

A Pragmatist Stance on the Practice and Maintenance of Organisational Values in the Small Firm Context

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Declaration of Authorship

I, Simon Oldham hereby declare that this thesis and the work presented in it is entirely my own.
Where I have consulted the work of others, this is always clearly stated.

Signed: _____ *Simon Oldham* _____

Date: _____ 28/02/2021 _____

To Madeleine

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Abstract

Values play a key role in shaping the culture, identity and purpose of organisations. However, while the previous literature has evidenced the salience and role of large firm organisational values, little research has focused on gaining an enhanced understanding of the practice and maintenance of organisational values in the small firm context. Previous small firm research has often relegated values to secondary importance or taken a monistic view of values; overall, leading to an obfuscated view of the importance and influence of small firm organisational values. Accordingly, this thesis seeks to provide greater comprehension of the nature, role and enactment of small firm organisational values as well as, importantly, how values are maintained, particularly in the face of external pressure and challenge. A Pragmatist stance, informed by John Dewey's work on Pragmatist ethics, is taken to theoretically frame the research. Pragmatist ethics seeks to move away from a singular normative position divorced from the influence of context and is sympathetic to the lived experience of morality.

Empirical data was collected in the context of micro and small alcohol production and independent retail firms in the South West of the UK via semi-structured interviews with senior managers. Interviews focused broadly on the nature and practice of organisational values while employing a critical incident technique to garner examples of where organisational values came into dispute with external stakeholders. Beyond highlighting a number of salient organisational values, the findings suggest that such organisational values play a vital role in determining a range of habituated small firm moral practices and norms which permeate a wide range of everyday operations, concerns and relationships within such firms. Nevertheless, the means by which firms conceptualise values, and their associated practices, is heavily determined by institutional, organisational and relational context. Disruption to such values and practice through external stakeholder challenge prompts a process of active moral reflection on the part of senior managers to navigate an appropriate response to such conflicting demands while maintaining value fidelity.

Overall, beyond contributing to an understanding of the influence of small firm organisational values, this thesis seeks to simultaneously highlight and consider the relevance and merit of the application of Pragmatist theory to research within the domain of business and society. This is achieved through examination of both the contribution that Pragmatism could provide as a valuable theoretical tool as well as the potential for a re-positioning of the field towards a Pragmatist paradigm.

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Glossary & Key Terms

Biodiversity	Measure of the variety of plant and animal life present in a given habitat
Brewing	Process of producing beer through combining a cereal based grain, water and yeast
British Wine	Wine produced in the United Kingdom from grapes grown outside of the UK, usually from imported grape concentrate
Business rates	Tax on non-domestic properties (often referred to as 'rates')
Brexit	Term used to describe Britain's departure from the European Union
CAMRA	Campaign for Real Ale
Collab	(Collaboration) An informal arrangement normally between two alcohol producing firms where typically a new product is co-designed, produced, marketed and sold
Craft brewery	Term typically denoting a small, independently owned brewery that emphasises the use of new techniques and flavours
Distillation	Process of boiling and condensation to separate components or substances, ordinarily alcohol from water
English Wine	Wine made from grapes grown in England
Fairtrade	A symbol that a production firm has met certain social, economic and environmental standards within production processes
Hectolitre	Unit of capacity equal to one hundred litres
Kimberly Process	Certification scheme established in 2003 to prevent 'conflict diamonds' entering market
Micro distillery	Informal term primarily used to describe a small, independent and often boutique-style distillery
Not from concentrate	Term used to designate product produced from pure, fresh pressed juice (typically in cider industry)
Off-licence	Shop licensed to sell alcoholic beverages for consumption off the premises

Organic	Food or drink produced using environmentally friendly practices, such as those that consider biodiversity
Small Brewer Relief	Discount on beer duty of 50% for brewers producing fewer than 5,000 hectolitres (introduced in the UK in 2002)
SME	Small and medium sized enterprise
VAT	Value added tax
UK	United Kingdom

Chapter One: Introduction

1.0 Introduction

Since the advent of the ‘corporate values rush’ of the 1980s (Jonsen *et al.*, 2015), it has become widely accepted that organisations possess values which play a key role in shaping their culture, identity and purpose (Sinclair, 1993; Bourne, Jenkins & Parry, 2019). In today’s world, gaining an insight into the importance of values to organisations requires relatively little effort. A quick internet search unlocks an array of organisations clamouring about their (often homogenous) values. All too familiar words and phrases, such as *social responsibility*, *transparency*, *integrity*, *respect* and *accountability*, punctuate organisational webpages, often in the form of bold statements about the distinctiveness of a particular organisation’s culture, ethics and principles. This is perhaps unsurprising given the pressures faced by private sector firms, in particular, to appear to be ethical social actors, coupled with the increasing realisation on the part of such firms of the potential financial benefits which accompany the possession of an ethical culture (Barnett, 2019; Nekhili *et al.*, 2017).

Discussions surrounding values and how people attempt to make ethical decisions have always intrigued me, but it was during my time working in the telecommunications industry that I began to think more about my own values and those of the organisations around me. First, the contrast between my own values and those of my colleagues, for me, became apparent when, after expressing an interest in the importance of sustainability, I at times received criticism and ridicule. This led to a colleague bestowing upon me the (affectionate) nickname ‘Greenpeace’, an epithet which spread around the office in a joking manner; critically, defining me by my difference in beliefs. Aside from this, not too long after I joined the company my employer was acquired by a large competitor, and in the process our ‘organisational values’ changed – seemingly overnight. This shocked me. How could these values we had all been working towards, which we had been assessed against when being recruited and during annual performance reviews, just suddenly change?

These experiences, among others, undoubtedly heightened my interest in values and provided much of the motivation behind this research. Therefore, although this thesis seeks to make an academic contribution, it has been a fascinating opportunity to explore values from a personal perspective and to consider the nature, role and importance of my own values.

1.1 Prior Research in the Field

In response to this widening organisational interest in values, research within the field of management studies has sought to establish a heightened understanding of organisational values. Within this section

a brief overview of this research, particularly with respect to small firms, is presented to contextualise the research as well as the research questions (section 1.5) and theoretical framing (section 1.6) underpinning the thesis.

A broad stream of research has investigated the role and influence of values in relation to a range of issues and phenomena, including: organisational commitment (Finegan, 2000), workaholism (Burke, 2001), organisational responses to environmental issues (Bansal, 2003), organisational process innovation (Khazanchi, Lewis & Boyer, 2007) and knowledge sharing (Michailova & Minbaeva, 2012). Another stream of work has studied the practice and enactment of values within organisations (Gehman, Treviño & Garud, 2013; Gruys *et al.*, 2008; Wright, Irving & Thevatas, 2020). Critically, such work has often been conducted within the field of business and society, where values are considered to have inherent moral bearing and are therefore an important influence on the ethics and social responsibility orientation of a firm (Siltaoja, 2006; Jin & Drozdenko, 2010; Pedersen, Gwozdz & Hvass, 2018).

This has overall allowed a relatively well-developed understanding of the influence and practice of values in a range of organisational types, including: large firms (Malbašić, Rey & Potočan, 2015) and public sector organisations (Boxx, Odom & Dunn, 1991; Parker & Bradley, 2000) as well as, to a lesser extent, non-profits (Voss, Cable & Voss, 2000), co-operatives (Hooks *et al.*, 2017) and political parties (Husted, 2020) (see chapter two, section 2.3.2 for further discussion of organisational values).

In the context of small and medium sized enterprises (politically defined in the EU and UK as firms that possess fewer than 250 employees (European Commission, 2018), understanding of the significance, role and practice of values remains considerably more limited. While the salience of owner-manager values has frequently been substantiated within this context (Kotey & Meredith, 1997; Hammann, Habisch & Pechlaner, 2009; Schaefer, Williams & Blundel, 2020), there exists a notable dearth of research seeking to elucidate the conceptualisation and practice of small firms' organisational values (see chapter two, section 2.3.3 for a comprehensive review of the literature on small firm values). This thesis seeks to provide a greater understanding of the role of organisational values within small firms and illuminate both the nature of the values that small firms perceive to be important, as well as how such firms attempt to enact these values on a day-to-day basis. In particular, the research seeks to provide enhanced comprehension of how small firms seek to maintain fidelity towards their values in the face of conflict and opposition to these from external stakeholders.

Through employing Pragmatist theory in the form of John Dewey's Pragmatist ethics (Dewey & Tufts, 1909), this research seeks to simultaneously engage in robust theory building and provide insights into the practice of small firm values which are sympathetic to the lived reality of such firms (see section 1.6

for further discussion). Importantly, it endeavours to appreciate the nuance of the small firm organisational context, the perennial financial pressures that many small firms are faced with (Spence, 1999) and to provide a realistic picture of the difficulties associated with moral decision-making within the real world – a world of shades of grey, not moral absolutes.

1.2 Conceptual Clarity

The presence of clear definitions and conceptual clarity are a critical feature of any research project. In order to ground and embed the key concepts of this thesis, this section outlines the most important concepts employed and how each are conceptualised within the thesis.

Values are delineated using Rokeach's definition of *'enduring belief(s) that a specific mode of conduct or end-state of existence is personally or socially preferable to an opposite or converse mode of conduct or end-state of existence'* (1973, p.5). In this thesis, values are thus considered to have inherent moral connotations and grounding (see chapter two, sections 2.1 and 2.4 for further discussion).

Stakeholders are conceptualised using Freeman's definition of a stakeholder as *'any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of the organization's objectives'* (1984, p.46). Of particular focus in this research are external stakeholders, which are considered to be any such parties that reside outside of the firm, encompassing, for example, suppliers, customers, competitors or local communities (see chapter two, section 2.6 for further detail).

Pragmatist ethics are a strand of Pragmatist philosophy attributable to John Dewey involving the application of Pragmatist thinking and theory to ethics (including Dewey, 1891; Dewey, 1902; Dewey & Tufts, 1909). The theory disavows traditional, normative theory, which seeks to prescribe fixed universal problems, in favour of a focus on context, experience and habit. Importantly, it emphasises the importance of inquiry in resolving morally problematic issues, through consideration, or dramatic rehearsal, of the possible courses of action and their consequences within a given situation (see chapter three, particularly section 3.3, for a comprehensive overview).

Practices are routinised activities, consisting of thematically connected actions orientated towards a specific purpose. Practices are therefore normative and collective in nature and are reproduced over time by organisational groups, (see chapter two, section 2.4.3 for further consideration of practices and Practice theory).

A **Stance** is conceptualised, using the work of van Fraassen (2002), as a broad attitude, commitment or approach to a sets of beliefs or propositions. In the context of this thesis, a Pragmatist stance implies

the sanctioning of a commitment to, and application of, a Pragmatist-based approach in order to facilitate tentative analysis and judgement while disallowing dogmatic adherence to the Pragmatist movement and its constituent beliefs (see chapter three, section 3.1.7 for further discussion).

Values disputations are considered to be *instances of tension, dispute or disagreement occurring between the values, and therefore core beliefs, of two parties*. Values disputations are often implicit and unspoken disagreements characterised by a divergence in the practices, and thus underlying beliefs, of typically organisations (see chapter two, section 2.6 for more in-depth discussion and chapter six, sections 6.3 and 6.4 for related empirical data).

SME or small firm or small business are defined using the UK/EU definition of any firm that possesses fewer than 250 employees. This research centres in particular on small firms, in possession of fewer than 50 employees, but more than nine, and micro firms – those firms with nine or fewer employees (see chapter two, section 2.5 for additional analysis).

The next section will discuss the rationale for undertaking research within the small firm context as well as the gap that exists in terms of the research into organisational values in small firms.

1.3 The Small Firm Context

Small firms provide a rich and compelling context for undertaking research as they are often highly idiosyncratic and demonstrate a high level of owner-manager influence, considerable organisational informality and a paucity of resources (Spence, 1999; Fassin, Van Rossem & Buelens, 2011). Furthermore, they are often a reflection of their institutional settings, with firms becoming embedded in a network of relationships at the local level, for example with the local community, customers, competitors and suppliers (Lähdesmäki, Siltaoja & Spence, 2019). As such, small firms are often integral to local communities and economies, providing not only goods, services and employment but also helping social and cultural capital to be built and maintained (Blackburn & Ram, 2006). However, while at the individual level small firms are often considered inconsequential, collectively they constitute over 99% of firms in the UK, providing over 50% of both private sector turnover and jobs (Department for Business Energy and Industrial Strategy, 2020).

Importantly, while the terms ‘small firm’, ‘small business’ and ‘SME’ are used broadly interchangeably within the thesis, given the heterogeneity of small firms (discussed in further detail in chapter two, section 2.5), these terms are used as collective nouns in order to note this heterogeneity while simultaneously recognising that such firms do often share common organisational features.

In terms of the motivation for studying values in the small firm context, little research has focused on organisational values in small firms, with what little research that has been carried out discussing values in an overwhelmingly implicit manner (for example see Stewart & Gapp, 2014). The research that has been undertaken has evidenced the presence of shared, organisational values, including *honesty*, *loyalty* and *trust*, particularly in small family firms where they help to shape and guide employee behaviour (Haugh & Mckee, 2003; Franco & Lucas, 2016). While this paucity of research mirrors general trends within the literature, such as a focus on large firm research (El Baz *et al.*, 2016), it also reflects the emphasis small firm research has often placed on owner-managers (for example, see Fraj-Andrés *et al.*, 2012). Studying organisational values in small firms thus enables a step beyond this focus on the owner-manager, for while the owner-manager is likely to have significant influence, given small firms' size and high levels of informality, employees often also have a significant voice in shaping firm culture (Connell, 2001; Rasheed *et al.*, 2017).

Nevertheless, as a number of scholars have suggested, a lack of research into a particular phenomenon or presence of a 'gap' in the literature does not in itself represent a guaranteed path to valuable research outcomes (Ashkanasy, 2011; Sandberg & Alvesson, 2011). The following section will thus discuss the motivation and rationale underpinning this research into small firm organisational values.

1.4 Motivation for Research

Within this research, there are three overriding justifications for placing small firms' organisational values front and centre as the primary research phenomenon to be investigated.

First, prior research has made it clear that organisational values play a key role in shaping organisational culture and, importantly, in creating an ethical firm climate which shapes the ethical norms and social responsibility practices of a firm (Sinclair, 1993; Grojean *et al.*, 2004). However, such research has typically been conducted in the context of large firms. Investigating whether this proposition holds true in the small firm context is critical in gaining a heightened understanding of the drivers of, and engagement in, small firm social responsibility practice.

Second, values, particularly the presence of shared values, are a key factor in determining the strength and nature of relationships built between firms and their stakeholders (Lähdesmäki, Siltaoja & Spence, 2019). This is a key concern in the case of small firms, given that they are often deeply embedded within a web of relationships with a variety of stakeholders and play a key part in the social and economic life of many local communities (Park & Campbell, 2018).

Finally, prior values research has frequently utilised quantitative methods to provide a broad overview of the role and influence of organisational values (for examples, see Marinova & Park, 2019; Matziari *et al.*, 2017; Posner, 2010). In contrast, a more recent wave of research has begun to identify

the importance of richer, more in-depth qualitative studies which bring greater understanding of how values are actually conceptualised, conceived and enacted within organisations (for instance, see Gehman, Treviño & Garud (2013); Wright, Irving & Thevatas, (2020). The importance of gaining an enhanced conception, a richer picture, of how values are actually practised within organisations, and how this may vary across organisational types and sizes, has become ever more apparent.

In summary, it is evident that there is need for research which looks beyond owner-manager values and places the investigation of small firm organisational values centre stage. The next section will consider the research questions underpinning this thesis.

1.5 Research Questions

As discussed at the beginning of this chapter, there concurrently exists a paucity of research into small firm organisational values in tandem with a number of compelling reasons to pursue research in this area. In order to start tackling this gap within the current literature, this research is motivated by the question: **How do small firms practise and maintain fidelity towards their organisational values?** For ease of conceptualisation, the research question was broken down into four sub-questions, namely:

1. *What is the nature of the organisational values that small firms consider to be salient?*
2. *What is the role of organisational values in small firms?*
3. *How are these values enacted?*
4. *How do small firms maintain fidelity towards their organisational values, particularly in instances where they face external challenge?*

In order to operationalise these research questions through an empirical study, the following steps were taken. First, the relevant literature in the areas of values, small firms and stakeholder relationships were reviewed to gain an understanding of the topography of extant research and consider in depth where this particular research may fill gaps.

Second, an empirical study was designed and implemented. This consisted of a review and selection of the most appropriate philosophical groundings and research methods based on the empirical phenomena and research question. An interpretivist grounding was selected and semi-structured interviews were chosen as the research method. The research method was trialled using a pilot study and upon successful completion, the main phase of data collection began. This consisted of forty interviews with representatives from small firms in the South West of the UK, of which half were micro firms (0 to 9 employees) and half were small firms (10 to 49 employees). Half of the micro and small firms were in the alcohol production industry and half were in the independent retail industry. Notably, the South West was chosen due to its rich culture and heritage, which have been significantly shaped by the region's geography – a confluence of factors that has led to the production of alcoholic

beverages becoming an important part of the region's identity. Additionally, given the high levels of tourism in the area, the area enjoys a large independent retail sector (see chapter four, section 4.3.1 for further detail).

The interviews undertaken with micro and small firms explored the values of each firm and how they sought to enact these, particularly within stakeholder relationships. A critical incident technique was also used within the interviews (Flanagan, 1954) to unearth instances where firms had experienced disputes related to divergent values with external stakeholders.

Third, the data was analysed utilising Braun and Clarke's (2006) method for data analysis to explore themes within the empirical data. A Pragmatist stance was taken throughout the process to theoretically frame and interrogate the data.

This section has outlined the research question which underpinned this research and has offered a brief summary of the research. The subsequent section introduces the theoretical underpinnings of the research in the form of the Pragmatist movement.

1.6 Theoretical Underpinnings: Pragmatism

Whereas the previous sections have provided an overview of the empirical phenomena and research questions that form the focus of this research, this section will briefly introduce Pragmatism. This research takes a Pragmatist stance throughout via means of broad acceptance and application of the tenets of the movement to theoretically frame and analyse the empirical data. Pragmatism provides a useful theoretical standpoint from which to undertake this research for three key reasons. First, Pragmatism focuses heavily on the importance and influence of context, a key consideration within small firm research given the heterogeneity of such firms (Soundararajan, Jamali & Spence, 2018). Second, it seeks to focus on real-world issues, such as those relating to ethics, and how social actors seek to manage and resolve these issues (Koopman, 2006). Third, with respect to ethics, the movement does not seek to prescribe fixed normative positions but to provide a process for attempting to reach solutions to practical and emotive morally problematic issues while taking into account key factors including habit and experience (McVea, 2007) .

The Pragmatist movement emerged during the late 19th century, primarily as a result of the work of Charles Sanders Pierce, John Dewey, William James and George Herbert Mead. Since its inception, the movement has often been considered broad and loose in nature, with the founders focusing on a handful of key themes and ideas including truth, experience, context and inquiry (Anderson, 2010; Ormerod, 2006) (see chapter three for further discussion of Pragmatism). A Pragmatist view draws together these themes to consider social practice as a process in which individuals and their contexts are perennially constructed and recast through reflexive processes of inquiry (Elkjaer & Simpson, 2011).

While Pragmatism evolved over the course of the 20th century and its influence spread into a number of social science disciplines, including politics and international relations (Diebert, 1997), law (Posner, 1990) and geography (Sunley, 1996), management studies has only very recently begun to engage with the movement and theory. The application of Pragmatist theory to work within the field of business and society, in particular, remains limited. This is in spite of the explanatory power of the theory, its capacity to deliver insights into the lived experience and practice of social actors, and its flexibility (Simpson, 2009).

Although from the outside the movement appears complex and difficult to comprehend, something to which I can personally attest, it provides a realistic, sympathetic and hopeful view of our social world and our experiences as human beings. For this, I am very grateful to the founders, as it has meant that the difficulties, tensions and compromises of real-world ethics and decision-making can be acknowledged and accepted and not simply swept under the carpet for convenience.

To conclude this chapter the following section will provide an overview of the thesis through providing a brief summary of each chapter and its contribution.

1.7 Thesis Layout

This thesis is separated into nine chapters, including this chapter (**Chapter one**: Introduction).

Chapter two affords a review of, and insights into, previous research in the areas of values, small firms and social responsibility, with a particular emphasis on stakeholder relationships, thus framing and contextualising the key phenomena of this research. The chapter begins by reviewing previous social science research into values, in particular, prior conceptualisation of the construct. It moves on to provide an overview of values research in the organisational context and the means by which values, and practices, are considered and conceptualised within this research. A discussion of the idiosyncrasies of the small firm context, including definitional considerations, common organisational features and their approach to social responsibility, with a focus on stakeholder relationships and values, is then presented. Finally, the research questions presented within the chapter are summarised and knitted together.

Chapter three presents an overview of the Pragmatist movement, which provides the theoretical underpinnings of the research. It offers a critical summary of the Pragmatist movement and its prior application to research within the field of management, especially that concerning research in the domain of business and society. It concludes with an examination of the applicability of Pragmatism to small firm ethics research.

Chapter four introduces the grounding and methods utilised to collect empirical data regarding small firm organisational values. It outlines the philosophical grounding of the research and the research method and population that were selected. The details of the interviews are outlined along

with how the data was analysed. Finally, data storage and research ethics issues are addressed and researcher reflexivity is considered.

Chapter five provides a descriptive overview of the empirical data collected from small firms in the research sample. The chapter begins with an examination of the nature of the values which firms articulated and how the firms conceptualised and sought to enact these values. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the role of small firm values.

Chapter six continues to analyse the empirical data through examining the communication of values and the presence and significance of values within external stakeholder relationships. The chapter explores the presence of shared values in small firm relationships with external stakeholders as well as critical incidents in small firm external stakeholder relationships, which were characterised by a misalignment in values. The chapter concludes with an examination of the strategies firms sought to employ to deal with such incidents.

Chapter seven takes a Pragmatist stance on the empirical data and draws out a number of key theoretical themes concerning the practice of small firm organisational values. A conceptualisation of values practices utilising Pragmatist theory is introduced, followed by consideration of the salience of context to the practice of values. The chapter is concluded with an exploration of values-based moral decision-making and the application of inquiry, before all of these themes are brought together to present a Pragmatist view on the conceptualisation and practice of small firm values.

Chapter eight draws together the analysis of the empirical data with the previous research to consider the overall contributions of the research. First, the contributions of the research as they relate to the practice of small firm values and moral decision-making are considered. The wider theoretical contributions concerning the deployment of Pragmatism within business and society research are then explored.

In **Chapter nine**, a summary of the findings of the research in relation to the research questions is outlined together with the implications of the research for future research as well as practice and policy.

1.8 Conclusions: Chapter One

To conclude, this chapter has outlined the background, rationale and structure of this thesis on the nature and practice of organisational values within the small firm context. Chapter two begins by outlining the context and background to the research through providing an overview of the previous research into values, focusing especially on values within the organisational context. Next, the chapter explores the research context of small businesses, both in terms of their organisational features and their approach to ethics, social responsibility and stakeholder relationships.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

2.0 Introduction

This literature review is structured as follows: first, the notion of values is addressed in order to provide conceptual clarity, including an examination of their definition and a review of the research conducted on them in the social sciences. This is followed by an overview of the research which has been undertaken into values in the field of management research, predominantly in the large firm context, followed by a discussion of research in the small firm context. This is concluded by exploration of the philosophy of values, particularly focusing on the role of values in moral theory construction and practice. The first three sub-research questions are then distilled and justified.

The nature and characteristics of small businesses, as well as definitional clarity, are then outlined. Next, the notion and definition of corporate social responsibility are explored, in conjunction with a discussion of the practice of social responsibility within small firms, with a focus on organisational stakeholders and their importance to the practice of values. This section is followed by exploration of stakeholder conflict and so-called 'values disputations', whereby small firms experience a misalignment in values with external stakeholders, before the fourth sub-research question is outlined. The literature review concludes with a summary of its implications and the research question driving the thesis as well as the four sub-research questions which underpin it.

2.1 Values

Many scholars have argued that values are an essential facet of the topography of the daily lives, as well as characters, of both individuals and organisations (Fischer & Karl, 2020). The phenomenon of 'values' has long been discussed, debated and contested within both society and, critically, within social science research, but according to Featherstone, *'to raise the question of values takes us into a series of complex issues which cross the social sciences and humanities'* (2011, p.119). The notion of values bearing great interest for social science and yet being contested in conception and nature is exemplified by the plethora of differing definitions and conceptualisations in the relevant academic literature (see *Table 1* for examples of values definitions from differing social science disciplines). As *Table 1* indicates, how values have been defined has varied considerably over time and between disciplines, with values broadly described as 'goals', 'beliefs' or 'desires'. What has often served as the unifying, cross-disciplinary features of values is that they are important to the possessor and that they, either directly or indirectly, influence behaviour. This perhaps bears testament to the etymological roots of the word values to its Latin infinitive forebear 'valere', which literally means *'to be worth'* (Oxford English Dictionary, 2021).

Despite debate surrounding definition, a substantial body of scholarly research has evidenced the vital role that values play in processes of decision-making to shape behaviour (Barnett & Karson,

1987; Miles, 2015). Values are integral to, and affect every facet of, our everyday lives, from the profession and employer we choose, to whom we socialise and form relationships with, as well as to our hobbies and interests and social, cultural, political and religious beliefs (Cleveland *et al.*, 2011; Arieli, Sagiv & Roccas, 2020; Davidov *et al.*, 2020). They play a vital role in the relationships between individuals and society, including those between individuals and organisations (Agle & Caldwell, 1999) and are of fundamental import to bonding within social groups (Grojean *et al.*, 2004). For instance, within organisations (Dempsey, 2015), countries and regions (Hemingway & Maclagan, 2004) and in demographic cohorts grouped by age (Cennamo & Gardner, 2008). Values have also critically been found to be integral to morality and ethical decision-making, both at the individual and organisational level (Fotaki, Lioukas, & Voudouris, 2020; Mubako *et al.*, 2020; Weber, 2019).

Author/Year	Field of Research	Definition and Descriptions of Values
(Kluckhohn, 1951, p.395)	Anthropology	<i>'A value is a conception, implicit or explicit, distinctive of an individual or characteristic of a social group, of the desirable that influences the selection from available modes, means and ends of action'</i>
(England, 1967, p.54)	Management Studies	<i>'A personal value system is viewed as a relatively permanent framework which shapes and influences the general nature of an individual's behaviour'</i>
(Sikula, 1971, p.281)	Psychology	<i>'the things or ideas that matter most to him, things which he will strive and sacrifice for in order to obtain'</i>
(Rokeach, 1973, p.5)	Psychology	<i>'A value is an enduring belief that a specific mode of conduct or end-state of existence is personally or socially preferable to an opposite or converse mode of conduct or end-state of existence'</i>
(Connor & Becker, 1975, p.551)	Management Studies	<i>'global beliefs about desirable end states underlying attitudinal and behavioural processes'</i>
(Brown, 1976, p.16)	Management Studies	<i>'a single prescriptive or proscriptive belief which transcends objects and situations to which attitudes are tied'</i>
(Hofstede, 1980, p.19)	Management Studies	<i>'a broad tendency to prefer certain states of affairs over others'</i>
(Schwartz & Bilsky, 1987, p.551)	Social Psychology	<i>'Values are (a) concepts or beliefs, (b) about desirable end states or behaviours, (c) that transcend specific situations, (d) guide selection or evaluation of behaviour and events, and (e) are ordered by relative importance'</i>
(Enz, 1988, p.287)	Management Studies	<i>'Beliefs held by an individual or group regarding means and ends organizations 'ought to' or 'should' identify in the running of the enterprise'</i>
(Argandona, 2003, p.16)	Management Studies	<i>'Central desires or beliefs regarding final states or desirable conducts that transcend specific situations'</i>
(Bardi & Schwartz, 2003, p.1208)	Social Psychology	<i>'Values convey what is important to us in our lives. Each person holds numerous values (e.g. achievement, benevolence) with varying degrees of importance'</i>
(Stephan, Ascalon & Gorgievski, 2011, p.213)	Management Studies	<i>'Values are stable, trans-situational goals that vary in importance and serve as guiding principles in people's lives'</i>
(Gao, 2017, p.50)	Management Studies	<i>'Personal values are desirable goals, varying in importance, that serve as guiding principles in people's lives'</i>

Table 1. Definitions of Values

Although the existence of substantial research into values arguably bears testament to their importance in society, scholarly interest and attention has peaked and waned over the course of the last one hundred or so years. Research into values within the social sciences, particularly within the fields of psychology and sociology, was prevalent, and arguably celebrated its heyday, around the mid-20th century. Critically, within the field of sociology, Talcott Parsons' work during the mid-20th century on values represented a significant conceptual shift. In contrast with previous conceptions which had focused significantly more on the notion of 'value' and the associated economic connotations, he argued that values are cultural in nature and concern desirable ideas of human action (Spates, 1983).

By the close of the 20th century, interest in a number of social science disciplines in values research had dwindled, demonstrated by Hitlin and Piliavin's (2004) characterisation of values as a 'dormant concept' and Miles' (2015) discussion of the 're-genesis of values'. Although this reduction in research attention could be attributable to trends and fashions within academic literature, research and theoretical constructs, some scholars have long argued that the lack of a unified conceptualisation of values impedes associated research:

'Reading the voluminous, and often vague and diffuse, literature on the subject in the various fields of learning, one finds values considered as attitudes, motivations, objects, measurable quantities, substantive areas of behaviour, affect-laden customs or traditions, and relationships such as those between individuals, groups, objects, events.' (Kluckhohn, 1951, p.390)

Other scholars have gone as far as to argue that continued research into values may in fact be a futile pursuit, given their unobservability and immeasurability as well as their lack of theoretical underpinning and unclear origins (Hecter, Nadel & Michod, 1993).

However, as Bachika and Schulz (2011) argue, interest in values is once more growing owing to reaffirmed recognition of their importance, both socially and culturally as well as at an individual level. Consequently, a raft of original work on values spanning the social science disciplines has flourished within the last twenty to thirty years as well as two new academic journals which focus on the study of values; the *Journal of Human Values* and *Valuation Studies*.

This newer wave of values-focused research has been conducted across a range of disciplines and research areas. For example, relating to personal values and personality traits (Parks-Leduc, Feldman & Bardi, 2015), the importance of values in shaping and determining culture (Morris, 2014), the impact of child rearing values on intergenerational class mobility (Sieben, 2017) and the role of democratic values in relation to institutions (Besley & Persson, 2019). Importantly, the relatively young social science discipline of management studies has scooped up the baton of values as a theoretical

construct, particularly within the sub-fields of organisation studies, where values have become a mainstay of much research into organisational culture, identity and leadership (see for example, Rau, Schneider-Siebke & Gunther, 2019; Groves, 2020; Pérezts, Russon & Painter, 2020), as well as in the sub-domain of business and society (for recent examples see Painter *et al.*, 2019; Weber, 2019; Astrachan *et al.*, 2020).

Overall, it is apparent that values are a key research phenomenon in the social sciences and are considered essential to both individual and organisational motivation, behaviour and decision-making. However, it is equally clear that research attention over time and between disciplines has often been patchy and uncoordinated. In recent years, scholarly interest in values has increased with values becoming a critical object of research attention in the discipline of management studies. The following section provides a brief overview of the notion and antecedents of values before moving on to consider values from an organisational perspective.

2.2 The Nature and Relevance of Values

2.2.1 Conceptualising Values

Values are trans-situational beliefs which guide, shape and determine the attitudes, actions and behaviour of individuals and groups and therefore play a key role in the identity of social actors (Grojean *et al.*, 2004). Critically, the means by which values are conceptualised differs based on whether a cognitive or cultural perspective is employed. Theorists taking a cognitive perspective, such as Rokeach and Schwartz, suggest that values are abstract conceptions of the desirable, in contrast with cultural theorists who have focused on values as manifested within symbols, rituals and artifacts (see section 2.3 for background on values within an organisational context) (Gehman, Treviño & Garud, 2013). At the individual level, values are argued to be hierarchically ordered, allowing prioritisation of certain types and courses of action and behaviour (Lilach *et al.*, 2017). Behaviour is thus often considered to be the discernible and explicit product of values, as it is values that shape an individual's awareness of opportunities, threats, challenges or problems which exist within their environment (Becker & Connor, 2003). Given the importance of values to identity and the fulfilment of goals at the individual level, the fulfilment of values tends to elicit feelings of contentment, while individuals will likely feel discontented when values are frustrated (Cha & Edmondson, 2006).

It has frequently been suggested that attitudes constitute the bridge between values and behaviour as they can be described as values applied in practice to a specific situation, incident and context, resulting in an orientation, opinion or conviction occurring towards objects and situations – and hence driving behaviour (Conner & Becker, 1994). Yet, this values-attitudes-behaviour relational chain causality is not as simple as some researchers assert; a simple causal relationship between the three constructs is

undermined by frequent value-behaviour gaps and the difficulty in conceptualising, measuring and studying each of the constructs (Hitlin, 2003).

Values also play a legitimising role, particularly as they act as a mechanism or explanation for individuals, or groups of individuals, to justify their behaviour (Meglino & Ravlin, 1998). In this sense, values are often classified, particularly from a sociological perspective, as having a normative bent, embodying morally valuable or desirable goods (Kraatz, Flores & Chandler, 2020). Values can thus be viewed as operating as part of a higher plane of moral reasoning as their employment in justification for engaging in action is intrinsically self-justifying.

In sum, research has evidenced the importance of values to both individuals and organisations in terms of the role they play in determining individual behaviour and shaping culture and normative beliefs. The next section discusses the antecedents of values, focusing first on the role that groups play in the maintenance of values, before considering how the values of individuals can change over time.

2.2.2 Antecedents of Values

Along with much research which attempts to understand the role of values and how they relate to behaviour, the source of an individual's values is a key question to which much research time and energy have been directed.

Early research into the subject, typically undertaken from a sociological perspective, concluded that values are generally gained from the society in which an individual resides as well as from other groups of which they are part, such as their family group, religion or social class (Rose, 1956). Subsequent research sought to try and understand the impact of social demography on individual values. Throughout the latter half of the 20th century, a plethora of research into the topic emerged, with factors such as social class, gender, religion, age, education and country of origin being deployed to explain an individual's values (Dukes, 1955; Vreeland & Bidwell, 1966; Longest, Hitlin & Vaisey, 2013). For instance, one study of gender and values found that women value the well-being of others more highly than men and are less materialistic (Beutel & Mooney, 1995), thus affecting their choice of profession (Marini *et al.*, 1996). Other studies have found that working class parents' values differ from those of middle class parents (Della Fave, 1974), a finding often explained by their differing workplace experiences (Kohn, 1959, 1976; Martins *et al.*, 2015).

While current research underscores the role of socialisation in informing individual values (Saucier *et al.*, 2019), evidence has mounted suggesting the importance of genetics in determining individual values. This body of research suggests that environmental influences, demographic factors and family socialisation are insufficient to explain variance in individual values and that values must

have an element of heritability and can be passed down genetically from our forebears (Knafo & Spinath, 2011; Parks-Leduc, Feldman & Bardi, 2015; Twito & Knafo-Noam, 2020).

Related to research concerning the antecedents of values, there has been considerable debate concerning the enduring versus transient nature of values. In spite of values being broadly stable in nature (Roccas *et al.*, 2014), recent research indicates that an individual's values can change over the course of their lives, indicating that values may adapt to reflect changing life circumstances or as a result of unexpected events (Lönqvist, Leikas & Verkasalo, 2018; Naveh-Kedem & Sverdlik, 2019).

The factors associated with such change are unanticipated; typically significant life events, including death or divorce; optional planned changes, such as emigration; or age-related life transitions, such as embarking on a new career or retiring (Vecchione *et al.*, 2016). This is substantiated by research conducted by Milfont, Milojev and Sibley (2016), which found that older adults tend to place more emphasis on others' welfare, whereas younger adults value power and status more highly. Consonant with this view, Bardi and Goodwin (2011) outline five factors which facilitate a change in values: priming processes, involving repeated priming of an alternative schema; adaption, driven by significant changes in personal circumstances; identification, via membership of new social groups; consistency maintenance, attributable to a desire to resolve personal dissonances or inconsistencies; direct persuasion attempts, such as education programmes. Interestingly, research by Bardi *et al.* (2014) found that individuals undertaking life transitions often already possessed values integral to their new life setting, while also evidencing the occurrence of value socialisation taking place during these life transitions.

Beyond the key role of values within individual decision-making, the role of values at an organisational level has often been noted. Given that the research object of this particular thesis is organisations, the next section of this literature reviews assesses the salience of values within the organisational context.

2.3 Values in the Context of Organisations

2.3.1 The Salience of Values to and within Organisations

Despite waning interest in values within much of the social science literature during the latter part of the 20th century, values have tended to be an enduring object of analysis in the domain of management studies. Interest in values has in fact arguably increased over recent years, with a notable escalation occurring in the 1980s in what Jonsen *et al.* (2015) refer to as the 'corporate values-rush'. In more recent years, this research has frequently been conducted within the sub-discipline of business and society.

Such research interest in values within the field of management is primarily attributable to two

factors. First, as a result of heightened interest in the economic success of Japan during the 1970s and 1980s, a number of popular management texts and a related academic literature appeared exploring the antecedents of Japan's rise. One of the common themes that became apparent was the success of organisations with shared values (Wallace, Hunt & Richards, 1999). In conjunction with this, and owing to the rise of globalisation, a firm's propensity to become more internationally orientated, typified by engaging in export to foreign markets and opening overseas subsidiaries, received increasing attention. This led to a greater focus on a sense and comprehension of inter-cultural dissimilarity. In particular, relating to cultural values, with intra-organisational conflict due to attempts to transfer management techniques and styles from the firm's home environment to that of its international operations becoming increasingly apparent (Davis & Rasool, 1988). As a result, values gained increasing currency in the study and practice of management, not least in relation to effective leadership, (for example, see Caldwell & Dixon, 2010).

Second, during the late 20th century an increased awareness developed surrounding the important role that values play within ethical decision-making (Fritzsche, 1991; Glover *et al.*, 1997; Coughlan, 2005), which coincided with organisations experiencing burgeoning levels of moral scrutiny and pressure. This led to organisations giving more credence to values, precipitating widespread attempts to assess, shape and employ values in an instrumental way to enhance organisational performance as well as weave an ethical thread into their organisational fabric. As such, in the following section the notion of organisational values is examined.

2.3.2 Organisational Values

While research interest in values within management studies notably heightened towards the end of the 20th century, the notion of organisations possessing values has a long history within the discipline. Values were a core feature of much work conducted from an institutional perspective from the mid-20th century onwards (for example see Clark, 1956), which suggested that organisations assimilate institutional values in order to gain legitimacy (Husted, 2020). Despite the study and consideration of values from an institutional perspective diminishing over time, the notion that organisations possess values has arguably become a core assumption in much organisational research (Kraatz, Flores & Chandler, 2020).

Organisational values are typically considered to be the fundamental tenets and beliefs which guide the purpose, culture and practices of an organisation (Sullivan, Sullivan & Buffton, 2001). As Amis, Slack and Hinings (2002) discuss, values are of essential import within organisations, as they '*underpin the way in which organizations are designed and operated*' (p.436). Values are considered an integral feature of organisational culture and identity which become entrenched through and within organisational structures, practices and processes (Bourne, Jenkins & Parry, 2019). Organisational

values signal and provide guidance to employees regarding what is valued within their organisational environment and influence the moral position of the organisation, especially in relation to its relationships with external stakeholders (Hunt, Wood & Chonko, 1989; Bourne & Jenkins, 2013; Marinova & Park, 2019). Shared organisational values are therefore considered to be integral to promoting a strong organisational culture and organisational cohesion, which in turn can lead to enhanced organisational performance and organisational longevity (Murphy & Davey, 2002; Donker, Poff & Zahir, 2008; Zander, Jonsen & Mockaitis, 2016). Nevertheless, critics have noted difficulties in pinning down what organisational values really are, given evidence of contradictions between espoused and practised organisational values and a lack of clarity regarding whether top management values are synonymous with organisational values (Meyerson & Martin, 1987).

A key strand of research into values in the organisational context is that which has focused on the role and presence of individual values, as discussed in the next section.

2.3.3 Individual Values within the Organisational Context

A core component of the extant research into organisational values has been research into values at the individual level within organisations. Previous research has evidenced the impact of personal values on work orientation and vocational interests, such as those relating to enterprising and social vocational interests (Berings, De Fruyt & Bouwen, 2004), as well as on behaviour within organisations (Arieli, Sagiv & Roccas, 2020). The previous literature has also addressed a broad range of concerns relating to individual values within the workplace, including the role of spiritual values (Kolodinsky, Giacalone & Jurkiewicz, 2008), 'green' values (Dumont, Shen & Deng, 2017) and cultural values (Wright, Berrell, & Gloet, 2008) as well as the impact of intergenerational values (Schullery, 2013) and the influence of individual values on ethical behaviour judgements (Finegan, 1994), job satisfaction (Froese & Xiao, 2012) and organisational performance (Watrous, Huffman & Pritchard, 2006).

Such research has highlighted the importance of so-called person-organisation fit, or the value congruence between individuals and organisation, as it has been found to impact the strength of the relationship between individual and organisation as well as outcomes for both individual and organisation (Posner, 2010; Jin, McDonald & Park, 2016). Decreased person-organisation fit has been found to be associated with reduced job satisfaction and organisational commitment, in tandem with increased turnover intention (Cennamo & Gardner, 2008). Research has also evidenced positive outcomes and relationships between person-organisation fit and individual and organisational outcomes, including organisational citizenship behaviour (Yaniv, Lavi & Siti, 2011), employee creativity (Saraç, Efil & Eryilmaz, 2014) and willingness for employees to recommend the organisation to others (Ruiz-Palomino, Martínez-Cañas & Fontrodona, 2013).

In sum, given the increasing awareness of the importance of values, both individual and organisational, to organisations, many organisations have attempted to implement so-called 'values-based management'. The notion of values-based management, including the role of organisational values and the relationship between values and culture, is outlined in the following section.

2.3.4 Values-Based Management

Given the importance afforded to values within many organisations, it is perhaps unsurprising that, at the intersection of individual and organisational values, the implementation of 'values-based management' has arisen in practice within a number of organisations. Values-based management is characterised as an attempt to shift '*attention to the connection between things: compassion, justice, and frugality*', as '*business decision making without a discussion of values is incomplete. People do not separate their work and materialistic lives from their religious and moral lives*' (Anderson, 1997, p.38). The employment of values in private sector organisations through values-based management has been manifested within the codification, publication and promotion of a set of organisation specific values (Naouar, 2016). Such values are designed to define the organisation's mission and are instrumental to, for instance, its recruitment practices, performance management regime and its implementation of organisational strategy. This is exemplified by this statement from Unilever's website, which describes the role that values play within their organisation along with the values that they perceive to be critical to their business:

'Our values define how we do business and interact with our colleagues, partners, customers and consumers. Our four core values are integrity, responsibility, respect, and pioneering. As we expand into new markets, recruit new talent and face new challenges, these guide our people in the decisions and actions they take every day.'
(Our Values and Principles, 2020)

As this quote indicates, Unilever suggests that its values play a vital role in shaping its stakeholder relationships and strategic decision-making as well as helping to guide its employees' decision-making on a daily basis. The role of organisational values from a values-based management perspective is examined in further detail in the following section.

2.3.4.1 The Role of Organisational Values

This increased realisation of the salience of values within organisations has been induced by growing comprehension of a number of the roles that values play. Firstly, as a more crystalline conception of culture has emerged, defined by Ogbonna as '*the values, norms, beliefs and customs that an individual holds in common with members of a social unit or group*' (1992, p.42), the relationship between organisational culture and values has become more explicit and better understood (Posner, Kouzes &

Schmidt, 1985). Pointedly, values are cited as being particularly important to the maintenance and preservation of cultural history and social capital (Mohan, 2011). Such increased awareness of the role and impact of values on the shaping of organisational culture is closely associated with organisations attempting to actively manage, shape and create their culture (Willcoxson & Millett, 2000). As discussed in section 2.3.3, this is evident through organisations increasingly attempting to engineer so-called person-organisation fit.

Secondly, values-based management is also the result, and symptomatic, of a shift away from hierarchical organisational structures and accompanied thinking towards organisations with flatter structures, decreased distance between decision-makers and decision-receivers and a greater emphasis on trust (Tyler, 2003). This alteration in organisational structure is a consequence of a presumed movement from management through the exertion of power and control to that of shared values and empowerment of employees (Pruzan, 1998).

Thirdly, the self-promoted conception of organisations being value orientated, and therefore having a deeper, more moralistic purpose, is interlinked with, and has in part been driven by, the rise of individuals within the workforce seeking work which they perceive to have greater meaning (Lips-Wiersma & Morris, 2009; Lysova *et al.*, 2019). Behind this quest for meaningful work, among other reasons, is resistance to a perceived breakdown in community culture, an increase in consumerist culture and organisations having much greater expectations of employees as well as employees seeking greater moral purpose within their work (Michaelson *et al.*, 2014). Interlinked with this has been increasing realisation on the part of employees that they may be required to disregard their values to succeed professionally (Lincoln, Pressley & Little, 1982), with demands for longer working hours and greater flexibility as well a general increase in stress from employers becoming ever more commonplace (Cartwright & Holmes, 2006). The importance of organisational values, particularly with respect to organisational purpose and meaningful work, has been well-demonstrated by evidence of inter-generational differences and even conflict in values and attitudes towards work (Smola & Sutton, 2002; Cugin, 2012).

Overall, this suggests the existence of a trend, towards individuals, particularly those newer to the workforce, seeking more purpose and meaning at work. Working for an organisation whose values align with their own often allows such meaning to be found. This has led to organisations seeking to enhance, and make explicit, their organisational values. A key means by which organisations seek to practise and evidence their values is via corporate social responsibility. The relationship between values and corporate social responsibility is thus addressed in the following section.

2.3.4.2 Organisational Values & Corporate Social Responsibility

As discussed above, a confluence of management and societal trends has led to increased attention being directed towards values within organisations, driven primarily by increased awareness of their relationship with firm commercial and financial performance. However, the mainstreaming of corporate social responsibility has brought the importance of values into even sharper focus, both within the relevant literature and practice. Heightened interest in organisations' impact on social and environmental concerns has led to growing demands for organisations to engage in more ethical conduct and to practise corporate social responsibility (Van Beurden & Gössling, 2008). Traditionally, a compliance-based approach was often viewed as the optimum means of instilling ethics within organisations, but latterly greater importance has been afforded to the role of values and the merit of a values-based approach (Joyner & Payne, 2002). The purpose of such a values-based approach is *'to articulate the values that govern the company's operations and hence express what the company stands for. Whereas codes tend to convey negative impressions in that they define behaviour likely to incur sanctions, values programmes emphasize the positive elements of workplace responsibility'* (Collier & Esteban, 2007, p.21).

Through taking a values-based approach it is argued that organisations can articulate and demonstrate their moral positioning, particularly in relation to their stakeholders, as well as their wider social and environmental commitments (Maon, Lindgreen & Swaen, 2009). Organisational values can also help engender an ethical climate and culture within an organisation, thus providing direction and inspiration for employees to conduct themselves in an ethical manner while also potentially providing greater meaningfulness (Somers, 2001; Aguinis, 2019). Organisations have therefore increasingly published and retrofitted their mission, vision and value statements, adding moral values, such as *integrity, trust, sustainability, honesty and responsibility* (Jin & Drozdenko, 2010). These values, as Bansal (2003) suggests, help organisations to frame, identify and decide upon the sustainability and ethics related issues which are important to them and therefore which of these will be tackled and how.

The role of values in relation to corporate governance has thus become increasingly apparent, especially in instances where organisational members wrestle with decisions in which no clear rule is apparent, as they can provide guidance in locating an appropriate answer (Fotaki, Lioukas & Voudouris, 2020). However, while a widespread move towards values-based management has widely been applauded, particularly as many consider it a more ethical way of doing business, some scholars have suggested that it amounts to little more than a subtle form of normative control. Such a perspective on values-based management is explored in the next section.

2.3.4.3 Organisational Values & Cultural Control

Despite the focus and apparent benefits of values-driven organisations and values-based management, such approaches are not without their detractors. Critics argue that values-based management is merely a sophisticated form of normative control, a ‘wolf in sheep’s clothing’, as it purports to facilitate empowerment, moral decision-making and a reduction in managerial control but in fact is merely a subtle form of control (Harris & Ogbonna, 2011). Although the value-centric narrative which has emerged within many organisations purports to facilitate high employee commitment through perceived empowerment of employees, fostering an emotional relationship with the organisation, synchronisation and alignment of employee and organisation interests, a move away from traditional bureaucratic style organisational practices and an injection of morality into organisational practices (Fleming & Sturdy, 2011), this is not always the case.

In reality, values-based management can be considered a form of cultural control; a hollow distraction, designed to deflect and obfuscate employees from the reality of the lack of discretion and control which they possess. This is particularly acute within industries which require repetitive and often tedious work, such as in the call centre industry (van den Broek, 2004). Where there is a lack of fit between the values of the individual and an organisation, evidence indicates that individuals often put on a pretence that such value congruence exists; potentially reducing psychological and emotional health (Hewlin, Dumas & Burnett, 2017). The notion of organisational values has also been criticised for often being devised and instigated in a top down fashion (Zhang *et al.*, 2008) as well as for the strategy of recruiting based on a set of values discriminating against individuals from certain backgrounds and cultures, and hence also creating the potential for substantial levels of group think within the organisation (Finegan, 1994).

Overall, the importance of values to a number of facets of organisational life has been demonstrated within the extant literature. The following section provides a brief summary of the overarching themes discussed within the chapter thus far, before the research and literature on values in the context of small firms is addressed.

2.3.5 The Importance of Values

As a consequence of the substantial interest in values, management research has investigated the construct and impact of values regarding a disparate array of phenomena. For example, relating to: the role of spiritual values as they relate to leadership (Reave, 2005), the impact of ethical values in organisations (Pedersen, Gwozdz, & Hvass, 2018; Valentine & Barnett, 2002), the role of leadership values (Gao, 2017), the role of organisational values in relation to business model innovation and sustainability (Pedersen, Gwozdz & Hvass, 2018) and the impact of value consistency on multidivisional firms’ subunits (Jacqueminet, 2020).

In summary, the presence, role and importance of values in the tapestry of modern corporate life and associated research in the domain of management studies appear to be extensive. By contrast, the role of values, and their management, within the smaller enterprise is far less clear, attributable to both the idiosyncratic nature of SMEs and the more general dearth of research on small firms. The research concerning values within the context of small businesses is addressed in the subsequent section.

2.3.6 Small Business Values

In spite of the breadth and depth of management research into values, as is the case with much research in the field, the vast majority has focused on large businesses. This section provides an overview of the research which has investigated small firm values, discussing links between values and social responsibility and ethics as well as research conducted into small firm organisational values.

The research which has focused on values in the small firm context has predominantly explored the links between owner-manager or entrepreneur values and firm engagement with social responsibility (Fraj-Andrés *et al.*, 2012; Kaesehage *et al.*, 2019; Kiefhaber, Pavlovich & Spraul, 2020; Schaefer, Williams & Blundel, 2020). Notably, this literature also suggests a positive relationship between small firm values and commercial performance, with social responsibility activities practised towards selected stakeholder groups resulting in positive financial returns for small firms (Hammann, Habisch & Pechlaner, 2009).

Early research into values in a small business context often drew on sociological perspectives. For example, research by Smith and Oakley (1994) investigated the impact of social demography and actor environment on owner-manager values, while research by Miller and Besser (2000) evaluated the impact of social demography on the community values of small business operators. Later research into values within SMEs has routinely been conducted from a business ethics or psychological perspective, focusing either directly or indirectly on the impact of values, particularly those of senior management, on firm social responsibility. The conclusions of this research indicate that the values of managers, owner-managers and founder-managers are highly influential in determining and shaping the ethical and corporate social responsibility engagement activities and behaviour of small businesses (Dawson, Breen & Satyen, 2002; Murillo & Lozano, 2006; Hsu & Cheng, 2012). This is the result of both explicit decision-making on the part of such individuals, which their position allows, such as through investment in sustainability initiatives, role-modelling actions and interpersonal relationships and behaviour (von Weltzien Hoivik & Melé, 2009). As Morsing and Spence (2019) suggest, values are key to both the practice and communication of social responsibility within small business, given the typically 'implicit' nature of social responsibility in such a context.

This is exemplified in the case of small firm environmental engagement where leadership

values associated with altruism and contribution to the common good have been found to be associated with higher levels of environmental consciousness and more engagement in pro-active environmental activities (Boiral, Baron & Gunnlaugson, 2014). Due to the concentration of power, and often ownership, in the CEO in an SME context, the values of such actors can take precedence over the profit-making interests of the firm; for instance, in the case of introducing environmental management systems, which are costly and may have intangible benefits to the firm (Cambra-Fierro, Hart & Polo-Redondo, 2008). For example, as research by Kearins, Collins and Tregidga (2010) indicates, the beliefs and values of entrepreneurs in small firms relating to the notion of nature can heavily shape the mission and ethos of such firms. This can result in social, cultural and environmental goals and values, such as the promotion of more sustainable consumption, the attainment of self-sufficiency over growth or the mitigation of environmental impact, becoming heavily embedded and prioritised over economic goals.

This being said, Jansson *et al.* (2017) found no relationship between management pro-environmental values and sustainability commitment within SMEs and further research indicates that the impact of CEO values are moderated by company age and size (Ling, Zhao & Baron, 2007). Similarly, Neher and Miles (2020) found a positive relationship between espoused values-enactment and larger firm size.

By contrast, research which has examined small firm organisational values is, at best, scant. The research that has been conducted indicates that small firm organisational values can underpin corporate social responsibility activities and engagement (Stewart & Gapp, 2014; Klapper, Berg & Upham, 2020). As research into small Fairtrade firms by Davies & Crane (2010) indicates, small firms recruit, induct and socialise employees on the basis of key organisational values. Literature within the wider field of family business which has focused on small family firms suggests that such firms do possess shared organisational values that are pivotal to organisational culture and succession (Grundström, Öberg & Rönnbäck, 2012; Franco & Lucas, 2016). Given that these values are often heavily entwined with family firms, they can, however, lead to the exclusion of organisational members who do not share these values (Haugh & Mckee, 2003).

Research into small firm culture has also often implicitly discussed organisational values through drawing on conceptualisations of culture as sets of shared values, beliefs and assumptions (for example, see Gray, Densten & Sarros, 2003). This has evidenced relationships between, for instance, culture and small firm innovation (Laforet & Tann, 2006).

In sum, due to the paucity of values research in an SME context, many values-related phenomena, relationships and effects remain unexplored. This is particularly apparent in relation to organisational

values, as the overwhelming focus of prior research has been on owner-manager values, with the assumption that organisational and owner-manager values are likely to be very similar if not identical.

Research into small firm organisational values, however, suggests that although there is likely to be overlap between owner-manager and organisational values, they are not identical. In particular, research suggests that owing to their small size and high levels of informality, employees may have a significant voice and power to shape firm culture (Connell, 2001; Rasheed *et al.*, 2017). Social and institutional norms have also been found to shape small firm culture (Tonoyan *et al.*, 2010). Finally, small firms vary considerably in size and it is likely that as firms grow the influence of the owner-manager on the firm's culture and values will diminish. Given the oft-noted importance of values in guiding ethical and corporate social responsibility behaviour, the merit of gaining a heightened understanding of small firm organisational values is apparent.

While this chapter has considered the definition and practice of values, given that values within prior management research, particularly with respect to small firms, have been considered in moral terms, the following section addresses the moral and philosophical underpinnings of values. This will be followed by a discussion of the research questions that have emerged on small firm organisational values as a result of this literature review.

2.4 The Philosophy of Values

2.4.1 Values as a Construct

There are two key but inter-related distinctions between research and literature on values within the social sciences. A portion of the research within the field of management has been undertaken from an interpretivist perspective, predicated on ontological subjectivism (Dina, 2012). This school of thought considers values to be a social construction. Hence, typically, qualitative methods are utilised to gain access to individuals' subjective, nuanced and personal experience of their values, including how they understand their values and how their values influence their lives, work and the organisations for which they work (for examples, see Lozano & Sauquet, 1999; Duarte, 2010; Schaefer, Williams & Blundel, 2020). In contrast with such research, much research into values, such as that within the field of psychology as well as to a certain extent within the field of management, has been undertaken from a positivist perspective. Positivism is predicated on an objectivist ontological position, and thus within such a paradigm social phenomena are studied with a view to gaining a holistic understanding of the phenomenon in question (Howell, 2013). Customarily, quantitative methods are employed in such fields, such as in that of psychology, where values are rated or ranked by survey respondents and researchers have little or no contact with research participants. Statistical analysis is applied to the results and concrete, rational theory constructed (for examples, see Schwartz, 1992; Roccas *et al.*, 2002; Sorthaix *et al.*, 2019).

Related to this positivist-interpretivist dualism is the question of whether values are conceptualised as intrinsically embodying moral weight, bearing or purpose. Much research treats values as largely amoral in nature, which is acutely apparent in relation to definition, such as in the case of Hofstede who defined values as a '*broad tendency to prefer certain states of affairs over others*' or Parks-Leduc, Feldman and Bardi (2015) who describe values as '*rather stable broad life goals that are important to people in their lives and guide their perception, judgement and behaviour*' (p.3). In addition to the definition of values conveying normative bearing, the types of beliefs that are classified as values also give insight into whether scholars assign moral purpose to values. Bose's (1962) work on 'peasant values' in India, for instance, touches little on moral concerns using measures such as scientific outlook, business attitude towards farming and rationality to assess values. Likewise, the headline examples of values given by Parks-Leduc, Feldman and Bardi are *achievement* and *security*, values which have little moral association.

In stark contrast to such a perspective, in response to the question '*what does it mean to say something is morally right or morally wrong?*', Carol Gilligan gave as the first line of her response; '*It has to do with responsibilities and obligations and values, mainly values....*' (1982, p.65). Gilligan's response is emblematic of a stance within the literature whereby values have innate moral bearing and purpose, with typical values cited within such literature having an inherent moral bent, such as *fairness*, *honesty* and *kindness*.

This question of the morality of values is one that is partially addressed by a critical classification of values within work by Milton Rokeach on defining values. Specifically, Rokeach (1968, 1973) differentiates between terminal values, values which indicate a goal or end to be attained, and instrumental values, those which indicate a means of acting. Additionally, Rokeach makes another key classification of values, subdividing instrumental values into competence and moral, with competence values relating to personal conduct and, when violated, individuals experiencing feelings of inadequacy. Instrumental values which are moral in nature relate to ethical concerns and therefore, when violated, illicit feelings of guilt.

Yet, it would appear remiss not to acknowledge that by this definition, both terminal and instrumental values can be broken down into competence or moral values, as the ends that individuals aim to achieve can often intrinsically embody moral principles. Correspondingly, *Table 2* breaks down Rokeach's values into instrumental and terminal as well as moral and competence.

Value Type	Moral	Competence
Instrumental	<i>Courage, Politeness, Honesty, Helpfulness, Love, Responsibility, Forgiveness, Broad Mindedness.</i>	<i>Cheerfulness, Ambition, Cleanliness, Self-Control, Capability, Imagination, Independence, Intellect, Logic, Obedience.</i>
Terminal	<i>Equality, A World of Peace, Freedom, National Security, Family Security.</i>	<i>True Friendship, Mature Love, Self-Respect, Happiness, Inner Harmony, Pleasure, Social Recognition, Wisdom, Salvation, A Sense of Accomplishment, A World of Beauty, A Comfortable Life, An Exciting Life.</i>

Table 2. Value Categorisation (adapted from Rokeach, 1968)

This stark conceptual contrast between moral and amoral values is often not explicitly alluded to within the literature. Another archetypal example of this are the values presented in Schwartz’s (1992) notorious ‘values wheel’. Many of the values presented within are arguably utterly amoral in nature; for instance, *creativity, clean* or *detachment*, whereas others are classic examples of moral values, for example *equality, honesty* or *responsibility*.

This is a vital philosophical, definitional and constructional dissonance that must be addressed in relation to this thesis. As this research concerns ethics, by the very nature of such a conception, values will be considered in moral terms. This is not to say that amoral values will be discarded or ignored; indeed, some values by their very nature arguably have no such moral bearing. However, the primary, foundational conceptualisation of values within this research are of beliefs which are moral in nature.

Consequently, the definition of values which will be used within this thesis is that of Rokeach’s seminal conception, namely that ‘*a value is an enduring belief that a specific mode of conduct or end-state of existence is personally or socially preferable to an opposite or converse mode of conduct or end-state of existence*’ (1973, p.5). Rokeach’s definition encapsulates the core features of values as they appear across disciplines and time (see *Table 1*). First, that the values are important beliefs. Second, that they can relate to both means of conduct or end states. Third, values have moral bearing and significance as they concern that which is socially or personal preferable. This definition therefore acknowledges the importance of morality to their conception, facilitating explanation and analysis of moral cognition and decision-making and, ultimately, moral behaviour.

Given this conceptualisation of values, the significance of values to moral practice and theory will be discussed, notably through considering a number of normative ethical theories which have previously been utilised to explain small firm ethics and social responsibility engagement.

2.4.2 Values & Moral Theory

As previously discussed, this research is concerned with the values which are considered to be beliefs imbued with an intrinsic moral bent. In order to fully conceptualise values as a moral construct, the notion of morality will be elucidated as well as a number of normative moral positions and their relationship with values. Morality concerns right and wrong, it involves judgements concerning people, society and actions, intent and behaviour (Trevino, 1986). Although morality is arguably codified within law, regulation and through social and cultural norms, it is intrinsically subjective, to which the plethora of contrasting normative moral theories bears testament. Moral issues are often intensely personal affairs. Morality is both a deeply practical subject as well as a highly philosophical one. It is a concern which paradoxically manages to permeate everyday life in a personal, substantive and deeply relevant manner at the same time as frequently residing in our complex, abstract and philosophical musings.

Moral theories provide guidance, rules or methods for assessing the morality of an intention or action. They are particularly salient during the second stage of individual moral decision-making: moral evaluation and judgment, which is preceded by recognition of a moral issue and followed by moral intention and behaviour (Douglas & Kevin, 2002). The relationship between moral theory and practice is adroitly described by Dewey (1891): *'theory is the cross-section of the given state of action in order to know the conduct that should be; practice is the realization of the idea thus gained: it is theory in action'* (p.18).

One of the key attributes of all moral theories is that they are explicitly or implicitly predicated on a number of heterogenous, foundational ideas regarding the nature of the world, of morality and of moral behaviour. These theories inherently promote the notion that if a single individual or all individuals subscribe to the ideas entrenched within the moral theory, it will facilitate moral decision-making and behaviour (Dreier, 1993). Normative moral theories are therefore essentially founded on a number of key values, both implicitly and explicitly, which allow their conceptualisation and operationalisation.

The role of values in moral theories is manifested and demonstrated in two main ways. Firstly, moral theories frequently prescribe explicit and general values concerning human conduct. Kantian ethics, for instance, cites as its primary maxim *'Act only in accordance with that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it become a universal law'* (Kant, 2002, p.37). Secondly, values can also be more implicitly referenced within moral theory, such as in discourse ethics, which references *'honesty'*, *'authenticity'* and *'openness'* (Schnebel, 2000). Alternatively, moral theories can act as a mechanism for individuals to promote and enact their own values within a framework which adds a layer of moral legitimacy to their decision-making and action.

In order to further evidence the link between values and moral practice, a number of moral

theories will be discussed, particularly those which have shown potential in providing a theoretical explanation for small business social responsibility (SBSR) engagement. First, ethical egoism (Longenecker, McKinney & Moore, 1988) alongside utilitarianism (Dawson, Breen & Satyen, 2002) are considered, before virtue ethics (Lahdesmaki, 2005) and ethics of care (Spence, 2016) are addressed.

2.4.2.1 Ethical Egoism & Values

Ethical egoism is a teleological, normative ethical theory concerned with the interests, desires, beliefs and self-preservation of the individual. Its core premise is that an individual moral agent should aim to put their own wellbeing, and values, above those of all other individuals, in an attempt to maximise their own happiness (Regis, 1979). Engaging in such self-centred and self-interested behaviour is, under ethical egoism, the morally correct course of action.

While the philosophy's core premise dates back in one form or another to Ancient Greek philosophy, the guise in which it is perhaps best known is in relation to economic theorising, particularly within the work of Adam Smith (Machan, 1979). The notion of self-interest lies at the core of the theory, but the theory does not totally disregard the interests of others, instead relegating them to secondary importance (Shaw & Post, 1993). The theory centres on the value of *self-interestedness* within the cognition, actions and behaviour of individuals, championing, as it does, the interests of the individual over the interests of others. Egoism also implicitly conveys *survival* as a value within its doctrine, as not surviving fundamentally contravenes the interests of an individual as it permanently halts any further self-interests being pursued.

Ethical egoism has received considerable criticism regarding its theoretical justification as well as the practicality of its application in the real world. A common criticism is that egoism can be employed in defence of the most egregious of acts, as long as some faint justification relating to the well-being of the individual moral agent, or the practice of their values, can be provided. The resolution of conflict in such situations where two individuals' interests are competing is also problematic, given that egoism provides little guidance for such instances occurring (Hospers, 1961). Some evidence also exists to suggest that individuals, and thus society, are predisposed towards altruism and not pure self-interest, given the potential anarchic circumstances which might arise if every individual was not just allowed, but actively encouraged, to prioritise their singular interests (Debeljak & Krkač, 2008).

Advocates of egoism contend that the theory is of fundamental import within an economic context in its explanation of, and its influence on, the proper functioning of markets. In addition, some commentators posit that egoistic behaviour is an entrenched characteristic of human beings (Mueller, 1986). More specifically, economists typically describe individuals acting in their own best interests as 'rational', with individuals only considering the interests of others when it is of benefit to themselves.

The result of the sum of all individuals acting in their own self-interest ensures the correct functioning of markets, as checks and balances will organically develop to ensure that individuals frequently violating the interests of others are punished (Bowie, 2001). This is the case, for example, where companies with unethical practices lose customer loyalty, and ultimately sales, in the long term as a result of their behaviour.

Beyond the arguments in favour of and against ethical egoism, the role of values, in a deeply idiosyncratic way, have a part to play within its practice. As egoism promotes the supposition that individuals pursue the course of action most likely to benefit themselves, this leaves much latitude for individuals to decide what is within their best interests (Forsyth, 1980). As such, individual values are exceptionally important within the practice of ethical egoism. As individuals have differing values and value priorities, when faced with a dilemma and employing an egoist theory and thinking, our values must guide what outcome we feel will be most beneficial. Consider the simplistic example of an individual who is faced with a promotion at work to a position with far more power and prestige attached but which requires working long hours and frequent overseas trips. The individual's values will likely guide what is the most personally correct course of action in accepting the job or not. An individual with values orientated towards *power* and *achievement* may readily accept the promotion, it being readily deemed to be in their self-interest. Conversely, an individual with values orientated towards *care* and *benevolence* may reject the promotion on the grounds that it may involve neglecting emotional care towards their family or those close to them. Equally, of course, a middle ground solution may also be possible, which allows a blend of both sets of values.

Overall, while values play a key role in the operationalisation of ethical egoism and the theory can be utilised to provide some insight into the social responsibility orientation of small firms, its explanatory theoretical power in such a context is limited. As the previous literature suggests, small firm social responsibility is often predicated on and shaped by concerns and values which extend far beyond mere self-interest (Spence, 2016).

2.4.2.2 Utilitarianism & Values

The purpose of utilitarianism is to aid individuals in taking the action which results in the greatest utility or happiness for the greatest number (Bentham, 1789). It is a classic teleological theory which focuses on the attainment of the most positive net outcome of a course of action, with little regard to individual intention (Renouard, 2011). The theory promotes the notion that individuals should weigh and sum up the consequences of multiple possible actions or decisions, both positive and negative, on all individuals involved, choosing the action or decision which the decision-maker believes will illicit greatest happiness or utility (Beekun, Stedham & Yamamura, 2003).

However, when considering the positive and negative effects of a decision, the theory suggests that the individual should be able to comprehensively envisage them all. Yet, in practice, the decision-maker is unlikely to be able to discern all the possible outcomes of the decision they will take and thus is perennially lacking perfect information to make such a decision (Smart & Williams, 1973). In addition, advocates of negative utilitarianism, a theory formulated by Karl Popper, criticise classic utilitarianism on the grounds that unhappiness is more important than happiness, and thus utilitarianism should seek not to gain the highest level of net happiness but the lowest levels of avoidable suffering (Griffin, 1979). Such critics argue that a reduction in suffering is of greater moral import than an increase in happiness, and therefore the theory cannot be used to justify the enrichment of a select few at the expense of the many.

Proponents of utilitarianism argue that the theory is simple to understand and apply and logically coherent (Emmons, 1973), as demonstrated by the significant role it plays within many legal systems, with many laws representing the codification of utilitarian principles (known as rule utilitarianism) (Bernstein, 1979). Research also evidences the notion that happiness can be created within modern society, and that happiness for some individuals does not have to come at the expense of suffering for others. Additionally, encouragement of happiness within society simultaneously encourages freedom within society as well as good health and civil behaviour and other important moral goods (Veenhoven, 2010).

Inherently, *happiness* is the value that utilitarianism holds up as most important in achieving as an end goal. Utilitarianism also arguably embodies the value of *responsibility*, given consideration afforded to the consequences of one's actions on others, in contrast to, for example, egoism where the individual is considered of most importance. *Imagination* could well be considered another value endorsed by utilitarianism, as an individual will likely have to engage in imagining the potential responses of actions that could be taken as well as the outcomes of such decisions.

Nevertheless, judging the outcomes of theoretical actions or behaviours is exceptionally subjective and leaves a great amount of scope for individuals to theorise what the possible consequences of an action are and how much happiness and pain these may bring. Hence the finer mechanics of the theory are merely the means of facilitating the operationalisation of this end. Specifically, when attributing value to the positive and negative outcomes of an action or decision, an individual must employ their values in order to achieve this.

For example, the owner of a business has to decide whether to accept an offer from a rival firm to take over the business. If the takeover goes ahead, many employees will lose their jobs, with large redundancy payments, but the survival of the company will be ensured. If the takeover is vetoed, all the employees will keep their jobs, but doubts exist as to the survival of the firm. In this instance, if the

owner of the firm employs utilitarianism, their values will shape which option they believe to promote greatest happiness. If the owner holds *loyalty* as an important value, as well as believing that keeping the brand and integrity of the business intact is crucial, then they are likely to believe that turning down the takeover is the correct moral decision. Conversely, if their values are orientated towards change and pragmatism, accepting the takeover may appear to be the correct decision, thereby guaranteeing some of the employees' jobs as well as redundancy payments for those losing their jobs.

In summary, utilitarianism embodies a very small handful of values, but vitally acts as a mechanism for an individual enacting their own values when engaging in decision making related to ethical dilemmas and conduct. However, in the context of small firm social responsibility, the theory overlooks a number of key factors including the importance of intent, the avoidance of creating negative stakeholder impact and the salience of the firm's interests and those of key stakeholders over those of more remote stakeholders (Lähdesmäki, Siltaoja & Spence, 2019).

2.4.2.3 Virtue Ethics & Values

Virtue ethics is a character-based normative theory most frequently associated with Aristotle and his work '*Nicomachean Ethics*', which suggests that ethical conduct is based on the development of virtuous character traits, so-called 'virtues' (Audi, 2012). Aristotle posited that the possessors of virtue, virtuous persons, have reached a disposition such that harmony, and not inner conflict, exists between their capacity for reason and their feelings (Bostock, 2000). These virtues come to the fore during decision-making, determining suitable virtuous behaviour and acting as motivators to engage in such behaviour, and therefore through the practice of these virtues a good life, 'eudaimonia', can be achieved (McPherson, 2013). This idea of virtue is intertwined with that of the 'Golden mean', as Aristotle considered virtues to be those characteristics which are the midpoint of extremes (Wright & Goodstein, 2007).

Proponents of the theory have argued that a focus on the development of excellent character makes it a suitable framework for promoting a highly functional and strong society (Bright, Winn & Kanov, 2014). Specifically, as virtue ethics proposes that individual agents be held accountable for their behaviour and character, even in the face of pressure to take morally compromising decisions (Solomon, 2003). As a result, scholars in a number of fields have suggested that the employment of virtue ethics could provide firm foundations for more moral practices (for example, Armstrong (2006) in relation to nursing practice and Moore (2005) with respect to business practice).

Critics argue that the theory's focus on overall character over discrete acts may lead to the potential justification of acts devoid of virtue in the short term as well as virtuous individuals losing their proficiency for virtue over the longer term (Louden, 1984). The theory has also been criticised on the grounds that it does not provide any means of appraising acts and does not therefore guide action

(Begley, 2005). Further to this, it has been asserted that there is little or no empirical evidence that supports the existence of character (Harman, 1999).

As virtues are often conceived of as *excellence*, excellence is a key value within virtue ethics (see chapter five, section 5.2.7 for a discussion of excellence as a small firm value). A further value integral to the theory is that of *wisdom*, as it allows an individual within a given situation to identify the morally correct response. *Living well* (eudaimonia) is another key value in virtue ethics, as Aristotle identified it as the goal of human life which can be achieved through the practice of virtues.

Links between values and Virtues, drawn from Aristotle's concept of virtue ethics, have previously been made within the relevant literature (for example, see Argandona, 2003 and van Dijk, van Engen and Paauwe, 2012). Moore (2005) draws parallels between the associated concepts of culture and values, and those of character and virtues, noting that distinction between the two is never likely to be clear cut. Rohan (2000) similarly suggests that values guide individuals into making 'good' decisions, which will aid them in attaining eudaimonia. Moreover, the virtues which Aristotle discussed within his work, such as courage, temperance and magnanimity, also bear strong resemblance to values commonly discussed in today's society. Nonetheless, beyond the values implicit within the theory, such as in the importance of the practice of virtues, there is little in the way of clear values in the theory.

Accordingly, while there is arguably some overlap between the notions of virtues and values, and links have been made in the small firm literature between owner-manager and firm character, virtue ethics does not provide firm theoretical footing for the current research. Specifically, as there is a blurred conceptualisation of and between virtues and values, which would hamper clear construct clarification, and virtue theory has typically been applied at the individual level and not the firm level, which is the focus of this research.

2.4.2.4 Ethics of Care & Values

Ethics of care is a focused normative theory (Borgerson, 2007) first proposed by Carol Gilligan in the late 20th century, which posits *care* as the most fundamental and basic moral value (Halwani, 2003). Gilligan presented within her work a three-stage model of moral development, based on analysis which is inclusive of women's voices, and theorised that the highest level of morality and moral thinking was that which embodied care: *'the sequence of women's moral judgement proceeds from an initial concern with survival to a focus on goodness and finally to a reflective understanding of care as the most adequate guide to the resolution of conflicts in human relationships'* (Gilligan, 1982, p.105). The theory recognises and promotes relationships as the means by which to operationalise the value of care and hence morality, advocating in particular the idea that individuals should apply the care and concern they have for themselves to others (MacHold, Ahmed & Farquhar, 2008). It therefore suggests that

individuals have a moral responsibility to 'concrete others', i.e. individuals known to them that feature within their lives, to act in a benevolent way, considering their interests as important and acting appropriately (Koggel & Orme, 2010).

One of the key strengths of the theory is the counterbalance it provides to many other 'masculine' theories. Ethics of care contrasts with many traditionally masculine ethical theories, which critics suggest overemphasise masculine thinking and tradition, promote rules, emphasise regard for the self as the central construct and focus on abstraction from the real world (Burton & Dunn, 1996; Linsley & Slack, 2013). Proponents of the theory also suggest that the idea of basing morality on the notion of care is advantageous as it plays into our basic human instincts, particularly as morality is often practised within the context of, or through, our relationships with others (Diller, 1988).

In contrast, critics argue that the theory leaves little room for justice and equality, which are important moral considerations, the absence of which may lead to unfair prioritisation of the interests of those with which we have strong, personal relationships (Edwards, 2009). Others maintain that the theory, given that it was based on research conducted with a small homogenous group of white, middle class women, ignores the influence of class and race on moral psychology (Robinson, 2020).

A number of core values can be distilled from the literature on Ethics of care. As Held (2010) describes, '*the ethics of care articulates especially the values involved in caring practices and it explores the guidance they provide*' (p.117). Importantly, it must be recognised that care in itself is a value as well as a practice (Lawrence & Maitlis, 2012). In order to facilitate a values-based analysis of Ethics of care, it will be conceptualised that 'care' is a terminal value and a number of instrumental values are required in order to achieve this terminal value.

First of all, Ethics of care fairly explicitly promotes the notion of individuals having a *responsibility* to those with whom they have close relationships to care for them. The theory advocates the idea that individuals are at the centre of their own social universe and have an obligation to attend to and promote the interests and welfare of those with whom they have a relationship. This closely relates to a second value, that of *equality*. Ethics of care emphasises the idea of dependency and the importance of relationships, as contrasted with what is termed the 'masculine view' of independence, autonomy and the importance of self (Hekman, 1995). Therefore, when practising the theory, the individual should not put their needs above those around them but should treat others with the care and respect that they apply to themselves.

Further values embodied and espoused by Ethics of care are far more implicit, such as '*caring relations seem to require substantial capacities on the part of those in them for being sensitive to the feelings of others*' (Held, 2006), implying that the value of *empathy* is intrinsically required in order to practise the theory. The provision of true care to another individual requires an understanding of their

situation, feelings, behaviour and needs so that adequate and proportionate care can be tailored to that individual (Cavanagh, Moberg & Velasquez, 1995). Also, an individual must practise *attentiveness* in order to be attuned to the needs of others and to proactively initiate care giving activities and behaviours (Brannelly, 2006). This allows them to shape their own behaviour to be appropriate when supporting and caring for others (Maeckelberghe, 2004).

To summarise, ethics of care is a normative theory focused on the practice of care by an individual towards those with whom they possess relationships. Whilst its use and explanatory power in relation to small firm social responsibility has been demonstrated (for example, see Spence, 2016), in the case of this research, the theory's focus on the value of care may obfuscate the presence and importance of other key values. This, in turn, renders it a sub-optimal theoretical grounding for the research at hand.

This exploration of these four normative theories has elucidated the importance of values in the construction and operationalisation of moral theory and the intrinsic moral bearing which values often possess within moral philosophy, particularly within the domain of business and society as well as more broadly in society today. It has also considered the relevance of these theories to this research and discounted their use (for further discussion of criticisms of traditional ethical theory from a Pragmatist perspective see chapter three, section 3.3.1).

As examined in sections 2.2 and 2.3, values influence the activities, behaviours and practices of individuals and organisations. The following section examines how practice has been conceptualised in the prior literature and its relevance to the study of values.

2.4.3 Conceptualising Practice

An emphasis on the importance of practices to social life, and social scientists' understanding of it, has led to social systems being characterised '*as ongoing, self-reproducing arrays of shared practices*' (Barnes, 2001, p.17). From this broad perspective, understandings of organisational phenomena are reached through studying practices rather than simply practitioners, and organisations are considered as a continuous performance of activities. This allows a conception of organisations as being composed of bundles of practices (Nicolini, 2012).

Practice theorists, such as Schatzki, conceive of '*practices as embodied, materially mediated arrays of human activity centrally organized around shared practical understanding*' (2001, p.2). As organisational scholars have suggested, organisation is increasingly understood as fluid, complex and transient, and a focus on practices allows a heightened understanding of organisational phenomena (Feldman & Orlikowski, 2011). As Reckwitz (2002) argues, social practices are both '*sets of routinized bodily performances*' (p.251) and mental activities, such as ways in which subjects are treated, objects

moved and the world is understood, suggesting a particular routinised way of comprehending the world, desiring something and grasping how to do something. Practices can therefore be considered as any ordinary activities which occur within organisations and are typically broken down into a series of thematically connected sets of action orientated towards a purpose. As such, practices are normative and collective in nature and are kept alive through organisational groups reproducing the practice over time (Nicolini & Monteiro, 2016).

While this research does not seek to take a Practice theory approach to the study of values, organisational practices and the context in which they arise and are enacted (Jarzabkowski *et al.*, 2016) are a particular focus on this research. This is especially true given the grounding of this research in the Pragmatist movement (see chapter three for further discussion and justification), which is primarily concerned with the real and lived world and is grounded in the notion of the inseparability of practice and knowledge (Bogusz, 2012). Of particular interest to this research are those routinised practices, as discussed by the firms, which can be considered as the enactment of values (Haywood *et al.*, 2014), encompassing activities that are undertaken within the firm and how they are done (Messner, Clegg & Kornberger, 2008). This research is also interested in the presence of temporality, which is often key to research conducted from the Practice theory standpoint (Feldman & Worline, 2016), especially how values are maintained over time through the preservation of practices.

Overall, while a Practice theory approach is not privileged within this research, practices – routinised activities and actions – will be considered as key means of gaining insight into organisational values, particularly as they are generally considered to be unobservable in and of themselves. The next section will draw together the themes of the previous sections to articulate the research question animating the thesis with regard to small firm organisational values.

2.4.4 Small Firm Values Research Gap

In sum, within the context of this research values will be defined using Rokeach's conceptualisation: 'A value is an enduring belief that a specific mode of conduct or end-state of existence is personally or socially preferable to an opposite or converse mode of conduct or end-state of existence' (1973, pg. 5). Accordingly, values will be considered as beliefs with inherent moral bearing, as demonstrated by their role in the construction of a range of mainstream normative theories.

It is apparent that values are essential to the functioning of organisations, well evidenced by the rise in values-based management within larger firms (Anderson, 1997), where their purpose, role and impact has been widely researched. However, while research has been conducted on values in the small firm context, evidencing their import, such research has often been limited by three factors. First, by an assumption that owner-manager values are the only values of significance in small firms (as per Schaefer, Williams & Blundel, 2020). Second, that values are only present and relevant to social

responsibility practice. Third, values should, therefore, be relegated to secondary importance as one of a number of factors explaining small firm engagement with social responsibility (for example, see Hsu & Cheng, 2012). In contrast to this, and as discussed in section 2.3.6, a small amount of work, often emanating from the family firm literature, has demonstrated the importance of organisational values, while evidencing a lacuna in relation to their role and practice in the small firm context.

As such, this research seeks to address this gap in understanding concerning small firm organisational values through gaining insights into what organisational values small firms seek to practise, what they consider the role of their values to be and the means by which they seek to enact their values. This will be achieved through answering the first three guiding research questions of this thesis, relating to the *nature, role and enactment* of small firm organisational values:

1. *What is the nature of the organisational values that small firms consider to be salient?*
2. *What is the role of organisational values in small firms?*
3. *How are these values enacted?*

However, given the importance of external stakeholders to small firms, particularly to their moral practice, this thesis will also seek to understand how small firms seek to maintain fidelity to their values over time. This is a consideration particularly relevant to the small firm context, given the power asymmetries that often exist between small firms and external stakeholders, especially where larger firms attempt to assert a 'moral monopoly' (Spence & Bourlakis, 2009) over small firm stakeholders. Accordingly, the following section will consider the heterogeneity of the small firm context, including the definition of a small firm, before introducing the notion of corporate social responsibility and, significantly, the relevance of stakeholders to the practice of social responsibility and ethics.

2.5 Small Business Definition & Characteristics

2.5.1 Small Business Definition

Defining what constitutes a small business is arguably critical in identifying the success and health of an economy, comparing economic statistics and designating the governmental support and tax laws that apply to an enterprise (Berisha & Pula, 2015), as well as to the design of scholarly research methods. A plethora of organisations have published and employed differing definitions of small businesses, in particular, regional and national governments, industry groups and international bodies.

One of the seminal definitions of a small business was that prescribed by the United States Small Business Act (1953), which described a small business as an enterprise that is '*independently owned and operated and which is not dominant in its field of operation*' (p.5). Such descriptive definitions were understandably deemed too vague to be used in isolation and as a result quantitative measures have largely come to the fore as the means by which small businesses are defined and

classified (Peterson, Albaum & Kozmetsky, 1986).

Two main categories of quantitative measures have become the standard of definition. Firstly, input measures, such as employees, assets or material inputs. Secondly, output measures, such as revenue or sales (Miller, 1982). Nonetheless, these measures have also been criticised, particularly that of measuring employee numbers, for three reasons. First, for determining the correct cut off point for the number of employees that should designate what sort of business it is. For example, whether the figure should be arbitrary, or whether it ought to be based on research or some logical justification. Second, due to the suspect relationship between employee volume and financial metrics (Oysteryoung, Pace & Constand, 1995). Third, because of the treatment of outsourced staff, and outsourced functions, in measuring employee numbers as well as unpaid family members or casual workers.

Additionally, in practice, the definition of a small business varies from region to region and from industry to industry (Street & Cameron, 2007). Within the UK, an SME is an organisation which meets at least two of these criteria: turnover less than £25m, possession of fewer than 250 employees and gross assets less than £12.5m (UK Government, 2006). On the other hand, in the United States, the definition of a small business is based on revenue and employee numbers, but these numbers vary by industry type (U.S. Small Business Administration, 2017). In India, the definition is predicated on whether a business is in the manufacturing or service sector as well as investments in plant and machinery and investment in equipment (Indian Government, 2006). These definitions can also be contrasted with those employed in China, where an SME can have up to 2000 employees and ¥800m in revenue (circa £9m) (OECD, 2016) as well as with the New Zealand context where no official definition exists, but an organisation with a maximum of 20 employees is widely considered to constitute an SME (Ministry of Business Innovation and Employment, 2017). As a result, it must be noted that some 'small firm' research, such as that conducted in the United States and China, may not be wholly congruent with research undertaken within the European context, given the differing definitional parameters.

In order to explore the most appropriate definition of an SME two factors must be considered. First, the definition must fit the socio-economic context of the UK, owing to the fact that SME definitions are very much contingent on the economic context, as evidenced by the definitions given above. Secondly, the definition must be specific enough to group businesses not only as SMEs but into their subgroups of micro, small and medium. The definition that best fits these two criteria, and which will be employed throughout this thesis, is that utilised by the European Commission (also often used by the UK government), not least because it does not discriminate based on industry.

The European Commission (2016) defines a small business as a profit-seeking enterprise that

has less than 250 employees, annual revenue of no more than €50m and a balance sheet total that does not exceed €10m (See *Table 3* for precise European Commission definitions of micro, small and medium enterprises).

Business Type	Employee Numbers	Turnover	Or	Balance Sheet Total
Micro	< 10	≤ € 2m		≤ € 2
Small	< 50	≤ € 10m		≤ € 10
Medium	< 250	≤ € 50m		≤ € 43

Table 3. European Commission Definitions of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises

In the UK, just under 99.9% of businesses have fewer than 250 employees, making them small or medium size enterprises, employing just over 60% of the workforce and generating just over half of annual private sector turnover. Of the firms that fit into the category of SME, just over 99% have between 0 and 49 employees (Federation of Small Businesses, 2019) (see *Table 4* for more detail). What is therefore clear is the sheer volume of SMEs which operate within the UK and the considerable impact they have collectively, both in terms of employment as well as on economic activity.

Business Type	Number of Businesses		Employment		Turnover	
	Thousands	Percentage of Total	Thousands	Percentage of Total	Millions	Percentage of Total
All businesses*	5,981	100.00%	27,732	100.00%	4,346,696	100.00%
SMEs (0-249 employees)	5,973	99.87%	16,836	60.71%	2,270,229	52.23%
Small businesses (0-49 employees)	5,937	99.26%	13,302	47.97%	1,576,540	36.27%
With no employees	4,568	76.38%	4,966	17.91%	315,627	7.26%
All employers**	1,413	23.62%	22,766	82.09%	4,031,341	92.74%
of which:						
1-9 employees	1,157	81.88%	4,196	18.43%	615,251	15.26%
10-49 employees	211	14.93%	4,140	18.19%	645,662	16.02%
50-249 employees	36	2.55%	3,534	15.52%	693,689	17.21%
250 or more employees	8	0.57%	10,896	47.86%	1,981,968	49.16%

Table 4. UK Business Statistics (Department for Business Energy and Industrial Strategy, 2020)

*These latest figures are correct as of the beginning of 2020 and therefore will not include the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic

**'With no employees' refers primarily to self-employed owner-managers and companies with the sole proprietor as an employee

These statistics, however, do little to illustrate the organisational characteristics of SMEs, in particular in relation to large firms. The subsequent section therefore focuses on the distinct and idiosyncratic characteristics of small and medium sized firms.

2.5.2 The Characteristics of Small Businesses

Small firms cannot simply be described as small versions of large firms (Sen & Cowley, 2013). The organisational characteristics of small firms, including those relating to structure, ownership and institutional embeddedness, typically differ significantly from those of large businesses. Although a vast array of small business definitions exist and the idiosyncratic nature of such firms has been repeatedly evidenced, small businesses do often share common characteristics. These can be broadly grouped into three categories: *internal firm operations*, *business ownership* and *institutional context*.

In terms of internal operations, many small businesses are characterised by their high levels of informality, flexibility and resource paucity, especially when compared with large businesses. This is often discernible through a lack of formal hierarchy, division of labour (Mallett & Wapshott, 2014) and physical, financial or human capital resources. Business ownership in the context of small firms tends to lie in the hands of a single owner-manager or a group of owner-managers, who tend to possess high levels of power (Higgins & Mirza, 2013). Finally, small businesses are frequently heavily embedded within their local and institutional context (Lähdesmäki, Siltaoja & Spence, 2019), possessing a breadth and depth of relationships with local stakeholders, including the local community, local businesses and individuals within the community. For more in-depth detail and description of typical SME characteristics, see *Table 5*.

Category	Feature	Description	Reference	
Internal Operations	<i>Organisational Informality</i>	High levels of organisational informality characterised by low levels of formalised structure and few systems of controls.	(Fassin, 2005)	
	<i>Organisational Flexibility</i>	High levels of flexibility due to centralised power and decision-making, low levels of bureaucracy and close proximity to customers and suppliers.	(Julien, 1993)	
	<i>Division of Labour</i>	Low levels of division of labour, departmentalisation and functional segregation often leading to employee multi-skilling.	(Gialuisi & Coetzer, 2013)	
	<i>Organisational Resources</i>	Possession of low levels of organisational resources, for example financial, physical or network assets as well as skills, capabilities and competencies.	(van Gils & Zwart, 2004; Vuorinen <i>et al.</i> , 2006)	
	<i>Organisational Focus</i>	Short-term focus often as a result of resource paucity, urgent tasks and risks arising leading to firefighting behaviour.	(Spence, 1999)	
Business Ownership	<i>Nature of Ownership</i>	Business ownership often lies in the hands of an individual or a small group of individuals who also frequently provide capital to, and manage, the business.	(Scott & Bruce, 1987)	
	<i>Family Involvement</i>	Ownership often in hands of single family who pass ownership and management through the generations, thus heavily influencing the firm, particularly the firm's strategy and culture.	(Carney, 2005; de la Cruz Deniz & Cabrez Suarez, 2005)	
	<i>Owner-Manager Influence</i>	Owner-Manager Power	Often heavily involved in day-to-day operations of business, shape organisational culture and set strategic direction and goals.	(Walker, 2004)
		Owner-Manager Demographic	Attributes and characteristics of owner-managers, including age, self-perception and personality traits, heavily influence business success and growth rate.	(Andersson & Tell, 2009; Blackburn, Hart & Wainwright, 2013)
		Owner-Manager Goals	Frequently determine profit orientation as well as whether a business grows, is sold or continues, such as upon retirement.	(Clark, 2001; Russo & Perrini, 2010)
Institutional Context	<i>Local Embeddedness</i>	Often high levels of embeddedness within the local community leading to close ties with local stakeholders and the business success heavily entwined with economic fortunes of the local area.	(Courrent & Gundolf, 2009; Gundolf & Jaouen, 2005; Miller & Besser, 2000)	
		Businesses being required to take the interests of local community and stakeholders into account when decision-making.	(Lamberti & Noci, 2012)	

Table 5. SME Characteristics

Overall, the definition of a small firm to be employed in this research is that of the UK and EU of any firm that has fewer than 250 employees and a turnover of less than €50 million or balance sheet total of less than €43 million. Beyond definitional considerations, it is clear that small businesses are by their very nature idiosyncratic entities and accordingly vary immensely in terms of their size, location and

the resources they possess as well as a plethora of other organisational characteristics. As discussed in section 2.3.6 on small business values and section 2.4, in the context of this research, small firm values are considered to possess an inherent moral bent and thus are closely aligned with and influence the orientation and practice of social responsibility in small firms. In the following section (2.6) the notion of corporate social responsibility is addressed. Given the importance of stakeholder relationships to social responsibility, especially in the small firm context, relevant theory is then considered. Beyond this, the nature and importance of stakeholder relationships, the notion of conflict in stakeholder relationships and values disputations in small firm external stakeholder relationships, including their relevance to the practice and maintenance of values, are then addressed.

2.6 Corporate Social Responsibility & Stakeholder Relationships

2.6.1 Corporate Social Responsibility

The notion of corporate responsibility, and that of practices which would currently be termed corporate social responsibility (CSR), has existed for many years, pointedly demonstrated during the Victorian era where business philanthropists, such as George Cadbury and William Lever, rose to prominence. These industrialists famously built whole towns for those employed in their factories, which included modern amenities and sanitation with the intention of increasing the health and happiness of their employees as well as employee productivity (Smith, 2003).

Despite a trickle of academic work addressing CSR appearing in the 1920s and onwards (Freeman & Hasnaoui, 2011), (for instance, see Edgerton, 1927; Maclean, 1927), the modern conception of corporate social responsibility can be traced back to the post World War Two era. From the 1950s onwards, questions arose regarding societal ethics, environmental issues and the social responsibility of business. This is exemplified by the publication of Howard Bowen's 1953 book entitled '*Social Responsibilities of the Businessman*' (Carroll, 2015). During the latter part of the 20th century, these questions continued to be asked, fuelled by heightening concerns over the sustainable functioning of the world economy, a string of high profile business scandals and intensified research and understanding of a whole host of endemic issues and opportunities facing businesses related to issues including sustainable sourcing, treatment of labour and gender equality (Carroll, 2015).

As a result, the umbrella term 'corporate social responsibility' arose and has endured, regardless of significant criticisms (Freeman & Liedtka, 1991), to describe the vast array of business practices which touch upon societal interests. For example, pollution mitigation, water reduction, eco design of products and services, fair payment of employees and philanthropy, as well as to describe the nebulous relations between business and society. However, due to the complex nature of business relations with

society, particularly relating to the responsibility and obligations of businesses, in tandem with the variety of socially responsible business practices that exist, an all-encompassing definition of corporate social responsibility has proven to be an essentially contested and elusive concept (Matten & Moon, 2008; Mitnick, Windsor, & Wood, 2020).

Perhaps the most commonly used definition of CSR is that proposed by Carroll (1991), whereby CSR is the responsibility that businesses have to regard and abide by their economic, legal and ethical philanthropic responsibilities towards society.

Consonant with the rise in practice of CSR, academic interest and research has heightened over the last fifty years. Such research has examined a wide range of social responsibility related issues within the context of, or relating to, organisations. For instance, academic work has addressed: sustainable supply chains (Koberg & Longoni, 2019), modern slavery (Crane *et al.*, 2019), marketing ethics (Javalgi and Russell, 2018), gender equality (McCarthy and Moon, 2018) and social enterprises (Doherty, Haugh & Lyon, 2014). As discussed in section 2.3.6, the relationship between values and the practice of social responsibility and ethics in small firms, in particular in relation to stakeholder relations, has often been highlighted. As such, the notion of small business social responsibility is outlined in the next section, followed by discussion of the relevance of stakeholder relationships to the practice of ethics and values.

2.6.2 Small Business Social Responsibility

While van Auken and Ireland proclaimed in the *Journal of Small Business Management* almost forty years ago that ‘*the era is past when the business community could make profit and stockholder interests its only considerations*’ (1982, p.1), the overwhelming majority of current and previous research and literature on social responsibility has focused on large businesses. In the process, social responsibility within the context of small firms has often been overlooked (El Baz *et al.*, 2016; Spence, Schmidpeter & Habisch, 2003). This is not for a lack of calls for greater research into small business social responsibility within the academic literature, nor for a lack of illustrations of gaps within the literature (for example, see Thomsen & Smith, 1991; Tilley, 2000; Panwar *et al.*, 2017; Soundararajan, Jamali & Spence, 2018). Although this under-representation of research into small businesses is part of a general trend within the literature, research into small businesses is confounded and complicated by the heterogenous nature of small businesses and the perception of their relative insignificance in terms of economic, environmental and social impact.

It would be remiss to suggest that the lack of research into small business social responsibility is testament to a lack of engagement and practice of social responsibility on the part of small firms. Social responsibility within small firms typically contrasts with that of large firms (Longenecker, McKinney & Moore, 1989; Lepoutre & Heene, 2006) and is attributable to a number of factors, including the role of owner-managers within SMEs, resource scarcity, organisational visibility and stakeholder pressure (Hsu

& Cheng, 2012). Social responsibility practices tend to be less formal, more idiosyncratic and often more implicit, meaning that they are often overlooked, especially as social responsibility practices in small firms tend to be less formally communicated than in large firms (Soundararajan, Jamali & Spence, 2018). Indeed, although a heterogeneous array of small business social responsibility practices and levels of engagement exist, which can include prompt payment of suppliers, treating employees with care, re-using packaging and other materials and small, ad-hoc financial and non-financial donations to local philanthropic causes (Spence, 1999, 2016), small businesses have been found, in certain cases, to have comprehensive and sophisticated social responsibility strategies. Egels-Zandén (2017), for instance, cites the case of Nudie Jeans Co, a small Swedish fashion company which demonstrates a coherent social responsibility programme: the firm uses 100% Fairtrade organic cotton denim, offers a free repair service for its products and publishes detailed information about their supply chain as well as implementing a pioneering project to calculate and implement a fair living wage at one of its suppliers located in India. Likewise, in their investigation into the green practices of SMEs in the South African wine industry, Hamann *et al.* (2017) evidenced the use of a number of social responsibility practices - from the discontinuance of insecticide usage to water conservation programmes, organic certification, water bottle lightening, energy saving initiatives and the introduction of pecking ducks for natural pest control.

Given the relative paucity of research into small firm social responsibility, social responsibility within the large firm context often acts as the starting point or norm for social responsibility research within small firms. While such a juxtaposition can yield fruitful insights, previous research has repeatedly substantiated the notion that while some medium sized firms can emulate the approach of larger firms (Russo & Tencati, 2009; Preuss & Perschke, 2010), small firms are not merely small versions of large firms (Perrini, Russo, & Tencati, 2007; Tilley, 2000). This being said, the importance of stakeholder relationships and the practice of responsibility towards firm stakeholders is a theme which cuts across social responsibility research in the context of large and small firms. The following discussion will therefore introduce and discuss the role and relevance of stakeholder relationships to social responsibility before considering the importance of stakeholder relationships to the practice of values in small firms.

2.6.3 Stakeholder Relationships & Stakeholder Theory

Organisations do not exist within closed systems but are influenced by and influence stakeholders within their institutional environment (Freeman & Reed, 1983). How firms treat, consider and are influenced by stakeholders has become a key strand of the means by which social responsibility is practised and theorised (Helmig, Spraul & Ingenhoff, 2016). As Phillips, Freeman and Wicks (2003) discuss, stakeholder theory '*addresses morals and values explicitly as a central feature of managing*

organizations' (p.481) through suggesting an obligation on the part of organisations to attend to the interests and wellbeing of stakeholders. The theory is therefore broad in nature and captures the notion that the purpose of the firm is as to serve as a vehicle to secure the multiple and often non-congruent interests of stakeholder groups (Crane & Ruebottom, 2011). Although critics have argued that significant ambiguity remains in relation to the theory, such as with regard to the definition of a stakeholder and stake, (Fassin, 2009) stakeholder theory and perspectives have become one of the dominant streams of research in the domain of business and society.

While no definitive conception of the term 'stakeholder' exists, the most commonly used, and perhaps most widely accepted, definition is that proposed by Freeman (1984) which describes a stakeholder as '*Any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of the organization's objectives*' (p.46). Stakeholder groups have often been segregated into broad categories, such as internal, namely composing of groups or individuals within a firm comprising of employees, shareholders and managers, and external, made of up stakeholders outside the firm, including suppliers, customers, government, pressure groups and competitors (Graham, 2020). However, as Mitchell, Agle and Wood (1997) argue, not all stakeholders and their interests are of equal importance and significance in the eyes of the firm, and stakeholder status is determined by three perceived factors, with the presence of all being required for firm decision-makers to consider an issue as a convincing call for attention. First, legitimacy, which concerns socially expected and acceptable behaviours or structures. Second, power in relation to the ability to control resources. Third, urgency, whereby a claim is pressing and is time sensitive in nature.

In the large firm context, stakeholder relationships are often great in number and thus shallow in depth and significance. By contrast, small firms tend to have a smaller number of closer and more local stakeholder relationships, particularly as such firms are often firmly embedded in their institutional contexts (Spence, Schmidpeter & Habisch, 2003; Lähdesmäki, Siltaoja & Spence, 2019). Small businesses therefore frequently focus attention on a handful of these organisations which constitute their key stakeholders and cultivate strong personal and professional relationships (Brammer, Hojmosse & Marchant, 2012). In the small firm context, stakeholder relationships are a key setting for the practice of values, with evidence suggesting that ensuring stakeholder satisfaction is a key value to many small firms (Stephan, Ascalon & Gorgievski, 2011). For example, the prior research has evidenced the importance to small firms of practising a range of values, including *trust, openness, fairness, respect, solidarity* and *reliability* in the context of their stakeholder relationships (Spence & Lozano, 2000; Hammann, Habisch & Pechlaner, 2009; Chou, Chang & Han, 2016)

Overall, it is clear that stakeholder relationships are a critical means through which firms seek to practise social responsibility. This is perhaps particularly the case in the small firm context, given the embeddedness of such firms within their institutional contexts. As such, small firm stakeholder relationships are a key arena in which small firms seek to practise their values. However, beyond the significance of stakeholder relationships to the practice of social responsibility, such relationships are also a common breeding ground for conflict. Stakeholder conflict and the role of values, particularly disputed values, are discussed in more detail in the following section.

2.6.4 Stakeholder Conflict and Values

Stakeholder conflict and disagreement are common occurrences within organisational life (for instance see, Kujala, Heikkinen & Lehtimäki, 2012 for an in-depth example of a multistakeholder conflict). Inter-stakeholder disagreements are perhaps associated most notoriously with the divergent interests and values of managers and workers that become apparent within periods of mass industrial action (Korpi & Shalev, 1976). Latterly, instances of shareholder rebellion and activism have provided another key example of stakeholder conflict, precipitated by tension between the goals and values of corporate executives and shareholders (Carney, Gedajlovic & Sujit, 2011; Michelon, Rodrigue & Trevisan, 2020).

As discussed in the previous section, small firms often attempt to practise their values through stakeholder relationships. However, divergences in values, objectives and assumptions between small firms and their stakeholders (Mitchell *et al.*, 2011), often referred to as ethical conflict, are likely to arise within such relationships. For instance, in the context of stakeholder relationships with the local community (Miller & Besser, 2000), competitors (Vitell, Diskerson & Festervand, 2000) and suppliers (Baden, Harwood & Woodward, 2009). This conflict may relate to a range of firm beliefs and practices, for instance, the values practised within the context of a particular relationship as well as the corporate social responsibility or broader operational practices of the firm.

Such conflict will be compounded by the power asymmetries which are often present within the external stakeholder relationships of small firms, such as those often found in the context of supply chains (Crook & Combs, 2007). External stakeholders often enjoy significant power over small businesses given their access to resources which may be essential to small businesses' continued success, for example, financial resources, be that in the form of sales or loans, information, access to networks or social support (Street & Cameron, 2007). In this research, misalignments in values which may occur between small firms and external stakeholders are termed 'values disputations', defined as '*instances of tension, dispute or disagreement occurring between the values, and therefore core beliefs, of two parties*'. The word *disputation* is chosen over *conflict*, as the latter is suggestive of a direct and often dramatic struggle which is apparent to both parties involved, whereas *disputations* may be more implicit, unspoken and not entailing confrontation. Given the difficulties associated with identifying

values, within this research values disputations are regarded as a key opportunity and means by which to understand the values a small firm is attempting to practise, as well as how they attempt to maintain fidelity to their values in the face of external stakeholder pressure.

In the following sections, key relationships in which values disputations have been apparent between small firms and external stakeholders in the previous literature are examined. First, values disputations in the context of small firm large firm stakeholder relationships are considered, before the issue of values disputations in small firm-community stakeholder relationships is explored.

2.6.4.1 Small Firm Large Firm Values Disputations

Value disputations are exemplified in circumstances where small businesses face pressure from larger firm customers. Larger businesses, as part of a move towards values-based management, regularly attempt to promote their corporate values through embarking upon and maintaining commercial relationships with businesses which they perceive to share these values (Baden, Harwood & Woodward 2011). As a result, these large businesses, as well as public authorities, may pressurise small businesses, both explicitly and implicitly, to adhere more closely to their values through the assertion of a 'moral monopoly' (Spence & Bourlakis, 2009).

Large businesses are able to engage in such behaviour as they possess high levels of bargaining power within the buyer-supplier relationship, particularly when the supplier is a small business. This is because the buyer's business may represent the majority of the small business' revenue stream and the buyer may easily be able to substitute the goods or services provided by the small business with those from another supplier. Such pressure can be exerted regarding: workers being treated in a fair manner; sustainability actions, such as waste reduction, recycling or energy reduction; attainment of social and environmental management certification; or the reduction of product prices, alteration of payment terms and inventory control (Walker & Jones, 2012; Walker & Preuss, 2008) (see *Table 6* for more detail).

While many of the issues identified in the figure above may initially appear to concern 'commercial' rather than 'values' related issues, a normative thread can often be detected running through these issues. For example, pricing and payment terms are often discussed in terms of *fairness*, quality in relation to *integrity* and operations practices in terms of *authenticity*. These larger organisations, as well as being driven by their own values, are also often passing on pressure to adhere to societal values in the form of consumer and regulatory pressure (Ayuso, Roca & Colomé, 2013).

Area in Which Supplier Pressure Exerted	Specific Issues		Means by which Issues are Monitored and Enforced
Corporate Social Responsibility & Sustainability	Social Issues	Fair treatment of workers: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Payment of minimum/living wage • Health and safety compliance • Maximum working hours enforcement • Attainment of SA8000/ISO26000 certification 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Buyer monitoring of supplier KPIs relating to, for example, timeliness of deliveries or product quality • Supplier audits, involving physical inspections, interviews and documentation inspection • Training provision by buyer • Supplier penalisation, for example, through financial penalties or loss of contract
	Environmental Issues	Sustainability: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Water, waste and energy reduction • Recycling • Emissions reduction • ISO14001 environmental management certification 	
Product or Service Attributes	Product price and quality: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduction of product or service price, such as volume discounts • Increase in product quality, e.g., through implementation and certification of ISO9000 standards • Alteration in nature of product or service to comply with technical standards, for instance, size, colour or packaging to fit with buyers' products or production processes 		
Operational Practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Payment terms, such as modification of payment terms, introduction of supply chain financing • Inventory control, for instance, requirement to adhere to 'just in time' practice 		

Table 6. Supplier Pressure Areas (Walker & Jones, 2012; Walker & Preuss, 2008)

Overall, it is apparent that small firm supplier relationships are a key context in which values disputes may arise in relation to a range of organisational practices, such as those concerning the firm's operations or corporate social responsibility. In the next section, values disputes in the context of another key small firm external stakeholder relationship, namely the small firm local community relationship, are considered.

2.6.4.2 Small Firm Local Community Values Disputations

As previously discussed, small firms often possess strong relationships with parties within their institutional environment. In particular, the local community is often a key stakeholder for many small firms. This is implicitly acknowledged in the 'social licence to operate' which exists between local communities and firms, where a set of expectations from the local community constitutes an informal, uncodified contract between a business and its stakeholders, reflecting the expectations and demands of society (Demuijnck & Fasterling, 2016). The breach of said contract, through lack of adherence to societal expectations regarding its behaviour, can lead to its licence being withdrawn and accompanying penalties being applied, typically in the form of economic sanctions (Lynch-Wood & Williamson, 2007). Such penalties can include social ostracisation, loss of business, loss of community

support, campaigns to prevent businesses opening and business expansion, for example, via opposition to planning permission applications, and difficulty in recruiting employees and sourcing goods and services from the local area (Lähdesmäki & Suutari, 2012).

This is exemplified in instances outlined within the prior literature of conflict in values between tourism-based businesses and local communities (Jamal & Getz, 1999; Kuvan & Akan, 2012) occurring as a result of communities perceiving tourism businesses to be diminishing social capital and community ambience through attracting large numbers of transient individuals into the community. In some communities, planned business openings have been thwarted by locals through heavy resistance, owing to the perception of a lack of fit between the community values and those of a new venture (Tinsley & Lynch, 2008).

Although a lack of consideration for and involvement in the local community are often the most heavily cited reasons for value disputations between local communities and small businesses arising, when small businesses do get involved in community social responsibility activities this can similarly lead to ire from the local community. Besser and Miller (2004) cite examples of businesses becoming involved in community projects, or leadership, which led to tension with the local community. For example, outlining an instance in which a business was boycotted for supporting the construction of a mental health clinic as well as businesses receiving criticism for members being involved with local, community-based institutions, such as city councils, chambers of commerce and school boards.

In summary, stakeholder relationships have become one of the primary media through which firms attempt to practise social responsibility. In the small firm context in particular, given the embeddedness of firms within their institutional settings, stakeholder relationships are pivotal to the practice of values. However, in the course of small firms attempting to practise their values in the context of their relationships with external stakeholders, these values can become disputed, particularly given the power asymmetries present within many of these relationships. Such instances of small firm external stakeholder values disputations provide fertile territory for the investigation of the practice of small firms values as well as the means by which small firms attempt to respond to disputed values and maintain their own values. Accordingly, in order to investigate the *maintenance* of values, particularly with respect to challenge from external stakeholders, the fourth question underpinning this research is:

4. *How do small firms maintain fidelity towards their organisational values, particularly in instances where they face external challenge?*

Together the four research questions underpinning the thesis (see section 2.4.4 for the first three) will allow the overall question of *'How do small firms practise and maintain fidelity towards their organisational values?'* to be answered.

2.7 Conclusions: Chapter Two

This chapter began by reviewing the prior values research, in particular that focused on the organisational context, given the importance of values to organisational culture and ethics. In doing so, it conceptualised the definition of values employed in this thesis, drawing on Rokeach's definition of values as enduring beliefs which possess inherent moral significance of bearing, and noted the significance of values to small firms but the paucity of research into small firm organisational values. Following this, the definition of a small business was clarified as those firms which possess fewer than 250 employees, and the idiosyncratic characteristics of small firms, such as informality, owner-manager influence and resource paucity, were discussed. Finally, the notion of social responsibility was considered, especially the importance of stakeholder relationships to the practice of values in small firms. As part of this discussion, the potential for values disputations, instances of tension and conflict between values, to arise and the accompanying need for small firms to attempt to maintain fidelity to their values, were considered.

Overall, it clear that values are a key research object within the social sciences, particularly within the field of management in relation to the study of organisations, where research into values has expanded in recent years. Research undertaken into values from a small firm perspective has evidenced their influence and importance, particularly with respect to the social responsibility practice and ethical orientation of such firms. However, this research has typically focused upon and privileged the values of owner-managers, which has led to a gap in understanding regarding the practice and maintenance of values in the small firm context. In order to address this gap and provide a fuller picture of the practice of organisational values in small firms, as discussed in section 2.4.4, this research will consider the nature of small firm organisational values (research question one), what small firms consider the role of their organisational values to be (research question two) and how small firms seek to enact their organisational values (research question three). In addition, and as considered in section 2.6, the means by which small firms attempt to maintain their values in the face of external stakeholder pressure will also be investigated (research question four).

To theoretically frame and ground this research, John Dewey's work on Pragmatist ethics will be used. Pragmatist ethics provide fertile theoretical grounding for the research as, unlike the normative theories presented in section 2.4.2, it does not prescribe universal, normative answers to ethical questions and dilemmas. This is important within this research as the organisational values of the small

firms will provide the normative grounding of the research. Pragmatist ethics also focuses on context, which is critical in small firms, given the heterogeneity of the small firm context and the moral issues which small firms are likely to face. Pragmatist ethics also centres on habit, a key consideration given the focus of this research on values-led organisational practices, as well as inquiry and how moral dilemmas are responded to, an issue pertinent to this research given its interest in values disputation and maintenance of small firm values over time. Accordingly, within the following chapter the Pragmatist movement, the application of Pragmatism to research in the domain of business and society and Pragmatist ethics are considered.

Chapter Three: Theoretical Framework: Pragmatist ethics

3.0 Introduction

This chapter introduces the Pragmatist movement and the associated notion of Pragmatist ethics. First, a general outline of the Pragmatist movement and its main principles are provided in tandem with some common criticisms that have been levelled at the movement. This is followed by a discussion of Pragmatism as a philosophical stance and the employment of Pragmatist thought within the field of management studies. Finally, John Dewey's notion of Pragmatist ethics is considered, concentrating in particular on how the latter relates to contrasting ethical theories and the value of applying Dewey's understanding of ethics to the notion of values within a small firm context.

3.1 The Pragmatist Movement

'Pragmatism, according to Mr. James, is a temper of mind, an attitude; it is also a theory of the nature of ideas and truth; and, finally, it is a theory about reality.' (Dewey, 1908, p.85)

The Pragmatist movement was founded in the late 19th century by a handful of key thinkers based in the United States, namely: Charles Sanders Peirce, William James, John Dewey, George Herbert Mead and Oliver Wendell Holmes (Ormerod, 2006). The title of the movement stemmed from a borrowing of the word 'Pragmatic' by Peirce from Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, which itself derived from the Greek *πράγμα*, meaning action (Kaushik & Walsh, 2019). James described the Pragmatist as an individual *who 'turns away from abstraction and insufficiency, from verbal solutions, from bad a priori reasons, from fixed principles, closed systems and pretended absolutes and origins'* and instead *'turns toward concreteness and adequacy, towards facts, towards action and towards power'* (James, 2009, p. 71).

The movement drew on, and was heavily influenced by, a rich and diverse set of historical and philosophical ideas and thinking, including those from the Ancient Greek philosophers, British Enlightenment-era thinkers and German Idealists. In addition, it drew on the methods of the natural sciences in relation to epistemological reliability (Almeder, 2007; Anderson, 2010). Despite the movement's perennial association with the 19th century and its founders, it was not confined to the late 19th and early 20th centuries, as throughout the 20th century prominent neo-Pragmatist thinkers, including Richard Rorty, Hilary Putnam and Donald Davidson, continued, extended and revised its founding preoccupations.

Pragmatism developed as a problem-centric philosophy, in stark contrast to the dominant mode of philosophy of the time, and centred on inquiry into, and resolution of, real-world problems. As a corollary of this, Pragmatism impressed the salience of context and experience in mediating the notion

of truth and thus dismissed the existence of a neutral position from which inquiry could be conducted (Lorino, 2018). The Pragmatist approach represented a shift away from a mathematical model of knowledge, which had arguably operated as the dominant academic paradigm since the time of the early Greek mathematicians. Pierce adopted a non-linear alternative to the foundationalist, mathematical model in which a circular process of knowledge, characterised by an unstable relationship between doubt and belief, was welcomed into the process of theory formulation. This scientific approach to knowledge, upon which Pragmatism was based, was that of '*a posteriori, fallibilistic, contextualized approach to knowledge*,' (Rockmore, 2005, p.263) and contrasted with the mathematical model in which a priori standard is applied in the posteriori realm and, in certain instances, the real and mathematics are conflated.

As a result, Pragmatism's principles and thought touch, and have been brought to bear, upon a number of foundational ideas and issues within the social sciences, including those relating to ontology, epistemology, ethics, empiricism and logic (Jasper, 2010). Such influence is evidenced by an enhanced focus on, and employment of, Pragmatist theory in a range of fields, including: the 'strategy as practice' movement within organisation studies (Miettinen, Samra-Fredericks & Yanow, 2009) as well as in the field of valuation studies in relation to values and valuation (Hennion, 2017).

While attempts have been made to encapsulate a holistic summary of the Pragmatist movement within a single definition, such as that by Farjoun, Ansell and Boin (2015), who specify that Pragmatism is '*a set of core ideas or "principles," which include a rich and behaviorally plausible model of human nature, an emphasis on the interplay of action and meaning, a strong distrust of dualisms ("means versus ends"), and an appreciation of recursive influence*,' (p.1788), the movement embodied a rich and diverse range of thought and theory. The movement was not unitary in character, indeed, arguably one its most enduring characteristics was a commitment to plurality relating, for example, to metaphysics and morality (Singer, 1992) and further evidenced by its commitment to anti-foundationalism. In spite of this, some commonalities and areas of overlap persisted within the movement relating to a handful of key areas of thought. Namely, those concerning problem-centrism and meliorism (Gross, 2009); fallibilism and logical inquiry (Margolis, 1998); contextualism (Fish, 1998); and truth, learning and experience (Elkjaer, 2004). These will be briefly unpacked in the following section. This description of the principles of Pragmatism will be followed by an examination of some common criticisms levelled at the Pragmatist movement.

3.1.1 Problem-Centrism & Meliorism

As Dewey argued in an address in 1927, there exists '*a contemporary philosophic movement, popularly known as pragmatism, which, discontented with the current separation of theory and practise,*

knowledge and action, regards thought and the beliefs which proceed from it as themselves modes of action and strives to envisage them in their directive office in conduct' (Dewey, 1928, p.3). The classical Pragmatists contended that substantive, real-world problems should be the focal point of thought and action, instead of the generation of abstracted, universal principles, which they argued did not provide solutions to such matters (Emirbayer & Maynard, 2011).

They further argued that human beings are innately creative problem solvers who employ thought, and more importantly *inquiry*, to guide action in the face of problematic situations, dilemmas and doubt. To quote Pierce on the subject, *'the irritation of doubt causes a struggle to attain a state of belief. I shall term this struggle inquiry, though it must be admitted that this is sometimes not a very apt designation...with the doubt, therefore, the struggle begins, and with the cessation of doubt it ends'* (Pierce, 2014, p.55). The employment of such a process of inquiry as the Pragmatists envisioned it involved the consideration of potential courses of action and beliefs to combat the 'problematic' when it arose (Gross, 2009).

Although, the movement's focus on real-world affairs may appear a seemingly banal proposition to the modern reader, such a proposal was, at that time, a dramatic shift away from, and implicit critique of, the abstract and academic rational philosophy of the 19th century (Elkjaer & Simpson, 2011). A number of Pragmatists hence viewed Pragmatism as *'a return to the idea of philosophy which prevailed when reflective thought was young and lusty, eager to engage in combat in the public arena, instead of living a sheltered and protected life'* (Dewey, 1928, pp.3–4). Given this, the Pragmatists prescribed an emphasis on the consequences of actions taken at the individual level and the value of these consequences with respect to solving real-world problems.

An important underlying feature of the Pragmatist stance was a belief in meliorism, or philosophical hope; the notion that progress is a possibility and through such progress improvements, both at an individual level as well as to the world, can be made (Koopman, 2006). Throughout much of Pierce, James and Dewey's work lies an implicit, if not explicit, hopefulness that through the development of a Pragmatist attitude, and its constituent methods and thinking, real-world problems may become the preserve and priority of philosophy. In employing such an emphasis, the Pragmatist stance endeavours to resolve such problems, allowing the actualisation of progress and therefore both the world and lived human experience to be improved (Stroud, 2009).

3.1.2 Fallibilism & Logical Inquiry

In order to centre attention on and aid in the resolution of real-world problems, Pierce developed a set of theoretical assumptions concerning the nature and development of knowledge. These assumptions constitute Pierce's Principle of Fallibilism and provided the theoretical foundations for his method and process of inquiry. The first tenet of Pierce's Principle of Fallibilism was that it is possible for humans to

hold mistaken beliefs. The second tenet is that through the deployment of self-corrective inquiry, it is possible, and in some senses likely, that a society of inquirers can discover their own mistakes and make progress towards unearthing the true state of affairs (Haack, 1979). The third tenet relates to the metaphysics of inquiry, specifically that the Principle of Fallibilism *'is hence a doctrine potentially capable of bringing its regulative ideal into line with a constitutive principle'* (Margolis, 1998, p.539).

Pierce viewed inquiry as the struggle to usurp doubt and reach a state of belief (Misak, 2004). Through the process of inquiry, Pierce, and particularly Dewey, argued that beliefs and knowledge could be generated relevant to real-world phenomena and issues (Psillos, 2011). In the pursuit of constructing a specified method of inquiry based on the Principle of Fallibilism, Pierce drew from the work of Aristotle and developed and centred the method around the notion of abductive reasoning. Deductive reasoning is typically described as movement to a specific prediction from a general theory, which contrasts with the process of inductive reasoning, as the latter involves movement towards general theory and explanation from specific cases. Abductive reasoning similarly seeks to move towards general theory, but its primary focus is the movement from particular observations to specific explanations in order to develop a narrow explanation of local observations (Behfar & Okhuysen, 2018). Within the process of abductive reasoning, provisional and speculative conjectures and hypotheses are formulated, developed and selected, allowing movement from initial inquiry to the formation of explanations or reasoning which best suit a given situation (Folger & Stein, 2017). Within Pierce's work, this process of abduction drew on a belief in human beings' innate ability to think and reason based on making inferences. For instance, he believed this was demonstrated through human beings' capacity to backwards reason to an antecedent from a consequent, such as where a surprising effect may be used to cast backwards to locate a cause which, up until that point, had been unknown (Wirth, 1999).

Under a process of abductive reasoning, to verify proposed hypotheses they must be tested, assessed and refined in order to ascertain which are most likely to provide 'true' explanations (Niiniluoto, 1998), with the simpler hypotheses being tested before the more complex (Burks, 1946). The process of abductive reasoning is comparable to the process of diagnostic inquiry in which doctors engage, involving the use of evidence to construct preliminary and potential diagnoses, which are refined through the collection of further evidence to determine the most likely explanation of a patient's symptoms (Behfar & Okhuysen, 2018). Importantly, the products of abductive reasoning are considered the most plausible, current answers or knowledge but are always subject to revision on the basis of further inquiry.

Through the employment of inductive and deductive reasoning alongside that of abductive

reasoning, Pierce argued that greater certainty could be gained regarding real-world phenomena. Deductive reasoning facilitates the generation of testable consequences from these abductively driven hypotheses, through allowing assessment of their validity and soundness, while inductive reasoning aids in assessing the validity of the hypotheses through drawing on the relevant evidence (Douven, 2017). Therefore, these differing forms of reasoning allow a logical process of inquiry to be undertaken and thus a clear explanation of the world to be attained through the formulation of sound, original hypotheses, which may be tested through experimental verification (El Khachab, 2013).

3.1.3 Contextualism

Linked to the issue of problem centrism and logical inquiry, the Pragmatists also stressed the importance of context. They asserted that there exists no difference between the world that we as human beings see and perceive and the world that exists outside our minds (Long, 2002). The human condition, according to Pragmatists, is characterised by a stream of experience, and we are constrained by the environment in which we are embedded (Martela, 2015). As we are unable to ever break free of our context or environment, the veracity of our knowledge claims will always be inherently mediated (Pynn, 2015).

Consonant with this, James contended that *'neither the whole of truth nor the whole of good is revealed to any single observer, although each observer gains a partial superiority of insight from the peculiar position in which he stands'* (James, 2009, p. 26). Under such a view, there can be no such thing as pure reason or pure logic, from which humans can assess things in a dispassionate and disinterested fashion (White, 2010). Judgements taken in response to real-world problems are, hence, inherently bound to the context of both the problem and the individual in question. Specific instances, experiences and real-world problems faced by individuals are perceived through the 'personal lens' of their previous experiences, and thus whether a belief can be considered knowledge and the extent to which it is justified is dependent on the context of the believer and the evaluator respectively. James argued that it is legitimate to believe in some propositions when such a choice meets certain and specific contextual circumstances, even when it cannot be settled by intellectual means (Hookway, 2011).

In contrast to abstract consideration of 'individuals' and contextual salience, Dewey, drawing on the work of Hobbes, analysed the importance of context in relation to specific professional roles and offices. With public office at the centre of this thought, Dewey contended that individuals who take public office should first and foremost be committed to serving the public interest. Similarly, he argued that individual citizens, as voters, have an important role to fulfil as a public officer. However, he also noted that, *'since officers of the public have a dual makeup and capacity, what conditions and what techniques are necessary in order that insight, loyalty and energy may be enlisted on the side of the*

public and political role?' (Dewey, 1946, p.82). The conflict that Dewey refers to is that which may arise between individual desires and habits and the context, duties and responsibilities attached to particular roles and offices.

To combat this, he asserted these roles should be fulfilled by individuals who demonstrate virtue and conduct appropriate to the public office and who will be led by the responsibilities and duties of their role and office, consequently suggesting an individual propensity for suitability towards particular roles and contexts (Pedersen, 2020). This example laid out by Dewey serves to illustrate that context may be brought through undertaking roles, as they provide expectations, duties and responsibilities to the individual and their actions.

3.1.4 Truth, Experience and Learning

Resting on the notions of pluralism and fluidity, the Pragmatists viewed truth as relative rather than absolute (Koopman, 2006; Watson, 2011). Anti-foundationalism, the rejection of founding principles and universalism in favour of a focus on substantive human practices, un-reliant on overarching philosophical commitments, was a key philosophical commitment of this position. As Brint, Weaver and Garmon (1995) argue, anti-foundationalism specifically implies that *'as situationally and contextually bound, we cannot obtain a warrant for certitude about our beliefs by basing them on transcendental or metaphysical entities'* (p.225).

In essence, the Pragmatists posited that all experience and knowledge is mediated by individual interpretation, which in turn is moulded by previous experience. Individuals' world views cannot, and never will, be the same. Knowledge cannot be directly accessed from an external source but requires the organisation of, and concentration on, experience (Rosenthal, 2005). In line with this view, experience does not act as a barrier to knowledge but can instead be considered a condition of it, and, as many argue, science and experience should not therefore be considered antithetical to one another (Gouinlock, 1978). As the meanings which individuals attach to life are never independent from their actions and history, they cannot *'be reduced to entities that have any independent ontological reality'* (Simpson, 2018, p.59).

The Pragmatists asserted that individuals have the capacity to generate knowledge and discern beliefs through active processes of introspection, interrogation, reflexivity and logic, as previously discussed in relation to problem-centrism and logical inquiry (section 3.1.2). Nonetheless, these are intrinsically mediated and hence cannot be absolute truths. Warranted beliefs may arise, as actions can be repeatedly engaged in by individuals in *similar situations*, with similar outcomes, which generate predictable outcomes. Yet these will always retain an element of provisionality, given the lack of repeatability of specific situations and experiences (Kaushik & Walsh, 2019). This does not render such

truths obsolete. Linked to the notion of problem-centrism, Pragmatists believe such relative truths possess utility, as they can allow individuals to generate ends or outcomes that possess value (Statler & Salovaara, 2017). James further argued that true beliefs are verifiable, via confirmation or corroboration, but only over the longer term (Haack, 1976).

Given his background in education, Dewey was especially interested in the notions of truth, experience and learning. He argued that experience is contingent on the process of living and is dependent on motor response, thinking and sensation. It is simultaneously a process and a product which occurs within, and as a result of, the environment (Elkjaer, 2004). On the subject of the 'truth', Dewey argued that the term 'warranted assertability' was preferable, as the truth is what the method of inquiry warrants us in asserting.

3.1.5 Theoretical Divergences within the Pragmatist Movement

Despite significant overlap between the work of Pierce, James and Dewey as well as evidence of the significant influence Pierce, as founder of the movement, had on James and Dewey, there exist theoretical and conceptual differences, as well as contrasting focal points, between each of their bodies of scholarly work. Pierce's work, for instance, has been argued to centre on meaning. This is evident within, for instance, his Sign Theory; a core part of which centres on the difference between what a sign stands for versus the means by which it is interpreted and may be further interpreted and re-interpreted. As Greenlee (1969) argues, in contrast to Pierce's focus on meaning, for James, Pragmatism was a doctrine of truth, evident within repeated assertions which argued that '*thinking operates exclusively for the sake of purposes and ends that have their origin in immediately felt emotional and practical wants and concerns*' (Thayer, 1981, p.141). For James, truth and satisfaction were inter-related concerns, with ideas being 'true' if they functioned in a certain way.

Such theoretical divergences between the work of Pierce, James and Dewey are also apparent in relation to the differing ways in which they considered the notion of 'truth' within their respective works. While the original Pragmatist theory of truth is attributable to Pierce and was adopted by Dewey, its development by James received substantial criticism, with James himself noting that '*my failure in making converts to my conception of truth seems, if I may judge by what I hear in conversation, almost complete*' (James, 2012, p.136). Pierce viewed truth to be the climax of inquiry and demonstrated little interest in individual truths but rather on the totality of these truths. James, while sharing Pierce's view that truth corresponds with reality, paid scant attention to the notion of inquiry within his works and focused on how truth was and could be viewed by individuals. James proposed that 'truth' is satisfactory to believe as it safe from being discredited by future experience. This contrast highlighted in itself the differing attitudes towards abstraction between Pierce and James, the former of whom warmly welcomed it, the latter being more distrustful. Meanwhile, Dewey shared Pierce's view that

truth was the end of inquiry but replaced the word truth with 'warranted assertability', arguing that truth simply describes certain beliefs to which we bestow the title of 'knowledge'. Dewey shared James' belief that truth was therefore coherent with experience and thus verifiable (Haack, 1976).

Divergence within the work of the original Pragmatist scholars is also apparent in their differing conceptualisations of experience. As Smith (1985) notes, each of the three scholars came from differing disciplinary backgrounds; Pierce was primarily a mathematician driven by interests relating to logic and the speculative, James was a humanistic psychologist interested in concerns of a moral and religious nature, whereas Dewey was an educationalist. Pierce frequently emphasised pervasive experience accumulated over the course of an individual's life and the effect of this on individual habit and thinking. James, on the other hand, concentrated to a greater extent on individual ownership and perception of actual experience and specified events of experiences and their consequences. Dewey concurred with James' view that there exist differing ways in which experience can be interpreted and many contexts from which these same events may be viewed, but he emphasised the role of construed experience and transformation in resolving problematic situations through the evolution of indeterminate and problematic situations into determinate and unproblematic ones (Smith, 1985).

Such inconsistency within the Pragmatist movement led to a number of scholars assailing the movement as a whole as well as specific facets of its thought and reasoning. An overview of such criticisms is outlined in the following section.

3.1.6 Critique of Pragmatism

Although Pragmatist thought was often predicated on implicitly and explicitly critiquing extant theory and thinking and has inarguably influenced a wide range of scholarly disciplines, including law, politics, philosophy, sociology and ethics, inevitably it has itself not escaped criticism. Such criticisms can broadly be broken down into three main categories, namely: definitional specificity and unity, theoretical clarity, consistency and justifiability, and overlaps between the movement and positivism. Each of these categories of criticism will be elucidated in turn in this discussion.

Over the course of their lives, the three main figureheads of the movement, Pierce, James and Dewey, published in substantial volumes. As previously indicated, their work often demonstrated differing focal points, approaches and conceptualisations but still related to the same issues and phenomena. This is, for instance, evident within the lack of agreement regarding even the most fundamental of matters, including the very definition of Pragmatism itself, between the three scholars (Elkjaer & Simpson, 2011). This has led to critics, such as Lovejoy (1908), arguing that the Pragmatist movement lacked clear and consistent theoretical unity and identity, noting that '*the Pragmatist school itself seems, thus far, more distinguished for originality, inventiveness, and a keen vision for the motes*

in the eye of the intellectualist, than for patience in making distinctions or the habit of self-analysis' (Lovejoy, 1908, p.6). A key justification for his criticisms derived from his reading of a number of Pragmatist works, through which he argued that 13 different philosophical positions became apparent and identifiable.

More recently, such debate has intensified as the individual strands of Pragmatist thought have been further analysed and contested. Mounce (1997), for example, argues that although James' work was instrumental to how influential Pragmatism was to become, his work was in fact a misinterpretation of that of Pierce. Mounce posits that James, and later Dewey, broke away from Pierce's core Pragmatist doctrine through subscribing to extreme empiricism as well as to metaphysical anti-realism. Mounce attributes Rorty's neo-Pragmatist, anti-realist philosophy, which has been likened to positivism in disguise, to this philosophical repositioning of classical Pragmatism on the parts of James and Dewey (Suckiel, 1998).

Such definitional and theoretical contestation has prompted questioning and debate concerning how Pragmatism should be delineated as a philosophical movement as well as which principles should constitute the essential foundations of the movement (Thayer, 1975). This is evident within debates over whether Pragmatism, in its current usage, has become divorced from many of the core ideas and commitments of its original founders. For instance, while some scholars now regard Pragmatism as a value-free method of inquiry, others insist on recognition and adherence to the philosophical and ethical commitments of the founders with regard to ideas such as pluralism, diversity and democracy (Kloppenber, 1996). Such a lack of clarity when it comes to the theoretical boundaries of the Pragmatist movement has arguably been further compounded by the development of the neo-Pragmatist movement and the tension between the beliefs and reasoning of classical Pragmatism and neo-Pragmatism (O'Shea, 2014).

Rorty, perhaps the most notable of the neo-Pragmatists, unequivocally refashioned the classical Pragmatists' notions of truth and inquiry, arguing that under a philosophical conception of truth, *'to call a statement true is just to pay it a metaphysical compliment as a statement about which we agree'* (Haack, 2004, p.30). Rorty reconceptualised inquiry as a process of negotiation with the intent of reaching agreement; a far cry from the classical Pragmatists' notion of inquiry as a process for unearthing truth. Even Putnam, who strongly supports many of the tenets of classical Pragmatism, including its anti-foundationalism and the subject of practice, has repudiated elements of classical Pragmatism. This is apparent in his rejection of the representationalism of the classical Pragmatists, evidenced by his avoidance of accounts of reality that accord importance to preconceptual experiences. This is in direct contrast to the work of Dewey, which affords salience to lived or primary experience (Hildebrand, 2000).

Further, specific criticisms of elements of Pragmatism are wide ranging and relate to notions including validity and power. King (1903) criticises Pragmatism on the grounds that although the movement asserts the salience of knowledge, it fails to articulate the evolution of knowledge in response to needs as well as in setting criteria for the assessment of the validity of such knowledge. In a similar vein, scholars have argued that unrecognised tension exists between the Pragmatist notion of truth, where truth is considered synonymous with the verified, and the dynamic nature of verifiability, where statements may be true at one time but false at another (Perkins, 1952).

Pragmatism has also been condemned for failing to critically account for the role of power and power structures or for treating the issue of power in a naïve or overly idealistic manner (White, 2004). Dewey's work on democracy in particular, with its emphasis on cooperation and consensus, has been used by critics to suggest that the Pragmatists considered conflict as merely attributable to a paucity of 'scientific' spirit, a lack of communication and insufficient time to solve common problems (Wolfe, 2012; Hogan, 2016).

Particular criticism of Pragmatism has emanated from those critical scholars who have repeatedly argued for the existence of an affinity between Pragmatism and positivism (Kadlec, 2006). Such an argument is perhaps unsurprising given the number of apparently overlapping principles and focal points between the two movements, including that of the value of logical inquiry, the value of seeking resolutions to real-world problems and the salience of knowledge to the process of verification (Putnam, 1995). As early as the 1930s, scholars began drawing links between the two movements, as seen in the publication of Charles Morris' book *'Pragmatism, Logical Positivism and Scientific Empiricism'* in 1937, in which he argues in favour of the complementarity of the movements as well as suggesting that their respective adherents should collaborate in the pursuit of a new form of scientific empiricism. Critics also viewed Pierce's determination to embrace the importance of scientific method and logical inquiry, and his propensity to look to science to gain inspiration for what philosophy could become, as evidence of the supposed significant overlap between positivism and Pragmatism (Gruender, 1982).

Notwithstanding the challenges and criticisms levelled at the Pragmatist movement and its constituent theory, it remains a touchstone for scholars working in a range of disciplines. Within the subsequent section the notion of Pragmatism as a philosophical stance is introduced, allowing less focus on minor disagreements between the Pragmatist thinkers and a greater focus on the attitudes and dispositions that characterise the stance.

3.1.7 Pragmatism as a Philosophical Stance

In his book *'The Empirical Stance'*, (van Fraassen, 2002) argues that philosophies can be considered as stances, arguing that *'a philosophical position can consist in a stance (attitude, commitment, approach,*

a cluster of such – possibly including some propositional attitudes such as beliefs as well. Such a stance can of course be expressed and may involve or presuppose some beliefs as well, but cannot be simply equated with having beliefs or making assertions about what there is’ (p.47-48). This, he asserts, is necessary as philosophy is distinct from science and philosophers, in contrast to scientists, are not ‘objectifying enquirers’.

In relation to Pragmatism, considering the movement or philosophy as a stance allows for a certain tolerance of elements of ambiguity and disunification between the classical Pragmatist works, given the characterisation of a stance as attitudinal or commitment based. Moreover, and more critically, it implies the sanctioning of a commitment to, and application of, a Pragmatism-based approach in order to facilitate tentative analysis and judgement, while disallowing dogmatic adherence to Pragmatist-based beliefs. As Fish discusses, the Pragmatist movement is well suited to be considered a stance, as it is inherently imbued with elements of criticality and humility given its commitment to pluralism, provisionality and anti-foundationalism, suggesting that *‘if Pragmatism points out that its rivals cannot deliver what they promise – once and for all relevant answers to always relevant questions – pragmatism should itself know enough not to promise anything, or even to recommend anything’* (Fish, 1998, p.419).

Such argumentation is also consonant with elements of James’ theorisation. James claimed the philosophical position of empiricism and in the process characterised such a position as attitudinally centred rather than merely being another description of what the world is like; *‘only an attitude of orientation, is what the pragmatic method means’* (James, 2009, p. 73). Consistent with this, he claimed that conclusions should not be regarded as facts but instead hypotheses, which may be subject to revision at a later date on the basis of experience, and, further to this, we may never infallibly know if we have reached the ‘truth’ (van Fraassen, 2002). In making such an assertion regarding the nature of Pragmatism, James draws on Panini’s apt metaphor of Pragmatism as a hotel. This hotel, according to Panini, possesses a corridor shared by all its inhabitants which facilitates access to individual rooms where scholars use the Pragmatist method or approach to investigate and pursue a whole host of phenomena.

Pragmatism *‘at the outset, at least, it stands for no particular results. It has no dogmas, and no doctrines save its method... it lies in the midst of our theories, like a corridor in a hotel. Innumerable chambers open out of it. In one you may find a man writing an atheistic volume; in the next someone on his knees praying for faith and strength; in a third a chemist investigating a body’s properties. In a fourth a system of idealistic metaphysics is being excogitated; in a fifth the impossibility of metaphysics is being shown. But they all own the corridor, and all must pass through it if they want a practicable way of getting into or out of their respective rooms’* (James, 1907, p.42).

Given the discussion of Pragmatism as a stance within this section and the emphasis of this research on the study of small organisations, the means by which a Pragmatist stance has, up until this point, been employed within the field of management studies will be addressed in the following section.

3.2 Pragmatism & Management Studies

In recent years, interest in, as well as application of, the Pragmatist school of thought has heightened within the field of management studies: as Weick argues; *'the virtue of the Pragmatist tradition has been its ability to address issues in organizations that matter to people and point to different ways of organizing, either through new theoretical frameworks or through conceptual provocation'* (2010, p.275). As indicated by Weick, such interest has been driven by renewed appreciation of the novel theoretical and practical insights that Pragmatist philosophy has the potential to bring (Farjoun, Ansell & Boin, 2015; Simpson & den Hond, 2021) as well as the sharp contrast it provides to entrenched narratives and mainstream theories within contemporary management studies. This is evident, for instance, in relation to the study of practice within the sub-field of organisation studies (for notable example see Simpson, 2009).

Consistent with this viewpoint, Pragmatism has been hailed as a body of thought capable of bringing fresh perspectives to narrow issues within the field. For example, demonstrated within the business and society literature in the work of Jensen and Sandstrom (2013), who employ Pragmatism to facilitate a repositioned notion of stakeholder theory which may yield greater value in practice by firms, as well as in the work of Ferraro, Etzion and Gehman (2015), who use Pragmatist theory to re-conceptualise the means by which so called 'grand challenges' are addressed.

Pragmatism has also been employed to redefine and reconceptualise broader issues within management studies, such as those related to epistemology, research ethics, methods and the decoupling of theoretical advancements and enhancement of substantive practices (Watson, 2011; Powell, 2019). Importantly, Pragmatism has been proposed as a means by which to construct a 'third-way' and break away from the positivist-anti-positivist dualism (Martela, 2015). Positivism is often described by critics as being characterised by 'Cartesian anxiety', an apprehension of the nihilism and relativism which may arise from departure from mainstream Western scientific reason based on rational scientific principles. Equally, critics argue anti-positivism, typically interpretivism, to be simply an inversion of positivism, given its unbending focus on pure subjectivism (Ruwhiu & Cone, 2010). Pragmatism has therefore been proposed as an epistemological alternative to both positivism and anti-positivism, as it promotes an emphasis on the resolution of real-world problems and assessment of the utility of knowledge based on substantive impact (Fendt, Kaminska-Labbé & Sachs, 2008; Morgan, 2014)

Pragmatist thought within the field of management studies has predominantly been applied within the sub-field of organisations studies, but it has also, to a lesser extent, been applied within other sub-fields, including human resource management (Watson, 2010), accounting (Baker & Schaltegger, 2015) and project management (Buchan & Simpson, 2020). Of primary interest to this research is the prior application of Pragmatism within the field of business and society, which is addressed in the next section.

3.2.1 Pragmatism and Business and Society Research

While a few, disparate scholarly works applied a Pragmatist stance to issues relating to ethics in the context of business (for example, Frederick & Petry, 1990; Wicks, 1990; Quinn *et al.*, 1997), it was arguably the work of Margolis (1998), Wicks and Freeman (1998) and Rosenthal and Buchholz (1999) that brought Pragmatism into more frequent usage within the field. In particular, as these latter authors addressed and argued strongly in favour of the specific benefits and advantages of incorporating Pragmatist theory into the field.

Margolis (1998) drew on the work of Dewey to assert that the field of business ethics should show a greater orientation towards creating and promoting methods for encouraging people to act in an ethical manner and should shift attention away from normative and empirical trends. This was justified on the grounds that within business organisations there is a propensity for individuals to engage in misconduct. Wicks and Freeman (1998) similarly argued that the employment of Pragmatism could re-orientate the field of organisation studies towards helping people live better lives, which would allow more room for the study of ethics within the field. In particular, they posited that the epistemological positions of positivism and anti-positivism marginalise ethical concerns within the field in contrast to a Pragmatist perspective, which would highlight ethical concerns. Rosenthal and Buchholz (1999) engaged in a more theoretical and in-depth application of Pragmatist theory to business ethics, introducing the value of classical Pragmatism to the study of business ethics and discussing Pragmatism in relation to a number of contemporary issues, such as environmentalism, globalisation and consumerism. They also introduced the notion of a Pragmatic theory of the corporation, concentrating on the notions of community relations and well-being and arguing in favour of the corporation as a moral being which possesses moral agency.

As a result, the utilisation of Pragmatism as a theoretical approach became, in a relative sense, increasingly widespread within the field. Elements of Pragmatist theory have since been employed as a theoretical lens to examine the separation of technology and ethics (Martin & Freeman, 2004), the practice of integrity (Jacobs, 2004), ethical decision-making (McVea, 2007), ethics and entrepreneurialism (Surie & Ashley, 2008), environmental ethics and competitive advantage (York, 2009), ethics and strategy (Singer, 2010), corporate social responsibility standards (de Colle, Henriques

& Sarasvathy, 2014), ethical consumption (Hiller & Woodall, 2019) and institutionalism and values (Risi, 2020).

Critical scholars have voiced concerns regarding the potential for certain interpretations of Pragmatism, including those which often conflate Pragmatism with positivism, to renew and embed positivist and managerialist tendencies (for example, see Painter-Morland & ten Bos, 2016). They argue that Pragmatism fails to consider the role of power or to seek to question and evaluate wider ethical concerns, such as the nature of the capitalist production system, and instead may be used to justify the introduction of ever more rules, codes and regulation (Visser, 2019).

In summary, it is evident that Pragmatist thought has started and continues to influence the field of management studies. Elements of Pragmatist theory are to be found within the sub-field of business and society, but its usage overall remains limited, and it is a theory which has neither become mainstream in its application nor been well explored.

Given the nature of the present study, the Pragmatist works that are of particular interest are those concerning ethics. The Pragmatist scholar who wrote widely upon, and is most frequently associated with, ethics is John Dewey, who dealt with ethics in a range of his works. While Dewey's work on democracy and education partially dealt with ethics as a concern, his book co-authored with James Tufts concentrated solely on ethics and morality and was simply entitled '*Ethics*'. The next section considers the work of John Dewey and his work on conceptualising ethics from a Pragmatist standpoint. First, John Dewey's critique of classical ethical philosophy is outlined, followed by a description of Dewey's own ethical theory and justification of the applicability of Dewey's work on ethics to understanding values within small firms.

3.3 Dewey's Pragmatist Moral Philosophy

'That philosophy is a mode of reflection, often of a subtle and penetrating sort, goes without saying. The charge that is brought against the non-empirical method of philosophizing is not that it depends upon theorizing, but that it fails to use refined, secondary products as a path pointing and leading back to something in primary experience... Not tested by being employed to see what it leads to in ordinary experience and what new meanings it contributes, this subject matter becomes arbitrary, aloof, – what is called "abstract" when that word is used in a bad sense to designate something which exclusively occupies a realm of its own without contact with the things of ordinary experience' (Dewey, 1958, p.6).

John Dewey succeeded Charles Sander Peirce and William James as arguably the foremost thinker and proponent of classical Pragmatist philosophy, directing his thought and writings towards a broad range

of social concerns that included education, politics, justice and democracy (Ormerod, 2006). In spite of substantial overlap between many of the works that constitute his scholarly canon, within the context of this research, Dewey's work on ethics is the focal point. Accordingly, this section centres around Dewey's work on ethics. Firstly, Dewey's critique of classical philosophical ethics is outlined, followed by a discussion of Dewey's work on the psychological and sociological development of morality. This is rounded off with a summary of Dewey's notion of Pragmatist ethics.

3.3.1 Dewey's Critique of Classical Ethical Philosophy

Dewey broadly defined ethics as *'the science that deals with conduct, in so far as this is considered as right or wrong, good or bad'* (Dewey & Tufts, 1909, p.1), describing moral conduct as *'activity called forth and directed by ideas of value or worth, where the values concerned are so mutually incompatible as to require consideration and selection before an overt action is entered upon'* (Dewey & Tufts, 1909, p.209). In line with broader Pragmatist ideals, particularly those of anti-foundationalism, Dewey argued that attempts in the modern world to identify ultimate moral ends or overarching ethical principles were futile: *'for recourse to casuistry is the only conclusion which can be drawn from belief in fixed universal principles... Every act, every deed is individual. What is the sense in having fixed general rules, commandments, laws, unless they are such as to confer upon individual cases of action (where alone instruction is finally needed) something of their own infallible certainty?'* (Dewey, 1922, p.240). This he attributed to the importance of contextualism and the dynamic nature of the modern world; a world characterised by the perennial existence of value plurality and conflict (Anderson, 2020).

3.3.1.1 Dewey's Critique of Teleological, Deontological and Virtue-Based Theories

Consonant with this viewpoint, Dewey argued that although many pre-existing ethical theories may at first seem intelligent, their applicability to real life moral problems is often questionable. He further disagreed with the dichotomy between moral theory centred on doing good, such as Kantian ethics, and moral theory centred on being good, notably virtue ethics. Instead he argued that the way in which individuals make moral judgements suggests that both character and conduct are interdependent and inseparable features of moral experience (Fernando Pappas, 1997b).

Dewey thus regarded many classic works on ethics as 'pre-scientific' (Anton, 1965), with each of the main sub-bodies of normative ethical theory – teleological, deontological and virtue-based – dependent on overarching principles and reliant on an independent source of information regarding the morally correct course of action. However, none of these sources of information, argued Dewey, have clear or convincing authority, leading to a situation whereby perennial conflict exists between each of the three bodies of theory; *'each of these three variables has a sound basis, but because each has a different origin and mode of operation, they can be at cross purposes and exercise divergent forces in the formation of judgement. From this point of view, uncertainty and conflict are inherent in morals;*

it is characteristic of any situation properly called moral that one is ignorant of the end and of good consequences, of the right and just approach, of the direction of virtuous conduct' (Dewey, 1930, p.280).

Dewey further criticised each of these three types of theory individually based on the source or type of information they advocated be employed to make moral decisions as well as perceived deficiencies of logic within each theory. Teleological theories which look to the consequences of an action in assessing ethicality, such as hedonism, were condemned by Dewey on the grounds that the calculation of pleasure and pain is too complicated for an individual to undertake. He argued such calculation is incompatible with the complex and holistic nature of our experiences of pain and pleasure, especially as individuals regard pain and pleasure in very different ways (Dewey, 1915). Dewey also argued that pleasure might not, in fact, be the end of action, but instead characteristic of the activity which facilitates the end, hence further undermining the value of such reasoning (Dewey, 1891).

Dewey similarly raised doubts about deontological theories, which focus on intent and motive of conduct, given the short-sightedness of ethical theories which extol fixed ethical principles and which do not take into account influential circumstantial factors. Dewey especially considered the work of Kant in his rejection of deontological ethics, attacking Kant's assertion that each act should be considered independently of each other act and should be individually generalisable, given the inevitable conflict and contradiction that would arise between such acts and principles (Dewey & Tufts, 1909). Dewey also questioned how any motivating force which may spur action can be present if, as Kant suggested, feeling should be excluded from the motive to action. Dewey similarly refuted the elevation of the rational feeling of *reverence*, which Kant claimed to be 'excited' by the moral law itself, and why therefore other feelings could not be elevated to this status (Dewey, 1891).

Although characteristics of Dewey's Pragmatist ethics arguably overlap with elements of virtue ethics, such as the importance of habit and reference to notions of individual character, Dewey articulated similar issues with virtue ethics as those he expressed in relation to deontological and teleological theory. Dewey located moral approval and disapproval, or praise and blame, as the fundamental cornerstones of virtue-based moral theories. While he argued that virtue was essential in character formation and that praise and blame aided people in being cognisant of the wider consequences of their actions, Dewey contended that was the limit of the theory and that at most it could simply facilitate greater responsibility and consciousness on the part of individuals in relation to their actions (Dewey & Tufts, 1909).

3.3.1.2 Pragmatist Ethics & Casuistry

Dewey's position on ethics thus tapped into, and took an arguably controversial stance on, a critical debate in moral philosophy which had been raging for many centuries – whether or not to incorporate

practical affairs and circumstantial factors into ethical theorisation, as well as whether universal principles should be the principle focus of ethical philosophy (Jonsen & Toulmin, 1988). The stance Dewey advocated acknowledged the value and application of casuistry, which similarly repudiates the notion that moral judgements can be made only through dogged adherence to fixed universal principles regardless of the circumstances of the ethical issue at hand. Casuistry importantly considers both individual cases – fixed points in time and place where persons and action coalesce – and circumstances when considering moral judgement as well as the value that can be derived from comparing and contrasting cases (Jonsen, 1995). Casuistry played an important role in moral reasoning from the 15th to 17th centuries, but by the 18th century it had largely fallen into disrepute as a result of attacks from the Jansenists and, in particular, a series of polemics authored by Blaise Pascal (Wildes, 1993). This culminated in a usurping of practical considerations from debate and theorisation of moral issues, as exemplified by Sidgwick's pronouncement that '*...the development of the theory of Ethics would seem to be somewhat impeded by the preponderance of practical considerations and perhaps a more complete detachment of the theoretical study of right conduct from its practical application is to be desired...*' (Sidgwick, 1907, p.13).

In stark contrast to Sidgwick's view that ethics should be divorced from practical affairs as well as previous theory and thinking, which had focused on the abstraction of moral issues, Dewey contended the polar opposite; namely that great value would, in fact, be derived from an approach that would help individuals grapple with real-world problems of a moral nature. In particular, those problems which arise during life and necessitate a decision or response. In line with this view, James argued '*there is no such thing as an ethical philosophy dogmatically made up in advance...there can be no final Truth in Ethics...until the last man has had his experience, and said his say*' (James, 1891, p.330). Dewey sought not to prescribe unconditional moral imperatives but to offer and recommend a stance that would help humans deal with the predicaments in which they habitually found themselves and aid them in considering the practical consequences of their moral decision-making (Gouinlock, 1978).

3.3.2 Psychological and Sociological Development of Morality

Dewey positioned his theory of morality within the context of what he perceived to be the process of moral development through which societies passed. Societal moral evolution, as he described it, could be broken down into three stages, where only within the final stage do individual organisms develop the capacity for active moral consciousness.

Dewey argued that early humans were driven by individual instincts and the exigency of meeting their fundamental needs. This he termed the *first level of conduct*. This level was characterised by humans seeking to fulfil fundamental needs, including food and shelter, as their absence precludes survival. Such conduct, he argued, was not moral in purpose but instead allowed valuable results or

outcomes for individuals.

His *second level of conduct* emphasises the conduct of individuals within groups following the development of inter-individual organisation. Dewey posited that these groups emerged as a result of rational forces, including work and arts and crafts, as well as socialising forces, such as the benefits of mutual co-operation. Within the second level of conduct, the existence of group morality or customs became critical in guiding and determining individual conduct; *'...wherever we find groups of men...we find that there are certain ways of acting which are common to the group...There are approved ways of acting, common to a group, and handed down from generation to generation'* (Dewey & Tufts, 1909, p.52). These social norms were enforced by society by various means, including public approval, taboos and physical force, and the focus of individual conduct becomes adherence to these social customs.

Within the *third level of conduct*, which Dewey argued is driven by a mixture of sociological and psychological forces, *'complete morality is reached only when the individual recognizes the right or chooses the good freely, devotes himself heartily to its fulfilment, and seeks a progressive social development in which every member of society shall share'* (Dewey & Tufts, 1909, p.74). Within this third level of conduct, the onus falls on the individual to make decisions and act in moral manner, with conduct being voluntary, active and personal. Such an onus on the individual and their capacity to make informed decisions and engage in moral conduct provides the foundations and context for Dewey's notion of Pragmatist ethics.

3.3.3 Dewey's Pragmatist Ethics

'But let the value of one proposed end be felt to be really incompatible with that of another, let it be felt to be so opposed as to appeal to a different kind of interest and choice, in other words, to different kinds of disposition and agency, and we have a moral situation. This is what occurs when one way of traveling means self-indulgence; another, kindness or keeping an engagement. There is no longer one end, nor two ends so homogeneous that they may be reconciled by both being used as means to some more general end of undisputed worth. We have alternative ends so heterogeneous that choice has to be made; an end has to be developed out of conflict. The problem now becomes what is really valuable. It is the nature of the valuable, of the desirable, that the individual has to pass upon' (Dewey & Tufts, 1909, p.207).

Dewey's notion of ethics draws heavily on a number of the core principles of the Pragmatist movement, in particular, the notions of anti-foundationalism, problem-driven inquiry, and contextualism.

First, the notion of *habit* is a key facet of Dewey's Pragmatist ethics as, *'concrete habits do all the perceiving, recognizing, imagining, recalling, judging, conceiving and reasoning that is done'* (Dewey, 1922, p.124). Dewey argued that habits are a key part of human behaviour, operating in the

unconscious and heavily shaped by previous experience (Surie & Ashley, 2008). These habits, he reasoned, are in essence humankind's unthinking, default modes of operation and are action dispositions, as opposed to observable behaviours. They are critical to individual prescience and judgement and thus are a fundamental constituent of the actions of individuals (Cohen, 2007).

Secondly, *experience* is essential to the practice of ethics according to Dewey, and experience, for the individual, is what is real, given that there can be no perfect truth. For Dewey, experience was a continuous process linked to intelligent action: '*there is a continuum of perception, experience, and action. The seeing-that informs the doing-that, and vice versa*' (Aikin, 2009, p.23). Dewey contended therefore that experience acts as both the initiator of an ethical issue and the means by which an ethical issue may be addressed and resolved. This experience, which initiates or triggers the moral, is critical as it occurs within a unique, ongoing context which will envelop and saturate the individual immersed within it. Nevertheless, elements of this experience or context will stand out to the individual, which may well become the focal point of the dilemma or issue with which they are faced (Fernando Pappas, 1997a).

Thirdly, the notion of *inquiry*, one of the fundamental cornerstones of the Pragmatic stance, is integral to Dewey's Pragmatist ethics. When the individual is faced with determining the most suitable course of action, through the application of experience they may become what Dewey regarded as an 'inquirer' (Evans, 2000): '*the inquirer as an agent, and inquiry as a way of arriving at what he (Dewey) calls practical judgements*' (Festenstein, 2010, p.93). Such inquiry allows for judgements regarding the course of action that can and should be taken, with these judgements being responses to environmental stimuli.

3.3.3.1 Pragmatist Ethics

These three constructs, namely *habit*, *experience* and *inquiry*, coalesce within Dewey's notion of Pragmatist ethics. Specifically, they form a process by which the triggering of a moral issue leads to a process of moral inquiry which allows an individual to determine the most appropriate outcome within a given situation and in relation to that specific individual.

Dewey contended that moral issues are typically precipitated by contextual factors – the blocking of moral habits, preferences, purposes or values – which typically occur as a result of changing situational circumstances or interaction with others in possession of different customs or values. Given Dewey's contention that harmony of personality, habit and preference are key to individual happiness, it is clear that such conflict, which arises from these blocked habits, preferences and purposes, should be dampened (Altman, 1982). As Gouinlock contends, '*specific values, conflicts, obstacles, and potentialities define each situation. The agents involved desire to effect a transformation of their circumstances. They desire to establish a mode of activity which will unify hitherto conflicting values and*

engage and fulfil their operative interests' (1978, p.219).

The key to potential resolution in such circumstances, according to Dewey, is the process of inquiry, as it allows the individual to determine the morally correct course of action from the manifold potential courses that lie before them (Sorrell, 2013). Through the application of inquiry, and in order to make a decision within such situations regarding an intended course of action, individuals must construct, and test, imagined hypotheses regarding intended or proposed behaviours. This process of 'dramatic rehearsal' involves individuals actively, intelligently and imaginatively reflecting on, and evaluating, such hypotheses and considering the effects of these differing hypotheses should they be brought to fruition via action. These hypotheses or ideas are functional; they are both ends and means, as they are evaluated in terms of their ability to bring inquiry to a close and the situation at hand to be resolved (Ezorsky, 1958). In this sense, Dewey was advocating the use of the 'scientific method' regarding this process of inquiry into issues of a moral nature, drawing on the work of Pierce in relation to fallibilistic inquiry and abductive reasoning (Levi, 1992).

As Hildebrand discusses, Pragmatic inquiry has a number of key features: *'First, inquiry is dynamic: it is a process of problem solving that involves feeling, observation, analysis, hypothesis, and experimental action. Second, inquiry's results are fundamentally provisional: any results achieved by inquiry (which may be codified as "laws," "principles," and so forth) should be understood to be "reliable" or "warranted" but never absolutely "true." Third, to be an effective method, inquiry must be self-correcting'* (2011, pp.592–593).

Dewey thus argued that individuals practise moral agency through assessing and reflecting on whether different proposed courses of action will accomplish the attainment of the value they desire. This process of deliberation also involves consideration of the social and physical environmental effects, including costs and benefits, of differing courses present within each of the hypotheses as well as whether these courses of action may thwart or facilitate the satisfaction of other values (Festenstein, 2010). The process of hypothesising, reflecting and deliberating therefore allows a judgement to be made regarding the optimum course of action that should be taken (Jacobs, 2004).

Dewey asserted that this was not the end of such reflection, as observing the consequences of these actions (testing hypotheses) allows more experience, and hence data, to be gathered, which will further inform future habits, choices and evaluation (Manasse, 1944) as *'there is always some observation of the outcome attained in comparison and contrast with that intended, such that the comparison throws light upon the actual fitness of the things employed as means'* (Dewey, 1985, p.211). This renders morality as a practical and iterative process, one that is dynamic and evolving and is in stark contrast to the static nature of much traditional moral thinking and theorising.

3.3.3.2 Criticisms of Pragmatist Ethics

Dewey's position and theorisation in relation to Pragmatist ethics has received not insignificant criticism from a range of scholars representing a number of contrasting positions. A number of logical positivists and empiricists have argued that the Pragmatist approach to ethics fails to understand that the collection of more facts regarding an ethical situation could in fact allow resolution of any given conflict. For example, facts relating to the subject and object as well as facts concerning the interpretation of, and differing perspectives on, the original facts (Cavell & Sesonke, 1951). Dewey's Pragmatist ethics also ran in direct contravention of the neo-realist movement spearheaded by Bertrand Russell and G.E Moore, who believed that if ethics were to be a science, it must operate on the basis of false and true statements, and if such ethical propositions are true or false, then they must be true or false in relation to some 'real' relation, property or quality in the real world. As such, these properties, relations or qualities must in some way be independent of the individual judgement maker (Welchman, 2002). Further to this, Russell directly criticised Dewey's *'Essays on Experimental Logic'*, noting that what Dewey *'calls "logic" does not seem to me to be part of logic at all'* (Russell, 1919, p.5) but should instead be considered part of psychology and that the assertion that practice-orientated judgements are in fact distinctive is invalid.

Likewise, other critics also attacked Dewey's theory on the grounds that they perceived him to have failed in proving how value judgements of an ethical nature could be empirical in a manner akin to that of scientific judgements, despite making claims to that affect (White, 1996). At least one scholar (Sleeper, 1960) has argued this is a misinterpretation of Dewey's claims, suggesting that while Dewey outlined a scientific treatment of ethics, he was not merely reducing morality to science. Similarly, Holmes (1964) critiques Dewey on the grounds that ambiguity persisted within his work relating to the notion of judgement, in that Dewey fails to differentiate between the activity of judging and judging as the outcome of this process of judgement, instead using the term judgement as an all-encompassing description of the process of deliberation.

Notwithstanding these criticisms, Dewey's work on ethics and his application of the principles of the Pragmatist movement to ethical concerns represented a brave step back towards the consideration of ethics as a practical affair. Given this, within the next section, the appropriateness of the application of Pragmatist ethics within the context of small firms, and in particular in relation to values, will be considered.

3.4 Pragmatist Moral Philosophy & Small Business Values

Although a small amount of research has applied elements of Pragmatist theory to business and society related issues, as Stroud (2009) argues, such application is limited considering the potential explanatory reach and power which deployment of a Pragmatist stance may provide. Given the specific claims of Pragmatist philosophy and particularly Pragmatist ethics, especially those relating to practical

judgement, contextual consideration and experience, Pragmatist ethics provides a fertile stance for the exploration of moral claims and practices within the context of small firms for three key reasons.

Firstly, Pragmatism is well suited to the small firm context as it positions itself as practice-orientated; seeking to tackle substantive problems within the idiosyncrasies of 'real-world' contexts. Such a stance allows sensitivity to the lived experience of individuals within small businesses of organisational life, legitimising the consideration of moral problems as highly emotive issues grounded in real world concerns that require attention and resolution (Arend, 2013; Spence & Lozano, 2000). This point is of critical relevance to the study of small businesses' values, given the highly practical issues that values drive and influence as well as the emotive nature of both values and the moral dilemmas and issues which accompany such practice. Given the often firm embeddedness of small businesses within their institutional contexts and the myriad of social ties which connect such firms to local stakeholders, moral issues and values-related dilemmas are often particularly heightened (Spence, 2016). In particular, as the outcomes of decisions taken by those of influence within small firms may directly and tangibly impact the wellbeing and livelihood of firm employees, the health, safety and prosperity of the local community and the sustainability of the natural environment, as well as the sense of moral fidelity and integrity of individual decision-makers (Lähdesmäki, Siltaoja & Spence, 2019).

Secondly, as Dewey argues, the application of fixed, universal moral principles to real-world moral issues is inherently problematic, as such moral positions are unable to account and allow for the idiosyncrasies of individual situations and context (Dewey, 1922). Within the small firm context this point has particular resonance given the immense heterogeneity of such organisations in terms of a number of factors, including size, organisational culture, institutional context and ownership, all of which are likely to shape the moral issues that small firms face. For example, as one small business owner within Vyakarnam *et al.*'s (1997) research into ethical behaviour within small firms related, context is incredibly significant, as *'ethics are not set in stone, they are situational – context and time specific – they relate to the information you have available – as a dilemma they are solved to produce an answer, not the only answer'* (1997, p.1632). In contrast to a number of mainstream normative positions, a Pragmatist approach is well suited to such heterogeneity as it seeks to recognise the salience of, and account for, such contextual organisational idiosyncrasies.

Thirdly, a number of specific elements of Dewey's Pragmatist ethics are consonant with themes salient to the practice of values and moral decision-making in the small firm context – suggesting a fertile fit between Pragmatist ethics and small firm values. The importance of experience and active reflection, which is at the heart of Pragmatist thought, mirrors previous research which has evidenced the importance of experience (see Cope & Watts, 2000; Jansen *et al.*, 2013), particularly that of owner-

managers, to maintaining and managing small firms. Given the need to respond to the unpredictability of small business life, managers and employees are often required to utilise their cumulative experience, often intuitively, to make highly practical decisions and judgements on a daily basis regarding a wide range of organisational concerns (Gibcus, Vermeulen & De Jong, 2009).

The notion of intuitive decision making based on such experience, which lies at the heart of Dewey's idea of ethical inquiry, also bears great significance. In the large firm context, decision-makers may be able to turn to formalised ethics processes or codified sources of ethical guidance, including codes of ethics, ethical pledges and values sets, while small firm decision-makers will more likely have to rely on their own intuition and conscience when facing moral dilemmas (Fassin, 2008). Furthermore, as Dewey stresses, the process of ethical inquiry is ongoing and dynamic; in small firms, unlike in larger organisations where decision-makers may be removed, both spatially and temporally, from parties directly affected by decisions taken, individuals are likely to come face-to-face with the consequences of their decisions. Therefore, they are likely to accrue experience over time and engage in active reflection and sustained inquiry over the longer term in relation to moral issues, which may in themselves evolve over time.

Overall, Pragmatist ethics provides a potentially productive resource for the exploration of values and their practice within small firms.

3.5 Conclusions: Chapter Three

This section has introduced the Pragmatist movement, which consists of a philosophical stance that impresses the importance and value of problem-centred inquiry, contextualism, experience and a firm adherence to anti-foundationalism. While Pragmatism has arguably gained a foothold within the current study of organisations, Dewey's notion of Pragmatist ethics, which applies the tenets of Pragmatism to the study of ethical problems and their resolution, has thus far had comparatively little purchase. Such a stance arguably sits in direct contrast to mainstream normative theory, as it focuses on individual decision-making and context, as well as the application of principles of inquiry, to aid individuals in their decision-making when faced with ethically sensitive issues. As discussed in the previous section, such a position provides a viewpoint which is both sensitive to the real-world issues faced by small firms and offers a plausible theoretical basis to analyse, explore and explain the practice and maintenance of values within small firms.

The following chapter outlines the method pursued to collect empirical data relating to the nature, role, enactment and maintenance of small firm organisational values. First, the philosophical grounding of the study is considered, followed by an overview of the research process. Finally, technical and ethical considerations, including researcher reflexivity are discussed.

Chapter Four: Methodology

4.0 Introduction

In order for the research questions laid out at the end of chapter two to be answered, empirical evidence was collected through the employment of a robust, cogent research methodology. This section will outline the specific research methodology utilised in the collection of this empirical evidence. First the philosophical grounding of the research will be articulated, followed by an examination of the particular methods considered and the means by which the data was analysed. This includes contrasts between these methods and alternatives, as well as why said methods are being pursued. Finally, broader technical and ethical concerns, namely the storage of data, ethical factors related to data collection and researcher reflexivity, are considered.

4.1 Research Philosophy & Method

When undertaking any scholarly research, the 'research paradigm', composed of the foundational philosophical assumptions of the project, is of exceptional import. It determines not only the range of methods available to the researcher but also the validity, reliability and generalisability of the research findings (Dina, 2012). Two key interconnected notions are vital when considering the philosophical underpinnings of any scholarly endeavour: the ontological assumptions and the epistemological paradigm (Morgan & Smircich, 1980).

The first of these, the ontological assumptions, refers to the researcher's conception as to the objectivity of the world, namely whether an objective reality exists and, if so, whether it can be studied in an objective fashion to obtain facts regarding phenomena and processes. These assumptions concerning the nature of the world in turn determine the epistemological paradigm in which the research takes place and hence how knowledge regarding the world is collected. Within the field of management studies, positivism and interpretivism are the two central epistemological positions (Reed, 2005).

Positivism is an epistemological position predicated on the ontological assumption of objectivity. Its application to the social sciences is generally attributed to Auguste Comte who, in the early 1800s, attempted to order the sciences into a hierarchy, from astronomy to physics to finally the new science of sociology (Honderich, 1995). In undertaking the task, Comte highlighted what he argued was a lack of scientific rigour in those scientific disciplines which sought to understand society (Hasan, 2016). As a result, the ontological assumptions and methodological approaches from the natural sciences, known as positivism, were brought to the realm of the social sciences (Caldwell, 1980). Positivism embodies the notion of an objective reality which can be studied, allowing a complete understanding of phenomena to be reached. This is made possible through researchers' capacity for

objectivity, particularly in remaining impartial and detached from the object of study (Howell, 2013; Johnson & Duberley, 2000). Positivism influences the methods used when collecting empirical evidence as it strongly encourages the collection of large amounts of quantitative data via surveys or close-ended questioning in interviewing (Lowe, 2004). It endeavours to construct knowledge of reality (Weber, 2004) by means of an inductive, hypothesis testing method, making it highly reliable and the results generalisable to a whole population (Golafshani, 2003).

In contrast, the epistemological paradigm of interpretivism rests on the ontological assumption of subjectivity. This encompasses subjectivity of the individuals being researched as well as of individuals' construction and perception of the world, phenomena or processes, all in tandem with the subjectivity of the researcher (Dina, 2012). It arose, in part, to address the flaws of positivism and its emergence can be attributed to Max Weber, while its subsequent development owes itself to Wilhelm Dilthey and Hans-Georg Gadamer (Matta, 2015). Compared to positivist research, interpretivism champions the collection of rich, qualitative data through more prolonged exposure to and interaction with the subjects of research, for example, via interviews, observation and case studies. Such an approach generates high levels of validity, allowing insights into and comprehension of individuals' subjective, self-constructed experiences, attitudes and opinions, thus facilitating an elevated understanding of the complex and dynamic social world (Leitch, Hill & Harrison, 2010). Yet, unlike positivism, interpretivist research findings cannot be used to generalise to a population, owing to the intrinsic subjectivity and paucity of reliability of such research (Williams, 2000).

This is not to say that positivist and interpretivist epistemologies are irreconcilable. Both positions are extreme and oppositional ends of a spectrum and hence are not a simple dichotomisation. This is illustrated by alternative epistemological paradigms, such as that of critical realism, which attempts to reconcile elements of both a positivist and an interpretivist approach. It asserts that entities can exist independently of their identification, and thus the existence of an objective reality is possible, but that observers have an intrinsically subjective perception of objects of study (Fleetwood, 2005). Individuals are bound and enabled by, and are constantly reproducing, social structures (Vincent, 2008). Under critical realism, a retroductive method is employed, involving the use of a mixture of quantitative and qualitative methods to seek patterns and quasi-realities (Belfrage & Hauf, 2017).

In summary, a number of epistemological positions exist within the domain of social science. The following section will discuss the epistemological position taken within this thesis including its limitations.

4.1.1 Epistemological Positioning

This particular research will be undertaken from an interpretivist perspective for two key reasons. Firstly, although a glut of prior research exists on values, it has frequently been conducted from a positivist position (for examples see Rokeach, 1968; Schwartz & Bilsky, 1987; Roccas *et al.*, 2002). Such research has typically focused on gaining large samples of responses to surveys, with respondents being asked to rank and rate values as well as provide socio-demographic information. Statistical analysis is then employed to seek correlations between, for example, social class or religion and values practices within social groups. Such results constitute simple facts, a staple product of positivist research, and as such are often regarded as valuable research outcomes (Peters, 1990).

Such an approach, and therefore the research findings, are however plagued with the inherent weaknesses of positivism, for instance being ahistorical, aphilosophical and decontextualised (Prasad & Prasad, 2002). This is demonstrated by a lack of increase in understanding of values, relating, for example, to their conceptualisation and their impact on behaviour. As Sandberg (2005) discusses, *'advocates of interpretive approaches claim that those methodological procedures and claims for objective knowledge have significant theoretical limitations for advancing our understanding of human and organizational phenomena'* (p.41). By contrast, interpretivism encourages the garnering of a richness, thickness and depth of data, thus facilitating the construction of detailed descriptions of the idiosyncratic experiences, actions and schema of research participants (Strauss, 1990). Therefore, an interpretivist methodology is far better suited to enhancing conceptualisation of values as well as, in this case, the role they play within small businesses, as previous studies have indicated (see Williams & Schaefer, 2013; Schaefer, Williams & Blundel, 2018).

A further argument in favour of an interpretivist approach relates to the consideration of values in moral terms, unlike in studies such as that by Schwartz and Rokeach. As both Brand (2009) and Buckley (2013) posit, the rationale for interpretivism within business ethics research has become increasingly clear. Pointedly, as it allows the use of research methods in which research participants can answer open ended questions, enabling a freedom of response conducive to exposing new answers, and questions, often not envisioned by researchers. This reasoning is further compounded by two other facets of this particular research, namely its focus on disputation and the small business context of the research. Both these features heighten the heterogeneity of the objects of study and as a result the subjectivity of the experiences of research participants. Accordingly, an interpretivist perspective allows this subjectivity and context to be taken into account (Kempster & Parry, 2011), especially as it attempts to move towards *verstehen*: the actual meanings and interpretations individuals ascribe to processes, phenomena and behaviour (Leitch, Hill & Harrison, 2010). Particularly, it recognises the role of individual agency and individuals' beliefs and attitudes in driving behaviour and

decision making (Hay, 2011). This is essential when exploring conflict, as the nature of conflict is often intrinsically subjective, with individuals disagreeing about both its definition and its presence and form, as well as being pertinent to the small businesses context given their variance in size, industry, geographical location, culture and organisation (Nordqvist, Hall & Melin, 2009).

4.1.2 Epistemological Limitations

Interpretivism, like any epistemological paradigm, has its weaknesses, and these must be highlighted and recognised in order for these deficiencies to be accounted for when conducting such research. Interpretivism has been argued to lack accuracy and reliability, especially by those adhering to foundationalist principles, who often evaluate research by the standards applied to quantitative (positivist) research (Denzin, 2009). Further to this, interpretivism, unlike, for instance, critical realism, fails to take into account underlying social structures which influence individual and group behaviours. Consequently, interpretivist research arguably overestimates the importance and role of individual agency (Mcevoy, 2006). The last, and perhaps most important, criticism of interpretivist research is that it is complex and lacking in amenability to peer review and third-party critique (Angen, 2000). Given the idiosyncratic experiences of the researcher, and their subjectivity, it makes it difficult for interpretivist research findings to be authenticated and repeated.

Overall, it is apparent that an interpretive epistemological approach is the most appropriate grounding for this research, as it will facilitate exploration and comprehension of the research constructs under investigation and is suited to the research context. In order to ensure that the research is undertaken in a rigorous manner, it is necessary to employ a set of criteria. In the case of positivist research, reliability and validity are most often used to test for research objectivity and thus quality (Leitch, Hill & Harrison, 2010), but such measures are far less clear when evaluating interpretivist research.

Although a variety of work exists suggesting criteria for assessing the quality of both interpretivist and qualitative research, Tracy (2010) articulates eight universal criteria, outlined in *Table 7*, which can be applied to qualitative research. These criteria will be employed within this research project to ensure a high research standard, as they can be applied to all qualitative research, are comprehensive while allowing an element of flexibility and have been tested by other researchers (for example, see Gordon & Patterson, 2013). As Symon, Cassell and Johnson (2018) discuss, care must be taken when assessing interpretivist research, as positivist assumptions often persevere and the epistemological assumptions inherent within the research may impact upon the quality criteria.

Criteria	Description
Worthy topic	Topic is relevant, timely, significant, interesting
Rich rigor	Study utilises sufficient, suitable and intricate: theoretical constructs, data and time in the field, sample, context and data collection and analysis
Sincerity	Study characterised by reflexivity and transparency
Credibility	Research involves thick description, detail, explanation, crystallisation, multivocality and member reflections
Resonance	The research impacts or affects some readers and audiences through evocative representation, naturalistic generalisations and transferable findings
Significant contribution	The research provides a significant contribution: Conceptually/theoretically, practically, morally, methodologically or heuristically
Ethical	The research considers procedural ethics (such as human subjects), situational and culturally specific ethics, relational ethics, exiting ethics (leaving the scene and sharing the research)
Meaningful coherence	The study achieves what it purports to be about, uses methods and procedures that fit its stated goals, meaningfully interconnects literature, research questions/foci, findings, and interpretations with each other

Table 7. Qualitative Research Quality Criteria Assessment Factors (Tracy, 2010, p.840)

Given that the epistemological approach, its strengths, weaknesses and the means by which quality criteria can be applied have been outlined in this section, this is followed by consideration of the specific research method used and justification for its selection.

4.1.3 Research Methods

A plethora of differing qualitative methods are available to researchers engaged in interpretivist research, including case studies, document analysis and ethnographies, with each possessing their own innate strengths and weaknesses. Within this section, a number of different qualitative research methods are outlined, followed by discussion and justification of the method that was selected and utilised to collect empirical data.

4.1.3.1 Interviews

Interviewing is a method of data collection consisting of a dialogue between researcher and participant guided by a number of questions posited by the researcher (Robson, 2002). Interviews' strength lies in their ability to facilitate the exploration of an individual's inner world, their thoughts, feelings and actions as well as the accompanying subjectivities and nuances of phenomena as individuals perceive them (Alvesson, 2003). Interviews enable researchers to seek clarification from participants and explore relevant areas in greater depth as well as to build rapport and trust, potentially meaning a greater level of information can be gleaned from research participants (Elliot *et al.*, 2016). Post-interview, data can be re-listened to, transcribed and coded in order for elements such as the pitch, timbre and tone of the interview to be analysed, encouraging reflexivity and an iterative research process (Holland & Rosalind, 2013).

Nonetheless, questions regarding the credibility of the information obtained from interviews are often raised as well as whether respondents may have a faulty memory, may be deliberately

misleading, may have incomplete knowledge or may simply dislike the interviewer and may not be motivated to give truthful answers (Podsakoff, MacKenzie & Podsakoff, 2012). Interviewers too may not be able to grasp the idiosyncrasies of research participants or their experiences (Roulston, 2010), and thus the quality of data gain from interviews can be heavily predicated on the skills of the interviewer, such as their ability to listen, take notes and build rapport (Roulston, DeMarrais & Lewis, 2003; Qu & Dumay, 2011).

While conducting non face-to-face interviews, such as over the telephone or video conferencing software, can be convenient and efficient, building rapport can be more complex and the possible lack of an image can mean that visual clues and cues are not picked up by the interviewer (Deakin & Wakefield, 2014). Participants may also act differently depending on whether or not the interview is conducted face-to-face (Block & Erskine, 2012). From the point of view of ethical considerations, interviews are facilitated by third party providers, which can lead to concerns around how such companies are storing information recorded on communication platforms (Iacono, Symonds & Brown, 2016).

4.1.3.2 Case Studies

A case study research method entails the use of multiple research tools, such as interviews, document analysis and participant observation, to conduct an in-depth investigation into a single or small number of specific cases. It is therefore a flexible method (Yin, 1981), as demonstrated by the existence of differing case study types, including descriptive case studies, designed to allow observation and description of a phenomenon, or explanatory case studies, where complex casual relationships are sought (Scapens, 1990; Baxter & Jack, 2008). The most pronounced strength of case studies arguably lies in their ability to investigate a phenomenon in great depth and thus to tackle complicated and broad research questions (Dul & Hak, 2008) through the collection of thick, detailed and rich descriptions of research entities within their natural surroundings (Meyer, 2001). Case studies also enable researchers to be immersed in the research entity, meaning they can gain deep contextual knowledge (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). The researcher can triangulate data gained from differing research tools to enhance the reliability of the research (Flyvbjerg, 2006). Hence, case studies as a research tool represent a means by which existing and new research topics can be addressed, particularly through facilitating insights into social processes and action and allowing for the generation of valid, novel and testable theory (Eisenhardt, 1989; Dyer & Wilkins, 1991).

Despite the strengths of case study research, the method has received significant criticisms, especially relating to the number of cases undertaken. Some scholars advocate the use of a single case approach, others the use of multiple cases, whereas some argue that either approach is of little use (Verschuren, 2003). Multiple cases studies have typically been denounced for not going into great

enough depth, one of the key purposes of case study research, and the accompanying comparison of cases garnering little research value (Dyer & Wilkins, 1991). Conversely, single case studies have been lambasted for lacking the breadth to draw meaningful conclusions and for being little more than interesting stories (Eisenhardt, 1991; Gerring, 2001). Moreover and importantly, a case study method is also contingent on the strengths of the constituent research methods used and undermined by their weaknesses (Gillham, 2000), demonstrated by the aforementioned strengths and weaknesses of interviewing as a research method.

4.1.3.3 Focus Groups

Focus groups involve individuals being brought together in order to collect data via a group discussion around a given theme and are facilitated by a moderator whose job it is to ensure conversational themes remain within the thematic boundaries (Boddy, 2005). Evidence suggests that focus groups are frequently used alongside other methods, such as interviews and surveys, as they can be used to narrow down research focus as well as identify important themes (Morgan, 1996). Focus groups are a means by which to conveniently collect data, insights and ideas as they emerge through informal discussion from typically around six to twelve people regarding a topic of interest (Herington, Scott & Johnson, 2005). They encourage plurality of opinion, the sharing of experiences and the comparison of inter-subjective understandings, giving rise to the generation of new and original ideas (Acocella, 2012). Importantly, they enable the researcher to observe the range of communication types and language used by individuals, for example, anecdotes, arguing and joking, which can give insight into individual attitudes not conveyed through direct questioning (Sagoe, 2012). Besides this, they are an opportunity to efficiently collect a large volume of data, are relatively inexpensive to conduct and often stimulate and engage the participants through the snowballing of ideas, group synergy and the security of being part of a group (Hines, 2000; Stokes & Bergin, 2006).

Conversely, the efficacy of focus groups as a research method is predicated on the skill of the moderator in, for instance, ensuring the discourse does not deviate from the given theme and encouraging all members to participate (Prince & Davies, 2001). Such issues can be compounded by the dominance of particular individuals within the group undermining others' opinions and discouraging them from participating as well as sensitive issues being difficult to research in such a setting owing to potential embarrassment or poor relations between individuals (Hines, 2000). Group think can also arise, where an excess of agreement occurs along with minority positions and viewpoints being superseded and overlooked (Vicsek, 2011). Selection of participants is incredibly important to the success of focus groups. The use of focus groups to collect data from an heterogeneous set of people regarding an emergent perspective or position has also been criticised, with critics arguing that the such approach lacks the necessary levels of validity (Reed & Payton, 1997).

4.1.3.4 Document Analysis

Document analysis is a research method which involves a process of systematically analysing and evaluating documents, both physical and online, to elicit meaning, data and understanding of, for example, processes or phenomena (Bowen, 2009). Such documents can include, but are not limited to: marketing material, minutes of meetings, survey data, newspaper articles, correspondence, such as emails, and diaries and journals (Baxter & Jack, 2008). Documents often provide hard evidence of events, processes or incidents; they can be rich in detail and may be untainted by lack of recall, the attitudes of individuals and the paucity of exactness which may be present in other research methods, such as interviews (Prior, 2003). Equally, the nuance of documents, particularly elements such as language usage, stylistic attributes, discourses and structures of communication, can provide significant insight into details, including how events are perceived and recorded (Vaismoradi, Turunen & Bondas, 2013). As such, they may indicate the position of the author regarding an event as well as potentially how they wish said event to be perceived. Analysis of documents can be of great benefit to a researcher as they can serve to corroborate or dispute other sources of evidence, such as interviews or focus groups, and thus serve as a source of triangulation (Connell, Lynch & Waring, 2001). As many documents exist within the public domain they can be procured easily, efficiently and at little or no cost, and importantly the process of research does not illicit 'reactivity' or impair the stability of the research entity, owing to its inanimate nature.

Nonetheless, used in isolation, document analysis can be a limited tool as it possesses hard boundaries, given the finite information it contains, outside of which no interrogation can occur (Fairclough, 2003). As with any research method, the skill of the researcher lies in interpreting, analysing and evaluating documents, and their contents can heavily dictate the utility of the method as well as the value of the data extracted from documents (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008). Obtaining key documents may also present difficulties as a result of an unwillingness on the part of organisations to release them and, as Beattie (1997) argues, care should be taken when considering documents as they may often only represent the voices and narratives of particular societal groups whose status grants them the privilege to author documents.

4.1.4 Method Selection

As discussed, all of the respective research methods possess both strengths and weaknesses which impacts their suitability for individual research projects (see *Table 8* for breakdown of method attributes). Arguments could be made for the use of each method within the context of this particular research. A case study based method would likely have been beneficial due to the depth and richness of data collected regarding values and would have provided the scope for triangulation of data through the use of multiple methods and the potential for comparison between cases. However, such an

approach would not have allowed a sufficient breadth of data to be attained, something of particular import, given the idiosyncrasies of small businesses. Organisational idiosyncrasy may also have adversely impacted the comparison of cases and, due to requisite resource intensity, completing more than one in-depth case study within the given research time may have posed difficulties.

Comparably, a focus group based method would have enabled efficient collection of a large volume of data, may have brought out some original themes and reflections from group members and would have allowed research participants to feel comfortable owing to the security of being in a group. Yet the sensitivity of this research topic and group pressures within a focus group may well have fostered moral collective norms within the discourse, discouraging individuals from breaking away and offering differing opinions and examples, which could be of vital import to the research. Further to this, due to their size, small businesses might well not have been able to give up so many of their workforce for sufficient time to participate.

Document analysis may well have presented an opportunity to gain access regarding organisational values from 'static' sources, including memos, correspondence and company reports – a means which requires little resource input from the organisation. Yet as it is small businesses in particular that are being researched, given their notorious informality, few documents would likely have existed which would have been pertinent to this research. Due to the nebulous nature of values, it is not unlikely that little value would have been gleaned from written documentation regarding such a construct, thus necessitating the use of other research methods, for instance, to provide context for the information obtained from documents.

An interview based method was selected as the most appropriate method, as it permitted a breadth and depth of data to be garnered from a range of individuals across a number of organisations. Furthermore, it facilitated an understanding of individuals' thoughts, feelings and perceptions of values and the relationships that they possess with organisational stakeholders. It also allowed rapport to be built between interviewer and respondent, which was critical given the sensitivity of the research topic and granted the interviewer a level of flexibility to be responsive to the answers and themes which emerged during the interviews.

Criteria/Method	Case Study	Interviews	Document Analysis	Focus Groups
Allows a breadth of data to be collected		✓		✓
Allows a depth of data to be collected	✓	✓		✓
Allows sensitive nature of research to be considered	✓	✓	✓	✓
Allows heterogeneity of small businesses to be considered	✓	✓	✓	✓
Allows rapport building	✓	✓		
Considers potential resource paucity of participant organisations		✓	✓	
Can be used in isolation as a research method	✓	✓		
Flexible	✓	✓	✓	✓
Efficient		✓	✓	✓

Table 8. Qualitative Research Method Attributes

4.1.5 Interview Type

While interviews were decided upon as the most appropriate and effective research method to utilise within this research project, it was also necessary to consider the type of interview and, importantly, the extent to which the interviews would be structured.

The level of structure within an interview refers to the extent to which questions are planned in advance, whether the questions are opened or closed and the level of deviation from prepared questions that can occur (Rowley, 2012). Interviewing within qualitative research tends to be far less structured than within quantitative research, where typically structured interviews employ a set of close-ended questions which are asked in the same wording and order to each participant (Doody, 2013). Structured interviews inject consistency and thus reliability into the data collected, in part through the suppression of researcher subjectivity and bias (Bryman, 2016). In contrast, unstructured interviews typically use a number of broad, open-ended questions to initiate the interview before using the responses to those questions to guide the remainder of the interview, therefore allowing spontaneity, interview tailoring based on the participant and exploration of a range of ideas and themes (Fontana & Frey, 1994).

Semi-structured interviews represent a middle ground as they involve a number of pre-determined questions, which must be utilised, but the interviewer can alter the order of questions and seek additional information through supplementary questioning (Carruthers, 1990). They therefore allow the interviewer room to explore respondents' answers and seek clarification if they are particularly relevant or interesting and enable moderately differing questioning strategies. For example, alteration of question wording or question order can be employed based on participant

responses (Barriball & While, 1994). Semi-structured interviews also ensure a level of consistency across all interviews conducted, hence facilitating comparability, as the same set of questions are used (Blumberg, Cooper & Schindler, 2011).

Ultimately, semi-structured interviews were used, as although consistency of questioning was important within this research project, for the purposes of flexibility, the ability for the researcher to alter question phrasing and ask follow-up questions was also key, given the nuanced, sensitive nature of values and social responsibility.

4.2 Pilot Study

Pilot studies are an essential means by which research methods can be tested or run as a ‘dress-rehearsal’ and therefore altered or tweaked prior to the main data collection phase of the research (Kim, 2011). They are useful for a number of reasons: to identify issues, problems and the feasibility of a particular method or approach, to give the researcher practice in employing the research methods and to make useful contacts within an organisation or industry (Sampson, 2004; Turner, 2010). As such, and in order to aid in the design of the final research method, a pilot study was undertaken to allow for the proposed research method to be trialled and its viability assessed as well as for the researcher to test how they present themselves (Harvey, 2011). It also allowed an opportunity for the interview questions to be tested, for example, to ensure they were cogent, elicited relevant information, were unambiguous and allowed the interviewer to consider their own biases and engage in reflexivity (Chenail, 2011).

4.2.1 Pilot Study Sample

Four representatives from small businesses within the South West of the UK, three of whom were owner-managers, were interviewed during the course of the pilot study; representing a variety of business ages, industries and respondent demographics (see *Table 9* for detail). The sample firms were selected in order to assess the viability of differing sectors and business sizes for the main data collection phase of the research. The sector types thus varied in terms of whether a tangible or intangible product or service was being provided and whether the business was a B2C or B2B.

Code	Industry	Age	Number of Employees	Business Type	Respondent Position
SB001	Software Publishing	31	2	Micro	Co-owner-manager
SB002	Software Publishing	20	18	Small	Financial Director
SB003	Education	20	1	Micro	Owner-manager
SB004	Education	2	1	Micro	Owner-manager

Table 9. Pilot Study Firm Characteristics

4.2.2 Pilot Study Questions

The four interviews undertaken each lasted between 25 and 75 minutes and were predominantly face-to-face, with the exception of one interview that was undertaken via Skype. The interviews primarily focused on the background of both the respondent and the organisation, before moving on to the subject of organisational values and key organisational stakeholders (see *Table 10* for pilot study interview questions).

Question Areas	Sample Questions	
Introduction	Organisational Background	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can you provide a brief overview of the business? • What is the age of the business? • How large is it, for example, in terms of employee numbers? • How does the business generate the majority of its revenue? • Who is the business' main customer base?
	Respondent Background	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can you describe your role with the organisation? • How long have you been associated with the business? • How has your role changed since joining the business?
Organisational Philosophy and Stakeholder Relationships	Organisational Philosophy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What does the business stand for? • Are there any core beliefs or values which are central to the business? • In what ways does the business contribute to society? • What are the key challenges currently facing the business?
	Stakeholder Relations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who are the business' key stakeholders? • Which of these stakeholders is the business most dependent on? • Which stakeholders are dependent on the business? • What characterises the relationships that the business cultivates with its stakeholders? • What role does the business try and play within its stakeholder relationships?
Critical Incidents in Stakeholder Relationships	Negative Incident	<p>Think of an instance where an issue or dispute has arisen between your organisation and a stakeholder.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can you describe the circumstances in which the issue or disagreements arose? • What were the actual details of the incident, for example, key events and issues?
	Positive Incident	<p>Think of an instance where a positive incident transpired between your organisation and a stakeholder.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can you describe the circumstances in which the incident arose? • For example, the key details, events and outcomes?
Impact and Management of Values Disputations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What effects did such incidents have on the business? • What effects did these incidents have on the longer-term relationship with that stakeholder? • Did this experience shape the means by which the business manages its stakeholder relations? • If such incidents occurred again, would the business manage them in a different way? 	
Conclusion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have you any thoughts or comments regarding anything we have discussed today? • Is there any extra information you would like to provide or any clarifications you might like to make? • Have you any questions for me or is there anything I can clarify? 	

Table 10. Pilot Study Interview Questions

4.2.3 Pilot Study Implications

Through undertaking the pilot study, three key considerations became apparent for the main data collection stage of the research.

Firstly, it became apparent that classification of firms by sector was not always clear. This was

exemplified in the case of firm SB002, which could potentially be classified into a number of different sectors using the Office for National Statistics' classification as an example, including 'education', 'retail sale via the internet' or 'information and communication'. Such issues related to industry classification are not new; as, for example, Kahle and Walkling (1996) highlight, SIC codes change over time, differing SIC code systems categorise businesses differently and researchers often do not specify the means by which they have classified firms on the basis of industry. The implication of this was that the sectors chosen for the main body of the research project must allow for simple and easy classification of firms.

Secondly, the managers of businesses within the software publishing industry who were interviewed discussed high levels of interaction and strong relationships with a range of stakeholders, from customers and suppliers to HMRC and local authorities and logistics firms and competitors. These owner-managers had little trouble in discussing the relevance of their values to their stakeholder relationships. Owner-managers of firms within the education industry by comparison expressed the existence of very few stakeholder relationships. For example, asserting that their only stakeholders were customers as well as one or two local or national government organisations. The implication of this was that the sectors chosen for the main data collection phase of the research should be those which possess a wide set of stakeholder relationships.

Thirdly, although the majority of the interviews went well, there was a distinct sense on the part of the interviewer of two particular phenomena occurring which distracted from gaining fruitful responses from respondents. Firstly, some respondents appeared to be trying to give 'right answers' to questions, or at least not give the 'wrong answers', for instance, through trying to gain information prior to the interview regarding the intended findings of the research. Secondly, other respondents spent a substantial portion of the interview engaged in a long-winded diatribe or fine-grained analysis of a specific point unrelated to the research questions. Both of those phenomena often resulted in extraneous conversation or respondents failing to address important points. Upon reflection, as the interviewer, I believed that I needed to be more proactive in responding to cues from respondents and adapting my behaviour. Particularly, through being more willing to be assertive, such as through explicitly directing respondents to get back on topic. This point is particularly important, given that a significant asymmetry of power in the interviewer-respondent relationship has been found to increase the likelihood of a 'failed interview' (Jacobsson & Akerstrom, 2012). I reflected that I perhaps might also have needed to be willing to give greater or fewer verbal or physical cues, such as nods and expressions of empathy, which aid either in reducing bias or in encouraging respondents, depending on which the situation requires (Turner, 2010).

Throughout the interviews, a pattern of behaviour on the part of respondents became apparent related to the critical incident portion of the interview. Specifically, respondents, when asked

to discuss 'critical incidents' which occurred between themselves and stakeholders, briefly outlined the details of an incident before quickly moving on to a tangential issue or point. Therefore, it would appear a necessity to preface the 'critical incident' section of the interview with a statement from the interviewer which stresses interest in the details of the incident, for example, key events, conversations and interactions as well as thoughts, feelings and reactions. In addition, including more questions and the greater use of probes, such as leaving periods of silence, giving enquiring glances, inserting more acknowledgement tokens and repeating back all or some of what a respondent has said may well encourage respondents to expand on, and give more detail concerning, these critical incidents (Robson, 2002; Irvine, Drew & Sainsbury, 2013).

Overall, the implications of the pilot study guided the design and execution of the main data collection phase of the research, as outlined in the following section.

4.3 Research Design

4.3.1 Research Sample

Having taken on board the implications of the pilot study, the business populations per sector within the South West of the UK (see *Table 11* for regional sector demographics) in conjunction with the characteristics of a number of sectors were assessed to formulate the criteria for the research sample.

4.3.1.1 The South West Region

The South West of the UK is an area of approximately 9,200 square miles, encompassing the counties of Cornwall, Devon and much of Somerset and Dorset and therefore a number of cities of different sizes and a large number of rural communities. The region has a total population of just under 6 million people. As a result of its natural geography, the southern part of the region in particular possesses a large farming industry, focused on both crop and livestock production (DEFRA, 2018), a food and drink production industry and high levels of tourism. A considerable number of high-value engineering, financial services and digital media firms are also present within the region. The total GDP of the region is approximately £150 billion, around 7% of the UK total (European Commission, 2020).

Despite, perhaps even because of, the strong identities of its individual counties, a perceived lack of discernible cross-regional culture in the mid-1990s led to a concerted effort to create and sustain the culture of the South West (Deacon, 2004). This has resulted in more explicit discussion and marketing of the South West's culture, with a particular focus on the intertwining notions and values of the natural environment and heritage as well as food and drink production and consumption, which have often been evident within the art, literature and folklore of the region (Knight & Harrison, 2013).

The physical geography of the region, in particular, is a significant influence on its culture and identity. For example, given it is a peninsula, a key facet of the South West's culture lies in its

connections to the sea; evident within its industry, which has traditionally focused on fishing, shipbuilding and tourism, its substantial areas of outstanding natural beauty and fertile soils and temperate climate (Howard & Pinder, 2003). Importantly, the production and consumption of food, such as cheese, baked goods and fish, as well as drink, notably cider and gin, are a key means by which the region's identity is formed and maintained (Sonnino & Marsden, 2006), particularly through the preservation of traditional heritage, ways of life and skills (Everett & Aitchison, 2008).

The region was selected as the research area due to its variation, with representation of both rural and urban business populations, as well as diversity in terms of sectors present in the region. In addition, and as discussed, the South West possesses a vibrant, deep rooted and culturally embedded alcohol production sector as well as a strong retail sector, attributable to the presence of significant levels of tourism in the region (see appendix, section 1 for detailed breakdown of alcohol production and retailing firms in the South West region). In the next section, the demographics of research sample, including justification for the firm sizes selected are discussed.

4.3.1.2 Research Sample Demographics

Small and medium sized enterprises, those with 1 to 49 employees, within the South West region were the characteristics selected for the research population. The South West is populous in terms of businesses and enjoys a wide representation of sectors due to its geographic diversity and size (Office for National Statistics, 2019) (see *Table 11* for more detail). Micro firms, with zero to nine employees, and small firms, with ten to forty-nine employees (European Commission, 2018), were chosen as the firm sizes to be utilised within the research sample, as justified accordingly.

The alcohol production sector and the independent retail sector were those included within the research sample and were selected on the basis of their strong contrast. The independent retail sector is typically regarded as relatively traditional sector (Passport, 2019), with firms in the sector predominantly pursuing a business-to-consumer businesses model. Importantly, such firms are typically heavily embedded within the communities they serve. By contrast, the alcohol production sector has seen prodigious growth within the last 15 years in the UK (Euromonitor, 2019), with a larger number of new entrants and new products. Alcohol has come to be regarded, both socially and culturally, as an important phenomenon and signifier (Pedeliento *et al.*, 2018). In addition, many alcohol producing firms, in contrast to retail firms, serve business-to-business markets, allowing a contrast in key stakeholder relationships between the sectors.

The choice of sectors also partially drove decision-making regarding firm size, with a high level of firms in the alcohol production sector being in their infancy, requiring a focus on smaller firms in order to capture a large enough sample. Those firms classified as 'small' (10-49 employees) can vary significantly in size and scale and are generally considered as representative of the small firm type, with

previous literature noting that, in contrast, medium sized firms often emulate large firm approaches to organising (Preuss & Perschke, 2010). Furthermore, the overwhelming focus on ‘larger’ small firms means that the presence of micro firms within research samples is often overlooked or not acknowledged. Micro firms, however, make up approximately 80% of firms in the UK (Department for Business Energy and Industrial Strategy, 2020) and their aggregate influence is therefore considerable. Inclusion of micro and small firms in the research sample further allows contrasts and similarities to be noted in terms of firm size.

Industry Group	Total Firm Numbers*		Percentage of Total
	South West Region	United Kingdom	
Agriculture, forestry & fishing	25,010	153,725	16.27%
Production	15,385	169,000	9.10%
Construction	32,820	353,620	9.28%
Motor trades	8,705	88,005	9.89%
Wholesale	9,405	122,950	7.65%
Retail	25,355	306,655	8.27%
Transport & storage (incl. postal)	8,860	128,240	6.91%
Accommodation & food services	19,750	204,275	9.67%
Information & communication	17,065	234,930	7.26%
Finance & insurance	6,010	77,215	7.78%
Property	9,805	114,290	8.58%
Professional, scientific & technical	37,825	492,945	7.67%
Business administration & support services	20,560	268,865	7.65%
Public administration & defence	2,420	24,185	10.01%
Education	6,285	74,755	8.41%
Health	14,100	160,990	8.76%
Arts, entertainment, recreation & other	16,810	205,960	8.16%
Total	276,170	3,180,605	8.68%

Table 11. South West Region Business Statistics

Overall, the research sample was composed of micro and small firms in the retail and alcohol production sectors in the South West of the United Kingdom. To provide further context to the research sectors selected, an overview of their size and development is provided in the next section.

4.3.1.3 Alcohol Production Sector Overview

Much of the alcohol production sector has changed dramatically over the previous 20 years. The advent of the 'craft movement', premiumisation and the introduction of tax relief for some small producers have led to significant industry growth in the number of producers as well as the range and type of products on offer (Euromonitor, 2019). This was likely reflected within the sample firms, with only 20% of sample firms over 25 years old and 50% of the firms five years old or younger. While differing sectoral segments, namely beer, wine, cider and spirits, remain overall very different in size, consumer demand has led to a focus across the whole sector on innovation as well as on improvements in product quality, especially taste, and provision of 'ethical' products with clear provenance. Terms such as 'organic', 'artisanal', 'craft', 'natural' and 'provenance' have consequently become rife within the industry (Marketline, 2018).

Such trends are perhaps most evident within the pioneering 'craft beer' or 'microbrewery' movement, where small producers have set out to provide alternatives to the products provided by the small number of typically large producers which had, for many years, dominated the industry with what small producers often perceive as 'homogenous' products. In the UK, incorporation of firms registered as 'manufacturers of beer' rose from 34 in 2007 to 378 in 2017 (Companies House, 2018). The hallmarks of such small, craft producers are typically: the use of novel ingredients, the production of non-traditional products and an emphasis on the 'authenticity' and 'uniqueness' of their products and businesses. Consonant with this, such producers often attempt to convey their values and identity through providing information about both the makers of the product and their backstory as well as through embedding themselves within a local area or community (Danson *et al.*, 2015). Such trends have arguably been emulated within other product categories, particularly in the gin sector, with a large rise in gin producing companies and a raft of new products, evidenced by a trebling in sales of gin between 2009 and 2017 in the UK (Office for National Statistics, 2018). Such growth can be significantly attributed to the entrance of entrepreneurs to the sector, who are often characterised by a self-professed passion for the product, a desire to run a 'lifestyle business' and a lack of experience and interest in traditional, 'profit-centric' business practices (Pedeliento *et al.*, 2018).

The championing of small, independent alcohol producing firms and the use of traditional methods have been led by, but have also influenced, a trend towards symbolic consumption, exemplified by increased focus on the experience of drinking alcohol and the notion of 'quality over quantity' (The Society of Independent Brewers, 2019). This trend is one that has been mirrored across all sub-sectors of the industry and is typified by producers and consumers seeking to use the production and consumption of alcohol products respectively to signal identity, convey affiliation with particular social groups and associate themselves with the values implicit within these differing social groups

(Barlow, Verhaal & Hoskins, 2018).

The alcohol production sector has thus undergone a dramatic transformation over the previous two decades, simultaneously drawing on and contributing to a number of current social, cultural and commercial trends, while drawing in a host of new actors, many of whom do not come from a 'traditional' business or commercial background.

4.3.1.4 Retail Sector Overview

Approximately 300,000 retail businesses exist within the UK, 99% of which are SMEs, with total sector sales of around £400 billion per annum (Rhodes, 2018). However, in contrast to the alcohol production industry, which remains dynamic and innovative in the face of fierce competition, the 'bricks and mortar' retail industry in the UK has suffered considerably in commercial terms within recent years. The growth in online retailers, high fixed costs and economic pressures, particularly related to the United Kingdom's departure from the European Union, have resulted in a large number of small and large retailers going into administration and many others struggling to stay solvent (Passport, 2019). This has led to considerable caution on the part of many traditional retailers and a focus on 'hunkering down' and managing bottom line performance in order to weather the host of pressures they face.

Such pressures, and associated caution, were evident within research interviews with retailers, as they often noted a drop in sales and consumer confidence as a result of the EU 'Brexit' vote, as well as through expressions of concern relating to high fixed costs such as rent and business rates. Low confidence in the retail sector is evident in the current low levels of store openings and large numbers of store closures, with, for example, the first half of 2019 seeing 2,868 store closures (PwC, 2019). This was likely demonstrated within the research sample, given that only 20% of the retail firms were five years old or newer, while 60% of the firms were 25 years or older, 40% of which were 50 years old or more. The divergent cultural and social values of differing generational consumer groups are arguably another key driver of retail trends. Research suggests that older demographics are often more interested in notions of customer service and quality, while younger consumers are more interested in fashion and convenience (Dabija & Babut, 2019). In summary, the retail sector has undergone considerable change within recent years, with firms facing significant economic and cost related pressures.

4.3.2 Data Collection

Utilising the firm characteristics of the intended research sample, approximately 100–150 organisations were approached. The lead researcher located firms using internet search engines and telephoned each firm to ascertain the name and contact information of the owner-manager or manager of the firm. If such relevant details were garnered via the telephone call, the researcher then emailed the individual in question, explaining the purpose of the research and requesting an interview. While a number of

firms declined over the phone, or when contacted via email or simply did not respond, gradually a number of individuals agreed to be interviewed. The revised interview questions as outlined in *Table 12* were used as the basic interview questions. Given the use of semi-structured interviews, although each of the broad themes of the interviews remained the same as well as often the questions, inevitably the tone, duration and focus of each interview was different.

Question Areas	Sample Questions
Introduction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can you describe your role within the organisation? • How long have you been associated with the business? • What is your role within the business? • What does a typical day at work look like for you? • Can you provide a brief overview of the business, such as its size, what it does and what sort of customers it sells to? • What are the key challenges currently facing the business? • How does the business consider its impact on society and the environment?
Organisational Philosophy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What does the business stand for? • Are there any core beliefs or values which are central to the business? • In what ways does the business contribute to society?
Stakeholder Relations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Which parties outside the business does the business rely on? • Which of these parties does the business most depend on? • Which of these parties are dependent on the business? • What tone does the business try and set in its relationships with parties outside the business? • Where do you believe power lies within the business' stakeholder relationships?
Stakeholder Values Disputations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do disagreements ever occur between the business and parties outside the business? • Are there any circumstances in which issues or disputes have arisen between the business and a stakeholder or you have had a difference in values with a party external to the business? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ What were the circumstances in which the issue or disagreements arose? ○ What were key events within this dispute? ○ What caused the issue? ○ In retrospect, was the issue avoidable?
Impact and Management of Values Disputations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What effects did the issue have on the business? • What effects did the issue have on the longer-term relationship with that stakeholder? • What actions did the business take to manage the issue? • Was the issue resolved? • If so, how? • Did this experience shape the means by which the business manages its relationships with other parties? • If such an event occurred again, would the business be better prepared to deal with it?
Conclusion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have you any thoughts or comments regarding anything we have discussed today? • Have you any questions for me or is there anything I can clarify?

Table 12. Interview Questions

4.3.3 Sample Size

Research suggests a mean sample size of around 30 participants is typical within such research projects (Mason, 2010). Nevertheless, data saturation is the critical measure of the point at which sufficient data collection has occurred. While the point of data saturation can be complex to identify within a particular study, owing to variations in data quality and the nature of the topic and the scope of the study (Morse, 2000; Guest, Bunce & Johnson, 2006), it is typically identifiable when thick, rich description is obtained from a range of individuals and no new themes or codes arise when the data is analysed (O'Reilly & Parker, 2013; Fusch & Ness, 2015). Utilising this conception of data saturation, interviews were conducted until re-occurring themes became apparent and a wide range of firms had been interviewed. In total, 40 interviews were conducted; 20 within each sector and 20 with each size of firm (see *Table 13* for organisational information on the research sample and respondent position). The interviews lasted between 30 minutes and 1 hour and 15 minutes. Of the 40 interviews conducted, 34 were undertaken in person while the other six were undertaken either over the telephone or via Skype. While the use of Skype and telephone interviews allowed a wider geographic sample to be included in the research and increased the willingness of some research participants to be involved, there are potential issues and limitations to conducting non face-to-face interviews (see section 4.1.3.1 for more detail).

Firm Code	Industry	Firm Size	Employee Numbers*	Sector	Firm Age Range**	Respondent Position	Respondent Gender
MAP01	Alcohol	Micro	3	Cider Making	5-10	OM	Male
MAP02	Alcohol	Micro	5	Gin Distilling	5-10	OM	Male
MAP03	Alcohol	Micro	2	Gin Distilling	0-5	OM	Female
MAP04	Alcohol	Micro	3	Gin Distilling	0-5	OM	Male
MAP05	Alcohol	Micro	2	Cider Making	5-10	OM	Male
MAP06	Alcohol	Micro	5	Cider Making	0-5	CEO/PO	Male
MAP07	Alcohol	Micro	3	Brewing	0-5	OM	Male
MAP08	Alcohol	Micro	5	Wine Making	5-10	HW	Male
MAP09	Alcohol	Micro	7	Brewing	0-5	OM	Male
MAP10	Alcohol	Micro	2	Wine Making	0-5	OM	Male
SAP01	Alcohol	Small	15	Brewing	0-5	OM	Male
SAP02	Alcohol	Small	12	Brewing	0-5	OM	Female
SAP03	Alcohol	Small	11	Brewing	0-5	SD/PO	Male
SAP04	Alcohol	Small	13	Brewing	10-15	OM	Male
SAP05	Alcohol	Small	25	Brewing	15-20	OM	Male
SAP06	Alcohol	Small	20	Wine Making	25-50	HW	Male
SAP07	Alcohol	Small	12	Wine Making	50+	OM	Female
SAP08	Alcohol	Small	15	Gin Distilling	5-10	OM/PO	Male
SAP09	Alcohol	Small	10	Brandy	50+	CEO	Female
SAP10	Alcohol	Small	35	Brewing	25-50	OM	Male
MIR01	Retail	Micro	2	Homeware	0-5	OM	Female
MIR02	Retail	Micro	1	Book Retail	25-50	OM	Male
MIR03	Retail	Micro	2	Book Retail	0-5	OM	Male
MIR04	Retail	Micro	3	Giftware	0-5	OM	Female
MIR05	Retail	Micro	8	Home Furnishings	50+	OM	Male
MIR06	Retail	Micro	3	Second-hand Goods	25-50	M	Male
MIR07	Retail	Micro	6	Cyclewear	5-10	OM	Male
MIR08	Retail	Micro	2	Home Furnishings	25-50	OM	Male
MIR09	Retail	Micro	4	Drinks	0-5	OM	Male
MIR10	Retail	Micro	2	Home Furnishings	10-15	OM	Male
SIR01	Retail	Small	19	Second-hand Goods	25-50	OM	Male
SIR02	Retail	Small	15	Automobile	50+	OM	Male
SIR03	Retail	Small	24	Jewellery	25-50	OM	Male
SIR04	Retail	Small	14	Electronics	50+	OM	Male
SIR05	Retail	Small	48	Jewellery	50+	FC/CS	Male
SIR06	Retail	Small	15	Giftware	25-50	OM	Female
SIR07	Retail	Small	39	Home Furnishings	50+	OM	Male
SIR08	Retail	Small	17	Jewellery	20-25	M	Male
SIR09	Retail	Small	45	Food	10-15	OM	Male
SIR10	Retail	Small	25	Gardenware	25-50	M	Male

Table 13. Research Sample Organisational Demographics and Respondent Position

*Employee numbers does not include informal work, for example, casual work and tasks undertaken by friends and family

** Age range used to ensure anonymity of participants firms

Organisational Code Key: **S** = Small, **M** = Micro; **IR** = Independent Retailer, **AP** = Alcohol Producer. For example, 'SIR05' = Small Independent Retailer Number Five.

Respondent Abbreviations: **OM** = Owner-Manager; **CEO** = Chief Executive Officer; **PO** = Part-Owner; **M** = Manager; **SD** = Sales Director; **OPM** = Operations Manager; **FC** = Financial Controller; **CS** = Company Secretary; **HW** = Head Winemaker.

4.4 Data Transcription & Analysis

4.4.1 Data Transcription

The first step in managing and analysing qualitative data is typically that of transcription (Matheson, 2007). Of the 40 interviews undertaken during data collection, 39 participants gave their consent for the interview to be recorded, while one indicated they were not happy to be recorded but that the researcher may take notes. These 39 recorded interviews were subsequently transcribed by the lead researcher through repeated listening to and simultaneous typing of the dialogue into a text document. Such an approach was taken in order to mitigate any interpretive or theoretical influence that an outside transcriber may have on the process of transcription (Tilley, 2003).

Although transcription is generally understood to be a simple process of conversion from the spoken word into the written, the process is laden with nuance and subjectivity, as the transcriber has to make a multitude of choices when transcribing and has the power to alter the meaning, sense and messages that are present within the data (Davidson, 2009). Even at their best, transcriptions are therefore only partial accounts of interviews, given that it is not possible to note and record every nuance and facet of the dialogue, for example, facial expressions, context and empathy (Poland, 1995).

Given the interpretive nature of the research, a denaturalised approach to transcription was selected as the appropriate approach to take, with accuracy focusing on perceptions and meanings formulated and shared within the interview (Oliver, Serovich & Mason, 2005). Within this approach, a number of guidelines needed to be considered and followed when transcribing data. Each transcription was a verbatim account of the interview, the text was clearly structured and each of the interviews was transcribed in the same format. In addition, the transcriber attempted to ensure that the morphological naturalness was maintained, specifically word forms and the use of punctuation was kept as consistent as possible with how it occurred within the interview (Mergenthaler & Stinson, 1992). While some researchers advocate a purist approach to this form of transcription through, for example, noting all non-verbal sounds and grammatical errors (McLellan, MacQueen & Neidig, 2003), during transcription the researcher was forced to remove some extraneous words and grammatical errors in order for the interview to be comprehensible. Care was nonetheless taken by the transcriber to ensure that respondents' meaning was kept intact and phrases and sentences were not missed; all particular risks, given the process of transcription is time consuming, repetitive and laborious (Halcomb & Davidson, 2006). Alongside this, the researcher took particular note of the emotional responses of participants during interviews, the employment of linguistic devices, including emphasis, sarcasm and joking, and the use of nonverbal techniques (Oliver, Serovich & Mason, 2005), such as showing the researcher physical items to explain and communicate points.

The next section discusses data analysis and the means by which the empirical data was analysed.

4.4.2 Data Analysis

Qualitative data analysis is the process by which linguistic or visual data is classified and interpreted to make conclusions regarding implicit and explicit processes, structures and phenomena in the world (Flick, 2014). Yet it is not a simple process but rather *'a dynamic, intuitive and creative process of inductive reasoning, thinking and theorizing'* (Basit, 2003, p.143). Three of the most common approaches are literal, interpretive and reflexive analysis. Literal analysis refers to analysing the grammatical structure or particular language structure, while interpretive analysis focuses on making sense of participants' accounts and understanding and reflexive analysis looks at the researcher themselves and their contribution to the data collection process (Welsh, 2002). An interpretive approach was selected as the approach most suited to this research, given its focus on understandings and perceptions of values, stakeholder relationships and critical incidents of values disputations.

Such an interpretive approach to qualitative data analysis is typically predicated on inductive analysis: an iterative process involving the search for and emergence of themes, patterns and categories within a data set, as opposed to the imposition of these onto the data (Srivastava & Hopwood, 2009). Thus, at the heart of the process of qualitative data analysis is categorisation: the identification of chunks of data which serve as evidence, are representative or emblematic of or belong to a more generalised phenomenon (Spiggle, 1994). Specifically, coding of the raw data is used as the means to achieve this categorisation. A code is *'most often a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language based data'* (Saldana, 2013, p.3). Beyond the role of coding as a means of categorising data, it also helps to remove the irrelevant and unnecessary data which dilutes that of research interest within the raw data (Gläser & Laudel, 2013).

Thematic analysis was thus employed to analyse the data, as it enabled rich description of phenomena to be achieved and meaningful themes to be developed and expanded in order to test existing theory (Smith & Firth, 2011). Thematic analysis is predicated on the notion of seeking themes within the data, whereby a theme is described by Braun and Clarke (2006) as a piece of information which *'captures something important about the data in relation to the research question, and represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set'* (p.10). Thematic analysis was commenced upon following the transcription of all respondent data, with the steps taken guided by Braun and Clarke's (2006) description of thematic analysis.

The specific method utilised to thematically analyse the data is described in detail within the next section.

4.4.3 Data Analysis Steps

Firstly, in tandem with the familiarity and understanding gained through transcribing the interviews, each transcript was read, evaluated and analysed in order for the researcher to familiarise themselves with the text, and gain an understanding of general themes and important events and consider the multiple meanings inherent within the text (Thomas, 2006). This gave the researcher an opportunity to immerse themselves in the world and frame of reference of each respondent (Burnard, 1991). Each transcript was then uploaded to NVivo Pro and initial coding was applied to the data as a provisional attempt at coding the data through the creation of conceptual codes (Westbrook, 1994). Specifically, each transcript was read in detail and elements of the text were selected and an initial code created. These codes were used to describe basic elements of the data which were of interest and relevance to the research questions, for instance, relating to specific values, the enactment and communication of values, the influence of values on stakeholder relationships and instances of disputed values. As such, these codes were intentionally general and simple in nature, as initial coding is a tentative exercise and therefore as many codes as necessary were generated in order to chronicle all relevant and fertile elements of the text (Berg, 2007; Elo & Kyngäs, 2008).

Upon completion of the process of open coding of the data, these codes were exported to an Excel document and subsequently analysed in order to identify themes and overlaps within these codes. This process allowed the rolling up of the open codes into themes – categories based on inter-relation or pattern (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). These themes were broader and thus more representative of the most salient themes within the texts, as they were at a far higher level of abstraction than the initial codes (Benaquisto, 2008) (see appendix, section 2 for example coding tree). This level of analysis allowed the relationships and links between themes and codes to be explored in greater detail, particularly as open codes may gain greater meaning when viewed alongside other data and codes (Aronson, 1994).

The next stage of data analysis was the reviewing and refinement of themes where themes were discarded, collapsed into one another or were broken down into separate themes. This involved the re-reading of extracts for each theme and evaluating whether they formed a coherent pattern. This was followed by consideration of whether the themes accurately reflected and depicted the themes which come across in the dataset as a whole (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Consequently, when these finalised themes became apparent, their significance, importance and the according implications were assessed in combination with the existing literature and theoretical framework in order to draw conclusions regarding the research questions and outcomes.

An important part of any research process is consideration of methodological limitations. These are considered in the following section, before issues relating to data storage and ethics are examined.

4.5 Methodological Limitations

It is an inevitability that any research project has both limitations and potential flaws relating to the methodology, the method or the particular mechanics of a myriad of other factors, such as the research sample, interview questions or construct measurements (Kelle, 2006). Within this particular research project there are two distinct limitations which arise naturally as a result of the epistemological position of the research: the generalisability of results and researcher and participant bias.

Firstly, the results of this research are inherently un-generalisable. This is due to a number of reasons, perhaps most importantly that research employing a purely interpretivist epistemology cannot be used to generate generalisable results. The interpretivist epistemology is predicated on a subjectivist ontology under which generalisability it is not sought (Labuschagne, 2003; Loh, 2013). Further to this, the research employed no sampling technique which would allow a random cross section large enough in size to draw generalisable results. Lastly, as semi-structured interviews were used to collect data, it means that the data collected was not 'comparable' enough to be reliable in allowing generalisability (Winter, 2000).

Secondly, participant bias is a serious consideration and limitation within the research. Social desirability bias, first coined by Edwards (1953), is the tendency of research participants to give answers which they perceive to be publicly favourable, leading to obfuscation of the 'truth'. It is particularly pertinent to this research, as it more prevalent and likely to occur in research which relates to ethically sensitive topics, such as moral issues in organisations and social responsibility (Crane, 1999; Miyazaki & Taylor, 2008). This is further compounded by the inevitability of researcher bias. Each researcher brings idiosyncratic experiences, values and beliefs to the research process which can influence, prejudice and bias, both consciously and subconsciously (Cresswell & Miller, 2003). This may manifest in a wide variety of ways, for example, in the wording of questions, how participants are interacted with and how the data is analysed (Mehra, 2001). However, such bias must be accepted (Bluhm *et al.*, 2011) and was partially mitigated through the researcher engaging in reflexivity (see section 4.8). In terms of participant bias, the researcher has little ability to influence it, aside from ensuring that questions are asked in a neutral, non-leading manner.

4.6 Data Storage

Two critical issues are present when it comes to the management and storage of research data: data integrity and data security. Within social science research, a large volume of data can be amassed through the research process, and so it is important to keep this data organised (Richards & Richards, 1994). This is to ensure that the data can be found easily but also to guarantee that data is not lost so that it can be referred back to, provided to substantiate findings and potentially so that it can be used by other researchers. Research data can otherwise run the risk of becoming so-called 'dark data'; data

that is not sufficiently carefully stored and organised, hence ending up unutilised or even lost (Heidorn, 2008). The data collected within this research project, both the audio and transcription files, were stored in, and regularly backed up to, three locations: on the cloud, on an ordinary computer and on a hard drive. This duplication of data ensured that integrity was maintained.

To maintain the security of the data and anonymity of the participants as well as undue exposure, all data was protected by a password which remained unknown to all but the researcher (Tracy, 2010) and the research data was not sent via email or by any other means (UK Data Service, 2018).

4.7 Research Ethics

Data collection within the context of social science research has an intrinsic moral bent; it involves the collection of personal data concerning individuals' lives, work and relationships, all of which may be sensitive areas of enquiry (Legewie & Nassauer, 2018). In the case of interviews, a range of moral issues can arise relating to the subject matter of the research, the interviewer's approach and epistemological positioning of the research (Hammersley, 2014; Elliott & Roberts, 2020), which may be heightened as a result of the rapport developed and trust built between interviewer and respondent. This can lead to moral injury or issues on the part of the respondent as well as problems for the researcher and their research (Greenwood, 2016). For instance, if interviewers build too much trust with a respondent they may feel compelled to protect the data from outsiders, especially if the conclusions reached are unfair to the respondent or cast them in an unflattering light (Fink, 2000). In order to mitigate and prevent such ethical issues arising within this research project and the collection of data through interviews with participants, a number of steps were taken to ensure the values of autonomy, privacy, confidentiality and care were upheld throughout the research process. These will be detailed within this section.

Autonomy is a vital principle within many societies, preserved so that individuals can engage in free decision-making and self-direction (Hammersley & Traianou, 2012). It is a pertinent concern when research is conducted as a consequence of the information asymmetries which typically exist between researcher and research participants. To ensure autonomy was safeguarded throughout the research process, freely volunteered informed consent was garnered from research participants through written or verbal consent gained prior to the interview. An explanation of the aims of the research and the background of the researcher were also communicated either verbally or in writing before the interview was conducted. Participants were made aware that all data would be anonymised but that select quotes may be used within the researcher's work.

The privacy and confidentiality of the research participants' identities, personal details and data were maintained through the anonymisation of research data (Wiles *et al.*, 2006; Saunders, Kitinger &

Kitzinger, 2015). In this case, the definition of confidentiality refers to regard for autonomy as well as privacy through the removal of identifying information (Wiles, 2013). This meant that any information within the research data which could be used for identification, such as names, was removed and replaced, both for primary and secondary subjects, that is to say, both the participants themselves and others they discussed or referenced (unless respondents were indirectly discussing an organisation, for instance, through giving a broad example of a particular type of organisation such as a supermarket). Details which would make an organisation identifiable, such as location, size and industry, or an individual, for example job role, responsibilities or personal details, were also removed to ensure that identification was not possible. Details extraneous to the research but potentially commercially sensitive, including customer base, turnover and other financial metrics, were also removed during the process of transcription. In order to maintain confidentiality while enabling the researcher to identify particular organisations, each interview was designated with a code (Carusi & Jirotko, 2009).

Care towards participants was also considered in order to minimise the risk of harm or discomfort as well as to avoid participants feeling exploited or deceived (Israel & Hay, 2006; Walsham, 2006). Given the sensitive nature of this research project, its relation to organisational ethics and social responsibility as well as relationships between the firms and its stakeholders and organisational reputation, consideration of the potential discomfort of participants required appropriate understanding and empathy (Brannen, 1988). This manifested within the course of the interviews through the interviewer seeking to avoid passing judgement over the responses of participants and giving participants sufficient time for reflection and space to answer in a considered manner, using their own words. Throughout the process of the research, the researcher also sought to reassure participants that participation was voluntary as well as to proactively deal with any anxieties or issues of participants.

Overall, given both the research method being employed within the research as well as the topic of the research itself, ethical concerns were a key consideration within the research design and the execution of data collection. Accordingly, considerations relating to autonomy, privacy, confidentiality and care were considered and accounted for and the research was approved through the research ethics process of the researcher's home institution (Approved 28/01/2019 – see appendix, section 3).

4.8 Reflexivity

Given that research is an exercise in the creation of knowledge by a researcher or a team of researchers, it can be viewed as '*an active process that requires scrutiny, reflection and interrogation of the data, the researcher, the participants, and the context that they inhabit*' (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004, p.274). Researchers bring biases and theoretical preferences to any research projects as well as an idiosyncratic set of values and experiences, which all influence the collection, analysis and interpretation of data

(Kleinsasser, 2000). As this research was predicated on an interpretivist epistemology which emphasises subjectivity, it is particularly important that the researcher's subjectivities were reflected upon and acknowledged by the researcher through engaging in a process of reflexivity (Mao *et al.*, 2016). Such reflexive analysis concerns the perpetual evaluation of subjective thought and actions, particularly concerning researcher relations with participants and how these inform and alter the research process (Berger, 2015).

Finlay (2002) suggests that the reflexive process can be split into three semi-distinct stages which are used to structure the following discussion. *Stage 1: pre-research*, in which the researcher examines their relationship with the topic, including motivations, assumptions and interests. *Stage 2: data collection*, in which the researcher reflects on how the power imbalance manifests between researcher and participants as well as the how research relationships develop and impact upon findings. *Stage 3: data analysis*, where the journey of data exploration is reflected upon, particularly the effect of emotive stories and ambivalent reactions to data, as well as any shaping of the researchers' ideas and beliefs.

4.8.1 Pre-Research Reflexivity

In terms of pre-research reflexivity, perhaps the most important assumption that I possessed prior to embarking on this research, which also functions as a key personal motivator, is that organisations have a moral responsibility to engage in ethical conduct. This is most likely the result of having completed a master's degree in sustainability within a management school, sitting within a sustainability research group during my PhD studies and having read numerous articles and books extolling the virtues of socially responsible and ethical business and the dire need for sustainable organisations. This likely results in confirmation bias on my part, leading me to look for evidence of the benefits of moral conduct within the organisations I study while not giving sufficient credence to evidence that suggests the opposite (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007).

Further to this, it would be remiss not to engage in some reflection on my own values. As previously mentioned, *sustainability* or 'achievement of a sustainable world' is an important belief of mine and therefore, logically, is an important value which I possess. Beyond sustainability, *equality* is something which I believe to be exceptionally important, along with *respect*, *curiosity*, *freedom of speech* and *avoidance of harm to humans, animals and the planet*. These are values which I attempt to practise and demonstrate through my behaviour. However, there are at least two caveats or implications attached to these. Firstly, I am innately subjective regarding my values and, as demonstrated within the academic literature, a 'value-action' gap may well occur between my espoused values and those which I actually practise (Huddart *et al.*, 2009). Secondly, given that I am cognisant of what I believe my values to be, if I come into contact with individuals through the research

whose values are contrary to my own, I am less likely to be positively predisposed to them, resulting in increased negative bias concerning the data they provide. Similarly, if I interact with individuals with shared values this can increase positive bias, the so-called 'halo' effect (Thorndike, 1920; Nisbett & Wilson, 1977).

4.8.2 Data Collection Reflexivity

Over the course of the interviews, the power asymmetries between me and the research participants became increasingly apparent. While my role as interviewer ostensibly imbued me with power, through allowing me to take the lead and ask questions, probe answers and use silences and supplementary questions to elicit information (Kvale, 2006), it became increasingly clear to me that both I and respondents felt and exercised differing levels of power. In particular, while some respondents engaged with the interview as if it were an opportunity for honest and often 'therapeutic' reflection (Hiller & DiLuzio, 2004), others diluted my power through exerting their own power in the form of resistance. For example, respondents often shut down lines of questioning through giving short answers, not answering questions, moving conversation onto other topics and contradicting themselves at times when discussing emotive topics (Beaunae, Wu & Koro-Ljungberg, 2011). To try to mitigate this, I attempted to ask questions or illicit further detail later on the interview in relation to points that respondents had attempted to skirt around. However, when analysing my data, I also sought to keep in mind and consider points and issues that respondents did not wish to discuss and the ramifications of this avoidance on their values and relationship with moral conduct.

4.8.3 Data Analysis Reflexivity

Having time and space to transcribe, listen back to and code the data allowed me to gain some perspective on the data and critically interrogate my relationship towards it. Through listening back to the interviews, I began to notice how my instinctive feelings towards the respondents and how easily we had built rapport had framed my perceptions of what they were describing. I realised that, perhaps inevitably as a result of bias (Chenail, 2011), I had a tendency to agree with narratives and views consonant with my own beliefs. For instance, regarding the salience of values-driven practices and sustainable and ethical conduct. As I realised this, I ensured that I took extra care to interrogate my own assumptions and feelings when analysing data to mitigate my own bias in this respect.

Furthermore, one particular interview made me pause for reflection and consider something that many respondents had made reference to but that I had perhaps not taken great time to consider. The interview in question was with a small cider producer who described with great passion the firm's commitment to authentic cider production. At the time, I took these declarations very much at face value as they concurred with what I had read on the firm's website beforehand, particularly in relation

to their commitment to 'crafting cider'. Whilst subsequently interviewing another local firm, that respondent mentioned the cider producer I had previously talked to and noted that the firm did not in fact make their own cider and went to some lengths to obfuscate this from its customers.

This left me feeling embarrassed, as I had not realised or even thought to ask this during the interview, but it did allow me to reflect on the notion of authenticity as many respondents had described it. I began to consider how from the point of view of those producers who described striving to transparently represent their businesses, they might perceive this as deliberately obscuring practices and processes for financial gain. In addition, I began to see from the consumer's point of view how overwhelming the 'noise' relating to authentic products and firms may be and that authenticity was therefore such a key moral value within the alcohol production industry. This led to authenticity and the notion and importance of context becoming some of the key themes that were discussed and interrogated within chapters five and six of my data analysis. Beyond reflexivity, the next section outlines the strategies taken within the research with respect to the mitigation of researcher bias.

4.8.4 Mitigation of Researcher Bias

In order to attempt to mitigate my biases, throughout the research process I engaged in reflexivity to build a habit of meta-cognition. Initially, I acknowledged my biases and assumptions through engaging in pre-research reflexivity (see section 4.8.1) in an attempt to recognise my inherent subjectivities; a critical step in my consciously endeavouring to try and limit the negative effect that my subjectivities have regarding the research project (Rowley, 2012). I also engaged in reflexivity at points during the research process, such as in the data collection and analysis phases, to try and further mitigate bias. This gave me an opportunity to examine the research journey as it progressed and highlighted the implicit assumptions and beliefs which emerged throughout the process that could be influencing the research (Roulston & Shelton, 2015) (see sections 4.8.2/3).

This continual, systematic and pro-active awareness of my own emotional responses to research participants, including what they said, how they said it and how I reflected upon it, was of fundamental import in allowing me to build the habit of meta-cognition (Peshkin, 1988). Specifically, in that the thoughts and feelings I experienced were continuously considered and reflected on in order to assess how I may be bringing my past experiences, assumptions and values to analysing data in an emotive manner, which could potentially taint the data and diminish or misrepresent the words of research participants. For example, having engaged in pre-research reflexivity, I found myself considering my experiences and beliefs and how they may have influenced my perspective on what a respondent had said, not only during the interview but also while travelling home from the interview and when undertaking other interviews. Likewise, when analysing the empirical data, I found myself frequently interrogating my initial responses to statements and reflections from respondents.

Through engaging in reflexivity throughout the process of research, I developed the habit of meta-cognition, facilitating the mitigation of the nefarious influence of my biases on the research process. This being said, it must be noted that research undertaken from an interpretivist epistemology will inherently be subjective to at least some degree.

4.9 Conclusions: Chapter Four

As described within this chapter, the most appropriate epistemological position by which to investigate the *nature, role, enactment* and *maintenance* of values is that of interpretivism due to the inter-subjective, idiosyncratic and personal nature of values and value disputations. Of all the qualitative methods available, interviews were employed to collect data from micro and small alcohol production and retail businesses in the South West of the UK regarding their organisations and, in particular, their values as well as their experiences of value disputations occurring between the business in which they work and other organisations or individuals. This research method allowed a large amount of relatively consistent data to be collected from a range of individuals across different contexts. Data was then transcribed and subsequently analysed using NVivo Pro to thematically code the data in order to organise it sufficiently to evaluate and draw conclusions.

Alongside this specified research process and method, a number of technical and ethical issues arose which have been outlined and addressed. Pertinently, the means by which research ethics were upheld through autonomy, confidentiality and care were of vital import within this research, as is how I, as the researcher, positioned myself regarding the themes and issues that became apparent during the process of data collection and analysis.

The following three chapters (chapters 5-7) comprise of the data and analysis of the data collected through the research interviews. While chapters five and six provide an overview of the data in relation to the guiding research questions, chapter seven seeks to draw together this data through interrogating it from a Pragmatist stance.

Chapter Five: The Nature and Practice of Small Firm Values

5.0 Introduction to the Empirical Data Analysis: Chapters Five, Six and Seven

This chapter and the following two chapters together provide an overview of the findings and analysis of the empirical data gathered from firms in the research sample. The current chapter broadly outlines and describes the data gathered in relation to the first three sub-research questions, questions one to three, which focus on the nature of small firm values, the role of these values and how firms seek to enact values. Specifically:

1. *What is the nature of the organisational values that small firms consider to be salient?*
2. *What is the role of organisational values in small firms?*
3. *How are these values enacted?*

The following chapter (chapter six) addresses sub-research question four, which concerns the means by which small firms seek to maintain fidelity towards their values in the face of pressure from external stakeholders.

4. *How do small firms maintain fidelity towards their organisational values, particularly in instances where they face external challenge?*

Chapter seven draws together the two previous chapters and theoretically grounds the findings presented therein. It does so through drawing on theory from the Pragmatist movement to take a Pragmatist stance on small firm values practice and answer the overall research question, namely: *How do small firms practise and maintain fidelity towards their organisational values?*

5.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on describing, and thus begins the analysis of, the empirical data collected via forty research interviews undertaken with small businesses in the South West of the UK. As outlined in chapter four, half of participating firms were in the alcohol production sector, while the other half were in the independent retail sector. Further to this, half of the businesses within each sector were micro businesses, with fewer than 10 employees, while half were small businesses, with between 10 and 49 employees.

In this chapter, the nature and practice of the organisational values cited within the interviews, as well as how representatives from the small businesses considered the role of their values, are presented and discussed.

5.2 The Nature and Salience of Small Firm Values

As evidenced within the previous literature, virtually all the respondents within the research sample stressed the salience of their values, defined by Rokeach as '*enduring belief(s) that a specific mode of conduct or end-state of existence is personally or socially preferable to an opposite or converse mode of conduct or end-state of existence*' (1973, p.5), to the functioning of their respective businesses. While one respondent did claim that their organisation did not possess any values, the majority of respondents across both sectors discussed the importance of values to the 'ethos' of their organisation as well as the day-to-day practices of the firm, particularly those relating to social responsibility (Hammann, Habisch & Pechlaner, 2009; Stephan, Ascalon & Gorgievski, 2011; Schaefer, Williams & Blundel, 2020).

Over the course of the interviews, a broad range of values were both explicitly and implicitly conveyed, emphasised and articulated (see *Table 14* for examples of commonly cited values). These values were often related implicitly through discussion of firm practices that were emblematic of firm values. Using Rokeach's (1973) conceptualisation of values as being either *moral* or *competence* in nature (see chapter two, section 2.4.1), the values referenced by respondents were classified accordingly. 'Moral' values, as suggested by Rokeach, include *equality*, *honesty* and *responsibility* and possess inherent moral bearing or association. Competence values, on the other hand, relate not to moral concerns, but to capability, both desired and actual, with examples including *ambition*, *wisdom* and *capability*. Within the empirical data, a number of moral and competence values became apparent. While competence values typically concerned the smooth and successful running of the business, and included *quality*, *excellence* and *customer service*, moral values related to more traditional moral concerns, such as *fairness*, *honesty* and *authenticity*.

What became apparent over the course of the interviews was that clear divisions could not be drawn between organisational values and the practices associated with them. For example, notions of authentic conduct were often discussed alongside practices associated with *honesty*, such as marketing practices being transparent. Similarly, when respondents reflected on treating customers *fairly*, they often also discussed, both implicitly and explicitly, the importance of ensuring that product quality was high and competent customer service was provided. This reflects previous research suggesting that values are not activated or practised in isolation, but instead 'constellations' of related values work together to influence decision-making and guide behaviour (Schwartz & Bilsky, 1987).

On the whole, the independent retailers within the sample tended to stress competence values over moral values, while the alcohol producing firms were more focused on moral values. That being said, all the firms in the sample either explicitly or implicitly emphasised the importance of turning a profit so that the firm could remain a viable business, with some respondents expressing concern and

anxiety over the financial state of their respective businesses. The increased emphasis on moral values in the alcohol production sector was often attributable to the fact that some businesses were ‘lifestyle businesses’ as well as to the increased product ownership that firms in the sector tend to enjoy given their direct manufacturing capabilities. This contrast was arguably further compounded by firms in the retail sector being more directly customer facing, necessitating a greater focus on customer service as well as an emphasis on quality. Particularly, for example, as customers often spent thousands or even tens of thousands of pounds on goods, as opposed to small amounts on a pint or cask of beer or bottle of gin or wine.

As such, retail firms’ codified values tended to be more focused on competence values, especially those relating to notions of *quality*, *customer service* and *excellence*, over perhaps more moral concerns, such as *sustainability*. Respondents within the retail sector attributed this to such values being used as a marketing tool to draw in consumers concerned with notions of product quality and customer service.

Value Type	Independent Retail Firms’ Values	Alcohol Production Firms’ Values
Moral	<i>Heritage</i>	<i>Authenticity</i>
	<i>Benevolence</i>	<i>Localism</i>
	<i>Integrity</i>	<i>Sustainability</i>
	<i>Excellence</i>	<i>Care</i>
	<i>Respect</i>	<i>Benevolence</i>
	<i>Inclusivity</i>	<i>Autonomy</i>
Competence	<i>Quality</i>	<i>Quality</i>
	<i>Customer service</i>	
	<i>Creativity</i>	<i>Profit-making</i>
	<i>Profit-making</i>	

Table 14. Frequently Cited Small Business Values

Among the values referenced within the interviews, a small number were cited more regularly than others (see Table 14 for summary of most cited small firm values). These values are explored in greater depth within this section through consideration of how respondents conceptualised such values as well as the norms, practices and processes that respondents described as being driven by these values. Although such values have clear overlaps, both in practice and theoretically, for the sake of clarity, they are described individually.

5.2.1 Authenticity

'I've never put a suit on for anybody I've ever met. So, I just rock up as I am, talk the same way and like it or lump it, basically. I'm certainly not going to change...' (MAP09)

Authenticity typically refers to the extent to which something is genuine or original, possesses a known origin and is not an imitation or copy (Van Leeuwen, 2001). The concept is prominent within the work of a number of philosophers, including Sartre, Heidegger and de Beauvoir, and authenticity has been referred to as the 'ultimate moral value', given its role in mediating the extent to which an individual remains faithful to their particular values and beliefs (Jackson, 2005). Within the empirical data collected in the alcohol production sector, and as theorised by Morsing and Spence (2019) in relation to small firm conduct, authenticity was frequently cited as a key organisational value. The definition of authenticity has often been contested, given that it is a socially constructed phenomenon (Peterson, 2005). As a result, differing perspectives often exist on the extent to which an entity is truly authentic. These perspectives are driven by individual, subjective notions of the definition of authenticity and judgements regarding what truly represents, for example, an authentic brand, story or product (Beverland, 2005). Representatives from the alcohol producing firms frequently stressed the criticality of authentic conduct. As Waehning, Karampela & Pesonen (2018) examine, the entwined notions of craft, authenticity and independence have become incredibly important within the brewing industry, in particular, and represent a key means by which smaller brewers attempt to differentiate themselves from larger, 'mainstream' brewers.

Firms discussed the practice and importance of authenticity within their stakeholder relationships through ensuring product authenticity in provenance, production and branding. Description of authentic conduct within stakeholder relationships typically related to honesty concerning the firm's history and backstory and avoiding alteration of individual behaviour and beliefs solely for commercial gain. As one winemaker from a small vineyard put it:

'I'm selling our brand but, in my eyes, I'm only telling people what I do ...so they can build up a genuine picture of this is what we do. I'm open and honest about it. I don't want to mislead people.' (MAP09)

A number of producers reflected on how they would rather lose business than act in what they perceived to be an inauthentic manner. They were also highly critical of competitors who they believed engaged in inauthentic practices, especially as such practices often involved flagrantly and deliberately misleading customers. A number of micro producers, who were newer entrants to the market, were particularly passionate about the importance of being and seeming authentic and ensuring that their firms remained so as they grew.

Consideration of producer inauthenticity was perhaps most acute where production methods were discussed. Within the cider production sector, for instance, a number of firms described how they believed some producers to be inauthentic as they engaged in non-traditional practices, such as making the product from concentrate rather than from pure apple juice or making fruit ciders containing no apple. Producers, however, also frequently referred to branding and labelling practices when considering authenticity. For example, citing what they perceived to be blatant shows of inauthenticity by other firms, such as firms having a 'locational' brand but the product not being made in the named location, cider companies outsourcing production instead of producing in house but often not making this apparent to consumers as well as large cider producers strategically employing branding associated with small, local producers.

In the same vein, firms in the wine making sector outlined emotive examples of authenticity-related issues and practices, which they often perceived as harmful to the industry as well as unfair, given the benefits they brought to the firms that employed them. Wine producing firms in the sample described how some competitors employed individuals as 'winemakers', despite outsourcing wine production, and engaged in a lack of transparency concerning the ingredients used within their products. A supplementary authenticity-related issue, one shaped by legislation and cited by multiple respondents, was many producers' use of the term 'British Wine', which they believed to be misleading for consumers, as while British wine must legally be produced in the UK, the grape juice or concentrate used in the production process can be sourced from anywhere in the world.

Overall, it is clear that authenticity is a key and emotive organisational value for many firms in the alcohol production industry and is heavily interlinked with a range of organisational practices spanning both production and marketing.

5.2.2 Heritage

'We've been doing this for a while and there is a lot of heritage and history to uphold and I need to ensure that I leave this farm, and this dynasty, in as good a place as it was, or better than, when we took over.' (S1R09)

As Alonso Gonzalez argues, heritage *'is a social construction and a metacultural process of selection, as there is no "heritage" before somebody starts to preserve, remember, reclaim, enhance or celebrate something'* (2014, p.360). It involves the preservation and valuation of practices, processes and institutions and therefore ensuring that current and future practices or norms are representative of pre-existing or historical values and practices (see chapter four, section 4.3.1.1 for a discussion of the significance of heritage to the South West region). Given the presence of a number of multigenerational businesses within the sample, with seven of the businesses over 50 years in age and one over 150 years

old, respondents frequently took time to reflect on the impact of the age of the business and the implications of the value of heritage on the firm. The importance of heritage has been noted within previous research in family businesses, in particular, as *'founders may aspire to meld family and business values and hope the heritage will be passed on to future generations'* (Adams, Taschian & Shore, 1996, p.157). Notably, while the notions of authenticity and heritage are arguably similar, the retail businesses within the sample tended to discuss predominantly heritage, while alcohol producing firms focused more on authenticity.

The importance of heritage as a value was often particularly apparent within the retail firms, as discussed by Mitchell *et al.* (2011), with a number of representatives emphasising the significance of the firm's legacy, and that of the family, on the business and the need to consider the implications of this on a day-to-day basis. For example, considering it necessary to preserve elements of traditional practices, stay true to the goals and beliefs of the firm founders and consider the long-term longevity of the business. As one owner-manager emphasised:

'I don't ever feel like this is mine to sell. It's not. It's hopefully just something that gets moved on to the next generation, which is something I think is quite rare in this day and age, where you have that longevity.' (SAP07)

Given that a number of retailers' family names resided above the shop door, a number of respondents commented on the pressure they felt to preserve and stay true to the heritage of the business, especially as they felt it was so inextricably linked to their family's heritage. One such retail owner-manager remarked on the value of the firm's heritage and the pressure to maintain it, as the firm had endured and sustained itself in spite of many significant social and economic events, including economic crashes, paradigm-shifting technological advancements and even world wars.

Within the alcohol production sector, as a result of the recent and high growth in new firms, many new entrants to the market felt that they were rekindling the lost heritage and tradition of British alcohol production, particularly given the strong historical and cultural links between alcohol production and the region. Conversely, more established firms within the sample reflected on the importance of, and the due credit they felt should be given to, their firm's heritage; especially their use of traditional production methods and the years of specialist knowledge and expertise they had amassed, which were key in the shaping, and evidencing, of the quality of their products.

In summary, heritage was a key value expressed by firms across both sectors, often relating to the preservation of organisational goals, values and practices.

5.2.3 Localism

'There is a value of being a proud local brand, part of the local scene.' (MAP01)

Interwoven with the notion of authenticity within the alcohol production sector and heritage in the retail sector, localism was another value stressed by many respondents across both sectors. The privileging of local interests, particularly economic interests, has featured within a variety of social, political and economic discourses and is often considered alongside a number of other related ideas, including autonomy, freedom and identity (Pratchett, 2004). Latterly, localism has typically been characterised as a *'primarily urban movement, promoting economic justice, environmental responsibility, and social fairness'* (Kurland, McCaffrey & Hill, 2012, p.45). As evidenced and discussed within much prior small business social responsibility research, local stakeholder relationships and traditions, as well as contributing to the local community, are often key concerns and motivators for small firms (Ciliberti, Pontrandolfo & Scozzi, 2008; Lähdesmäki, Siltaoja & Spence, 2019). A number of respondents expressed such sentiment through describing the symbiotic relationship between their business and the local area and an accompanying need to consider and give due regard to the local area and the local community. As one winemaker related:

'The locals are always very much on our side...we never buy anything outside our valley...we like to try and keep wealth within the county, in our sort of little pocket.'
(SAPO6)

When discussing localism, respondents often stressed the integral role that the local community, the local land or local geography had played in the success of the business and how the firm therefore owed loyalty to the community. For instance, firms noted how the local community supported the business financially by procuring their products or services and providing skilled labour for the business. In addition, less tangible local community support was often discussed, with firms reflecting on the tolerance of their respective communities towards inconveniences that the business had brought, such as noise, and the emotional support that they provided.

In the case of the alcohol production sector, the notion of community was often discussed in relation to other firms within the sector. Breweries in particular cited many instances of engaging in 'collabs', as colloquially termed, with other breweries, involving informal, short-term arrangements with other, typically local, breweries to co-produce, co-market and co-distribute a new product created and brewed together. Such collaborations typically involved staff from one brewery visiting the collab partner's brewery for a day of brewing, socialising and mutual learning, which, if successful, was often repeated with a reciprocal visit to the other partner's brewery. Information exchange as well as the sharing and lending of physical assets, raw ingredients and even staff were further common examples

of the support that existed at a local level between many firms in the alcohol production sector. In terms of connection to the local land, cider producers and vineyards often discussed a strong, emotional link with the local land (and nature) that yielded the core ingredients of grapes or apples for their respective products. Such a connection was often attributed to the amount of time spent working outside on the land and with nature in producing the annual crop. As one micro winemaker described:

'There's something very special about here. So, we also look...at local history and have a sense of the way the land is, what the geology is.' (MAP10)

A range of alcohol producers therefore stressed the importance of respecting the local area, both the local community as well as the physical landscape, and contributing to it.

Respondents from the retail sector described the pride associated with the role that their business played in the community and how they and their respective counterparts in other local businesses helped to maintain the social fabric of the community. Many retailers stressed their desire to support local makers, for example furniture and gift makers, with some discussing how doing so was an integral founding principle of their firm. Given that many of the individuals employed within the firm also lived close to the business, a great deal of blurring between personal and professional relationships, such as with customers and individuals employed within other local businesses, was often evident. As a result, many respondents stressed how integral the local community was to their success as well as their joy at being an integral part of it through providing goods and services to the community and donating time and resources to community projects.

'It's little things like the local school coming in for a donation – "yeah, OK" – because we are part of a community and that's what you do, you help a community. Sometimes the biggest donations aren't monetary, they are time or advice or experiences.' (SIR08)

In sum, localism was a key value expressed by many firms, with both alcohol producing and retailing firms expressing pride in their local area and a range of practices which involved engaging with and contributing to the local area or community.

5.2.4 Sustainability

'We have an economic ambition, but in trying to do things the right way, it's also about trying to build social and environmental capital.' (SAP04)

Another value which was emphasised across both sectors within the research sample was that of sustainability. The notion of sustainability as a value arguably stems from its coinage by those within the environmental movement of the 1980s (Brown *et al.*, 1987). In current usage, it is typically used to

describe the long-term protection of environmental capital, including the maintenance of biological stocks and environmental quality, as well as of social capital, through the promotion and safeguarding of harmonious social relations and social justice (Vallance, Perkins & Dixon, 2011). Sustainability has often been associated with large firms, as evident within a tranche of the literature on small business sustainability which promotes the notion of small businesses as laggards in promoting voluntary sustainable practices (Revell & Rutherford, 2003; Revell & Blackburn, 2007). However, respondents outlined a commitment to sustainability and, accompanying this, a wide variety of sustainable practices present within their firms. While some of the firms' business models were specifically 'green' or 'sustainable' in nature, such as organic breweries or second-hand retailers, other firms attempted to ensure that their firms were more sustainable through embedding ad hoc sustainable practices. Although many of the firms in the sample expressed the importance of sustainability, a number of micro-sized firms equally expressed a feeling that it was too much of a distraction or too much of a drain on resources for them to consider as their businesses stood.

Examples of such sustainable practices included: breweries forming informal arrangements with local farmers so that spent grain from the brewing process could be used to feed livestock (MAP07; SAP03), vineyards minimising the use of chemical treatments (MAP08; MAP10), alcohol producers creating vegan products (SAP02; MAP07), retailers reducing the use of plastics and attempting to reuse, reduce or recycle packaging and other materials (SIR02; SIR03; MIR10), jewellers upcycling unwanted jewellery pieces (SIR03; SIR05; SIR08) and food retailers seeking to account for, and minimise, food miles (SIR09).

Some respondents described the means by which they were trying to ensure sustainability was more fully embedded within their firms. One owner-manager of a retailer-producer related the steps the business was taking to anchor sustainability as a concern through engaging in more sustainable practices:

'We are on a bit of a journey where we are almost taking our farming practices back to pre-First World War levels, where the consensus then was that you looked after your land first, anything other than that was a by-product; profit, or anything like that, was a by-product.' (SIR09)

The notion of sustainability was predominantly treated as an environmental concern by respondents. Given that the research was conducted between May and September 2019, it was apparent that there had been a recent uptick in interest and awareness of sustainability, stemming largely from the work of environmental activist Greta Thunberg and nature documentaries impressing the nature and scale of current ecological issues.

Alongside this, some respondents also referred to sustainability in relation to social issues and social capital. This was particularly apparent within the context of brewing firms, where a number of owner-managers noted the desire to bring people and communities together in consumption of their products, especially in their onsite 'taprooms', to try and build social capital. One owner-manager, for instance, commented on the fact that they deliberately avoided playing music in their taprooms to encourage conversation, while another discussed intentionally installing large communal tables in their open-plan bar to galvanise customers to talk to one another and thus build new social bonds.

Within the wine making industry, given the small size of some of the firms, a common practice at harvesting time was having friends, family and people from the local community, sometimes hundreds at a time, coming to pick the fruit. In doing so, this allowed an opportunity to bring people together, not only to pick, but to eat, drink and meet new people, consequently facilitating the rejuvenation and formation of social relationships.

This being said, some firms, echoing the previous literature (for example, Hall & Wagner, 2012), noted the challenges associated with sustainability in a small firm context, such as the low levels of bargaining power within stakeholder relationships as well as the lack of support from suppliers and the government in facilitating sustainable practices. This was exemplified by the furniture retailers within the sample, who cited the lack of sites for used goods to be recycled, a lack of interest from large suppliers in investing in sustainability and the prohibitive cost of many sustainable products as major obstacles. This led to these retailers expressing frustration at their inability to close sustainability related 'value-action' gaps within their businesses (Revell, Stokes and Chen, 2010).

Overall, firms in the sample expressed a range of sustainability practices relating to both environmental and social sustainability and the importance of sustainability as an organisational value.

5.2.5 Care

'I always remember that we look after a lot of people. Just like I look after my wife and kids, the guys that come here look after their girlfriends, wives and, the ones who've now got kids, their kids.' (SIR02)

The notion of care is prominent within both philosophy and theology, notably in the work of Heidegger, Gilligan and Noddings (see chapter two, section 2.4.2.4 for discussion of ethics of care and section 2.6 on small firm stakeholder relationships). It is often considered a basic ethical value practised in the context of relationships, where one party fulfils the need of another (Noddings, 2013). Within her discussion of care, Gilligan stresses the importance of relationships as well as of listening and responding to the needs of others in relation to the practice of care (Gilligan, 1982). Care was a key value alluded to across many interviews, especially within the retail sector, and implicitly underpinned many of the values already described. As such, and consonant with the work of Spence (2016),

respondents across both sectors expressed the need to practise care within their businesses in their relationships with parties including: employees, customers, other close stakeholder organisations, the local community and the natural environment. Such values practice manifested in a range of ways. In relation to employees, given the longstanding employment of many staff members and the strong personal relationships within many firms, the notion of employees becoming 'like family' was commonplace. Hence, respondents often expressed the need to keep the business financially solvent in order to ensure employees kept their jobs. As one respondent emphasised:

'If the shop fails that's a bad thing, obviously, well, I need to find a job, but for me the worst thing would be losing employment for seven people... If the business failed and they were fine, that wouldn't bother me.' (MIR05)

In addition to maintaining solvency, and as evidenced by previous small firm research (for example, see Marcketti & Kozar, 2007), respondents also cited the need to consider the emotional needs and happiness of their employees, ensuring that they felt appreciated, valued and cared for by the firm. While being interviewed, one owner-manager pointed to a list of all the firm's employees' birthdays and joining anniversaries on his desk. The owner-manager proceeded to explain that he texted each employee to wish them a happy birthday or happy work anniversary at the appropriate time. Other care-driven practices related by respondents were owner-managers helping employees with personal problems, allowing employees to 'be themselves' and ensuring employees had opportunities for professional development.

Within the context of customer relationships, respondents related the need to show care through treating customers with kindness, respect and honesty (Chou, Chang & Han, 2016). Some respondents noted the significant empathy they felt for customers and thus the need to treat them correctly and with kindness. Examples given to demonstrate this included ensuring that customers were fairly charged for the firm's products and making sure that the firm honestly presented itself to customers. One respondent, for instance, evoked the notion of karma to justify such treatment of customers with an appropriate level of care. As previously discussed in relation to localism (section 5.2.3), the notion of care often extended into relationships with the local community and other local businesses, such as through showing respect, offering help when required and acting in a positive manner within stakeholder relationships. Respondents also often implicitly conveyed care towards the natural environment through the steps they had taken to make their businesses more sustainable (as examined in section 5.2.4) and thus lessen their impact on the environment.

Altogether, a number of firms cited the importance of care as an organisational value and its practice through a range of stakeholder relationships, including those with employees, customers and the local community.

5.2.6 Benevolence

'Integrity and customer service. We try to provide a service that's fair and reasonable.' (MIR05)

Benevolence is typically described as behaviour which privileges the interests of another party and therefore provides them with some benefit. Benevolence is often associated with kindness and the donation of money and thus plays a key role in shaping trust in relationships (Hauswald & Hack, 2013; Moodie & Mitra, 2021). McCarty (1988) argues that a *'benevolent act is a gesture of good will'* (p.73) and that businesses can engage in benevolent behaviour without seeking to gain commercial benefit. As alluded to within discussion of other values, such as localism, care and sustainability, numerous firms emphasised, generally implicitly, the importance of benevolence (Schaefer, Williams & Blundel, 2020). This manifested in firms seeking to consider the needs of stakeholders with which they often did not possess a deep and well-established relationship and act in a kind and compassionate manner towards them. The value of benevolence was closely associated with that of fairness, which in Rawlsian thought is often associated with justice (Rawls, 1958). Prior research has evidenced the importance of fairness as a value in the small firm and family firm context (Ahmed & Braithwaite, 2005; Ferguson, Brown & Johnston, 2017; Samara & Arenas, 2017). Although fairness often refers to the equitable treatment and application of rules (Hooker, 2005), respondents typically used it to describe the right or correct treatment of stakeholders.

A number of retailers in the sample discussed how they sought to treat small local suppliers, such as individual makers, as well as customers benevolently by acting in a fair and respectful manner towards them. For instance, through ensuring that they paid suppliers a generous margin on their goods and paid them promptly when invoiced. Firms also discussed the importance of not overcharging customers for their products, while one furniture firm related how, although they did not provide warranties, they would fix any broken piece of furniture they had sold a customer regardless of how long ago it had been purchased. When discussing such stakeholder treatment, firms often evoked the idea of moral reciprocity through treating stakeholders in the way in which the firms themselves would like to be treated.

The value and practice of benevolence was not confined to the retail sector. In the alcohol production sector benevolence was most apparent in the form philanthropy. While philanthropy is often considered and measured in the relevant literature in formal, direct financial contributions

(Brammer, Millington & Pavelin, 2006; Su & Sauerwald, 2018), many of the firms in the sample related examples of ad hoc donations of time, expertise and goods, alongside money, to charitable causes when approached, often at a cost to the business (Lähdesmäki, 2012) (see chapter six, section 6.2.2 for further discussion of small firm community relationships and philanthropy).

Overall, benevolence was a key value expressed by firms across both sectors and typically involved the fair and equitable treatment of stakeholders with which firms did not have a strong or close relationship.

5.2.7 Excellence

'Probably every day we criticise ourselves because we want to achieve better and do things in a stronger, sustainable way.' (SIR05)

The notion of excellence is often associated with the work of the Ancient Greek philosophers, for example, that of Aristotle, who described excellence as a *'characteristic of the soul... that makes a human good and do one's work well'* (Leighton, 2011, p.50) (see chapter two, section 2.4.2.3 for discussion of virtue ethics). Related to excellence is the concept of *'arete'*, which is typically defined as excellence or moral virtue. The term features within Ancient Greek philosophy where it is associated with goodness and courage, such as in the work of Homer (Hawhee, 2002). The importance of excellence as a value arose frequently within interviews across both sectors in a number of guises. For instance, while some firms focused particularly on competence values, such as product quality and customer service, others emphasised associated values, including efficiency, competency and profitability.

As previously evidenced by Wilson (1980), a number of respondents expressed both the necessity of providing product quality and the pride which accompanied such provision. Discussion of quality was frequently linked not only to firm identity but to the personal identity of the owner-manager. In particular, how poor-quality products or services would reflect on both the firm and the industry, such as through potentially undermining trust and integrity in both entities as well as by sullyng the owner-manager's personal reputation and local standing. This was exemplified by phrases expressed within the interviews, such as *'aim high'* (SIR05), *'let's make it better than anything we've done before'* (SAP01), *'be a leader in our industry'* (SIR03) and *'proud of the product'* (SAP08), which provided insights into the link between regarding *'excellence'* as an important value and how this manifested within their businesses. Such phrases indicated how the practice of excellence as a value drove respondents' expectations of their organisational practices, firm standards and overall firm strategy (Kotey & Meredith, 1997).

Within the alcohol production sector, product quality was a particular focus, given that many of the firms had started as hobby brewers and distillers and regularly expressed the passion and

admiration they possessed for what they produced. Accordingly, they often conveyed a willingness to invest in product quality despite the financial cost involved, as it felt like the 'right' thing to do. Equally, some respondents displayed chagrin when reflecting on instances where the product quality had not, in their eyes, been of a sufficiently high standard.

In a similar fashion, many of the retailers expressed the satisfaction accompanying the provision of quality customer service. One retail owner-manager, for example, paused midway through the interview to find and show the interviewer, with obvious pride, the shop's online customer service scores and explained the causes of the reviews that were any less than perfect. Another retail owner-manager reflected on an incident where a customer had given the shop a poor review and, although admitting that they believed the customer's frustration to be self-inflicted, reflected on how that was still the firm's fault and how they could have perhaps managed the customer's expectations in a better way.

In summary, excellence was a key organisational value, particularly in the retail sector where codified values often related to notions of customer service and quality. Following descriptions of specific values that were key to their businesses, respondents also described the role they perceived values to play within the firm and the importance of values to the firm. Such themes are explored within the next section.

5.3 The Role of Small Business Values

In contrast to the typical large firm approach, which often emphasises formal and codified statements of ethics (Schlegelmilch & Houston, 1989; Russo & Tencati, 2009), only a handful of the small businesses within the research sample possessed formal and codified organisational values. Furthermore, in instances where firms did possess codified organisational values, respondents were often unable to recall them. Nevertheless, many of the small firms did convey the salience of their values and the importance of fidelity towards their values. As one small retailer outlined:

'As long as you're true to your values, that's the thing, isn't it, you've always got to be true to your values.' (S1R04)

Consonant with this, many of the respondents described how, given their organisational values were so integral and embedded, they struggled to verbalise, articulate or justify them. As one micro cider producer related when questioned why the firm did not do more to communicate their environmental practices:

'One doesn't go round shouting about that: "I'm not a racist. I am a feminist. I believe in democracy." You don't shout about things because they're almost just, like, assumed.'

That's how you all are these days, or all should be, and so the fact that I'm pretty ecologically responsible – I think we should all be.' (MAP01)

Instead, respondents often perceived and described their organisational values as emotional and intuitive norms entrenched within the firm. Thus these descriptions often, but not always (see respondent quotes below), contrasted with traditional, rationalist perspectives on ethical decision-making, which emphasise the role of logic and active deliberation in ethical decision making, such as that conveyed within Rest's (1986) model of ethical decision-making.

During the interview, rather than explicitly discussing particular values, what many of the individuals from the firms found easier was to outline their perception of the role of values within the business and the values-led practices of the firm (as described in section 5.2). Many respondents described their organisational values as akin to a compass, providing the firm, and the individuals within it, with direction or guidance when a problem or dilemma arose or a decision needed to be taken. For example, one respondent within the alcohol production sector outlined the importance of consistent values practice across the business and the need to communicate their values effectively to their staff:

'We do have values which we try to live by and run our business by, and kind of get across to our staff so that it permeates the whole business, and it's something that we are always working to.' (SAP02)

Similarly, another respondent in the retail sector emphasised how their organisational values drove standards and expectations within the firm:

'Just like the little rules of the game, so to speak, of what we expect of our team, out of each other and ourselves, to try and get the best out of our business really.' (SIR09)

An owner-manager within the retail sector discussed how their organisational values, which were in fact codified, facilitated decision-making and consistency of behaviour within their business:

'Having a clarified set of values makes a lot of decision-making an awful lot easier, because you get something in and it's all shiny and it looks great, and then you realise it contravenes one of your essential values, and you've got them in front of you sitting on your notice board and you think: "Well, it seems... but, no, we've decided we're going to focus on this because this is a good idea." It makes decision-making easy.' (SIR06)

Further to this, a number of respondents expressed how integral their values were to their business model and how their financial performance was tangibly impacted by their values practice. One micro

alcohol producer, who espoused particularly strong environmental values, outlined how they almost considered the 'business' elements of their company to be subordinated and driven by their values:

'A lot of the work that we do is looking after the land... A lot of the focus is on improving the soil, bringing biodiversity, building habitats... These are what we believe in and what we love to do. In some ways, it's almost as if the wine is the natural by-product of that approach.' (MAP10)

Likewise, another micro alcohol producer conveyed the importance of honesty and integrity over making money for the sake of it and potentially misleading customers in the process:

'Yes, so I think being absolutely genuine is the most important thing about running a business... So, I try and make sure I would never say anything that's not true. Everything I say is absolutely genuine and I believe it 100%... I'm not going to sell anything to anybody unless they've tried it first, and they are going to take it, because then it's just taking their money and I'm not interested in doing that.' (MAP03)

One micro alcohol producer expressed how they chose not to make products in certain categories, regardless of their popularity and the potential returns, because they felt it would be inauthentic for them to do so:

'We don't make products in certain categories that are by far and away the most popular and the fastest growing. So, there's a big trend for things like rhubarb gins, fruit gins. Gins that have fruit flavours, colours and sugars added post distillation are the biggest growing trends and the one thing we get asked for the most but we don't do, and we've no intention of doing it. Because, in the same way that certain musicians don't make popular music, it's the same concept; we're passionate about what we produce, and I have no passion for producing sweet things. That's not where our palettes are at, it's not what we want to create.' (MAP02)

In summary, while the values of the firms in the research sample tended to be uncodified, respondents often discussed with clarity the role of their values in firm decision-making and conveyed the importance of values to their business model and organisational norms. In tandem with this, and as

discussed in further detail in the next section, respondents also related the satisfaction which accompanied the enactment of, and fidelity towards, their values.

5.4 Satisfaction in Values Practice

In accordance with firms citing the importance of their organisational values and the intuitive nature of values practice, many respondents emphasised the satisfaction they derived from the practice of or adherence to their values. This reflects previous research which argues values are of high importance to individuals and groups, being both desirable in nature and playing a significant role in their identity (Lilach *et al.*, 2017). Satisfaction accompanying values practice is evidenced by Wilson (1980), who argued that some small business owners seek to practise values in addition to being profitable and derive significant pride from the practice of values, such as 'being ethical', 'facilitating employee growth and development' and 'helping others'. Respondents thus often discussed an instinctive sense of having done something 'the right way' when it was done in accordance with their values and how that could take precedence over pure financial success. Upon reflecting on their motivation for adhering to their values, one independent retailer stated that:

'I like making money, but I don't want to do it at any price. My great satisfaction is when people come in... and they go out and they look wonderful... I love that...that really gives me a buzz, more than the profit at the end of the day and the end of the year.' (SIR10)

Additionally, when asked why the business chose not to broadcast the fact that they had recently made a large charitable donation, one small retailer indicated that:

'We don't go: "Right, we've done this charitable donation, let's put it on our social media, let's put it on our website, this is our charitable partnership this year." We just do it because we feel it is right and that's it, that's our goodness. Internally we feel good about that, we don't need everyone else to know that we've done that.' (SIR08)

In the alcohol production sector, one micro alcohol producer, when questioned about their values, responded that:

'There's no point in being so super ethical that it makes a rancid product that no one wants to buy, and vice versa, for us, even if it was really successful but we couldn't sleep at night because of guilt, that wouldn't work either. It's finding a balance between absolute premium product without the detrimental effects on the surroundings, ourselves, our family lives. You have to be proud of every angle of what you do, rather than sell your soul and make some money.' (MAP05)

Another micro alcohol producer, after describing how some other vineyards buy in their grapes, expressed the view that:

*'We do it (grow their own grapes) so we can sleep better at night. We can go to bed feeling that openly and honestly we are selling a **** (name of county) wine. The grapes are grown by us – I've planted the vines, tended to them, put all the posts and wires in, pruned them.'* (MAP08)

Discussion of values and values practice within interviews with the small business representatives frequently focused on internal firm practices and decision-making. However, respondents often began to relate the means by which they sought to communicate their values and the obstacles and challenges they faced in attempting to do so.

5.5 Conclusions: Chapter Five

This chapter has described and analysed the empirical data in relation to the *nature, role and practice* of small firm organisational values. The empirical data allowed a number of insights. First, that many small firms express common organisational values, including *sustainability, fairness, care* and *authenticity*. Second, despite this overlap in values, the practice of these values is often characterised by intuitiveness and the influence of context. This was demonstrated by the presence of a number of idiosyncratic habituated norms and practices discussed by firms which were linked to and considered as the enactment of firm organisational values (see chapter seven, section 7.1. for a discussion of Pragmatist ethics and small firm habituated practices and section 7.2 for consideration of the influence of context on firm practices). Third, despite organisational values often not being formally codified, they provide important guidance in firm decision-making and are often entwined with the overall purpose, strategy and practices of the firm. The following chapter will continue the exploration of the empirical data through focusing on the role of values in stakeholder relationships and how stakeholder relationships can impact, both positively and adversely, the maintenance of values.

Chapter Six: Values, Stakeholder Relationships and Values Disputations

6.0 Introduction:

The previous chapter sought to explore themes within the empirical data relating to the *nature, practice and role* of small firm values. This chapter continues the analysis of the empirical data and investigates the data from the perspective of sub-research question 4: *How do small firms maintain fidelity towards their organisational values, particularly in instances where they face external challenge?*

To this end, this chapter is structured as follows. First, the communication of values by small firms is examined as well as the obstacles such firms faced in communicating their values. Second, the importance of small firms establishing stakeholder relationships based on the presence of shared values is discussed. Third, the notion of values disputations is addressed in more detail and critical incidents of direct values disputations between the small firms and a range of external stakeholders are considered. Fourth, indirect values disputations are explored where, for instance, small firm values came into conflict with the values and norms implicit in industry norms. Finally, the means by which firms sought to manage such disputations and ensure continued values fidelity are discussed.

6.1 The Communication of Small Firm Values

6.1.1 Explicit and Implicit Values Communication

The importance of inculcating stakeholder relationships on the basis of shared values was often described by respondents, particularly as it generally ensured that firm values-led practices could be maintained when dealing with stakeholders. Furthermore, it allowed a general sense of values fidelity to be maintained. To this end, respondents often viewed clear communication of their values, and therefore 'who they were as a business', as critical to the formation of relationships underpinned by shared values, notably as it facilitated the attraction of potential stakeholders with similar values. As part of this, some respondents, particularly those in the alcohol production sector, took time during the interview to express the means by which values were communicated to stakeholders, both implicitly and explicitly.

As previous research suggests, the communication of organisational values is integral to the projection of firm identity to external stakeholders (Huang-Horowitz & Evans, 2017). As such, a small number of firms had decided that the best course of action to communicate their values was to explicitly publish them on their firm's website:

'I think the reason that I thought it was a good idea to stick them on the website was basically because anyone who's really interested is capable of getting a better approximation of who we are and what we're about.' (SIR06)

The majority of firms in the sample, however, did not explicitly communicate their values. Instead, given the notoriously high levels of informality within small firms (Fassin, 2005) and as previously noted by Morsing and Spence (2019), communication of values and organisational identity, via both organisational and social media websites, was often implicit. This was particularly acute in the case of micro firms. Such firms often lacked the key resources, especially time, to engage in comprehensive and formal communication, while still viewing 'who they were' as critical to the identity of the business and its values.

These firms typically attempted to communicate their identity through general provision of (often necessary) information about the firm, such as its location, products and ownership structure, as well as through sharing information relating to the background of the individuals employed within the firm. Alongside these, another means of implicitly communicating firm values was through providing insights into what day-to-day life within the firm looked like, for example, the activities and interactions taking place on a particular day or locations members of the firm were visiting or at which they were working.

This was exemplified by one small brewery owner-manager who outlined how the firm was about to start a series of posts describing each member of their team, including who they are, both professionally and personally, and what their role within the firm is:

*'We are a small business and that sense of community, being rooted in the city and talking about who we are, feels to me like the only way you can really build a genuine community around you, I suppose... And it's something that's really important for us to get across in our social media, so we're just about to start a series just talking about these guys, who they are. So that you know who's bringing your beer, you know who our sales manager is and why he's appearing at this event and what he does within the business. So that when you come to the taproom, you know this guy is called *** and he also does some design work and he designed our merch, and this is *** behind the bar as well, and she works part-time because the rest of the time she's an ***.'* (SAPO2)

One owner-manager of a micro cider producer discussed the use of social media to convey the organisation's identity and the necessity of drawing on the day-to-day reality of the firm to do so:

'With things like Instagram and Facebook, unless we're using things that we see in our day-to-day lives, there is no content. We haven't got photo shoots that happened or big corporate events or food and drink expos. Unless we are using the fact that we are out

in the hills, or picking flowers in the woods, then there would be nothing to put across.'
(MAP05)

This theme of authenticity being key to implicit identity and values communication was frequently cited within the alcohol sector, with one micro firm owner-manager reflecting on the importance of building authentic relationships and how they perceived themselves as not being a 'salesperson':

'I'm not really much of a salesman. I've got dirt under my fingernails and I know everything there is to know about it (the product).' (MAP05)

Further to this implicit communication of values, respondents often discussed elements of practices, processes and norms driven by their values which were both an implicit and informal means of communicating their values. An important facet of such values practice, and the communication of this practice, was the need to be consistent and transparent in values practice. As one small brewery described of their relationships with suppliers and wholesale customers:

'We aim to have a degree of transparency with our suppliers and customers. Being open about pricing structure, from raw materials to the mark-ups we have, we work with our customers to get our pricing right, that works well. It's about a certain amount of loyalty, you know, regardless of price, recognising the challenges that we face, therefore sticking to suppliers that have the right ethos, not just about price.' (SAP04)

In the retail context, one micro furniture business elucidated the salience of *benevolence* and *fairness* within stakeholder relationships and how transparency facilitated the practice of such values:

'We actually itemise the delivery breakdown: this is who we are using, this is how far it's going, this is the size of the box, this is how much it's going to cost, that's how much you're going to pay. So, there's a lot of transparency there ... so people don't get shafted on things. Sometimes we lose out, sometimes we send something out and we have slightly undercharged for delivery, but I think that is a bit better than being too much in the opposite direction.' (MIR05)

One brewery owner-manager discussed how a potential customer had judged the firm's values on the basis of the shape of the bottle in which their product was contained and how this would preclude a relationship between the brewery and that particular shop developing:

'There's an off-licence, a very good one, in the city. I went in there to sell our bottled beer. I was only in there for about 60 seconds; they said: "No, no, that won't work in here". I said: "What on Earth are you talking about? You haven't tasted it yet!". They said: "The bottle's the wrong shape". It was a simple as that. "What that bottle tells me is traditional, English ale and that's the message it will send to my customers. I'm afraid that's not the profile of consumer that we have in this place".' (SAP03)

In addition to consistent values practice, and as stressed by previous research in the area, a number of respondents noted the salience of building personal relationships (Perrini, Russo & Tencati, 2007), predominately through face-to-face contact, in order to implicitly convey their values and ethos as well as to get a better sense of the values of their stakeholders. Micro firms, in particular, frequently cited using such a strategy, as they considered there to be a very strong connection between the personalities of those employed in the firm and the identity of the firm. The motivation for such a strategy was compounded in the alcohol production sector, where firms were often one step removed from the end consumer with a wholesaler positioned as the intermediary. As a consequence, a number of firms described the use of face-to-face contact to convey their identity and values to intermediary stakeholders so that the stakeholder could themselves better understand the producing firm but also so that these messages could be conveyed to end consumers. As one micro vineyard expressed it:

'One thing that we do in relation to the business is we try and get everybody, and we've done this with almost everybody who wants to buy the wine, to come to the vineyard. So, (it's) not just that we want to sell it on the vineyard because we don't sell to most of those directly on the vineyard at that point, but if there is a restaurant that wants to take fifty bottles then we will always say: "Yes, you are very welcome to, but we would like you to come to the vineyard to see the vineyard, to see what we do, understand why the wine is the way it is." So that they understand our story, so that they understand why the wine tastes the way it does, and that is really important to us.' (MAP10)

Additionally, one micro brewery described their attempts to have restaurants and bar staff who were selling their products come along and understand the ethos, story and values of their firm:

'We do try to get customers, especially those we have ongoing relationships with, we try to get them involved with us as much as we possibly can. So, a specific example of that is when a local restaurant or hotel comes on board, we will immediately invite them to come and visit, and I don't just mean in a fluffy way of having a free beer, but coming along and try and get that education in. We've done that very successfully with some local restaurants and hotels. We've actually taken the time to ship their entire bar related teams, sometimes up to 12 people, over to the brewery and done a talk on how we produce beer, given them a whole backstory about us and the products and how we see it fitting in with their companies.' (MAP07)

In summary, firms often viewed the communication of values as key to the projection of their identity and the formation of stakeholder relationships. Nonetheless, while some firms chose to explicitly communicate their values, much communication of values, particularly in the context of micro firms, tended to be implicit in nature and was achieved through marketing practices, such as via social media and through broader practices and processes. Face-to-face communication was expressed by a number of firms as a powerful means by which to convey their values and identity, with some firms proactively encouraging stakeholder visits and interactions. However, respondents also noted difficulties and obstacles their firm had faced in attempting to communicate as well as practise their values. Such issues are discussed in the following section.

6.1.1 Obstacles to Values Practice and Communication

Much previous research suggests that small firms tend towards informal practice and communication of social responsibility and ethics (for example, see Santos, 2011). While the empirical data found evidence substantiating such research, it also found evidence that this apparent lack of formal communication was often attributable to the communication-related difficulties faced by small firms, as opposed to the absence of desire. Specifically, the research found evidence to suggest, consonant with the work of Wickert, Scherer and Spence (2016), that many of the small firms struggled to implement formal communication strategies. Such issues in relation to the communication of their values and social responsibility practices often occurred due to difficulties associated with authenticity, legitimacy and distinctiveness of message.

While firms discussed strategies for both implicitly and explicitly communicating and practising their values, some respondents noted that such activities could at times prove difficult. The presence

of barriers to identity communication is consistent with previous research, which often segregates such barriers into those driven by internal firm factors and those attributable to factors external to the firm (Abimbola & Kocak, 2007). Internal barriers to values communication were exemplified in the case of one respondent in particular, who reflected on how their values could sometimes be overlooked and forgotten as a result of the frantic nature of day-to-day life within the business:

'You sometimes forget stuff, not your raison d'être, but your core values, and sometimes just articulating it actually just focuses your mind a bit more. I've got to try a bit harder on that and not lose sight of it.' (SIR07)

Other respondents related alternative internal barriers to values communication. For example, one respondent described how a decision taken early on within the business had led to long-term difficulties in the communication of their values, particularly those relating to *authenticity* and *localism*:

*'We made a big mistake when we first started, we got the first few batches of gin made elsewhere; this created such waves in the industry. Like *** (place name) gin's not being made in *** (the named placed). So, that will never happen again. Obviously, that was just a prototype stage, getting 1000 bottles made. However, much as I hate to admit it, the gin industry can be a little bitchy at times... So, (people thought we were) acting as though we are this micro distillery, with our gin being made here, but actually getting it made elsewhere. So, that was a big old hoo-ha. I'll hold my hands up; it was never meant to be there permanently, that was the prototype stage. But people saw it, people latched on to it, and still today we get some naysayers saying it's not being made in here, despite the fact that every drop of our gin has been made in this building or the one up the road for years now.'* (SAP08)

Similarly, within the independent retail sector, examples of how the small businesses themselves were perhaps not succeeding in successfully communicating their values were apparent:

'We wanted to be very inclusive, which is kind of the most important thing with bike shops, and I guess not alienate anybody. There's still a lot of bike shops now where you walk into, where people aren't particularly friendly, or customers feel that they might not want to go in there or they don't fit in. I think that there's still that perception about this place really, but we want to stop that.' (MIR07)

Conversely, respondents also discussed external barriers to the communication of values. An especially prevalent barrier within the interview data was the notion of 'noise' in the marketplace. This was exemplified in the alcohol production industry in relation to the notion of authenticity, with every firm attempting to tell their 'story', their unique values, ethos and identity, which consequently acted as a hindrance to the authenticity and legitimacy of their own message. As one respondent emphasised:

'There is a lot of smoke and mirrors in the drinks industry and especially when it comes to creating craft... in terms of craft being produced by the big guys on big commercial metrics.' (MAP06)

Therefore, a number of producers stressed the difficulties in communicating their ethos and values and how they attempted to do so in such a crowded marketplace:

'Even though the beers are great, they would rather have a beer from an independent brewery, so these values do matter and are starting to help us in our sales, but the challenge really is about communicating these messages in a simple way. Usually over the bar, on an image and in very few words, and hopefully help people make the right consumer choice.' (SAP04)

Such difficulties relating to values communication were emphasised to be even more difficult when firm products were sold either online or via wholesale, meaning the small firm had little or no contact with the end consumer and was often heavily reliant on an external stakeholder to communicate their values. As one micro retailer reflected, having a web developer who could understand the ethos of the business and could faithfully represent their business, and its values and ethos, via a website was a difficult task and required a heavy reliance on such external stakeholders:

'Those new stakeholders are going to be the people who, bizarrely, extract my humanity as a retailer and get it on the screen... Instead of the customer being the next person who meets us because they are walking through the door, now those key stakeholders arguably could be the people who are going to represent me on the screen.' (MIR08)

Comparably, given their lack of direct contact with end consumers, a number of alcohol producers emphasised their reliance on intermediaries in terms of values communication. Pubs, bars, restaurants and wholesalers are often located between the alcohol producing companies and the end consumer,

making it more difficult for alcohol producers to communicate their identity and values to end consumers:

'It's the step when you go into wholesale, you lose that direct communication, so the product is just an island with itself and you're not there with it. That's been a learning curve, certainly: how to put across your information when it needs to leapfrog distributor to stockist. How you put the same information across without it reading the same way as Thatchers' blurb does... It's very easy for large companies to use that same rhetoric. In terms of: "we make it the way it's supposed to be made", "it tastes like it should", "handpicked", and you end up using the same tone as a lot of them. Although your product is different, how do you get that across to someone?' (MAP05)

Equally, some firms, for instance those with strong environmental values, emphasised the increased obstacles they faced in attempting to communicate their values to unreceptive stakeholders:

'I think there is some misconception about organic. Again, I think people are starting to understand a bit better what that means, but there was a time when that might be construed as going backwards, being not progressive, it can be a bit hippy. There's all sorts of images and connotations around that, whereas it's not necessarily about that at all; it's about being forward-thinking and not using chemicals and being much more effective about energy use and all these things.' (SAP04)

In summary, while many firms within the sample related the importance of culturing relationships on the basis of shared values, and therefore communicating their values, a number discussed the barriers, both internal and external, that they had faced in the communication of their values. Such barriers included a lack of a distinctiveness of message and an inability to successfully communicate their values. Nevertheless, many respondents discussed the existence and importance of external stakeholder relationships underpinned by the existence of shared values. As such, the role and presence of shared values in small business-external stakeholder relationships are examined in the following section.

6.2 Small Business Values & External Stakeholder Relationships

6.2.1 Small Business-Stakeholder Value Alignment

Whilst relating the role and practice of values, many respondents conveyed the importance of stakeholder relationships to the enactment and maintenance of their values. In particular, indicating the import of establishing stakeholder relationships on the basis of shared values. The following

discussion considers the notion of value alignment in small firm stakeholder relationships and key relationships in which small firms in the sample considered the significance of having aligned values.

A small number of firms described their external stakeholder relationships, including inter-firm collaborations and buyer-supplier relationships, as purely economic transactions based on mutual strategic gain. This type of relationship is typically characterised within the relevant literature as being driven by cost, uncertainty reduction and facilitation of competitive advantage attainment. Such relationships are typically predicated on and involve mutual benefit, with both parties gaining access to important resources, such as skills, raw materials, physical or financial assets as well as technical competencies, through the relationship (Inkpen & Ramaswamy, 2007). This view of stakeholder relationships mirrors much of the previous research within the domain of inter-organisational relationships which contends that relationship success is best measured through its impact on commercial performance (for instance, see Mackelprang *et al.*, 2014). This is often exemplified by the rhetoric used within this literature, for example: *'the value of supply chain management is reflected in how firms...have used their supply chains as strategic weapons to gain advantage over their peers'* (Ketchen & Hult, 2007, p.573).

In contrast to this view, and as suggested by previous research (for example that by Hammann, Habisch & Pechlaner, 2009) which notes the important role of values within small firm stakeholder relationships, many respondents cited a desire to build relationships with stakeholders with whom they shared common, reciprocal values. Therefore, stressing 'values over value'. For example, one retail owner-manager discussed the importance of equality in the stakeholder relationships which the firm sought to build:

'I like to treat people how I like to be treated. So, I tend to try and do business with people I want to do business with to the extent you can.' (MIR02)

Many respondents emphasised that the formation of relationships based on shared values allowed more informal relationships to be built predicated on a sense of trust (Keshishian & Jamali, 2009). This view is consonant with research which argues in favour of the existence of a strong link between stakeholder relations and organisational identity and, in particular, demonstrates the significant role that stakeholder relationships play in the construction of organisational identity (Brickson, 2005). As one retail manager put it:

'I think you do in life don't you...? Your friendships are based on people with similar values to you, similar outlooks to you. It's very rare that you will have a very close bond with somebody who is incredibly different to you.' (SIR08)

Accordingly, when assessing the values of potential stakeholders, many of the small firms used organisational features, such as size, geographical location and the nature of ownership, as a guide to other organisations' values. The respondents therefore often expressed their firm's affinity for organisations with similar characteristics, typically other local, small, often family-owned firms:

'Most of my customers, generally, they're generally independents, they're generally owner-managed, and so they are just decent people who I like dealing with.' (MAP01)

*'We would rather work with people like ***; we know, we like, we believe in what they are trying to do, and we think that they believe in and like what we're trying to do.'* (SAP02)

The perceived worth of possessing relationships based on shared values was well demonstrated in instances where firms expressed that although they could find alternative suppliers that would allow them to realise cost savings they chose not to. In such cases, the firm noted that the existence of positive, pre-existing relationships predicated on loyalty and trust was more important than any potential cost savings they may be able to attain through altering existing relationships or entering into new ones. In the extreme, respondents discussed the existence of relationships with stakeholders with which they felt such a shared sense of values that it drove them to seek opportunities for commercial alliances or collaborations.

Some respondents noted how certain stakeholders could mediate or facilitate the perceived ability of their firm to practise their values. This was exemplified by how poor service, low quality products or unclear sustainability information on the part of a supplier could infringe on the small firm's ability to provide a high-level service or sustainable goods to its own customers.

Discussions of inter-organisational values alignment often yielded specific, tangible examples of groups of stakeholders or individual stakeholders with whom the small business in question felt their values were well aligned. When describing the existence of common values within stakeholder relationships, the language respondents employed often conveyed the presence of a heightened level of trust and security, whether in relationships with the local community, competitors, suppliers or customers. Value alignment within a range of differing small firm stakeholder relationships is discussed in more detail within this section.

6.2.2 Small Business Local Community Value Alignment

As Miller & Besser (2000) argue, small firms possess differing types of community values and therefore consider their relationships with their respective local communities in disparate ways. The existence of differing levels of community values on the part of small firms within the research sample was apparent

across both sectors when firms discussed the breadth and depth of relationships they shared with their respective local communities and local stakeholders. As considered within section 5.2.3, which focused on the importance of localism as a value, many firms across both sectors within the sample stressed the importance and tangible sense of shared values at a local, community level.

This is in contrast to some previous perspectives which have highlighted the individualistic attitudes of small firms, typified by a lack of networking on the part of small firms and the divergent interests of small firms and local communities (Curran *et al.*, 1993; Curran, Rutherford & Smith, 2000). As such, the empirical data evidenced the existence of a shared sense of community values, and therefore trust, which helped to bond local firms, even if firms were not in the same industry, sector or sub-sector. For instance, respondents described the support that local businesses provided to one another and the shared sense of community it generated:

*'We all kind of know what's going on and all talk to each other and try and offer as much support as possible...The lady next door, completely different clientele, always looking to support stuff. From it being absolutely freezing in winter and lending us a heater to taking in parcels.... Yeah, we're quite honest, we're quite honest and open and we talk about how things are going. So, we'll talk to each other about that. Frank conversations about how s*** the week's been to there might be a way you can shave a little bit off your rates... The hairdresser across the road, we don't speak and I don't go in and get my hair cut, but they'll come across and buy a card and we'll do it at a reduced rate because it's just right. They could go and buy somewhere else, but they're supporting the local businesses and that's kind of what we do.'* (MIR06)

Beyond supporting other businesses in the community, a number of firms discussed how they liked to get involved in the wider community via local organisations and events and how the firm and the community could consequently benefit. As one micro distillery related, they could afford to donate to the local community and felt that is something they 'should' do:

'The community stuff is the stuff that we enjoy. I judge the local bake off at the local community fun day. We sponsor the Donkey Derby at the local scout thing, we've done four PTA (parent-teacher association) things, charity things offsite, WI (Women's Institute) things. We love the WI. Not only does it feel good... we are giving up our time for free because it supports the local community and they're nice people.' (MAP02)

Further to this, a number of businesses located within the same small community remarked on how local businesses worked together to form part of the local community and promote local values:

'It's really community-based here. For instance, there was a lady that had dementia and we were all keeping an eye on her. She kept coming in for cards and going in for baguettes, so we all had to make sure she was OK. I definitely think there's the community thing... everybody wants to help each other out.' (MIR04)

'People come and ask my advice about things now... so I'm hoping I'm part of the social fabric of the local community. I probably say there's ten or so key individuals within this village who nearly everybody knows because they shopped there, or the guy who runs the deli or the guy who runs the cafe, the guy that runs the hardware shop. Everybody knows them and you know what you'll get from them.' (MIR03)

In sum, a number of firms expressed the presence and importance of shared values with the local community. Such alignment often manifested itself in the provision of support, such as financial or emotional support, to groups and individuals within the local community, including community groups and other firms or the owners or managers of other firms.

6.2.3 Small Business Competitor Value Alignment

As Spence, Coles and Harris (2001) argue, competitors are key, but often forgotten, external organisational stakeholders (Graham, 2020). Consistent with this view, a number of respondents related how a shared sense of values existed between themselves and other firms within the industry. This bond was often underpinned by a sense of 'local values' and close geographical proximity. While this was apparent in the retail sector, with respondents often noting cordial relationships with competitors, it was most apparent within the brewing sector where, regardless of intense competition for space on pub 'pump clips', firms discussed habitually drawing on relational capital (Welbourne & Pardo-del-Val, 2009) in order to access and borrow resources, including machinery and manpower as well as information and advice. Collaboration brews were also cited as a frequent occurrence, often driven by, and predicated on, a sense of shared values. As one brewer described, a shared sense of values had brought them together with another brewery to collaborate on a joint brew:

'So, they are an organic brewery, which is kind of quite an interesting one, and so they are quite focused on that and on sustainability and on trying to be positive for the environment, or less negative. They've worked with a local ethical bank based here to

fund their recent growth. They're kind of not a new hip, trendy brewery – they brew a lot of cask beer – and we're not particularly cool either really, so we don't chase trends, we're not releasing beers all the time to chase the FOMO (fear of missing out) thing. Then they are just really nice people that we like and that's a big part of it I think.' (SAP02)

Likewise, one respondent described how information relating to potential customers was readily shared between local breweries in competition with one another:

'My colleague will walk into a bar, but if he knows it isn't for us he will go: "X (owner of a competitor brewery), this is one for you, or Y (owner of another competitor brewery), this is one for you." They will do the same for us, so you've got to work together. If you didn't, then you'll soon get a fairly bad name in the industry.' (SAP05)

The existence of this attitude between firms was therefore often predicated on a shared sense of empathy and a desire for mutual success. As one micro gin maker described of themselves and their competitors:

'We're not greedy, we have enough and we're growing well. So, we do gin tastings and there is a competitor making gin out of their garage. If we buy six bottles from them every two weeks, then that's giving them lots of money, so in that way we can support people. Especially through our gin tastings; we'll have them over here and, basically, it's advertising for them. We give the whole story and whole spiel for them, and then people can go and buy their stuff.' (MAP05)

Such value alignment within the context of small firm competitor relationships was not exclusive to the alcohol production sector. In the independent retail sector, instances of information being shared between competitors were often related within interviews:

'We have quite a good relationship with most people because most of our competitors have been supplying this product a long time so we will tend to know each other. It's pretty easy; if someone says something, we will just pick up the phone to the dealer and say: "Just out of interest...".' (SIR02)

Some retailers also discussed how a shared sense of industry values bonded retailers, leading to competitors recommending one another:

'Fortunately, all us jewellers get on even though we are all competitors. If we can't do it, for example, we don't sell watches, then I would recommend another shop in the city. We got recommended yesterday by another jeweller and a client bought from us.'
(SIR03)

A small number of respondents noted how such a strong shared sense of values between some businesses had led to instances of firms approaching a competitor who they felt shared their values to ascertain whether they might take over their business upon retirement or exiting the market. Respondents reported the motivation behind this was that firms believed that their legacy and culture would be retained if their firms were taken over by a firm with similar values. For instance, one retailer described how they were approached by a larger business to take over one of their retail sites. The respondent expressed the values symmetry which they believed had led to them being approached and had subsequently defined their relationship:

'I think that they liked that we are a family farm, that we are a family business and we had our roots in the community as well. How we did things was very similar to how they liked to do things and we are a proper farm shop; we aren't a chain of farm shops that were looking just to add another shop. I think they just liked what they saw really...we seemed to hit it off, really, and we have a really good relationship there. Four years on, they look after us really well and they are really approachable, really flexible... So, I think they understand us, and we understand them really.' (SIR09)

Overall, many respondents commented on the possession of relationships with competitors which were characterised by an alignment in values. This was commonly evident in practices and norms related to the provision of support and guidance to competitor firms and a sense of empathy towards other firms, particularly within the sector. Alongside competitors, suppliers are often described as key firm stakeholders and values alignment in the context of small business supplier relationships is examined in the following section.

6.2.4 Small Business Supplier Value Alignment

Buyer-supplier relationships can be fraught with tension and conflict (Johnsen & Lacoste, 2016). As previous research has suggested, relationships between small firms and suppliers, particularly large firm suppliers, can often be fraught with difficulties (Baden, Harwood & Woodward, 2009) (see chapter two, section 2.6.1.1 for further discussion). Despite this, many respondents underscored the sense of shared values which underpinned their supplier relationships. Such a finding is consistent with the previous literature which stresses contrasts between small and large firms in terms of how they view and manage supplier relationships. In particular, the increased importance of social factors, such as

trust, in the establishment and continuation of customer-supplier relationships between small firms (Morrissey & Pittaway, 2006). For example, a number of respondents expressed the presence of shared values with suppliers, including *sustainability, quality* and *localism*:

'I mean, I think in fairness it's true of most of the makers we work with, I think their values are very much about, you know, handmade or however you want to define handmade...there's a connection in terms of it's a beautiful object with functionality, local and values of sustainability. None of them use slave labour; if they are getting stuff made to the design, they're doing it ethically. I wouldn't work with someone who was getting all their stuff, who is supplying it really cheap, because they are using slave labour.' (MIR01)

Critically, in some small firm supplier relationships, such as in the case of one retailer of vintage products, the process of blind ordering stock in bulk quantities meant that values of *fairness, trust* and *honesty* were of paramount importance within their supplier relationships, and thus much care was required in picking suppliers:

'We don't just buy from anyone. The way that we buy, as I described, is by weight. So, we can only do that if we trust who we are buying from because they grade the clothes as they come through, so they make sure the buttons are there, make sure there's nothing that's immediately going to have to go in the bin.' (MIR06)

Furthermore, some firms within the sample conveyed how the presence of shared values within relationships with suppliers drove a sense of positivity that was often beneficial to the business. This was especially apparent with respect to timely payment of suppliers, a critical and emotive issue for many small firms (Paul & Boden, 2011). For example, as one small business related:

'I think it's right to respect, you know, the local builder and electrician; for example, we'll pay immediately on receipt of invoice. I think that mutual respect is important. We look after them, they look after us. It works. Certainly, if we have something that's urgent, they will drop things and come, and that helps! It's important to have the right relationship. If your relationships are strong, you can deal with anything.' (SIR05)

Similarly, one small retailer reflected on a critical incident with a supplier where a sense of shared values had led to a mutually beneficial and positive outcome for both the small firm and the supplier:

'Our pot supplier, they send in merchandisers to do the displays; usually we do an order one week, and then they come in the following week with the pots and put them out. A couple of years ago in the spring, our very busy time, it was a bank holiday weekend coming up. I had a look outside on a Thursday and the pot stock was low. I sent them a fax, saying: "Look, we are really low on stock, is there anything you can do?" The next morning, on the Saturday morning, they sent a lorry out with stock and merchandisers and put it all out over the weekend. The next day I sent a fax to the owner to say: "We really appreciate what you did, your guys did a really fantastic job, we really appreciated the help." I saw the owner at the spring fair the next year and he was pleased to see me. He said: "I loved that fax, I put it up on the noticeboard in the staff room for everybody to see," and that relationship has continued in the same way, as good as gold.' (SIR10)

While buyer-supplier relationships are often characterised by difficulties, an alignment in values between small firms and suppliers was at times apparent, with firms noting the presence of values such as *honesty, fairness* and *respect* within such relationships. A number of firms in the sample were themselves in the position of supplier. Alignment of values in small firm customer relationships is therefore considered in the next section.

6.2.5 Small Business Customer Value Alignment

Such small business supplier value symmetry was mirrored in instances where the small firms themselves were in the position of supplier. For example, in the alcohol production sector, where firms supplied a wide range of pubs, bars and restaurants as well as working with intermediaries such as wholesalers:

'In terms of our relationship with stockists and customers, we've got some really good relationships with bars, restaurants and cafés. They have faith and belief in us and us in them. We're quite lucky in the two counties in which we operate – they're quite cider heavy in terms of counties in England. So, we get quite a lot of faith and admiration for trying to do it in those places and that's really gratifying. Like I said before, if you've got someone who believes in what you're doing, then there's no need for the sales pitch, it's just: "This is the new things, this is how we are doing that," and they will just take it on face value and tell that same thing to the customers.' (MAP05)

Some respondents emphasised their faith in intermediary customers, such as wholesalers, to represent and share their values. As one respondent who was looking to sell into wholesale for the first time related:

'The interesting thing for me has been that the three people that have been interested in buying my beer are three people that I deal with for the bars. So, I've seen how they represent breweries when they've tried to sell me beer for my bars. So, if that's how they are going to represent me, then I've got no qualms about them selling it... I think these smaller wholesalers care about it just as much as the producer or the bar. They care about it just as much.' (MAP09)

In summary, a small number of firms, particularly in the alcohol production sector, discussed the existence of positive relationships predicated on shared values with customers or potential customers.

Overall, many firms in the sample related the importance and value of possessing external stakeholder relationships predicated on the basis of shared values. However, the critical incident portion of each interview focused on instances where firms had perceived misalignments between their own values and those of external stakeholders. The next section provides an overview of the types of values disputations related by respondents and how firms attempted to respond to these disputations.

6.3 Small Firm External Stakeholder Values Disputation

Disagreements and conflict of varying scope and intensity are an everyday occurrence in and between organisations and the individuals that make up organisations (Pondy, 1967; Lumineau, Eckerd & Handley, 2015). Although conflict is characterised by underlying disagreement, the drivers and subject of the disagreement can vary considerably, for example relating to goal divergence, incompatibility of interests or power asymmetries (Vaaland & Håkansson, 2003).

Within the context of this research, given the primary focus of values as the object of research, conflicts and disagreements characterised by divergence in values were focused upon. As such, and as part of respondents reflecting on the salience and nature of their values, instances of tensions, disputation and disagreements which occurred between their values and those of other organisations or individuals outside the firm were outlined. While a number of such instances were provided by respondents, not all respondents discussed experiencing instances where values disputations had arisen. Such conflict is consonant with the work of Dewey, who argued in his work on the application of Pragmatism to ethics that conflict is an inherent facet of the lived experience of morality and should be considered and accounted for when discussing the practice of ethics (see chapter three, section 3.3

for further discussion of Dewey's Pragmatist ethics and its juxtaposition with traditional normative theory).

Such disputations also mirror, confirm and add depth to instances of values disputation (often described within the literature as ethical conflict), as previously discussed and revealed within small business research (see in particular Vitell, Dickerson & Festervand, 2000). For example, instances in the context of small firms' relationships with: customers (Fenwick, 2010), local communities (Besser & Miller, 2004), competitors (Vitell, Dickerson & Festervand, 2000) and suppliers (Baden, Harwood & Woodward, 2009). Alongside descriptions of such ethical conflict, respondents often also discussed how the firm attempted to mitigate or resolve such disputations in order to ensure that their values were not subordinated. While reflecting on instances of values disputation, respondents displayed a wide and complex range of emotions, feelings and perspectives on behalf of the firm. These ranged from anger, sadness and frustration to apparent acceptance and lack of surprise. Furthermore, while at the core of each of these disputations lay differing perceptions regarding the 'correct' value or values that should be practised or privileged, the nature and scope of the values disputations related across the interviews varied significantly. Such variance related to the type of stakeholders involved in the disputations, for instance competitors, suppliers and customers; the subject of the disputations, including pricing, product provenance and branding; and the value or values being disputed, such as *fairness*, *authenticity* and *sustainability* (see Table 15 for breakdown of values disputations).

One of the most consequential facets of such disputations was whether the dispute was direct, and thus manifested within the context of a relationship with a particular stakeholder, or whether it was indirect, and arose between the values of the small business and the values implicit within common industry practices. Given such categorisation of values disputations as direct or indirect, each type of disputation is described and examined in turn.

Nature of Values Disputation	Values Disputation Type	External Stakeholder Involved	Firm Sector	Firm Size	Firm	Value(s) Disputed	Description
Direct	Direct	Supplier	Independent Retail	Small	SIR02	<i>Respect; Benevolence</i>	Direct dispute between small firm and external stakeholder with which firm held professional association, e.g., customer-supplier relationship.
			Independent Retail	Micro	MIR10	<i>Sustainability; Honesty</i>	
			Alcohol Production	Micro	MAP01	<i>Benevolence; Fairness</i>	
		Customer	Alcohol Production	Micro	MAP02	<i>Authenticity; Independence</i>	
			Alcohol Production	Small	SAP09	<i>Respect; Fairness</i>	
			Independent Retail	Small	SIR06	<i>Respect; Benevolence</i>	
		Competitor	Alcohol Production	Small	SAP08	<i>Respect; Fairness</i>	
			Alcohol Production	Micro	MAP10	<i>Sustainability; Benevolence</i>	
			Independent Retail	Micro	MIR05	<i>Fairness; Integrity</i>	
		Collaborator	Alcohol Production	Micro	MAP04	<i>Care</i>	
Alcohol Production	Small		SAP09	<i>Authenticity; Honesty</i>			
Indirect	Industry Practice Related	Competitor	Independent Retail	Micro	MIR07	<i>Fairness</i>	Indirect, perceived conflict between small firm values and those embedded within industry practices.
			Independent Retail	Small	SIR03	<i>Fairness</i>	
			Independent Retail	Micro	MIR10	<i>Honesty; Fairness</i>	
			Alcohol Production	Micro	MAP09	<i>Heritage</i>	
			Independent Retail	Small	SIR08	<i>Integrity; Benevolence</i>	
			Alcohol Production	Small	SAP09	<i>Authenticity; Heritage</i>	
	Situational	Competitor	Alcohol Production	Micro	MAP05	<i>Benevolence; Heritage</i>	Indirect conflict between small firm values and values and practices of firms in a given situation.
			Alcohol Production	Micro	MAP03	<i>Authenticity; Honesty</i>	
		Supplier	Independent Retail	Small	SIR08	<i>Benevolence; Fairness</i>	
	Relationship Avoidance	Customer	Alcohol Production	Small	SAP04	<i>Sustainability; Care</i>	Perception of values incompatibility leading to the avoidance of potential relationships.
			Alcohol Production	Micro	MAP09	<i>Respect; Fairness</i>	

Table 15. Small Firm External Stakeholder Values Disputations

6.3.1 Direct Values Disputation

Within the context of this research, disagreements and conflict were apparent as a result of divergent values between small firms and a range of direct stakeholders. These direct values disputations were typically characterised as specific critical incidents or critical relationships where the firm had experienced an instance or instances of conflict, disagreement and tension related to divergent values with a stakeholder with which they had a direct, and sometimes close, relationship. Such direct value disputations were evidenced within the context of a number of stakeholder relationships, including those with suppliers, customers, competitors and collaborators. Such disputations were typically underscored by a sense on the part of the small firm that the stakeholder in question was acting, or had acted, in a way in which they themselves would never act, as to do so would contravene their own values. In particular, the value of *respect* was apparent in the context of many of these disputations. As one small firm owner-manager in the retail industry stated:

'If ever I'm having a dispute with a supplier, I will often say that: "You're not treating me how I treat my customers".' (SIR07)

Accordingly, within the following discussion, values disputations outlined in the context of a range of external stakeholder relationships, namely those with suppliers, customers, competitors and collaborators, will be considered.

6.3.1.1 Small Business-Supplier Direct Values Disputation

Conflict within the context of buyer-supplier relationships is an oft noted phenomenon within the literature (Ellegaard & Andersen, 2015). Consonant with this, respondents regularly recounted values disputations within the context of small business-supplier relationships over the course of the interviews, particularly to emphasise their own firm values. Such incidents, when described, were often intended as a means to juxtapose their own values with alternative sets of values.

Within each of the examples outlined below, the respondents primarily stressed the importance of particular values which they felt their respective suppliers had contravened, thus leading to disputation. In the retail context, for example, one small business indicated the importance of *care* and *respect* within their stakeholder relationships. They then proceeded to highlight the values tension which had resulted from one of their largest suppliers being bought out. In particular, stressing the shift in values which had accompanied the buyout:

*'**** (the supplier) used to be fantastic, but over the last few years they've changed as a business a lot. So, basically, they've changed since they were selling out and were bought out recently. When I look back, when their relationship with their customers started to change was about a few years ago... The close friendly relationships that we had, they've totally changed, which is really sad, and I find it very, very sad. The relationship we have with our customers we used to have with this supplier. We don't have any longer. So, whereas I used to go up to the factory every couple of weeks, I try not to go now if I can. That's a sad sort of thing really... I think that attitude towards their retailers has changed. I don't know what it is, but you get phrases now, like I think they feel like we are taking money that they could be making. The supplier of Tesco wouldn't turn around and go: "You've f***** us over for selling all that stuff".'* (SIR02)

Similarly, one furniture retailer chronicled the divergence in values, practices and expectations relating to sustainability which became apparent when visiting a potential supplier:

*'You will find other companies, there is one not too far from here, another little pocket of makers, there is not many left there now. There is a big one called **** that I went to see. They said: "Oh yeah, it's all sustainable timber," and this sort of thing. I was looking around this quite impressive factory – there were four hangars and it was all going through this big production thing – and (the maker) said: "This is where it all comes back from China". I was like: "What?!" "Well, we buy French oak and then we send it to China where it's milled". They were getting the crappy bit of oak in the middle and then putting two nice bits of oak either side, then chamfering off the edges. "So, you send it to China?" Oh God, right, I'm not touching that. It's ridiculous. (In a mocking tone:) "Oh yes, this is all sustainable timber, but it's been to China and back; from Europe to China, back to Europe!'".'* (MIR10)

Lastly, within the alcohol production sector, one owner-manager of a cider firm reflected on how the firm's value of kindness had come into conflict with the values of their bottling supplier via their organisational practices:

'An aggressive telephone manner. They didn't give any credit whatsoever, which in some ways is fair enough, but most people do. I sent some bottles, some cider, up there to be bottled, and it hadn't been released yet. I was talking to somebody and she said: "I had some of your new cider the other day." I said: "Oh right, which cider was that?" and she said: "This sparkling one," and I said: "Where did you have it?" She said: "Oh,

down the road.” I said: “Was that at so-and-so’s house from this company?” – he’d taken a load of my stock home. If he had said: “I’m going to have a barbecue at the weekend, do you mind if I take some of that stock home?”, if they’d asked me, I’d just happily done it, but they didn’t...’

‘They once tried to charge me. I needed some quick bottling done. I called them and I said: “How much would it cost to do this much, and when could you do it?” They sent back an email with their quotes and their time frame of when they could do it. It didn’t fit in, and stupidly I just ignored it, but I then, a few weeks later, had an invoice from them for failure to deliver the stock that I’d booked in. I called them and said: “What on earth is this all about, well?”, and they said: “If we send out a quote, we consider that a booking.” I mean, you can consider it whatever you want though. It’s just all the time, it’s just this attitude of trying to just screw people, so I don’t like dealing with them.’

(MAP01)

In summary, a number of respondents discussed critical incidents and relationships with suppliers where disputation in their underlying values, such as those relating to *sustainability, care* and *loyalty*, had arisen. In the following section, the direct values disputations which were cited in the context of customer relationships are examined.

6.3.1.2 Small Business Customer Values Disputation

Where the small business was in the role of supplier, a number of respondents reflected on how their values had come into conflict with the values implicit within the practice, processes and expectations of customer organisations to which they were expected to adhere. Within such instances of values disputations provided by respondents, small businesses typically described the expectations, behaviours and organisational practices of customers as being emblematic of values which contravened their own, causing friction within the relationship.

Given the relatively high bargaining power of large firm buyers in markets served by small firm suppliers (Wyld, Pugh & Tyrrell, 2012), it is often noted that large firm buyers wield substantial power over small firm suppliers and can often largely dictate the terms of the relationship. In contrast to this perspective, a number of respondents discussed how they had walked away from relationships with large firm customers due to a lack of control and misalignment in values.

As one gin producer outlined, one customer had expected them to alter their organisational practices to fit their expectations, with the gin producer feeling unwanted pressure to act in a way that they felt was not consonant with their own values:

'We are who we are, and we don't change our tone no matter who we are talking to. Probably a good example of that: a large department store chain approached us asking for stock. They came at us asking for our, is it unique? ...One of those dodgy marketing words... "What's your USP?" and "Send us your deck," and do this and do that. And we just said no, and now they don't stock us, but we don't care because that's not how we operate. We do us, and if other people want to be a part of that then that's great, and if they don't, then that's fine too.' (MAPO2)

Correspondingly, one brandy producer related their experience as a supplier to a supermarket and the stringent, and what they perceived to be unfair, rules that they were forced to adhere to as part of that relationship:

*'One supermarket we did a deal with one time, years ago. They asked us to be in there, and they decided that we absolutely had to do tastings as part of it in their stores, but we weren't allowed to do them ourselves, we had to pay their staff to do the tastings, which cost £400 a day first of all. Then they made us pay £2000 for the printouts, you know on the shelf where it says **** product, which would have cost all of 0.0001 pence, and they made us pay thousands of pounds for the installation of those, which was completely ridiculous. Then we were obliged to take an advert in their magazine as well. So, we paid them, and then they never ordered from us.'* (SAP09)

Within the retailing industry, one retailer-producer described their relationship with a large firm they had supplied and discussed the accompanying expectations and practices expected of them, which they felt were unnecessarily burdensome, leading to a lack of equality and respect within the relationship:

'We were making all sorts of things for them... They have a de-humanising degree of corporate... If you're working as a supplier for them, then they want better rates than everybody else, and they try and impose things, like, if they pay on time, they want an even bigger percentage and to have their goods, they want them in a... They want the administrative equivalent of a triple back-flip through a fiery hoop. You know, a specific time of day, delivered in a specific window, and if everything's not barcoded... I mean, just ludicrous... If they perceived that you'd done anything wrong – quite often

you hadn't – they would arbitrarily whack bits off what you were supposed to be owed, and it just became such a job trying to actually get what little money they were willing to pay.' (SIR06)

In sum, a number of small firms within the sample communicated the difficulties of maintaining relationships with customers who possessed differing values to their own. This was particularly acute when the customer in question was a large firm which sought to impress their own values onto small firm suppliers through pressuring them to adhere to their own practices, processes and language. Beyond buyer-supplier relationships, some respondents also noted instances of values disputations that had occurred within relationships with competitors. These are discussed in the next section.

6.3.1.3 Small Business Competitor Values Disputation

As Tidström (2009) notes, even competitor firms working in collaboration frequently experience conflict within their relationships. Given the potential threat that competitor firms pose to one another as well as the direct comparisons that can be made between the practices and values of firms with similar profiles, it is perhaps unsurprising that respondents communicated instances of values disputations occurring between themselves and competitors. These values disputations typically related to issues of fairness and fair treatment of stakeholders, both those of the small firm in question as well as the competitor's.

For instance, one small gin producer expressed how, although they had no problem with local competition, they had taken issue with one local rival due to their perception of a lack of *honesty* and *integrity* on their part. Specifically, the rival firm had given themselves a similar name to that of the pre-existing gin producer, which was potentially a legal issue, and yet had not even extended the courtesy of contacting them to introduce themselves:

'I just inherently don't like the other local gin company. Simply because I think that the hard work that we've put in, they are not only diluting that, but they are also prospering as a result of it. You know, they didn't reach out to us, they just started with a brand name very similar to ours, and that was a bit of a 'kick in the nuts'... It's just been so, so much ball ache of different shops and people coming in saying: "I tried your gin the other day." I'm just like: "That's not our gin." There are just so many people. A local pub took on our competitor's gin and they had a massive blackboard: "Come and try the brand new (company brand name)." But it's not our gin. It's not only diluting our hard work, it's also, like, would they be where they are if we weren't here?' (SAP08)

One small vineyard owner described how the environmental beliefs and values embedded within their firm as well as the associated firm practices, which diverged significantly from those of most other wine producing businesses, had led to ridicule from and tension with stakeholders. In particular, as these values contrasted with and challenged widely-held industry values and norms relating to the relationship between commercial performance and sustainability:

'Well, I studied for a couple of courses at a vineyard training college and, yeah, that was amazing, because there was direct ridicule of what we were doing when we were there. Very, very negative attitudes towards it, even towards organic farming. So, I found that, and I've also spoken to people who have studied there, young people mainly, who have been kind of indoctrinated with that idea. So, they have come out with those feelings that (the environmental standard) is ridiculous, it's stupid, it doesn't bring you anything. So, yeah, there is definitely a significant feeling against it.' (MAP10)

Beyond these instances of firms discussing values disputations with competitors that had a negative impact on them, some firms brought up examples of values disputations where they perceived that the values and practices of competitor firms were having a negative impact on the stakeholders of the competitor firm in question. For instance, one furniture retailer detailed with an obvious sense of frustration the divergence of their values and those of a local competitor with respect to the unfairness implicit within their pricing strategy and negative impacts this had on the competitor firm's customers:

'There are a couple of shops locally that I will leave nameless, big and small companies; I know what product they sell, I know where they buy it from, and I cannot figure out for the life of me how they justify the price. There are some suppliers that we deal with that other shops deal with; we just apply a normal mark-up, which is enough to cover the cost of the building, to cover staff wages and profit to reinvest into the business and advertising, the product itself and everything else. But what some of these other businesses charge to me is unfair, especially if it's a fairly simple product, it's hard to justify... If you charge somebody £2000 for a sofa that should be £500, it's not right, I don't think, and I have no interest in running a business like that.' (MIR05)

In summary, many firms noted the occurrence of values disputations with competitor firms, citing the negative impact that the values and associated practices of competitor firms had on them or the stakeholders of the competitor firms in question. In tandem with discussing the values of competitor firms, firms in the sample similarly discussed those of firms with which they collaborated. As

respondents intimated, however, these relationships were also a breeding ground for values disputations and as such are examined in the next section.

6.3.1.4 Small Business Collaborator Values Disputation

Although inter-firm collaborations can yield significant commercial gain for parties within such arrangements, such relationships can be difficult to sustain (Madhok & Tallman, 1998). Firms across both sectors, but particularly in the alcohol production sector, cited instances of collaborations. These typically involved co-creation and marketing of products or simply stocking one another's goods. Respondents discussed instances of where, either actual or potential, inter-firm collaborations had resulted in values disputations. Such collaborative arrangements and relationships were, perhaps unsurprisingly, often described in emotive terms, given both parties' capacity to practise and communicate values which the other may not feel are representative of themselves or 'correct'.

For example, one small brandy producer reflected on their experience of dealing with a potential collaborator and the process of discovering that their business' values did not align with those of the other firm. In particular, how, although superficially it appeared the values of the two firms were well aligned, after doing some research, the respondent discovered that the firm's practices contravened their own adherence, and practices related, to authenticity:

'I had some people who sent me some rum today. They had a great story. I spoke to them on the phone for ages, and they said: "Oh, we are making this rum, and we do it like this, and it's amazing." So, they gave me this whole story, and they told me what the rum was like and all of this sort of stuff. I looked them up on the internet, and they have their rum made by someone that actually just flavours industrial alcohol and say that they are the best distiller in the UK and all this stuff. So much of it is a con, that's marketing and branding, and it's a sad state of affairs really.' (SAP09)

Also within a retail context, one owner-manager related the difference in value systems between their business and that of a local collaborator in terms of what they considered the right way to treat employees and run their businesses. Interestingly, the owner of the other firm was a family relative of the owner-manager interviewed, with this values disputation leading to tension within their own personal relationship:

'We're still involved with them, they still stock our (products) in all of their shops over there. But our value systems are absolutely divergent. I mean, for example, I tend to try and have as open a culture as possible in terms of, you know, if people ask me questions,

figures from the company are freely available. I'm not covert about who I'm doing what with. If people ask me questions, I'll try and be as upfront as possible and I don't think (their business) is run in a similar way. They're not allowed music at work, they're not allowed tea during the day, all sorts of stuff that I think personally is really dehumanising.' (SIR06)

Values disputations between firms in collaboration were evident in the empirical data. Such values disputations had often led to issues within the relationship between the two parties and, in the second example given, the termination of the collaboration before it had even commenced.

Overall, the presence of direct value disputations within small firms' relationships with a range of stakeholder parties was evidenced. Nevertheless, another key theme within the data relating to values disputations was the disputations which the small firms reported to exist between their own values and those of parties with which they had little or no direct contact. Such indirect values disputations are explored within the next section.

6.3.2 Indirect Values Disputation

A number of the respondents highlighted industry practices and norms (Burks & Krupka, 2012) as well as the practices of other firms which, despite the small firm in question not being a direct stakeholder of or having direct contact with these firms, they felt were morally questionable. In particular, it became clear that this occurred through small firms judging the practices of other organisations through the 'lens' of their own values. This often resulted in the small firms equating contravention of their own values and what they perceived as the right way of practising these values as these parties behaving in a morally incorrect manner. These indirect values disputations were often steeped in the juxtaposition of values and practices between the small firm and large firm approaches to issues such as stakeholder management, tax compliance and honest marketing practices. While small businesses in the sample expressed anger at practices and values demonstrated by other organisations, they simultaneously intimated that the observation and awareness of such practices strengthened their own resolve and provided motivation for them to stay true to their own values.

The following discussion of indirect values disputations is structured as follows. First, so-called industry practice related values disputations, where firms disputed widespread or overriding industry values, norms and practices, are considered. Second, situational values disputations are examined where values disputations between small firms and organisations with which they did not possess a relationship arose. Third, instances where firms actively avoided stakeholder relationships based on a divergence of values are discussed.

6.3.2.1 Industry Practice related Values Disputation

Industry practice related values disputations concerned small firms' perception of disconnect and conflict between their own values and accompanying practices and the values implicit within dominant market practices within their own or adjacent industries (Posner & Schmidt, 1987). Such disputations were often precipitated by a sense of the absence of 'fair play' within industry practices or in the practices of dominant firms. This was perhaps best exemplified in the retail sector, where respondents compared their own practices to those of large firms within the industry. For many of these businesses, large online retailers, such as Amazon, represented an existential threat to their business, with firms perceiving Amazon's market dominance as attributable to the company's privileging of profit as a value over all else, especially over notions of *fairness*. For example, one independent retailer described their anger with Amazon's practices and how it actively sought to put small businesses, such as themselves, out of business:

'I don't like Amazon. I don't like their business model, which is basically geared up to sell what small independents were selling and selling them for a little bit less. Ethically, I think that's wrong.' (MIR07)

Another retailer similarly criticised the unfairness of large firms not paying tax when they themselves pay all their tax, once again citing Amazon as the company that predominantly personified a lack of values in relation to *fairness* and *integrity*:

'The big boys not paying their VAT or corporation tax, that's totally unfair... Pay all my VAT, I pay all my corporation tax on every penny we earn. Why does Amazon...why do all those people not?' (SIR03)

In a similar vein, a number of respondents commented on industry and sector specific practices that they perceived to contravene their own values and heavily contrasted with their own practices. For instance, one small furniture retailer outlined the unfairness and lack of transparency surrounding frequently used pricing and selling strategies within the industry:

'We just do a fair price... It's got to be a proper price. I don't mess around; I hate all the discounting. Some of these fitted companies, you hear stories... You sort of ring up and say: "How much are these fitted wardrobes?". "They will be £3200." You go: "OK, that seems quite expensive." They say: "Let me see what I can do; we can do that for £2500." They do that and you think: "Where has that £700 gone?". If someone walked in here and said: "I want 10% off this, this and this," there isn't 10% to knock off. I've had people

working here who have started doing that, but if we start doing that, then we have to put 10% on everything... A lot of them do that, which I hate. It's this whole thing with a sale. It's annoying if you buy something and you go back and it's half price or money off, particularly if you are still waiting for it to be made. You have to go in and say: "Excuse me, I've bought that and now it's in the sale.". "Well, OK, we will give you some money back." But you don't want to have all that hassle. You just want what you have paid to not change in price because it's got to be a fair price. I'm happy with the price, you are happy with the price, and that's it.' (MIR10)

In a comparable fashion, one micro alcohol producer, a brewer, outlined with visible frustration and sadness their take on the current state of the pub industry and the negative role that large breweries had played in altering the values and traditions of the industry:

'Brewery owned pubs have been completely and utterly wrecked by breweries, like, having the noose around their necks tightened the whole time. It's just rubbish. You walk into any pub in the UK, and it's the same rubbish on every pump. It's disheartening, and that's why I feel like pubs are dying away. Maybe I'm a beer snob, maybe that's what it is, but if I walked into a pub and just saw the regular rubbish, I would just have a soft drink. I don't understand why you would want to drink that; I personally just don't get it.' (MAP09)

Correspondingly, some firms discussed what they saw as differing factions within the industry which, although superficially often looked to be caused by differing product ranges or market segments targeted, were in fact often precipitated by the presence of divergent values. As one small jewellery retailer stated, competitor firms within a different segment of their industry possessed differing values to their own sector and as a result often tried to take advantage of one another:

'We were at an award ceremony last week, and you see a definite divide between the ones that try and do business one way and maybe those that try and do it another way. I think those two groups try and stick together. I think that those (retailers) that have watches generally try and stick together closer than those that don't have watches because there is less of a cross over. I think with watch suppliers, they limit the amount of product that retailers can get. So, they are always trying to borrow watches from each other, you know: "You haven't sold that yet and I have a customer that wants it."

So, there is kind of an internal system of trying to get things they can't get. I also think they are always trying to stitch each other up.' (SIR08)

Analogously, one cider producer discussed how in the cider industry, differing factions existed based on differing notions of authenticity and traditionalism as values. These tangibly manifested in the different factions using differing production methods, which firms used to judge the values of other firms in the industry:

'So, in the cider industry as opposed to the spirits industry, you've got 100% pure juice makers, and we are friendly with those people because that is how cider should be made. Then you've got all these people making cider out of concentrate, which is totally illegal in other parts of the world because it's not making cider out of apples, it's making out of concentrate.' (SAP09)

To sum up, firms conveyed a number of examples of instances where their values had come into conflict with those implicit within industry norms and practices. These disputations often provided an insight into the differing factions which existed within industries based on key values, such as *integrity*, *fairness* and *authenticity*. The next section examines values disputations which arose where small firms came into contact with firms in possession of contrasting values.

6.3.2.2 Situational Values Disputation

A small number of firms within the sample outlined specific instances where they had come into contact indirectly with firms, through for example visits and events, whose values contrasted with their own, leading to perceived disputations and conflict between the two sets of values. While the instances typically had little tangible impact on the firms, respondents often indicated the strong impression such instances had left on them and how they had emphasised their own values.

For example, as one micro cider producer described, when the firm was in its early days, the founders had gone to seek inspiration by visiting a large cider maker based in the region. However, the visit had emphasised the gap between their own values and those of the firm in question:

*'It's funny, as we were making our first batches. *** (a large, national cider maker) were just on the cusp; they were still a very worthy cider maker, who were getting bigger, but were no way the size that they are now. We actually went there, we went to the cider farm, and we were making jokes about 'going to Mecca' and seeing how it was done and treating it like it was a proper day of 'seeing the big boys do it.' We got pretty short thrift when we were there. It was basically like: "How much do you want to buy?", "Carry on – can you leave us alone?". So, it was a bit of an eye opener and now for the logos and phrasing they use, and the fact the quality of the product has dropped*

*out so much – it's no different from *** or *** or any of the rest of them now. It's so low in juice content, it's so high in sugars, there's a lot of citric acid in there to create an apple flavour instead of any actual acidity from fruit.'* (MAP05)

Similarly, one micro gin producer related how they had attended an industry trade show and the frustration of listening to a presentation given by a fellow gin maker. The respondent noted how this had underscored the difference in values between those of their own firm and those of many firms in the sector. In particular, given the use of 'marketing practices' and the deliberate use of inauthenticity within the presentation:

*'I've just been up to the London Wine Fair because I knew it had some gins there... I went to a talk by people who make *** gin, and it was half an hour of lies about the ingredients they put in and why they put them in and what the blending does. It was all nonsense. It was just marketing. Then a lot of backstory about how they made it in their kitchen and he wore his slippers and he came from ***. Who cares? I don't care! It's smoke and mirrors because if it's genuine, it's not a marketing exercise, so you don't need to sell a lifestyle, you're selling your product because you believe in it. You're not trying to sell yourself.'* (MAP03)

In the retail sector, one jewellery retailer chronicled the values and behaviour of a large jewellery supplier in the industry and how drastically these contrasted with their own. Specifically, they discussed the effects on small businesses of 'getting into bed' with this particular supplier:

*'You would be shocked. You would be utterly shocked at the control that you hand over... You could lose your main source of income, your main income driver like that (clicks fingers) and your business is gone, and it could be nothing to do with what you have done but something that they have decided that they want you to do. There are things with **** that are horrendous; they will drive growth to companies and then finish them because they get to a point where actually they want to take it over from them – it's horrible. One last year, a company went from being a big player in silver to basically scraping a living. Fifty odd members of staff made redundant, because **** went: "No, we are not selling it to you anymore."'* (SIR08)

Overall, a small number of firms in the sample conveyed instances of indirect values disputations with parties with which they had indirectly come into contact. Firms often used these examples to demonstrate how their values diverged from the values of other organisations within the sector. By

extension, some firms discussed how they sought to avoid entering into relationships with particular organisations based on the perception of the incompatibility of their mutual values.

6.3.2.3 Values Disputation & Relationship Avoidance

Beyond discussion of interactions, even those largely indirect in nature, in which firms reflected on values disputations they had experienced, a number of firms discussed potential relationships that the firm had avoided on the basis of incompatible values. Some respondents made it clear that some potential stakeholder relationships were avoided outright due to a perceived rift in values between the firm and the potential stakeholder. Such discussion often explicitly or implicitly drew on themes related to the contrasting values and practices between the large and small firm approaches. This was exemplified in the alcohol production sector in relation to the role and impact of supermarket chains, with firms often expressing a perception of a lack of care and respect on the part of such organisations. One small brewing firm with particularly strong environmental values noted how they had actively set out not to supply supermarkets owing to their negative impact at local level and focus on commercial gain:

'So, so not selling to supermarkets was an initial decision; we tried to sell through independent outlets. As we've grown, we've had the temptation of supermarkets and probably wouldn't go to any of the ones that I would consider the worst... It's largely what they do with their money. Supermarkets export wealth out of an area, they undercut our core market, which is pubs, through selling products cheaply. They basically do business without care. It is purely profit driven and not about social and environmental gain. Whereas other independent businesses would do a better job of that.' (SAP04)

While in the previous example the respondent focused on the negative impact of supermarkets on independent firms generally, another small brewer discussed the perceived impact that dealing with a supermarket would have on their particular business. To be precise, noting how they perceived such a relationship would be lacking in the key values of *care*, *respect* and *equality*:

'I can't imagine doing anything like that personally – selling into a supermarket... They don't care about us; they are just looking to get it as cheap as possible. So, they can make whatever money they need to make. There's no respect. You walk into a room with Tesco or whoever, they're not going to give any time or thought to what might help you. They basically put an offer on the table and just say: "Accept it or don't", basically. There's no negotiation with it.' (MAP09)

As such, some respondents discussed how they actively sought to avoid potential external stakeholder relationships due to misalignment in their values.

In summary, respondents within the research sample articulated a broad range of value disputations, both direct and indirect, that they had experienced within the context of their external stakeholder relationships. Such disputations often related to key values, including *benevolence*, *authenticity*, *fairness*, *respect* and *sustainability*, and involved a sense that particular stakeholder or industry practices were emblematic of values that were inconsistent with those of the small firm (see chapter seven, section 7.3 for discussion of values disputation and ethical conflict from a Pragmatist perspective). Given the strong, intuitive sense of virtue accompanying adherence to their values, as outlined in the previous discussion, and the potential for external stakeholders to impair small firms' values fidelity, respondents also elucidated the steps which they had taken in order to try to remedy these value disputations and ensure adherence to their own values. Within the following section, these strategies for managing values disputations are thus chronicled and categorised.

6.4 Firm Responses to Values Disputations

As the examples above demonstrate, the nature of values disputations experienced by the small firms varied considerably. Such variance was apparent in relation to, for example, the nature of the values involved and the context of the firm and the stakeholder relationship in question. Accordingly, the means by which firms sought to respond in these instances to ensure that they remained faithful to their values differed from firm to firm. In this section, how firms responded to direct values disputations with external stakeholders is outlined.

Importantly, it became apparent that alcohol production firms were often more cognisant of avoiding stakeholder relationships in which values disputation or conflict might occur, leading to more independent retail firms in the sample describing instances where they had been required to respond to values disputations with external stakeholders. Beyond the influence of the nature of the disputation, a number of factors also impacted the response of firms. Importantly, it became apparent that multiple trade-offs were apparent and faced by firms when selecting the appropriate response.

As previously discussed, small firms often lack key resources (Spence, 1999) and can find themselves in an unstable and thus precarious position. In addition to and as a result of this, in the context of supply chains small firms can find themselves at the mercy of larger firms, given their relative lack of bargaining power (Crook & Combs, 2007). Therefore, the means by which firms sought to respond to these

challenges, and a potential lack of fidelity, to their values was influenced by a number of factors. For example, the impact that severing a stakeholder relationship might have on the financial position and stability of the firm or how too strictly adhering to one value may compromise fidelity to other values. In this section, the responses in which firms engaged to try to tackle values disputations are outlined. Although these responses are presented in four different sub-sections, they are presented in such a manner to make it simple for the reader, and so it must be noted that these responses varied considerably between firms and were not mutually exclusive. Some firms took elements of each of these differing approaches over the course of the issue or the stakeholder relationship.

6.4.1 Acceptance of Values Disputation

In some instances of values disputations with external stakeholders, respondents noted how, despite the firm being uncomfortable with the presence of conflicting values, they chose not to challenge the values of the stakeholder in question. Such a response was typically driven by high reliance on that stakeholder, the opportunity cost of not engaging with the stakeholder or a lack of requisite resources, for example, that would allow the small firm to sanction the stakeholder. Ultimately, it came down to such small firms choosing not to take any action in relation to the values disputation as it could not afford the financial ramifications of the relationship being altered or terminated by the stakeholder. As discussed in chapter five (section 5.2.5 on care), respondents often considered the financial performance and viability of the firm in moral terms, equating firm solvency with being able to provide care and livelihoods for their employees.

For instance, one small brewing firm discussed the high opportunity cost of not engaging with a potential stakeholder, particularly if the stakeholder in question was a customer and thus could provide greater financial stability to the firm. The respondent conveyed two instances in which the firm had to make difficult, but pragmatic, choices around engaging with external stakeholders with which they felt a contrast in values. In relation to its stance towards supermarkets, the respondent noted how this had changed over time as a result of the financial pressures facing the firm:

'We always said that every bottle sold in a supermarket is one less pint sold in a pub, which is true, it's so true, and we were proud of that, but you can sit there and bury your head in the sand and think: "I'm just going to continue to supply pubs and that's all I'm going to supply because I believe it's a socially responsible place to sell beer and consume beer". But in the meantime, every other brewer is going to cut deals with supermarkets and is selling cheap beer in them. So, you can either sit there and ignore it, but that might be a silly thing to do, which is the view we took about three years ago. So, we now sell into three of the big four supermarkets as well as another big one, which we actually supply direct, but the other three we use an agency. We are in a couple of

hundred of each of those stores and it's fine, our sales rates are good. You make no money on it – it's terrifying how little money you make on it.' (SAP10)

Similarly, the respondent discussed another group of stakeholders, large pub groups, and how their stance on engaging with them had altered over time, explaining that they had chosen to embark on relationships with such groups despite having issues with their values and practices:

*'Again, I wouldn't really have wanted to work with *** and ***, who at one point owned a quarter of the pubs in the country... We could see the people we were dealing with when we first got involved with them, but you can't ignore a quarter of the market. So, you have to sort of work with them, and we have worked with them very successfully up until the market starts to turn, and then they just spit you out. They suggest they care but they don't really.'* (SAP10)

However, not all firms in the sample attributed the lack of direct challenge to contrasting stakeholder values to commercial concerns; some discussed their belief in and acceptance of the plurality of values they saw within the industry:

'We just kind of accept that, that we do some stuff differently, we all live different lives, and we all have a different code of ethics to live by.' (MAP06)

In the retailing sector, values disputations with individual customers were frequently noted, but the majority of firms attributed the lack of challenge to these values not to the financial impact but to their legitimacy to do so, often quoting the mantra 'the customer is always right'. For example, one micro retailer emphasised how, despite the strong environmental values of the business and some customers being less than polite, they chose to leave such value clashes unaddressed:

*'Customers as well – I had one yesterday who was going: "How much is it? For the mattress?". I said: "Well, all our mattresses are organic". He was like: "I'm not bothered about organic". It was just like (owner-manager inner monologue): "Really? F***, you are winding me up". (Mocking customer's old-fashioned tone:) "Organic is a load of rubbish as far as I'm concerned." I said: "It basically means it's not fire retardant. We can get you one that is treated. It will probably be about half the price, maybe a little bit more, it will still have a 10-year guarantee." (The customer:) "Will it still be the same quality?". (Owner-manager:) "Yes". (The customer:) "Well, that sounds OK." But he was like: "Organic? Big con as far as I'm concerned". I'm like: "OK, that's your opinion".'* (MIR10)

In sum, some firms chose to accept the presence of divergent values in their stakeholder relationships and not to challenge the values of the stakeholder in question. Such a stance was typically justified on the part of the small firm through reference to the financial impact that taking any action might have, their acceptance of the existence of differing values in the industry or their sense that they possessed no right to take any action. While some firms chose to take the approach outlined in this section, others sought to distance themselves from stakeholders with which they perceived a conflict or divergence in values. This approach is discussed in further detail in the next section.

6.4.2 Distancing from Stakeholder

A key means by which some small firms attempted to manage values disputes was through distancing themselves from the stakeholder in question. Such an approach typically involved a reduction in direct, informal communication from the firm to the stakeholder as well as, in some circumstances, a professionalisation or formalisation of the relationship. Such a transition represented, to a certain extent, a shift from a fairness approach to stakeholder management based on trust, honesty and collaboration to an arms-length approach based on instrumental motivation, bargaining power and a formalised relationship (Bridoux & Stoelhorst, 2014). As one retailer in the car industry explained, one of their key suppliers, with which they had enjoyed a close relationship based on a number of shared values, had been bought out, which had led to the retailer perceiving a change in the values of the supplier:

'We'll see what happens in the next couple of years. I think it's probably a healthier relationship being at an arm's distance anyway and taking emotions out of your dealings with them. It's probably a good thing. Whereas I was pretty close to them, I was on the dealer committee with everything, with all the decisions, events, I was privy to. I still get conversations where people ring me up and ask me stuff. As much as I (would) prefer to go back (to) the way it was, I don't think it ever will, which is sort of interesting really.' (SIR02)

Another small firm in the retail industry illustrated how values dispute with a collaborator firm which also operated locally in the sector had led to issues within the relationship and a formalising of the relationship based on mutual commercial gain:

*'And I haven't spoken to ***, who's the managing director there, for a couple of years, basically, because we had quite a serious difference of opinion about values. I don't know what else to tell you about that one. We're still involved with them, they still stock*

*our (products), they still stock *** in all of their shops over there... But no, our values are completely divergent.'* (SIR06)

As an extension of this engagement in stakeholder distancing, some respondents related how their firms sought to avoid contact with potential external stakeholders due to a perceived lack of value symmetry and the potential for values disputation to occur within such a relationship:

'I avoid having to deal with large companies if I possibly can because I know from hard bitten experience how they work and how they operate. I've worked for large companies myself... You can't expect anything else from them other than a wall of silence or a wall of platitudes. And someone on the end of a call centre on the other side of the world, which can't possibly be good, satisfactory. But when they have the vast numbers of customers they have, economically speaking, they have to deal with it that way, but just avoid them, basically.' (SAP01)

In summary, stakeholder distancing was a key means discussed by firms of dealing with values disputations. Such an approach typically involved a reduction in communication and a formalisation of the relationship, thus mitigating the immediate presence of a divergence in values. In contrast to this approach, some firms sought to strengthen stakeholder engagement in the face of values disputation and tried to persuade and educate stakeholders. This approach is discussed in more detail in the following section.

6.4.3 Strengthening Stakeholder Engagement

In some instances of values disputation, respondents chronicled how they felt compelled to challenge – directly or implicitly – the values, and practices, of the external stakeholder. Such a communication based approach to disagreement and conflict typically involves focus on areas of disagreement and negotiation of these areas in order to mitigate or bypass such disagreement and reach a consensus, or at least a sufficient *modus vivendi*, to be able to proceed (Holmes & Marra, 2004; Lindskold, Han & Betz, 1986). In examples given by respondents, this approach was typified by communication with the stakeholder and the use of a blend of persuasion and education in an attempt to try to compel the stakeholder to change particular organisational practices, and thus implicitly, alter the values practised.

As one micro alcohol producer explained, their approach was to actively engage with parties in possession of differing values and attempt to educate them so as to try to change their beliefs and practices:

'We try to always deal with people who share our ethos but we wouldn't cut somebody out that doesn't because we see that as a really good space to educate. Not just to educate the publican, or the licensee, or whatever they may be; we see it as a trickle down right to the consumer to try and change the industry. We are not just here for ourselves. We work for an entire industry; to make things better and to educate people better.' (MAP06)

In the retail sector, one small retailer related a key instance where their values had come into conflict with those of a potential customer and the firm had attempted to directly engage with the customer in order that they might change their practices to be more in line with the values of the small firm:

'We have just welcomed a new butcher to our team...he has brought with him a wholesale customer who wants to spend a lot of money, around £80-90k a year, on meat. They want to continue working with him because he has looked after them so well. So, he gave me the product list yesterday of what the client wants and it's chicken fillets from Holland, bacon from Denmark, lamb shanks from New Zealand; and considering that I've got such strong values I said: "I would love to keep this contact, but I'm a farmer, I've grown up during times when as a farming family we have been dealt a pretty low blow from cheaper imported meats. I believe British farming is the best type of farming". So, I'm going to go back to our wholesalers and try and find UK versions of all of this stuff and then try and wean them on to a new product list. And we are doing this process at the moment. It's not going to be as cheap and we are working at the moment with the client, but those are my values, so I just have to take a step back from that.' (SIR09)

Other respondents emphasised the importance of reaffirming their expectations of stakeholder values practised within external stakeholder relationships. This was exemplified by one small retailer who used direct communication to attempt to reorientate one such relationship back on course:

'For most of the time we have been here, we have dealt with one company, which is a family-based firm, and for virtually the whole of that time, I've dealt with one person, who is one of the directors. We have always had a very good relationship... Now, like me, this director is more or less the same age as me and inevitably he is winding down

a bit. So, we don't see as much of him, and the company has got bigger, and last year we had a few problems with them – deliveries being late – and this year it has been worse. So, I sent this chap an email and just said: "We have been working so well together for all these years, I really need to let you know that there are some cracks appearing in the system and that things need to be sorted". Within hours, I got an email back from him to say: "I'll look into it and get back to you". He did some delving, and I gave him my general manager's number. He phoned my general manager, and they went through all the issues, and I'm sure they will try and work it out.' (SIR10)

However, such engagement and education concerning divergent values was not just limited to direct stakeholders. With social media an increasingly important tool for small businesses, communication with other parties outside the firms' direct relationships was cited. For instance, one micro furniture retailer emphasised an instance where the firm's values had come under scrutiny via social media and the owner-manager had attempted to use it as an opportunity to engage and educate those attacking the firm:

'We did a vegan bed for someone last year – that was interesting. You can find that on our Facebook because I promoted it and got a little bit of reaction. It was like seeing what people get when they are celebrities; people just chipping in from here, there and everywhere. You know (putting on an accent): "I'm a steak eater from Illinois, I hate this, why is this vegan?" My girlfriend was saying: "You've got another hater, you've got another hater, just leave them". I was like: "No, I'm going to reply to them and say I'm not a vegan, I think veganism is good, we are not a vegan shop".' (MIR10)

Overall, many firms perceived values disputations to be an opportunity to stand up for their values through engaging with stakeholders and seeking to persuade them to alter, typically, organisational practices but, at times, the beliefs of the organisation. This being said, and as examined in further detail in the next section, some respondents related how the conflict in values between themselves and a stakeholder had led to a severing of the relationship.

6.4.4 Severing Relationship with Stakeholder

The dissolution of stakeholder relationships as a result of severe, irresolvable conflict or differences is a noted occurrence within the previous literature (Gedeon & Fearne, 2009; Ellegaard & Andersen, 2015). In line with this, perhaps the most extreme and emotive of the four values disputation management strategies recounted by respondents was a termination of the relationship with the external stakeholder in question (as noted in section 6.3.2.3, some firms attempted to avoid potential values disputations through not engaging in potentially problematic relationships). In a number of

instances, micro and small businesses emphasised how they felt compelled to end the stakeholder relationship, either gradually or quickly, because their values were so in conflict with those of the external stakeholder. The impact of firm size was apparent in relation to this response, as micro firms who discussed the termination of relationships made it clear that, given their size, they could often not afford to find alternative suppliers or customers to make up for the loss of supply or purchase.

One gin producer discussed how the firm had become aware of a conflict in values with one wine merchant which acted as a stockist for their products for a period of time and had, as a result, terminated the relationship:

'Briefly, we stocked into a wine merchant, and we realised pretty quickly that was an error. They didn't pay their bills on time, they weren't very nice to deal with, they undercut some local independent outlets, and we took one look at it and thought: "No". So, we delisted all our products from their outlets. Even though they were a volume customer, it didn't fit with what we are and what we do. As a small independent, we want to support small independents.' (MAP02)

Likewise, one owner-manager of a small, independent retailer-producer recalled their dealings with a large, corporate customer to which, among others, they had previously been a supplier and how the conflict between their own values and those of the customer had become increasingly apparent, ultimately leading to the small firm ending the relationship:

'The rates were awful, and then if they perceived that you'd done anything wrong – quite often you hadn't – they would arbitrarily whack bits off what you were supposed to be owed, and it just became such a job trying to actually get what little money they were willing to pay. It was one of those cases of, well, actually this is not good business, this is not a pleasure in any way, this is like an uphill struggle – toodley-pip. It was more, good business should be a pleasure than "don't be a dick". Actually, it was a bit of a combination of both really there, but they went by the wayside, and there have been various other people that have gone by the wayside because they're just incapable of being pleasant.' (SIR06)

Another independent micro retailer discussed their relationship with one supplier and how a case of disputation in values in relation to the values of transparency and communication had caused conflict within the relationship. As the respondent related, after a process of communication, the small firm ended the relationship and stopped stocking the supplier's products:

'We used to do a sofa range years ago from a company up north, and they used recycled bottles in their cushions. So, that's the classic sort of thing you think: "That's really good because fleeces are made out of recycled bottles". So, you think that is a good, eco thing, using a waste product. But then you think: "Oh, but is it all treated with fire retardants?" So, you are like: "What is in the fire retardant?". They are like: "We can't disclose that for copyright reasons, but it's quite safe". "As safe as it can be" is what they always say. So, they can't tell you what they are actually putting on it; they are putting on all these bromides and odd things to stop it catching fire. So, on one hand, you are like – great, they are solving recycled bottles by making this great material, but then you are spraying on this stuff that people will have reactions to. Sometimes you don't realise that you are breathing in these toxic fumes. So, we stopped doing that.'

(SIR10)

Overall, a number of differing approaches to resolving values disputes and retaining fidelity to organisational values were discussed by the small firms. These responses were by no means mutually exclusive and their scope and scale were heavily influenced by the immediate context in which the values dispute arose. Pointedly, factors including the duration and nature of the relationship, the organisational values of the small firm and the financial stability of the small firm all influenced the responses each firm took in response to divergence or conflict between their own values and those of external stakeholders. It was therefore apparent that there existed no one 'right' answer or solution to resolving such conflict in values, but instead a process involving the consideration of contextual factors and possible responses was needed in order for firms to locate an appropriate solution for the issue at hand.

6.5 Conclusions: Chapter Five and Six

Overall, chapters five and six outlined the results of the empirical data collected from the forty small firms in the research sample. Chapter five analysed and discussed the results of the empirical data collected in relation to the first three research questions. Specifically, those concerning the *nature, role* and *enactment* of small firm values. The empirical data collected evidenced the existence of a range of small firm organisational values, including moral values, such as *care, authenticity, sustainability, excellence* and *benevolence*, as well as competence values, such as *profit-making, quality* and *customer service*, and examined how these were conceptualised by firms. Further to this, the role that such values play in small firms was also considered, suggesting that values act akin to a compass, guiding firm decision-making with respect to a number of areas, such as production, marketing and stakeholder treatment. The means, or practices, by which firms sought to enact these values was also considered,

with a range of practices outlined in relation to a number of values. For example, with practices such as mitigation of waste, reduction in energy and creation of social capital in the local community all being attributed to the enactment of the value of *sustainability*.

Chapter six, which focused on the fourth research question underpinning this research, centred on the *maintenance* of small firm values, particularly with respect to external stakeholder relationships. The implicit and explicit communication of values was first discussed, alongside the obstacles that small firms encountered in such communication. While the communication of values was overwhelmingly implicit, through communication of, for example, the day-to-day life of the firm, some firms did attempt to explicitly communicate their values. However, the communication of values was often considered complex by the small firms, given a paucity of resources and the lack of a distinct message.

The existence, and active establishment, of stakeholder relationships predicated on shared values was then explored in the context of the small businesses' relationships with stakeholders, including suppliers, competitors and the local community. This evidenced the importance of such relationships and the mutual reinforcement of values and practices associated with them.

This was followed by consideration of instances of values disputations between small firms and their external stakeholders. This included both direct values disputations between small firms and immediate external stakeholders, such as suppliers and customers, as well as more indirectly with, for example, values implicit in industry norms. As the empirical evidence demonstrated, such instances of disputation varied greatly in relation to a number of factors, including the nature of the issue and the values it concerned. This variation was reflected in the range of responses which firms sought to pursue, with each small firm looking to chart a response appropriate to the context of the firm and the situation at hand.

In sum, together these two chapters evidence the importance of organisational values to small firms, particularly to a range of organisational practices and aspects of decision-making, and the means by which such firms seek to retain and maintain their values, especially when faced with external pressure. Ensuring fidelity to values was seen as a key concern by the small firms and encountering stakeholders with conflicting values presented a significant challenge which the firms sought to respond to through constructing an appropriate response. The following chapter will draw together the themes from these chapters and adopt a Pragmatist stance to the data outlined. Specifically, Dewey's Pragmatist ethics will be used to frame and conceptualise the practice and maintenance of values in the small firm context.

Chapter Seven: A Pragmatist Stance on Small Firm Values Practice

7.0 Introduction

In the previous two chapters an overview of the empirical data collected through the interviews was outlined. Chapter five explored the *nature* of the values that the small firms expressed as important, as well as how they sought to *enact* these and what they considered the *role* of their values to be. Chapter six subsequently examined the communication of values, the importance of cultivating stakeholder relationships predicated on the basis of shared values and the existence of values disputations between small firms and external stakeholders as well as how the small firms in the research sample attempted to manage these to *maintain* their values.

In this chapter, in order to theoretically frame and analyse the findings from the empirical data collected, a Pragmatist stance is taken towards the empirical data. While the previous two chapters presented an overview of themes and findings from the empirical data relating to the practice and maintenance of small firm values, this chapter will knit the findings and themes from these two chapters together from a theoretical perspective to address the overall research question of the thesis. This will allow a greater clarity of understanding to be garnered through consideration of values practice and maintenance as an iterative process which transpires over time and is contingent on the context of the situations and issues at hand. This is achieved through taking a Pragmatist stance to outline a theoretical conceptualisation of how practices become embedded in small firms as moral habits, how context shapes the practice of these habits and how firms deploy inquiry to respond to disputed values and values-led practices.

First, the notion of moral habit in relation to values practice will be considered, followed by an examination of the notion and impact of context on the practice of values. Next, a discussion of moral habit disruption and Pragmatic inquiry and valuation will be introduced and outlined. Finally, these aforementioned strands will be drawn together in consideration of what a Pragmatic view of small firm values entails.

7.1 Values and Moral Habits

A key notion within the Pragmatist school of thought, and thus the Pragmatist stance, is that of habit: '*the stage of unconscious activity along lines set by previous action*' (Dewey & Tufts, 1909, p.9). Present within the work of Pierce, James and Dewey, habit is characterised by the Pragmatists as the tendency of beings to possess and demonstrate particular and repeated forms of habituated behaviours, responses and activities (Cohen, 2007). As explored in chapter three (section 3.3), Dewey's work on the application of a Pragmatist stance to ethical issues impresses the importance of habit to the theory and practice of Pragmatist ethics (Dewey, 1922). Moral habits, Dewey argued, are moral action dispositions

which lie within the background of consciousness, guiding unthinking behaviour. Such moral habits are driven and underpinned by socially meaningful ideas (Surie and Ashley, 2008).

As discussed in chapter five (section 5.2), the empirical data gathered in this study provided meaningful insight into the character and features of the practice of small firm organisational values. Respondents primarily stressed the need to ensure that their values predominated within organisational practices, processes and relationships and described how they considered values, such as *authenticity*, *benevolence*, *care*, *sustainability* and *heritage*, as key to the functioning of the firm. For example, describing how *localism* was practised through consideration of and contributions to the local community and area; *care* was practised via consideration of the wellbeing and happiness of employees; *benevolence* through fair and kind treatment of a range of indirect stakeholders. Such a commitment to embedding the firm's organisational values in its day-to-day practices and norms was justified by respondents as being motivated by: '*because we feel it is right*' (SIR08), the need to '*be proud of every angle of what you do*' (MAPO5) and '*so we can sleep better at night*' (MAPO8).

Despite respondents explicitly articulating commitments to both the practice of values and the specific nature of those values, the day-to-day practice of small firm organisational values was, by contrast, often implicit, intuitive and habitual. The small firms, for instance, often likened their values as akin to a compass which guided them, shaping their practices into habituated norms which generated moral satisfaction. Over time, such norms and practices became entrenched; simply becoming the taken-for-granted way of doing things.

7.1.1 Values-Driven Practices as Moral Habits

Utilising Dewey's characterisation and conceptualisation of moral habit, small firm organisational values practices can be considered as instances of moral habit.

First, as Dewey stresses, because ethics are concerned with the worth of particular modes of conduct, one of the key features of moral habits is that they are underpinned by, and predicated upon, socially meaningful ideas Dewey (1891). As discussed in chapter two (section 2.4), this research project has conceptualised values as intrinsically moral constructs, with Rokeach's definition of values employed to acknowledge this: '*A value is an enduring belief that a specific mode of conduct or end-state of existence is personally or socially preferable to an opposite or converse mode of conduct or end-state of existence*' (Rokeach, 1973, p.5). Utilising this definition in tandem with the empirical data, it is clear that the values practices enacted by small firms are driven by socially meaningful ideas and result in ends that possess value. Values, such as *honesty*, *compassion* and *respect*, are widely considered to be inherently socially meaningful and beneficial, given their re-occurrence across, for example, a wide range of religious and moral codes (Kinnier, Kernes & Dautheribes, 2000; Roccas, 2005), and have come to possess intrinsic moral value and significance. Furthermore, as Rokeach suggests, the practice of

values, both through their practice as modes of conduct or their promotion as end states of existence, yields ends which are morally meaningful and valuable. For instance, through a small firm practising the value of *sustainability*, a number of ends that possess value may be realised. These include a sense of moral fidelity and virtue on the part of the firm for enacting a key value, as well as a more environmentally and socially sustainable world. As a result, given that small firm values practices embody values which are socially meaningful, such practices meet this characteristic of moral habits as outlined by Dewey.

Secondly, Dewey describes moral habits as modes of conduct which are entrenched and enacted unthinkingly (Bergman, 2005; Dewey, 1920). As previously outlined within chapter five (sections 5.2 and 5.3), respondents within the research sample often stressed the intuitive nature of their values practice as well as how their values-driven practices were habituated and embedded within the firm. As a facet of this, respondents described how their values practices were very much taken-for-granted ways or means of doing things. This was demonstrated through respondents often not being able to describe or justify organisational practices related to their values, with the explanation simply being that this was just the way things are, and have always been, done within the firm. The small firm values practices therefore share the ingrained and habituated nature of moral habits as depicted by Dewey.

Finally, as Dewey suggests, these moral habits build, accumulate and accrue over time (Kanne, 1988); *'In so far as definite acts are repeated and consolidated, the original habit or instinct of doing certain things in a certain way is just strengthened'* (Dewey, 1902, p.367). Thus, such habits, and the values they represent, become increasingly embedded within the organisation. This was observable within the research sample, as more established firms tended to convey with a greater level of confidence and authority the manner in which they attempted to practise their organisational values as well as their justification for engaging in particular practices, processes and relationships. By contrast, newer firms were often better able to explicitly articulate their values-commitments than more established firms.

In summary, employing Dewey's notion of moral habit renders it apparent that the small firms' values practices are attempts to enact inherently socially meaningful ideas and thus such practices represent the values and beliefs of such firms. Over time, these moral habits become increasingly embedded until they are unthinking ways and means of doing things, therefore becoming habituated. Nevertheless, despite firms being largely unified in their practice of moral habits driven by their organisational values, both the conceptualisation of individual values and the means by which firms endeavoured to, and actually, practised them differed considerably from firm to firm. Within the subsequent section,

Dewey's stance on the importance of context is employed to conceptualise the importance and influence of circumstance and situation to the practice of these values-driven moral habits.

7.2 Values & Context

As outlined in chapter three (section 3.1.3), a key facet of the Pragmatist stance is a focus on and consideration of the salience of context (Martela, 2015). The Pragmatists argued the role of context to be of critical import, as perception, consideration and judgement are inherently and inevitably mediated by context, which can never be removed from any given situation (Pynn, 2015). As such, when considering context, Pragmatists drew on the idea that beings possess a particular point of view or position, arguing that this position serves as a unique lens through which they view the world and events within it (Long, 2002). Such regard for the importance of context is mirrored within Dewey's work on ethics, as he stressed the importance of context, particularly in relation to contextual factors which shape and influence the nature of moral issues and thus how they ought to be resolved; mirroring elements of casuist thinking (Dewey, 1922).

As explored in chapter five (section 5.2), throughout the collection and analysis of empirical data, the influence of context on the practice of values-driven moral habits by small firms became apparent in a number of ways. The role of context was especially apparent through the differing position of each firm towards individual values. For example, while many of the respondents from small firms professed adherence to or a strong belief in particular, and often the same, values, such as *benevolence*, *honesty* or *fairness*, each firm possessed differing notions of these values and the organisational practices which should accompany and be driven by them.

The most explicit and apparent example of this was in relation to the notion of *authenticity* in the alcohol production industry (see section 5.2.1 for further detail). Within the latter, the salience of authenticity was frequently cited by respondents (including firms MAP04, MAP05 and SAP09), and yet the definition of authenticity and the focus and tolerance of authenticity-related practices varied from firm to firm regarding production and marketing practices as well as general firm conduct. For example, some producers professed a belief that the practice of authenticity required ownership and control of the whole production process, as opposed to the outsourcing of either the growth of raw material inputs or parts, or all, of the production process to third parties. Other firms, while equally stressing the importance of authenticity, asserted that the outsourcing of organisational practices, for instance through procuring pre-made products and simply flavouring them, was in no way in contravention of the value of authenticity.

In a similar manner, while a number of firms professed the importance of *sustainability* (such as firms SIR03, SIR07, MAP10), each illustrated differing notions of how it should be conceptualised and

practised (see section 5.2.4 for in-depth description). While some firms sought to firmly ingrain sustainability within their firms through, for example, attaining organic certification, others only engaged in more cosmetic sustainability practices, for instance via increasing recycling within the firm. Similarly, firms possessed differing notions of sustainability, with some viewing sustainability as a predominantly environmental concern, while others perceived sustainability to be concerned primarily with social issues.

Accordingly, the importance of contextual influence on the means by which small firms conceptualise their values and culture values-driven moral habits became apparent. These contextual influences were broken down into three different categories: institutional norms and practices, internal firm pressures and relational factors. Within the following discussion, the influence of institutional context on values-conceptualisation and its impact on associated moral habits is first examined. This is followed by analysis of the influence of organisational context on the practice of small firm values as well as consideration of the role of stakeholder relationships and accompanying relational context in the practice of small firm values.

7.2.1 Institutional Context

The impact of institutional context on the practice of firm values was appreciable in the perceived presence of industry or local norms and practices in relation to particular values. As touched upon within previous research into small firm social responsibility (see, for instance, Cambra-Fierro, Polo-Redondo & Wilson, 2013; Ruffo *et al.*, 2020) as well as in the wider CSR literature (Whitcomb, Erdener & Li, 1998; Alas, Ennulo & Törnpuu, 2006), institutional norms and practices can shape firms' notions of the importance of particular values as well as how such values should be practised or enacted.

The influence of firms' perceptions of industry norms and practices in relation to the value of *sustainability* was particularly apparent in the juxtaposition between the jewellery and the furniture industries. Within the jewellery industry, firms cited the importance of sustainability as a value and the plethora of practices embedded within the industry in the pursuit of sustainability. They noted that, given the value of the materials they work with, the value of sustainability possessed a long history within the industry, with, for example, carpets traditionally being swept weekly to collect gold filings and the recycling of old pieces and materials being a common occurrence. In tandem with this, the proliferation of standards and processes, such as that of Fairtrade certification and the Kimberly process, had led to both the value of sustainability and related practices, particularly third-party certified practices, becoming embedded within the industry (Carrigan *et al.*, 2017). Firms therefore generally considered sustainability to be an important value and one that was typically practised in a

proactive and formal manner with support from actors and regulatory frameworks within their institutional environment.

'It's important to our industry because I think people feel there is a way forward for it to be sustainable... Every base material that everyone in the jewellery industry uses comes from the planet... All we do is put our touch at the end; we do the design, we do the finish, we do the setting, but the product comes from the ground. But then you can redo our bit of it by recycling it. In a way, our industry is self-fulfilling.' (SIR08)

Conversely, firms within the furniture industry described how sustainability was a concern often given little credence within their industry. They attributed this to the high costs of producing goods in a sustainable manner and the inherently environmentally burdensome production of many of the materials required to make furniture goods, such as the production of leather and metal, both of which are carbon intensive activities. They asserted that this was further compounded by a lack of effort within the industry to close the loop, including difficulties in recycling, consumer apathy and a lack of transparency and information relating to the origin of, for instance, wood used within particular items of furniture. This lack of formal architecture and support for sustainable practices led these furniture retailing firms to perceive sustainability as both costly and burdensome, despite voicing concerns relating to environmental issues and a reported desire to embed sustainability within their organisations.

*'I'd love to say it does... It's a terrible waste; you can't recycle carpet or beds – there's just no facility around here for doing that... It's shocking what goes into landfill. It disgusts me but there isn't anywhere to do it so I can't do it... The customers don't give a **** sadly.'* (SIR07)

In an analogous manner, the presence and influence of institutional norms relating to the value of *localism* were apparent within the empirical data (see section 5.2.3). This was particularly evident in the case of two small rural winemakers (SAP06 and MAP08) who discussed the importance of localism within the area and community in which the businesses were situated and, as a result, the importance of the value to the identity of their businesses. These firms outlined the institutional norms present in relation to localism which existed within the region, how residents within the area encouraged and supported the notion of localism and how many firms sought to practise and uphold these. Such norms and practices on the part of local firms included close relationships and collaborations with other local businesses, mutual promotion of one another's businesses, attempts to keep wealth within the area and vocal expression of a fierce sense of local pride. As such, the firms within the research sample felt

the value localism was integral to their businesses and sought to embed localism-driven moral habits within their firms.

'The locals are always very much on our side, promoting us to their visitors that come into the area... We never buy anything outside our valley, so all the grapes come from this valley and that's very important to us... We like to try and keep wealth within the county, in our sort of little pocket.' (SAP06)

That being said, and as touched upon in chapter six (section 6.1), while firms typically adhered to institutional norms relating to the conceptualisation and practice of particular values, others sought to cultivate values-driven moral habits which contrasted with, and challenged, institutional norms with which they disagreed. Furniture retailing firms MIR05 and MIR10, for instance, both cited institutional norms and practices related to the value of *fairness*, which they believed contradicted their own position on, and belief in, this particular value. Both firms perceived institutional norms relating to a lack of honest and transparent pricing as being deeply unfair to consumers within the industry and therefore had independently and actively sought to challenge and disrupt such norms through their own values-driven moral habits.

'We just do a fair price... It's got to be a proper price. I don't mess around; I hate all the discounting. Some of these fitted companies, you hear stories... You sort of ring up and say: "How much are these fitted wardrobes?". "They will be £3200." You go: "OK, that seems quite expensive." They say: "Let me see what I can do; we can do that for £2500." They do that and you think: "Where has that £700 gone?'" (MIR10)

Overall, it is clear that context, in the form of institutional norms and practices, plays a role in shaping consideration and practice of firm values and moral habits. Yet while some firms internalised such institutional norms, others sought to actively disrupt and challenge such norms as a result of the conflict they perceived between their own values and institutional norms and values. That being said, although institutional context represented an important influence on firms' values practices and moral habits, it was not the only form of context shaping firms' perceptions and practice of values. Pressures from within the firm were also a key influence and are discussed in the next section.

7.2.2 Internal Firm Context

Alongside institutional norms, the heterogeneous internal firm context of each individual small firm shaped the means by which organisational values and moral habits were considered and practised. A number of firms cited the impact of perennial issues and worries they faced, including in terms of market competitiveness, a lack of consumer confidence and pressures associated with meeting high fixed monthly costs, on the practice of their values. Despite some previous research suggesting the

existence of a positive link between the practice of values, such as *honesty*, *respect* and *trust*, and small firm financial performance (Hammann, Habisch & Pechlaner, 2009), firms related how financial pressures played a key role in shaping firms' consideration of the salience and practice of values. Specifically, while firms noted on the one hand the importance of their values, they also impressed the need to fulfil the commercial mission of their organisation and the implications for their commercial performance and the sustainability of attempting to practise their values in a totally purist manner.

The presence and necessity of the consideration and trade-offs which accompany the practice of morality, as cited by the small firms within the study, mirror Dewey's position on morality. In line with the Pragmatist commitment to anti-foundationalism, Dewey argued that moral decision-making is an uncertain and often messy affair which cannot simply be solved through the application of fixed rules to attain ideal solutions (Dewey & Tufts, 1909). Instead, Dewey contended that an approach based on casuistical thinking and method is more appropriate, where attainment of a solution within a given situation and context must be sought, which may well involve trade-offs between differing values and moral goods (Hiller & Woodall, 2019).

Instances of firms struggling to balance commercial pressure and financial viability with the practice of values were perhaps most explicit in relation to the value of *sustainability*. A number of firms expressed the importance of sustainability (see section 5.2.4) and how they would like to see it embedded more fully within their organisations through, for instance, installing solar panels, using more sustainable materials and reducing energy and water use and waste. Firms also expressed that they lacked the time to organise such activities and that they believed the financial implications for their business would likely be dire. For example, as the added costs would have the impact of reducing their profit margins, cutting sales volume due to heightened retail prices or depleting cash reserves. Respondents expressed how less-than-ideal trade-offs often had to be made between financial performance and fidelity to their values in the short term.

'The environmental sustainability side of things is something we're not quite as good at as we would like to be. My partner's background in environmental science would have him like us to have solar panels on a roof and that kind of thing, but we have to balance that with our finances.' (SAP02)

Similarly, a number of alcohol producers discussed how their values, including *authenticity*, *heritage* and *localism*, drove them to take a purist approach to the design and production of their products. For example, within the cider sector this typically manifested itself in the utilisation of a traditional technique of making pure juice ciders with no additional additives. Respondents also noted, however, that the cost implications of such an approach, as well the effect on sales volume, could be seriously

deleterious to the business and that trade-offs between such values and the financial viability of the firm had to be considered.

'You get purists that would only ever use the key products and then the other people that see that they get more options from changing production styles... But it's finding a harmony I think between your own values, as a cider maker or brewer or whatever, and is it commercially viable. Do people want to pay for it? If one's yes and one's no – something's wrong; it has to be both.' (MAP05)

Some firms noted that their commitment towards values such as *benevolence* and *integrity* meant that they sought to engage in practices such as fair pricing, the avoidance of misleading sales techniques and employing marketing campaigns which depict the firm and its products in an accurate manner. They also discussed how such attempts to stay true to particular values could, in fact, negatively impact the firm. For instance, in the retail environment, one owner-manager described how customers often sought to have free delivery on products anywhere in the United Kingdom. However, the firm did not offer free delivery, as it would have to increase all of its prices, including for local customers, to compensate for delivery costs for customers further afield, something they believed to be unfair. The owner-manager noted how this had led to friction between local traders, such as themselves, and customers:

'Someone from Norwich was saying: "The company down the road does free delivery"... We don't put it in the cost. If we did then someone locally would be paying for us to take stuff to Norwich. You would have to say: "That bed is 50 quid more because we have to sell so many so a lady in Norwich can have her chest of drawers delivered for free."' (MIR10)

Furthermore, alongside considerations of balance between the practice of organisational values and commercial performance lay concerns related to the maintenance and practice of other values. As alluded to within chapter five (particularly section 5.2.5), firms often associated or conflated financial sustainability with the ability for firms to continue to practise care towards their employees through providing a financial livelihood to them and their dependents. Likewise, stemming from a strong sense of localism, firms sought to maintain their financial stability in order to continue to contribute to the local economy and community.

The influence of firm context in terms of the financial pressures on and commercial viability of small firms at any given time had a demonstrable impact on how firms considered and attempted to enact their values. In particular, respondents often reflected on the messiness, trade-offs and less-than-ideal

courses of action that were present in decision-making processes given the constraints of the individual situations in which the firm found itself.

In tandem with the importance of institutional and internal firm context to the practice of firm values and moral habits, as frequently referred to within chapter six, the stakeholder relationships that firms possess are of key import to the firm and its practices. Within the next section, the notion of relational context is discussed.

7.2.3 Relational Context

As outlined in chapters five and six, many small firm values practices arose within the context of stakeholder relationships, such as those with customers, suppliers and the local community, or related to the treatment of, and firm impact on, key stakeholders. As a result, and as explored in chapter six (section 6.2), small firms frequently sought relationships with stakeholders with whom they perceived the presence of common values. The nature of the relationships which small firms cultivated with particular stakeholders varied considerably in terms of strength and length as well as in relation to the moral norms and habits present within the relationship. Consequently, the context provided by the nature of, and norms present within, particular relationships influenced the manner in which small firms conceptualised and practised their values and thus how moral habits manifested themselves and were deployed within such relationships. Critically, the small firms were often acutely aware of whether values, and the moral habits associated with particular values, were reciprocated or were likely to be reciprocated within stakeholder relationships. This was alluded to by one small retailer who reflected on the notion of mutual respect within their supplier relationships and how prompt payment on the part of their firm demonstrated their respect for suppliers and how this respect was reciprocated by suppliers and thus mutually reinforcing:

'I think it's right to respect, you know, the local builder and electrician; for example, we'll pay immediately on receipt of invoice. I think that mutual respect is important. We look after them, they look after us. It works. Certainly, if we have something that's urgent, they will drop things and come, and that helps! (SIR05)

Conversely, a lack of moral reciprocity within stakeholder relationships was made clear by one small gin maker (SAP08) who, while relating how the firm practised respect towards many of their local competitors, juxtaposed this with one of their competitor relationships (as discussed in chapter six, section 6.3.1.3). The gin maker described how they perceived that they had been disrespected by one local firm who had started up with a name very similar to their own and had used family relationships to enable their product to be stocked at a council-owned retail outlet with very high footfall in which they had been unable to have their product listed. SAP08 therefore highlighted the difference in moral

norms between their relationship with many other gin firms and the gin maker in question, noting the lack of reciprocity in terms of respect and camaraderie and the hostility present within the relationship:

'When they first started, we sent them a letter saying: "This isn't on". You know: "What are you doing?", "This is a registered trademark and it's very obvious that you're passing off" and they ignored it... I then went to a local award show for good foods show and we won 'Best Local Spirit'. Our competitor was also there – I'm not going to lie; I did have a bit of a smug look on my face.' (SAP08)

A lack of reciprocated moral norms was also described by another gin producing firm. The micro gin producer in question juxtaposed the relationship they possessed with a supplier based on mutual respect and loyalty with the lack of perceived reciprocity and respect which potential customers often exhibited:

'The people we buy our neutral grain spirit from, we were the first small producer that they sold to... When they first sold to us, we were so tiny, so they had to change their ways of working to work with us. So, now we're bigger we feel they deserve our loyalty...

People have written to us asking for our product and written to us asking for a sample and we've said: "No. We don't send samples", and then they kick off and don't stock our product, but that's fine because they came to us. If they want our product then sell our product.' (MAP02)

Such variation in moral norms and the practice of values within the context of stakeholder relationships was particularly observable within those relationships with distinct power asymmetries. Typically, such relationships were apparent between small firms and larger buyer or supplier firms and often resulted in the smaller firm finding difficulties in practising their values, with a sense on the part of the small firms that their values were being usurped in favour of the values or commercial interests of the larger firm. When interacting with large firm suppliers or customers, small firms were often obliged to adhere to formalised and prescriptive standards, procedures and processes which differed from their own practices (Baden, Harwood & Woodward, 2011). As one small retailer-producer (SIR06) described, while their own practices focused on *kindness*, *fairness* and *respect* in order to achieve equitable and positive relationships, their relationship with one particular customer had been disruptive of these practices and values given the demands, and power, of the customer:

'It works better for everybody if you are nice to people and you are nice to yourself... It's what they call the golden rule, essentially, in various religions, which is treat other

people as you would like to be treated yourself, and that theme is prevalent through how you deal with your employees and how people expect to be treated as employees, how you treat your customers... We were making all sorts of things for them, and, despite the fact that they're a cooperative, they have a de-humanising degree of corporate... If you're working as a supplier for them then they want better rates than everybody else and they try and impose things like if they pay on time they want an even bigger percentage... The rates were awful and then if they perceived that you'd done anything wrong, quite often you hadn't, they would arbitrarily whack bits off what you were supposed to be owed and it just became such a job trying to actually get what little money they were willing to pay.' (SIR06)

In summary, the context and influence of stakeholder relationships impacted the values, norms and moral habits practised by small firms. Context, in terms of the presence of shared values, the strength of the relationship and the existence of power asymmetries, shaped how firms sought to practise their values in relation to differing stakeholders as well as the moral habits present within particular stakeholder relationships.

7.2.4 The Importance of Values within Context

In summary, it is clear that the presence and influence of context, in the form of institutional, organisational and relational contexts, play a significant role in shaping the position or stance of firms towards their values and that these are enacted through moral habits. This includes firms' commitment to particular values, the importance of values and the practices, norms and, critically, the nature of the moral habits which should be adhered to and driven by these values. This was evident within the differing meanings and contrasting practices associated with individual values which firms expressed and demonstrated. Nonetheless, as discussed earlier with respect to issues concerning relational context, firms also cited instances where they found themselves in situations where their moral habits became disrupted. This was particularly evident in instances where firms came across and interacted with stakeholders who possessed starkly contrasting moral habits. Within the following section, the notion of Pragmatic inquiry and valuation in response to such moral habit disruption is unpacked.

7.3 Values, Moral Habit Disruption & Inquiry

As previously discussed, small firm representatives described a range of moral habits driven by their values, apparent in the form of practices, processes and norms embedded within the day-to-day operations of their firm. In tandem with this, and as outlined in chapter six (section 6.3), respondents often described instances and relationships where their firms came into contact with stakeholders within their institutional environment who possessed contrasting moral habits and values, as well as

the steps their firm had taken in response to such situations. Within the previous chapter, such occurrences were referred to as values disputations and characterised as instances of tension, disagreement or conflict between the values of two parties, as implicit within divergent practices, processes and norms.

While the Pragmatist stance, and particularly the work of Dewey, highlights the importance of habit to individual conduct, it also recognises that in certain instances, such as in new and uncertain situations or when interacting with outside parties, habits may become redundant or be disrupted (Elkjaer & Simpson, 2011). In such situations, the Pragmatists prescribed the employment of a process of inquiry to resolve such issues (see chapter three, sections 3.1.2 and 3.3.3 for more detail) through identifying possible and potential solutions (Sorrell, 2013). As Simpson and den Hond articulate, *'normativity in Pragmatism thus takes the form of tentative proposals for action that are continuously forged and tested in the transformative processes of inquiry'* (2021, p.14). Importantly, inquiry is contextual, as judgements and resolutions cannot be separated from context and, as it is engaged in to respond to actual problems, the resolutions at hand may only be 'ideal' to the extent to which the situation allows (Hickman, 1998). Pragmatist scholars also impress that through such a process of inquiry new habits could be formed.

Within Dewey's work on the application of Pragmatism to ethics, an inquiry based reflexive process of moral imagination and reasoning is prescribed to deal with morally problematic issues (Sorrell, 2013). This approach contrasts with that predicated on traditional moral theory as it is tentative, triggered by morally problematic situations and conflict, iteratively develops over time based on the outcome of particular actions and does not generate one clear, normatively grounded 'right' answer. The focus rests on the process of identifying possible courses of action and associated outcomes, rather than on fixed, normative solutions (Dewey, 1916). This focus on the necessity of inquiry and the plurality of differing options and solutions when dealing with moral issues is therefore emblematic of his wider characterisation of the world and moral issues as being heavily marked by plurality and conflict (Anderson, 2020).

As explored within chapter six (section 6.3), where values disputations arose between small firms and their external stakeholders, the small firms experienced challenge to their values as well as, typically, disruption to their moral habits. As Dewey stresses, when parties with divergent beliefs come together it may necessitate mutual adjustment and adaption so that each party may continue to adhere to their respective beliefs (Dewey & Tufts, 1909). Given the oft noted power asymmetries between small firms and their stakeholders, small firms may feel particular pressure to adhere to the norms, standards and practices of more powerful external stakeholders, such as large firm customers (Baden, Harwood &

Woodward, 2009; Spence & Bourlakis, 2009).

For instance, as one owner-manager within the cider production industry related (SAP09), while dealing with one large firm customer the contrast between their respective values and associated moral habits became increasingly stark. While the small firm stressed the importance of *authenticity*, *integrity* and putting the longevity of the business over the drive to make short-term profit, the owner-manager reflected on the firm's dealings with a supermarket customer and the challenge this had posed to their values and moral habits. In particular, how the supermarket customer had unfairly insisted on the small firm paying for staff to conduct in-store product tastings as well as for shelf-labelling and other marketing costs. As a result, the small firm realised the difference between their values and those of the supermarket, particularly in relation to the prioritisation of profit and the lack of importance afforded to the values of fairness and respect, and how their moral habits had been challenged and disrupted.

Similarly, the owner-manager of a micro alcohol producing firm (MAP01) discussed how the divergence in values between those of their own firm and of one of their suppliers emerged through the contrast in their moral habits. While the small firm owner-manager stressed the importance of *kindness* and *fairness*, they discussed how the supplier had displayed values and associated practices which contravened these values. Specifically, as the supplier firm had communicated in what the owner-manager perceived to be a rude manner and had acted dishonestly, notably in order to try and profit from the small firm via opaque practices and processes.

In both these instances, underlying these values disputations were divergences in beliefs highlighted through contrasting practices, processes and norms which disrupted or provided challenge to the moral habits of the small firm involved. Accordingly, and as evidenced within the empirical data, in such instances respondents discussed how such moral dilemmas required a response and a decision to be made to ensure fidelity to their values. Within the next section, a Pragmatist stance is employed to allow enhanced understanding of how small firms attempt to remain faithful to their values through constructing solutions to, and mitigating the impact of, their disrupted moral habits.

7.3.1 Pragmatic Inquiry, Valuation & Values Disputation

'It's a call-by-call kind of situation... If it's right and if it's not, it's not. It's definitely a call-by-call, case-by-case basis.' (MAP06)

While respondents described instances of values disputations and the accompanying divergences in values and moral habits within small firm stakeholder relationships, they also often cited how the firm had found themselves at a crossroads whereby a decision had to be made regarding the course of

action to be taken. Accordingly, respondents often related the complexity associated with considering the context and nature of the moral issue at hand and the need to ensure fidelity to their organisational values.

Through taking a Pragmatist stance on such an approach, these owner-managers, tasked with such decision-making, can be considered to be taking on the role of 'inquirer', involving them in '*the stress of conflicting interests, the processes of deliberation and valuation, and the final act of choice*' (Dewey & Tufts, 1909, p.9). According to Dewey, moral issues should be dealt with through engaging in a reflexive process of this kind, which allows the particular idiosyncrasies of the issue and context at hand to be considered (Dewey, 1985). Respondents outlined how, through drawing on their organisation's values, they engaged in an often iterative process of moral reflection and deliberation to construct, consider and deliberate hypotheses regarding courses of action which could be taken in order to practise and maintain fidelity towards their values, both as means and ends (Jacobs, 2004). Such deliberation involved consideration of the consequences of each potential course of action and how each possibility may prevent or facilitate the attainment of their organisational values.

Where small firms' values were implicitly challenged through interactions with a stakeholder or stakeholders in possession of contrasting values and moral habits, owner-managers related a wide variety of thoughts and reflections that had occurred when considering how to deal with such instances. For example, through: considering the ways in which it could persuade the stakeholder to better meet its own notion of particular values or moral habits, contemplating ending or distancing the relationship, deciding to do nothing as any action may thwart the practice of other values, finding an alternative party to deal with and reflecting on the impacts of different courses of action on stakeholders. Such impacts included the financial impact of these proposed courses of action on the firm and the resultant effects it may have for its stakeholders and whether the owner-manager and the wider firm would feel comfortable with the decision in both the short and long term.

To examine in greater detail the employment of moral inquiry by small firms, and following in the casuist tradition of case-based reasoning (Jonsen & Toulmin, 1988), of which Dewey himself was a proponent, within this section a number of cases from the empirical data are presented. These cases allow for the illustration of the highly emotive, complex and context-sensitive issues with which firms were faced as well as for an exploration of the nature of the inquiry-based processes in which small firm owner-managers engaged.

7.3.1.1 Localism, Traditionalism & Customer Values Disputation

As one owner-manager from a retail-producer firm (SIR09) indicated, *localism* and *traditionalism* were two of the firm's most important values, evident within the mission of the firm and a number of its

moral habits. The firm saw its mission of producing, feeding and becoming a core part of the local community as combining the values of localism and traditionalism and perceived its moral habits to play an integral role in this. For instance, the firm endeavoured to source all their products as locally as possible through building close relationships with local suppliers and proudly displayed signs within their shops detailing the 'food miles' of many of their products.

However, the owner-manager related one particular instance where an interaction and potential relationship with an external stakeholder with values that differed from their own had challenged their own values and moral habits. Specifically, the owner-manager of the firm described how a new employee had brought a profitable trade contract to the business, but the trade contract consisted of the purchase and supply of low-cost products bought from outside the UK.

While the owner-manager discussed how *'running a business is bloody hard work these days and every month we have got to find enough money (to pay staff)'*, they also described how their family's business had been ruined by cheap imports. Therefore, the firm had felt a clash of values with their potential new customers relating to the values of localism and traditionalism; an issue further complicated by financial pressure and one requiring a decision to be made.

The owner-manager described how they had decided that the best course of action to try and maintain fidelity to their values was to go back to the customer. As the owner-manager related, they had initiated an honest and frank discussion to deal with the issues; *'I said: "I would love to keep this contract, but I'm a farmer, I've grown up during times when as a farming family we have been dealt a pretty low blow from cheaper imported meats. I believe British farming is the best type of farming".'* This was done in an attempt to get the customer to try to change their habits and buy locally sourced, but more expensive, products. The owner-manager also noted that if their attempts at persuasion had failed, they would simply have walked away from the customer in order to maintain fidelity towards their values because *'you want to try and build something a little bit bigger with a little more integrity behind it, I think it is important to hold on to your values'*.

This example highlights the tentative process of moral consideration and action in which the owner-manager engaged to attempt to deal with the divergence in moral habits, and values, between their firm and that of the potential customer. As discussed, this process involved the consideration of a number of factors and values, including the commercial performance of the firm, the maintenance of the firm's values and the stakeholder relationships and responsibility of the firm. Encompassed within this, the owner-manager sought to consider both the potential responses their firm could take as well as possible counter-responses from the customer firm.

7.3.1.2 Loyalty, Trust & Supplier Values Disputation

The owner-manager of retail firm SIR02 described the difficulties and moral habit disruption they had faced as a result of one of their suppliers being bought out by a firm with very different values to their own. The owner-manager related how the firm's values centred around *loyalty, trust* and *care*, noting that these stemmed from the firm being a long-standing family business. The owner-manager explained that their firm had a family feel to it as it had a number of long term employees. Consequently, the firm felt a significant duty of care, not just to their employees, but also to their families. While the firm had enjoyed a long relationship with the supplier in question, one built on personal relationships between senior managers from both companies, the supplier firm had recently been bought out.

Despite having felt symmetry in values with the supplier, after it was bought out, the owner-manager perceived a dilution in care on the part of the supplier towards its customers and an increased focus on profit. This had led to a decreased sense of trust, reciprocity and equality within the relationship: *'I think the core family values have shifted and I think that's been a significant change... I think they feel like we are taking money that they could be making'*. As such, the owner-manager described the discomfort and sadness they felt as a result of this change and how they could try to minimise this contrast between their own values and moral habits and those of the supplier as well as prevent the supplier's actions having an impact on the firm's customers.

The owner-manager described how he had talked to some of the supplier's other customers and even some of the supplier's employees and that they felt the same way about the supplier's change in values. The owner-manager reflected on how they believed the situation might evolve and the course of action upon which the firm had decided. Given that the bulk of the small firm's revenue was generated by products from this particular supplier, while the owner-manager intimated that they would potentially like to end the relationship, they had instead decided to distance themselves from the supplier through communicating and visiting them less as well as through formalising the relationship. This reduction in contact and acknowledgement of the transition the relationship had undergone from one based on shared values to one based on mutual commercial gain allowed the perceived dissonance between the values of the small firm and supplier to be reduced. In addition, it allowed the small firm to minimise the impact of the supplier's actions and attitudes on its customers. As the owner-manager put it: *'I think it's probably [a] healthier relationship being at an arm's distance anyway and taking emotions out of your dealings with them'*, while also admitting that they would prefer the relationship to go back to the way it was.

The owner-manager indicated that he had shielded the firm's own customers from this shift in the supplier's values, as it was a well-loved brand, and that the firm had also formalised and

professionalised their relationships with its other suppliers so as to avoid ending up in the same position again.

In this case, the retail firm owner-manager outlined the consideration and steps taken to deal with a perceived change in supplier values to prevent the disruption of their own moral habits, particularly those relating to care and loyalty. What is specifically interesting from a Pragmatist perspective is the steps the owner-manager took to gain more information in order to facilitate more informed reflexive inquiry into the best course of action to take. Moreover, that the firm's moral habits had changed as a result of this incident as their behaviour towards their other suppliers, namely the distance and formality of those relationships, had altered.

7.1.1.3 Sustainability, Authenticity & Customer Values Disputations

The owner-manager of one small alcohol producing firm (SAP10) related the distinctive and firmly held values of the firm, which included *sustainability, respect* and *care*. As part of this, the owner-manager discussed how the firm did not have *'a department that has got corporate social responsibility written on the door where you go in and you are kind of like drilled about it'*, but that they were a family business and that *'if you could write a manual of how to act in socially responsible way it would be the rules of a family, that's all it is. You respect your staff, you respect the environment, you look after charities'*.

However, the owner-manager reflected on how the stakeholder relationships they possessed and the moral habits they practised had changed over the years and, through engaging in reflection and consideration of their values, how a balance between staying true to their values and keeping the firm afloat had been necessary. Specifically, they discussed how when the brewery was small, they had sought to not deal with supermarkets due to a belief that cheap supermarket alcohol was socially irresponsible as it fuelled binge drinking: *'And also (the supermarket) we sell you a pint of beer at £1.25 which you can drink at home – it's criminal really'*. Further to this, and in a similar vein, the owner-manager stressed that the firm had not wanted to do business with the large pub groups, as they believed such groups have eroded pub culture in the UK and act in an uncaring manner: *'they suggest they care, but they don't really'*. Despite this, given the increasing competition in the market, the owner-manager related how, after considerable reflection on the firm's values in tandem with its responsibilities towards its employees, they had eventually reluctantly decided to start selling into both supermarkets and pub groups, as if they had decided not to do so it would have had potentially severe commercial and financial consequences for the firm.

In summary, while the owner-manager stressed the importance of the firm's values, they also very much stressed that over time the moral habits associated with their values, particularly in relation to the stakeholders with which they formed relationships and the trade-offs that had to be made between different values, had altered. Such change involved a process of consideration and reflection

by the owner-manager on the firm's values, in tandem with a number of contextual factors, over a significant period of time. This process involved contemplating the possible courses of action available, selecting the most appropriate and reflecting on the implications and consequences of these decisions and actions.

7.3.2 Values Practice & Inquiry

As is evident from the cases illustrated above, challenge to the values of small firms from external stakeholders in possession of contrasting values and moral habits often precipitated a process of reflexive moral inquiry on the part of the small firm, especially on the part of the owner-manager or manager. Within such situations, small firms illustrated the difficulty of the issues with which they were required to deal, with such difficulty being attributable to three key reasons or concerns. Firstly, such issues often proved complex for the small firm given the pull, on the one hand, towards remaining true to their values and the opposing force, on the other, from the demands or behaviour of the external stakeholder. Secondly, such issues were frequently entwined with commercial concerns, as, for example, the external stakeholders in question were often an important contributor towards the small firm's success, leading to further complexity. Thirdly, the small firms also often sought to mitigate the negative impacts of the issue on other stakeholder parties, such as employees and customers.

Through their employment of such iterative processes of moral reflection and consideration, the small firms attempted to balance these conflicting demands and complexities to consider the possible courses of action that could be taken, and the potential consequences of these, in the face of often dynamic, contextually embedded situations and dilemmas. As the cases demonstrate, while small firms were often able to find appropriate responses to deal with the issues they faced, they were often less than satisfied with the solution or the eventual outcome given the trade-offs required.

7.4 Conclusions: Chapter Seven - A Pragmatist View of Small Business Values

As is apparent from the empirical data, small firms practise patterns of behaviour which are implicitly predicated upon the values they believe to be salient. These patterns of behaviour, which embody socially meaningful ideas and promote ends that possess value, are consonant with what Dewey conceptualised as moral habits. As Dewey suggests, and the small firms demonstrated, these moral habits are enacted unthinkingly and become entrenched within the firm's practices over time. These moral habits vary greatly from firm to firm and situation to situation, with firms seeking to enact similar, or even the same, values through differing patterns of behaviour. Importantly, therefore, the empirical data evidenced the key role context plays in shaping firms' moral habits, with context at the institutional level, the internal firm level and the relational level influencing how different firms conceptualise values and the associated moral habits that they deploy.

Where small firms cited instances of morally charged values disputations with external

stakeholders, as apparent within contrasting values or moral habits, taking an inquiry-based perspective allows insights into the processes of moral reflection engaged in by owner-managers to navigate an appropriate response. Such a process entailed consideration of the potential responses to the moral dilemma which faced the firm as well as of the consequences of each on the firm's stakeholders and on the firm's fidelity to its values. This allowed firms to consider, evaluate and identify the best response to such an issue, given the idiosyncrasies of its context, while allowing the firm to remain true to their values in so much as the situation allowed.

Fundamentally, using Pragmatist ethics as a lens to gain greater clarity of the means by which small firms conceptualise and attempt to enact their values yields a number of different insights. First, it has allowed legitimate focus on and consideration of the real-world moral issues small firms face on a day-to-day basis, as well as allowing theoretical analysis to be undertaken from an anti-foundationalist stance – shedding the cloak and limitations of fixed ethical principles. Second, it has enabled explanation of how practices associated with and driven by values become implicitly and intuitively embedded within and practised by small firms. Third, it has permitted the importance of context and nuance to be illustrated and accounted for; a key consideration given the significant and perennial influence that multiple layers of context exert upon small firms' moral beliefs and perceptions of moral issues. Finally, it has illustrated the fluidity and dynamism of values practice and how small firms navigate instances where their values are challenged by stakeholders within their institutional environment through employing processes of reflexive moral inquiry in an attempt to manage these complex and conflicting demands, all while attempting to remain faithful to and being led by their organisational values.

Broadly speaking, previous research into small firm values has typically sought to identify the values of small firms and investigate the role that values play in motivating and shaping small firm social responsibility (Murillo & Lozano, 2006; Fraj-Andrés *et al.*, 2012; Hsu & Cheng, 2012; Williams & Schaefer, 2013; Schaefer, Williams & Blundel, 2020). While this research has provided valuable insights into small firm values, it has often been conducted from a corporate social responsibility based perspective. This approach has a number of characteristics which have limited further comprehension of the role of values within small firms. Firstly, the importance of values is often marginalised, as values are relegated to secondary importance as one of a number of explanatory factors elucidating firms' CSR engagement and orientation (for example, see Evans & Sawyer, 2010; Tang & Tang, 2012). Secondly, such research often implies that values are only present and important within small firms in relation to CSR (see, for instance, Jansson *et al.*, 2017), thus overlooking the importance of values in culture and decision-making outside the bounds of 'social responsibility' (Neher & Miles, 2020). Thirdly, values are often employed with a lack of grounded, nuanced conceptualisation and precise examples, evident

within often vague references to 'social values', 'business values' or 'market values' (see, for example, Fraj-Andrés *et al.*, 2012; Hsu & Cheng, 2012).

In contrast, this research has focused primarily on values and has, therefore, taken a more holistic view of values practice, considering both the nature and meaning of values that small firms attempt to practise in tandem with how these values are both implicitly and explicitly entrenched and enacted on a day-to-day basis within small firms. This research has thus sought to acknowledge the complexity and nuance that accompanies the practice of small firm values.

As a facet of this, the notion that the presence or absence of particular firm values can be employed to explain firm behaviour is contested. Through employing a Pragmatist stance to interrogate the empirical data, it is apparent that meaning and context are essential to the practice of values. Contrasting firm practices, which may ostensibly be attributed to differing values, may in fact be better understood through heightened comprehension of individual firm context as well as through an awareness of how firms conceptualise and understand particular values. Moreover, the research has demonstrated that small firm organisational values are not simply 'switched off' when the firm is not explicitly considering CSR, as the previous literature has at times implied, but that they constantly pervade small firm decision-making and operations. This is apparent through the wide range of decisions and concerns which are, both explicitly and implicitly, influenced and shaped by such firms' organisational values, including those relating to fair pricing, honest and transparent marketing, caring and kind treatment of employees and sustainable sourcing of raw materials and products.

In summary, while this chapter has taken a Pragmatist stance on the empirical data collected from the small firms in the research sample, the following chapter will explore the implications of this research within the broader context of the extant literature. It will discuss the contribution of this research to the field of small firm social responsibility and organisational values practice as well as the theoretical implications and contributions, especially in relation to the deployment of Pragmatist theory.

Chapter Eight: Discussion & Contributions

8.0 Introduction

This research has sought to investigate the *nature, role, enactment* and *maintenance* of small firm organisational values, with a particular focus on the influence of external stakeholder relationships and disputed values. To this end, the previous literature on organisational values, small firms and corporate social responsibility was reviewed in chapter two. Chapter three introduced the overarching tenets of Pragmatism as a philosophical stance and its applicability to the research question framing this thesis. In chapter four, the qualitative method employed in the research project was outlined. Chapters five and six explored the empirical data, with the former seeking to provide a cohesive overview of the data collected from the small firms, while chapter seven explored and applied a Pragmatist stance to interrogate the data.

While each chapter has built on the former, this chapter will draw together the findings and implications of the research with reference to the extant literature in order to present the contributions of the research. First, the conclusions and implications of the research with respect to small firm values practice, wider organisational values practice and moral decision-making in organisational settings are outlined. This is followed by an examination of the theoretical implications and contributions of the research, with particular focus on the use of Pragmatism as a framework within the context of business and society research.

8.1 The Conceptualisation and Practice of Organisational Values

Broadly speaking, previous research into values within the small firm context has offered three key propositions. First, that owner-manager values are a key motivator for small firm engagement in corporate social responsibility. This is typically attributed to the integral role that such actors play within small firms and the power that they possess as a result of their role and status as both principal and agent (Fraj-Andrés *et al.*, 2012; Hsu & Cheng, 2012; Williams & Schaefer, 2013). Second, beyond motivation, the nature of small firm owner-manager values, in the form of their specific values and beliefs, plays a significant role in determining both the extent to which corporate social responsibility is pursued and the types of economic, environmental and social issues addressed through social responsibility initiatives (Boiral, Baron & Gunnlaugson, 2014; Schaefer, Williams & Blundel, 2020). Finally, it is frequently posited that a relationship exists between owner-manager values and the commercial ambition of small firms as well as a positive relationship between owner-manager values and the commercial performance of small firms (Hammann, Habisch & Pechlaner, 2009; Fassin, Van Rossem & Buelens, 2011).

As explored within chapters five and six, this research has substantiated elements of the claims made in the previous literature in relation to the role and enactment of values within small firms. The empirical evidence collected from small firms confirms the notion that values play a critical role in motivating and determining a wide range of practices within such organisations (Jenkins, 2006). In particular, those practices which relate to concerns or issues of a moral nature. The empirical data demonstrated the broad range of organisational concerns and activities, such as sourcing, procurement, product development, employee relations and external stakeholder management, which were driven and shaped by the organisational values of the small firms. These values included *sustainability, benevolence, authenticity, care and localism*. This study thus confirms elements of the previous research concerning small firm values, which suggest that values play a key role in determining small firm ethics and social responsibility engagement and practice, such as that undertaken by von Weltzien Hoivik and Melé (2009), Cambra-Fierro, Polo-Redondo and Wilson (2013) and Kiefhaber, Pavlovich and Spraul (2020).

The current research also confirms suggested links between small firm values and the commercial performance and success of such organisations, as discussed in research such as that by Bamberger (1983), Kotey and Meredith (1997) and Hammann, Habisch and Pechlaner (2009). Organisations within the research sample in this study cited and discussed links between their values and the success of the business, often suggesting values to be an integral driver of, and a means to explain, the historic and continued financial success of the firm (see section 5.3 for more detail). This was attributed, for instance, to the influence of their values on the strength of their stakeholder relationships as well as on the means by which the firm was run on a day-to-day basis. For example, at an overall level, the mission and ethos of the business, which in turn influenced everyday decisions made in the organisation – such as how and which products were produced and the types and source of services and goods procured – guided how the firm marketed itself and the extent to which it engaged in sustainability initiatives. Furthermore, and as previously discussed within the literature (for example, by Vyakarnam *et al.*, 1997), a number of organisations in the sample also expressed how, at times, trade-offs were necessary between their values and commercial and financial concerns, owing to an extreme of one leading to the degradation of the other.

Given that this research centres on organisational values, there are a number of apparent and notable parallels with insights generated from research into organisational values undertaken in the large firm context. In particular, the notion that a shared sense of values was discernible within the sample organisations akin to a common moral purpose and understanding. This, in turn, directed both the

purpose of the firm and its commitment to particular stakeholders and environmental and social issues (Maon, Lindgreen & Swaen, 2009). These values therefore play a key role in providing guidance to organisational members in instances where no 'rule' exists to provide moral direction within a given situation where a decision needs to be made (Fotaki, Lioukas & Voudouris, 2020). Despite these broad similarities, the practice of values within small firms is undoubtedly characterised by the 'small firm' approach and norms, both of which have oft been depicted within the extant literature. Namely, informality relating to a typical lack of value codification and an associated tendency towards implicit rather than explicit values communication (Morsing & Spence, 2019). In addition to informality, other hallmarks of the small firm approach were evident, including the presence of significant owner-manager or owner-family influence on the nature of the firm's values (Walker, 2004) and the influence of local stakeholders, such as the local community, on firm values practice (Fassin, 2005).

The present research has substantiated a number of claims made in prior small firm values research, particularly in relation to the significance of values to the moral position of the firm and the impact of values on firm commercial performance. This being said, in spite of these points of agreement between the present research and prior research undertaken in the area of small firm values and organisational values, the current research also evidenced a number of contrasts. These are outlined in the succeeding section, which begins with a consideration of the focal points of this research and how these have facilitated the contributions of this research to the small firm values literature.

8.1.1 Departure from Previous Literature and Contributions to Values Research

While the current research demonstrates some consistent findings and points of agreement with prior research undertaken in relation to small firm values as well as, to a limited extent, large firm organisational values, it has simultaneously generated new insights. This is largely attributable to the departure of the present research from the overriding focal points of much of the previous research as well as the employment of distinctive theoretical framing – both points which are explicated in greater detail within the subsequent discussion.

First, while much of the aforementioned research has concentrated predominantly on firm owner-manager values, the current research has placed organisational values centre stage in order to move away from the dominant trend within the literature to focus on owner-manager values (for instance, see Kotey & Meredith, 1997; Jenkins, 2006; Neher & Miles, 2020) and gain a heightened understanding of the nature and role of organisational values in small firms. Second, the majority of prior research has been conducted from a corporate social responsibility based perspective, where values are typically only tangentially addressed and considered as one of a range of organisational features or causal factors driving social responsibility practice (for example, see Evans & Sawyer, 2010;

Fraj-Andrés *et al.*, 2012; Luederitz *et al.*, 2019). By contrast, this research has taken a more in-depth, detailed approach, one underpinned by the collection of qualitative data, in order to place the spotlight specifically on values as the primary research phenomenon. Third, while previous studies have utilised a range of different theoretical positions, including Schwartz's value system (Schaefer, Williams & Blundel, 2020), diffusion of innovation theory (Hsu & Cheng, 2012) and stages of consciousness development (Boiral, Baron & Gunnlaugson, 2014), there has remained a lack of theory which helps explain the practice of values within small firms. In contrast, this study has employed theory in the form of Pragmatist ethics, which provides an appropriate theoretical framework to consider and analyse the notion and practice of small firm values (see chapter three, section 3.4 for justification regarding the suitability of Pragmatist ethics to the research context).

Such an approach has provided a number of insights into values within the context of small firms. These contributions to the ongoing discussion and conceptualisation of the nature and practice of values within the small firm context are outlined in the following sections. First, the role and significance of organisational values are considered in conjunction with the importance of value symmetry within stakeholder relationships to organisational values practice. Next, the implications of context to the practice of values is explored. Finally, the relevance of inquiry and case based reasoning is elucidated.

8.1.1.1 Contribution 1: Enactment of Organisational Values

As alluded to above, given the lack of focus on values, and especially organisational values, within the existing small firm literature, an understanding of the means by which values shape day-to-day firm practices in small firms, and how these practices are maintained, has often been lacking. That said, a small number of studies have begun to provide a more in-depth picture of the links between values and their influence on the day-to-day life, ethos and culture of small firms (see, for example, von Weltzien Hoivik and Melé, 2009). In general, where research has focused on values, it has often been concerned with gaining broad, but thin, insight into values, often through categorisation based on groups of motivating values (Dawson, Breen & Satyen, 2002; Luederitz *et al.*, 2019). Such research has therefore neglected to provide fuller insight into the enactment of these values, particularly in relation to activities not explicitly related to social responsibility.

This research has primarily highlighted the nature of small firm organisational values and the practices through which these are enacted. Through the application of a Pragmatist stance, the present research has built on these empirical insights into organisational values practice in tandem with Dewey's notion of moral habit to redress this lacuna concerning the enactment of organisational values. Through conceptualising values-driven practices as moral habits, it becomes apparent how small firm

organisational values come to be substantively enacted within such organisations via habituated modes of conduct in the form of activities, norms and processes. These moral habits are conceptualised as habituated means, activities or responses, such as engaging honestly with stakeholders or attempting to act in an environmentally responsible manner, which are underpinned and motivated by socially meaningful ideas, namely: the values of the organisation, including *authenticity* and *honesty* in the first example and *sustainability* and *responsibility* in the second. As such, the day-to-day enactment of such moral habits possesses intrinsic moral worth given their predication upon the values that such organisations believe to be socially meaningful. Over time, it is apparent that these moral habits become increasingly entrenched and embedded within such firms, with habits, such as acting in an honest and authentic manner, attempting to build an inclusive business or practising care and concern towards key stakeholders, becoming the normal and taken-for-granted means of doing things.

8.1.1.2 Contribution 2: Importance of Stakeholder Value Symmetry & Reinforcement

While previous small firm research has, at times, recognised the influence of small firm stakeholder values, particularly in relation to the local community as a key stakeholder (see, for example, Miller & Besser, 2000; Sen & Cowley, 2013), this research reinforces the significance of shared values within small firm stakeholder relationships. Such a finding aligns with work conducted which suggests a need to consider and account for the role of reciprocity in stakeholder relationships in relation to responsibility, trust and fairness (Greenwood & van Buren, 2010) and the benefits that firms can accrue from the practice of reciprocity (Bosse, Phillips & Harrison, 2009; Fassin, 2012). This notion of reciprocity and shared values is likely a particularly acute concern in small firms, given the importance of social bonds based on shared values to such firms and the accompanying heightening of moral obligation for both parties within the relationship (Lähdesmäki, Siltaoja & Spence, 2019).

The present research provides evidence of the importance of values to the bonds between small firms and their external stakeholders. Many of the firms in the study expressed a desire to build stronger stakeholder relationships with third parties, including customers, suppliers, trade bodies and local communities, with which they shared common values and to avoid relationships in which their values differed. Respondents outlined the importance of inculcating such relationships on the basis of shared values and the mutual understanding, security and trust that such relationships offer, even citing instances of where the importance of shared values in relationships took precedence over commercial concerns. For example, a number of firms cited how the maintenance of certain stakeholder relationships was not in the best interests of the firm from a commercial point of view, but how the presence and worth of a relationship based on shared values took precedence.

A key means by which firms sought to foster such values-based relationships was via implicit, often face-to-face, communication of their identity and values. In the alcohol production sector, for

instance, firms regularly invited wholesale stockists, customers and members of the local community to visit the firm. Such visits normally involved a chance to meet and spend time with the owners and employees of the firm, to hear about the firm and to see how and where the product was manufactured, allowing firms to give a compelling insight into the culture, values and mission of the business.

Critically, as discussed in chapter six (section 6.3), taking into consideration the ability of external stakeholders to disrupt the moral habits of small firms, it is apparent that through seeking stakeholder relationships predicated on shared values, small firms are limiting the extent to which their moral habits and values are likely to be challenged. As a result, they are also limiting the extent to which processes of reflexive inquiry as well as moral habit disruption and re-adjustment would need to occur.

8.1.1.3 Contribution 3: Considering the Importance of Context

As discussed in chapter seven (section 7.2), a key contribution of this research has been in emphasising and providing greater understanding of the importance of context to the practice of small firm values. Previous research has often presumed a link between the presence or absence of particular values and organisational moral practices (for example, see Schaefer, Williams & Blundel, 2020). For example, attributing a lack of sustainability related practices to an absence of sustainability as a key value. While at times this may well be the case, employing a Pragmatist perspective within the current research has underscored the influence of context on value conceptualisation and practice. Importantly, it suggests that engagement in particular practices, or indeed a lack thereof, may be driven by how a firm is conceptualising a particular value and not as a result of an absence of belief in said value (for a prominent example of this, see chapter five, section 5.2.1 for alcohol firms' disparate notions and conceptualisations of *authenticity* as a value).

As part of this, the current research has therefore highlighted the relevance of institutional, firm internal and relational contexts to the practice of values. In turn, this suggests that the means by which firms conceptualise and attempt to enact values through particular firm practices, and thus the moral habits they inculcate, are highly context dependent. First, context in the form of institutional norms, which were evident in the importance of a particular value, or common practices associated with a value or values within an industry or sector. Second, internal firm pressures, discernible in the trade-offs that occur between organisational values fidelity and the costs involved in different practices and attempts by organisations to balance the two. Finally, relational context, apparent within the differing norms present within stakeholder relationships, especially levels of mutual trust and reciprocity between small firms and particular stakeholders, and how these shape values-driven practices. For

instance, whether the relationship is predicated on shared values and social bonds or whether it is a purely commercial relationship based on cost or convenience.

This is an important contribution and one that suggests that, given the oft-noted heterogeneity of small firms (Spence, 1999; Soundararajan, Jamali & Spence, 2018), understanding how values are conceptualised, both in nature and significance, is important in gaining greater comprehension of how these firms seek to enact organisational values. This has relevance beyond small firms, as the importance of gaining an understanding of the context in which values are practised mirrors recent organisational research which impresses the salience of local context to values practice (for example, see Wright, Irving & Thevatas, 2020).

8.1.1.4 Contribution 4: Inquiry & Case based Reasoning

Much extant research has sought to examine how values come to be enacted and embedded within organisations through particular organisational practices (Murphy & Davey, 2002; Paarlberg & Perry, 2007; Gehman, Treviño & Garud, 2013) as well as the role that organisational actors play in shaping values practices (Damodar & Rooplekha, 2010). Previous research into organisational values has also investigated links between values and practices and the enactment of values (Gehman, Treviño & Garud, 2013). However, there has been little explicit acknowledgement that organisational values can be challenged or disrupted by organisational stakeholders and therefore of how organisations may seek to respond to such challenge or disruption. Implicit discussion of values disruption, disputation and conflict has been evident at times within the previous small business social responsibility research (Vitell, Diskerson & Festervand, 2000), particularly in relation to stakeholder power and influence (see Miller & Besser, 2000; Baden, Harwood & Woodward, 2011). Nonetheless, the means by which small firms seek to respond to disruption to their values has received scant attention.

As evident within the empirical data, through exploring small firm responses to values disputations together with the Pragmatist notions of moral habit, context and inquiry, it is evident that firms often respond to disruption of moral habits through engaging in an inquiry-based process of moral reflexivity to locate an appropriate resolution to a moral issue (see chapter seven, section 7.3 for a discussion of inquiry and values practice and example cases). Specifically, disruption to small firms' moral habits, and thus implicitly to their values, often occurs through interactions with stakeholders who possess contrasting values to their own, requiring key actors within the small firm to engage in a reflexive process to seek the most appropriate response within that particular situation and context. This process involves consideration of the possible courses of action that could be taken and selecting which best meets the values and goals of the inquirer (Sorrell, 2013). While perceived organisational fidelity and integrity were the most ostensible drivers and goals behind this process, consideration of the impacts of potential courses of action on key stakeholders and the financial sustainability of the business are

other crucial and influential concerns. Such a view underscores the presence and role of active moral reflection on the part of small firms and the process of moral inquiry in which they engage to ensure value fidelity.

This perspective therefore emphasises, beyond the impact of stakeholders on organisational values practice, the influence of temporality on the practice of values. Importantly, how the means and form by which values are enacted through practices may change over time as a result of stakeholder interactions and attempts on the part of a firm to maintain values fidelity.

8.1.2 Small Firm Values & Pragmatist Ethics

In summary, this research has provided a number of contributions in relation to the practice of small firm organisational values. Through employing Dewey's work on the application of Pragmatist philosophy to ethics (Dewey, 1891b; Dewey and Tufts, 1909) alongside the qualitative data collected from small firms concerning the *nature*, *enactment* and *role* of values, the role of moral habits, context, and processes of reflexive moral inquiry in the practice of small firm values has been revealed. Taken together, these empirically driven theoretical insights allow consideration of small firms as organisations whose values practice can be viewed as an iterative process. Ingrained moral habits, predicated on their organisational values and shaped by context, form the moral purpose and behaviour of the firm. Importantly, these habits can be disrupted by organisational stakeholders, prompting inquiry on the part of the firm to seek resolution, thus informing future organisational moral habits.

A view of organisational values practice is offered which arguably better represents the messiness of situational moral decision-making within the real world. In particular, as within practice there exist no fixed rules for moral decision-making (Dewey, 1922). Organisations are therefore often required to come to a decision regarding the correct course of action for a complex moral issue located within the boundaries of a particular context, for which they are ultimately poorly equipped. Accordingly, while the notion of an organisation attempting to enact its values perhaps sounds a straightforward task, in reality such organisations are often obliged to construct the 'least worst' course of action in order to try to balance a number of moral and stakeholder concerns.

This view breaks with previous theory within the area, particularly as such theory has often engaged little in investigating processes of moral decision-making within small firms or gaining comprehension of the relevance and influence of context. Instead it has often predominantly focused on owner-manager values and the construction of overly simplistic linear links between values and the attitudes of owner-managers or between values and firm practices and moral engagement (Hsu & Cheng, 2012; Williams & Schaefer, 2013). The current research therefore seeks to complement recent research

which has added greater nuance to the evidence and theory of the practice of values within small firms (for example, see Kaesehage *et al.*, 2019; Morsing & Spence, 2019; Neher & Miles, 2020; Schaefer, Williams & Blundel, 2020).

As discussed in chapter three, Pragmatist ethics seeks to bypass the limitations of the fixed, unyielding principles which typically define most other normative positions, while considering the detail of situational context and the lived experience of morality. Within this research it has, therefore, facilitated a realistic and sympathetic view of the moral struggles and issues that small firms face, without seeking to make a judgement or prescribe how such small firms should act. Vitality, it has still allowed engagement with robust theory building.

Despite the pronounced analytical and explanatory power that Pragmatism can bring to management research (Elkjaer & Simpson, 2011; Farjoun, Ansell & Boin, 2015), within management studies as a whole, but particularly business and society research, it is a relatively underused theoretical tool. As such, within the subsequent section the theoretical potential that Pragmatism holds for providing insight within future business and society research will be considered.

8.2 The Application of Pragmatism to Business and Society Research

According to Visser (2019), there has been a discernible 'Pragmatist turn' within the field of organisation studies. This has been widely regarded as resulting in greater comprehension of a small but growing number of issues and subjects in the field, notably the study of practice (Simpson, 2009; Buchan & Simpson, 2020). By contrast, the application of Pragmatism as a theoretical tool in the field of business and society is significantly more limited. Given the value that Pragmatism has brought to many pertinent research matters, in this section the opportunities that Pragmatism presents for both theory building and gaining an enhanced comprehension of a number of issues within the field of business and society will be considered. First, the application of Pragmatism within the field up until this point will be reviewed. This will be followed by discussion of the areas and opportunities present within the field that may benefit from engaging with theoretical consideration and application of a Pragmatist stance.

8.2.1 Previous Application of Pragmatism

At the turn of the 21st century, it appeared that Pragmatism might well break into the mainstream of business and society scholarship. A modest stream of books and articles were published that conveyed the theoretical promise of Pragmatism and its capacity to focus attention on substantive issues of ethics as they exist within the real world as well as on their resolution (Margolis, 1998; Rosenthal & Buchholz, 1999; Wicks & Freeman, 1998). This was followed by a number of publications, largely empirically focused, that utilised elements of Pragmatism as their theoretical grounding (Jacobs, 2004; Martin &

Freeman, 2004; McVea, 2007; Surie & Ashley, 2008; Singer, 2010; de Colle, Henriques & Sarasvathy, 2014; Hiller & Woodall, 2019; Risi, 2020). Nevertheless, the number of scholarly works within the field to date that have engaged with Pragmatism, and have deployed it to theoretically frame their work, remains limited. This paucity of engagement with Pragmatism is particularly acute when compared to many other theoretical traditions within the field, such as stakeholder theory (Freeman & Reed, 1983), institutional theory (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983) and agency theory (Jensen & Meckling, 1976), for example, as well as a host of normative theories, such as virtue ethics (Moore, 2005), utilitarianism (Gustafson, 2013) and Confucian ethics (Chan, 2008).

8.2.2 Towards a Broader Application of Pragmatism

This limited application of Pragmatism within the field is likely attributable to the complexity and broadness of the philosophical movement. In spite of this, the movement has significant potential to unlock novel theoretical insights within the field in relation to a range of phenomena and issues. In addition, at a broader level, a reorientation of the field towards a Pragmatist paradigm could allow a significant shift towards the amelioration of practice and theory. The application of Pragmatism within the field and at a broader, meta-theoretical level will thus be explored within the following section.

8.2.2.1 Contribution 5: Pragmatism as a Valuable Theoretical Tool

An exceptionally limited range of scholarly works, and the theories they offer, have typically been employed in business and society research to frame and explain empirical insights (Ma *et al.*, 2012). This is well demonstrated through the dogged adherence of research and researchers in certain sub-domains to particular theoretical traditions. For example, institutional theory (Aguinis & Glavas, 2012) and stakeholder theory (Laplume, Sonpar & Litz, 2008), which have dominated social responsibility research and focused much scholarship on the external drivers of corporate social responsibility (Frynas & Yamahaki, 2016). Frequent application of the same theories, or lack of engagement with theory building, has led to limited, or small, incremental theoretical contributions becoming the norm in the field (O'Fallon & Butterfield, 2005). This has, for example, been evident in relation to research and theory building on ethical decision-making (Blay *et al.*, 2018). Moreover, as de Bakker *et al.* (2018) note, highly influential and impactful research in the domain of business and society typically offers novel theoretical insights or perspectives which allow re-conceptualisation of phenomena or issues within the field.

In contrast to many of the more frequently applied theories in the field, Pragmatism remains largely underemployed as a resource. This is in spite of the fact that many of the issues with which the Pragmatists were concerned, and thus the areas they studied, overlap with and are highly relevant to current issues within the field of business and society. For example, ethics (Alzola, Hennig & Romar,

2020), religion (Astrachan *et al.*, 2020) and individual experience and agency (Lindebaum, Geddes & Gabriel, 2017). In addition to this, and as discussed in some depth in chapter three, Pragmatism is predicated on a commitment to anti-foundationalism that is characterised by a rejection of universalism and founding principles (Miller, 2005). Pragmatism thus largely aligns with van Fraassen's (2002) notion of a philosophical stance, regarded as broad attitudes or commitments but ones that *'cannot be simply equated with having beliefs or making assertions about what there is'* (p.47-48). This allows for theory to be built without a zealous adherence to the movement and its principles.

Correspondingly, given the flexibility of Pragmatism as a mode of inquiry in tandem with the fact that it is largely under-applied within the field, it is apparent that the wider employment of Pragmatism would facilitate a move away from the theoretical steadfastness which is so often apparent within the field as well as enable the potential re-framing of issues and phenomena to generate novel theoretical and practical insights. This section will outline in further detail the value Pragmatism could bring to the field. It will first do so through exploring the juxtaposition between Pragmatist ethics and a number of normative positions often employed by scholars, before discussing its wider application.

Business and society research conducted at both the individual and organisational levels has often drawn on a narrow range of normative ethical positions to theoretically frame empirical work, including virtue ethics (van de Ven, 2008; West, 2018), ethics of duty (Bowie, 2000; Ohreen & Petry, 2012) and utilitarianism (Renouard, 2011; Gustafson, 2013). As Dewey himself suggested, many common normative theories, including those which can be categorised as teleological, deontological and character-based, are predicated on strict, fixed moral rules that are often abstracted from the practice of morality in particular 'real world' situations and contexts (Dewey, 1915). The employment of these theories thus arguably leads to explanations and prescriptions of individual and organisational behaviour which are based on the narrow, prescriptive and abstract view of morality these theories promote.

Pragmatist ethics focuses to a much greater extent on the process of moral decision-making, the lived experience of morality and the particularity of individual moral issues and their situational context (Dewey & Tufts, 1909). One implication of this for Pragmatism as a theoretical framework is that it leaves greater theoretical scope for research within the field to concentrate less on fitting individuals and organisations into normative 'boxes' which attempt to explain their behaviour, or on prescribing beliefs or behaviour through using a single normative theory. Instead, it promotes an enhanced focus on gaining an appreciation of the impact of contextual specificity on moral issues and decision-making and attaining greater comprehension of individual processes of moral judgement. Its more extensive deployment within the field would therefore facilitate a heightened level of

understanding of practised morality and a movement away from prescriptive moral theory, as well as providing an alternative theoretical viewpoint from which to explore and analyse issues.

Beyond the utility of Pragmatist ethics to business and society research, the broader application of Pragmatism as a theoretical framework in the field of business and society has the potential to highlight and help explain the importance of context, experience, meaning and judgement as well as their impact on social responsibility concerns and ethical issues in the real world. The importance of these concerns has arguably started to become apparent in a new wave of work within the field of business and society. This has been demonstrated, for instance, by work that investigates historic corporate social responsibility (Schrempf-Stirling, Palazzo & Phillips, 2016; Phillips, Schrempf-Stirling & Stutz, 2019) and research which seeks to bring the voices and viewpoints of marginalised groups into the field (Mordi *et al.*, 2010; Vincent, Wapshott & Gardiner, 2014; Lauwo, 2018). In addition, other research has attempted to gain greater appreciation of the influence of issues such as temporality on social responsibility (Slawinski & Bansal, 2012, 2015).

Critically, this work demonstrates that social responsibility and organisational ethics, as constituted in the present, cannot be fully understood without scholars gaining an appreciation of their wider context, for instance, through attaining insight into historic practices, norms and processes surrounding decision-making (for examples see Coraiola & Derry, 2019; Van Lent & Smith, 2019). A key part of this often lies in unlocking the disparate standpoints of social actors and understanding how their experience and lived realities impact their beliefs and practices as well as how these become revised over time (Ruwhiu & Cone, 2010). Given its anti-foundational stance, its focus on contextual nuance and its commitment to fallibilism, Pragmatism provides a flexible theoretical underpinning for such research. It therefore constitutes an overlooked and underexploited resource for framing such emerging issues, with significant potential for generating novel theoretical insights and gaining a clearer picture and understanding of these phenomena. Consequently, it deserves considerably more attention, as it has the potential to facilitate theoretical development in the field as a whole.

While the deployment of Pragmatism at the micro level as a theoretical grounding is distinctly lacking in the domain of business and society, at the macro-theoretical level opportunities for its application also exist. In the next section, discussion is focused on the opportunities for and benefits of conducting business and society research within a 'Pragmatist paradigm'.

8.2.2.2 Contribution 6: Repositioning The Field Towards a Pragmatist Paradigm

Business and society research, encompassing organisational and individual sustainability and ethics as well as corporate social responsibility, is inherently related to real-world problems and practical issues.

This has perhaps never been more the case, given the immediate and acute nature of the issues with which the world must currently contend. For instance, severe and worsening environmental issues, such as climate change, biodiversity loss and natural resource depletion (UN Environment, 2020), as well as issues of social justice, including racial and sexual/gender equality and economic inequality (Bashi Treitler & Boatcă, 2016; Padavic, Ely & Reid, 2020). Despite this, much research within the field, and as part of a much larger trend within the wider domain of management studies, has focused on the attainment and generation of theoretical contributions at the expense of practical insights into, and solutions to, the issues with which the world is currently faced (Starkey & Madan, 2001). As such, the generation of small incremental theoretical advances, such as the application of mainstream theories to novel contexts, is valued over the production of solutions and insights with practical applicability. This is largely attributable to the entrenched assumption within the field of the duality between science and practice, or 'rigour versus relevance' (Bartunek & Rynes, 2014; Banks *et al.*, 2016). As Sharma and Bansal (2020) discuss, 'research'- and 'practice'-focused knowledge systems are widely considered incompatible, with the former focusing on theoretical advances to the abstract picture and understanding of the world sought by science versus the attainment of knowledge with direct, substantive applicability to real world issues.

While Pragmatism has predominantly been discussed, both within the context of this research and in previous research, as a micro-level theory for framing organisational behaviour, it was considered by the founders as a meta-theoretical standpoint and process for conducting research (Strubing, 2007). As Morgan (2014) suggests, Pragmatism can thus be characterised as a paradigm for conducting social research; one which does away with older approaches to the philosophy of knowledge based on concepts such as ontology, epistemology and methodology. This Pragmatist paradigm is predicated on the notion of meliorism (philosophical hope), where substantive progress is a possibility that can offer improvements in the world around us (Koopman, 2006). Critically, for the founders of the movement scientific research and inquiry was an intrinsically ethical activity with the aim of transforming the world for the better, not just observing it (Simpson & den Hond, 2021).

Within the Pragmatist paradigm, the entrenched philosophical dichotomy between the higher realm of fixed, abstract reality and the lower realm of action, based on the notion that '*The only road to the higher realm of absolute and enduring truth and value is pure thought. Pure thought offers the utopia of the universal, eternal, and immutable, while practical activity only offers at best a precarious probability*' (Oquist, 1978, p.150), is overturned. In a Pragmatist paradigm, thought and action are therefore unified (Aram & Salipante, 2003). Accordingly, a researcher is considered an agent whose primary goal and focus should be to seek resolutions to real-world social issues, in contrast to the

overriding contemporary view of a researcher as a 'truth' seeker who attempts to understand the world through contributing to an abstract, 'fixed' theoretical conceptualisation of said world (Stich, 1993).

The increased employment of the Pragmatist paradigm in the field of business and society would therefore legitimise an enhanced focus on social responsibility and business and society related issues within their real-world context. Concurrently, such a repositioning of the field would permit researchers to focus on building theory in response to these issues, the utility of which would be evaluated on the extent to which they alleviated said issues, aligning with Dewey's argument that *'the test of the validity of any particular intellectual conception, measurement, or enumeration is functional, its use in making possible the institution of interactions which yield results in control of actual experiences of observed objects'* (Dewey, 1929, p.104). This would involve a process of inquiry being triggered by the recognition of a problematic real-world issue, such as a lack of engagement in sustainable consumer purchasing behaviour, organisational discrimination or institutional pressure for firms to act in an unethical manner. Inquiry into such issues would consider the differing courses of action which could be taken in response to the issue, an evaluation of these actions in relation to their foreseeable consequences and the selection of an optimal course of action, which would be tested and verified through its real-world application (Morgan, 2014).

This repositioning of the field would thus see an end to the dichotomisation between theory and practice as well as relevance and rigor. Instead, it would see business and society research as composed of lines of inquiry conducted from different perspectives and viewpoints which seek to discover the optimal, or least sub-optimal, courses of action and responses to particular issues facing the world and its institutions, organisations and individuals, such as climate change or modern slavery. This would entail a move beyond the epistemological conflict between positivism and interpretivism, therefore encouraging greater methodological pluralism and disciplinary tolerance (Pratt, 2016). Furthermore, it would require fallibilism, the notion that absolute certainty and final knowledge can never be reached, to be firmly anchored within the field (Martela, 2015). This would constitute a shared commitment to the fact that any beliefs embedded within in it, as well as those held by individual scholars, may ultimately prove to be false (Festenstein, 2002).

To sum up, a repositioning of the field of business and society towards a Pragmatist paradigm would permit a focus on 'useful' knowledge which is applicable within practice and capable of helping to substantively tackle the social and environmental issues facing the world today.

8.3 Conclusions: Chapter Eight

In summary, this research has yielded a number of contributions to research on small firm values, and therefore small firm social responsibility, as well as in relation to the application of Pragmatism to the

field of business and society. First, it has elucidated the nature, enactment and role of organisational values as well as the relationship between organisational values and their enactment through conceptualising values practices as moral habits. Second, it has highlighted the importance for small firms of building stakeholder relationships with parties that possess similar and overlapping values to their own. Third, it has firmly underscored the salience and influence of context to the practice of small firm organisational values at the institutional, firm and relational levels. Finally, the notion of small firm moral inquiry has been conceptualised to explain organisational responses to values conflict and disputation with external stakeholders. The present research has sought to provide a nuanced portrait of small firm values conceptualisation and practice, in contrast to that which has often been painted within the existing literature.

In addition to these contributions to the organisational values and social responsibility literatures, this research has also sought to make broader theoretical contributions with respect to the deployment of Pragmatism within the academic field of business and society. Pragmatism is an agile, but theoretically powerful, tool which has been comparatively underused within the field, despite the fact that it has the ability to provide fresh perspectives on a number of key issues and phenomena as well as to break away from the theoretical dogmatism that has at times been evident in the field. At a macro level, the deployment of Pragmatism in the field of business and society to create a Pragmatist paradigm would legitimise a greater focus on substantive ethics and sustainability related issues as well as on the search for theory and answers that may provide resolution to such issues.

While this chapter has sought to draw together the empirical analysis of the research data with the extant literature to consider the contributions of the research, the final chapter will outline the overall conclusions of the research, including opportunities for future research in the area as well as possible implications for practice and policy.

Chapter Nine: Conclusions & Implications

9.0 Introduction

In the previous chapter, I sought to draw together the conclusions of this research and consider them in relation to the extant literature. The chapter presented the contributions of the research regarding prior research in the fields of values and small firm social responsibility. This chapter will bring this thesis to a close. First, it will present an overview of the research process, before considering the conclusions of the research with regard to stimulating future work in the field as well as to practice and policy in the area. The chapter will conclude with some personal reflections on the process of conducting the research and some brief concluding remarks.

9.1 Summary

As outlined in chapter one, this research was driven by a desire to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the role and practice of organisational values in the small firm context. The research was underpinned by the primary research question: **How do small firms practise and maintain fidelity towards their organisational values?** For clarity, this research question was broken down into a number of sub-research questions, which helped to drive the data analysis and clarify the focal points of the research:

1. *What is the nature of the organisational values that small firms consider to be salient?*
2. *What is the role of organisational values in small firms?*
3. *How are these values enacted?*
4. *How do small firms maintain fidelity towards their organisational values, particularly in instances where they face external challenge?*

In order to reflect back on these research questions in this chapter, first, a brief summary of each chapter of the thesis will be provided with reference to its contribution to the research, before each research question is considered in light of the research findings and implications.

9.1.1 Thesis Structure

As indicated in **Chapter one**, this research has sought to use empirically grounded insights, informed by previous research in the area and shaped by a Pragmatist stance, to answer the guiding research questions. This section comprises of a brief summary of each chapter and its contributions to the research overall.

Chapter two provides a review of the means by which values have been conceptualised in the existing literature from the perspective of a number of different social science disciplines. The discussion moves on to consider how values have manifested and been explored from an organisational perspective and to illustrate the existence of strong links between values and morality. The chapter

then considers small firm definitional considerations and characteristics. An important facet of this was exploring the notion of corporate social responsibility, with a focus on small firms, given that values were conceptualised as inherently moral phenomena and are therefore both explicit and implicit within such social responsibility practice.

In order to theoretically ground and frame the research, **Chapter three** outlines a broad overview of the tenets of Pragmatism. An important facet of this was conceptualising Pragmatism, in the context of this research, as a stance (van Fraassen, 2002); a set of tentative, broad beliefs or a position to facilitate critical, theoretical analysis. Criticisms of the movement were then considered, after which John Dewey's notion of Pragmatist ethics was examined. The chapter concludes with exploration, and justification, of the applicability of a Pragmatist stance to the empirical context and phenomena encompassed in this thesis.

Chapter four establishes the rationale for the philosophical and methodological grounding of the research method used to collect empirical data regarding the practice and nature of small firm values as well as values-disputations with external stakeholders. A summary of the semi-structured interviews undertaken with micro and small firms in the independent retail and alcohol production sectors in the South West of the UK is then provided. This encompasses an outline of the interview questions used, the use of a critical incident technique to focus on value-disputations and a breakdown of the organisational characteristics of each participating firm. The chapter next discusses the means by which the interviews were transcribed and thematically analysed and coded using Braun and Clarke's (2006) guide for such analysis, with particular focus on how firms conceptualise and practise values.

Chapter five explores the empirical data, focusing on the nature, practice and role of small firm values. A number of explicit values were thus elucidated in the chapter alongside the means by which the firms in the sample considered the role, utility and influence of their values and how firms sought to enact these values through particular practices. **Chapter six** built on chapter five through examining the communication of values and the inculcation of stakeholder relationships on the basis of shared values. In tandem with this, it sought to examine instances of misalignments in values between small firms and external stakeholders by providing a summary of the empirical data concerning the critical incidents of values disputations as reported by the small firms. Both direct and indirect values disputations were considered, as well as the means by which the small firms attempted to respond to these instances where their values and values fidelity were challenged.

Chapter seven takes a Pragmatist stance to frame the findings of the empirical research. Drawing on Dewey's work on the application of Pragmatism to ethics, the notion of values practices as moral habits was conceptualised. This was accompanied by consideration of the influence and salience of context to the practice of values. The means by which small firms respond to morally problematic

situations, such as in the case of values disputations, were then introduced, with a focus on how firms deployed inquiry-based processes of moral reflection to navigate such instances. Finally, each of the elements was brought together to present a Pragmatist view of small business values.

As mentioned above, **Chapter eight** sets out the contributions of the research to the areas of small firm social responsibility and organisational values, in conjunction with contributions to the employment of Pragmatism to the field of business and society.

Having provided an overview of the thesis, the next section provides a brief synopsis of the conclusions of the research in relation to the research questions that guide it.

9.1.1 Research Questions & Conclusions

With reference to **research question one** – *What is the nature of the organisational values that small firms consider to be salient?* – this thesis highlighted a range of small firm values which such firms considered salient, including *authenticity, care, heritage, localism* and *sustainability* (see chapter five, section 5.2. for greater detail and examples).

In relation to **research question two** – *What is the role of organisational values in small firms?* – this research evidenced the notion of values acting, despite often not being fully formalised, as a compass to guide decision-making and organisational practices and behaviour (see chapter five, section 5.3). Adherence and fidelity to organisational values was characterised by respondents as eliciting satisfaction (as per discussion in chapter five, section 5.4).

With respect to **research question three** – *How are these values enacted?* – the empirical evidence highlighted a number of practices and norms, related to production, marketing and stakeholder treatment, through which small firms enacted their values. For instance, in the case of the value of *care*, firms sought to ensure that consideration for the wellbeing of stakeholders was practised through providing assistance to employees when required as well as supporting the local community (see chapter five, section 5.2 for further discussion of values-led practices). Importantly, a Pragmatist-based perspective was employed to elucidate the relationship between values and values practices through conceptualising these values-driven practices as moral habits which become embedded and entrenched as part of small firm organisational life. Moreover, the research noted the importance of context in shaping firm conceptualisations of values and the practices associated with them (as per chapter seven, section 7.2)

In terms of **research question four** – *How do small firms maintain fidelity towards their organisational values, particularly in instances where they face external challenge?* – the research found that small firms often sought to establish relationships on the basis of shared values (as per chapter six, section 6.2). Additionally, where firms experienced values disputations with external stakeholders and their

values were challenged, firms sought to ensure that the most appropriate course of action was considered and enacted in response. In such cases, and to ensure fidelity to their values, these firms employed a number of approaches, ranging from severing the relationship in question to engaging with stakeholders in an attempt to modify their behaviours and even beliefs (as per chapter six, section 6.4).

Through employing a Pragmatist stance to theoretically frame these empirical insights and address the overall research question – *How do small firms practise and maintain fidelity towards their organisational values?* – it became clear that the practice of values could not be considered a simple process or relationship whereby one value could be directly linked with a particular practice. Instead, it became apparent that the practice of values is a dynamic and contextually situated process (see chapter seven, section 7.3 for more comprehensive discussion). For instance, a number of values are often working in tandem to shape issues, decisions or practices and context, in a number of forms, plays an integral role in shaping how values are considered and manifested, something that varies considerably from firm to firm.

Drawing on Dewey's work on moral habits, such values practices were conceptualised as moral habits, which become entrenched and often take-for-granted in firms over time. These are heavily shaped by institutional, firm and relational context. Importantly, when small firms are faced with morally problematic situations in which moral habits and thus, implicitly, values are challenged, firms are required to deploy inquiry-based reflexive processes to consider and select the most appropriate means by which values fidelity can be maintained. Such a process involves consideration of the potential courses of action facing the firm, together with reflection on the organisation's values, to construct and identify the most appropriate course of action in the given situation that still allows the firm to remain as faithful to their values as possible. This process, however, is dynamic and is shaped by the emerging and changing context in which problematic issues are located.

In the following section, the implications of this research and its conclusions for future research in the area will be considered.

9.2 Implications for Future Research

This study has a number of implications for future research in the areas of organisational values and social responsibility, especially with respect to small firms. Accordingly, the subsequent discussion will explore these by considering the implications for future research in the areas of values in small firms, the study of values praxis in both small and large firms and the role of values in moral decision-making processes.

9.2.1 Broadening Horizons in Small Business Social Responsibility Research

This research has underscored the importance of focusing on fresh empirical phenomena and employing diverse theoretical perspectives in future small business social responsibility research (Morsing & Spence, 2019). This is particularly important given the advent of the Covid-19 pandemic, which has had a prodigious, and largely negative, impact on small firms across the globe, with likely serious consequences for social responsibility engagement.

In terms of addressing different empirical phenomena to gain a broader understanding of small firm social responsibility practices, this thesis has emphasised the role, and thus importance, of moving beyond owner-manager values to consider other values sets in small firms, particularly organisational values. In the previous small firm social responsibility literature, owner-manager values have been the overwhelmingly predominant focus (Quinn, 1997; Schaefer, Williams & Blundel, 2020). In contrast, the current research evidences that organisational values play a discernible role in the day-to-day moral practices and stance of small firms. It is important to acknowledge that, while the influence of the owner-manager on a small firm's organisational values is likely to be important, small firm owner-managers often welcome the input of other parties in determining firm values (Miller & Besser, 2000). They do so, for example, through actively encouraging employees to bring their identities and values to work and via allowing them the autonomy to take responsibility and make decisions regarding their work (Schlosser, 2015).

Future research in the domain of small firm social responsibility should therefore be circumspect in relation to the conflation of owner-manager and organisational values, particularly in larger small firms where the influence of the owner-manager is likely to be diminished (Sendlhofer, 2020). This research has also highlighted the need to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship between owner-manager and organisational values as well as the role that disparate stakeholder groups, especially employees, play in shaping small firm organisational values. Given the significance of heritage and tradition to many small firms, subsequent research could also benefit from exploring the maintenance of values, and associated moral habits, under periods of succession (Yan & Sorenson, 2006), be that intergenerational succession, in instances of firm acquisition or periods of significant upheaval, such as economic downturns.

At a broader level, subsequent research could, for example, look beyond the empirical confines of small firms in the developed, Western world to better understand social responsibility outside of this context. Beyond undertaking research in different contexts, small business social responsibility research could also investigate the darker side of small firm ethics, for instance regulatory non-adherence (Lynch-Wood & Williamson, 2014) and corruption (Tonoyan *et al.*, 2010). Such research could also provide a greater focus and emphasis on micro firms, which are often overlooked in small

firm research (Jaouen & Lasch, 2015), and investigate differences between firms of this size. Notably, as significant variation is likely to exist in terms of social responsibility orientation and practice between, for example, a micro sized firm with two employees and a micro sized firm with eight or nine employees.

From a theoretical perspective, the use of Pragmatism in this research, in combination with recent work in the field (for example, see Morsing & Spence's (2019) use of Foucault's work on governmentality), has made it clear that research in the area must move beyond the 'usual (theoretical) suspects'. Namely, stakeholder theory, social capital theory and enlightened self-interest, which have been the most frequently used theoretical positions in the small business social responsibility literature (Soundararajan, Jamali & Spence, 2018). The opportunity cost of repeatedly utilising the same theories is the loss of potential greater theoretical and practical insights as well as of new conceptualisations of empirical phenomena that would help to transform our understanding of the practice of small business social responsibility. Further research in the area could look to the broader fields of management or organisation studies for theoretical inspiration. As new theoretical positions emerge within these literatures, we should seek to broaden the conversation through considering their application to small business social responsibility, as well as drawing theoretical inspiration from outside the domain from fields such as philosophy, sociology or human geography.

9.2.2 The Need to Study Values in Context

Alongside recent research in the area, such as that concerning values work (Gehman, Treviño & Garud, 2013; Wright, Irving & Thevatas 2020), this research has illustrated the need for more holistic, contextualised understandings of organisational values to be pursued in order to develop a better picture of the everyday praxis of organisational values in both small and large firms. Extant research has often employed quantitative methods to generate broad, but shallow, insights into the role and influence of values in organisations through, for instance, seeking relationships between values and variables, such as organisational commitment (Finegan, 2000) or knowledge sharing (Michailova & Minbaeva, 2012). Nevertheless, it is clear that such an approach prevents the garnering of understanding concerning the ways in which values are actually practised on a day-to-day basis in organisations (Husted, 2020), especially given previous research which has suggested significant dissonance between espoused and actual organisational values (Murphy & Davey, 2002). Therefore, engaging in research which utilises a qualitative approach would facilitate a heightened comprehension of the means by which organisational context may shape differences in how values are conceptualised, enacted and practised from firm to firm. Notably, while the worth of such an approach has been well demonstrated in other social science disciplines which have engaged with qualitative values research (for example, see research in the field of nursing for comparison, Cricco-Lizza, 2011, Maben, Latter &

Clark, 2007), management studies has only recently started to fully embrace such an approach and the explanatory reach it can provide.

In the small firm context, further research could therefore seek to conduct further in-depth qualitative studies into the practice and role of values and their impact on small firm social responsibility in other industry and sector types to those that formed the focus of this research. Importantly, differing institutional contexts could also be investigated, especially developing country contexts, which have often been overlooked within prior small firm ethics and social responsibility research (Amaeshi *et al.*, 2016). The impact of different firm sizes as well as firm management and ownership structures on organisational values practices could also be considered, for example, family-owned versus employee-owned firms. In the large firm setting, given the propensity of such firms to espouse similar, if not identical, organisational values, future research could consider inter-organisational differences in how such firms understand identical values, such as transparency, sustainability and integrity, and how this shapes their influence in different organisational contexts.

9.2.3 Understanding the Role of Values in Moral Decision-Making

Despite the existence of significant empirical evidence suggesting that values play an important role in processes of moral decision-making, such as in motivating ethical behaviour (Bagozzi *et al.*, 2013), the means by which values shape such processes remain underexplored. Research into values and moral decision-making has typically drawn on simplistic, linear models of moral decision-making (for example see Rest, 1986) which often place a strong emphasis on individuals looking outside themselves for guidance when faced with moral dilemmas (Coughlan, 2005), (see, for instance Trevino, 1986). Moreover, similar to much research into values, a significant tranche of prior work has been conducted using quantitative methods, which have typically attempted to link action or behaviour to groups of values (Fritzsche, 1995; Fritzsche & Oz, 2007). The role of values in determining the action chosen in response to a moral dilemma has been the focus of prior research. Nonetheless, the current research has underscored the role that values play at each stage of the decision-making process. Significantly, it has emphasised that values frame the perceived presence or absence of a morally problematic issue, so-called moral sensitivity (Myry & Helkama, 2002), as well as highlighting the means by which values shape processes of moral inquiry, whereby the possible and potential avenues of conduct or response are considered and selected by the decision-maker (Craft, 2013).

Future research could thus focus to a greater extent on the role of values in the recognition of moral issues as well as on how values shape the process of moral inquiry and the valuation of potential courses of action which face both individuals and groups of individuals in morally problematic situations. Research in the area could, in the large firm context, shed greater light on how individuals experience and manage the interplay of personal and codified organisational values upon recognising moral issues

and seeking to resolve them. In the small firm context, research could investigate the means by which morally problematic issues surface and emerge within such firms and the influence of stakeholder groups' values, such as those of the local community, employees or other stakeholders, on the response to such issues.

9.2.4 The Employment of Pragmatism

While chapter eight discussed in some detail the value that Pragmatism can bring to business and society research, both at the micro and macro level, it is apparent that future research into organisational values and moral decision-making would benefit from drawing on the tenets of the movement and taking a Pragmatist stance. As Mudrack & Mason (2013) discuss, decades of research into moral judgement have led to little advancement in scholarly knowledge. A strong argument can be made that this is at least partially attributable to the removal of contextual influence from such research. This is evident through the employment of positivistic research methods, such as vignette-type set-ups where respondents are provided with very brief summaries of hypothetical ethical scenarios upon which they are required to make a judgement (Cohen, Pant & Sharp, 2001; Davis, Johnson & Ohmer, 1998; Xu & Ma, 2016). Moreover, as discussed within the previous chapter, the limitations of such research have been compounded by an assumption that processes of moral decision-making are linear and rational and therefore that they are either informed, or can be explained, by common normative theory.

As this research has highlighted, such an approach fails to replicate the complexity and nuance of real-world decision-making, including the disparate meanings that individuals attach to values and the means by which the pressures and influence of their immediate context shape processes of decision-making. This results in the highly personal and idiosyncratic impact of individual moral perspective and justification often being removed from such research as well as the inherent conflict which surrounds moral decision-making. The application of a Pragmatist stance to future research in the area would allow such research to be more sympathetic to the lived experience of reality. It would also facilitate the inclusion of the influence of context, the impact of personal experience and the role of inquiry on such processes of moral decision-making, thus allowing further insights into such processes to be achieved.

9.3 Implications for Practice

Alongside the implications of this research for future research, the current project has highlighted a number of considerations for practice in the area. These are outlined in this section, beginning with an examination of the benefits of small firms clarifying their values as well as making their values more explicit, before moving on to how large firms could consider small firm supplier values to a greater extent.

9.3.1 Reflecting on Small Firm Values

While many organisations in the research sample expressed the importance of their values, ambiguity regarding organisational values was also often implicitly or explicitly conveyed. This was put across, for instance, in relation to the nature of their organisational values, the purpose of their values or the relationship between their values and organisational practices. As a result, it is apparent that small firm owner-managers and employees would benefit from taking time to actively explore elements of their organisational values. Such reflection could encompass a number of considerations, including: the nature and role of the organisation's values, the means by which values should be enacted in day-to-day firm practices, whether certain values should take precedence over others, the relationships and practices which would directly contravene values and whether the organisational values should change over time. The benefit of this would be to clarify the firm's values, as this would save time, especially if morally problematic instances, such as potential values disputations, have been considered ahead of time and possible resolutions contemplated.

9.3.2 Making Small Firm Values Explicit

This research has illustrated the importance of values to small firms and the difficulties associated with values challenge and disputation with stakeholders. While the previous discussion noted the benefit of small firms considering their values to a greater extent to remove elements of ambiguity, this research has also pointed to the potential benefit of small firms making their values more formalised. Although many small firms may be resistant to formalising values, given that they often tend towards informality (Spence, 1999; Lai, Saridakis & Johnstone, 2017) while being hamstrung by a lack of resources and a short-term focus (Lepoutre & Heene, 2006), a number of respondents related the merit of formalising organisational values. In particular, they described how having formalised and codified values aided in instances of decision-making, as the formalised values acted as a compass to provide direction and helped to guide employee behaviour by way of clarifying the beliefs and expectations of the firm for employees. Such increased organisational formalisation, despite possessing a number of vociferous detractors (Barzelay, 1992; Courpasson & Reed, 2004), is arguably beneficial as it can allow enhanced accountability, explicit authority and open and transparent rules to guide decision-making (du Gay, 2000; du Gay and Vikkelsø, 2018).

Perhaps most importantly, heightened explicit communication of values may also enable small firms to attract potential stakeholders with which their values are well aligned more effectively as well as to avoid stakeholders with which their values may come into conflict or disagreement. While it would likely be remiss to suggest that small firms should follow the large firm approach to values, given the differences between such organisations, especially in relation to social responsibility (Baumann-Pauly *et al.*, 2013; Wickert, Scherer & Spence, 2016), small firms could seek to emulate elements of the larger

firm approach to values. For example, small firms could internally publish and clarify their values via staff induction and training as well as information notices. Similarly, from an external perspective, small firms could use organisational websites and social media to explicitly communicate their values to outside stakeholders. Overall, therefore, small firms may derive benefits in their relationships with both internal and external stakeholders from explicitly and actively communicating their values to a greater extent.

9.3.3 Supply Chain Management and the Role of Values

Buyer-supplier relationships are often plagued by conflict and difficulties (Kozan, Wasti & Kuman, 2006; Johnsen & Lacoste, 2016). Where the supplier is a small firm and the buyer a large, or vice versa, a combination of inherent power asymmetries, divergent norms, interests and values as well as pressure from the large firm, for instance in relation to social responsibility (Baden, Harwood & Woodward, 2011), often render such relationships untenable. This research has evidenced the importance many small firms place on building relationships on the basis of shared values, while largely avoiding relationships with parties with contrasting values, suggesting that large firms would benefit from learning to speak better the 'language of small firm values'. In particular, as instances in the empirical data of difficulties in supplier-customer and customer-supplier relationships often resulted from a perception of divergent values and, in some cases, precipitated small firms quickly severing mutually commercially beneficial relationships with large firm customers and suppliers.

Notably, while the large firm approach is often characterised by a business-commercial logic predicated on the primacy of maximum financial value capture (Laasch, 2018), small firms are often concerned with a 'values-logic', where values fidelity is considered of principal importance. Furthermore, it is apparent that large firms are not always aware of, nor appreciate, the conflict generated by the 'value versus values' approach. The implication of this is that large firms may well be able to cultivate more positive and robust relationships, and capture more financial value, via gaining a heightened comprehension of the importance of values to small firms and through understanding the values which small supplier firms consider to be important. The latter could be achieved by means of actively gaining greater cognisance of the underlying values, culture and mission of their small firm suppliers and explicitly communicating their own values to supplier firms to create heightened mutual understanding.

Beyond the implications of this research for practice in both small and large firms, the following section will consider the implications of this research for policy.

9.4 Implications for Policy

9.4.1 Removing Barriers for Sustainability Engagement

It is imperative that small firms engage with social responsibility more fully, given their collective environmental and social footprint (Revell & Rutherford, 2003; Revell, Stokes & Chen, 2010). Beyond this research substantiating the role that values play in driving small firm social responsibility and sustainability related practice, it has also evidenced the existence of barriers to further and more holistic sustainability engagement. Firms in the research sample often demonstrated a lack of knowledge in relation to sustainability and attributed their perceived inability to engage in sustainability more fully to the inherent cost and complexity of such endeavours (Tilley, 2000). This was perhaps most evident in the case of a number of micro firms in the sample who discussed how they were not yet at the stage where they could consider and mitigate, for instance, their environmental footprint because the firm was still commercially fragile and in its infancy. More generally, it was apparent that many small firms were fiercely independent, proud of their success and reliant on the informality of their working practices as well as often distrustful of large firms and the government.

This would suggest that many small firms would benefit from external input to provide encouragement and assistance to aid them in overcoming the barriers that prevent them from becoming more sustainable. However, given the implications of this research, the nature and form of such assistance should take into account the values, priorities and interests of small firms. Further to this, as this research has evidenced, pressing and relevant sustainability and social responsibility issues vary considerably from sector to sector, with, for example, carbon emissions relating to transportation of products being a key issue in the alcohol production sector but not typically in the retail sector. The implication is that this should take the form of 'light touch' industry or sector level groups to both advise on sustainability issues and provide a space for firms to come together to share industry-specific knowledge, collaborate and use their collective voice to call for change (Johnson, 2017). Such groups could provide advice to small firms relating to the importance of sustainability and the relationship between sustainability and commercial performance and could offer guidance and information on how firms may become more sustainable. Importantly, utilising advisors and spokespeople who are themselves from a small business background, and with whom the small firms feel a sense of shared values and experience, would help to legitimise these groups in the eyes of the small business community.

In summary, this research has a number of implications for research, practice and policy in the areas of values, moral decision-making and sustainability engagement. To bring this thesis to a close, my reflections on the research process and concluding remarks are outlined in the next section.

9.5 Reflections

Undertaking this PhD has, at times, inevitably been both intellectually and emotionally exhausting. Each constituent task, such as 'writing a literature review' or 'conducting data collection', often felt like being thrust into a darkened room. Only when I had clumsily familiarised myself with the layout of the room was I able to 'switch on the light' (much of the time with a nudge from my supervisors) and really understand both how to complete the task at hand and how it would contribute to the research overall.

Now that I am able to stand back and see how each element fits together, and therefore have the gift of hindsight, there are a number of things that I would likely have tried to do differently. First, I feel that it would have been valuable to involve more voices from each firm in the research. There is a highly understandable trend in small business research to focus on owner-managers, particularly in micro enterprises (Fassin *et al.*, 2011; Jaouen & Lasch, 2015). However, there are many other voices and positions, such as those of both formal and casual employees, that shape the culture and practices of small firms, including their values. Given that previous research has repeatedly drawn attention to the importance of employees in small firms (Deshopande & Golhar, 1994; Schlosser, 2015), I feel that it would have been truly valuable to include the experience and voices of more employees from the sample firms in the research. While such research was of course available to me before I embarked on this research, it was only through conducting data collection that the significance of the employee perspective fully dawned on me. In particular, as I realised the level of influence that many employees have in small firms and, having visited firms and witnessed their idiosyncrasy first-hand, how different small firm employee perspectives and experiences must truly be.

Second, despite being glad about the choice of research sectors, if I had the opportunity to do the research again, I would include at least one high-skilled, more 'professionally-orientated' sector, such as the consultancy, finance or technology sectors. Much small business social responsibility research has examined relatively low-skilled sectors which often involve high levels of manual labour, such as the manufacturing sector (von Weltzien Hoivik & Melé, 2009; Boiral, Baron & Gunlaugson, 2014). The benefits of including a more highly skilled sector would therefore have been twofold. First, more professionally-orientated sectors are as yet largely unexplored in the small firm social responsibility literature and would have provided a fascinating point of insight. Second, research into lower skilled sectors typically only perpetuates the notion of small firms as inconsequential economic entities which merely subsist and therefore have little value to bring in terms of social responsibility practice. Consequently, employing a greater focus on 'professional' small firms, which are likely to possess differing cultures, values and levels of social responsibility engagement, would have been highly fruitful and I feel would have been a small, but worthwhile opportunity to make a minor contribution to deconstructing the often negative narrative that haunts small firms and associated research

(Blackburn & Smallbone, 2008).

Third, during the course of this research and my PhD studies, the ‘#MeToo’ (Clarke, 2020) and ‘#BlackLivesMatter’ (De Genova, 2018) movements entered the wider public conscience. These movements further highlighted the entrenched and continued discrimination that many members of marginalised groups in society face on a day-to-day basis. In retrospect, it is with chagrin that I look back and see how this research could have considered such discrimination. The overwhelming majority of the respondents were white men over the age of forty, with only seven of the respondents being women. While this is partially attributable to the geographical area and industry sectors in which the research was conducted, this was a lost opportunity to amplify the voices and experiences of traditionally marginalised groups, for instance, through specifically focusing the research on women small business owners. Alternatively, I could have done more to try to ensure that a wider set of voices were included in the research, be that BAME small business owners, women business owners or younger small business owners.

Overall, although the whole PhD process has been a steep and difficult learning curve, it is one which I feel privileged to have experienced. While I will carry on learning and undoubtedly making mistakes, the knowledge and experience I have gained from my PhD, along with many fond memories, will remain with me for the rest of my career and life.

9.6 Concluding Remarks

Values are an essential feature of society and our social worlds and have become an increasingly important facet of the study of organisational life. As this research has illustrated, contrary to previous work in the field of management studies, values are not something that can, or should, be left at the office (or brewery) door. They are pivotal to both organisations’ and individuals’ recognition of moral and social responsibility related issues, they provide the necessary motivation for such issues to be ameliorated and they shape the means by which such amelioration occurs (Hemingway & Maclagan, 2004; Posner & Schmidt, 1993; Tourky, Kitchen & Shaalan, 2020).

However, while the spotlight has so often fallen upon corporate values, this research has sought to stress the salience of small firm organisational values. The collective influence of small firms is prodigious in relation to a host of different factors, including economic contribution, employment and environmental impact (Morsing & Perrini, 2009; Revell, Stokes & Chen, 2010). Beyond these headline measures, at a local level, small firms not only bring jobs and wealth to communities but also help to maintain the social fabric of the latter in a number of ways. They do so, for example, through supporting local charities and causes, supplying essential goods and services and providing spaces for people to come together and build relationships. The Covid-19 pandemic has only reinforced the multifaceted importance of small businesses and has provided many examples of small businesses

putting their values at the forefront of their operations, with many small firms stepping in to provide essential goods and services, donate their resources and even switch production to make up shortfalls in vital suppliers over the course of the outbreak. This, for example, was brilliantly demonstrated in the alcohol production sector by a number of distillers who rapidly switched their production processes to make alcohol-based hand sanitizer.

Small firms and the values that underpin them are key to the required transition to a more sustainable world. It is therefore crucial to seek new avenues and perspectives from which to conduct research into small firm sustainability, social responsibility, ethics and values in order to broaden and deepen understanding of these phenomena. At a broader level, given the dire social and environmental problems facing the world and organisations of today, alongside the current crisis in public trust in business (Pirson, Martin & Parmar, 2017), the nature and role of values has perhaps never been as important. Values, including sustainability, equality and respect, and how they are defined and practised, punctuate debate and discussion surrounding the most contentious and pressing issues of today, including movements for social justice, such as the Black Lives Matter movement, or environmental movements, such as Extinction Rebellion. However, as these public discussions indicate, it has become imperative to question and understand not only which values our organisations profess to embody but also how our organisations are enacting these values.

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Appendix

Section 1

Alcohol Production Sub-Sector	Total Firm Numbers		Percentage of Total
	South West Region	United Kingdom	
Distilling; rectifying and blending of spirits	70	730	9.59%
Manufacture of wine from grape	10	35	28.57%
Manufacture of cider and other fruit wines	40	95	42.11%
Manufacture of other non-distilled fermented beverages	0	5	0.00%
Manufacture of beer	170	1,440	11.81%
Total	290	2,305	12.58%

South West UK Alcohol Production Sector Demographics

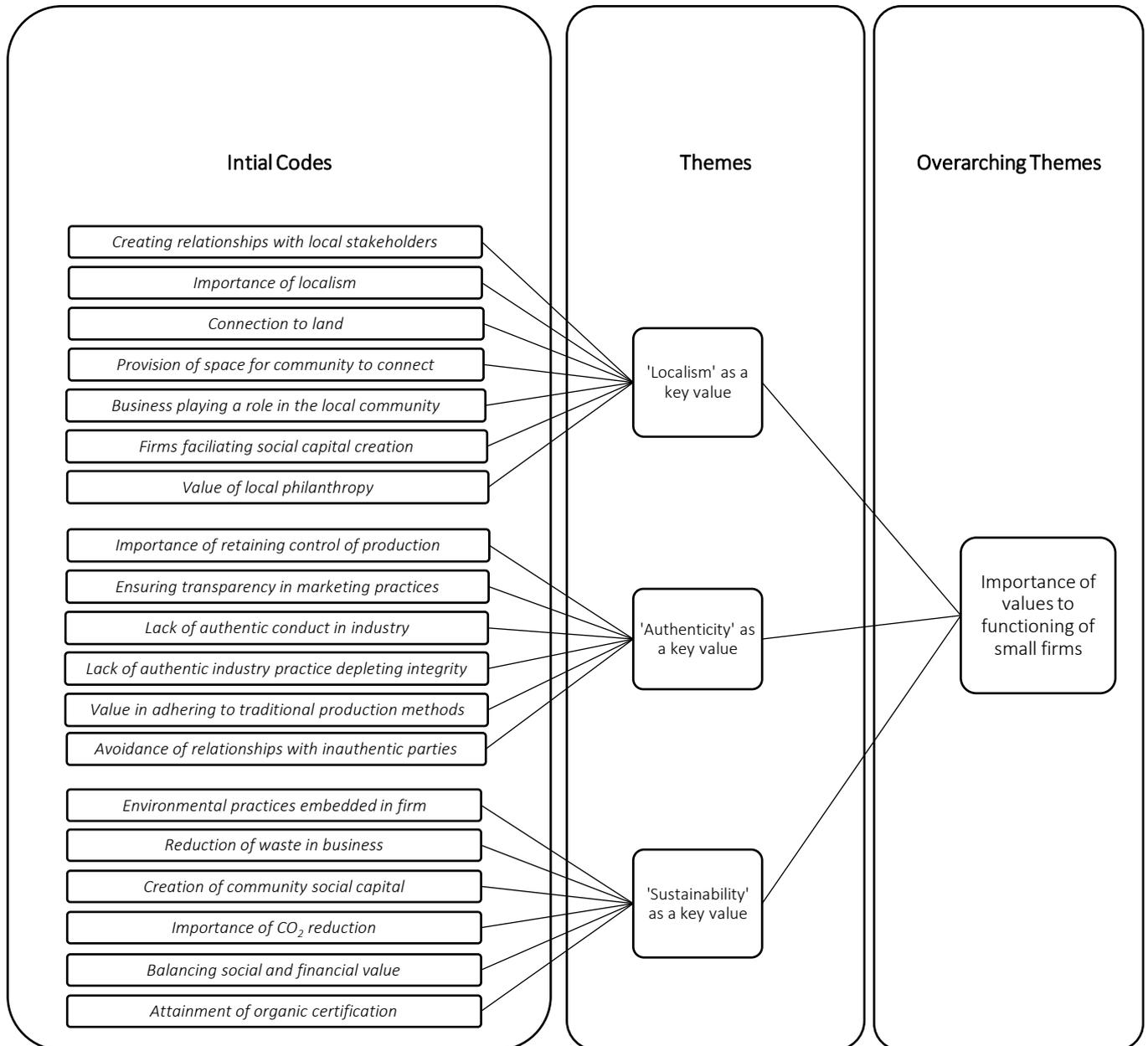
Independent Retail Sub-Sector	Total Firm Numbers		Percentage of Total
	South West	United Kingdom	
Retail sale in non-specialised stores with food; beverages or tobacco predominating	3,575	48,195	7.42%
Other retail sale in non-specialised stores	1,280	13,760	9.30%
Retail sale of fruit and vegetables in specialised stores	225	2,690	8.36%
Retail sale of meat and meat products in specialised stores	475	6,300	7.54%
Retail sale of fish; crustaceans and molluscs in specialised stores	120	1,195	10.04%
Retail sale of bread; cakes; flour confectionery and sugar confectionery in specialised stores	725	7,645	9.48%
Retail sale of beverages in specialised stores	335	5,510	6.08%
Retail sale of tobacco products in specialised stores	120	1,940	6.19%
Other retail sale of food in specialised stores	565	5,475	10.32%
Retail sale of automotive fuel in specialised stores	410	4,275	9.59%
Retail sale of computers; peripheral units and software in specialised stores	165	1,930	8.55%
Retail sale of telecommunications equipment in specialised stores	225	3,420	6.58%
Retail sale of audio and video equipment in specialised stores	75	805	9.32%
Retail sale of textiles in specialised stores	230	2,415	9.52%
Retail sale of hardware; paints and glass in specialised stores	870	9,580	9.08%
Retail sale of carpets; rugs; wall and floor coverings in specialised stores	405	4,725	8.57%
Retail sale of electrical household appliances in specialised stores	300	3,825	7.84%
Retail sale of furniture; lighting equipment and other household articles in specialised stores	1,230	13,970	8.80%
Retail sale of books in specialised stores	230	2,120	10.85%
Retail sale of newspapers and stationery in specialised stores	475	5,410	8.78%
Retail sale of music and video recordings in specialised stores	50	615	8.13%
Retail sale of sporting equipment in specialised stores	860	7,930	10.84%
Retail sale of games and toys in specialised stores	170	1,580	10.76%
Retail sale of clothing in specialised stores	2,020	24,045	8.40%
Retail sale of footwear and leather goods in specialised stores	540	5,805	9.30%
Dispensing chemist in specialised stores	810	12,095	6.70%
Retail sale of medical and orthopaedic goods in specialised stores	190	1,975	9.62%

Retail sale of cosmetic and toilet articles in specialised stores	335	4,950	6.77%
Retail sale of flowers; plants; seeds; fertilisers; pet animals and pet food in specialised stores	835	8,065	10.35%
Retail sale of watches and jewellery in specialised stores	575	7,005	8.21%
Other retail sale of new goods in specialised stores	2,625	24,360	10.78%
Retail sale of second-hand goods in stores	1,605	13,015	12.33%
Retail sale via stalls and markets of food; beverages and tobacco products	75	1,190	6.30%
Retail sale via stalls and markets of textiles; clothing and footwear	25	385	6.49%
Retail sale via stalls and markets of other goods	55	835	6.59%
Retail sale via mail order houses or via Internet	1,880	39,410	4.77%
Other retail sale not in stores; stalls or markets	680	8,200	8.29%
Total	25,365	306,645	8.27%

South West UK Independent Retail Sector Demographics

Section 2

Example thematic coding fragment





Ethics Self Assessment

Your answers indicate that you do not need ethical approval. If your research includes use of animals as research subjects, you will have been emailed separate guidance which must be followed before you begin your research. Should the circumstances of your research alter in any way please revisit this process to validate your project.

Applicant details

Declaration

By clicking the 'submit form' button, I declare that the questions above have been answered truthfully and to the best of my knowledge and belief, and that I take full responsibility for these responses. I undertake to observe ethical principles throughout the research project and to report any changes that affect the ethics of the project to the University Research Ethics Committee for review.

Project type:	Royal Holloway postgraduate research project/grant
Name:	Oldham, Simon (2017)
Email:	PDTM011@live.rhul.ac.uk
Academic supervisor:	Professor Laura Spence
Department:	Management
Title of research project or grant:	Under What Conditions do Small Business-Stakeholder Value Disputations Impact Subsequent Firm Behaviour?
Email address of Academic Supervisor:	laura.spence@rhul.ac.uk
Funding Body Category:	Research Councils
Funding Body:	ESRC

Information about the Research Project

Will the research project involve the use of human participants or human tissue (with or without their knowledge or consent at the time)?, No

Are the results of the research project likely to expose any person or community to physical or psychological harm?, No

Will the research project involve the use of animals as research subjects?, No

Will you have access to personal information that allows you to identify individuals or company confidential information (that is not covered by confidentiality terms within an agreement or by a separate confidentiality agreement)?, No

Does the conduct of the research project present a significant risk to the environment or society?, No

Are there any other ethical issues raised by this research project that in the opinion of the PI require further ethical review?, No

Does the PI believe that the results of this research could reasonably lead to legal action or negative press coverage, for which the PI would require University support?, No

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