

**The psychological impact of transition on young adults  
from the world of academia to the business world.**

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>LIST OF TABLES</b> .....	5
<b>LIST OF FIGURES</b> .....	5
<b>SUMMARY</b> .....	7
<b>CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION</b> .....	9
<b>CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW</b> .....	13
<b>2.1 The effect of transition from academia to the business world</b> .....	13
<b>2.1.1 Defining transition</b> .....	13
<b>2.1.2 Historical theories and contemporary approaches</b> .....	15
<b>2.1.2.1 Maslow’s Hierarchy of needs</b> .....	17
<b>2.1.2.2 Erickson’s theory of Development</b> .....	21
<b>2.1.2.3 Jean Piaget’s Stages of Development</b> .....	22
<b>2.1.2.4 Piaget’s Constructivism theory</b> .....	24
<b>2.1.2.5 Social Constructivism</b> .....	25
<b>2.1.2.6 Socialism and Acculturation</b> .....	27
<b>2.1.2.7 Quarter Life Crisis</b> .....	30
<b>2.1.2.8 Personality Theories</b> .....	31
<b>2.1.3 The transitional relationship of academic and business worlds</b> .....	34
<b>2.1.4 Practical Theoretical point of departure</b> .....	39
<b>2.1.5 Conclusion</b> .....	40
<b>CHAPTER 3: MEASUREMENT INSTRUMENT</b>	
<b>3.1 INTRODUCTION TO USING QUALITATIVE QUESTIONNAIRES</b> .....	42
<b>3.1.1 Reasons for using qualitative questionnaires for this study</b> .....	43
<b>3.1.2 Potential problems with qualitative questionnaires</b> .....	45
<b>3.1.3 Qualitative versus Quantitative research</b> .....	48
<b>3.2 Conclusion</b> .....	53

## **CHAPTER 4:            METHODODOLOGY**

<b>4.1</b>	<b>INTRODUCTION TO THE METHODOLOGY</b> .....	<b>55</b>
<b>4.2</b>	<b>OVERVIEW</b> .....	<b>55</b>
<b>4.2.1</b>	<b>Type of design used in this study</b> .....	<b>59</b>
<b>4.2.2</b>	<b>Validity issues</b> .....	<b>63</b>
<b>4.2.3</b>	<b>Conclusion</b> .....	<b>63</b>
<b>4.3</b>	<b>PARTICIPANTS AND DATA COLLECTION</b> .....	<b>63</b>
<b>4.3.1</b>	<b>Procedure for data collection</b> .....	<b>64</b>
<b>4.3.2</b>	<b>Small sample studies</b> .....	<b>66</b>
<b>4.4</b>	<b>DATA ANALYSIS</b> .....	<b>66</b>
<b>4.4.1</b>	<b>Practical aspects of data gathering</b> .....	<b>66</b>
<b>4.4.2</b>	<b>Limitations of the study</b> .....	<b>67</b>
<b>4.5</b>	<b>CONCLUSION</b> .....	<b>68</b>

## **CHAPTER 5: RESULTS**

<b>5.1</b>	<b>SAMPLE</b> .....	<b>69</b>
<b>5.1.1</b>	<b>Descriptive findings from the sample</b> .....	<b>69</b>
<b>5.2</b>	<b>INTERVENTION</b> .....	<b>90</b>
<b>5.3</b>	<b>CONCLUSION</b> .....	<b>91</b>

## **CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION OF THE RESULTS**

<b>6.1</b>	<b>RESULTS DISCUSSION</b> .....	<b>93</b>
<b>6.2</b>	<b>IMPROVING THE METHODOLOGY</b> .....	<b>96</b>
<b>6.3</b>	<b>LACK OF STATISTICAL SIGNIFICANCE</b> .....	<b>99</b>
<b>6.4</b>	<b>CONCLUSION</b> .....	<b>101</b>

<b>REFERENCES</b> .....	<b>103</b>
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## LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

<b>Illustration 1.</b>	<b>Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs</b> .....	18
<b>Illustration 2.</b>	<b>Social Networks, What Maslow Misses</b> .....	20
<b>Illustration 3.</b>	<b>Generalising from Cases (Qualitative versus Quantitative Research)</b> .....	51
<b>Illustration 4.</b>	<b>Professional Critique Applied to the Whole (Qualitative versus Quantitative Research)</b> .....	52

## LIST OF TABLES

<b>Table 1.</b>	<b>Main Themes Derived from the Interviews</b> .....	77
<b>Table 2.</b>	<b>Scoring of Data According to Themes</b> .....	79
<b>Table 3.</b>	<b>Psychological Impact and Related Issues</b> .....	95

## LIST OF FIGURES

<b>Figure 1:</b>	<b>Gender Split</b> .....	71
<b>Figure 2:</b>	<b>Diversity Distribution</b> .....	71
<b>Figure 3:</b>	<b>Degree Choice</b> .....	72
<b>Figure 4:</b>	<b>Age Range</b> .....	73
<b>Figure 5:</b>	<b>Living Arrangements</b> .....	74
<b>Figure 6:</b>	<b>University Attended</b> .....	75
<b>Figure 7:</b>	<b>Marital Status</b> .....	75
<b>Figure 8:</b>	<b>Expectation and Psychological Impact</b> .....	79
<b>Figure 9:</b>	<b>Organisation's Culture, Psychological Impact and Transition</b> .....	81
<b>Figure 10:</b>	<b>Psychological Impact and Transition</b> .....	82
<b>Figure 11:</b>	<b>Change, Psychological Impact and Transition</b> .....	83
<b>Figure 12:</b>	<b>Challenges, Psychological Impact and Transition</b> .....	84

<b>Figure 13: Degree Choice, Organisation’s Culture, Psychological Impact and Transition.....</b>	<b>85</b>
<b>Figure 14: Summary of Themes and the Rate of Recurrence of Participant Scores.....</b>	<b>86</b>
<b>Figure 15: Summary of Highest and Lowest Themes of Participant Scores.....</b>	<b>89</b>

## **ANNEXURES**

<b>Annexure A: Research Questionnaire.....</b>	<b>110</b>
<b>Annexure B: Questioning Response and Grouping Summary of Themes.....</b>	<b>118</b>
<b>Annexure C: Samples of Transcripts.....</b>	<b>119</b>

## SUMMARY

Young adults are faced with many challenges, changes, demands and decisions as they grow up and become young adults. Emerging adulthood is a distinctive period of change, development and a foundation for future achievements, goals and occupation decisions. This era is marked by certain biological changes, changes in social roles, individual and psychological change, as well as legal changes. This period of adult development, plus young adults' first experiences in the work place signifies a period of often dramatic change into adulthood, combined with life and career goal alignment.

The paradigm for the research is that South Africa is no different to the rest of the world; young adults are faced with the same challenges and demands as they move from a relative place of comfort in a University setting, to a very different setting in a commercial environment. In order to break down the complexity of this paradigm, the researcher viewed the changes and the challenges that accompany it, as a good opportunity for research. The transition from the world of academia to the world of work is one that seems to have a material impact on young adults. As such, this provides an opportunity for research, and this paper delves into the challenges and demands on young adults, looking at what impacts them the most. The research was conducted by way of semi-structured interviews and was led by the researcher on a one-on-one basis with recently hired graduates (2007) as the participants, in a Financial Services firm in Johannesburg, South Africa.

The participants' age group ranged from 21 to 29 years of age and were from various cultures and race groups. The semi-structured interview contained a range of questions which included a number of key words that were used to probe the participants view and insight into what the psychological stressors were for them personally, including emotional, physiological and mental stressors. The resultant information was that overall, young graduates felt significant stress and pressure, which was made up of various factors culminating in psychological impact.

The semi-structured interview further explored various potential stressors like the organisation's culture, company choice, earning potential, expectation and transition; overall the psychological effect of transition from an academic environment to a working environment had the greatest effect on the participants in this research process.



## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Emerging adulthood is a distinctive period of change, development and setting a foundation for future achievements, goals and occupation decisions. This era is marked by certain biological changes, changes in social roles, individual and psychological change, as well as legal changes (i.e. the coming of age / turning 21 years old). This period of adult development, plus a young adult's first experience in the work place, marks one of the greatest opportunities for research, as it signifies a period of often dramatic change into emerging adulthood, combined with life and career goal orientation.

South Africa is a dynamic country that is continually changing. It has its own unique blend of multi-culturalism and multi-lingualism supporting 11 official languages, a phenomenon that is not found easily anywhere else in the world. South Africa has a unique past to reconcile, the present to grow and develop, and a future to aspire to. One of South Africa's challenge is to accommodate and also assimilate the past, the present and the future.

This phenomenon in South Africa presents many opportunities for research and this research paper aims to explore the psychological impact on young graduates moving out of an academic environment and into the workplace to begin their formal careers. The research opportunity for this paper lies in the phase between parental influence and a personal career goal, i.e. parents influence > **university** > **job** > personal career goal.

Many young adults have an idealistic and predetermined view of their future careers as they leave tertiary institutions or university and fully engage in professional life and adulthood. This period of change and adjustment presents an opportunity for better understanding the present for the future, as well as better understanding personal and career expectations of young adults. Many young adults struggle with the transition from university to the world of business.

The emphasis on accountability and time management becomes a crucial factor in this transition and the challenges of how to manage these two elements in particular, affect young adults in various ways. Many young adults have an idealistic and predetermined view of their future careers as they leave university and fully engage in professional business life. What many of them struggle with the most is the ability to adjust to a world where deadlines are critical and the margin for error is extremely narrow.

Many young graduates are not equipped to deal with the world where theory and reality do not necessarily meet. This period of change and adjustment presents an opportunity for better understanding of the psychological impact of these changes on the lives on young adults, across different cultures in South Africa as they migrate from academia into full time employment. Erikson in his “stages of development” theory extends the idea of change during development as *“always changing ...it is a process of increasing differentiation”* (Maddi 1996).

For many organizations including the organization that was used for this research paper, expressed a need to better understand and address the numerous imbalances and lack of understanding of cultural differences, personal aspirations, empowerment, and BEE that were noticeable in the organization, coupled with a rapidly changing market place.

In my opinion and from discussion with the financial services firm I used to conduct the research, many young adults are fast-tracked in organisations in order to quickly develop and for organizations to effectively utilize potential BEE talent effectively. What is of paramount importance in instances such as this, is that such development programs are undertaken in such a way that all aspects of the individual are considered: ethnic group, age, gender, education qualification, aspiration, personality, management and leadership styles and the desire of the individual.

The transition from the academic environment to the business world is, in itself challenging and should be considered in fast-track programs so as not to cause potential undue additional distress to the individual(s) concerned.

The aim of this study is to demonstrate that there is a potential psychological impact on young adults as they transition from the world of academia into the business world. There is no pre-set hypothesis as this is an exploratory study on the psychological impact on young adults as they move from the world of academia to the business world. If it is found that there is indeed a psychological impact on young adults leaving an academic institution and starting work in a business environment for the first time, this result would then be a starting point from which the relationship between the two can be investigated. The potential causal relationship can then be studied to possibly determine the reason and direction of the association.

The cause of this psychological impact could potentially be investigated further to determine what interventions could be put in place to potentially address the psychological impact of the transition on young adults and therefore manage or even lessen the psychological impact of the transition on the individual.

Please note that for the purposes of this study, the research, literature review and the findings from the research, the phrase 'psychological impact' and the word 'stress' are used as having the same meaning for the most part and are generally interchangeable.

The study was conducted utilizing a small sample and can be viewed as a pilot study. An overview of the effect of transition from academia to the business world is provided in Chapter 2 together with the literature review which also provides some insight into historical theories and contemporary perspectives. In Chapter 3, the measurement instrument and the use of qualitative questionnaires is discussed together with the potential downside and the upside of using this measurement instrument. Chapter 4 covers the chosen methodology and practical application thereof.

The study explores the psychological impact of the transition from the world of academia to the world of work as it affects different individuals; this is discussed in Chapter 5 where carefully considered interpretation of the results is presented. Conclusions of the study and recommendations are discussed in Chapter 6.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### 2.1 The effect of transition from academia to the business world

This literature review provides a background for exploration of the effect that the transition from the world of academia to the world of work has on young adults in South Africa. It includes writings, research, scholarly opinion and topical publications concerning the description, measurement and evaluation of the impact that the transition has on young adults. It further explores the stress factors that could influence the psychological impact on young adults as they transition. The literature review encompasses a variety of views both from a historically theoretical perspective, as well as a more contemporary standpoint. For the purposes of the research, literature review and the findings from the research, the phrase 'psychological impact' and the word 'stress' are used as having the same meaning for the most part and are generally interchangeable.

##### 2.1.1 Defining transition

Transition as defined by the World English Dictionary, describes transition as a change or passage from one state or stage to another. Or the period of time during which something changes from one state or stage to another. Synonyms for transition include; a move, shift, conversion, change, modification or alteration from one state or stage to another.

In mathematics, a matrix is used to describe the probability of moving from one state to another in a dynamic system. This matrix is known as the Markov Transition Matrix (Meyn, 2007). This matrix, also known as a Markov chain, is a random process with the property that the next state depends only on the current state.

Markov chains are useful as mathematical tools for statistical modelling in modern applied mathematics, particularly in information sciences, as well as looking at the potential future state of an item or individual as they move away from a current state.

The Markov property states that the conditional probability distribution for the system at the next step (and in fact at all future steps) given its current state, depends only on the current state of the system, and not additionally on the state of the system at previous steps (Meyn, 2007).

This means that the system changes randomly and it is generally impossible to predict the exact state of the system in the future. However, the statistical properties of the system's future can be predicted. In many applications it is these statistical properties that are important.

In the research study that was conducted for this paper the Markov Chains could potentially offer a future prediction of stress or psychological impact on individuals based on the numerical data that was collected for the study. It is important to note that the use of the Markov chain would be used as an indicator only, as the very nature of the study was qualitative and not statistically defined.

The changes of the state of the system are called transitions, and the probabilities associated with various state-changes are called transition probabilities. The set of all states and transition probabilities completely characterizes a Markov chain. By convention, we assume all possible states and transitions have been included in the definition of the processes, so there is always a next-state and the process goes on forever (Meyn, 2007).

A useful analogy supplied by the information sciences (Meyn, 2007) is that of a frog jumping among several lily-pads, where the frog's memory is short enough that it doesn't remember what lily-pad it was last on, and so its next jump can only be influenced by where it is now.

Similar to Myen's example above and in relation to the study of young adults transitioning from an academic world to a business one, the Markov chain is relevant in that it is only once the graduates join the business world do they know what is expected of them and what the next steps might involve, regardless of where they have come from.

The study focuses on the transition of young adults from academia to the business world, and in so doing, the various state-changes or transition probabilities in the Markov chain explained above, indicates that there is always a next state and that this process continues to go on forever.

The process of the psychological impact can be described as the shift, move or change which influences the individuals as they move from academia into the business world.

### **2.1.2 Historical Theories and contemporary approaches**

The writings in this review reflect both authors' and researchers' interest in the description, measurement and evaluation of the transition from academia to the business world. The writings and research focus on the dimensions regarding the transition in relation to; age, gender, culture, and education differences. These differences are viewed in terms of the various ways they impact on young people in terms of the psychological, aspirational and personal impact that these differences have on them.

There is a vast amount of literature available on the transition from academia to the business world, this particular review however is limited to the most substantiated theories and accepted principles as described by Graham and McKenzie (1995) in *Delivering the promise: The transition from higher education to work (Part I)*. *Education and Training Journal*, 37(1) 4-8, Dolby (2001) in *Constructing Race; Youth, Identity and popular Culture*, and Feldman (2001) in *Social Psychology* which are quoted in this paper.

Similarly, the wide range of contemporary writings relating to the transition from academia to the business world, as well as the papers and writings that explore the stress factors that could influence the psychological impact on young adults as they transition, makes it necessary to limit this review to the most popular and mainstream writings of accepted authors relevant to this particular study.

The literature review that has been completed to date for this particular research paper, is by no means exhaustive, and although there is research available that has focused on the impact on young people as they move from academia to full time employment, the specific research proposed in this paper has not, to the best of my knowledge, been done before; that is, research specifically targeted at young adults in South Africa, between the ages of 21 and 29, in the financial services industry focusing on the psychological impact of the transition from an academic world to a business world.

Numerous research initiatives and papers have been presented on similar topics, and do provide some insight into the topic proposed for this research paper. Graham and McKenzie (1995) in the journal; *Delivering the promise: The transition from higher education to work (Part I). Education and Training Journal, 37(1) 4-8*, for example.

South Africa provides a potentially unique and dynamic platform for ground breaking research initiatives in this area of study. The discussion portion of this review is organised into 3 sections.

The first section deals with historical studies on development; both psychological and educational development using classical and well established theories and historical perspectives. These include Maslow's Hierarchy of needs, Erickson's Theory of Development, Jean Piaget's Stages of Development and Social Constructivism.

The second section reviews more contemporary research, writings and theories, and focuses on the psychological impact of the transition from academia to the business world.



It focuses particularly on age, gender, culture and education. These writings include Mc Millan and Lopez's article: *Socialisation and Acculturation (2001)*, Quarter Life Crisis by Robbins and Wilner (2001), as well as Personality Theories from S.R. Maddi (2001).

The third and final section ties together the philosophies, concepts, evidence, theories and practices discussed in this review including the transitional relationship between the academic and business worlds. This section highlights the effects of the transition on young adults from academia and the business world.

### **2.1.2.1 Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs**

Traditionally, life was very simple, when women stayed home to look after the children and men went out to work. Education and learning was necessary and only the very rich, affluent or more fortunate individuals went to college or university to further their studies. Today this is not the case – aspiration, expectation and personal drive come into the equation and make for a very different, much more stressful and competitive environment for young people.

Maslow's hierarchy of needs (a theory in psychology that Abraham Maslow proposed in his 1943 paper *A Theory of Human Motivation* (Maslow, 1943)) is useful to illustrate an awareness of past literature being relevant to having a psychological and educational impact on the transition from an academic to a business environment in the current era.

Maslow studied the healthiest one percent of the college student population rather than mentally ill or neurotic people, commenting that the study of crippled, stunted, immature, and unhealthy specimens can yield only a crippled psychology and a crippled philosophy (Maslow, 1943).

Maslow's hierarchy of needs is often depicted as a pyramid consisting of five levels; the four lower levels are grouped together as deficiency needs.

Deficiency needs must be met first. Once these are met, individuals seek to satisfy growth needs which drives personal growth. The higher needs in this hierarchy only come into focus when the lower needs are met.

Once an individual has moved up a level, needs in the lower level are no longer prioritized. A person cannot move from a higher level to a lower level; however priorities may shift between the levels at certain times.



<http://www.maslowshierarchyofneeds.net>

**Illustration 1. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs**

By way of example; if a successful business person is diagnosed with cancer; he or she may move from an esteem level to the physiological needs level in order to look after his or her health, but would still value work performance (esteem need) and would most likely return to work during times of remission. There are many criticism of Maslow as well, and as such it is often view as a bit dated by today's standards. However for the purposes of this study, it has been used to set the framework of Maslow's original hierarchy of needs and use Pamela Rutledge's article on social networks to make it more relevant in society today.

Pamela Rutledge in Psychology Today entitled, Social Networks: What Maslow Misses, (2011), points out that Maslow misses the role of social connection.

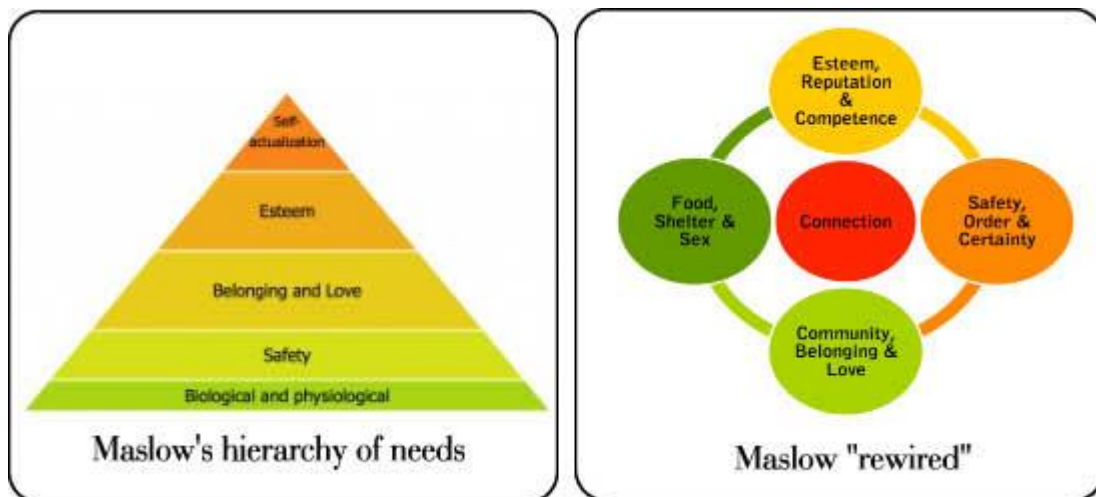
Maslow's hierarchical model, with the human brain at the base, is driven by a basic instinct to survive with food, water and shelter. The second level is made up of safety needs. The third level comprises social needs like family, affection, relationships, work groups and community (Rutledge, 2011). The fourth level comprises the egocentric needs of achievement, responsibility and reputation. Finally at the top of the model is self-actualisation, personal growth and fulfilment.

Rutledge (2011), takes Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and explains that none of the needs, starting with basic survival, are possible without social connection and collaboration. Rutledge (2011) goes on to say that survival is not possible without collaboration. To defeat a Woolley Mammoth, build a secure structure or care for children while hunting, is not possible without a team effort.

Rutledge claims that this factor is truer now, than it was then. Reliance on each other grows as societies become more complex, interconnected and specialized. Connection is a prerequisite for survival; physically and emotionally.

Needs are not hierarchical, they are, like most other things in nature, an interactive, dynamic system, but are anchored in our ability to make social connections. According to Rutledge (2011), Maslow's model needs rewiring so that it matches the brain functions of today. Belongingness is the driving force of human behavior, not a third tier activity on Maslow's Hierarchy.

The system of human needs from bottom to top, shelter, safety, sex, leadership, community, competence and trust, are dependent on our ability to connect with others. Belonging to a community provides the sense of security that makes the human brain happy and keeps individuals safe.



Psychology Today, entitled, *Social Networks: What Maslow Misses* Pamela Rutledge, 2011

**Illustration 2. Social Networks; What Maslow Misses**

Rutledge goes on to propose that Maslow’s Hierarchy should be rewired from the original to a more accessible model for today. Seeing as connection is fundamental to survival, connection should be the basis of and the driving force of human needs. When this idea of social connection is applied to the research for this paper, it becomes increasingly clear that a feeling of belonging, doing the right thing and acceptance is extremely important to new graduates starting work for the first time.

The comments from the research participants was clear in that they wanted to ‘fit in’ and ‘being part of the crowd’ was incredibly important. When they did not feel as though they belonged, it caused them stress and the psychological impact was evident (the questions in the semi-structured interview that related to this topic were; Social Anxiety, Expectation Gap and Organizations’ Culture).

Rutledge (2011), further suggests that in some ways life hasn’t changed peoples’ fundamental human natures. Whether it is on the ancient, Savannah Grasslands or today’s Twitter and Facebook, social behaviors adapt to the environment to support the most basic of human needs – social connection.

This proposal from Rutledge can also be extrapolated to support the proposal of potential psychological impact on young adults as they move from the world of academia to a business environment.

The young adults want to feel like they belong, that they are in some way safe and that they connect with their new environment, that there is a certain competence that they bring into the new organization, and a sense of connectedness with their new world.

### **2.1.2.2 Erickson's Theory of Development**

Building on the concept of Maslow's hierarchy of needs, another theory of interest is Erickson's theory of Development.

Erickson's Theory of Development, highlights the stages of growth and needs related to the stages of development that a person progresses through.

The stages are as follows:

- Stage 1: birth to one - conflict. Trust and mistrust (Hope)
- Stage 2: one to two, autonomy vs. doubt (Will)
- Stage 3: three to six, initiative vs. inadequacy (Purpose)
- Stage 4: linked to Freud's latency period industry vs. inferiority (Confidence)
- Stage 5: adolescence - identity vs. confusion (Fidelity)
- Stage 6: early adulthood - intimacy vs. isolation (Love)
- Stage 7: later adulthood marked by generativity vs. stagnation (Care)
- Stage 8: integrity vs. despair (Wisdom) (Maddi, 2001)

During the transition from the world of academia to the business world, focus is not only on the day to day issues of stress, pressure, new environments, different cultures, transformation and coming out of one's comfort zone; it also includes the very real developmental stages and psychological growth stages in a young adults life that can affect the transition in both a positive and a negative way (Maddi, 2001).

If we consider both Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, particularly taking into account Rutledge's (2011) 'rewired' version of Maslow's Hierarchy, and Erickson's Theory of Development, a common factor is a sense of identity versus confusion and a sense of belonging or of isolation, in Erickson's case.

The sense of identity of *self* is important as it relates to *self-confidence* and a sense of assurance in "I know who I am". If that sense of *self-confidence* and assurance of *self* is lacking then belonging and connecting with others becomes even more important in new environments. If both a sense of confused identity and a sense of isolation exists, the result could and most often does result in a potential negative psychological impact on young adults as they move from academia to the world of work (evidence was found in the themes that made up Psychological impact in the research findings which is discussed later in this paper). Without this sense of belonging or connectedness, individuals may begin to feel isolated and not part of a group. This is true too for young adults moving from a relative state of safety at university to one of insecurity in a new working environment. This could ultimately be a factor leading to depression (this is further discussed in a later chapter).

### **2.1.2.3 Jean Piaget's Stages of Development**

According to Jean Piaget, there are two major principles that guide intellectual growth and biological development; these are adaptation and organization (Piaget, 1985). For individuals to survive in an environment, they must adapt to both physical and mental stimuli.

Assimilation and accommodation are both part of the adaptation process (Piaget, 1985). Piaget believed that human beings possess mental structures that assimilate external events and convert them to fit their mental structures. Furthermore, mental structures accommodate themselves to new, unusual and constantly changing aspects of the external environment.

Piaget's (1985) second principle, organization, refers to the nature of these adaptive mental structures. He suggests that the mind is organized in complex and integrated ways. The simplest level is the schema, a mental representation of some physical or mental action that can be performed on an object, event or phenomenon.

Piaget (1985) suggested that through the processes of assimilation and accommodation, individuals construct new knowledge from their experiences. Piaget's theory posed that individuals internalize knowledge during a process of assimilation. They incorporate new experiences into a framework that already exists and they do not change their original framework.

This process of assimilation may occur when an individual's experiences are aligned with their internal representation of the world, but may also occur as a failure to change a faulty understanding (Smith, 1993). An example is that the individual may not notice events or may misinterpret or misunderstand input from others, and dismiss the information about the world as unimportant.

In contrast, the individual may change their internal representations; they may change their perceptions of the experience to fit their internal representations (Smith, 1993). According to theory, accommodation is the process of reframing one's mental representation of the external world to fit new experiences. Accommodation can be understood as the mechanism by which failure leads to learning (Smith, 1993). In the context of this research, the theme *Expectation* and the related topics illustrated for the most part that when the participants' expectation of their new environment did not match their expected belief, they found it difficult to accommodate the new experience. The resultant outcome was an increased sense of anxiety leading to worry and panic which were incorporated under the theme *Psychological Impact*.

In summary, when we act on the expectation that the world operates in a certain way and it violates our expectation that the world operates in this way, we often fail. However, by accommodating the new experience, and by reframing our own model of the way the world works, we learn from the experience of failure.

This can be aligned to the concept of *Expectation* of young adults' moving from academia to the business world, they often experienced some form of psychological impact due to their own expectation being violated and then having to accommodate the new experience.

#### **2.1.2.4 Piaget's Constructivism Theory**

Piaget focused on the individual as opposed to the social environment. He posed that through the processes of accommodation and assimilation, individuals construct new knowledge from their experiences (Smith, 1993).

It is important to note that constructivism is not a particular strategy of instruction or style of teaching; it is rather a theory describing how learning happens, regardless of whether learners are using their experiences to understand a lecture or a project plan for a new client. In both these cases, the theory of constructivism suggests that learners construct knowledge out of their experiences.

Constructivism is often associated with pedagogic approaches that promote active learning, or learning by doing (Smith, 1993) over the reliance on rote learning and instruction from educators without input or thought from the learners.

The converse of constructivist learning is constructionism. Constructivism has an emphasis on constructing knowledge from personal experiences, whilst constructionists believe that context is as vital as the external environment.

Constructivists promote active learning and learning by doing, whilst the constructionists promote collaborative learning and learning by creating or building models or constructions through specific instruction (Ackermann, 2001).



Some argue, the researcher included, that the approach of social constructivism is more realistic than pure constructivism in our society today as we are exposed to so many factors in our social lives where we have to make decisions in social environments, and have to continually assimilate new information.

#### **2.1.2.5 Social Constructivism**

Through his articulation of the mechanisms by which knowledge is internalized by learners, it is believed that Jean Piaget formalized the theory of constructivism as per the interpretation of Smith (1993).

Constructivism as mentioned above, is a theory describing how learning happens; learning can take place through active engagement or by being given instructions on how to complete something. Either way, learners construct knowledge out of their experiences which can be closely associated to learning by doing or active learning (Smith 19093).

The importance of the nature of the individual's social interaction with knowledgeable members of the society is equally important. Without the social interaction with other more knowledgeable people, it is impossible to acquire social meaning of important systems and to learn how to utilize them. As children, individuals develop their thinking abilities by interacting with other children, adults and by engaging and assimilating the knowledge they acquire from the physical world around them (Wertsch, 1997).

Social constructivism extends the theory of constructivism by viewing each learner as unique, with unique, individual needs and backgrounds. During the research interviews it became evident that each participant was eager to learn as much as they could. This learning process did not relate only to their technical and academic ability, but rather to their social environment. Many of the participants expressed that they wanted to know what their peers did, or how they had reacted or why they did what they did.

The participants on the whole felt that if they had insight into not only the culture of the organization (one of the key themes in the research) but were also aware of their own expectation gap (also a main theme in the research), then they would have felt more comfortable and less stressed by their transition.

The participants in the research were as complex, as well as multidimensional, human beings each with their own personal ability and views. Social constructivism acknowledges the uniqueness and complexity of the individual encouraging this uniqueness as an integral part of the learning process (Wertsch, 1997). As children, individuals develop their thinking abilities by interacting with other children and as adults by engaging and assimilating the knowledge they glean from the physical world around them (Wertsch, 1997).

It is further argued by Von Glaserfeld (1989) that the responsibility of learning should reside increasingly with the learner. Social constructivism emphasizes the importance of the learner being actively involved in the learning process, unlike previous viewpoints where the learner played a passive and receptive role. Von Glaserfeld (1996) emphasizes that the learner constructs their own understanding and that they do not simply mirror and reflect what they read.

In the research findings this was noteworthy as the participants found the academic learning curve to be easy compared with the learning curve of being in a new environment. Many of the participants commented that it was far easier to learn for their studies and learn new unfamiliar principles, than to have to learn new information and ways of doing things without a text book.

It meant that they had to look for meaning and then try to find regularity and order in the events of their new world, coupled with the absence of full or complete information. They found this to be very stressful based on their responses to the themes *Expectation Gap* and *Organisation Culture* specifically.

This links up with Vygotsky's zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978) where learners are challenged within close proximity to, yet slightly above their current level of development.

By experiencing the successful completion of challenging tasks, learners gain confidence and motivation to embark on more complex challenges. If we consider Vygotsky's standpoint of proximal development in an effort to understand the psychological impact of transition from University to a working environment on young adults, we may be able to better understand why some young adults find it more difficult than others to adapt to a working environment.

If all young adults were at the same standpoint of proximal development, then they would in theory all be able to cope with slightly more demanding and complex challenges. In theory this may be so, however in reality the ability to cope varies from person to person, hence the reason for the varied levels of psychological impact on you young adults as they transition to a working world from an academic one in the research which follows in the later chapters of this paper.

#### **2.1.2.6 Socialisation and acculturation**

If we further consider Piaget's theory where he posed that we construct knowledge out of our experiences; it can be similarly found that the theory of constructivism exemplifies how learning happens, regardless of whether learners use experiences in an academic or social environment to construct knowledge (Smith, 1993).

Social constructivism not only acknowledges the uniqueness and complexity of the individual, but actually encourages, utilizes and rewards it as an integral part of the learning process (Wertsch, 1997).

Social constructivism encourages individuals to reach their own version of the truth which is influenced by their background, culture and/or worldview.

Historical factors such as language and symbols are inherited by the individual as a member of a particular culture and these are learned and assimilated through the individual's life. This also stresses the importance of the nature of the individual's social interaction with knowledgeable members of society.

Without the social interaction with other, more knowledgeable people, it is impossible to acquire the social meaning of important systems and to learn how to utilize them. In the research many of the participants felt that if they understood the social structure of the organization they would feel more equipped to deal with the challenges and changes that they faced. Thus the social interaction with others, particularly those more senior and more experienced was of great importance to them.

As mentioned previously, graduating from University is a significant time of change in any young person's life. For most individuals it signifies an essential transition into the real world of being totally independent and earning a living. The thought of being out there on your own can make the experience a daunting and scary one. Some graduates will easily adapt and adjust to this new way of life; others however, will find it increasingly difficult (Bruce, 1999).

In their article *Socialisation and Acculturation: Organizational and individual strategies towards achieving P-O (person-organisation) fit in a culturally diverse society*, McMillan & Lopez (2001) acknowledge the importance of considering both the organisational and employee-related variables for better integration of new employees into organisations. In some instances, newcomer employees who embrace an organisations' culture whilst at the same time maintaining close ties with their own culture, are engaging in integration. Through the companies' socialisation efforts, new employees learn the organisations' culture and adjust to its environment (Hood & Koberg, 1994). Integration involves willingness for mutual accommodation, involvement in two social systems, and flexibility (Berry, 1997).

The organisation accepts the newcomer because (s)he is willing to adopt the same behavior and culture; even though, the newcomer also retains his/her own cultural identity (McMillan & Lopez, 2001). This should lead to greater opportunity for the newcomer to learn the values, cultures and expectations of the organisation.

As a result of willingness on the part of both the newcomer and the other members of the firm, an integration acculturation strategy is expected to strengthen the relationship between institutionalised socialisation and P-O fit (McMillan & Lopez, 2001).

Theoretically organisations strive to create higher levels of P-O fit, however, it is important to note that individuals play a vital role in the achievement of P-O. If newcomers or individuals in the firm do not support the P-O strategies, separation and marginalisation will occur which substantially weakens the relationship between institutionalised socialisation tactics and P-O fit (McMillan & Lopez, 2001).

If newcomers or individuals have neither strong ties with their own culture nor to the organisations, marginalization occurs. Due to their lack of interest, newcomer employees engage in marginalization and learn very little about the new culture. As a result, the dominant group often rejects the newcomer employee and does not allow him/her to enter the group, which can cause high levels of conflict (Berry, 1992). The risk is that the new employee will not fit into the firm's culture well, regardless of socialisation efforts.

Newcomer employees who elect to reject the organisation's culture while strongly embracing their own culture are engaging in separation. Separation tactics involve a re-affirmation of one's own heritage behavior, and rejection of a new culture (Berry, 1992). In these cases the newcomer employee may leave the firm because (s)he cannot and will not take on the firm's cultural values and beliefs. When addressing the socialisation tactics used by organisations it becomes more apparent that both individual and organizational influences must be considered.

In today's climate of increasing diversity, organisations must begin to re-examine how they socialise employees. In addition, acculturation strategies will become more critical as the number of employees with differing backgrounds increases (McMillan & Lopez, 2001).

In the case of the research and the participants' reaction to the culture of the organization, most felt that a great effort was made in order to accommodate each person individually and take into account any differences in culture, historical background and view-points. The social acculturation did not cause stress to the participants on the whole, rather gaining new knowledge of the organization was stressful. In some cases social acculturation was completely unfamiliar to the individual.

It is interesting to note that in these cases the individuals' preconceived ideas about starting work did not match the organizations' efforts in making them feel welcome. It was positive in that the organizations' efforts far exceeded the expectation of the individual.

#### **2.1.2.7 Quarter Life Crisis**

Feelings of anxiety are generally apparent during major changes in a person's life. Graduates feel this anxiety and stress as they move into the world of work and leave behind a relatively care-free campus life.

During the research it was found that the anxiety facing young graduates could be in the form of questioning their choices; *have I made the right decision, am I really doing what I am supposed to be doing, do I know enough, am I good enough, will I fit in, I don't know anyone there, my free time is going to be different, will I like the people and will they like me*. Any of these feelings, on their own can be quite frightening, but putting them together can create a very daunting place for any young graduate starting out in their first real job.

At the age of twenty-something, young people are generally torn between having a career and a life. Friends seem more important and are often viewed as more successful.

Young adults tend to feel suffocated by choice, responsibility and self-doubt. Money, home life and relationships are all constant stresses (Robbins & Wilner, 2001).

In light of the above, much of the research focused on the transition and the resultant feelings of suffocation and stress related to choice, responsibility and even self-doubt. One of the aims of this research was to gain a better understanding of the psychological impact on young adults from various cultures in South Africa as they moved from the world of academia into the business world, specifically relating to the impact of stress (psychological impact) this may cause in their lives. The impact of these psychological stressors, may have many different result, for some it may mean not remaining in a firm long enough to gain experience and knowledge, persuading them to do the proverbial 'job hop', or they may become lost in the business and not excel as they could have.

Furthermore, the research may highlight personal development areas which may ultimately assist companies and organisations to work towards better understanding personal aspirations and the needs of their young adult workforce to ensure that not only their career aspirations, but also their personal aspirations and expectations are fulfilled.

#### **2.1.2.8 Personality Theories**

Over time, personality theories have offered a wide variety of explanations for behavior and what constitutes a person. Carl Roger's theory of personality evolved out of his work as a clinical psychologist and developed as an off-shoot of his theory of client-centered (later called person-centered) therapy (Rogers, 1959).

Rogers maintained that the human "organism" has an underlying tendency which aims to develop all capacities in ways that maintain or enhance the organism and move it towards autonomy. This tendency is directional, constructive and present in all living things.

This concept, known as the actualizing tendency, encompasses all motivations; tension, need, drive and creativity as well as pleasure seeking tendencies (Rogers, 1959).

Roger's concept of self-actualization is specifically related to self and thus different from Maslow's which appears to incorporate both self-actualization and actualizing tendencies (Maddi, 2001). Only the organism as a whole has this actualizing tendency, parts of it (such as the self) do not. Maddi (2001) describes it as "biological pressure to fulfill the genetic blueprint". Each person thus has a fundamental mandate to fulfill their potential.

While Rogers sees the common human condition as one of incongruence between self and experience, this does not minimize his ultimate belief in the autonomy of human beings. Rogers (1977) sees human beings as capable of evaluating outer and inner situations, understanding him/herself in context, making constructive choices as to the next steps in life and acting on those choices.

Roger's person-centered approach has had an impact on domains outside of therapy such as family life, education, leadership, conflict resolution, politics and community health (Maddi, 2001).

When we look at Roger's person-centered approach in the work context, it is relevant in that many people have a desire to reach their full potential, they are prepared to work very hard towards autonomy. As mentioned before this tendency is directional, constructive and present in all living things. In the work context achievement and competitiveness also enter the equation and the more competitive the nature of the individual the more driven and determined they are to reach independence and self-sufficiency.

This comes at a cost to the individual and may manifest itself in an array of stress-related disorders and conditions. These conditions and disorders may manifest themselves in psychological disorders (depression, anxiety), emotional strain (dissatisfaction, fatigue, tension), maladaptive behaviors (aggression, substance abuse) and/or cognitive impairment (concentration, memory problems).



The manifestation of these problems may lead to higher absenteeism, poor work performance, less productivity or in some cases personal injury (Colligan, Thomas W, Colligan MSW, and Higgins, M (2006) (Workplace Stress - Etiology and Consequences).

Job stress is also associated with various biological reactions that may ultimately lead to compromised health, such as cardiovascular disease, or in extreme cases, death (WHO, 2008). Due to high pressure and demands in the workplace the demands have been shown to be correlated with increased rates of heart attack, hyper tension and other disorders (WHO, 2008).

For young adults, although they may not be at the same place where hyper tension or a heart attack is threatening, the change in a relatively undistorted awareness at university can transform into distortions in awareness of self brought about by an altered environment as they move from university to the world of work, this could potentially cause more stress than the organization is aware of and should be noted as something to investigate further in potential future studies.

These young adults could potentially move into a period of maladjustment and destructive behaviors until such time as they become more familiar with the experience of the working world, and defense-free in order to allow themselves to live “the good life” (Maddi, 2001).

In the research conducted it was apparent that some of the participants felt that they were out-of-their-depth, the world that they knew at university was quite literally turned on its head and they felt like they were, to use Roger’s word; maladjusted. They expressed this through comments such as feeling alienated, confused, uncertain, bewildered, rattled, derailed and insecure. There was an incongruence between who they knew themselves to be and the experience they found themselves in. They were unsure of how to cope with this new barrage of emotions and bombardment of information, they felt that is was an ‘overload’ on all fronts.

Many young adults are not equipped, either through training or guidance to take up the challenges of the world of work versus the academic world. They are unsure of what to expect and what demands will be placed on them. The participant group felt, on the whole that they were afraid to ask questions, they were scared that it may make them look bad or incompetent and they therefore had to deal with greater anxiety which was not necessarily appropriate because they kept quiet. This change in both the environment and apparent self-actualization can cause potential stress and high levels of anxiety to the individual. It is the incongruence of self and experience that causes the stress, however, Rogers (1977) ultimately believes in the autonomy of these incongruent factors.

### **2.1.3 The transitional relationship of the academic and business worlds**

Moving from an academic environment to the work place will affect most parts of a young adults' life. The experience can be both daunting and exciting; it can be positive and negative and generally shapes the future commitment of the new recruit towards the organisation. According to Graham and McKenzie (1995) in their research paper *Delivering the promise: The transition from higher education to work*, virtually all the graduates in their research project experienced some degree of transitional problems.

Many of the graduates found that the transition was exceptionally difficult and experienced what is known as Future Shock; a term coined by writer Alvin Toffler (1965) which he described as *shattering stress* and *disorientation* that is induced on individuals by subjecting them to too much change in too short a period of time.

The study by Graham and McKenzie (1995) further investigated the transition from academia to the world of work focusing on their key issues identified as:

- Culture shock/change
- Education preparing graduates for work
- Expectations of graduates and employers
- Levels of commitment and satisfaction

The greatest change for graduates as expressed in the research of Graham and McKenzie (1995) was that of embracing the culture of the firm, as it differed so vastly from that of campus life.

The culture of an organisation will be immediately apparent as soon as the graduate walks into work for their first day. Their own culture may or may not have a place within the organisation and they may feel at odds with their surroundings.

In order to cope better with the transition, Magau (2006) suggests that one should; *open oneself up to different cultures, histories, power relations, ways of thinking, access to resources and current interests*. The individual will have to define themselves as a positive influence at these different meeting points or interactions.

Bruce (1999) further commented on the transition saying that employers are not looking for entry level workers who are “cool”, they are looking for dedicated, ambitious and focused individuals who will do their best and ultimately invest in the future of the firm. Being the hippest dresser or most popular socialiser is of little importance to the organisation.

All new hires start out on the same footing and superior academic achievement does not necessarily mean favoritism on the job. Each person has to establish themselves as credible, reliable, hard working and dependable. Employees do not treat their intake differently and they expect the individual to establish themselves, make themselves known to others and deliver what they were employed to deliver. Although organizations do not expect perfection from new employees, what they do expect is hard work, dependability, reliability and delivery.

Most young graduates struggle with finding the balance between work life and living. It is important to retain your roots says Bruce (1999).

It is important to strike a happy balance with community involvement, recreation and social involvement – some organisations are very involved in communities and community projects through Corporate Social Responsibility projects and initiatives. The Financial Services firm that agreed for me to make use of a sample from their company, is such an organization.

Involvement in these initiatives could assist with the transition for young graduates, particularly if they have had to relocate in order to accept their new job offer and have had to leave not only their own community behind, but their friends and social circle as well.

Making the transition from academia to the world of work is not easy, but it does go hand in hand with maturing into responsible adulthood. Young graduates should prepare themselves for this transition and take their rightful place in society and the business world in order to make a difference (Bruce, 1999).

Occupational stress according to the World Health Organization's (WHO) definition, occupational or work-related stress "is the response people may have when presented with work demands and pressures that are not matched to their current knowledge and abilities which challenge their ability to cope." (Global Plan of Action on Workers' Health. 2008-2017, endorsed 2007.) In this instance the related stress to starting a new job for the first time is relevant in that it covers the young graduates' inability to match their current knowledge and abilities which challenges their ability to cope. This was apparent when the one-on-one interviews were conducted with the participants. Their stress levels were (according to them) high because they felt out-of-their-depth. They were unfamiliar with how their knowledge and ability was going to assist them in *fitting in, being part of the crowd, doing the right thing*, to mention but a few participant responses.

Stress can be influenced by a large number of variables which is the result of the complex interaction of a large system of interrelated variables. Stress can come in the form of stressful job conditions or by stressors from an individuals' reaction to stress variables.

The reactions to stress can be physical, mental or emotional. Generally occupational stress can have a physiological effect on the body and also on the emotional wellbeing of the individual. There are many factors that contribute to stress in the work place, these can be excessive work load, isolation, extensive hours worked, management, lack of motivation or lack of direction in one's career.

For the purposes of the research study conducted for this paper, many of the stress variables listed above were considered in the semi-structured interview. The participants, on the whole, felt that they were immediately placed under stress due to excessive workloads, lack of direction, isolation (due to being new) and lack of clarity around expectations. Their stress often manifested itself by the participant becoming ill, either with flu-like symptoms, or excessive headaches and fatigue, lack of concentration, isolation because they didn't want to look foolish in front of new bosses, new peers and new colleagues. This often resulted in the participant being booked off for a few days to recuperate or recover. The physical manifestation was in most cases directly related to the emotional stress that the participant felt. Stress in the workplace can become distress if it is not handled properly.

It seems that distress is a prevalent and often costly problem in today's workplace. About one third of workers report high levels of stress (NIOSH, 1999, Stress at Work). According to Colligan, Thomas W, Colligan MSW, and Higgins, M (2006) (Workplace Stress - Etiology and Consequences), with continued distress at the workplace, workers will develop psychological and physiological dysfunctions and decreased motivation in excelling in their position. Increased stress at the workplace is often related to an awareness of having little control of the situation but lots of demands in the work area.

The Kenexa Research Institute (2010) released a global survey of almost 30 000 workers which showed that females suffered more workplace stress than their male counterparts.

According to the survey, women's stress levels were 10% higher for those in supervisory positions, 8% higher stress in service and production jobs than men, and 6% higher in middle and upper management than men in the same position.

In the research conducted for this paper, it was interesting to note that the male and female participants scored similarly on stress when the results were compared. It is however worthy of note that the women were far more open about how they felt about their stress and they were more willing to talk more about why they felt this way.

Many of the women participants did express concern that as they became more entrenched in the firm and more comfortable in their new roles, they feared that their male counterparts would advance faster than they would. This was not necessarily a measure in this research, but worthy of mention due to the results of the Kenexa Research Institute survey. This item may be useful to probe in future studies.

In a study conducted in June 2012, by Dr Joaquin T Limonero, a professor for the Research Group on Stress and Health at the University of Barcelona (UAB), found that there is a group (of students) who actually gain strength and grow personally from meeting adversity.

The study comprised of 254 students from the Faculty of Psychology at UAB, who were tested on different questionnaires to gauge levels of satisfaction with life and also probe connections between resilience and capacity for emotional recovery (Limonero, 2012).

The results showed that students who were more resilient (about a fifth), were more satisfied with life and also believed that they had control over their emotions and state of mind. Resilience seems to be correlated positively with satisfaction with an individual's life (Limonero, 2012).

Dr Limonero (2012) concluded that some of the characteristics of being resilient can be worked on and improved, such as self-esteem and being able to regulate one's emotions. Learning these techniques can offer people the resources needed to help them adapt and improve their quality of life. This suggests that even if some participants in the study for the research paper felt overwhelmed, stressed and emotional at starting work for the first time, this experience could potentially be a positive experience and not a negative one, based on their happiness with life in general.

According to Dr Limonero's study the participant could in fact build resilience and therefore cope better in similar situations in the future. It is important to note though that not everyone will enjoy stress, nor will they want to pursue it even if there is a potential promise of improved resilience. This particular item was not probed in the current study for this paper, again it could be useful for discussion in potential future studies.

#### **2.1.4 Practical point of departure**

There is no single pragmatic point of departure for this study of young adults moving from the world of academia to the world of work, as it is a complex and multidimensional occurrence with personal and individual experiences. Based on the research conducted for this paper, there is no common point at which psychological impact takes place, it varies from person to person, and varies in the length of time it takes to recognize the stress and begin dealing with it.

It is said that a fundamental part of the scientific method is that all hypotheses and theories must be tested against observations of the natural world, rather than resting solely on a priori reasoning (independent of experience), intuition or revelation. Science is therefore considered to be methodologically empirical in nature (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). This holds true for the research conducted for this paper, it was experimental and exploratory in nature.

In philosophy, empiricism is a theory of knowledge which asserts that knowledge arises from experience. Empiricism is one of several competing views about how we know things, and it is part of a branch of psychology called epistemology, or the theory of knowledge.

Empiricism emphasizes the role of the experience and evidence, especially sensory perception in the formation of ideas, whilst discounting the notion of innate ideas (except in so far as these might be inferred from empirical reasoning, as in the case of genetic predisposition) (Baird & Kaufmann, 2008).

Due to the dynamic nature of the transition and the numerous factors that influence this transition, empiricism being one of many rivaling views about how we know things, means that there is no single theory or model that would support the research for this paper in its entirety.

### **2.1.5 Conclusion**

Empiricism (how we know things) is a part of a branch of psychology called epistemology, or the theory of knowledge. The formalisation of the theory of constructivism, generally attributed to Jean Piaget, who expressed the methods by which knowledge is internalised by individuals and learners, is yet another branch of psychology. This too is as relevant to the psychological impact on young adults, as the theory of knowledge is the young adults starting point in understanding the world around them. This knowledge is generally internalized and learning happens when the young adult knows things and their theory of knowledge, do not coincide.

Maslow (1943) has relevance too in that his theory supports the notion that basic needs (physiological) must be met first before a person can move to the next level of safety needs. Rutledge (2011) argues that Maslow has missed the point and that in today's world connectedness is fundamental to survival, as we do not live alone. This too links to Erickson's Theory of Development where Maddi (2001) explains that a common factor in a person's development is a sense of belonging (intimacy) and connectedness.



Piaget on the other hand focuses more on the individual, almost restricting the individual's mind and thought processes to their own narrow understanding of the world. We must remember that we do not live in isolation to Rutledges's point (2011), so using any one theory, Piaget's constructivism theory for example will only be a single view of the world around us and an internalized one at that.

For the purposes of this study it is not possible to use only one philosophy of thought, or a particular theory of knowledge, there are many elements from each of the theories, papers and articles discussed above that are relevant and pertinent to this research paper.

This paper and the research that follows will draw on parts of the preceding theories, concepts and models as a basis and foundation for some of the explanations and suppositions of the research. These ideologies in part will also support the more hypothetical findings of the study and in the final chapter, a link with certain of the theories and ideologies will be made to associate the research findings with the theories in the formerly referenced chapter.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **MEASUREMENT INSTRUMENT**

#### **3.1 INTRODUCTION TO USING QUALITATIVE QUESTIONNAIRES**

By definition, qualitative research is exploratory in nature. It is a method which makes use of in-depth interviews or focus groups to gain insights and achieve a better understanding of individuals' views, feelings or opinions. For this reason, the qualitative method was used for this research paper. The very nature of the topic for the research required a better understanding and more in-depth appreciation of the participants' views, ideas, feelings, reactions, personal opinion and experiences.

Qualitative analysis differs from quantitative analysis in so far as the sample size differs, the nature and structure of the questions differ and most importantly the central reason behind conducting the research differs. There are some fundamental differences between qualitative and quantitative research and these lie primarily in the level of assumption about the research (epistemological and ontological) rather than the level of the data itself.

The level of assumption lies in the epistemological branch of philosophy that studies the nature of knowledge, in particular its foundations, scope, and validity and the ontological, which is the most general branch of metaphysics, concerned with the nature of being. In other words, the assumption about the research data lies in the researcher's epistemological and ontological references and view of the world; that is their view of the nature of knowledge and the nature of being.

Many researchers and writers alike, believe that the qualitative-quantitative debate is philosophical and not methodological (Trochim, 2006). Many qualitative researchers believe that the best way to understand any phenomenon is to view it in context.

Quantitative information therefore is seen as limited in nature, looking only at one small portion of a reality that cannot be separated into more meaningful segments without losing the whole experience.

Qualitative researchers on the whole are flexible in their enquiry about people in context rather than approaching measurement with the idea of constructing a fixed instrument or set of questions. Many qualitative researchers operate under different ontological assumptions about the world. They do not assume that there is one single reality in the world. Each person experiences a different reality and as such, by conducting research where this is ignored, it violates the fundamental views of the individual (Trochim, 2006).

There are merits associated to both qualitative and quantitative approaches to research and the interpretation of the data can only be translated as accurately as possible by the researcher, taking into account a degree of subjectivity and the inherent limitations and complex assumptions beneath all numbers and data (Trochim, 2006).

Either way; both qualitative and quantitative research methods have their limits and merits. In many ways it is advantageous to the research in question where both methods are used and therefore the results will reflect the advantages of each method.

### **3.1.1 Reasons for using qualitative questionnaires for this study**

The emphasis for this particular research needed to be on the quality of meaning; the richness of the information gathered and the meaning that each individual assigned to a certain situation or set of circumstances through their own understanding of it, their experience of it or their perceptions and attitude towards it. The qualitative approach was used so that the research data could provide highlights as to why an individual behaved in a certain way and not another, or why certain circumstances affected one individual more than another.

The one-on-one interviews used in the study was to provide information and insight into the psychological impact on young adults as they transition from academia to the business world. The use of the qualitative questionnaires provided a platform for a systematic enquiry aimed specifically at examining the psychological impact on young adults during their transition to work.

The very nature of the qualitative method included non-structured procedures which allowed the semi-structured questionnaires to be utilised for maximum accumulation of information from the participants.

The structure of the design of the research questionnaire provided a starting point to guide the interaction between the researcher and the participant. The purpose was to assist the participant in feeling relaxed, comfortable and safe enough to be open to the questions that were posed. The reason this was done was to allow the participant to relax and in so doing provide information and feedback that was as individualistic as possible, personal in nature, honest and indicative of the person's own experience.

The focus was primarily on the individual and the questions asked needed to be open-ended so that the information that was collected during the interview was as honest and unique to that particular individual as possible.

The very nature of these semi-structured interviews allowed the participants time to reflect and provide insightful information to the researcher. The researcher in turn had the opportunity to probe, or ask more direct questions which the respondent could elaborate on. Although this method is often time consuming, it does allow for more thorough questioning of specific topics and personal views or experiences. It provides a richness of opinion that would not necessarily be available using alternative methods such as quantitative research for example.

Qualitative research allows the focus to remain on the individual and their own experience, their own understanding and the effect that different situations had on them personally.

The meaning that is uncovered and discovered within the information collected is rich, incredibly valuable and often has deep and significant meaning.

In order to fully discover and uncover the richness within the research data it is necessary to further examine it by way of in-depth analysis. By exploring the data further, examining it and analysing it, the findings will expand in depth and breadth. In order to get the most out of the data in terms of meaning and value it must be thoroughly examined by way of content analysis, and /or thematic analysis. In the research conducted for this paper thematic analysis was used to gather meaningful information from the data.

### **3.1.2 Potential problems with qualitative questionnaires**

Qualitative research means any type of research that produces findings that are not arrived at by using statistical methods or any other means of calculation or measure.

Qualitative research refers to research about people's lives, their experiences, feelings, behaviours, and emotions. It is not measured through statistical data and it is largely interpretive and deductive in nature. It is decoded and deciphered by a non-mathematical process of interpretation that is carried out to discover concepts and relationships in raw data and then organised into a theoretical explanatory scheme (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

One of the reasons, and probably the most compelling reason for using the qualitative research method is the research problem. In the case of the research completed for this paper, the research problem itself was an attempt to understand the meaning or the nature of the experience of the respondents with problems that they faced personally. Often qualitative research will be used in cases such as chronic illnesses, addiction or emotionally based issues as it lends itself to getting out there, to getting into the field and finding out what people are doing and thinking (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

Qualitative methods are most often used to explore substantive areas about which little is known or about which a lot is known in order to gain new or fresh understanding. In addition to this, qualitative research methods can be used to obtain complex details about phenomena such as feelings, emotions, thought processes and opinions that are difficult to extract or learn about through more conventional research methods.

According to Strauss and Corbin (1990), there are basically three major components of qualitative research. First, there is the data, which can come from various sources such as observations, documents, records, interviews and recordings.

Second are the procedures that researchers can use to interpret and organise the data. These procedures usually consist of conceptualising and reducing data, elaborating categories in terms of their properties and dimensions and relating these through a series of prepositional statements. Conceptualising, reducing, elaborating and relating are often referred to as coding. Other procedures are part of the analytical process which includes non-statistical sampling, writing of memos and diagramming.

The third component is made up of written and/or verbal reports. These are often presented as articles in scientific journals, in talks and presentations or in books (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

There are many different types of approaches to doing qualitative research; one approach is “grounded theory”. According to Corbin and Strauss (1990), Grounded Theory means theory that was derived from data, systematically gathered and analysed through the research process. In this method, data collection, analysis and eventual theory stand in close relationship to one another.

A researcher does not begin a project with a preconceived theory in mind (unless his or her purpose is to elaborate and extend existing theory).

Rather, the researcher begins with an area of study and allows theory to emerge from the data. Theory derived from data is more likely to resemble the “reality” than theory derived by putting together a series of concepts based on experience or solely through speculation (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

Grounded theories, because they are drawn from data, are likely to offer insight, enhance understanding, and provide a meaningful guide to action.

Qualitative evaluation draws on both creative and critical thinking during the process of analysis; there is an interplay between the researcher and the data. It is both science and art. It is science in the sense of maintaining a degree of rigor and by grounding analysis in data. Creativity is in the ability of the researcher, to appropriately name categories, ask stimulating questions, make comparisons, and extract an innovative, integrated, realistic scheme from masses of unorganised raw data. “It is the balance between science and creativity that we strive for in doing research” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

Quantitative research in contrast is fairly inflexible. This type of research generally tries to confirm the hypotheses about phenomena. The instruments used are more rigid in that they elicit information and categorise responses to questions, they also require a fixed response, so the questions are not open-ended. They use highly structured methods of data collection through the use of questionnaires, surveys or structured observation.

Quantitative research aims to classify features, count them and construct statistical models in an attempt to explain what is observed. The data is in the form of numbers and statistics and is more generalizable. For the most part, researchers tend to remain objective and separated from the subject matter (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

The very nature of the qualitative method used in research includes non-structured procedures. The research design for the purposes of this study was in the form of semi-structured interviews, conducted on a one-on-one basis.

The data was collected by means of the empirical (observed, first-hand or experimental) research method.

The research questionnaire was designed so that the questions were open-ended and the participants could provide their own personal experiences. Due to the exploratory nature of the study, the results cannot be generalised to all cultures and all races. Further studies may need to be considered using a much larger sample and the introduction of a quantitative element should not be ruled out.

### **3.1.3 Qualitative versus Quantitative research**

The qualitative versus quantitative research debate is an on-going one. It is complicated as there are many schools and sub-schools of thought on the topic. Most researchers will have a preference and a tendency to make use of one method above the other; this is not to say that either method is inferior or less valuable.

In all research the questions to be answered are either to prove or disprove the hypothesis. In the case of qualitative research, the question “why?” is of paramount importance. Qualitative researchers are not prepared to accept quantitative answers, answers which on the whole come from close-ended questions which limit the responded answers to certain alternatives. This does not mean that quantitative data is not important, it means that more detail around the “why?” question needs to be acquired. For this research paper it was important to understand why the respondents felt the way that they did, why they were in the situations they found themselves in and what had brought them to that place in the first instance. The only way to better understand the ‘why’ and ‘how’ of the participants in this study was to elicit information from them. Close attention needed to be paid to individual cases and the need to understand those individual cases was vital.



When dealing with people, it is not possible to be exact; people change, situations change, views change, some views conflict and so do social situations, thus it is too complex an animal for pure numerical description.

Qualitative research does not attempt to create objective knowledge, it is much softer. It does not avoid the complexity of social life, instead great lengths and efforts are made to highlight and understand the complexity of human feelings through involvement and in-depth detailed exploration. The way in which qualitative researchers might transfer research findings from one situation to another is done through generalisation (McBride & Schostak, 1995).

In order to fully understand the psychological impact on young adults as they moved from an academic environment into a business one, it was necessary to ask questions that relate to meaning - what it means to be part of a certain group, or how the respondents felt about a particular situation. In order to find out what it was like for them, it was necessary to ask them and to observe what they did, and how they answered the question. This opportunity to observe is what provided the wealth of information obtained during the research process.

In qualitative research the researcher needs to be a good listener and have some flexibility as they listen to the respondents and probe for more information or explanation. Dialogue between the researcher and the respondent is therefore a critical element and the qualitative researcher needs to always be available and willing to engage in discussion with all the participants (Mc Bride & Schostak, 1995).

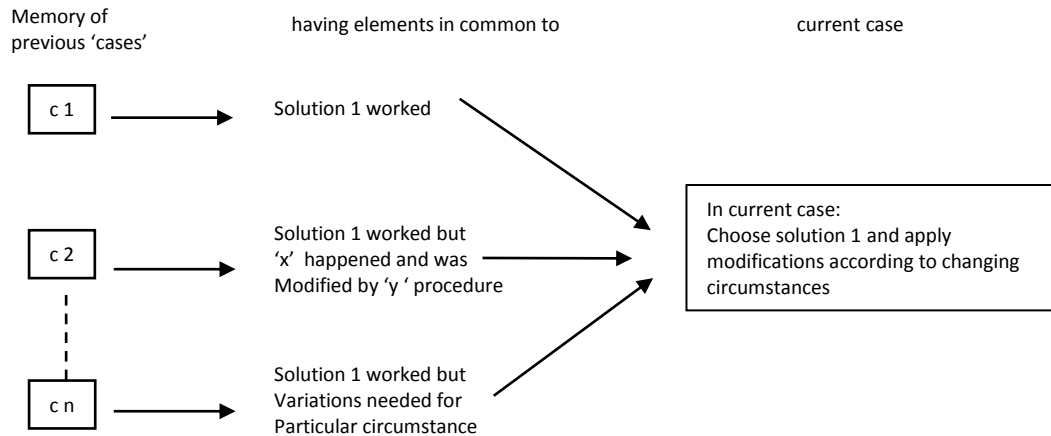
During the research process it is sometimes difficult for the researcher to remain neutral and ignore their own views and traditional beliefs. McBride and Schostak (1995) are of the view that rather than suppress traditional and personal views, qualitative researchers tend to draw attention to them. This form of reflection allows the reader to judge the biases and position of the researcher and simultaneously allows the researcher the opportunity to rigorously explore their own interpretation of the data collected.

In qualitative research it is important that the relationship between theory and practice interact. Qualitative researchers are concerned about building theory from a basis of experience of the practitioner, to research different levels of interaction, to focus on the everyday or routine.

Qualitative researchers do not look for detachment or impartiality like most quantitative researchers tend to do. They seek to provide information and findings that are familiar to the subjects of the research, thus providing a platform for not only action but potential change as well. The qualitative research for this study was person-centred (Maddi, 2011) and structured in such a way that the individual was at the centre of the study. The notion that each individual is unique and part of a social environment as well, was important to take into account during the research. This phenomenon was used because it ties in well with the concept of social constructivism and discussed in the literature chapter earlier in the paper.

If we take into account Paiget's theory of adaptation and organization (1985), we are conscious of the individuals past as well as their current experiences. The research for this paper used the concept of adaptation and organization when discussing the young graduates' move from academia to the business world. It was interesting to note that although most of the participants drew on their past experiences (some expecting work to be similar to university), they tried to assimilate their university experience and work experience. This resulted in many of them being not only disappointed, but feeling out of their depth and vulnerable in their new situation of work. The outcome was a relatively steep learning curve for most of the participants as they had to not only adapt to their new situation, but also learn from their failure to organize their past into their present reality.

When making decisions, for the most part we inadvertently draw upon our past experiences. We come to a conclusion by reasoning that: If I did X on a previous occasion in a similar situation, then if I do the same thing in this similar situation it should be the correct conclusion or decision.



### **Illustration 3. Generalising from Cases**

(Reworked from: Qualitative versus quantitative research: McBride & Schostak (1995))

The above diagram illustrates that no matter how similar a situation may be; no case is identical. It is important then to not only recognise the similarities, but to note the differences as well. This is true for the research conducted for this paper, the participants had similar responses in some cases, yet no two responses were the same.

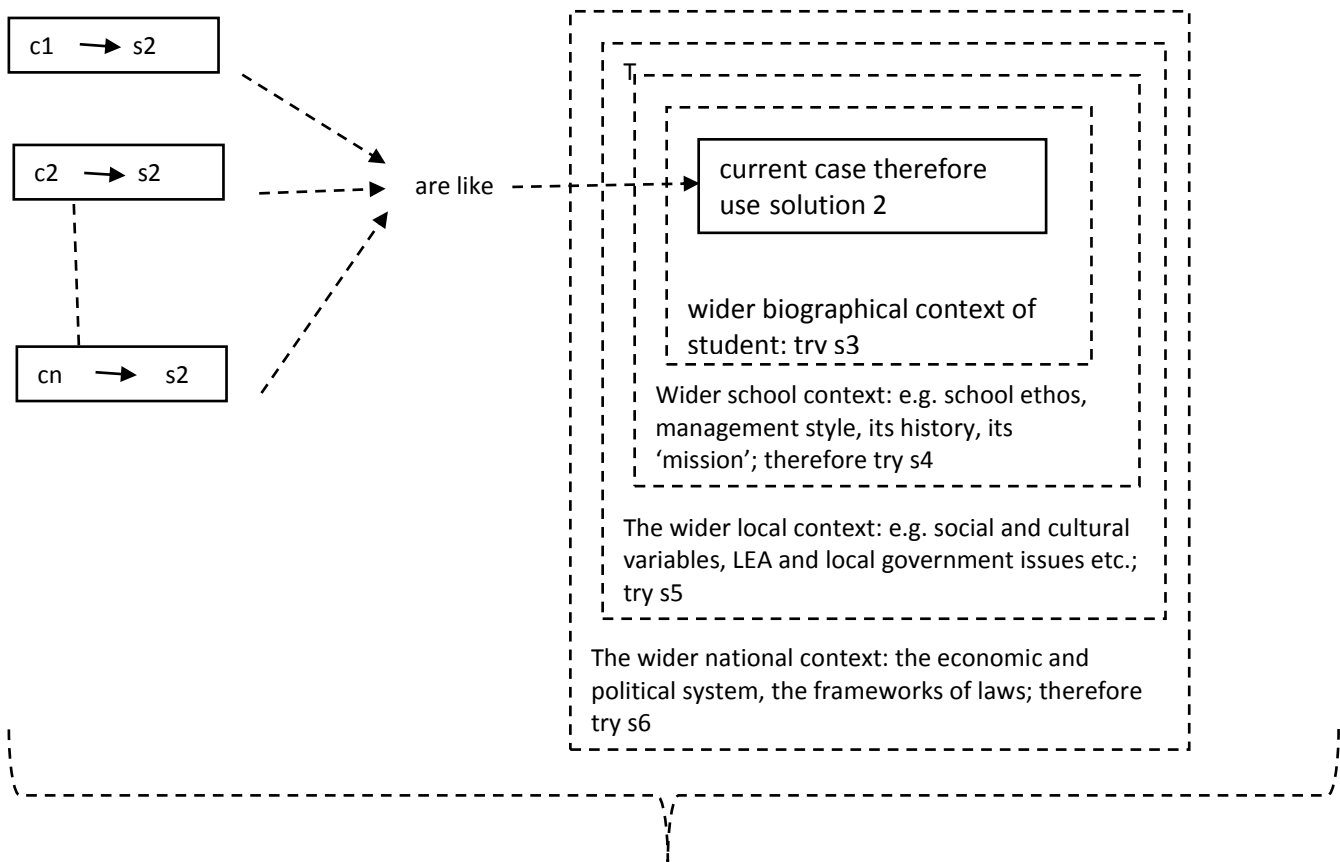
Each person had their own individual experience and although there were many common themes that came from the research, they remained personal and individualised. The use of the semi-structured interviews allowed for each interview to be unique and to provide not only similarities within the participant group but differences as well.

Over many years of research and experience, and over time, researchers do tend to generalise across cases to formulate general principles and categories of explanations, even theories as a basis for organising experiences about current cases (Mc Bride & Schostak, 1995).

By making use of this prior knowledge, experience and research information, strategies could be developed to assist in various similar situations in the future.

If, for example, the findings from this research were used to assist young adults with their transition to a world of work, through practice, prior experience and knowledge, techniques may be used and built upon to manage the new challenges facing new recruits the following year.

By broadening the current view of the participants in this study for example, it becomes possible to draw on previous knowledge that is potentially more extensive than the immediate situation, viewing the individual in their new context.



**Illustration 4. Professional critique applied to the whole**

(Reworked from: Qualitative versus quantitative research: McBride & Schostak (1995))

By using the model above, it highlights that rather than focussing on the new employees as the source of the problem, the organisation should be able to apply a professional assessment of the new employees in context. By continuing to build on these and similar situations an increasingly sophisticated analysis of the working environment can be made, and the evidence base upon which the professional decision makers draw, will expand to include information not previously considered. As a result, the quality of decision making improves, and in this case the integration of new recruits becomes less stressful for them and the psychological impact on the new recruits is more understandable and therefore more manageable.

By allowing theories to form and evolve through what people say and do, qualitative research cannot be accused of imposing its theories upon others. Equally by keeping detailed records of what is said and what happens, qualitative research does not reduce the complexity of social life to easily manipulated equations. Rutledge (2011) in her 'rewiring' of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, discusses this particular complexity of 'social networks'. Rutledge (2011) is of the opinion that before anything else, in this day and age, social connectedness is the most important factor for young people. The research findings for this paper highlighted the fact that the participants on the whole wanted to feel like they belong, that they are in some way safe and have a sense of connectedness to their environment. The participant group was familiar with Twitter, Facebook, Blogging and the tools available to connect them to their friends, the outside world and new information. They expected that their new world of work would be the same and the same social connectedness would exist.

In terms of qualitative research, McBride and Schostak (1995) explain the social connectedness in another way; rather than skating on the surface of everyday life, it is close contact and detailed recording that allows the research to glimpse beneath polished rhetoric, or plausible deceits; it is able to spend more time focusing upon the smaller, yet powerful process which other methods gloss over or ignore. This type of research allows the researcher to better understand the importance of topical issues, like social connectedness for example.

### **3.2 CONCLUSION**

The use of qualitative questionnaires for this paper provided a platform for a systematic enquiry aimed at examining the psychological impact on young adults during their transition from the world of academia to the business world. The use of semi-structured questionnaires allowed for individualistic and personal responses, indicative of the person's own experience. The very nature of the qualitative method included non-structured procedures which allowed for in-depth discussion and potential theories to form and evolve through what the participants did or said.

The aim of the study was to provide information and insight into the psychological impact on young adults as they transition from academia to the business world. Although no absolute conclusions were drawn from the qualitative study used for this paper, the measurement instrument was extremely valid for the topic chosen as it allowed the researcher to probe, question and delve deeper into the meaning of the feedback and responses from the participants.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **4.1 INTRODUCTION TO THE METHODOLOGY**

Methodology is the defining aspect of research; it can produce results that are reliable and valid if the method used is appropriate for that particular study. If the research method used is unstable or inappropriately chosen, then the results produced will also be unstable and generally inappropriate.

Research, according to Paul Gerhardt (2004) is the foundation of modern organizational science in academics; in other words he is saying that research is the basis for knowledge, information or data in learning or education. He goes on to say that its goal is to empower individuals and nations alike with growth, achieved through acquired empirical wisdom. When done efficiently, research can be conducted much like peeling an onion. In the course of each layer shed, new directions, new perspectives and new truths are revealed. Similarly, research is like walking through a maze that sometimes takes the researcher on roads that seem to lead nowhere, generate new questions for them to pursue or reward them with the satisfaction of coming to the end of a journey with new enlightenment that cannot seem to be contradicted (Gerhardt, 2004). The diversity in the science of research methodology paves the way to discovery, growth and empowerment. It is however the research itself that should determine the method of research (Ulmer & Wilson, 2003).

#### **4.2 OVERVIEW**

The research methodology chosen for this research paper was specific in the in-depth, person-centred information was required. The research method used for this study was of particular importance as the value of the research findings lay in the value of the interviews.

In theoretical terms, research can be defined as the search for knowledge, or as any systematic investigation, to establish novel facts, solve new or existing problems, prove new ideas, or develop new theories using a scientific method. The primary purpose for basic research is discovering, interpreting and developing new methods and systems for the advancement of human knowledge on a variety of scientific matters in our world and universe (Trochim, 2006).

The purpose of this overview is to touch on the processes of modern research methodologies, briefly including qualitative and quantitative approaches, and some definitions of research concepts are provided to illustrate the strengths and weaknesses commonly attributed to each method.

Pursuing a better understanding of research methods through examining methods of investigative study are influenced by trends in both science and society, which make research challenging and often widely debated, though rich and rewarding (Cooper & Schindler, 2003; Creswell, 2003). Research results do not always reflect a definitive answer with clearly revealed conclusions, and in fact, often seem to generate more questions than they answer (Gerhardt, 2004). Sometimes research proves that more investigation is required, or more information is necessary to draw definitive or precise conclusions. This may also result in new hypotheses or new theories being developed. In addition, further research may reveal that there is more than one correct answer to the research questions (Gerhardt, 2004).

The research conducted for this paper was no different from the findings of Gerhardt (2004). The research did provide a definitive result, it did however highlight that further research was needed in order to address the issues that were raised during the interviews. The research did highlight that there is in fact a noteworthy amount of stress that the participants felt in entering the work force for the first time. Much of their stress and anxiety was not realised by them until further discussion took place and probing questions asked by the researcher.



Many of the participants did not necessarily equate their feelings of stress to entering the work place but they did feel that somewhere it must have had an impact, the extent of the impact was in general underplayed initially by most of the participants.

Interpretation of information is generally not particularly straightforward and it may even take multiple forms. It is through varying methods or integrating methods that information can be interpreted and derived in its complexity (Gerhardt, 2004). The research themes that were deduced from the participant interviews was established through thematic analysis. In reviewing the findings and perusing the comments from the interview data, it became apparent that Psychological Impact for example came in many forms and descriptors from the participants, and was often described as some form of stress. This stress factor was generally high in most instances and fell under the theme of Psychological Impact. There were twenty three (23) items relating to stress that fell into the category of Psychological Impact for example.

It was evident to the researcher that for the purposes of this research, a qualitative method had to have been where participants were interviewed on a one-on-one basis. If another methodology was used for this particular study it may not have provided the richness in the data that was ultimately concluded.

Davies (2003), Creswell (2003), and many others, suggest that research requires either qualitative, quantitative or both types of data. The purpose of the research and the questions posed should direct what approach to take as the researcher looks for where and how to search for more data. For example, research questions at the heart of qualitative studies often enquire into the processes associated with change, or individuals making sense of certain situations or circumstances. Conversely, quantitative studies are typically geared towards revealing relationships between variables as measured by central tendencies in a data set (Gerhardt, 2004). Very often, variations of data collection and analysis methods are used when designing and drawing conclusions in a study.

Recording of the data was done with a pre-designed questionnaire where both observations and interview data was recorded. Established interview protocols were provided so that the structure to the interviews guided the discussion. Protocols such as a specific research brief with specific questions to guide the interviewer were recommended. These protocols also enabled the interviewer to take notes on the responses of the participants during the interview. They also assisted the researcher in organising thoughts on items such as headings, ways for starting the interview and concluding ideas in a conversation with time constraints (Creswell, 2003). Audio recordings were also valuable for validity reasons as they allowed answers to be transcribed verbatim.

The research method used in this study was Thematic Analysis as it generally lends itself well to qualitative research approaches. The assumption of this research was that there is a noteworthy psychological impact on young adults as they move from the world of academia to the business world. If this is true and there is a potential relationship between the psychological impact of leaving an academic institution and starting work in a business environment for the first time, the result would then be the starting point from which the relationship can be investigated further and its underlying connections studied to possibly determine the reason for and direction of the relationship.

Qualitative and quantitative research methods both have individual strengths and weaknesses. Evaluating the strengths and weaknesses of each approach involves a form a qualitative research in itself. Importantly, employing properly designed research strategies (e.g., in data collection and analysis), while meeting the needs of each research project; often determines whether the research will be fruitful (Creswell & Miller, 2000).

In fact, qualitative data often needs to be supplemented with quantitative methods, and vice versa, in order to reveal different learnings from the research (Ulmer & Wilson, 2003). Clearly, there is a need for both quantitative and qualitative research, as their relative strengths complement the weaknesses of the other.

In the research conducted for this study, only the qualitative method has been used. The purposes of this study, was in fulfilment of the mini dissertation for academic purposes and did not allow for both qualitative and quantitative research to be commissioned. However if the study were to be repeated, both qualitative and quantitative data gathering would be preferable. Both qualitative and quantitative methods have merits of their own. Quantitative research provides breadth of information whilst qualitative research is valuable in its depth and in its ability to uncover and interpret mechanisms behind behaviours (Gerhardt, 2004).

Qualitative research, as has been mentioned provides a more holistic examination of data; it is usually based on interviews, observations or focus groups. It usually focuses on life-experiences, social processes, organisational structures and settings (Strauss and Corbin, 1990).

#### **4.2.1 Type of design used in this study**

For the purposes of this study, the research design can be seen as an empirical research design as it makes use of an interview guide, the data can be categorised as qualitative, thematic analyses is used and it falls within the lowest levels of control that is; exploratory research.

Thematic analysis is generally used in qualitative research to focus on and examine themes within data. This method uses rich descriptions of the data set to identify implicit and explicit ideas within data. The research for this paper was conducted through semi-structured interviews so that in-depth and rich information could be attained through the interview process. The nature of the research topic dictated that discussion, probing, exploring and questioning was necessary in order to gain insight and the deeper understanding of the issues and concerns that the participants had when starting work for the first time. By using this method of research it was possible to extract common themes from the research data and recognise common concerns and problems that the participants were experiencing.

The first step in the process was coding the data, this was the primary process for developing themes within the raw data by recognising important instances in the data and encoding it prior to interpretation (Boyatzis, 1998).

The interpretation of the codes included comparing theme occurrences, identifying theme incidence rates and collating the information. This was done in a graphic format, making it easier to see visually the prominent themes and data information. Thematic analysis was used primarily to ensure that the richness and the intricate meaning within the data set was captured.

Data sets for thematic research purposes can be made up of various elements. Texts can range from a single word response to an open-ended question or even as complex as a body of data containing thousands of pages (Boyatzis, 1998). As can be expected, data analysis strategies will most likely vary according to size. Most qualitative researchers analyse and transcribe in-depth interviews, sometimes as long as 2 hours in length, resulting in many, many pages (roughly 40 pages) of transcribed data per respondent. It is also important to note that the complexity of the data will vary according to the complexity of the study.

Thematic analysis takes the concept of supporting assertions within data from Grounded Theory. Grounded Theory is a qualitative research approach that was originally developed by Glaser and Strauss in the 1960's (Trochim, 2006). The self-defined purpose of Grounded Theory is to develop theory about phenomena of interest. It is not just abstract theorising, instead the theory needs to be grounded or rooted in observation; hence the term.

Grounded Theory is a complex, iterative process. The research begins with the raising of generative questions which helps to guide the research but are not intended to be either static or confining (Trochim, 2006). As the researcher begins to gather data, core theoretical concept(s) are identified. Tentative linkages are developed between the theoretical core concepts and the data.

This early phase of the research tends to be very open and can take a long time. Later on the researcher is more engaged in verification and summary. The efforts tend to evolve towards one core category that is central (Trochim, 2006). This type of research (Grounded Theory) is designed to construct theories that are grounded in data themselves (Charmaz, 2006).

This concept is reflective in thematic analysis because the process consists of reading transcripts, identifying possible themes, comparing and contrasting themes and building theoretical models (Guest and MacQueen, 2012).

Thematic analysis is also related to phenomenology in that it focuses on the human experience subjectively (Guest and MacQueen, 2012). This approach emphasises the participants' feelings, experiences, perception and/or insight as being the paramount objective of the study. Rooted in humanistic psychology, phenomenology notes giving voice to the "other" key component in qualitative research in general. This allows the respondents to discuss the topic in their own words, free of constraints from fixed-response questions found in quantitative studies (Guest and MacQueen, 2012).

Like most research methods, this process of data analysis can occur in two primary ways; inductively and deductively (Braun and Clarke, 2006). In an inductive approach, the themes identified are strongly linked to the data because assumptions are data-driven. This means that coding can take place without the researcher trying to fit the data into pre-existing models or frameworks. It is important to note that throughout this inductive process, the researcher cannot possibly free themselves from their theoretical, epistemological responsibilities (Braun and Clarke, 2006). In other words the researcher will always investigate the origin, nature, methods and limits of human knowledge.

Deductive approaches on the other hand, are theory-driven (Crabtree, 1999). This form of analysis tends to be less descriptive overall because analysis is limited to preconceived frames, or set structures.

The results therefore tend to focus on one or two specific aspects of the data that were determined prior to the data analysis. The choice between these two approaches generally depends on the researchers' epistemologies (Boyatzis, 1998).

For the purposes of this particular research study, an inductive approach was taken as the information from the participants could not be based on a particular theory, and the assumptions were data-driven.

The research design and methodology aimed to investigate and examine the potential relationship between the psychological impact and the transition of young adults from academia into the business world. The interviews were used to probe the participant's reasons for their feedback and to question and search for their own personal meaning in the responses given.

The study served as an initial investigation, an exploration of a potential way to examine the relationship of the psychological impact of transition from academia to the business world. The purpose of the study was to begin penetrating the reasons behind the responses from the participants as they pertain to the psychological impact of their transition to the business world from an academic one.

In order to explore the psychological impact the transition had on the participants, the study focused on a qualitative method to gather the necessary data that could be further examined and collated to produce findings that were relevant and (hopefully) insightful. It is important to note that the qualitative method chosen for this research, meant that the findings were not arrived at by using statistical methods or any other means of calculation or mathematical measure.

This research method was flexible in nature and non-mathematical in its application. The results were thus interpreted cautiously and the methodology evaluated for flaws so that improved studies could be conducted in the future.

### **4.2.2 Validity issues**

A primary objective of research is to draw a single conclusion or explanation of the findings and factors that may have caused the results. In this particular research, a single conclusion or conclusive explanation of the findings was not possible as there were many factors of influence on the participants during their transition which was reflected in the findings.

### **4.2.3 Conclusion**

The exploratory research used for this paper lends itself well to a qualitative research design in order to collect data from interviews and observation so that patterns, similarities and differences can be used to develop a theory based on the findings as there is no pre-set hypothesis.

It is worthy of note that non-experimental design is an integral part of psychological research, as there are phenomena that cannot be studied in a true experimental fashion. Non-experimental designs are more flexible in nature and provide the researcher with the opportunity to explore various aspects of the research questions in a more flexible manner. Quantitative research by comparison usually begins with a hypothesis, which is tested by running data through statistical analysis, leading to the development of a theory that either refutes or confirms the hypothesis.

## **4.3 PARTICIPANTS AND DATA COLLECTION**

The participants were selected from a group of young graduates who had recently joined a financial services firm in Johannesburg. The firm was originally an Audit Firm primarily, and now offers a wide range of Tax and Advisory services as well. The sample was a simple random sample drawn from young graduates who had recently joined the firm.

The recent graduates and newly recruited staff were asked to please express interest if they wanted to participate in the study. The first 16 participants that responded were accepted and taken in to participate in the study. These graduates had been with the firm for no longer than one year and not less than six months. The reason for this was that the researcher wanted the participants to have had some experiences in the working world, but not so long ago that they had forgotten their initial and earlier introduction to the world of work from an academic environment.

The sample consisted of participants ranging in age from 21 to 29 years old and the participants came from mixed cultural backgrounds and were of mixed gender. The reasoning for the mixed cultural backgrounds, ages and gender was to try and get as representative a sample as possible of the firm's new graduate joiners. The choice of mixed gender was to ensure unbiased views which could have been gender specific; the same is relevant to the choice of mixed cultural backgrounds. The participants were given the option to participate or to decline participation in the study once they were taken through the methodology of the study.

#### **4.3.1 Procedure for data collection**

Data collection was by means of an individual, semi-structured, one-on-one interview. There was one interviewer (the researcher) who conducted all the interviews; extensive notes and recordings were made during the interview process. All participants were interviewed from the same set of open-ended questions. The research questionnaire was designed in such a way that it was used as a starting point to guide the interaction between the researcher and participant.

The focus of the research was on the individual and the information collected during the interview process. The interviews were semi-structured and the questions open-ended, allowing for unrestricted answering and opinion of the participants.



The gathering of the information was through the interview process, making notes and recording the conversations. The research data collected was thoroughly analyzed by means of coding and thematic analyses.

As discussed earlier in this chapter, Thematic Analysis according to Braun and Clarke (2006) is a qualitative, analytical method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data. At its minimum, it organises and describes a data set in rich detail. It does however frequently go further than purely organising and describing data, and interprets various aspects of the research topic as well (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The themes extrapolated capture a specific element relevant to the research question. Patterns in the responses started forming, and responses have similar meaning within a data set.

Braun and Clarke (2006) suggest a 'guide' with six phases to conducting thematic analysis. They are, (1) Becoming familiar with the data, (2) Generating initial codes, (3) Searching for themes, (4) Reviewing themes (5) Defining and naming themes, and finally (6) Producing the report.

The analysis of the data collected for this research was executed by way of coding the information into categories, looking for similarities and differences amongst the data so that patterns and themes could be extracted from the findings and named according to main themes and sub themes.

The main themes that were extrapolated were those themes that recurred on a regular and a notably frequent basis. From the main themes, sub themes were then noted and were highlighted under the main themes. The research data and information from the interviews was used as a suggested measurement of the relevant and main themes, as well as sub themes, thus providing information for thematic analysis.

All participants were assured of anonymity in the reporting of results and findings of the research, and as such were encouraged to speak honestly and freely, expressing their own personal views and perspectives.

The participants all signed consent forms before the research was conducted and it was explained to them that high level findings, such as the main themes would be presented back to the firm. No names or specifics about individuals would be divulged either in the report or in any discussion following the final report.

### **4.3.2 Small sample studies**

Naturally if one could gain access to an entire population it would be ideal but this is a very rare possibility. In light of this a subset of subjects, indicative of the given population is selected; this is called a sample (Lunsford & Lunsford, 1995). Before conducting a study it is necessary to ask two pertinent questions;

- (a) How many subjects will I need to complete my study?
- (b) How will I select my sample? (Lunsford & Lunsford, 1995).

Most researchers have constraints such as limited access to funds, thus necessitating smaller sample sizes. In this research study there were only a limited number of young adults, newly recruited into the firm and therefore the sample size was determined by the recruitment process and acceptance of positions by these young adults. The small sample size was also dictated by the purpose of this paper as fulfilment of a mini-dissertation for the purposes of requirements of the degree MA Research Psychology.

## **4.4 DATA ANALYSIS**

### **4.4.1 Practical aspects of data gathering**

The data gathering was very time consuming. Each interview lasted for anything between 60 and 90 minutes depending on the interaction, engagement and talkative nature of the participant. The interviews were conducted at the convenience of the participants and at times had to be re-scheduled several times in order for their work priorities to take precedence.

The interviews were conducted making use of a semi-structured set of questions. All the interviews covered all the questions, it was unstructured in that the participants were permitted to share as much or as little information as they wanted to. Some participants wanted to expand on the questions and explore some aspects that were not part of the set questions, this was acceptable and tolerated due to the nature of the interviews and the methodology that was used.

On the whole, the participants appeared to be relaxed and many of them said that the discussion in itself had helped and assisted them with some of the anxiety and stress they felt on entering the work place from their academic institution. Most of the participants expressed the opinion that they enjoyed having the discussion and that it was a welcome opportunity to express how they were feeling as well as vocalise their experiences of the move from academia to the business world.

The questionnaire that was used is attached in Appendix A for ease of reference. The questions were based on the personal experiences of the participants and their own reactions and feelings as they transitioned to the business world. The questions were specific to their initial encounter of the business world, the firm, the people they were exposed to and the general feeling of the environment. Appendix B contains samples of actual transcripts for information and examples of some of the data recorded during the interviews. The main themes are discussed by way of in-depth descriptions of the themes and sub-themes in the chapter that follows.

#### **4.4.2 Limitations of the study**

Due to the exploratory nature of the study, the results cannot be generalised to all cultures, all races and all young adults. Further studies will most likely be needed to consider a larger sample and possibly the introduction of a quantitative element to the research. This will be discussed in the final discussions of this paper.

## 4.5 CONCLUSION

The aim of this study was to better understand the psychological impact on young adults as they transition from academia to the business world. No absolute conclusions could be drawn from this study and the study as it stands is not conclusive; however the findings are indicative of a relationship between the psychological impact on young adults and the transition that they undergo in joining the world of formal employment for the first time.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **RESULTS**

#### **5.1 SAMPLE**

To select the sample group of participants for the research, it was necessary to attain permission from a financial services firm in Johannesburg. The sample was drawn as a simple random sample from young graduates who had recently joined the firm. The graduates had been working at the firm for no longer than one year and no less than six months.

Once selected, all the participants in the sample were given the option to participate or decline participation in the study. Those that participated all signed consent forms and agreed to the usage of the findings for the purpose of this dissertation, potential further studies in the future should the need arise and well as head line findings provided to the firm should they require this information.

The sample was made up of sixteen individuals from mixed cultural backgrounds (all English speaking even though English may not have been their first language), mixed gender, mixed qualifications and between the ages of 21 and 29 years old. The graduates were all in the transition phase of the world of academia to the business world. The choice of mixed gender was to ensure unbiased views that could have otherwise been gender specific; the same is relevant to the choice of mixed cultural backgrounds and the choice of age range.

##### **5.1.1 Descriptive findings from the sample data**

The following section describes the data collected from the semi-structured interviews and provides data and comparative information for the analysis of the various themes that were extrapolated from the research data. These findings are descriptive in nature and are therefore not statistical in any way.

Thematic analysis was used for this research due to the very nature of the questions posed during the interviews. These questions led to thematic analysis being the most appropriate way to group and translate the data into meaningful units. Thematic analysis was used to draw out the main themes from the interview data and then further used to translate these themes into comparative graphs which follow. The graphs and pie charts are comparative in nature so that the relationship between the various themes as they relate to one another can be easily seen. The graphs also provide information to ascertain what the relationship was amongst the themes as they relate to transition from an academic world to a business one.

Further to this, the main objective was to try and find the most common, or highest scoring items that related to transition and the impact of this transition on young graduates as they began their working careers.

The graphs one to seven, display the demographic nature of the sample. This includes gender, race, degree choice, living arrangements, university attended, age and marital status. The demographic data assists in framing the sample group as young adults with similarities, yet also taking into account many diversities amongst the sample. The main reason for including the demographic data was to ensure as fair a representation as possible across the population of recent young graduates moving to a working environment, taken from the firm involved. The sample size was very small and it was relevant in this instance to attain as representative a sample as possible.

The second set of graphs, eight to sixteen, graphically represent the questions used in the interviews as they relate specifically to the impact of transition on the sample group as they moved from the world of academia to the business world. The findings from these interviews provide comparative data which is indicative of the participants' particular views, reactions, feelings and personal information provided during the interviews.

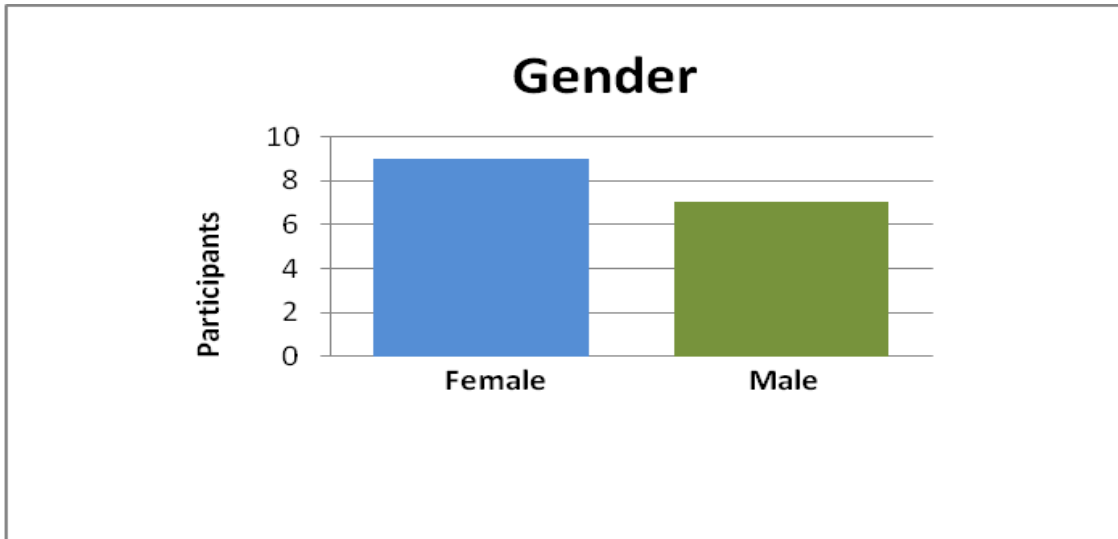


Figure 1: Gender Split

Figure 1 above shows the total sample of 16 participants, 7 male and 9 female, resulting in a sample of 43.75% male and 56.25% female participants. Although the split between male and female was slightly higher on the female side, it is still a good representation of gender. The gender split result, was simply due to the responses received from participants who expressed interest in taking part in the study and was in no way deliberate.

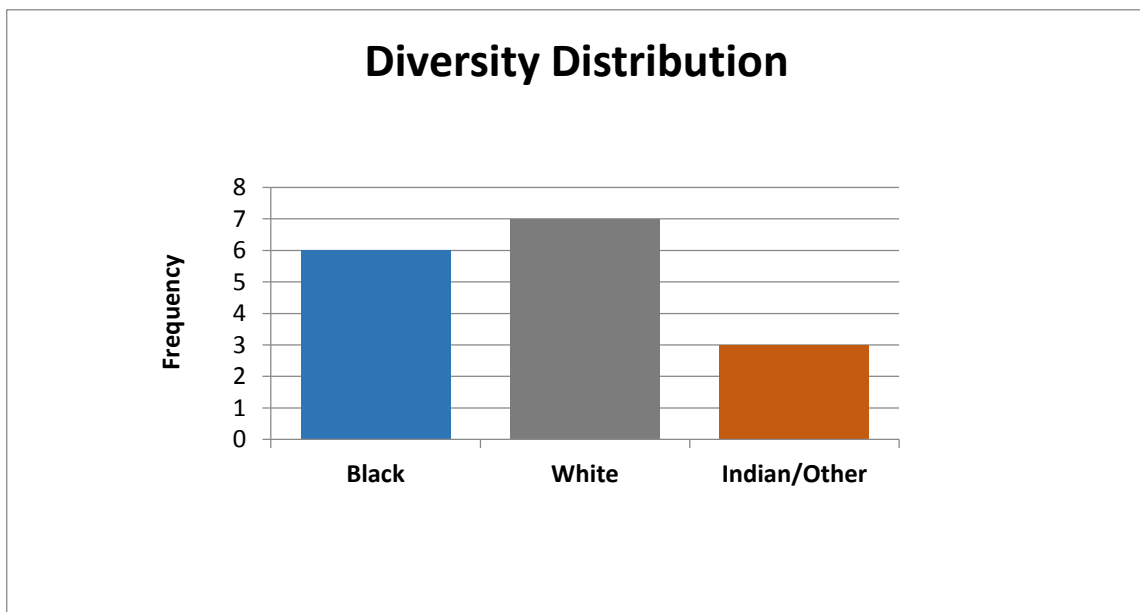


Figure 2: Diversity Distribution

Figure 2 shows the diversity distribution amongst the participants by ethnic group. As mentioned previously, the research was conducted in English as the participants all spoke English as their business language even though it may not have been their first, or home language. Of the 16 participants, 6 were black, 8 white and 2 Indian (and/or other). The percentage split amongst the sample group was as follows; 37.5% black, 50% white and 12.5% Indian (and/or other). The diversity split amongst the groups is largely representative of the population group as it relates to the firm as a whole from which the sample was taken.

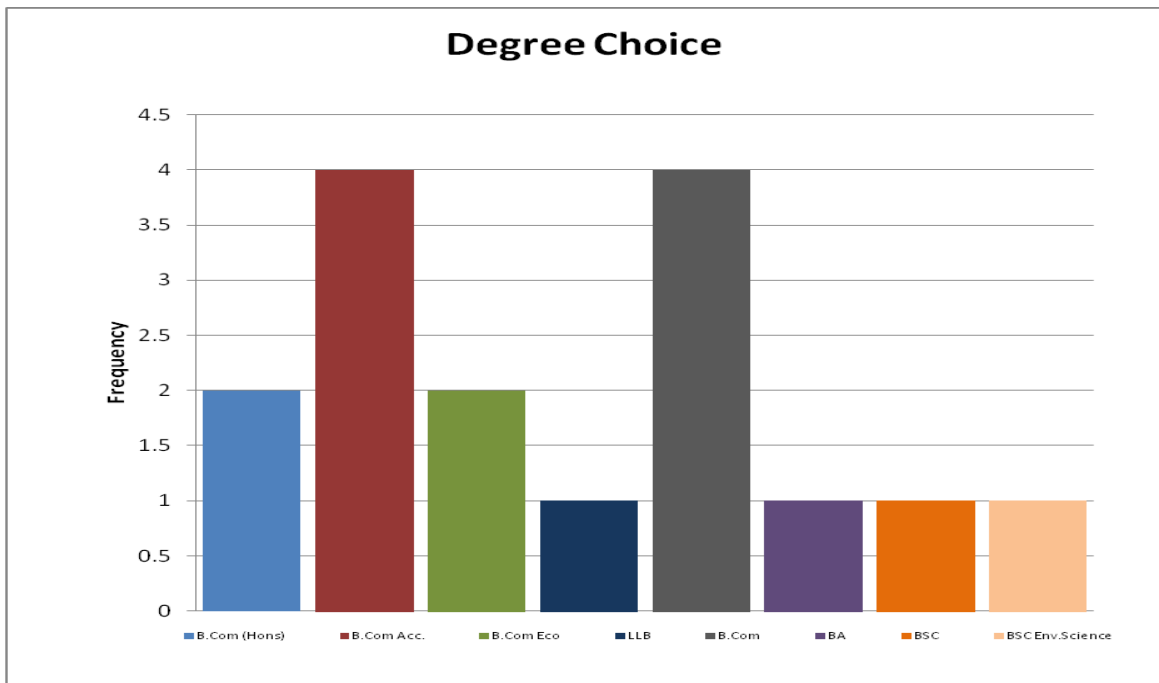


Figure 3: Degree Choice

As can be seen from the figure above the sample consisted of various degree choices, and subsequent qualifications achieved by the participants. The degree choices included; Bachelor of Commerce, Bachelor of Commerce in Accounting, Bachelor of Commerce in Economics, Bachelor of commerce in Law (LLB), Bachelor of Arts, Bachelor of Science and Bachelor of Environmental Science.



The sample group as mentioned was taken from a financial services firm and as such, it is to be expected that the majority of the participants would have a qualification in Commerce. The most common degree being B.Com. Accounting followed by a straight B.Com. Degree. The next most popular degree choice was B.Com. Honours and second to that, B.Com. Economics. The balance of degree choices were evenly split amongst, an LLB, BA and BSC.

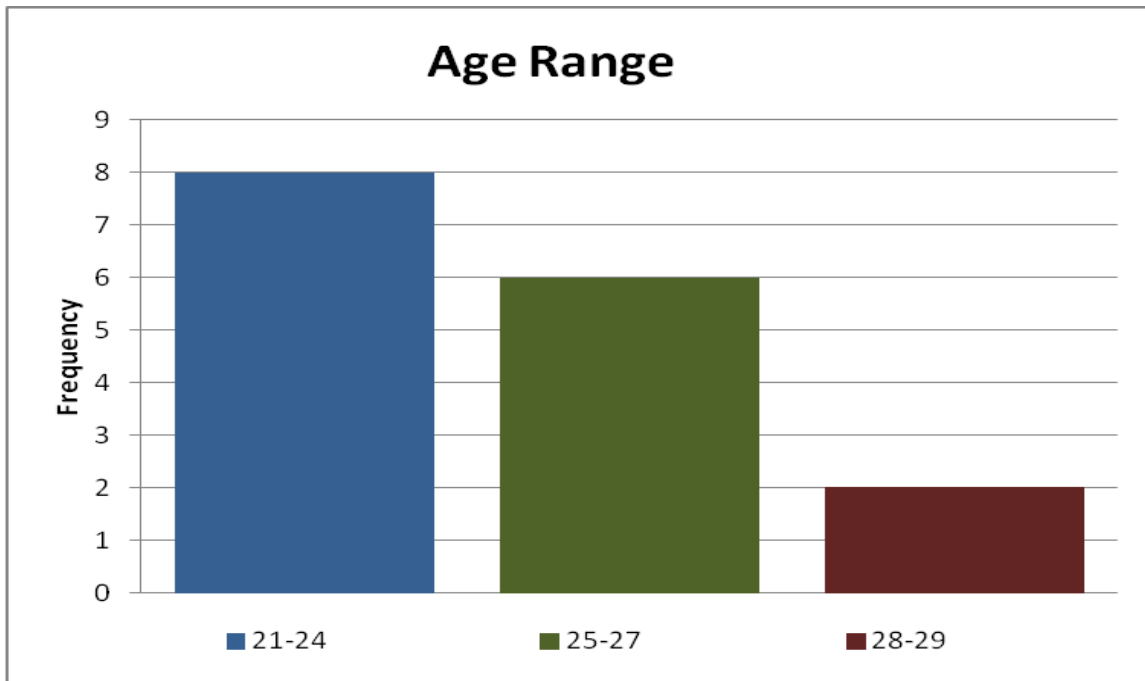


Figure 4: Age Range

The ages of the sample group in figure 4, ranges between 21 and 29 years of age. Eight participants fell into the 21 to 24 age bracket with 6 participants falling into the 25 to 27 age range. The remainder of the participants (2) fell into the 28 to 29 year age range.

Fifty percent of the sample group fell into the 21 to 24 year age range with 37.5% falling into the 25 to 27 year age range, the remainder, 12.5% falling into the 28 to 29 year age range. The majority of the group was between the ages of 21 and 24 years old, which is in line with the general Universities' age range for a student completing a 4 year degree with honours. The minority of the participants fell into the higher age range of 28 to 29 years old. The older participants had various reasons for not falling within the age norm.

Having started their degrees earlier in their lives, they were somewhat older than the rest of the sample. Their reasons ranged from lack of finance, to indecision on degree choice, working to support families and taking care of younger siblings which had to take precedence to studying at the time.

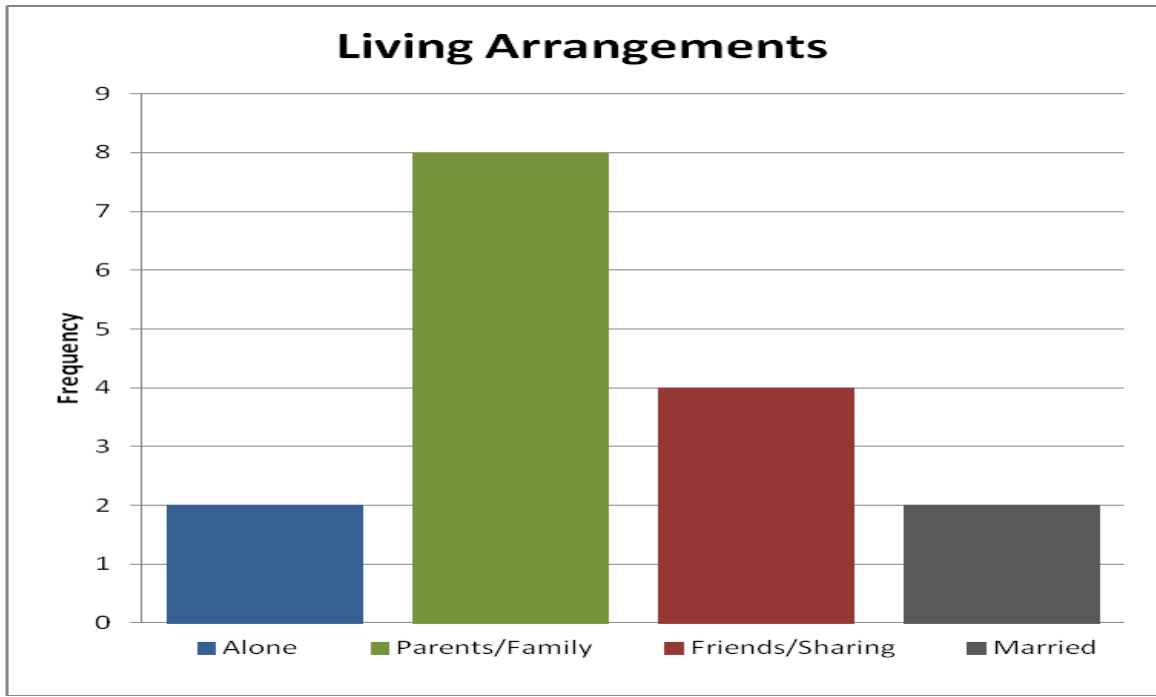


Figure 5: Living Arrangements

The majority of the sample as represented in figure 5, either still live with their parents, family members or siblings as opposed to living alone. Following this is the group that live with friends or share accommodations, the balance of the sample either live alone or with a spouse. Of the sample, 50.00% still live with their parents, followed by 25.0% living with friends or sharing with others, 12.5% living with a spouse and the remainder 12.5% of the participants living alone.

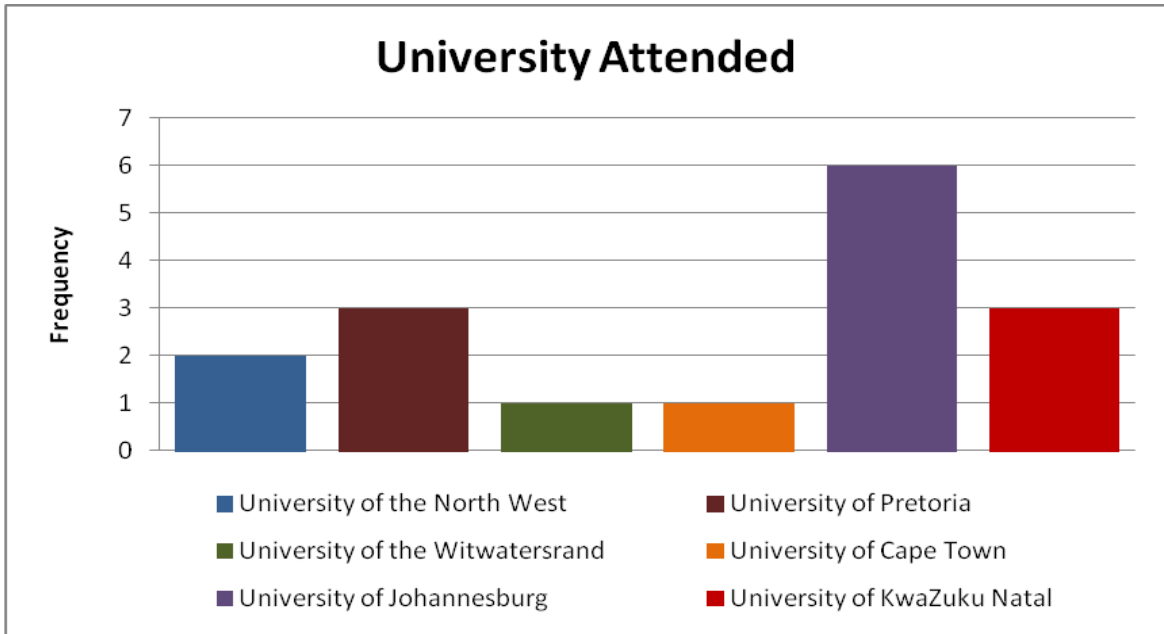


Figure 6: University Attended

The figure above shows that the majority of the sample attended university in either Johannesburg or Pretoria with the balance attending university further away in another province. Of the sample, 62.5% attended university in the Gauteng or Tshwane Provinces, with 18.75% attending university in KwaZulu Natal, 12.5% in the North West Province and 6.25% attending university in Cape Town.

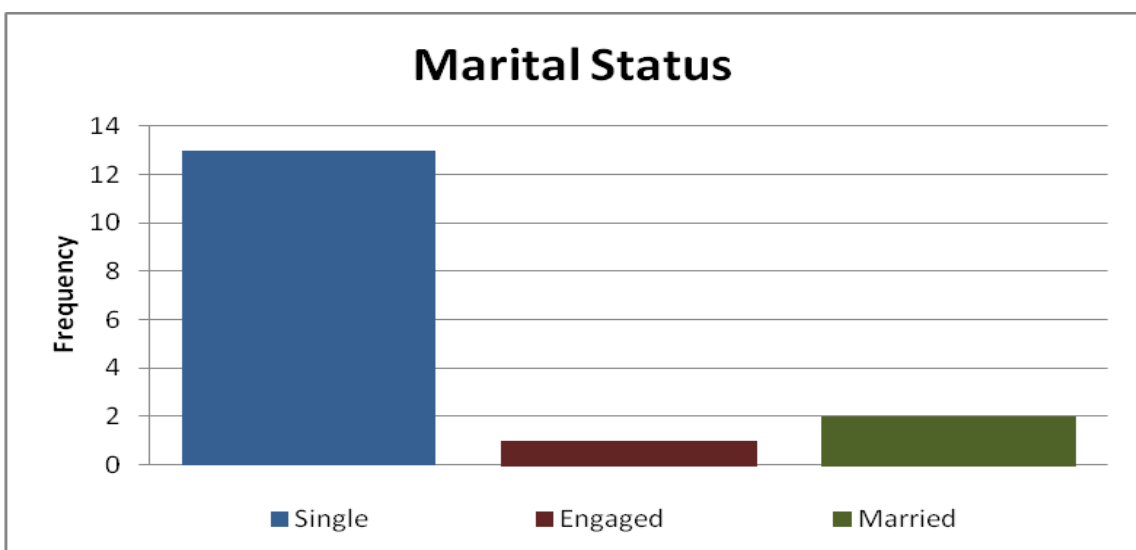


Figure 7: Marital Status

The majority of the participants in the sample, 81.25 % were still single. 6.25% of the sample was engaged to be married, leaving the balance of the participants in the sample, 12.5%, being married. Note that this differs from living arrangements.

The graphs which follow below, figures 8 to 16, are comparative in nature in that they illustrate the various scores relating to the topics in the questionnaire. For example, the questions relating to *expectation* are compared to the scores on the questions relating to *psychological impact*. The graphic display of these scores shows the difference in rate of recurrence of each topic. Thus indicating that the higher the score, the higher the rate of recurrence and the lower the rate of recurrence, the lower the score. It is deduced from the findings that the lower the score for example *expectation*, the higher the *psychological impact*.

In essence, the findings from the data collected from the interviews, graphically represented, shows the rate of recurrence of each participants' answer to each question, and how they relate to the specific themes extracted through thematic analysis, as well as the relationships amongst the themes.

The tables below illustrates the themes derived from each interview. The themes were then collated into groups so that main themes or topics were derived from the analysis. Once this was completed the related themes or sub-themes were put under each heading.

<b>Qualitative interview:</b> The psychological impact on the individual as they transition from the world of academia to the world of work.									
<b>Interviewees</b>	Sample of 16								
<b>Interviewer</b>	A.J. Wilmot								
* <b>Note:</b> Participant 100610 was removed from the study - insufficient data due to being in their current employ for less than 6 months									

Participant Codes	Main Themes Derived from Interviews										
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
10610	12	2	10	6	6	3	3	10	20	11	0
20610	6	3	5	6	14	4	8	8	35	16	2
30610	3	1	4	8	14	5	6	3	30	9	4
40610	5	2	4	2	11	2	3	4	42	10	2
50610	6	3	3	9	10	4	6	13	29	4	1
60610	8	1	7	5	14	3	3	14	26	12	2
70610	7	3	7	6	22	6	2	3	14	7	1
80610	11	5	11	7	11	6	5	14	46	8	1
90610	10	3	4	10	31	8	5	2	39	8	0
110610	6	2	2	4	17	6	4	4	30	8	1
120610	6	3	6	1	20	5	12	5	28	14	4
130610	3	3	6	6	21	12	3	9	26	4	0
140610	4	2	5	9	16	8	3	1	24	13	0
150610	9	5	2	6	4	14	8	3	32	2	3
160610	11	4	7	12	18	3	3	5	27	17	0
170610	9	3	7	8	19	4	7	15	32	16	5
<b>Total mentions per theme</b>	<b>116</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>90</b>	<b>105</b>	<b>248</b>	<b>93</b>	<b>81</b>	<b>113</b>	<b>480</b>	<b>159</b>	<b>26</b>

**Table 1. Main Themes Derived from the Interviews**

Scoring
The scores per participant and the scores under the theme headings (numbers); are representative of the number of times that the particular theme was mentioned by the individual participant.
<b>For Example;</b> Participant <b>10610</b> , mentioned <b>Choice</b> , <b>12</b> times

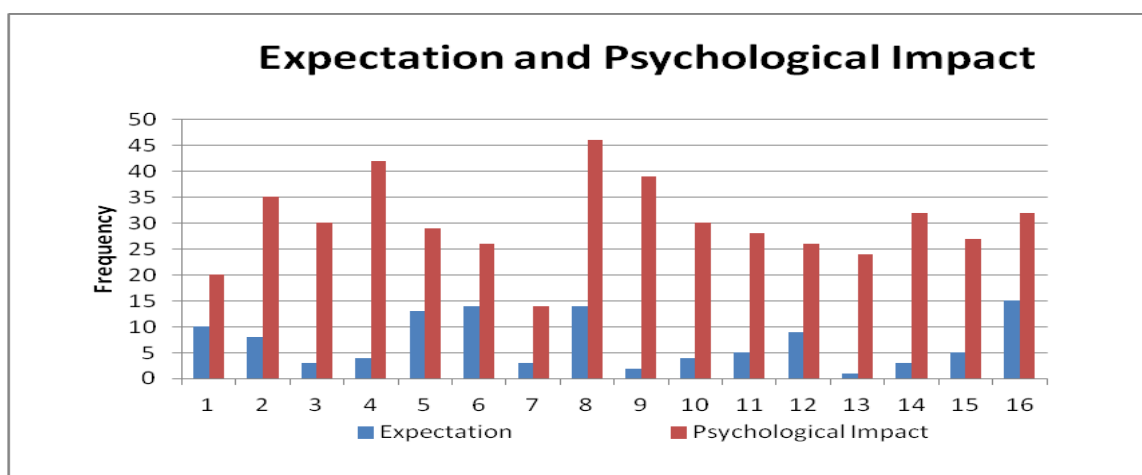
Main Themes	
Choice	1
Company	2
Earning money	3
Work	4
Organisation culture	5
Challenges	6
Change	7
Expectations	8
Psychological Impact	9
University vs. work	10
Comments	11

<b>Links to Main themes</b>	
Choice of degree	1
Influence in degree choice	1
Choosing your degree	1
Influence of company of choice	2
Which company to choose	2
How to choose company options	2
Starting a job and earning money for the first time	3
Salary expected	3
Financial independence	3
Why that salary	3
First day of work	4
Expectations of work	4
Expectations met/not met	4
Actual work done	4
Actual work expected	4
What was the culture like	5
Did you fit into the culture	5
If you made a culture change; What?	5
If no, why did you accept/ assimilate the culture?	5
What culture did you expect	5
Personal challenges	6
Challenges with you job	6
Challenges with people	6
Challenge with the environment	6
Did you experience stress	7
Was change in your environment stressful?	7
Did the change cause stress	7
Was it a stressful change?	7
Expectation gap	8
Psychological impact	9
Personal impact	9
Stress impact	9
Effects of stress and change	9
Physical changes due to stress - headaches, getting sick more often, stomach aches/cramps	9
Muscle tension, tension headache	9
Not knowing how to fit in	9
Lack of self confidence	9
Mental change from stress - not sleeping, feeling anxious	9
Always tired and stressed	9
Questioning self-worth	9
Am I good enough	9
Continual worry and anxiety	9
Not understanding all the new things, feeling inadequate	9
Feeling stupid, feeling incompetent	9
Social anxiety - social interaction do's & don'ts	9
Nobody said it would be so stressful	9
Feelings of anxiety and tearful	9

<b>Links to Main themes continued...</b>	
Does everyone feel like me or am I on my own - troubled	9
Feelings of concern	9
Feeling nervous	9
Very apprehensive -thought I was confident, now I'm not	9
Will I make friends	9
Feeling upset, a bit panicked	9
Differences between varsity and work	10
Welcoming atmosphere	10
Comfortable/comfort	10
New Friends	10
Advice you would give to a young graduate?	10
Additional comments	11
It's about me/it's about real life now	11
Support and direction lacking	11

**Table 2. Scoring of Data According to Themes**

The findings from the data collected and the resultant themes that were extrapolated are graphically represented below in various graphs with explanations below each graph. When reading the graphs, it is important to note that the higher the bar on the graph of the particular theme, the more mentions of that theme in the data. Therefore the higher the score, the higher the bar, the greater the mention of the theme, the greater the issue for the participants. The converse is also true; the lower the bar, the lower the mention, the lesser the issue for the participants.



**Figure 8: Expectation and Psychological Impact.**

In the figure above, regarding expectation and psychological impact, it can be seen that the participants scored much higher on the psychological impact field. The questions that were asked relating to *expectation*, were framed around the participants expectations on the world of work. On the whole their expectations were not met, thereby causing them stress, worry, anxiety, lack of self-confidence and ultimately what was grouped together in the analysis and themed as *psychological impact*. The findings illustrated that there was a lack of relationship between the participants' expectation and the reality of the world of work they found themselves in. In discussion it was ascertained that this large expectation gap caused the participants great stress, thus creating the high psychological impact on the individuals, as illustrated by the graph above.

The participants related psychological impact to how they felt about entering the world of work, the related stress they felt and the anxiety that they experienced during their transition. The participants generally commented that the anxiety, stress and worry they felt was worse than any exam they had ever written. Also, because they didn't really know what to expect, they were not that aware of the size of their own expectaiton gap, rather the anxiety, worry, stress, pressure and concern they felt, resulted in their own personal psychological impact of the actual transition.

The data above is indicative that the participants' expectations not being met, were not as significantly felt as the actual psychological impact they felt. Even if their expectations had not been met during their transition phase from an academic environment to a work one, the significant psychological impact on them due to the stress that was caused to them during the transition phase was significantly higher. The psychological impact was expressed by some of the participants as the significant change they experienced as they transitioned from university life to the world of work. Their expectation and their experiences were often not in line, and the incidence of stress, causing the high psychological impact, meant that the relationship between expectation and psychological stress was dissimilar. The result was that the psychological stress the participants experienced was more impactful to them than their expectation not being met.



The impact of the psychological stress as it related to their future experiences at the firm were not measured in this study, and thus cannot be commented on here. This will have to be left to another, future study.

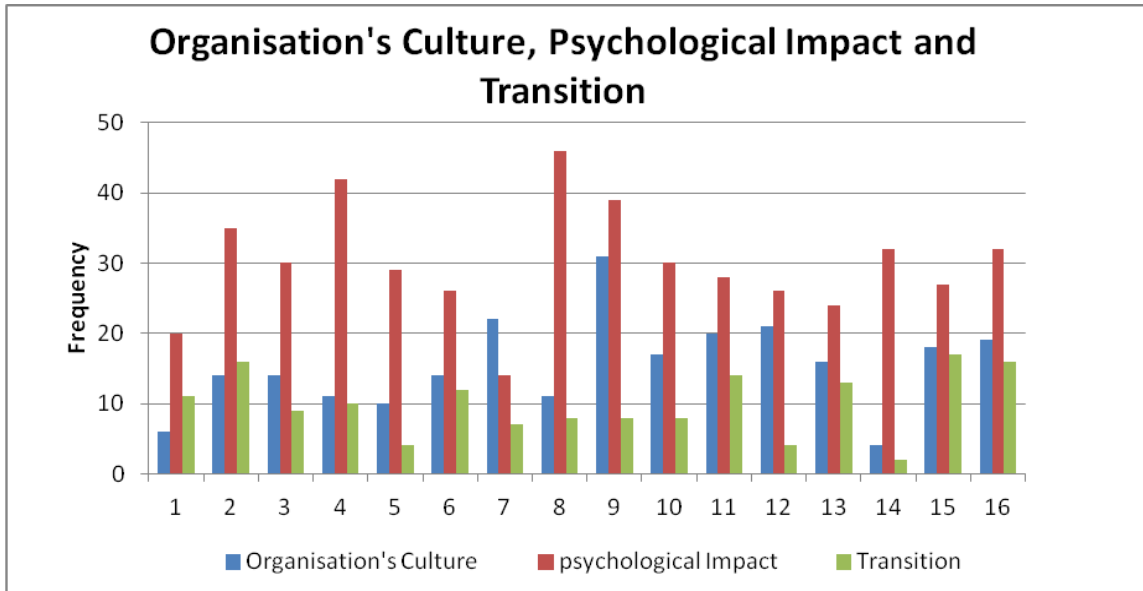


Figure 9: Organisation's Culture, Psychological Impact and Transition

Figure 9 represents the relationships between the organisations culture, the psychological impact and transition on the participants. The graph above illustrates that in the majority of cases, Psychological impact remains the highest scoring item in all instances except for one participant (participant 7).

Organisational culture and transition are relatively similar in occurrence in most cases. This indicates that organisational culture was important to the participants on the whole, many of the participants felt that the culture of the organisation was similar to their own understanding of a business culture; the values of the organisation matched their own. The participants did not find the organisations culture to necessarily be a problem or an issue during their transition. This may suggest that the organisations's culture and transition are more comparative with one another, whereas the psychological impact scores remain disparate and significantly higher in most cases, suggesting high stress levels as experienced by the participants are due to other reasons.

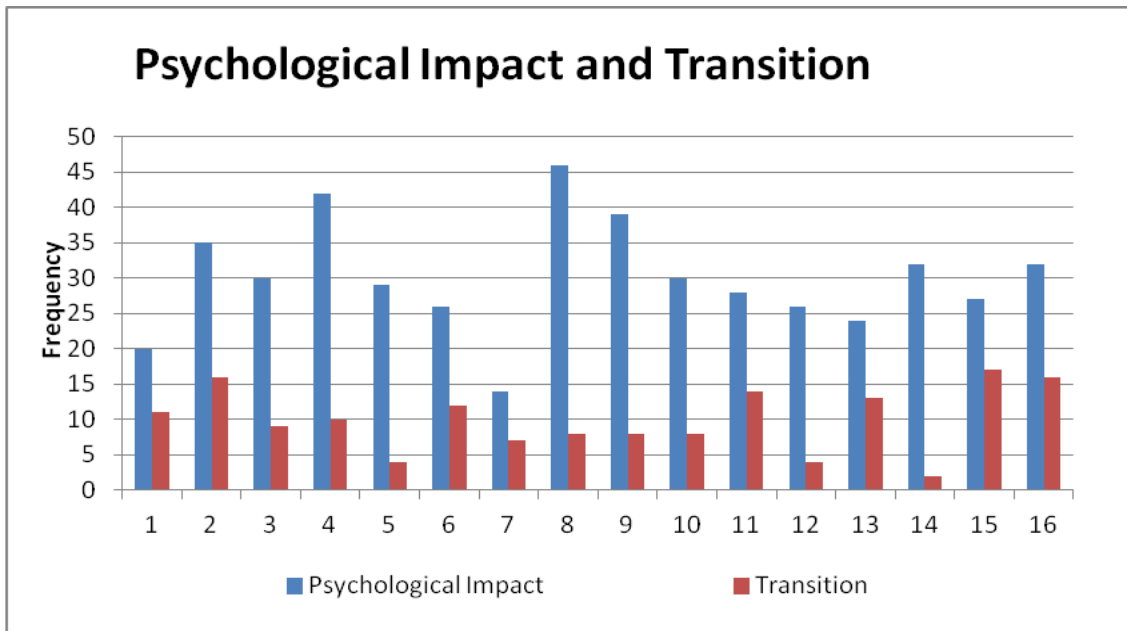


Figure 10: Psychological Impact and Transition

The figure above (Figure 10) shows the psychological impact on the participants as compared with the transition that they experienced. For the majority of the participants, the relationship between the transition and the psychological impact is material. The graph indicates that there is a psychological impact, potentially significant, on the participants as they transition from the world of academia to the business world, yet the transition itself may not be the only causal factor, particularly if we compare these findings to those already discussed above in Figure 9.

In discussion with the participants it was the apprehension, anxiety, concern and sometimes even fear that caused the psychological impact on them personally. It was more about their own emotional sensitivity in most cases that caused a reaction resulting in the psychological impact score rising due to their own experience of entering the world of work and their inexperience in this area.

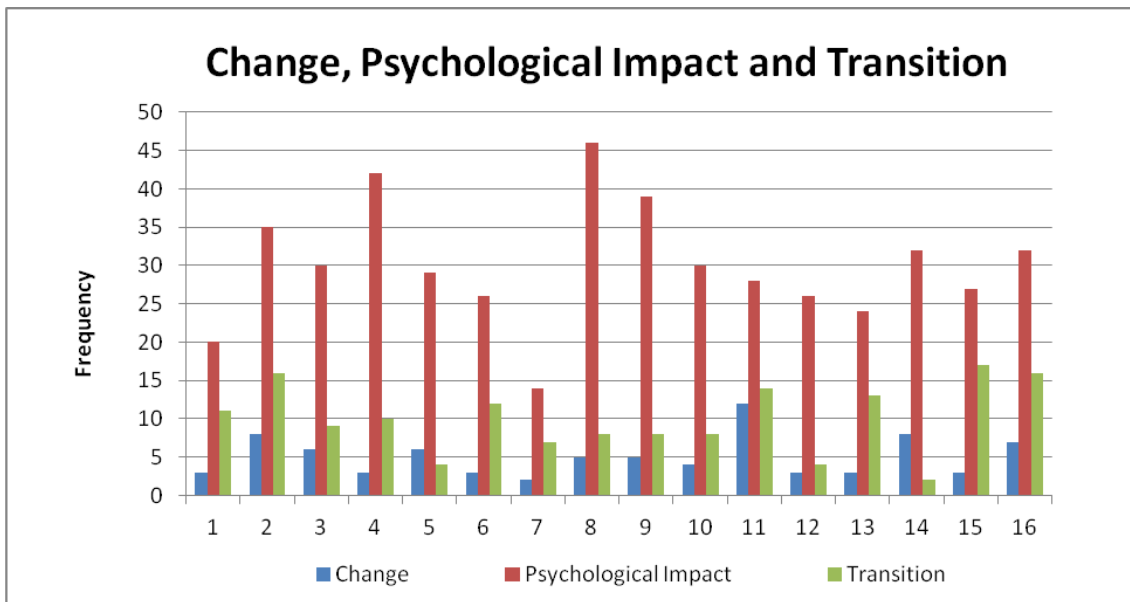


Figure 11: Change, Psychological Impact and Transition

Figure 11 shows that a high psychological impact is experienced by the participants in relation to change and transition. This suggests that both change and transition do not have as significant an impact on the participants as the psychological impact does as they move from the world of academia to the business world. The graph above also indicates that the transition is more impactful than the change itself.

The questions used during the interview relating to the theme on transition, probed participants on their move and the related aspects of their move to a business environment, whereas change related to the actual change from university or academic life to a business one. In the questioning of the participants and resultant discussions, most participants were eager to change their focus from academia to business, however the actual move itself was what caused them anxiety, worry and ultimately stress (as measured in the psychological impact detail on the graph).

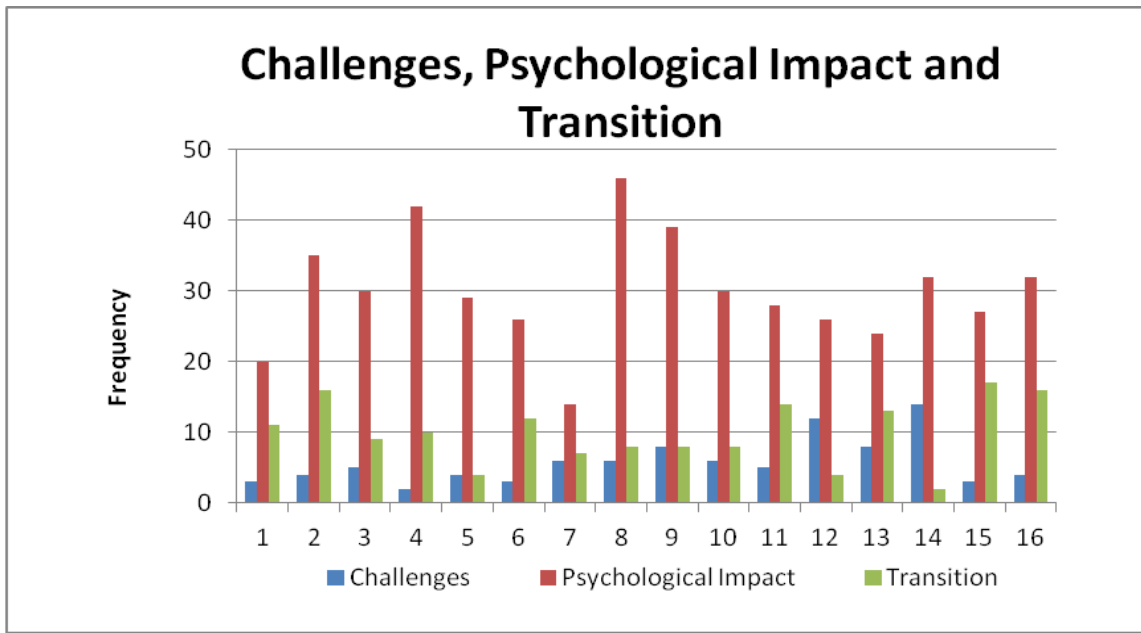


Figure 12: Challenges, Psychological impact and Transition

The participants continued to score higher on the psychological impact field, as seen in the graph above, when compared to the challenges they faced and the transition itself. This again suggests that the greatest impact on the participants during the transition phase is the psychological impact when compared to challenges and the transition itself.

When the participants were faced with challenges during the transition phase, the psychological impact scores remained significantly higher than the actual challenges that they faced and/or the transition itself. In this graphic representation above the transition score is higher than the challenge score. This suggests that although the challenges were apparent, the transition itself was more impactful on the participants.

In discussion, the participants found the challenges mostly manageable. They discussed that they had expected the challenges to be present and they knew they would have to deal with them. The challenges for them were things like having to be on time for work every day, and if you didn't feel like getting up so early, they still had to get up and be on time for work.

Another challenge for many of the participants was that they were accountable to a boss or manager, whereas at university they were not really accountable to anyone but themselves. Taking leave was another eye opener and challenge for most of the participants, they were surprised that they had to apply for leave and get it approved; they couldn't make the decision alone as someone else had the final say. The participants further explained that the transition or the move they had to make (either physical, mentally or both) was more impactful or tough than the challenge itself.

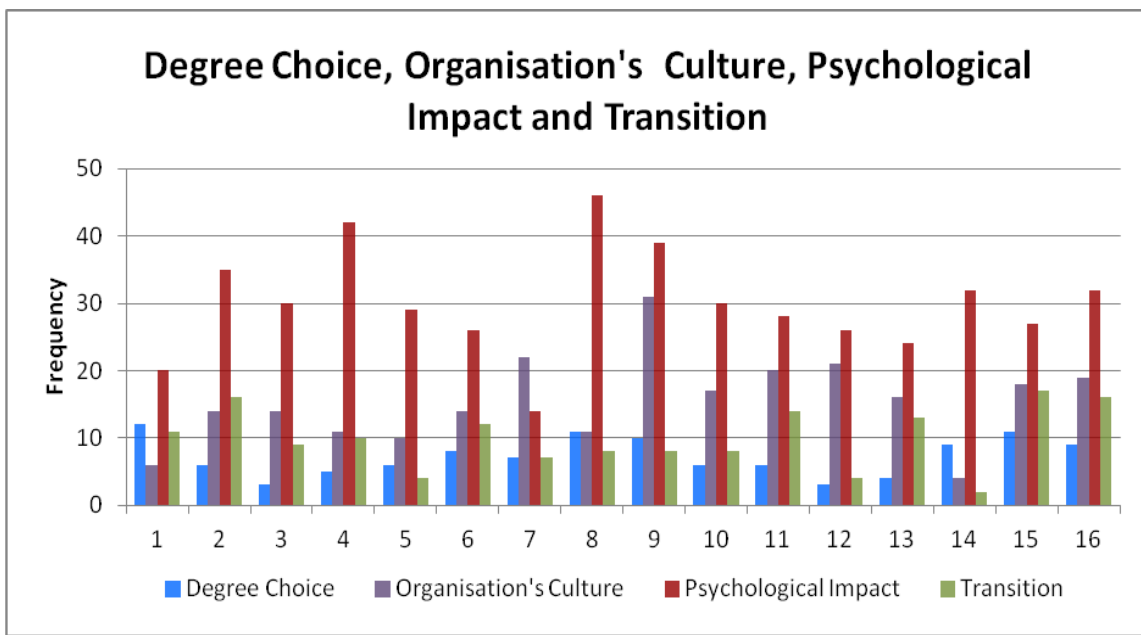


Figure 13: Degree choice, Organisation's culture, Psychological impact and Transition.

The participant's scores in Figure 13 show high levels of incidence in psychological impact when compared with the other three themes of; degree choice, the organisation's culture and transition. When degree choice was added to the data for analysis, there was no decrease in the psychological impact theme in the graphs. This could be due to the fact the degree choice was already taken and completed before the transition phase, so therefore it was not a strong indicator for the participants on the psychological impact measure.

The participants knew what was expected of them to some degree from a technical aspect and therefore it was not a major factor during their transition and not of significance in terms of the psychological impact for them.

The graph also indicates that there is generally a closer relationship between the organisation’s culture and transition than there is when compared with degree choice. This indicates that the organisation’s culture and transition are more heavily weighted for the participants than their degree choice. This is due to the fact that the participants are all graduates who have made the choice to study their respective degrees, and qualified already. It has therefore been assumed that psychological impact, the organisation’s culture and transition do not affect the participant’s response to degree choice.

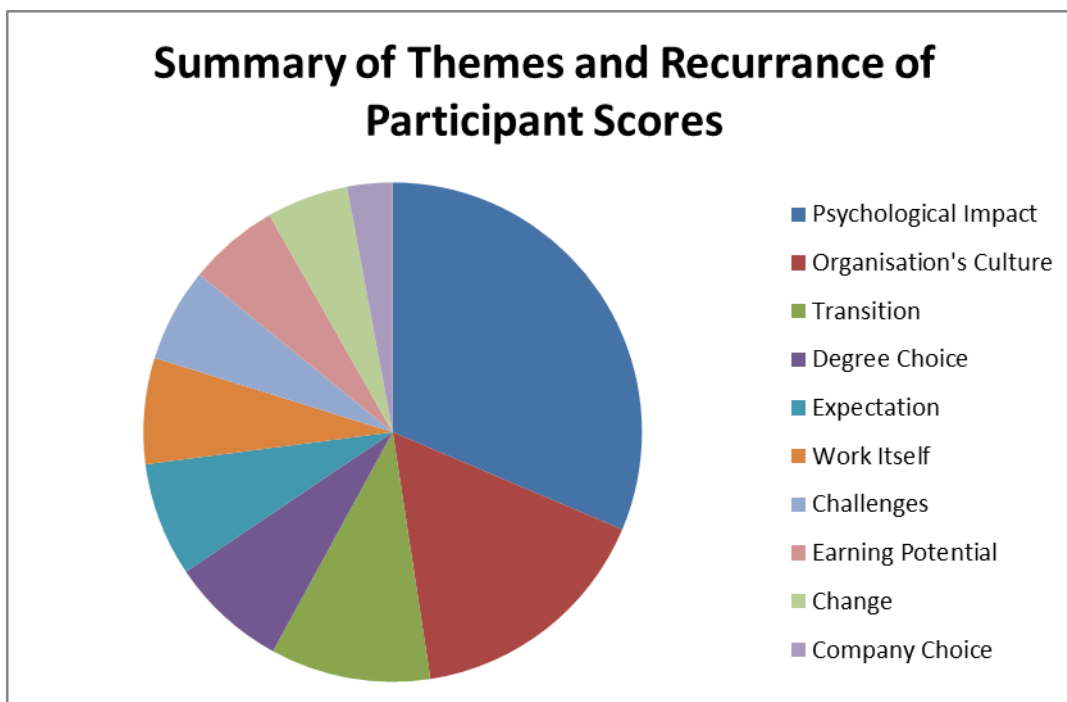


Figure 14: Summary of the themes and the rate of recurrence of participant scores.

For ease of reference and to more easily graphically represent the comparative results of all the themes used in this study a pie chart has been used. The graph above (Figure 14) provides an overview of the participants scores against the entire set of themes extracted from the data.

Psychological impact (large blue section) remains the highest scoring theme (53.33%) against all the other scores by comparison.

The organisation's culture (represented by the burgundy section) and transition (represented by the green section) also play an important part in the results when compared with the other themes as represented above; they have the second (27.56%) and third (17.67%) highest scores respectively.

The organisation's culture as a particular theme was explored with the participants to ascertain what it meant for them in practice. Generally the participants felt that if the organisation's culture resonated with them on some level they found it easier to adapt and move with the transition. The organisation's culture in many instances was similar to the way the participants expected the business world to function, and to be in line with their own morals, principles and values.

The two themes had an influence on the participants, and in further discussion it was noted that the better the fit for the participants with the organisation's culture, the more smooth the transition was for them. Note however, that the psychological impact still remained high for the participants as this was related to their emotional response and the stress factors experienced by them of the overall transition.

Degree choice and expectation were almost on par when it came to the scoring of these two items. On the whole, as discussed previously, the participants had already graduated and were happy with their degree choice; technically they felt more confident that they knew what they were doing, which made the transition in some ways a little easier or manageable. They didn't feel that there was a huge gap between their expectations of what the work would entail for them and the work itself. The degree choice and expectation were comparative in that they were both more encouraging aspects of the participants' experience of transition.

When reviewing the participants' scores on degree choice, expectation, the work itself and challenges, these scores were relatively similar. The participants' response to these questions was that they felt like they had more control over these particular items in some respects. They had chosen their degree, therefore they could not feel stressed about their degree choice. They had already supposed that there would be challenges to deal with and they expected some change to occur on a personal level; what they did not expect was the impact that these factors would have on them during the transition, which resulted in their high psychological stress measures.

As discussed earlier, the expectation the participants had and the work itself was not that dissimilar from what they had prepared themselves for and the challenges that they faced were not dissimilar from the challenges that they expected would be present. The example of a challenge for some of the participants was that they could not decide that they would skip the first few hours of their day and go in to work later like they did at university, they had to get up, dress up and show up.

Earning potential and change were seen by the participants as not as important as the other factors, viz. psychological impact, organisations culture and transition. The participants' view was that their earning potential would be greater the harder they worked. As they worked harder and gained experience along the way, their earning potential would naturally increase. They acknowledged that it was something that they had to work towards and achieve first.

On the whole the participants did express the desire to have a higher than average earning potential, due to the degrees they had chosen. Their expectation on earning potential was that it would be there in the future and was not an immediate concern. Change for the participants was inevitable and for the most part they considered change to be part of their process. Similarly, their choice of company was something that they had decided upon, and as long as it was a good reputable organisation there was no anxiety linked to this choice.



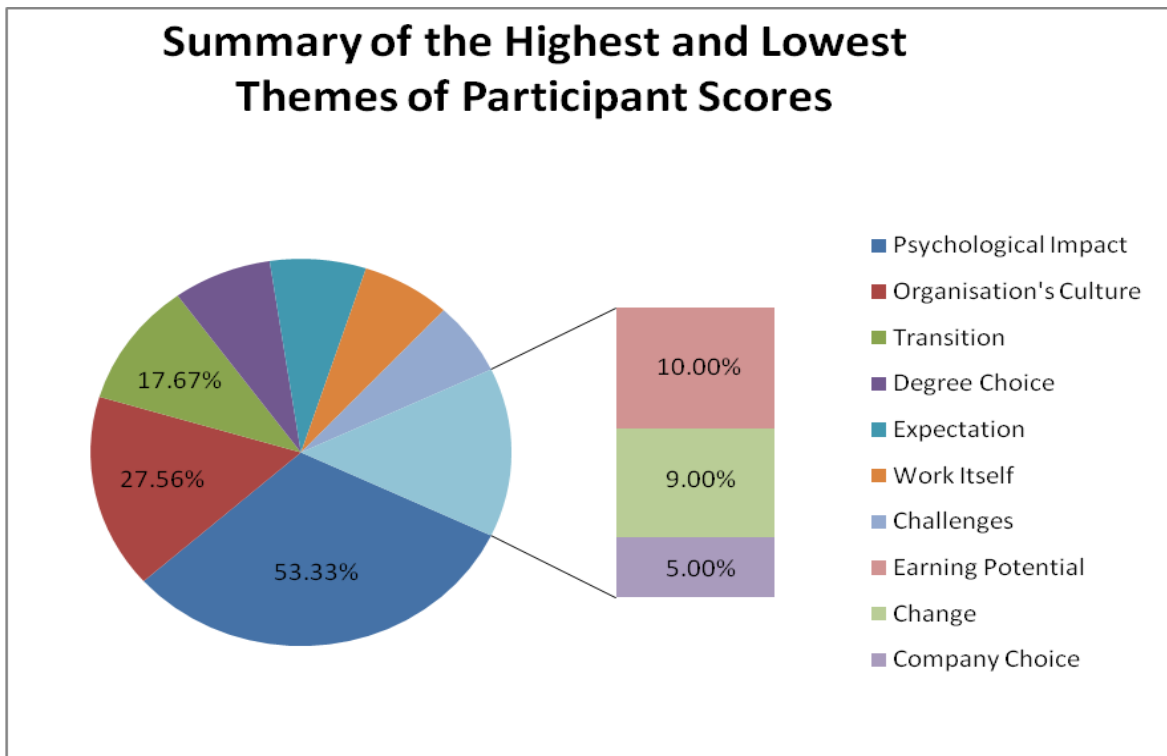


Figure 15: Summary of the highest and lowest themes of participant scores

The graph above (Figure 15) provides a comparison between the highest scoring items, (Psychological impact, Organisation's culture and Transition) against the lowest scoring items (Earning potential, Change and Company choice) (not discussed in detail in the findings as the lowest scores were not necessarily significant in comparison to the higher and more frequently scoring items as they related to the themes.) The graphical representation suggests that the relationship between psychological impact and the organisation's culture together with transition, play a more significant role in the participants lives as they move from the academic world to the business world than any of the other factors.

Similarly, the aspects of earning potential, change and company choice appear far less significant to the participants in comparison to other higher scoring themes according to the data collected.

Thus, it appears that the lowest scoring items are far less significant in order of importance to the participants during the shift from an academic environment to a business one. This is clarified and confirmed above as part of the summary findings in the graphs.

Throughout the interpretation of the research findings and the graphical representations above, the highest scoring item, on a consistent basis was the psychological impact on young graduates as they transitioned from academic environments to the business world. The psychological impact, as discussed with participants, included both mental, physical and emotional (in some instances even geographical) changes that caused the participants to feel stress, anxiety, worry, fear, insecurity and in some instances even physiological stress causing headaches and a feeling of illness. On the whole the participants experienced the personal impact that the transition had on them as significant in that it was made up of various facets and elements indicated above, ultimately resulting in an emotional reaction, translated into psychological impact for the purposes of this study.

## **5.2 INTERVENTION**

The intervention, as previously mentioned, consisted of a group of sixteen young graduates employed in a financial services firm. The participants had joined the firm at the least six months previously, and some of the participants had been with the firm for as long as one year. Each participant was interviewed privately for approximately one hour, in a one-on-one, semi-structured interview. The same interviewer was used for all interviews.

The nature of the intervention was to allow the participants to speak freely and openly so that as much information could be attained during the interview as possible, focusing on their own experience of the transition from the world of academia to the business environment, and the resultant impact this move had on them.

The interviewer allowed the participants to speak as much, or as little as they preferred as they moved from theme to theme during the interview. The interviewer probed as much as possible as to what each theme or set of questions meant personally to the participant, thus gaining personal insight into the transition per individual. The amount of information per theme, varied per person as some participants were more outspoken than others. The general findings were however, that each participant did experience a psychological impact in one way or another, of varying degrees, as they transitioned from the academic world to a business one.

### **5.3 CONCLUSION**

Chapter 5 included the descriptive analysis of the participant sample in order to ascertain which, if any of the themes extrapolated from the interviews were significantly different from others.

The demographics revealed that the participant sample was balanced and equally matched in terms of gender, age, degree, living arrangements and marital status. There were no outliers and no significant differences in the demographic data. This indicates that the sample was representative of the population (from the firm) for the purposes of this study.

The descriptive analysis revealed that from the data gathered there were significantly different results for certain of the themes. These results were psychological impact being the highest (53.33%), the organisation's culture being the second highest (27.56%) and transition the third highest (17.67%). These highest scoring items across the data were noteworthy as they formed the themes for the thematic analysis.

From the findings it was evident that second to the psychological impact of moving from an academic environment to a business one, the relationship between the organisation's culture and the participants had a greater impact on the participants' transition than any other factors expressed as themes in the research findings.

Due to the format of this study being exploratory in nature, when considering the findings from the data gathered and the results shown graphically throughout this chapter, it is important to note that the data is not intended to provide statistical information.

As explained earlier, the research itself does not provide sufficient information for statistical measures to show statistically significant differences, and the purpose of the study was to ascertain potential levels of psychological impact on the participants as they moved into the world of work from a university environment. As the sample size was small and no statistical data was intended for this study, certain assumptions have been made, based on the thematic analysis and the results found from this data.

## CHAPTER 6

### DISCUSSION OF THE RESULTS

#### 6.1 RESULTS DISCUSSION

The research that was undertaken for the purposes of this study was to ascertain if a psychological impact of transition on young graduates as they move from academia to the world of business existed for them or not and to what extent it affected them. The research was exploratory in nature. The interview process, although making use of semi-structured questionnaires was conducted in the same environment and using the same criteria for all 16 interviews. The interviewer used was the same interviewer for all 16 interviews, and was the researcher for this paper.

The participants were encouraged to speak freely and to explore the nature of their own responses. Some of the participants were more open to the discussion than others and were comfortable to speak openly for longer than the hour allocated to the one-on-one interview. No participant was penalised, nor was their information altered in any way regardless of how much or how little information they chose to share.

The very nature of this research was aimed at ascertaining if there was a psychological impact on the young graduates during their transition from the world of academia to the business world, or not. It was also to ascertain and explore what other factors, if any, may have had an influence on the psychological impact of the participants' transition.

During the interviews it was found, upon probing many of the responses from the respondents and asking what psychological impact meant to the participant, that Psychological impact meant different things to different people, however the main and recurring theme was that of stress.

On the whole, the participant's related psychological impact, to stress, they often used the terms as interchangeable. The stress that many of the participants felt and described was both mental, emotional and physiological.

Stress was explained by a number of the participants as a feeling of anxiety, a feeling of apprehension, self-doubt, of being out-of-their depth, feelings of insecurity, uncertainty and a loss of control. Many participants felt physically ill, came down with the flu, had numerous aches and pains, bad headaches, had trouble sleeping, some had trouble eating, or craved junk food, and felt exhausted most of the time.

The levels of emotional impact were felt by all participants at one time or another. The emotional impact, physical impact and mental impact as described by the participants were grouped together to make up the theme; Psychological impact.

For many of the participants the sense of *self* was very important as it related to *self-confidence* and a sense of assurance in "I know who I am". When that sense of *self-confidence* and assurance of *self* was lacking, then belonging and connecting with others became even more important in their new environment.

If both a sense of confused identity and a sense of isolation existed, the result could and most often did result in a potential negative psychological impact on young adults as they moved from academia to the world of work (evidence was found in the themes that made up Psychological impact in the research findings which was discussed earlier in this paper). Without this sense of belonging or connectedness, some of the participants began to feel isolated and not part of a group. This was true for the participants as they moved from a relative state of safety at university to one of insecurity in their new working environment. In some instances this feeling of isolation, stress and additional anxiety, lead to greater psychological and emotional concerns that was ultimately a factor leading to depression (one of the participants was on anti-depressants within the six months of joining the firm – it is important to note that the transition did not necessarily cause depression, it may have been a compounding factor).

The findings from the interviews and the thematic analysis that followed indicated a trend towards high levels of psychological impact across the entire sample of 16 participants as they transitioned from academia to the business world. These levels were particularly noteworthy in comparison to the other themes that were extrapolated, as was discussed in chapter 5 and this indicated that the transition from academia to the business world did have a high psychological impact on the sample group of participants. This finding has been noted as important for future studies and for the firm, as each year new graduates join the firm from various universities and geographical areas.

Psychological impact, as taken from the participant interviews and in discussion with them, was made up of the following related issues:

<b>Psychological impact</b>
Personal impact
Stress impact
Effects of stress/worry
Physical changes due to stress - headaches, getting sick more often, stomach aches/cramps
Muscle tension, tension headache
Not knowing how to fit in
Lack of self confidence
Mental change from stress - not sleeping, feeling anxious
Always tired and stressed
Questioning self-worth
Am I good enough
Continual worry and anxiety
Not understanding all the new things, feeling inadequate
Feeling stupid, feeling incompetent
Social anxiety - social interaction do's & don'ts
Nobody said it would be so stressful
Feelings of anxiety and tearful
Out of my depth and scared
Does everyone feel like me or am I on my own – troubled
Feelings of concern
Feeling nervous
Very apprehensive -thought I was confident, now I'm not
Will I make friends
Feeling upset, a bit panicked

**Table 3. Psychological impact and related issues**

A number of participants commented that “it was very scary, I didn’t know what to expect”, “I felt more stressed than when I was writing exams”, “I was worried I might not fit in or I’d say the wrong thing”. One participant said that she had a headache for the first two weeks caused by “stress” and another commented that he sometimes felt sick but he knew he wasn’t.

The impact of the stress from these few examples indicate that the worry and anxiety felt by the participants as they transitioned from academia to the business world, did have a psychological impact on them. The impact was experienced in various forms and degrees of severity as indicated by the participants from a sense of anxiety to feeling physically ill.

The second highest scores were found when looking at the organisation’s culture; this appeared to be significant in the participants’ responses and again indicated that this theme was of importance to them. After probing and asking more questions, the sample indicated that it was important to them to feel a sense of belonging, a sense of understanding, being understood and supported in their new environment.

Many of the participants felt that they resonated in some way with the organisation, they felt that they could fit in due to the same sense of morals, principles and values that they had, which matched the organisations’ culture.

Due to the nature of the research and the small sample that was used for the purposes of this mini dissertation it was not possible to have a larger, more appropriate sample which would have potentially provided more robust and significant results. The sample size used was small and would have to be significantly increased if this research was to yield useful statistical information and more robust results.

## **6.2 IMPROVING THE METHODOLOGY**

In order to gain more robust data and findings, it would have been preferable to increase the sample size for the research significantly.



The semi-structured interviews allowed for more in-depth and qualitative information, and in addition similar questions could have been structured to allow for a quantitative research element through a questionnaire that could have been distributed to some 300 young graduates as they entered the world of formal employment.

In order for a research project to have significant meaning and findings it is important that enough data be collected. Because this research was exploratory in nature and part of the requirements for a Masters Research dissertation, the sample size was much smaller than would ordinarily be used. Ideally this type of research could be turned into a longitudinal study where, over time, the trends and impact of the variables could be more robustly measured and the relationship between the themes more rigorously examined.

This study, to the best of my knowledge, was the first study conducted in this particular professional services firm, so there was no comparative data to consider.

In order for this research to be more robust, it would make sense to extend the research over time; this particular research and the initial set of data could provide a base-line so that if the findings were indeed materially significant then the trends could be measured more effectively, and plans developed to address these significant trends in the firm for young graduates.

The significant trends could be addressed; issues such as the psychological impact could be addressed and measures put in place to potentially lessen the negative, stressful elements of the psychological impact on these young graduates. By doing this, it also potentially addresses the maturation threat, where change in a trend can be more easily identified.

Ensuring the scientific validity of a study is paramount to obtaining useful results. Sometimes however practical problems may hinder the researcher from using the best available methodology. It is always advisable to strengthen the design as much as possible to ensure scientific validity.

This particular research was designed to allow the researcher to draw conclusions about cause and effect relationships, amongst other things. The ultimate goal was to develop a theory that explains the relationship found amongst the various themes. For the purposes of validity in this study, the measure, simply put was whether the researcher's conclusion is true or correct; and that it corresponds to the actual state of the world (Mc Burney, 2001).

The most fundamental type of validity is internal validity because it concerns the logic of the relationship between the independent and dependent variables. Internal validity is the extent to which a study provides evidence of a cause-effect relationship between the independent and dependent variables.

An experiment has internal validity if there are sound reasons to believe that a cause-effect relationship really is present between the independent and dependent variables. (Mc Burney, 2001). In other words, the independent variable causes the dependent variable to change. If however you cannot conclude that the feedback caused the result, then the experiment lacks internal validity and is known as confounding (Mc Burney, 2001).

Another important factor to note regarding validity for the purposes of this study is construct validity. The construct validity of a measurement concerns whether it measures what it is intended to measure and nothing else (Mc Burney, 2001).

Construct validity in research concerns the question of whether the results support the theory behind the research. A question to ask would be; does another theory predict the same results? If the measurement used in some research lacks construct validity, then the results as a whole will also lack construct validity (Mc Burney, 2001).

In this particular study the psychological impact of transition on young graduates was the main premise, the secondary assumptions were the company choice, company culture and the transition itself.

The findings showed the secondary assumptions to be true; that they did indeed have an effect on the main premise. If the secondary assumptions were false, negative or untrue, the results could have been that there was no significant psychological impact during transition.

It is very difficult, probably not possible to ensure construct validity, but it is possible to plan the research so that it is more plausible (Mc Burney, 2001). In order to improve the validity of this research it would have been advisable to include tests, prescribed scales or assessments that have more standardised measures and proven validity.

In the case of this particular research, instruments such as the OPQ (Occupational Personality Questionnaire which measures workplace personality (SHL Group Limited, 2009), or the Taylor manifest Anxiety Scale which measures stress, motivation and human performance (Mc Dowell & Newell, 1996) would be valuable as additional tools to this research.

Construct validity and internal validity are similar. Internal validity strives to rule out alternative variables as causes for potential behaviour or interest; construct validity strives to rule out other possible theoretical explanations of the results. In either case, it may be necessary to perform another study in order to rule out a threat of validity (Mc Burney, 2001). For internal validity it may be necessary to redesign the study to control for the source of confounding.

### **6.3 LACK OF STATISTICAL DATA AND STATISTICAL SIGNIFICANCE**

Statistical validity is similar to internal validity. The question is whether the observed relationship between the independent and dependent variables is a true cause-effect relationship, or was it accidental? (Mc Burney, 2001).

Statistical tests establish that an outcome has a certain low probability of happening by chance alone; it does not guarantee that it was the result of a true cause-effect relationship.

There is also no way to guarantee any of the types of validity of a research result; all methods of validity simply increase confidence in that there has been a conclusion drawn from the research (Mc Burney, 2001).

This being said it is important to take into account that inferential statistics is an essential tool in judging the validity of a research outcome. Inferential statistics are statistics that help us to draw conclusions about populations. Similarly and often used are descriptive statistics that summarise a set of data based on the findings. In this particular research, no statistical information is available due to the nature of the research and the small sample size.

One of the questions involved in judging the statistical validity of a study is whether enough observations were made to make it likely that the null hypothesis could have been rejected even if it were false. In this research study the number of observations, (sample size) was too small in comparison to a full blown research study and therefore provided insufficient data to statistically measure the statistical validity, and therefore statistical significance of the of the research. Important to note is that although statistical data and validity are important, statistical validity was also not the main purpose of this research.

In the case of this research, the sample size was too small to measure any statistically significant differences. The nature of this research was limited by the mini dissertation criteria, the small sample size and the qualitative research design chosen and therefore can be viewed more as a pilot study.

It is important to note that even though there was no statistically significant measure, it does not mean that the data collected and the findings are meaningless. To the contrary, the findings could easily form the basis for further studies like a longitudinal study for example, and this particular study could be viewed as the preliminary exploratory research project.

## 6.4 CONCLUSION

Although it cannot be ascertained from this study whether transition causes a psychological impact or other factors cause a psychological impact, the findings do show that there is a significant response to psychological impact during a transition phase of young graduates as they move from an academic environment to a business one.

In the literature review at the beginning of this dissertation, Graham and McKenzie (1995) in their research paper, *Delivering the promise: The transition from higher education to work*, virtually all the graduates in the research project experienced some degree of transitional problem or stress. This is true in the research findings as per this research project as well. It is also interesting to note that although Maslow's Hierarchy of needs is outdated in many respects, many of the young graduates related to having their basic needs met first and then looked to a more contemporary approach of Social Networks, and what Maslow is missing as per the paper by Pamela Rutledge (2011).

In order to further explore the themes and better understand the root cause of the psychological impact, many more interventions will be needed. The sample size would have to be increased significantly, and further to this, in order to achieve useful and robust findings, the study would need to be conducted over a longer period of time. A new proposal for continuing this research project would have to be drawn up and submitted for consideration.

The study could for example, make use of a new sample of recent in-takes; the current study could serve as the basis for the study going forward. The new sample would therefore be viewed as a comparative group to the group already interviewed. The current sample would also have to be re-interviewed after a twelve month period to see if there had been any change, significant or otherwise for them as a result of their transition, and the time factor involved.

The study would have to continue for several months in order to re-interview the second sample group so that the information between the two groups is comparative. It would also have to include a significant increase in the number of participants, a possible quantitative questionnaire and even selected instruments like the OPQ for example mentioned earlier, for more solid research findings.

This would in turn allow for more robust internal, construct and potentially statistical validity. The purpose of this study, as with all scientific research, is for the advancement of psychology and would hopefully provide further useful information in the realm of the human sciences.

In essence, research is a way to gain knowledge about human behaviour. Science is, after all, a human activity and therefore subject to human failings (Mc Burney, 1999). Since science is a human enterprise, it is subject to human bias. Some of these biases cause science to have a conservative influence and some cause a liberal influence, never-the-less the responsibility of the scientist includes having as its goal that society will be benefited from the work (MC Burney, 2011).

Ultimately, scientists do have a responsibility to educate the public about the nature and results of scientific research and science flourishes only in an atmosphere of free speech, including freedom of inquiry into popular ideas. The problem with this is the risk that the new knowledge may present to society.

Having said this though, we must remember that science has been an enormously successful vehicle for human progress, the contributions of science to our everyday life is vast and continual. Research, regardless of whether it is qualitative, quantitative or both, remains a fertile and exciting field with interesting, inspiring and thought-provoking discoveries waiting to be revealed and further researched.

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## Annexure A:

Interview Guide for Research: The psychological impact of Transition on Young Adults from the World of Work to the Business World.

*Interview guide for research on the psychological impact on the individual as they transition from the world of academia to the world of work.*

Begin:

- Thank the individual for agreeing to be interviewed
- Provide a short introduction on the reason for the interview:
  - “I am busy completing my Masters dissertation and the research question is the psychological impact on the individual as they transition from the world of academia to the world of work”.
  - The hypothesis is that for some the transition is seemingly painless and smooth, whilst for others there are a number of factors that make the transition not only stressful, but very difficult too.
  - Each individual in the sample is asked to please complete a demographic sheet to provide information on age, cultural background, how many years spent studying, how many years employed, etc. This information will be collated and used to ascertain if there are any recurring themes relating to age group, etc.
- There are no right or wrong answers; please try and answer as honestly as you can with the first thought you have.
- Please feel free to ask me to explain anything you are unsure of or if you need the question asked again.

### Section A – Demographic information

Please indicate your answer by marking X in the space provided, or editorial if required.

<b>Gender</b>	Male		Female					
<b>Age Range</b>	21-25		26-29					
<b>Marital status</b>	Single		Engaged		Married		Divorced	
<b>Ethnic Group</b>	Black		Colored		White		Indian	Other
<b>Do you have children?</b>	Yes		No					
<b>Do you live:</b>	Alone		With parents		With friends		With extended family	Other (please specify)
<b>What is your home language?</b>								

<b>In what year did you finish school?</b>	
<b>Did you go straight to university after school?</b>	
<b>If no, what did you do?</b>	
<b>Which university did you attend?</b>	
<b>Did you study part-time or full time?</b>	
<b>What degree did you study for?</b>	
<b>How many years did you take to complete your degree?</b>	
<b>What is your highest qualification?</b>	
<b>Do you intend to study further?</b>	
<b>Did you go straight from an academic institution to your employer? (If no, please provide details)</b>	

<b>How long have you been employed at your current employer?</b>	
<b>Have you had any previous jobs? (If yes, what was the job and how long were you there?)</b>	
<b>When did you start your first job?</b>	

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**Question 1:**

What made you choose to do the degree you chose?

**Question 2:**

How did you choose your degree?

**Question 3:**

Did anyone influence your choice of degree? (If yes, who and what was the influence)

**Question 4:**

Did anyone influence your choice of company to work for?



**Question 5:**

What were your thoughts around starting a job and earning money?

Sub Question: What kind of salary did you expect to earn?

Sub Question: Why did you expect that salary?

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**Question 6:**

Can you remember your first day of work? Take me through your first day and what thoughts and feelings you had on this day.

**Question 7:**

What were your expectations of your first work day?

Sub Question: How were these expectations met/not met?

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**Question 8:**

In your opinion and experience, what was the atmosphere/way of doing things of the organization?

Sub Question: Did you feel like you fitted into the organisation's culture when you started? (could you relate to it?)

Sub Question: Did you change to fit into the organizations culture?

Sub Question: If yes how and what did you have to do?

Sub Question: If no, why did you choose not to assimilate the new/different culture?

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**Question 9:**

What were the main challenges that you faced personally during the first few weeks of starting your new job?

Sub Question: How did the change in your environment affect you?

Sub Question: Did the change in your environment stress you?

Sub Question: Was there a gap between what you expected and what you experienced in starting your new job?

Sub Question: What was (if any) psychological impact on you from this change in environment?

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**Question 10:**

What was the impact on you personally moving from an academic environment to a business environment?

**Questions 11:**

What stood out for you in terms of the difference between being at an academic institution and being in a business environment?

**Question 10:**

When you first started your new job, who made you feel most welcome or comfortable and why?

Sub Question: Who did you initially befriend and why?

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**Question 11:**

What is the one piece of advice you would give a young graduate starting work straight from an academic environment?

**Question 12**

Do you have any additional comments that you would like to make?

## Annexure B:

### Questioning Response and Grouping Summary of Themes

#### Questioning Response and Grouping Summary of Themes

Question Response & Grouping	Theme
Response words relating to stress, worry, anxiety, lack of self-confidence, lack of self-esteem, uncertainty,	<i>Psychological impact</i>
Response words were; not knowing what to expect, having no expectation, unsure of what was going to happen, very similar to University, expected more money,	<i>Expectation</i>
What was the culture, do I fit in to the culture, do I have to make a culture change/ assimilate the culture/ accept the culture, do I like the culture?	<i>Organisations Culture</i>
Personal challenges, it's now about the real world, this is real life, nothing like university life, difference between academic world and application of what was learnt, job becomes challenging, thinking differently, paradigm shift	<i>Transition</i>
Change in environment, change in the way things are done, change of lifestyle, change of friends, changed relationships, change in perspective of the future, change in dreams	<i>Change</i>
Did I do the right degree, is my degree relevant here, can I see myself doing this for the rest of my life, did I work hard enough at university, did I pay attention to what really matters in my academic life, will my degree serve me well, do I have to study further	<i>Degree Choice</i>

**Annexure 3:**

**Sample Selection of Transcripts**

**Question 7:**

What were your expectations of your first work day?

' Hoping for (and expecting) a gentle landing - allowed time to settle in and feel like 'I fit in' the environment, feel like there are 'people I can relate to' is NB. for me - it's a safe place.

**Sub Question:** How were these expectations met/not met?

yes met. For our dept, KPMG induction, then ENR induction, this becomes the group you form relationships with.

**Question 8:**

In your opinion and experience, what was the atmosphere/way of doing things of the organization?

Professional, organised & relational. Amie @ induction - fancy KPMG folder, got everything you need, training, precesses etc well prepared. Parnes message about NB relationships - shaping view of the future!

**Sub Question:** Did you feel like you fitted into the organisation's culture when you started? (could you relate to it?)

' yes I think I did, I feel like I fitted into the work culture, not always 'the social culture'. Involved in challenges with argument etc. Sometimes felt like lots of social environment was white Americans!

**Sub Question:** Did you change to fit into the organizations culture?

' chose not to, willingness & attitude to working diverse. Reality not so 'clear cut, overtime a job - clashed at work ethic with overtime.

Expectation = 5 ^  
Impact = 7 ^  
Org. Culture = 11 ^

Sample Sections of Transcripts Continued:

**Question 5:**

What were your thoughts around starting a job and earning money?

1 Mix between excitement & fear - feeling like we built up a certain identity & values, want to develop this, fear that work will take over and I was scared that the pressures of workplace would make me work like mad & think of money.

**Sub Question:** What kind of salary did you expect to earn?

1 Earning salary, opportunity to have + influence around you.

Expectation that as articulated client you don't get much - standard

**Sub Question:** Why did you expect that salary?

1 Big & have similar salary structure & pay + the same.

1 Salary so not really of a surprise.

**Question 6:**

Can you remember your first day of work? Take me through your first day and what thoughts and feelings you had on this day.

1 Independence was key and I didn't want to lose this.  
1 Naturally introverted, but tried to be as extrovert as possible, felt intimidated, desperately need to talk to others, and don't want to be the person sitting/standing alone.

1 Induction is exhausting & emotionally draining.  
1 no so stressful, good induction did feel like into overload, but we need to know all of this - fun &  
1 Sociable.

^ Impact = 16  
^ Earning = 5  
^ work = 6