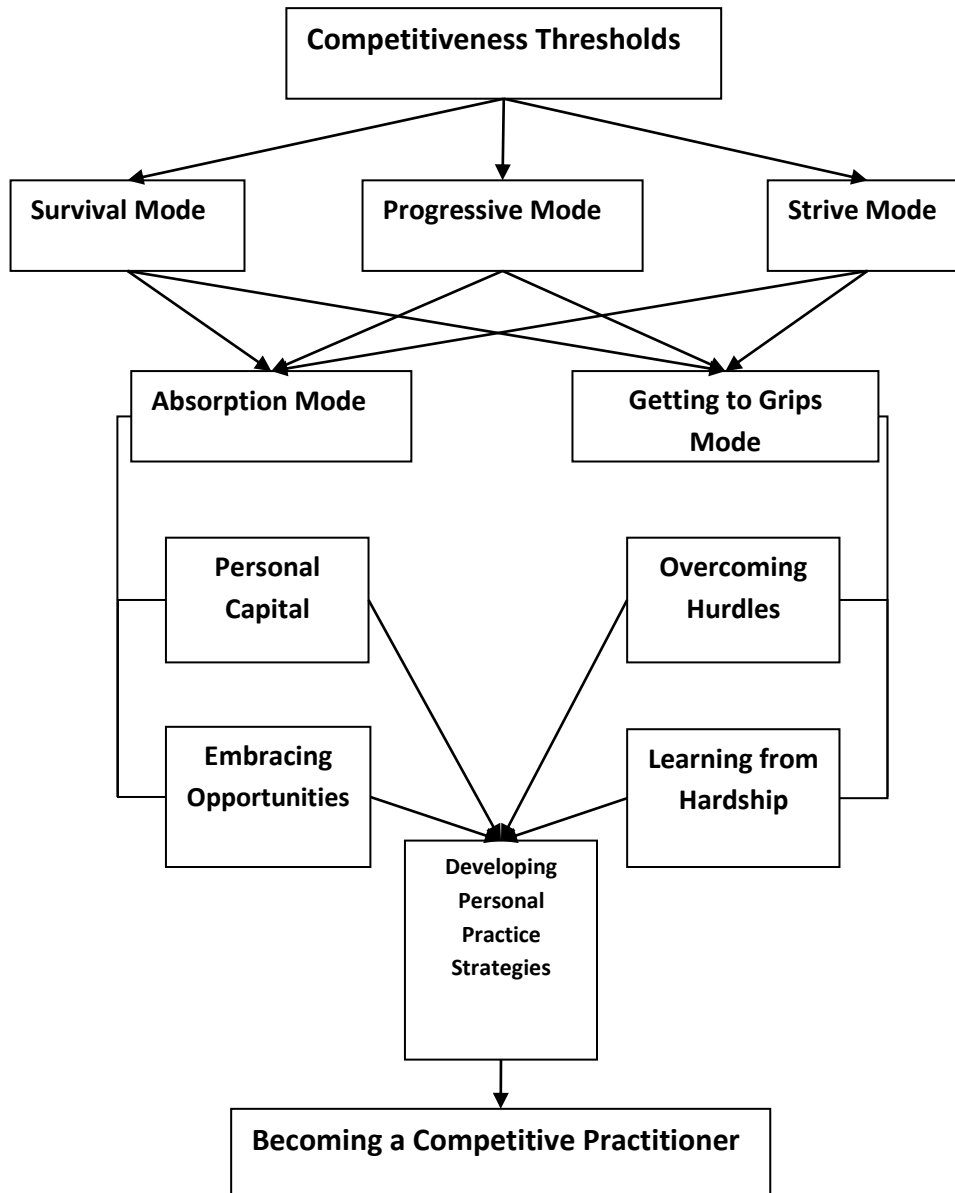


Figure 9-1 Competitiveness thresholds

9.3.4.1 Competitiveness – Survival Mode

Competitiveness can be seen as an ‘ability to survive’ as echoed by the interviews with practitioners. Some of the manufacturing practitioners interviewed during the data collection (for example MP-2, MP-14, MP-26, MP-27) legitimised their actions of competitiveness to be related to maintaining the ‘status quo’ by

adapting passive competitive strategies. In other words practitioners in this mode defy the traditional notion of growth and consider shrinking also to be an act of growth. The sense of 'accomplishment' (Vaara, 2002) and resilience (Brown, 1998) for the practitioners was to succeed through their 'abilities' and carry on with their lives in their meaningful way they perceived fit for them. While 'giving back' locate the practitioner as having accumulating material success and reputation and conveying the impression of a compassionate individual that puts the well-being of the firm specifically (or for that sake the family) and society in general above their narrow self-interest. In other words the stories as expressed by the manufacturing practitioners depict the becoming of a more complete human-being who selflessly shares his or her fortunes of success with others. Thus explaining the perception of the manufacturing practitioners sincerity and authenticity (Bourdieu 1997) to others over self-interest and personal reward (Suchman, 1995).

9.3.4.2 Competitiveness – Progressive Mode

Furthermore, competitiveness can be seen as an 'ability to progress'. Some practitioners (for example, MP-15, MP-16, MP-18, MP-21, MP-22 and MP-23) encompassed 'anonymity' as a mechanism to be competitive. The practitioners adapted a responsive strategy to the changing environment and thereby improved their own (self and or firms) abilities to compete again reflecting the sincerity and authenticity to the self and others. However their performance in relation to the general understanding of competitiveness differs. In this mode the practitioner reflects on the personal capital he/she has been able to absorb into their practices over the years of being a manufacturing practitioner and getting to grips with the hurdles and hardship they have had to persevere.

9.3.4.3 Competitiveness –Strive Mode

Some practitioners (for example, MP-8, MP-17, MP-19, MP-20 and MP-23) reflected a higher degree of competitiveness and developed strategies for the self

and the firm they worked for. Practitioners 'ability to strive' indicated an ability to influence that competitive environment through more efficient operations, higher degree of development and superior qualities than their competitors. In other words the manufacturing practitioners with the ability to progress apply measures in order to catch up or overtake with the leading competitors (be it within a personal capacity, practicing within level, practiced at the region or country level). Competitiveness at this level validates the firm's ability to survive, to progress and to strive in markets that they are competing locally and internationally in. Where, business practitioners actively pursue competitiveness strategies and are unintentionally subjecting themselves to competitiveness, and do all things within their legal business means' to achieve a better position within their market both for the firm and themselves.

9.4 Contribution and implications

The results of this study present several contributions to the literature. The current study increases understanding of Bourdieu's framework and his concept of habitus and reflexivity. The existing literature on competitiveness has been researched through the Porterian view of the self-interested individual. This research outlines a novel way of interpreting the perception of competitiveness by drawing on post-structuralism and, in particular, the notion of habitus and reflexivity. It is suggested that such an approach can help to overcome the divisions between policy and practice, and view the manufacturing practitioner in a new light – as a reflexive practitioner.

The research has enabled the researcher to explore and understand how competitiveness is actually practised from an academic viewpoint and presents several contributions to the literature:

9.4.1 Contribution to knowledge

First, the study of competitiveness increases the understanding of Bourdieu's framework and his concept of habitus and reflexivity. The

literature establishes that Bourdieu's framework has been applied in regional and national development studies (Porter, 1990, Krugman, 1997, Martin and Sunley, 2003, Amin, 1999, Kitson et al., 2004) and organisational studies (Whittington, 2011 Jarzabkowski, 2005, Chia, 2004), studying how competitiveness should be practised. However, the researcher found no studies that applied Bourdieu's framework to connections or disconnections between manufacturing competitiveness policy and practice in the manufacturing sector. Therefore, this thesis has contributed to the body of knowledge on how the concepts of habitus and reflexivity can be used to explain the perception of manufacturing practitioners of manufacturing competitiveness policy and practice.

- Second, this thesis further contributes to the broader conceptual literature of habitus and reflexivity. Although several studies (for example, in the economic, regional and national development field of studies) have involved the concept of habitus (Martin and Sunley, 2003), these studied only the perception and action aspect of habitus on what competitiveness should be as a linear system with regard to the growth and productivity of the economy. This thesis, through the life-stories of manufacturing practitioners on how they became manufacturing practitioners, contributes to the sparse literature on competitiveness. It does so by considering perceptions and action not as rational decisions of people but in line with Bourdieu's explanation of habitus (see explanation of habitus, Chapter 3 and Chapter 7, for analysis practitioners through social origins). It is presented that as people are born into specific social classes, people in general and manufacturing practitioners specifically develop different perceptions about their future. These perceptions develop aspirations which when externalised into actions lead to a particular practice. As in this study, it leads to varying perceptions of competitiveness policy and practices which do not make sense to the rational individual. Therefore,

this study contributes to the knowledge by studying the non-economic perspective of the rational, self-interested individual.

- The third contribution to knowledge is by exploring how various forms of capital have influenced the practitioner's perception of competitiveness policy. Many researchers have studied strategy (SAP) in the field of manufacturing and the impact of the various influences of social and cultural capital (Harvey and Maclean, 2008, Gomez, 2010, Merand and Forget, 2012, Messner et al., 2008) and the resources available within the firm to sustain growth/ productivity (Jarzabkowski, 2004, Carter et al., 2008a, Vaara and Whittington, 2012, Whittington, 2001) and competitiveness in its markets. This study can be differentiated from the others by its examination of the influence of social and cultural capital on manufacturing practitioners developed through their lifetimes and in some cases passed down by their social circles and family backgrounds (family and society levels). According to Bourdieu, the way that people perceive the world and develop aspirations and ambitions is based on the knowledge and skills that are disseminated through the family and society to them when they are young; the result of this study confirms this.
- The fourth contribution is the use of sense-making and legitimising (through the reflexive lens) to explain the relationship between the various forms of capital possessed by the practitioners and their career paths. This study traces the life-history of manufacturing practitioners through the sensemaking and self-legitimising framework of Maclean et al., (2012) used to study career paths of banking sector elites. Not much is known about how manufacturing practitioners seeking leverage for themselves through the internal mechanisms reflexively manoeuvre themselves into positions of power. This is especially true for the non-privileged elite (Maclean, 2012), who when embarking on their careers, lack the economic, cultural, social and symbolic resources (capital) of

those stemming from the upper tiers of society (ibid). This study uncovers the true nature of practice and advances the knowledge and understanding of competitiveness by analysing the actual micro-practices and everyday routines of strategy formulation.

- Fifth and finally, the findings provide new knowledge concerning the thresholds of competitiveness as practised by the manufacturing practitioners. Most studies of competitiveness in strategy and policy alike assume competitiveness to be one-size-fits-all (Krugman, 2005); either you are suitable (Buckley et al., 1990) to compete or perish (Schoenberger, 1998). This is not the case. This study, enabled through the practice lens of Bourdieu (1990), has been able to classify three positions of competitiveness. These positions are interconnected and influenced by time and space. Individual manufacturing practitioners periodically assess their positions within the field of power and adjust their position within the thresholds of competitiveness (see section 9.3.3). In short, competitiveness is not a one-size-fits-all phenomenon. By realising the different positions people take within the threshold framework, policy can become relevant to practice and vice versa.

9.4.2 Implications for Managers, Business Schools, Society and Government

The findings from qualitative research typically lack the same degree of generalisability (Creswell, 2009). However with this in mind the researcher puts forward some implications.

Implications for managers

Orlikowski (2010) argues that practice-based research seeks to 'bridge the gap' between scientific knowledge and lived reality. Practice-based research by engaging more deeply in the empirical details of organizational life on the ground would prove relevant to practitioners. The research has illustrated that firms that

are successful in business use every legitimate resource and strategy available to them to gain advantage over their competitors. Competitiveness thresholds can enable firms to gain market share, attract more customers, boost profits, reward their employees and, most importantly, kill the competition. The endeavour for competitiveness enables firms to exert more influence and authority over the market than merely being a market leader. In other words, the firms that are successful in transforming the capabilities and resources available to them are able to obtain an influential advantage (Stalk and Lachenauer, 2004). This influential advantage enables firms to dictate terms to markets and competition and gain favourable conditions not just as a market leader, but also to exert their position to gain favourable terms over suppliers and buyers, or be able to lobby government policy for further favourable conditions that could strengthen their position / dominance in the market. Milton Friedman (2009) in his book *Capitalism and Freedom* writes that 'there is one and only one social responsibility of businesses – to use its resources and engage in activities designed to increase its profits so long as it stays within the rules of the game, which is to say, engages in open and free competition without deception or fraud'. This statement caused many a controversy, and a revisiting of corporate social responsibility (Jamali, 2008) as well as the ethical purpose of the firm in the larger society. However, in this thesis it is argued that by examining the 'perception of the practitioner' from a habitus perspective and a practice theory lens, the study will be able to demonstrate how current manufacturing competitiveness policies are perceived by manufacturing practitioners.

Implications for educators

The findings of the research provide strategy educators with some significant challenges and opportunities, which will have a knock-on effect on their roles and mission. One of the key challenges for business schools is how to adequately prepare pre-experience students to become potential managers of the future. Is exposure to all aspects of management theory an essential prerequisite? Should it be more processual? Should it be more SAP? Should it be different? The answer

is 'yes' to all of these questions. Central to the claim of practiced-base strategist is the importance of a more micro activity based view of strategy (Golsorkhi et al., 2010, Kaplan and Jarzabkowski, 2006). SAP literature sits on the tenants that practice-based research in strategy is concerned with the daily activities of strategy practitioners and the way these 'practices' relate to strategic outcomes. Thus through this research the practice-based approach can get closer to the practitioners and their activities in order to gain a deeper understanding of what actually happened when people engage in practices such as strategic planning, strategic workshops, board meetings, and so on. In essence educators can make aware of the value of this perspective to enhancing managerial, employee and organisational performance.

Implications for Society

The implications can be at society level too with respect to business performance around CSR. Businesses engage the wider community and make them aware of the good things the business is doing in their community. By understanding the thresholds of practitioners in adapting competitiveness practices businesses can better understand their customers and connect. The local and wider community has become more aware of the nuances of the knowledge economy, the perceptions about the role of management and managers will change. If journal editors, university teachers and researchers can capture the logic of strategy praxis and reflexivity, and by doing so open the possibilities and constraints within which strategy practices are enacted. By doing so, the scientific knowledge can inform the practitioner about new or alternative routes of action.

Implications for Government

The UK government is pursuing a knowledge-based economy agenda. Significant ongoing investment in skills development and management education can be seen as essential at secondary and tertiary levels. Colleges, universities and professional training institutions can better focus their attention on developing and implementing specific policies designed to stimulate world class excellence in

management education and research, which is essential to supporting the knowledge-based economy. Investment in human capital, for example, in business schools with increased levels of multi-disciplinary research and deeper collaborations within and between business and academia. In other words policy makers can support organisational capabilities development of firms into true world class businesses.

9.5 Limitations

When interpreting the results of the study, several limitations should be taken into consideration. First, the study was limited to urban England. This suggests that to some degree, the results might reflect regional differences, culture, and economic trends. At the start of the study, the intention was not to measure the regional disparities within the UK and this should be kept in mind while reading the analysis and results. However, as the data was collected from regions within England's (North East, North West, Midlands and South East) urban areas, there emerges a possible opportunity to extend the study to the rest of the UK.

The limitations of this research include the comparatively small sample size of participants and subsequent interviews analysed. Similarly, the focus was on manufacturing practitioners only in a single country at a particular point in time. Nevertheless, the study can still be said to add to the currently sparse literature on how manufacturing practitioners behave with regard to competitiveness. Thus the storytelling, sensemaking and self-legitimizing practices of manufacturing practitioners within the field of power merit further attention in further research, as the lessons learned may benefit the competitiveness agenda and further illuminate how competitiveness is perceived by the practitioner.

With the unit of analysis as the practitioner the research proved beneficial as it enabled the researcher to focus on what actually happens to the perception of individual practitioners within their respective habitus and field. By doing so, the study responds to the call for a post-processual approach (Chia and MacKay,

2007, Hurtado, 2010) to theorising. The study contributes to the challenge of differentiating from the strategy process view and contributes to the social practice viewpoint of everyday strategy practices that are discernible patterns of actions arising from habituated tendencies and internalised dispositions rather than from deliberate purposeful goal setting initiatives (ibid). Thus there is an opportunity to extend the analysis of the perceptions of manufacturing practitioners on competitiveness through habitus and reflexivity to the actual conducting of strategy (Jarzabkowski et al., 2007, Whittington et al., 2003, Maclean et al., 2012a, Hendry and Seidl, 2003) and not the nitty-gritty local routines (Whittington, 1996) of strategists' everyday work (Hurtado, 2010).

Regarding the unit of analysis, a concern was of a methodological nature. The unit of analysis to capture the social practices is the practitioner. This creates two limitations, the first being the interviewing of practitioners to capture the reasons for their actions. This was overcome by grasping the internal logic of their practices (Chia and Holt, 2006) by adapting the reflexive lens with the concepts of habitus. By doing so, the study was able to capture the schemata of actions of the practitioners, which were internalised, unconscious (Godard and Bounty, 2007) and 'unthought' (Bourdieu, 1990), and make sense of their 'unthoughts' by the sensemaking and self-legitimising process of Maclean, Harvey and Chia (2011). The second, methodological limitation was that of only using habitus to explore the connection between policy and practice. The concept of habitus is used to analyse the unthought, unconscious actions of practitioners (Bourdieu, 1990, Godard and Bounty, 2007). Hurtado (2010) points out that Bourdieu's concept of habitus is not used justifiably and emphasises that researchers and scholars alike tend to cite habitus without connecting the implications to social structures and power. This again is a methodological concern for the unit of analysis. This study, by connecting the field of the manufacturing practitioner with the habitus and relating it to power, has addressed this issue. In chapter 7, the researcher analyses how the practitioner mediates within the field of power, where the practitioner's field is his working environment (inter-organisational connections,

networks) and social environment (family, friends, and wider social settings). Through reflexive practices, it was shown that these practitioners were able to negotiate their position in their social spaces (fields of power) and improve their social class (Bourdieu, 1998). This was seen especially when the practitioners lacked social mobility, coupled with economic, social and cultural hardship within their families and the environment. They were nonetheless able to manoeuvre their position (in their respective field); often, the opportunity of education enabled them to move 'up' the social class system (Bourdieu, 1998; MacLean, 2012) and become competitive.

9.6 Further research

This research responds to Seidl and Whittington (2014) call to further the agenda of SAP by connecting the praxis to the micro level activities of practitioners. This was achieved by exploring the perceptions of practitioners on competitiveness through the lens of habitus and field answers this call. The findings enabled the researcher to theoretically contribute to the sparse literature on the practice overlooked in traditional strategy research (Chia and MacKay, 2007). Through the use of storytelling in sensemaking and legitimising the research has been able to capture the unthought thoughts of practitioners of becoming and being competitive. This has wider implications for research and gives rise to an opportunity for further research to capture data from a wider audience of practitioners other than those involved in manufacturing.

For example in the description of the approach to perceptions of manufacturers the focus was particularly on the structures and dynamics within an individual's field. As Bourdieu (1990) stressed, different fields might possess different degrees of autonomy. Some fields might be self-determined while others might be significantly influenced by other related fields. This way future research may explore how competitiveness of practitioners in one organizational field might influence their position (i.e. their stakes and acquisition of capital) and thus their practices in another field. Exploring these potential influences across field

boundaries could provide additional insights into the mechanisms through which attitudes towards competitiveness may change. This would have implications on policy and practice. On policy for example, social movements (Crossley, 2003, Gardiner et al., 2013) of skills from one region to another might have implications for policy makers on socio economic growth of the region. Examples of key questions in this line of inquiry are: how do changes in related fields influence the power structures in a given field? How does this affect the conditions under which practitioners within that organizational field perceive competitiveness initiatives? On the practice side, the implications for organisations can be in terms of recruiting the right set of skillset the organisation needs and what type of training would be needed. This is important core competence (Mutingi, 2012) when in the current economic climate shortage of skills is seen as a key in the science and technology globally sector (Husing et al., 2013, Oishi, 2013)

Practice theory scholars underpin their research by adopting a practice approach focus on what people do in relation to strategy. In this way this research will be particularly relevant to practitioners (Splitter and Seidl, 2011a). Reciprocally, SAP could benefit from including an understanding of how individual perceptions are embedded in the broader cognitive schemes. As social institutions are maintained and reproduced researching in the process by which practitioners practice 'practitionerhood' may be beneficial. This research also responds to the call from Suddaby (2010) in furthering the research of SAP and New Institutional Theory. As concluded in chapter six (becoming competitive a new direction for research that combines SAP and institutional theory. SAP and institutional theory can be re-theorize (Suddaby, 2010) based on the new understandings of actors and agency presented in this research. Suddaby explains that one type of social actor is the 'hyper-rational agent' (top management teams, effective leaders, and institutional entrepreneurs) and 'dope'. This research identifies social actors as the 'progressive and striving' practitioners and 'survival' practitioners respectively (see figure 9.1: Competitiveness thresholds). This way of analysis is very encouraging for practitioners, businesses especially when recruiting and training

staff. By negotiating their positions in their habitus these are ideal candidate in who demonstrate superhuman awareness of the social, cultural, and economic constraints that surround them and are able to make effective choices that improve the efficiency, survivability, or adaptability of the firm or institution. In short the study of the 'reflective practitioner' will benefit scholars and businesses.

Appendices

Appendix 1

Sample Invitation Letter sent for Delphi Study Participation

██████████
Hello ██████████

As you are influential in the area of innovation and economic development and your current involvement with MIDAS I would like to invite you to participate in a short survey questioning the manufacturing competitiveness policy. Just to give you an overview of my research I am investigating the impact of government policy on strategy as practice. For this I am conducting a Delphi study and would like to invite you to participate in the survey and provide me with your valuable thoughts regarding policy related to the manufacturing sector. The survey has limited questions (not more than 4) for which I would like you to give your opinion.

I am only targeting key influential people whom fit my criteria for being actively engaged at the policy level to drive the manufacturing competitiveness agenda. Hence you have been identified as an expert who has a direct role in policy-making.

Participation in this study will likely take no more than one hour of your time in total. You will be given an open-ended questionnaire. In a fortnights time you will be asked to complete a second, Likert-scale questionnaire. Subsequently after that I will contact you to see whether or not you would like to participate in a 30-minute interview. Even if you are not able to do the interview, I hope that you will be willing to help with the first two questionnaires. I do not think there will be any harm to you from answering the questions or offering your opinions on this important topic.

No one but ██████████ (my PhD supervisor) and I will see your answers. Answers will be kept in a locked file cabinet. Your answers will be put into a computer without your name. All of your answers will be identified with a code in order to conceal your identity. Participating in this survey is completely up to you.

I hope that you volunteer to participate in this study. Should you participate, please be assured that you may withdraw from this study at any time.

Please let me know so that I can send you the links to the questionnaire and assign you a code.

Thanking you in anticipation

Kamal Qazi

Appendix 2

Delphi study round 1 evolving pattern codes

Growth Review for Manufacturing				Pattern codes
Stability	Reform Market Dynamics	Supporting Investment	Supporting Individuals	
National Innovation Policy	Low carbon Initiative	R&D staffing & training	Further Education & Higher Education Support	National Innovation Policy
National Export System	UK trade and Industry value chain programmes	National Export System	Skills framework	National Export System
Trade skills Support	Competitive advantage from non-traditional elements of manufacturing	Enterprise Funding	Redirection of funds to wealth creation	Skills
Energy price Stabiliser	Lower taxation			Reduce bureaucracy
Reduce bureaucracy	Reduce bureaucracy			Funding
Higher Education and Further Education supportive of skills improvement	Exports			Balanced regional growth
SME-friendly initiatives by Government	Apprenticeships			PPI (Public - Private - Initiatives)
Low cost capital	Innovative designs			Availability of Finance
Monetary and fiscal policy example: Corporate Venture scheme, enhance capital allowance	Integration of design innovation (marketing - design - manufacturing)			Innovation
Regeneration	Regional Growth Fund			Regional Policy

Appendix 3

Delphi study round 2 results

	Raw Data	Participants' views in round 2	Analytical Codes
Theme 1	<p>The National Innovation Policy (also known as the NIS) should be integrated within the manufacturing sector's growth plan in order to encourage marketing-design-manufacture as a whole; in other words expanding the role of manufacturing towards a service led manufacturing concept.</p>	<p>Whilst the concept is admirable, there exists the challenge of influence and facilitation</p> <p>Configuration of activities is often the product of organisational culture and so bringing about a shift in this is potentially problematic</p> <p>The usual centrally led approaches have been met with varying success and, as such, policy is problematic</p> <p>Education, incentivisation, communication</p>	<p>Culture is holding back growth</p>

Raw Data		Participants' views in round 2	Analytical Codes
Theme 2	A competitive national export system (NES) should be framed to encourage local SMEs to participate at the international level	<p>Potential for SMEs to perform highly</p> <p>Companies must be supported by appropriate infrastructure, state owned banks with long term views, complementary industries and knowledge networks, a healthy communication and distribution network</p> <p>Investment for the future</p>	<p>Uniform distribution of investment in infrastructure</p> <p>Incremental growth</p> <p>Regionalism</p>
Theme 3	Trade specific skills should be widened so as to encourage apprenticeships for new (or back to work) starters, on the job training for existing staff, and encourage best practice knowledge	<p>Some skills are passé (no longer in fashion); only positioning within high-tech is going to be sustainable</p> <p>Recognising that these jobs are critical, high value-adding and requiring only the best candidates will create success and status – a pull rather than push approach.</p> <p>Organisations should take responsibility for their own people development, with long-term buy-in to education and training at the highest level</p> <p>Governments can support, not dictate, with a light touch</p>	<p>Empowerment</p>

Raw Data		Participants' views in round 2	Analytical Codes
Theme 4	Red tape (bureaucracy) such as export licenses, trade exhibitions and regional development 'initiatives' should be minimised so as to widen the participation of manufacturing SMEs	Some bureaucracy is desirable; it creates order and prevents issues of governance Whilst it would be desirable to rationalise and simplify, it would also be useful to support and facilitate, as overcoming these barriers is not insurmountable	Self-responsibility Bottom-up approach to governance
Theme 5	A credit-easy policy or, we may say, access to funding is needed to increase confidence of businesses, smoothen out cash flow restrictions, aid capacity building, and encourage further investments by the manufacturing sector.	Long term investment is essential in generating wealth. Lenders and firms are short-term, risk averse and lack understanding Banks need to employ relationship managers who really understand the sectors and tap into the right advice	Market driven reform Banks not lending Strategic planning
Theme 6	Public-private initiatives (PPIs) should be encouraged so as to foster infrastructure development, regional development and innovation within the economy	Giving the next government a headache Great for government institutions, very poor for SME's, who need practical help and education	Policy engagement

Raw Data		Participants' views in round 2	Analytical Codes
Theme 7	Any other point you may want to add to strengthen your point of view?	<p>How many SME's understand the concept of world class?</p> <p>How many SME's are led by educated professionals?</p> <p>How many SME's have access to funds from sympathetic but prudent providers?</p>	<p>Access to funding</p> <p>Knowledge</p> <p>Job stability</p>

Appendix 4

Phase-2 Main Study Sensemaking Code Framework

Descriptive codes	Analytical Codes	Patterns
Sensemaking in Action	Locating the Manufacturer	Illiterate parents
		High Esteem
		White Collar Social Elite
		Practical Person
	Meaning Making Stories	Jobless
		Struggle
		Motivation
		Honour
		Prestige
		Belief
		Still Surviving
		Aspirations
		Work Life Balance
	Becoming Competitive	Gain Respect
		Sense of Accomplishment
		Challenge the Authority
		Practical Person
		Career Development
		Relationships
		Networks
Initiatives		

Appendix 5

Self-Legitimising Code Framework

Descriptive Codes	Analytical Codes	Pattern Codes
Self-legitimising	Accomplishment	Struggle
		Inspired by parents
		Worked on a farm
		Work life balance
		Support
		Life style
	Resilience	Determination
		Persistence
		Being committed
		Trust
		Learning ways
		Negotiating
	Succeeding through abilities	Autonomous
		Authority
		Responsible
		Capable
		Suited
		Anonymous
	Giving back	Work life balance
		Family
Desire		
Look after concerns		

Appendix 6

Competitiveness Thresholds Code Framework

Descriptive Codes	Analytical Codes	Pattern Codes
Competitiveness Thresholds	Survival	Status Quo
		Memories
		Prestige
		Honour
		Sharing
	Progressive	Engaging
		Career Development
		Personal Capital
	Striving	Influence
		Efficiency
		High Degree of Career Development
		Superior Qualities

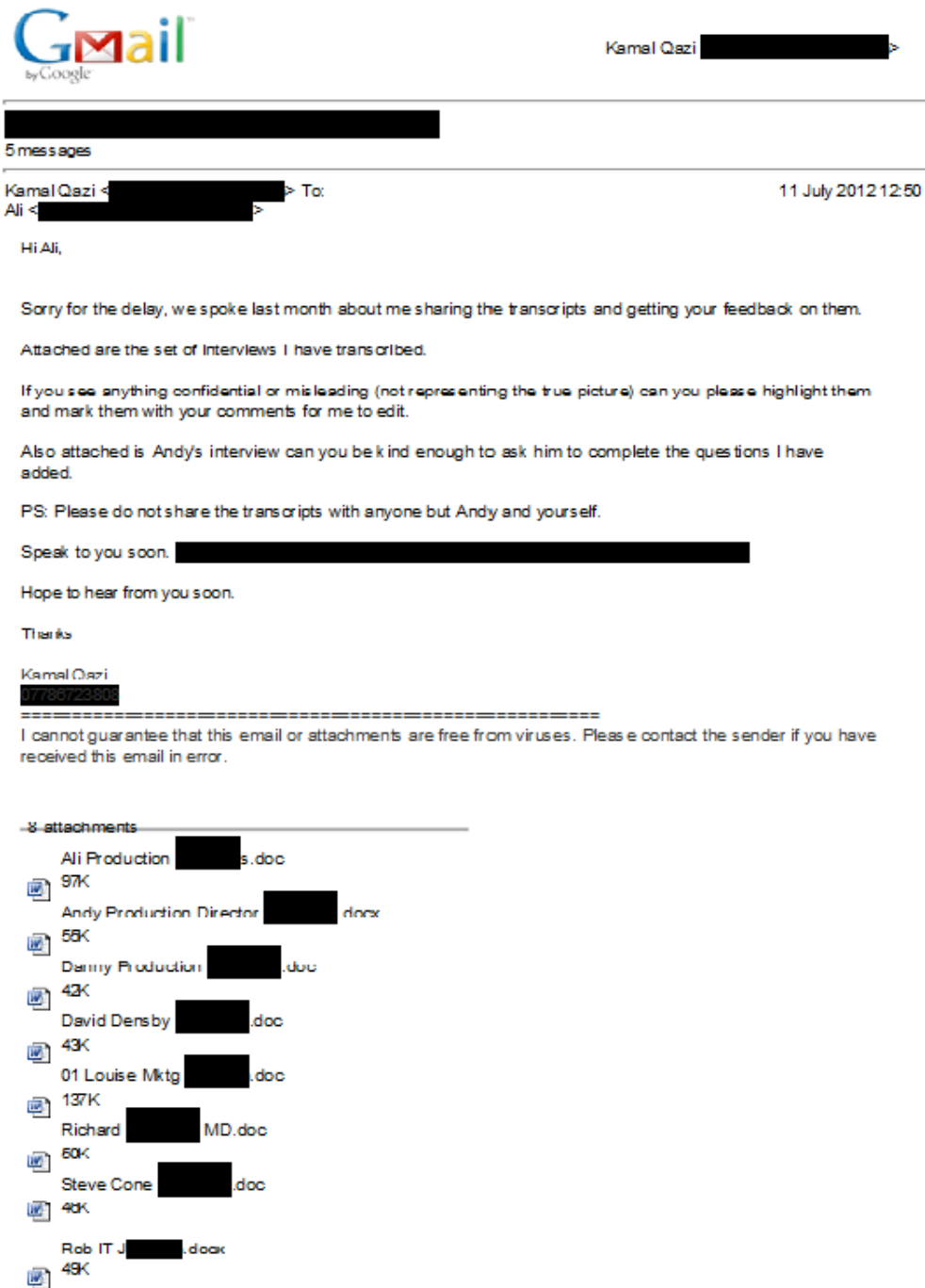
Appendix 7

Sample Search Strategy on FAME database

Data update		7028	
Username		Manchester Business Scho-1863	
Export date		11/10/2011	
		Step result	Search result
1.	Legal form: Private	7,155,998	7,155,998
2.	Companies with phone number registered on CTPS	40,707	37,771
3.	Companies with web site	380,627	22,650
4.	UK SIC (2003): All codes: 15 - Manufacture of food products and beverages, 16 - Manufacture of tobacco products, 17 - Manufacture of textiles, 18 - Manufacture of wearing apparel; dressing and dyeing of fur, 19 - Tanning and dressing of leather; manufacture of luggage, handbags, saddlery, harness and footwear, 20 - Manufacture of wood and of products of wood and cork, except furniture; manufacture of articles of straw and plaiting materials, 21 - Manufacture of pulp, paper and paper products; publishing and printing, 23 - Manufacture of coke, refined petroleum products and nuclear fuel, 24 - Manufacture of chemicals and chemical products, 25 - Manufacture of rubber and plastic products, 26 - Manufacture of other non-metallic mineral products, 27 - Manufacture of basic metals, 28 - Manufacture of fabricated metal products, except machinery and equipment, 29 - Manufacture of machinery and equipment not elsewhere classified, 30 - Manufacture of office machinery and computers, 31 Manufacture of electrical machinery and apparatus not elsewhere classified, 32 - Manufacture of radio, television and communication equipment and apparatus, 33 - Manufacture of medical, precision and optical instruments, watches and clocks, 34 - Manufacture of motor vehicles, trailers and semi-trailers, 35 - Manufacture of other transport equipment, 36 - Manufacture of furniture; manufacturing not elsewhere classified, 75 - Public administration and defence; compulsory social security, 80 - Education	315,467	3,414
5.	Directors: Position: Highest executive, Member (LLP), Unspecified executive, Deputy executive, Company secretary; Current directorships only; Only directors who are individuals	6,269,052	3,413
6.	Cos owned by an Ultimate Owner: Def. of the UO: min. path of 50.01%, known or unknown shareh.; DUO only	362,842	979
7.	Number of Employees: Last available year, min=2, max=250	163,729	295
TOTAL			295

Appendix 8

Sample interview transcript trustworthiness



li <[REDACTED]>
To: Kamal Qazi <[REDACTED]>

20 July 2012 16:18

Afternoon

Sorry for a bit late to reply.

I have whizzed through the interviews. They seem fine by me.

For Andy's interview you might have to wait as he is off site and then on holidays.

I will speak to you over the weekend.

Thanks

Ali

From: Kamal Qazi [mailto:kamalqazi@gmail.com]
Sent: 11 July 2012 12:50
To: Ali
Subject: CONFIDENTIAL: Interviews Transcripts

[Quoted text hidden]

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